



# Offbeat Oregon History: Murderers wandered McKenzie

By Finn JD John  
For The Sentinel

In Charles Maturin's classic 1820 Gothic horror novel Melmoth the Wanderer, a sinister scholar named Melmoth, having sold his soul to the devil in return for an extra 150 years of life and suffering from the worst kind of buyer's remorse, wanders the Earth in search of someone who will, essentially, take over payments for him. If he can find someone to buy out his contract, as it were, he can die in peace and go to heaven — or, at least, not automatically be sent to hell.

In the summer of 1898, two young Oregon men found themselves in a similar situation. They had murdered a wealthy rancher on a trip across the Cascades, then belatedly realized how bad it would look to show up at the end of the trip without him. So they searched with increasing desperation for someone to lie under oath for them by swearing they had seen the three of them arriving in the valley together.

It didn't work — for them or for Melmoth.

The story started in March 1898, when 22-year-old Courtland Green moved to Condon to work. He had a friend there, another 22-year-old named Clarence Branton. Both Green and Branton had sweethearts in the McKenzie River valley, but weren't in a financial position to get married. Both were on the lookout for ways to make lots of money really fast. And Branton had a plan to do just that.

Branton's plan involved a local rancher named John Linn, who was rumored to carry a purse with \$1,000 in gold (worth \$30,000 in 2018 currency) as walking-around money. Branton had sweet-talked Linn into partnering up with him on some horses. Soon it would be time to bring those horses over the pass to the McKenzie River valley to market. It was easy: they'd murder Linn in the most remote part of the trip. Between the \$1,000

and the proceeds of the sale of the horses, they'd both have all the money they needed to set up housekeeping, and be right there in the McKenzie valley ready to pop The Question. One wonders if they made plans to be Best Man in one another's wedding.

That night they made camp around 9 p.m. at a place called Isham's Corral, one or two dozen miles west of the pass near Alder Springs. Linn had spread his bedroll near the fire and was peacefully sleeping; it was now or never. Branton had brought along a cheap five-shot Iver Johnson American Bulldog revolver — probably a .32, although the newspaper accounts don't specify — and he now got that out and, after a whispered conference with Green (who apparently was getting cold feet) walked over to Linn with it and shot him several times.

Of course, the first thing the two of them wanted to do was find the \$1,000 Linn reportedly carried. In that, they got a disappointing shock: all they found in his purse was \$65 and an I.O.U. for \$800. Linn had lent almost all his walking-around money to a friend before leaving on the trip.

But the short summer night was no longer young, and they had a body to get rid of before dawn. Branton and Green gathered wood and expanded the campfire into a massive funeral pyre. They tended it all night, trying to completely destroy Linn's corpse, which they chopped up with an ax to encourage better burning; and the next morning it was still smoking prodigiously, drawing a good deal of attention from nervous residents miles away, who feared it was a forest fire breaking out.

Leaving the bloody ax there beside the still-burning fire, the two of them then drove the horses down toward the valley, where they hoped to sell them. Along the way they met several people, who commented on the smoke and wondered

if they knew about it. It was finally beginning to dawn on them that, when Linn's disappearance was remarked, they would be the prime suspects, having been seen leaving Condon with him and arriving in the McKenzie valley without him.

What to do?

The two of them decided what they needed was to find some rustic sucker willing to perjure himself by swearing that he had seen the three of them together, bringing the horses down.

And so commenced Branton and Green's Melmoth-like wanderings through the McKenzie Valley, horses in tow, looking for friends old and new who would be willing to perjure themselves in exchange for the pick of the herd.

Branton even made a fake beard so that he could pretend to be Linn at one spot. This didn't work, though, because the rancher he was trying to fool recognized his voice.

The two of them tried several times to sell the horses, too, but no one would take them because Linn wasn't there to sign the bill of sale.

Eventually it dawned on Branton that they were basically doomed, and his best shot was to cut and run. So the partners split up. Branton ended up in Kansas with the \$65; Green, however, stayed in Eugene.

It may have been their plan all along for Green to finger Branton if the heat came on, and Branton to be gone on the lam. In any case, that's how it went down. Green, whose psychological state had deteriorated badly and whose alcohol consumption rate had skyrocketed, finally couldn't stand it any more and confessed to a friend, Lane County Sheriff's Deputy John Day. Day took his friend directly to the district attorney, and the jig was officially up.

Branton had underestimated the difficulty of life on the lam, and perhaps the fact that he and Green had spent weeks wandering around bug-

ging people to perjure themselves about having seen a missing man without anyone apparently getting wise had led him to an underestimation of the intelligence of his fellow man. In any case, a month or two later he paid a visit in Eugene and was nabbed on the spot.

