



Offbeat Oregon History: Was Lewis O'Neil a murderer?

By Finn JD John
For The Sentinel

Of all the variations on the theme of “love gone bad” known to gossips, storytellers and prosecuting attorneys since the dawn of time, the “love triangle turned deadly” pattern has got to be given first place.

And it would be hard to find an example of this kind of story that would top the one that reached its climax with a shotgun blast on a dark Ashland street, a few days before Thanksgiving of 1884.

It started when a 46-year-old carpenter named Lewis O'Neil rolled into town, three months before. O'Neil had abandoned a wife and six children down in California a couple years earlier and drifted north with the railroad. When he'd arrived in Ashland, he seems to have decided to stay a while and put down some roots — after meeting Mandy McDaniel.

Sarah Amanda “Mandy” McDaniel, 35, was the wife of a prosperous local grocery-store owner, 48-year-old Lewis McDaniel. The McDaniels had married three years before, when she was a pretty youngish widow with a seven-year-old son and he a lonely frontier bachelor. The marriage had soured fairly quickly; when O'Neil rolled into town, the McDaniels were living separately, and Amanda was apparently looking for a new romance. She and O'Neil began a secret affair soon after he arrived in town.

Two weeks after he arrived, O'Neil took a short vacation from work to go and visit his much-older brother, 72-year-old George, at his mining claim several dozen miles from town. When he returned, he was carrying a shotgun which George had given him to try to sell.

Back in Ashland, Lewis moved into a room at the Pioneer Hotel and briefly resumed his affair with Amanda McDaniel. Then Amanda approached her husband, reconciled with him, and moved back into their home.

And a few days after that, at 7:30 p.m. on the cold, rainy night of Nov. 20, 1884, someone stepped up behind Lewis McDaniel and shot-gunned him in the back of the head. He fell forward, dead, his hands still in his pockets.

The town marshal's night watchman, Charles Miller, was soon on the scene, and, recognizing the corpse, went directly to the McDaniels house to let Amanda know that someone had murdered her husband. With another citizen, he stood on the doorstep and knocked for several minutes as the rain poured down on them; then the two of them retreated to a neighbor's house to figure out what to do next. A few minutes later they decided to wait inside for Amanda to return, and crossed over to the McDaniels house again and — after a little more fruitless pounding on the front door — went inside and lit a candle and settled in to wait.

Then Amanda herself opened the back bedroom door, stepped out, and seemed surprised to see her living room full of people.

Rumors of extracurricular romantic activities, in a small town, spread very rapidly in a small town and are pretty much impossible to keep bottled up. By the time of the murder, everyone — including Lewis McDaniel — knew of O'Neil's affair with Amanda. So when someone murdered her husband, O'Neil was instantly the prime suspect. Almost immediately, the 1880s equivalent of an A.P.B. was out. Town marshal S.D. Taylor found O'Neil around 10 p.m., drinking in a saloon, and arrested him on suspicion.

There wasn't any hard evidence against O'Neil; but there was a lot of the circumstantial kind. For one thing, the shotgun he'd brought back from his brother's mining camp — a distinctive weapon with an alligator carved into the stock — was nowhere to be found. He first claimed he had no shotgun; and then, apparently realizing too many people had seen him bringing it back, he claimed he'd sold it to some guy on the road home. It was later found, chopped up into bits, scattered over a

vacant lot. The lot had been searched the day after the murder, so someone besides O'Neil had obviously done this. The obvious suspicion was that Amanda had done it for him, to help him cover his tracks.

It was enough. O'Neil was convicted on March 12, 1885, and sentenced to swing.

A few weeks later, another inmate claimed O'Neil had confessed to him that he'd done the deed under the precise direction of Amanda — who wanted her husband out of the way so that she could formalize her affair with O'Neil and so that she could inherit his grocery store.

On the strength of this conversation, Amanda McDaniel was arrested. But jailhouse confessions aren't very solid evidence, and the jury just wasn't convinced. She was acquitted.

As the hanging day loomed ever closer, a series of remarkable letters started going out from the Jackson County Jail, where O'Neil was being held.

The first and most egregious one went to Amanda McDaniel. It was a proposal, essentially, that she take the rap for him. He prefaced it by assuring her that if her court case had gone badly, he would have “come to your relief and clear(ed) you by taking the whole responsibility on myself, though I am innocent, but ... if you were found guilty you should never hang or go to the penitentiary for I would save you. Now you have been tried and come clear, and it is in your power to save my life.”

