



# Offbeat Oregon History: Picked the wrong landlady

By Finn JD John  
For The Sentinel



It was after 10 p.m. on a Thursday night, and Multnomah County District Attorney George Chamberlain was dressing for bed when the telephone rang.

He seized the receiver. "Who's there?" he said into it, in none too friendly a tone.

"Never mind," replied a firm matronly voice on the other end of the line. "I want you to come to 181 First Street at once. Something important has happened."

"Can't you come to my office, during business hours?"

"If you knew what I wanted you for, you'd step over here quickly. You are working on that murder, across the river, are you not? Well, it's about that. Now you understand. Ask for Mrs. Whitlock."

Mrs. Whitlock was right — now that Chamberlain knew what she wanted him for, he most certainly would step over there quickly. But she had no real idea how right she actually was.

Mostly, Mrs. Whitlock was just frustrated. She had rented a room in her boardinghouse to a trio of rough characters, who had gone through her stuff and stolen \$60 worth of goods. She'd been trying to get a policeman to come see her about the theft since early that afternoon, without success. She'd tried to reach Chamberlain several times earlier

in the day, but his line had been busy. The police, after the usual assurances of prompt action, had never shown up. Now it was late at night, and she no doubt suspected the thieves would be gone by morning. So she'd called up the district attorney — former attorney-general of the state of Oregon, and a future governor and U.S. Senator — at his home, at 10:15 p.m., to demand instant action. And she got it

It goes without saying that Mrs. Whitlock was the wrong sort of person to steal stuff from.

Now, although Mrs. Whitlock suspected her lodgers of having had something to do with the murder that had happened a few days previously, she had no proof and, really, no evidence at all beyond an intuitive feeling. Mostly she was just using the reference to the murder to get the district attorney out of bed and over to her house before the thieves escaped. It worked.

But, as an added bonus, it turned out she was right. One of her boarders really was the murderer.

This murder was essentially a mugging gone horribly wrong. One of Mrs. Whitlock's boarders, William Strickland (who went by the alias William Dalton), had been leaving a saloon with a friend, Joseph Ewing (who went by the alias Jack Wade or the nickname "Kid McFadden") when they'd come upon James Barkley Morrow, a young bartender on his way home from a visit to his fiancée.

"I know him," Dalton said. "He's a gambler." And he pulled his big-bore single-action Colt and stuck it in Morrow's face.

Now, it is possible (although very unlikely) that Morrow in fact had fleeced Dalton in a rigged card game in one of Portland's low doggeries; that sort of thing was common in 1901. Perhaps he had in mind to get his money back; if that was the case, Morrow likely would have handed over his wallet and there would have been an end to the matter; crooks don't usually call the cops on crooks. However, Wade and Dalton appeared to have been making a regular practice of these discreet stick-up jobs, and it's more likely that this was just another play for drinking money.

But it turned out not to matter. Because of the several bad decisions Dalton made that night, one in particular stands out as a life-changing "boner," the one that would send both himself and Jack Wade to the gallows: As he drew, he cocked his revolver.

And as Wade reached out to take Morrow's wallet from him, the big six-gun in Dalton's hand went off in the bartender's face, sending a .44-caliber

slug crashing through his head and killing him instantly.

Possibly the second worst decision of Dalton's life came when he arrived back at the boardinghouse the night after stealing Mrs. Whitlock's stuff (which, if not the third-worst decision of his life, was surely at least in the top five) and found District Attorney Chamberlain, reinforced with a couple of police detectives, waiting to question him about the murder (which, remember, was only a topic of conversation because the landlady had used it to get the D.A. out of bed). Mindful of the \$500 reward that was being offered for information leading to the arrest, he promptly told them Jack Wade had done the shooting — basically confessing the whole thing, without so much as asking to see a lawyer.

The police soon found Jack Wade in his room at a different boardinghouse, and arrested him as well. Both Dalton and Wade admitted the murder had happened, but each claimed the other was holding the pistol when it went off. No doubt the police played on their ignorance of the law in letting them do this, since clearly they did not at first know that legally it didn't matter who did the actual shooting. Under Oregon law, if a crime goes wrong and an innocent person dies, every member of the conspiracy is held just as culpable as if each had been the trigger man.

