



OPINION

Offbeat Oregon History: Murderer of Mystery

By Finn JD John
For The Sentinel

On the evening of December 1, 1878, all four prisoners in the Wasco County Jail, in the back of the county courthouse, were out of their cells and relaxing in the common area near a glowing woodstove. One, a horse thief named Tharp, was sitting by the stove with a Chinese man (whose name is not given in the newspaper account); James Cook, a great burly man with an English accent, was pacing up and down, dragging his heavy shackle (probably an "Oregon boot"), apparently lost in thought; and George Craig, a slender tow-headed young man of 22, was sitting on a bench contemplating his fall from grace.

He had indeed fallen a long way. Craig was in jail, and on his way to the state prison, for a crime three months before, when he and Cook had robbed Baldwin's Saloon in The Dalles. Craig's involvement in this crime had shocked the little community; he was the son of the late Polhemus Craig, M.D., a highly respected physician and druggist. The son hadn't risen to the heights of his father, though, and had taken a job as a flatboat operator on the river, then fallen in with a bad and dissolute crowd — a crowd that included James Cook.

After the robbery, Craig had fled to Portland, and it had taken a month or two for authorities to catch up with him. When they had, he'd quickly confessed — and implicated Cook.

The news had traveled faster than the law, and by the time Deputy Marshall Haine was knocking on Cook's door, he'd already heard they were looking for him. His Native American wife (or girlfriend; the newspapers don't say) had told the sheriff he'd gone to Boise. Haine had thanked her kindly and then asked what was in the giant crate sitting in a corner of the room.

"Cultus ictas," she replied — which

is Chinook for "Bad things," or "garbage." This seeming suspiciously vague, Haine pulled his six-shooter and covered the box with it while directing the other deputy to tip it over.

"The box was upset and Cook stepped out, coolly remarking, 'Well, you 'ave got me coppeded,'" the Morning Oregonian's The Dalles correspondent wrote.

Cook's coolness didn't last, though. When he learned that Craig had ratted him out, it turned to hot fury. At his trial, he firmly denied any involvement; and when he was convicted, it was almost solely on Craig's testimony.

But that was all over now. Craig and Cook both were on their way to the state pen to serve seven-year stretches. And Cook had finally gotten over his anger against Craig.

Or so it seemed until suddenly Cook, walking past Craig while pacing the jailhouse, suddenly pounced.

There was a terrible cry — a scream of "Oh God, take him off!" — and then came a horrible gurgle and a splashing sound.

Sheriff James B. Crossen hurried into the room from the front office, where he'd been working on some paperwork. By the time he got through the door, it was all over. Cook, with a straight razor he'd somehow gotten hold of, had seized his former partner by the hair and sliced his throat open to the spine.

Crossen pulled his pistol out, put it against Cook's head, and demanded to know where the razor had come from. Cook refused.

"Go ahead and shoot," he said. "I'd rather hang or have you shoot me than spend seven years in the penitentiary."

(No one ever did figure out where Cook got that razor from; but his Native American wife had been in to see him the day before, and it seemed most likely that she'd slipped it to him then.)

Just a few minutes later, Craig's aged mother arrived, intending to spend the

night there in the jail with her son before his departure the following morning on the boat for Salem.

"Her cries would have melted the heart of any man not steeped to the very lips in crime," the Oregonian's correspondent wrote — almost certainly referring to Cook and his cocky heartlessness in the aftermath of the killing.

The gruesome nature of the crime made a great impression on the public, and the newspapers got right on the story, trying to learn as much as they could about this cold-blooded razor killer. Who was he? What kind of life would lead to such an end?

James Cook was ready for them — with a real whopper.

"My earliest recollections of life are of being among the Indians — the Sioux," he told an Oregonian reporter in a jailhouse interview a few weeks later, lounging insouciantly on his bunk in the prison cell. "I never could find out who my parents were but I am under the impression that they were captured and murdered by the Indians while traveling ... I remained with the Indians for 16 years, and during that time was twice engaged in war against the whites. The Indians called me Laveris. ... While with the Indians an Englishman, a Dr. Roach, who was hunting on the plains, came into our camp ... I was selected to guide the intruder out of our hunting grounds. The doctor took a fancy to me, and I concluded to accept his offer to accompany him in his travels as a body-servant and leave the Indians.

"After journeying about six months in the United States we left for India, where for 20 months we remained tiger hunting in the jungles ... Tired of India, we left for Africa ... We spent portions of the time in Abyssinia, the country surrounding the Red Sea, after which we crossed the great desert; thence to Alexandria, and after a short stay in Egypt we sailed for England.

