

# Offbeat Oregon: History No. 506

## Teen girl ended brewing family feud with a shotgun

By Finn J.D. John

For the Cottage Grove Sentinel

From around 1875 to about 1915, the riverfront part of Clatsop County (outside Astoria) was more populated than it is today. The gillnet fishing fleet plied the big waters of the river, hauling in tons of salmon, and the blue-water sailing ships of the grain fleet daily poured in and out of Astoria's ports. Many of the locals who worked as fishermen and net menders preferred to live away from Astoria proper — at the time the town had a reputation, which it sometimes well deserved, as a nest of shanghaiers.

So, the net menders and fishermen and sail-makers and chandlers who didn't absolutely have to be in Astoria to ply their trades would row or sail up the great lake-like expanse of the Columbia a few miles, and make their homes in one of the little villages on the riverbank — villages with no roads, whose only connection with the outside world was the river.

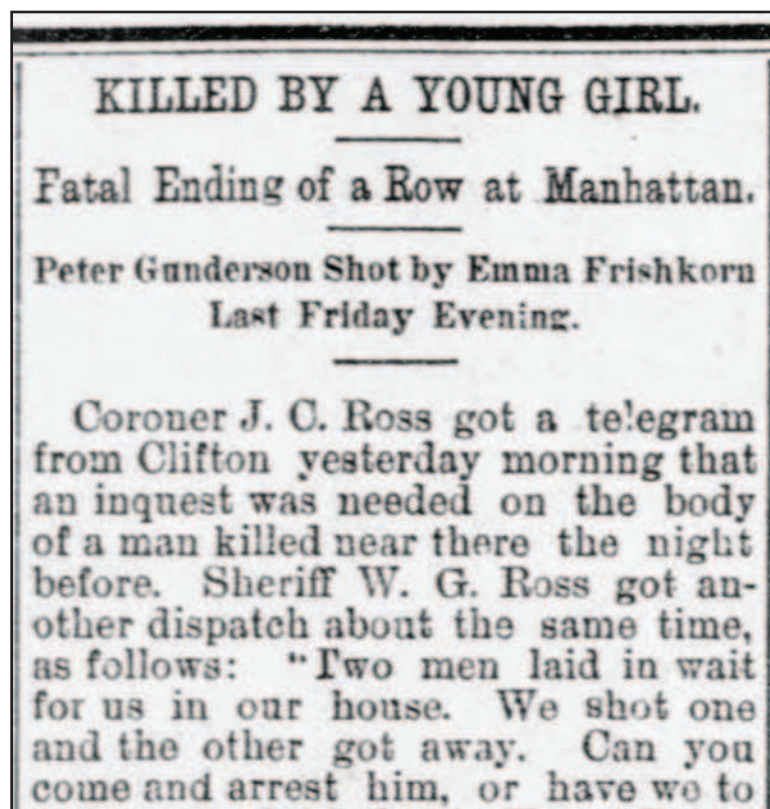
Most of these villages are long gone now, all traces having decayed in the relentless dampness. Many of them exist today only as names mentioned in the Daily Astorian; you won't even find some of them in Oregon Geographic Names, the three-inch-thick reference tome published by the Oregon Historical Society. We don't even know, today, exactly where they were.

One such village was called Manhattan, and it was probably a mile or two downstream from Clifton. And it was, in 1887, the site of a shooting that was unusual in that it was done by a 14-year-old girl.

Here's the story — as much of it as we know:

The Henry and Bertha Frishkorn family had rented a large house in Manhattan. With them lived their two daughters, 14-year-old Emma and 22-year-old Minnie; and two boarders, Norwegian net menders Peter Gunderson, 32, and Julius Udbye, 43.

According to the Daily Astorian, the five of them seemed to have worked out an arrangement by which Gunderson and Udbye paid the rent, and the Frishkorn family supplied all the meals. This apparently worked OK, until Gunderson and Udbye started courting Emma and Minnie. Both of them — but Gunderson most especially — seemed to have gotten the idea that the girls' hands in marriage were part of the deal: We pay the rent, and you supply meals — oh yeah, and wives.



The newspaper coverage in the Jan. 16, 1887, edition of the Daily Astorian after the shooting in Manhattan several days earlier. (Image: Daily Astorian)

Matters came to a head on Jan. 11, when Gunderson got Minnie alone and asked her to marry him. She turned him down.

