

Offbeat Oregon History: Deadwood Dick's adventures

By Finn JD John
For The Sentinel

Between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the 20th Century, the most popular form of fictional entertainment in America was dime novels.

Dime novels were cheap paperback novelettes printed on pulpwood stock and sold for 5 to 15 cents each. They were pure entertainment, with no literary aspirations whatsoever; plots were lurid and melodramatic, characters were clownish and overdrawn, and heroes and villains were painted without shades of gray. Basically, they were pulp fiction before there was anything called pulp fiction.

One of the most famous dime-novel heroes was Deadwood Dick, a roving gambler, gunfighter, and white-hat con artist, very much in the style of television's "Maverick." Deadwood Dick was the creation of Edward Lytton Wheeler, a New York native who cooked up the character for his Philadelphia Vaudeville theater and then used him in a series of 35 dime jobs published by the Beadle Brothers.

Wheeler, of course, didn't make any trips out to places like Laramie or Cripple Creek or Roseburg to scout locations for his Deadwood Dick stories. So, most of them are geographically ambiguous, and those that do specify real locations contain geographical howlers for the natives to scoff over. But, they were great fun in an era before television or radio, and nobody complained (much).

Now, these old dime novels are hard to come by, and I have not been able to personally inspect all 35 of the Deadwood Dick stories — nor the 100 or so that followed starring our intrepid hero's only son, Deadwood Dick Jr. But in his wanderings about the American West, Deadwood Dick does seem to have strayed into the Oregon country a few times.

DEADWOOD DICK'S BIG DEAL; or, The Gold Brick of Oregon:

The first time appears to have been in "Deadwood Dick's Big Deal; or, The Gold Brick of Oregon" (1883). In this one, "Gold Brick" is a nickname for a gorgeous golden-haired broad who owns a disreputable gambling house, the bank of which Dick undertakes to "break" because he's recognized the "Gold Brick" as his estranged wife, Calamity Jane, the mother of their 3-year-old son. At the end of the book, having succeeded in this little quest of spousal vengeance, Dick puts a cherry on top of his victory by winning sole custody of Deadwood Dick Jr. in a hand of Euchre.

It's probably safe to say the "heroic narrative" in "Deadwood Dick's Big Deal" hasn't aged very well. Although, who knows, it may have provided inspiration for one or two embarrassingly self-indulgent feature movies from the "auteur" era made by bitter, freshly-divorced directors. "Tequila Sunrise" comes to mind.

DEADWOOD DICK'S DANGER DUCKS; or, The Owls of Oregon:

In "Deadwood Dick's Danger Ducks; or, The Owls of Oregon," the next Deadwood Dick story set in the Beaver State, our hero is actually Deadwood Dick Jr. — he who was, on his previous visit to our state, won by his father at a gambling table and torn from his mother, presumably never to see her again.

In spite of that bit of childhood trauma, he seems to have grown up fairly well adjusted, and when we join him at a campfire near Roseburg he's a twenty-something "United States Detective" traveling with his two friends, rough-and-ready mountain man Job Johnson and clownish African-American Nicademus Noodle. (At least, he says it's near Roseburg. But he also says it's an hour's ride east of the "famous lava beds.")

Dick is there in not-so-hot pursuit of a murderer who's escaped from the state pen in Salem. The trail has gone cold.

But, as he's making plans to turn back, a strange forest girl with a head injury stumbles into their camp; and then two local horsemen join

them for the night and, around the campfire, tell them of a gang of notorious bandits who have seized possession of an island in the middle of a lake "some ten miles down the valley" called Lake Sylvan. There is, of course, a rich mine of gold on the two-acre island, and it's presided over by a dangerous damsel known to all of the thoroughly cowed neighbors as "Lady Sylvan." Everyone who's tried to swim out to the island has been turned back or killed by the desperados on the island, who call themselves The Owls. (This seems, to modern ears, a weird name for a gang of desperados to affect. Perhaps all the scarier and more gang-like monikers such as "The Bloods" and "The Crips" and "The James-Younger Gang" were already taken and all that were left were the names of Boy Scout patrols?)

The next morning, one of the two strange horsemen is dead as a doorknob, pinned to his bedroll with a big Bowie knife, and there's no sign of the girl. The other horseman — who later turns out to be the murderer — tries to pin it on the strange girl, but Dick doesn't buy it.

His interest piqued, Dick and his friends decide to join the locals in investigating the island by swimming out to it disguised as ducks — that is, each of them wearing a dead, unplucked duck, staged with some quick-and-dirty taxidermy to keep its head from flopping around, so that the island sentries would see not a bunch of invaders swimming ashore, but merely three very tall, stiff, rigidly immobile ducks slowly and silently drifting toward the island, their heads and necks gently rocking back and forth with the wave action like the masts of tiny ships.