Remaining at the doctor's home for a short time, we left for Australia where I left the service of the doctor and started off on my own hook for America.

"I reached San Francisco all right, and after remaining there some little while I followed the crowd then rushing to Nevada ... then traveled through the state continuing my journey through Colorado and finally brought up in Texas where I was engaged as a stock driver. To this capacity I went to Arizona, and in 1865 found myself in Montana, from which place I returned to San Francisco.

"One morning I found myself on board the ship Yenisei. How I came there I could not comprehend at first, but shortly realized that I'd been shanghai'd.

"We were bound for China, but never reached our destination. The ship ran on a reef, and myself and four others were the only ones that escaped to the mainland after being in an open boat for nine days without food and water. After our rescue we tooted it through South Anam, and then on to Canton. We were then sent to Hong Kong, from which place I returned to San Francisco. I came to Oregon about 16 months ago, and have lived in and about The Dalles during the time."

Well, all righty then.

"Such is the history of his life that Cook gives," the Oregonian writer dryly concludes. But, he adds, "there was not one of those present who listened to the recital that believed it."



And yet this mouthful of malarkey is all there is about James Cook's past ... except for one thing: a newspaper report from the Oregon City Enterprise a little over a year before the killing: "James Cook, for trying to aid prisoners to make their escape from the penitentiary, goes back to that institution for a period of five years for his trouble, by order of Judge Boise."

This may refer to a different man, also named James Cook. And it doesn't explain how Cook got out of the penitentiary just a year or so into a five-year stretch. But, given the conditions in the state prison in the 1870s, it might explain his decision to avoid a prison sentence by escalating the charges to Murder One with a bit of revenge, and getting hanged instead.

On the morning of Feb. 7, 1879, James Cook went through the floor of the gallows with his lips still shut tight. He'd eaten a hearty breakfast that morning, visited briefly and unproductively with a Catholic priest, and declined to say anything further when invited by the sheriff to do so. Seventeen minutes later, he was dead.

We still have no idea even what his real name was.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Opinion on test scores

How sad is it that South Lane School District employees are so apathetic with regard to the current state test results? The acceptance of our "average" performance and our standing of 48 of 50 states within the comment "It's a conversation starter" is beyond belief. With the amount of dollars spent being thrown at education, the parents of our school-aged children should be outraged at this poor performance.

John Caloia

Dr. Fuhrman: Apple season is here

By Joel Fuhrman, MD
For The Sentinel

Crisp, juicy apples are a fall tradition. Take advantage of the bountiful selection of apples available this time of year. There are hundreds of varieties to sample. They range from red to yellow to green, crunchy to tender, sweet to tart and simple to complex.

Apples contain a wide variety of phytochemicals, many of which have been found to have strong antioxidant activity. They are particularly high in quercetin, a flavonoid antioxidant. Epidemiological studies have linked the consumption of apples with reduced risk of some cancers, cardiovascular disease,

asthma, diabetes and obesity.2-7 Not only can eating an apple a day help keep the doctor away, an apple a day might keep the pounds away too; adding apples to the diet has been shown to enhance weight loss.8-9 To optimize phytochemical content, it is important to eat the pigment-rich apple skin, not just the flesh. Choose whole, organic apples over applesauce or apple juice.

Apples are also a rich source of pectin, a type of soluble fiber that is found in plant cell walls and tissues. This soluble fiber works to lower cholesterol by reducing the amount that is absorbed in the intestines. Studies have shown that the pectin in apples interacts with other ap-