Since she had been cleared of all charges in her trial, he continued, she could now confess to the murder with total impunity — clearing him. He would then sue the state for heavy damages and split the proceeds with her.

“I hope you will not delay,” he wrote, “as I know you can save my life and the disgrace will be no worse on you than it is now.”

Amanda did not reply.

Other letters went out as well, to other friends

and relatives, with various other schemes for someone else to take the rap for him. The last one went to his brother George, the one who gave him the shotgun; and it was an open request for his brother to “confess” to the killing and take his place on the gallows.

“The most trying feature,” the condemned man wrote, “is leaving my six children to the mercy of a world without protection and the disgrace of their father being hanged. ... As for you, you have lived to be a very old man, and in the natural course of events you can expect to live but a very few years more and are liable to drop off at any time. If you had one hour to live it would be a hard request to ask you to come and state that you had done the killing and that I had not had any hand, act or part in it or any knowledge of it. That would clear me, and spare me to my children, and only on their account could I ever think of making such a request of you.”

Of course, O'Neil hadn't thought so much of the children when he'd abandoned them and their mother four years earlier; but a looming death sentence does tend to remind one of family and friends. Ironically, the letter never reached the “very old man”; George had, shortly before, died of typhoid fever.

And so, on March 12, 1886, still maintaining his innocence, Lewis O'Neil was hanged.

As for Amanda, after liquidating her late husband's estate and paying off his taxes and debts, she cleared \$2,000 (worth \$55,000 in 2017 dollars). She took this and left Ashland the night before the hanging, settling in Talent, where she opened a café.

And so the story ends. Except, there is just one question still hanging out there in the air, a question that never was fully answered:

Where exactly was Amanda McDaniel, a few minutes after her husband had been murdered, when the town watchmen were pounding on her door?

Dr. Fuhrman: Plant based diet benefits

Protein from meat, eggs and dairy products (animal protein) is different than protein from vegetables, seeds, nuts, beans and whole grains (plant protein). The protein itself is different: animal protein is higher in essential amino acids than plant protein; animal protein and plant protein both provide us with adequate amounts of all of the amino acids, but because animal protein is more concentrated and higher in essential amino acids, it increases the body's production of a hormone called IGF-1, which is associated with aging and an increased risk of several cancers. Also, the packaging that protein comes in is different; the nutritional composition of animal foods compared to plant foods. Animal foods are calorie-dense and contain pro-inflammatory and pro-oxidant substances, whereas plant foods are rich in fiber, vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals.

A recently published article in JAMA Internal Medicine investigated the relationship between (animal vs. plant) protein sources and mortality risk based on almost 30 years of follow-up from the Nurses' Health Study and Health Professionals Follow-up Study, which together included over 170,000 participants.

Interesting findings came out of one particular question the re-

searchers asked: What would happen if the participants replaced some of their animal protein with plant protein?

They analyzed the data to estimate how participants' risk of death from all causes over the follow-up period would change if some of the animal protein sources (equivalent to 3 percent of total daily calories) were replaced with plant protein sources:

Replace processed red meat: 34 percent decrease in risk
 Replace unprocessed red meat: 12 percent decrease in risk
 Replace poultry: 6 percent decrease in risk
 Replace fish: 6 percent decrease in risk
 Replace eggs: 19 percent decrease in risk
 Replace dairy: 8 percent decrease in risk

What's wrong with animal protein sources? In addition to elevating IGF-1, which is linked to increased cancer risk, carnitine and choline from meat and eggs are converted by gut bacteria to a pro-inflammatory compound called TMAO that promotes cardiovascular disease. Meat, especially red meat, is a rich source of

heme iron, which in excess is an oxidant that contributes to cardiovascular disease and Alzheimer's disease. Animal products are also high in arachidonic acid, a fat that promotes inflammation, and may increase cancer risk. Certain carcinogenic compounds are also commonly found in animal foods, such as heterocyclic amines, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and N-nitroso compounds.

Higher animal protein intake also promotes weight gain. In fact, a recent study compared meat availability, sugar availability and obesity rates in different countries and found that sugar and meat had similar correlations to obesity rates. This result suggests that availability of meat contributes to obesity just as much as availability of sugar.

This is the latest of many studies to link greater meat consumption to a greater risk of death. In contrast, plant protein sources are associated with better health: for example, seeds and nuts reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and are linked to longevity, and micronutrient and fiber-rich beans are linked to improved blood pressure, LDL cholesterol, body weight, insulin sensitivity and enhanced lifespan.

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