This is surely why the trial was so very short. Having depended on a defense that wasn't a defense, the two of them had, by the time they were assigned lawyers, essentially confessed their crime, utterly destroying all chances of acquittal. Wade's attorney advised him to go for the Hail-Mary pass, pleading guilty and throwing himself on the court's mercy. It showed him none. Dalton, who pleaded innocent, was convicted promptly as well, and both men were sentenced to hang.

In the jailhouse waiting for their execution day, the two erstwhile partners made a very interesting pair. Dalton immediately "got religion" in the most extreme way and, painfully aware that he had to make up for an entire lifetime of wickedness and sin in the few weeks that remained to him, proceeded to make life miserable for all and sundry with his prim preachiness; Wade seemed to be playing the whole thing up for laughs. Really they were rather like before-and-after shots of The Prodigal Son.

Also during their jailhouse stay, the mayor of Portland, Henry S. Rowe, happened by and recognized Dalton as the man who had mugged him

a few weeks before. Nothing could be proven, of course, and Dalton denied it — but he did so with a shaky and nervous demeanor that didn't do much to convince anyone he wasn't lying.

On the Sunday before the hanging, Dalton announced plans to fast. "It is the last Sabbath I shall ever spend on Earth," he declared, "and I think too much of my Blessed Saviour to take my thoughts from him."

"I'll eat," Wade shot back. "I have a long road to travel."

And so, under the disapproving (and probably hungry) eye of his ex-partner, he tucked into his chicken dinner. Then he looked up from his repast. "What did you have for breakfast, Billy?"

"Tea," said Dalton primly.

"They must have put something in it!" Wade

crowed. On the day of the hanging, the fence around the scaffold was filled with a capacity crowd of 400, and thousands more clustered around, lining the roofs of nearby buildings and the lower limbs of trees, jockeying for a chance to watch two men die. Wade indulged in some genuine, bona-fide, literal gallows humor; he pulled a cigar out of his pocket and threw it into the crowd, then threw a pocket handkerchief out like a rock star with a T-shirt cannon. Then he grabbed the noose and dramatically sniffed it.

"It's tough!" he hollered, winking at the crowd.

But then, as the appointed hour grew near, he quickly grew serious, for almost the first time since his arrest.

"Don't any of you fellows follow in the tracks of Jack," he told them. "Now don't you do it. You may think I am happy here. I am not."



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### In defense of Wolfclan

So, what's the rational behind the protests in front of the Wolfclan Armory? Please let me explain why I support this business move to Cottage Grove. This is a small, family run business try-

ing to live the American dream. I personally know the co-owner, Al Laskey, for many years as we both worked for the same company back in the 1980's - 1990's. It was EL-JAY manufacturing,

based in Eugene with about 350 employees. He was a supervisor there while I worked as a senior plant electrician. So I knew Al Laskey. If you ask any former employee about him you would hear words like honest, intelligent, helping others, decent, honorable and fair to others. So, when a few protesters started movement to ban his business

and trying to run him out of town I was very upset. We all know that his son, currently in jail, had some issues and made some bad choices. That alone should not be reason to punish his entire family. Painting the rest of family with broad brush is frightening and Un-American and must stop. Show me a family in this country not hav-

ing at least one "bad" apple among them.

According to Sentinel's report, the city council weighted in on the "controversy" during the weekly meeting. Kudos to councilor Jake Boone for being a voice of sanity. On the other hand, councilor Garland Burback comment advising the good folks of Cottage Grove to

"Just don't shop there" is very extreme and uncalled for. He basically promotes a boycott of this business. Councilor Burback is a small business owner himself owning the Cottage Grove Garbage Service.

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Cottage Grove

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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. 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. The Sentinel reserves the right not to print letters that may contain libelous content.

### IN BRIEF APRIL 18-MAY 2

An Earth Day celebration will be held in Coiner Park on Saturday, April 21 beginning at 10 a.m. and ending at 4 p.m., the park will feature food, vendors and music to celebrate the planet. Community organizations will have booths around the park, there will be youth activities, a local birding opportunity, a Native American blessing and a "Trashion" show.

The Family Relief Nursery will hold its annual fundraising event on April 20 beginning at 6:30 p.m. This year's theme is "Let's Make it Happen." Tickets are free. To reserve, call 541-942-4835.

Have an event, class, lecture, party or gathering that people should know about? Send details to cmay@cgsentinel.com