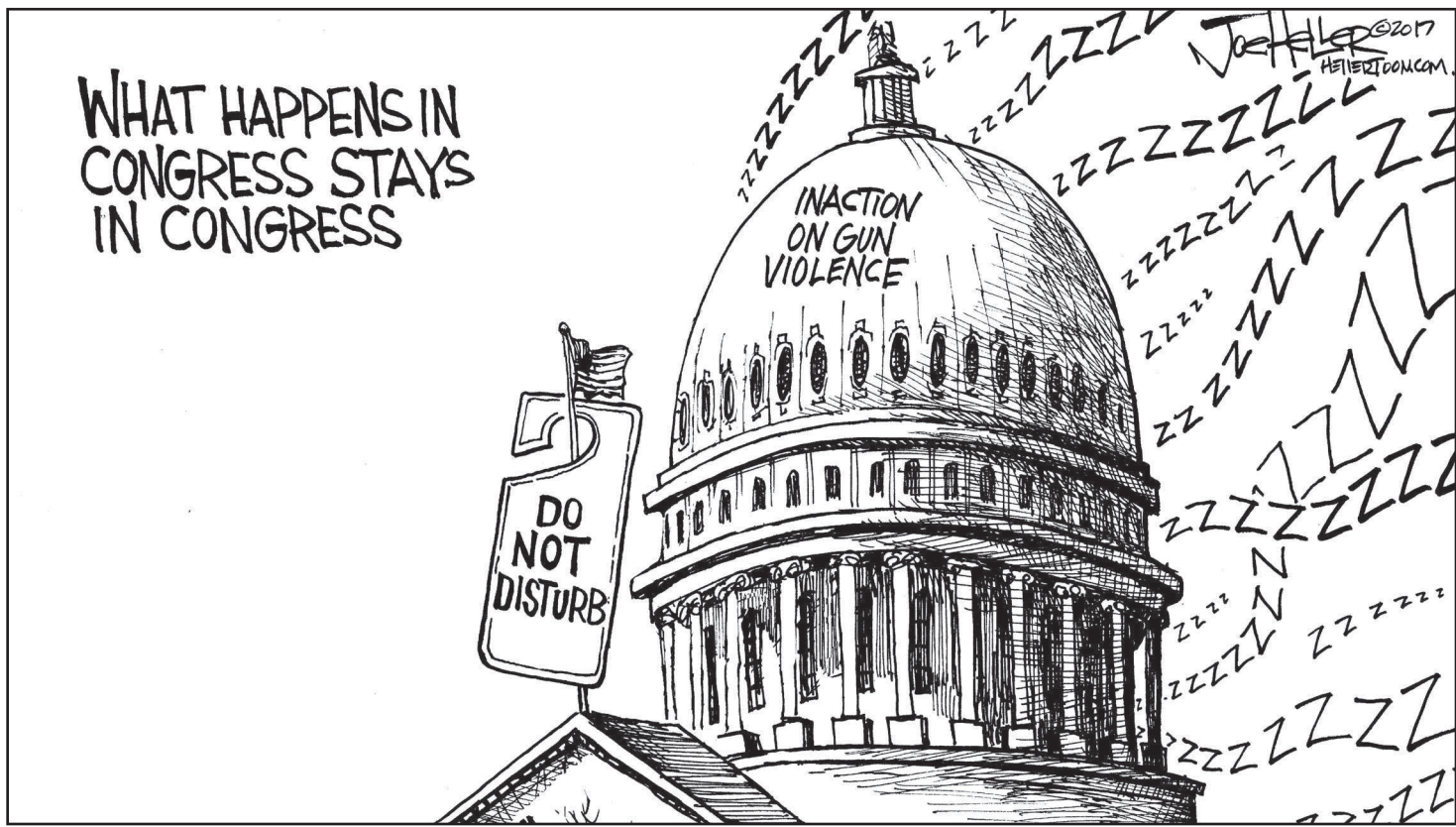
ple phytonutrients to achieve an even greater reduction in cholesterol.10 Researchers have also discovered that apples can boost intestinal health by increasing the numbers of healthy gut bacteria which feed on apple pectin.11 Apple polyphenols are thought to help lower blood pressure, and apple intake is also linked to a reduced

risk of multiple cancers.12,13

Portable and easy to pack, apples are great to include in your on-the-go meals. For an easy dessert, enjoy them baked with a sprinkle of cinnamon and nutmeg. I like to dice an apple, toss it with baby greens, some chickpeas, maybe a handful of walnuts or pumpkin seeds and then top it off with flavored vin-

egar or perhaps a dressing made from nuts and seeds.

Experiment with the many different varieties of apples to discover which ones are your favorites. Have fun seeking out your local organic apple growers, farm stands and farmers markets and look for different types of interesting apples. They do not have to look perfect. The smaller and more imperfect they look, the better they taste. If you go apple picking and get lots of them, don't worry, you can store them for several months. Just wrap each apple in a paper towel to prevent them from touching each other and store in a closed cardboard box in a cool place such as the basement or garage.



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The Cottage Grove Sentinel receives many letters to the editor. In order to ensure that your letter will be printed, letters must be under 300 words and submitted by Friday at 5 p.m. Letters must be signed and must include an address, city and phone number or e-mail address for verification purposes. No anonymous letters will be printed. Letters must be of interest to local readers. Personal attacks and name calling in response to letters are uncalled for and unnecessary. If you would like to submit an opinion piece, Another View must be no longer than 600 words. To avoid transcription errors, the Sentinel would prefer editorial and news content be sent electronically via email or electronic media. Hand written submissions will be accepted, but we may need to call to verify spelling, which could delay the publishing of the submission.

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