

## — HISTORY —

# A grisly 1884 murder shakes up the town of Lebanon

On Feb. 20, 1884, Lebanon was shaken by the tragic news that Harvey Chappell, a well-known farmer, had been brutally bludgeoned to death in his own home on Kick Hill. A traveling tree salesman had made the gruesome discovery. He approached Chappell's house and seeing that the back door was open, he entered and found the farmer's body lying in a pool of blood on the kitchen floor.

Lebanon's medical examiner and coroner quickly arrived at the scene, and assessed that the unfortunate victim had died from numerous blows afflicted about his head. Chappell's house had been thoroughly ransacked. His cap, spectacles and a broken lantern lie beside him, and chairs were overturned indicating a struggle. The old farmer had apparently been working in the barn, and upon hearing a noise in the house, he returned to investigate and met his horrific death.

Rumors quickly spread about the town, like Chappell left large sums of money around the house,

that the house had been ransacked and robbed on two occasions previously, and that \$155 was found later which escaped the notice of the thieves.

The murder caused a local sensation, as nothing like this had happened in Lebanon for 70 years or more. Local people flocked to the crime scene to investigate, and subsequently all evidence and clues were lost before a police officer could secure the area. All that could be ascertained was that Chappell had been beaten to death by a club, but the murder weapon was not found. A family was soon to move in with Chappell and work the farm, and it was believed that the knowledge of this hastened the crime.

Chappell, 78, had lived at the family house on Chappell Road since 1807. He was considered



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"eccentric and odd in his ways," and was very methodical and fastidious. Nevertheless, he was "thoroughly fair and honest in all his dealings, and truthful to the last degree." He was a bachelor, and his nearest relatives were nephews and nieces.

The following week, a local man named Oliver Kingsley was sensationally arrested and charged with Chappell's murder. Kingsley, considered to be "a good for nothing character whose record was of the very worst kind," had spent half of his 35 years in jail. He was a sneak thief, and had been seen near to the house two days before the murder.

Kingsley lived at Exeter, two miles west of Chappell's farm, and was reported to have been absent from home on the night of the murder. He was arrested by the local sheriff, and taken on the 9:24 p.m. train from Lebanon to Norwich and jailed.

Kingsley had inherited \$5,000 from his father two years previously. He purchased a saloon in Willimantic, and led a high life,

dressing in "broadcloth and silk velvet." Nine months later he had squandered all that he had inherited, and took to stealing. On one occasion he broke out of jail in Willimantic, and ran through the streets in broad daylight "with nothing on but a pair of handcuffs."

When arrested for Chappell's murder, Kingsley admitted that he was in the neighborhood, but positively denied that he had anything to do with the murder. He convinced the authorities of this, was released, and the identity of Chappell's murder has remained a mystery to this day.

Seventy-three years later a retired Lebanon judge, 80-year-old Frederick Burgess, recounted his memories of the Chappell murder. Burgess was born in a farmhouse near to the Chappell farm in 1876. He lived in the Kick Hill area until 1920, when he purchased Gov. William Buckingham's house in Lebanon Center — Buckingham was Connecticut's Civil War governor. Burgess was 7 years old at the

time of the murder, and he remembered that Chappell had been beaten to death by a "hammer-murderer," and also that he went over to Chappell's farmhouse and saw the bloodstains soaked into the floor.

There were no state police in 1884, Burgess recalled. The local constable drove over to the farmhouse on his horse and buggy, but knew nothing about fingerprints and little about clues. The killer found no money because Chappell had invested his wealth worthless Illinois railroad stocks.

It was recalled at the time that Chappell used to cuss the railroads "from hell to breakfast." Judge Burgess did not mention Oliver Kingsley during his 1957 interview, but remembered that Chappell Road was very muddy on the day of the murder, and that there was a report that a man in Willimantic hired a horse from a livery stable and returned it the next morning covered in mud — but nothing ever came of this, and Chappell's murderer was never caught.

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