

OFFBEAT OREGON HISTORY

Running from the FBI? Try hiding in a small town

BY FINN J.D. JOHN

Offbeat Oregon

Happy new year! In the spirit of the American tradition of the season, today we're going to explore the stories of two Missouri men whose New Year's resolutions probably once included "Give up crime" and "Hide from the F.B.I."

This is the sort of thing that used to be very easy to do in Oregon, which is actually the only state (so far as I have been able to learn) to have ever had one of its U.S. Senators serve under an alias which he adopted while running from law enforcement. (That would be John M. Hipple, a.k.a. John H. Mitchell — a cool, amoral Gilded Age rascal after whom the town of Mitchell is named — who in 1860 abandoned his wife and family in Connecticut, "borrowed" \$4,000 from his employer, and fled with his mistress to the West Coast to start a new life under a new name.)

Hipple's adventure is a story for another day. Today we are going to talk about two other fugitives, both of whom had the bad luck to be on the lam 90 years after Hipple's successful scampering-off. Their luck would not be as good as his.

Like Hipple, neither was a killer. One of them was arguably not even a "real" criminal. But both of them were fugitives from justice who were caught "laying low" under aliases in little towns in Oregon, and both were caught through the media — in one case, the newspapers, and in the other, a radio show.

Orba Elmer Jackson, a.k.a. Ken Van Kempen:

In March of 1950, Clide Adams, the postmaster in the town of Tualatin, was going through a packet of FBI "Wanted" posters preparatory to putting them up on the post-office wall when he noticed a familiar face looking up at him from the stack.

The name on the poster was Orba Elmer Jackson. But the picture — well, if that wasn't Ken Van Kempen, a local handyman who occasionally worked at the house across the street, it had to be his twin brother.

He showed the poster to Bernice Ladd, his postal clerk and she agreed it had to be the same man.

Ken, they knew, had recently taken a permanent job at Cy Kirkland's chicken farm in Aloha, and had left a forwarding address with them. So Clide sent off a letter to the FBI office in Portland, telling of his suspicions and giving the forwarding address.

Two days later, the "FBI's Ten Most Wanted" appeared in the Portland newspapers. Orba Jackson was No. 7 on the list, and several other of "Kens" acquaintances also made the connection and reached out to the FBI.

Everyone who knew "Ken" would be flabbergasted by the FBI's description of the vicious-looking, hardened criminal whose sour puss glared out at the reader from his newspaper mugshot: "Orba Jackson is now a fugitive," the FBI wrote. "He is considered dangerous and is believed to be armed. He may attempt to 'shoot it out' with law enforcement officers should his capture become imminent."

Readers also learned that he got into a life of crime early, as a Missouri farm-boy teenager. Basically, he was a car thief. He drew a four-year sentence for auto theft in 1924, when he was 18, and served it at the Missouri state pen. A few months after he got out, he got busted for another car theft, and was sent back for another three years.

After he got out, he went straight for a few years before making the biggest mistake of his life: joining an accomplice to try to rob a rural general store. The robbery went badly — not as badly as it could have, but badly enough: The old man who ran the store grabbed Jackson's accomplice's pistol. The accomplice punched him in the face to make him let



Submitted photo/Morehead State Public Radio

Cast members and Foley sound technicians recording an episode of Gang Busters in August 1938.

go. Then the old man's brother-in-law came in with a rifle. Jackson got the drop on the rifleman, grabbed the gun and yanked it out of his hands. At that point, the two of them decided things were getting too rich for their blood, and ran for it.

They knew they were in trouble, but at first had no idea how much. The thing was, there was a little post office in the back of the store they'd robbed. Armed robbery was bad enough, but robbing a post office was a much bigger deal, and a federal offense to boot. So on this, Jackson's third trip to the Big House, the sentence was 25 years.

Seventeen years into his sentence, Jackson walked away from a work crew he was assigned to as a "trustee" and disappeared. That was in 1947.

He moved out to the West Coast, settled down in Tualatin, changed his name to Ken Van Kempen, and started a new hobby as a landscape painter.