This plan goes just as well as you would expect it to, and all our heroes are promptly captured and subjected to a sort of show trial presided over by the girl with the head injury from Scene One, who turns out to have been Lady Sylvan herself. The murderer whom Dick was pursuing is there as well. In good melodramatic fashion all appears lost, and then virtue emerges triumphant with a

little help from the abiding love that's been burning in the breast of Lady Sylvan since that night by the campfire when Dick fixed up her head injury and gave her a blanket.

She, it turns out, is a figurehead; the Owls are actually a gang of "counterfitters" who are, apparently, stealing gold from various places, bringing it onto the island, and pretending to mine it there.

(As a side note, this would not have worked in real life. Assayers in gold country in the late 1800s were surprisingly good at identifying the source of freshly mined gold based on average grain or nugget size and color and nature of impurities, and used those abilities fairly regularly to catch careless stagecoach robbers. Had someone tried this stunt, the locals would have known exactly what they were doing the minute they first tried to have their "diggings" weighed at the local assayer's office. But, of course, our Philadelphia author didn't know that.)

In the end, justice is more or less served. Nicademus Noodle, after forcing the murderer to change clothes with him, finds \$1,000 in the pocket and hits the road with it. The murderer, thinking he'll restore his fortunes by burgling the bad guy's house, gets shot and killed, so Dick's job is done; nonetheless he insists on riding off into the sunset to his next adventure, without bothering to say goodbye to Lady Sylvan, who we never hear of again.

All in all, it's a pretty rough little story, stretched with a lot of unnecessary "business." And the character of Nicademus Noodle, although endowed with resourcefulness and wit, is nonetheless a typical late-1800s African American character — that is, an insulting racial stereotype brought to life. But overall it's a fun, fast read, and its descriptions of nonexistent Roseburg scenery and geography surely brought a smile to the face of more than one 1880s Douglas County resident.

Worship Directory

DRAIN:

HOPE U.M.C.
131 W "A" St. Drain, OR
541-315-1617
Pastor: Lura Kidner-Miesen
Fellowship & Song: 11:30am
Potluck Lunch: 12:00pm
Worship: 12:30pm

COTTAGE GROVE:

6th & Gibbs Church of Christ
195 N. 6th St. • 541-942-3822
Pastor: Aaron Earlywine
Youth & Families Pastor: Seth Bailey
Service times: 9am & 10:30am
Sunday School: 9am for all ages
Christian Education
Nursery for pre-k - 3rd Grade
www.6thandgibbs.com

Calvary Baptist Church
77873 S 6th St • 541-942-4290
Pastor: Riley Hendricks
Sunday School: 9:45am
Worship: 11:00am
The Journey: Sunday 5:00pm
Praying Thru Life: Wednesday 6:00pm

Calvary Chapel Cottage Grove
1447 Hwy 99 (Village Plaza)
541-942-6842
Pastor: Jeff Smith
Two Services on Sun:
9am & 10:45am
Youth Group Bible Study
Child Care 10:45am Service Only
www.cgcalvary.org

Center for Spiritual Living
700 Gibbs Ave. (Community Center)
Rev. Bobby Lee
Meets Sunday 3:00 p.m.
cslcottagrove@gmail.com

Church of Christ
420 Monroe St • 541-942-8565
Sunday Service: 10:30am

Cottage Grove Bible Church
1200 East Quincy Avenue
541-942-4771
Pastor: Bob Singer
Worship 11am
Sunday School: 9:45am
AWANA age 3-8th Grade,
Wednesdays Sept-May, 6:30pm
www.cgbible.org

Cottage Grove Faith Center
33761 Row River Rd.
541-942-4851
Lead Pastor: Kevin Prueett
www.cg4.tv
Full Children's Ministry available
Service: 10:00am

Delight Valley

Church of Christ
33087 Saginaw Rd. East
541-942-7711
Pastor: Bob Friend
Two Services:
9am - Classic in the Chapel
10:30am - Contemporary in the Auditorium

First Presbyterian Church

3rd and Adams St
541-942-4479
Pastor: Karen Hill
Worship: 10:00am
Sunday School: 10:00am
www.cgpresbynews.com

Hope In The Grove

700 E. Gibbs • 401-855-5668
Pastor: Wayne Husk
Sunday services:
Worship: 9am
Coffee Fellowship: 10:15am
Bible Study: 10:30am

Hope Fellowship

United Pentecostal Church
100 S. Gateway Blvd.
541-942-2061
Pastor: Dave Bragg
Worship: 11:00am Sunday
Bible Study: 7:00pm Wednesday
www.hopefellowshippupc.com
"FINDING HOPE IN YOUR LIFE"

Living Faith Assembly

467 S. 10th St. • 541-942-2612
Worship Services Sundays: 9a & 11a
Youth Worship Sundays: 11a (all ages welcome)
Mondays: 5:30p (6th-12th grades)

Non-Denominational Church of Christ

1041 Penoyer Ave
541-942-8928
Preacher: Tony Martin
Sunday Bible Study: 10:00am
Sunday Worship: 10:50am & 5:30pm
www.penoyeravccoc.com

