

OUT OF THE VAULT 'Dirty book' creates uproar in Weston

A novel published in the 1930s by Eastern Oregon native Nard Jones caused quite a stir with residents in his home town of Weston, who thought some of the characters and scenarios were just too familiar.

The book, "Oregon Detour," follows a group of teenagers from the fictional town of Creston through high school, graduation night, their first sexual exploits and the early years of marriage. And though Jones published a note in the Weston Leader newspaper claiming the book was a work of total fiction, critics, including Weston's powerful Saturday Afternoon Club and the Methodist Church, attacked the book as "dirty" and the characters and situations as only thinly disguised — the town's minister appeared as a doctor in the book, and the fictional high school principal was named after Weston's real-life delinquent.

George Venn, a literature professor at Eastern Oregon State College, read a student's paper on the book and applied for a grant in 1982 to investigate what really happened, he told a group of Pendleton library supporters on April 21, 1983. He talked to Weston residents, some of whom thought the book was funny. Others told Venn they'd tried to find the book for years, but every copy placed on the shelves of the Weston Public Library had mysteriously disappeared for

years. Local libraries were told not to loan copies of the book to Weston, and the few copies that did exist in 1983 could be read, but not checked out. One resident Venn interviewed figured there was a chest somewhere filled with copies of the book.

The book still had its critics, though. Members of the Saturday Afternoon Club asked Venn during his inquiries, "Why are you going around trying to get the skeletons out of the closet?" And the son of a member claimed his mother was one of the story's characters, and that Jones was trying to "drag people in the dirt."

Jones, a graduate of Weston High School and Whitman College, distinguished himself as a writer and actor, and penned 17 novels including "Swift Flows the River," a bestseller. Venn figured Jones wrote "Oregon Detour" during a brief stint working at his father's store in Weston after college, but the book was published while he was living and working in Seattle as a columnist, editorial writer and associate editor for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

Despite the controversy, Venn thought the book was worth reading for its "insight into the life in a small community." For those interested in reading "Oregon Detour," 28 copies are currently available in Eastern Oregon libraries, including two at the Weston Public Library.

DAYS GONE BY

100 Years Ago From the East Oregonian April 29-30, 1917

Mrs. George W. Kennedy, daughter of Postmaster and Mrs. T.J. Tweedy, is dead, and Fred Bunn, a stockman, and Anton Gentges, an employe of the O.-W. R. & N. are in the hospital with injuries as a result of a collision yesterday evening at 5 o'clock between an O.-W. engine and a Ford automobile owned and driven by Bunn. The tragic accident occurred at the West Webb street railroad crossing. The engine, which had pulled in the Spokane train, was going west to the Y in order to turn around and the auto was coming east on Webb street. Though the track is in plain view for several blocks, neither the driver nor Mrs. Kennedy saw it coming, according to their statements. The auto was almost across the track when the pilot of the engine struck the rear right wheel. The car was knocked down the steep embankment and literally demolished except for the engine and chassis. The occupants were thrown from the car and Gentges, who was riding on the pilot of the engine, was thrown in such a way that he was pinioned under the car. Mrs. Kennedy died of internal injuries and shock from two fractures of the right thigh and a fracture

50 Years Ago From the East Oregonian April 29-30, 1967

An epidemic of red measles, the most virulent type, has hit Umatilla County. A mass inoculation program to combat spread of the disease will start Monday. Dr. Alton Alderman, Umatilla County health officer, said Friday 200 cases of red measles have been estimated in Hermiston the past two weeks. Hermiston appears to be the center of the epidemic.

25 Years Ago From the East Oregonian April 29-30, 1992

Prison employees, at a union rally this morning, were told to assume Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution will close as proposed and that they must fight to keep their jobs. The regularly scheduled union meeting took on more emphasis and was split into two sections to accommodate added interest following the Department of Corrections announcement Friday that EOCI would close under a proposal to cut 20 percent from the 1993-95 budget. Gov. Barbara Roberts was "shocked and livid" to learn of the Corrections Department recommendation to close EOCI, Mayor Joe McLaughlin said Wednesday after speaking with the governor by telephone.

ODDS & ENDS

Vermont man grew pot because he thought it'd be legal soon

ST. ALBANS, Vt. (AP) — Vermont police have arrested a man who acknowledged growing marijuana to prepare for possible statewide legalization of the drug.

St. Albans police say they came across Michael Marshall while investigating a hunting violation. Marshall fled into a house after a

confrontation with police, and then consented to a search of the residence. Police say they then found and seized 13 full-grown marijuana plants and 27 smaller plants.

Police say Marshall told them he thought marijuana would be legalized soon, so he wanted to get an early start on growing it.

The possession of small amounts of marijuana has been decriminalized in the state of Vermont, but it is still illegal for recreational use.

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