Green, brought to trial, shocked the court by pleading guilty despite the strong probability that it meant the gallows. He lucked out, though: the charge, when it was made, was second-degree murder, meaning a life sentence rather than death. He served 10 years of that sentence in the Oregon State Penitentiary before being conditionally paroled by the governor.

But Branton — with the help of Green's testimony — knew very well he couldn't even hope for a break like that. And sure enough, when the verdict came in, it was "guilty of first-degree murder," and the sentence was hanging.

Branton was kept in the county jail until the sentence could be carried out, and it was immediately clear he was a desperate man. When he was brought back to his cell, the instant the handcuffs were off him he leaped on Deputy Day, grabbing for his revolver. The two of them fought over the gun for a second or two; then the sheriff arrived and grabbed Branton by the throat, choking him until he let go.

Later Branton made a fake gun, carved out of pieces of food, and tried to bluff his way out of the joint by pointing it at Sheriff Withers. Withers, having good reason to know Branton wasn't armed, said, "Oh, come off it," and Branton passed it off as a joke.

Finally, on May 12, 1899, Claude Branton's sentence was carried out. His wanderings were finally over; but, unlike Melmoth, he wasn't expecting damnation to follow. He'd been baptized in prison, and spent the morning of his execution in Bible study.

## Dr. Fuhrman: Animal protein and colon cancer

Most people are aware of the connections between red and processed meats and cancer — that there is convincing evidence that these dangerous foods are a cause of colon cancer. In addition, cooking any meat at high temperatures (for example, grilled or fried chicken) forms carcinogenic compounds such as heterocyclic amines, which contribute to cancer risk.<sup>3</sup> However, animal foods such as non-fat dairy products, egg whites and fish are considered healthful by most people. It not yet widely recognized that foods such as these, since they are so high in animal protein, can also contribute to increased cancer risk.

When we consume animal protein, the body increases its production of a hormone called IGF-1, (insulin-like growth factor 1). IGF-1 is one of the

body's important growth promoters during fetal and childhood growth, but later in life IGF-1 promotes the aging process. Reduced IGF-1 signaling in adulthood is associated with reduced oxidative stress, decreased inflammation, enhanced insulin sensitivity and longer lifespan. In contrast, IGF-1 has been shown to promote the growth, proliferation and spread of cancer cells, and elevated IGF-1 levels are linked to increased risk of several cancers, colon cancer included. Several observational studies have suggested that high circulating IGF-1 may translate into promotion of tumor growth in the colon. For example, one study in men and one another in women found that those with higher levels of IGF-1 had double the risk of colorectal cancers compared to those

with lower levels.

Which foods raise IGF-1? Since the primary dietary factor that determines IGF-1 levels is animal protein, the excessive meat, fowl, seafood, and dairy intake common in our society elevates circulating IGF-1. Refined carbohydrates, like white flour, white rice, and sugars can also raise IGF-1 levels, because they cause rapid increases in insulin levels, leading to increases in IGF-1 signaling. In fact, IGF-1 signaling is thought to be a major factor in the connection between diabetes and cancer.

It is the amino acid distribution of animal protein that sparks IGF-1 production. For this reason, isolated soy protein, found in protein powders and meat substitutes, may also be problematic

because the protein is unnaturally concentrated and its amino acid profile is very similar to that of animal protein.

How can we keep IGF-1 in a safe range? Reducing IGF-1 levels by dietary methods is now considered by many scientists to be an effective cancer prevention measure. Minimizing or avoiding animal protein, isolated soy protein and refined carbohydrates can help to keep our IGF-1 levels in a safe range. Green vegetables, beans and other legumes and seeds are rich in plant protein and they have cancer-preventive, not cancer-promoting properties. For optimal cancer protection, vegetables, beans, fruits, nuts and seeds should comprise the vast majority of our calories.

Have something to say? Send a Letter to the Editor by emailing [cmay@cgsentinel.com](mailto:cmay@cgsentinel.com), [cgnews@cgsentinel.com](mailto:cgnews@cgsentinel.com) or drop off a hard copy to 116 N. 6th St.

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## IN BRIEF MARCH 11-MARCH 25

The Family Relief Nursery is holding its annual fundraiser event on April 20. "Let's Make Magic Happen" will be held at the Cottage Grove Armory from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. and will feature a professional mentalist, drinks, mingling and a presentation by the incoming director. To reserve free tickets, call (541) 942-4835.

At the next meeting of the Cottage Grove 912 Project on April 16, we will hear about Freedom Works' Regulatory Action Center, which fights against bureaucratic power-grabs and repeals burdensome, job-killing regulations. The meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. at Stacy's Covered Bridge Restaurant, 401 E Main. This meeting is open to the public.