DEATH OF “MRS. CHANDLER,” 80, GAYLORDSVILLE RECLUSE, PRINCIPAL IN A FAMOUS POISON TRIAL

Mrs. Maybrick’s Secret Closely Kept by Few Until Announcement of Death Thursday Morning; All Evidence Points to Woman’s Innocence of Grave Charge; 1889 Case Stirred the World

Though several persons living in Gaylordsville and South Kent had known for many years that an elderly woman recluse, known as Mrs. Florence Chandler, (her maiden name) living in a small home on the dirt road running from the Waller farm in Gaylordsville to South Kent School, had been the principal character in a murder trial that took place in England more than fifty years ago, not one divulged the woman’s secret until she died last Thursday morning. This was in accordance with an agreement the small group had made among themselves when first the secret was unearthed by one or more of their number. Many knew or believed they knew that the old lady had a mystery about her, but what it was they never truly understood until the news broke Thursday night that the old lady was none other than Florence Elizabeth Maybrick tried and convicted in Liverpool in 1889, for the poisoning of her husband, a well-to-do cotton broker. She was sentenced to be hanged, a sentence which was later commuted to life imprisonment, which in England meant twenty years. She actually served fifteen and one-half years.

Came Here to Work

Her reasons for coming to this section were not entirely a desire to seek seclusion from the world, though that doubtless played its part. She came here on the recommendation of a teacher friend of Miss Henrietta Barnwell’s, and was to act as housekeeper for Miss Barnwell, who some twenty or more years ago embarked upon a chicken-farm venture, a venture which was later taken over by the late Henry B. Prescott.

Miss Barnwell was more or less disappointed in the woman, for it was quickly seen that she was not accustomed to housework, but gave every evidence of being a refined and cultured woman. They separated, “Mrs Chandler” leaving to board with the Grisell family in the neighbourhood. A year or two later she had the Beach
concern build a small cottage by the roadside in which she lived until her death last Thursday morning. It was in its day a trim little bungalow of three rooms and an inclosed porch, far from the beaten track, and ideally suited for one who desired seclusion.

**Her Identity Discovered**

After she had lived in this cottage for a time, she chanced to give to one of the women with whom he had become acquainted, a lace dress, quite valuable and in good order. In unpacking the dress to hang, this lady discovered a small card in one of the shoulders. That card had the words “Florence E. Maybrick” on it. Not a difficult matter, with that bit of information, and the assistance of a New York librarian, to connect that quiet little lady with the famous trial in Liverpool. The handful of persons was soon able to clear the mystery for themselves, but each was good enough to keep the secret.

Mrs Maybrick’s cottage is situated on a charming back road, one of the many such in the township, sweeping up the hill in a curve that permits one to get varying views of the hills to the north and east. From the former Waller farm, where it leaves the main South Kent Road to the point at which it intersects the old main road running west from New Preston to South Kent, it is about two and one-half miles long. There are but three house on it, the first north from Waller’s corner being a house formerly belonging to Eliza Thorpe (Mrs Maybrick bought a half acre of land from the Thorpes) and recently sold to city people who have spent considerable money in remodelling and improving it. This is on a particularly favourite site, for it has one of the best views along the stretch. The next house north is that belonging to Mrs Maybrick, while the third is owned by Mrs Anthony and a Miss Irwin, who in past years have had children as summer boarders.

**Walking to Boyd Store**

Mrs Maybrick, while almost in the center of this stretch of road, was nearer to the South Kent store than to the store at Gaylordsville, and naturally went to the Boyd place at South Kent for her supplies, the little woman (she was five feet, two inches in height and weighed about 100 pounds) who looked so frail, stepping along the mile and a half distance with spryness that would have fitted a young and stronger person. In her goings and comings she had to pass South Kent School and doubtless the simple brick chapel on the hillside, a chapel in location and architecture not unlike one of the rural churches to be seen in the province of Quebec – indeed, it looks at first glance to have been built after plans made by some Quebec architect of the past – had its effect on her. In some manner she became acquainted with the kindly housemother of South Kent School, Miss C. C. Dulon, who died in 1933. Out of that acquaintanceship grew a friendly feeling on the part of Mrs Maybrick for the school and its faculty, and on the part of Samuel Bartlett, the headmaster and his associates an interest in the apparently poor and lonely woman who lived in the cottage on the back road. The present nurse of South Kent School, Mrs Lyons, continued the
contacts begun by Miss Dulan, and frequently called upon Mrs Maybrick to render help if needed, and to keep alive the lonesome woman’s interest. Mr Woodward, one of the masters at South Kent, also kept in touch with Mrs Maybrick and occasionally called to see if anything were needed or odd work to be done about the small house.

One of the last calls made by Mrs Lyons was a few days prior to the death of Mrs Maybrick. Mrs Maybrick had telephoned to the Kent visiting nurse, Miss Hanson, asking her to call. Mrs Lyons accompanied the nurse on two occasions. Together these two ladies after the death prepared the body against the coming of the undertaker, Ralph Bull, of Kent.

**Old Age Assistance**

In 1936, after much correspondence with persons in different parts of the country, an old-age stipend was granted to Mrs. Maybrick by the Connecticut Old Age Assistance office in New Milford, the secretary for which is Miss Anne Hopson of Kent. In some of this correspondence the woman’s real name was disclosed, without its attracting attention. For instance, there was a communication from the office of the Greenwood Cemetery corporation of New York. In this letter it was stated that a Darius B. Holbrook had died in New York on January 22, 1858, and his body placed in a receiving vault on January 26, 1858. The remains were removed to a plot in a cemetery which had been bought by Mrs Elizabeth F. Holbrook, presumably his widow, on June 2, 1875. His daughter was Caroline von Roques, and her daughter was Florence E. Maybrick.

**Source:** *New Milford Times (USA)*, October 29th 1941