But, of course, the FBI wasn't ready to let bygones be bygones. His offense, armed robbery, may have been comparatively minor; but, as an escapee from a federal prison, he was pretty high on their priority list — high enough to make No. 7 on the Ten Most Wanted.

He made it fairly easy for them, too, making no attempt to change his appearance by, say, growing a beard or even changing hairstyles. "That's a hoosier trick," he said. "That's what they expect you to do."

He told reporters the FBI's bulletin on him was "a pack of lies."

"To put me on the list of the ten worst criminals is the silliest thing I've ever heard of," he grumbled glumly. "I haven't done anything very bad. The paper said I was dangerous and probably armed. Hell, I haven't had a gun since I got out. What do I want with a gun? I got enough trouble without one."

Orba Jackson was bundled into Rocky Butte Jail to await extradition back to Leavenworth to finish his sentence, plus a few extra years for the escape. Meanwhile, his friends in Washington County rallied around, offering moral support and more. Chicken farmer Cy Kirkland, Jackson's employer, started a legal defense fund for him and wrote letters urging the parole board to be merciful.

"We think he has paid plenty for his crimes, and that he has been honestly trying to go straight," said Cy Kirkland's wife.

It must have worked, because he was out by 1955, about ten years before his sentence would have been up. Although the Kirklands had invited him to come back to Tualatin and resume his old job after his release, he didn't return. But he didn't turn back to crime either. Given the chance to go straight, Orba Jackson took it. When he finally died, in 1993, he was living in California, having kept his nose scrupulously clean for the last 40 years of his life.

John Harvey Bugg, a.k.a. Cowboy Jim Williams

Late in the month of March, 1948, in the small coastal town of Gearhart, Pauline Virgin, 12, and her cousin Navarre Smith, 14, were listening to the famous "Gang Busters" radio program on radio station KEX (A.M. 1190). Gang Busters, as you may recall, was billed as "the only national program that brings you authentic police case histories." It was, basically, "America's Most Wanted" for the Golden Age of Radio.

The radio host was telling the story of a wanted criminal named John Harvey Bugg, who back in 1945 had kidnapped a county sheriff, robbed him, and tied him to a telephone pole. Listeners were urged to be on the lookout for a man who walked with a limp, loved horses, and had the word "LOVE" tattooed across the knuckles of his left hand.

"Why — that's Cowboy Jim!" Pauline exclaimed.

Cowboy Jim Williams was a popular 31-year-old ex-rodeo cowboy who, after several years of living the "Amarillo by Morning" lifestyle following the rodeo circuit, had settled down in Gearhart and taken a job at a riding academy. He'd been doing the job for a year by then, teaching kids like Pauline and Navarre how to handle ponies. He was good with kids, even better with horses, and widely loved.

But he always kept strips of masking tape wrapped around the knuckles of his left hand, and rebuffed the kids' requests to know why. Pauline, in particular, had been very curious about the tape, and one time after she pressed him on it, he actually got angry.

Now, she thought, she knew why.

So she shared her suspicions, first with the editor of the local paper (who didn't take her seriously) and then with one of Gearhart's police officers, who passed the tip up the line.

A couple weeks passed, during which time Cowboy Jim himself heard the rumors and realized things were about to get too hot for him in Gearhart. Obviously loath to leave the community that had been so welcoming to him, he went to Hillsboro to lie low in a friend's house and see if anything should happen.

Unfortunately for Cowboy Jim, the FBI, when it learned about him, did some legwork and learned his Hillsboro friends' address. So after three agents came to Gearhart and found him gone, they checked there — and found Cowboy Jim trying to hide behind a baby's crib, his fancy Western boots sticking out behind it and giving the game away. He was taken into custody without incident.

"Cowboy Jim" Bugg's story was an interesting one — he'd committed an extraordinarily serious offense — menacing, robbing, and kidnapping a law officer — almost by accident. What had happened was this:

As a young buck working on an oilfield in Seminole, Okla., Bugg one day bought a Buick. The car's price was \$2,200, but the salesman told him he could finance the whole price if they'd do a little paperwork dance: They'd write the sale up at \$2,700; Bugg would write a check for \$500; and the dealership would "lose" the check. That way, the finance company would think it wasn't financing the whole price of the car.