Old Time Gospel Fellowship

103 S. 5th St. • 541-942-4999
Pastor: Jim Edwards
Sunday Service: 10:00am
Join in Traditional Christian Worship

Our Lady of Perpetual Help and St. Philip Benizi

Catholic Churches
1025 N. 19th St.
541-942-3420
Father: Joseph Hung Nguyen
Holy Mass:
Tue-Thu: 8:30am; Sat: 5:30pm
Sun: 10:30am
Confession: After daily mass,
Sat. 4-5pm or by appointment
St. Philip Benizi, Creswell
552 Holbrook Lane
541-895-8686, Sunday: 8:30am

St. Andrews Episcopal Church

1301 W. Main • 541-767-9050
Rev. Lawrence Crumb
"Church with the flags."
Worship: Sunday 10:30am
All Welcome

Seventh-day Adventist Church

820 South 10th Street
541-942-5213
Pastor: Kevin Miller
Bible Study: Saturday, 9:15 am
Worship Service: Saturday, 10:40
Mid-week Service: Wednesday, 1:00

Trinity Lutheran Church

6th & Quincy • 541-942-2373
Pastor: James L. Markus
Sunday School & Adult Education
9:15am
Sunday Worship 10:30 am
Comm. Kitchen Free Meal Tue & Thur
5:00pm TLC Groups
tlccg.com

United Methodist Church

334 Washington • 541-942-3033
Pastor: Lura Kidner-Miesen
Worship: 10:30am
Comm. Dinner (Adults \$5, Kids Free)
1st & 3rd Monday 5-6:00pm
umcgrove.org

"VICTORY" Country Church

913 S. 6th Street • 541-942-5913
Pastor: Barbara Dockery
Worship Service: 10:00am
Message: "WE BELIEVE IN MIRACLES"

CRESWELL:

Creswell Presbyterian Church
75 S 4th S • 541-895-3419
Rev. Seth Wheeler
Adult Sunday School 9:15am
Sunday Worship Service 10:30 am
website www.creswellpres.org

WHY I TEACH...

When I graduated from college, I wanted a career in business. I wanted to make lots of money and drive a BMW. I got a job selling and writing radio advertising for a big radio station in Portland. After eight months of "dress for success" and meetings with clients I became discouraged. I realized that even in my most successful month of sales, all I was really doing was moving money around. I wanted my time and

my life to be spent doing something that mattered more than moving money. So, I went back to college for another 18 months and became certified to be an elementary teacher.

I have taught 1st, 2nd or 3rd grade for 34 years, 32 of them right here in Cottage Grove. Sometimes I am tired or discouraged. It is an overwhelming job, because you want to help every single child make lots of progress. Classes can be huge

and behaviors can be difficult. Sometimes sadness from kid's lives make them uninterested in learning. But every single day I know my time was well spent on the children and families of our town. I am now teaching the children of former students! I have loved spending my days with children. I will always be glad I became a teacher.

Debbie Taie

Bohemia Elementary School

I became a teacher because the most influential and supportive people in my life were teachers, either in a school or by nature. When it came time to choose what I wanted to pursue as a career, I needed to know that my life and my labors would help other people and contribute to the community I live in instead of seeking to profit. I wanted a life focused on giving rather than taking; in teaching, I have that chance every day.

Daniel Henson

Kennedy High School
Language arts and
social studies instructor



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Saturday May 12th • 9am-4pm

American Legion Hall • 826 W. Main

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cgsentinel.com

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter." - Dr. Martin Luther King

TIM EAST
Laue Lane
TimLaue.com • 541-600-9722 COUNTY COMMISSIONER



"The people in Lane County deserve more. Our seniors should feel secure in their homes. Our children should be safe at school and our families should have decent opportunities for a hopeful tomorrow." - Tim Laue

Tim has BOLD IDEAS for Lane County's communities.

- **Increase public safety patrols** on our highways and in our neighborhoods.
- **Hire coordinators in East Lane watersheds** to improve rural services.
- **Demand a fair share** because while you pay more and get less every year, out of state corporations get millions in benefits and tax breaks.
- **Provide for affordable healthcare & housing.**

Tim has served and delivered in Lane County for twenty-five years.

- **New public safety facilities** for fire, ambulance and youth services.
- **A new library, improved parks and open spaces and better neighborhoods.**
- **Keeping government accountable** by protecting vulnerable people and our environment.
- **Balancing services during deep cuts** including public safety, public health, mental health, human services, youth services, economic development and jobs.

*Common Decency,
Common Sense,
Common Ground,
Common Good.*

ELECT TIM LAUE FOR LANE COUNTY COMMISSIONER

timlaue.com

(541) 600-9722 • votetim@timlaue.com

Paid for and authorized by Tim Laue for Commissioner, Lee Gire, Treasurer

Our Worship Directory is a weekly feature in the newspaper. If your congregation would like to be a part of this directory, please contact the Cottage Grove Sentinel @ 541-942-3325

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With Us!