

Crime in Cleveland

Cassie Chadwick: The Con Artist of Millionaires' Row



Photo credit: Cleveland State University.

In 1870, a 14-year-old named Elizabeth Bigley opened an account at an Ontario bank using a forged letter of inheritance. She was arrested shortly thereafter but was released on the grounds of insanity. Five years later, she followed her sister to Cleveland. From there, she would enjoy an extensive and unbelievable criminal career as Cassie Chadwick.

When Chadwick arrived in Cleveland, she rented a space on Garden Street and began practicing as a clairvoyant under the name Madame Lydia DeVere. A few years later, she married Dr. Wallace S. Springsteen, but when the Plain Dealer ran an article about their nuptials, several people – including Chadwick's sister – came to their home to collect the debts that

she owed them. After learning about his new wife's past, Springsteen demanded she leave their home and immediately filed for divorce (after settling her debts).

Chadwick, now practicing under the name Madame Marie LaRose, married again and spent four years living on a Trumbull County farm with her husband before abruptly filing for divorce.

In 1889, Chadwick was arrested for forgery once again, this time sentenced to nine and a half years in the state penitentiary in Toledo. Four years into her sentence, she was granted parole and moved back to Cleveland, now living as Mrs. Cassie Hoover. It was there that she married her third husband, a wealthy doctor named Leroy Chadwick.

After the two married in 1897, they took up residence in Leroy Chadwick's home on Millionaires' Row. However, his neighbors – Cleveland's wealthy elite – did not warm to his new wife, choosing instead to keep their distance

from her. Their suspicions about the strange woman turned out to be valid: by that time, Chadwick had already begun what would become the largest con of her career.

During a visit with her husband to New York City, Chadwick began a rumor that she was Andrew Carnegie's illegitimate child, claiming that he had sent her over \$7 million in promissory notes because he was so stricken with guilt. She also claimed that she would be granted a sizeable inheritance upon Carnegie's death.

As the news spread to Northeast Ohio, she began to take out loans with banks that were increasingly eager to work with her. She was ultimately granted a total of \$2 million in loans, and she eventually became known as "the Queen of Ohio" because of her frivolous spending habits.

Chadwick's con ultimately came to an end in late 1904, when a Massachusetts banker grew suspicious of her and recalled his loan. When she was unable to pay, the bank sued her, a process that slowly revealed the extent of her fraud. Carnegie publicly denied ever knowing her, and Chadwick fled to New York to evade arrest. However, she was quickly arrested and returned to Cleveland for trial.

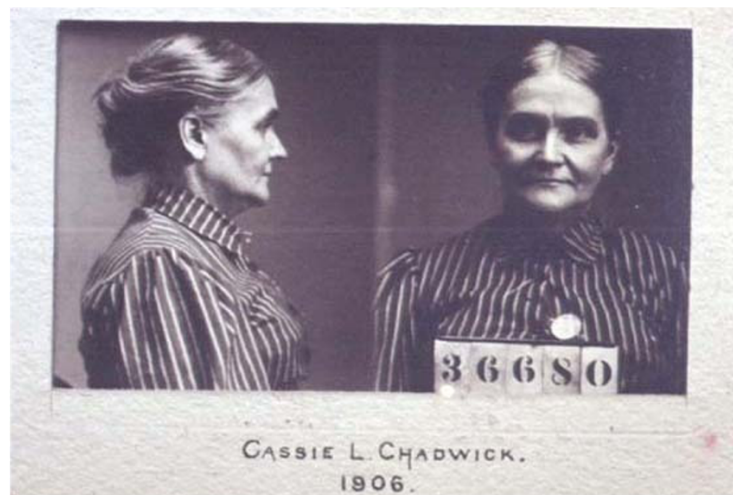


Photo credit: Oberlin College Library.

In 1905, Chadwick stood trial in Cleveland. Her trial, which was attended by Andrew Carnegie, attracted media attention nationwide. On March 10, 1905, Chadwick was convicted of fraud and sentenced to 14 years in

prison and a \$70,000 fine. Her trial was also attended by many of her former Euclid Avenue neighbors.

Chadwick was sent to the Ohio State Penitentiary in Columbus in January of 1906. Her health quickly began to deteriorate, and she died in prison on October 10, 1907.



Photo credit: Western Reserve Historical Society.

The Chadwick Mansion

Leroy Chadwick fled to Europe with his adult daughter when the news of his wife's arrest broke. The Chadwick Mansion on Euclid Avenue and East 82nd Street became something of a tourist destination after Cassie Chadwick's trial, but it was demolished in the early 1920s.