Bugg wrote the check and drove away the car. Then ... the dealership cashed the check. Or, rather, tried to. Bugg's \$500 check bounced halfway to low-Earth orbit.

Several days later, Bugg drove his new car to Greenfield, Mo., to visit his parents, and was met there by the local sheriff, who arrested him for passing a bad check.

Bugg, angry and frightened, made a really bad decision. With his hand in his jacket pocket as if gripping a pistol, he bluffed the sheriff into dropping his gun, then ordered the sheriff to drive him, in his new car, to the dealership in Oklahoma to straighten out the whole bounced-check thing.

But when they crossed the state line, the sheriff told Bugg he'd just violated the Lindberg Act — under which kidnapping someone and transporting him or her across state lines was a federal offense.

Bugg freaked out, and apparently decided that if he was now a criminal, he might as well go the whole hog. Accordingly, first he ditched his Buick and, with the sheriff, hailed a taxi. He then forced the taxi driver to drive a short distance out of town before stopping, robbing him and leaving him tied to a tree by the side of the road. Several hours and another state line later, he stopped and tied the sheriff to a telephone pole, robbed him of all his cash, and fled alone. Abandoning the stolen taxi a short time later, he made his way west as a fugitive.

He kept a step or two ahead of the law for several years by following the rodeo circuit. He was already a seasoned rodeo cowboy — he'd won about \$3,000 at the Madison Square Garden rodeos in New York in 1941 and 1942. Now he got back into the business as a way to make money while on the lam.

"I made pretty good money working at rodeos," he told re-

porters, "but I was afraid of the publicity. They almost caught me at Redding. Some friends tipped me off and I headed north."

Now, tracked down at last, Bugg waived extradition and eagerly took a visiting Oklahoma sheriff up on an offer to drive him back east to face the music.

Once there, he appeared in court. The riding academy posted bail for him, and he promptly journeyed back to Gearhart to resume teaching his students. When he arrived, about 30 youngsters gathered to give him a rousing welcome. Pauline and Navarre weren't there, but both were among the very first to sign a petition to the Oklahoma authorities urging clemency.

Bugg was eventually sentenced to 10 years, but became eligible for parole after 15 months.

The moral of the story, in the newspaper and on Gang Busters alike, was always, "Crime Does Not Pay." But bad though their luck might have been in life, it could have been a whole lot worse for both of them. Both of them were, at least, lucky in their choice of places to hide out, and the friends they made while on the lam in the quiet parts of Oregon.

Sources: Law and Order at the End of the Oregon Trail, a book by Ken and Kris Bilderback published in 2015; FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, Nov. 1947 and Jul. 1949; archives of Portland Morning Oregonian and Portland Journal, 1948-50
■ Finn J.D. John teaches at Oregon State University and writes about odd tidbits of Oregon history. His book, *Heroes and Rascals of Old Oregon*, was recently published by Ouragan House Publishers. To contact him or suggest a topic: finn@offbeatoregon.com or 541-357-2222.

DEATH NOTICES

Phylisha Marie Minson of Madras, OR
December 30, 1989 -
January 22, 2021

Arrangements:
Baird Funeral Home of Bend is honored to serve the Minson family. Please visit our website, www.bairdfh.com, to share condolences and sign our online guest book.
Contributions may be made to:
A Go Fund Me page has been set up by Ginny Minson to help with final expenses.
Please donate at:

https://www.gofundme.com/f/phylisha-memorial?utm_source=customer&utm_medium=cop

Theodocia "Grace" Tyrrell of Redmond, OR/ Crooked River Ranch, OR
Sep 10, 1926 - Jan, 21, 2021

Arrangements:
Arrangements Entrusted To: Redmond Memorial Chapel; 541.548.3219. Please visit www.redmondmemorial.com to leave a thought, Memory, or Condolence to the family.
Services:
A Graveside Service is Scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 30th, 2021 at 10:00AM at Redmond Memorial Cemetery
Contributions may be made to:
A Local Charity of Your Choice

Gregg Gillis McFadden of Redmond, OR
Dec 11, 1951 - Jan 23, 2021

Arrangements:
Arrangements Entrusted To: Redmond Memorial Chapel; 541.548.3219. Please visit www.redmondmemorial.com to leave a thought, memory, or condolence for the family.
Services:
Private Family Services
Contributions may be made to:
Partners in Care, 141 N.W. 6th Street Suite B, Redmond, OR 97756

Michael Jerry Cowger of Terrebonne, OR
Feb 17, 1962 - Jan 21, 2021

Arrangements:
Autumn Funerals, Redmond 541-504-9485 www.autumnfunerals.net
Services:
Services will be held at a later date.

Patricia Jo Harms of Redmond, OR
January 20, 2021

Arrangements:
Autumn Funerals of Redmond is honored to serve the family. 541-504-9485 Memories and condolences may be expressed to the family on our website at www.autumnfunerals.net
Services:
No services will be held at this time.
Contributions may be made to:
Heart n Home Hospice
745 NW Mt. Washington Dr., Suite 205
Bend, OR 97703

Wesley James Wilson of Terrebonne, OR
November 26, 1963 -
January 15, 2021

Arrangements:
Autumn Funerals of Redmond is honored to serve the family. 541-504-9485 Memories and condolences may be expressed to the family on our website at www.autumnfunerals.net
Services:
A private Celebration of Life will take place at a later date.

Arthur H. Wright of Redmond, OR
December 3, 1922 -
January 23, 2021

Arrangements:
Arrangements Entrusted To: Redmond Memorial Chapel www.redmondmemorial.com; 541.548.3219
Services:
Private Family Services
Contributions may be made to:
Charity of Your Choice

Keith A. Rivera of Powell Butte, OR
May 06, 1952 - Jan 19, 2021

Arrangements:
Arrangements Entrusted To: Redmond Memorial Chapel www.redmondmemorial.com; 541.548.3219
Services:
A Graveside Service is Planned for Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021, 1:00PM, at Redmond Memorial Cemetery

Mary Ann Young of Redmond, OR
March 29, 1941 -
January 19, 2021

Arrangements:
Autumn Funerals, Redmond 541-504-9485 www.autumnfunerals.net
Services:
Services will be held at a later date.

OBITUARY

Joanne Cardon Carr
September 9, 1938 - December 13, 2020

Joanne Cardon Carr, 82, of Redmond, Oregon, passed away peacefully in her home surrounded by family on December 13, 2020 from pancreatic cancer. She is now reunited with her beloved parents.

She was born September 9, 1938 in Los Angeles, California. She grew up in Livingston, California, attended Livingston High school. Her friends always remarked how much fun Joanne was to be around. That she was a true marvel. She fell in love and married Ivan Cardon in 1956. They raised one son and four daughters in Eugene, Oregon. Ivan was taken ill at a young age and passed away on January 24, 1980.

Joanne loved to dance and socialize. She met Richard Carr, at a local dance in Visalia, California. Joanne was instantly swept off her feet and the two were married on March 28, 1991 in Tigard, Oregon.

Joanne loved yearly campouts with her family which were held at Oregon's Willamette pass, Waldo Lake for the past 47 years that were filled with kayaking, horseback riding, swimming, campfires, birthday cakes, and skits put on by kids and grandchildren.

Joanne was known for her compassionate spirit. Her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren were the pride and joy of her life. The legacy of Joanne's kind spirit, passion for adventure, and zest for life will live on through them.

Joanne was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and attended wards in Eugene, OR, Springfield, OR, Bend, OR, Redmond, OR, Gilbert AZ, and Turlock, CA

Joanne will be missed but not forgotten. She is survived by her husband Richard, her five children, Michael, Tammy, Torry, Lanette, and Cara, her sister Sandy, 17 grandchildren and 27 great-grandchildren.

A virtual memorial service will be held on February 6th 2020 at 10:00am PST. Contact: Brittany Cardon at Brittany.cardon@gmail.com for invite link Pre-sign up highly suggested.