"He asked her why," the Daily Astorian recounted, several days later. "She said she had been told he was cruel, and that he already had a wife and children. He denied it, and asked her who said so; was it her father? She finally told him it was her mother that had warned her."

Gunderson went to bed angry, and the next morning, "he was very abusive to the old folks."

Two days later, the girls were invited to a dance at a neighbor's house — the neighbors, a family called Thompson, lived on one of the islands in the river — and both of them left the house and paddled off to the Thompsons' house.

As soon as they were gone, Gunderson and Udbye turned on the Frishkorns and basically drove them from the house. They fled to the river, climbed into their boat, and rowed to the Thompsons' house for help.

The next evening, with a group of neighbors to protect them, the elder Frishkorns returned to the house to retrieve their things. One of the neighbors rowed ahead to try to smooth the way, telling Gunderson that the "old folks" would be there soon, and just wanted to collect their clothes and personal belongings and leave. Gunderson said that would be fine, and that there would be no trouble.

When the party arrived, Udbye was sitting in a corner playing an accordion and Gunderson was standing by the windows watching them approach. When they entered the house, he shouted, "Who brought all these sons of bitches here?"

"These men will stay here until I get my clothes," Bertha Frishkorn told him.

"Where is my whore?" Gunderson shouted back — meaning, presumably, Minnie. "I am the boss here and will show you. Get out from here!"

He then picked up a big knife off the table and raised it, yelling for everyone to get out. Udbye put his accordion down and slipped

upstairs, returning with a heavy coat draped over his arm.

Meanwhile, Minnie, the 22-year-old whom Gunderson had proposed to two days earlier, went to the table to try to calm him down. But instead, once Udbye had reappeared, he gave him what appeared to be a prearranged signal. The arm with the overcoat came up, spat fire. The bullet, intended for Henry Frishkorn, missed. Meanwhile Gunderson was charging straight at Minnie with the knife.

Then a shotgun roared, deafening everyone. Pellets spattered the wall near Udbye's head, and the concussion blew out all the lights in the house except for one bulls-eye lantern.

The shotgun roared a second time, and the top of Gunderson's head flew off and he collapsed, literally dead before he hit the floor. The bulls-eye lantern went out, plunging the house into darkness. It turned out that while all the adults had been shouting and

threatening each other, 14-year-old Emma had slipped into the closet where the shotgun was kept, and quietly loaded it. When Udbye fired at her father, she shot at him, but missed because her mother was standing nearby and she didn't want to pepper the old woman with stray pellets. Then, Gunderson having gotten dangerously close to Minnie with that knife and clearly intending to use it when he got to her, she let him have the other barrel.

The shot gunning, and the subsequent darkness, put an immediate damper on the growing riot. All parties to the conflict separated for the night. Emma, pale and shaking, had already fled to the boat, and she and the rest of her family retreated to the Thompsons' house.

The next day, everyone came to Astoria on the sternwheeler Favorite, and the sheriff's investigation was held. Emma, not surprisingly, was held to have acted in self-defense; but Udbye drew a one-year prison sentence for assault with a dangerous weapon.

As with so many stories of this kind, there are some unanswered questions here. Chief among those is, why did the Frishkorns come to retrieve their personal effects in the dark of night rather than waiting for morning? And the text of Henry Frishkorn's initial telegram to the sheriff in Astoria has a distinctly disingenuous sound to it. "Two men laid in wait for us in our house," he telegraphed from the nearby town of Clifton. "We shot one, and the other got away."

"Laid in wait" ... playing an accordion?

The real story is probably that this was an old-fashioned group fistfight that got out of hand — that the Frishkorns, reinforced with a large posse of supportive neighbors and perhaps braced with a drink or two, came that night to avenge the insults of Gunderson and Udbye with an old-fashioned thrashing. But regardless of that, no one — especially after Gunderson pulled the knife and Udbye started shooting — could blame the frightened 14-year-old girl hiding in the closet for putting an end to it the way she did.



### 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  
Summer Service: 9:30 am  
Christian Education:  
Pre-K through 5th  
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.  
cslcottagegrove@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 Pruett  
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 Baptist Church

301 S. 6th St • 541-942-8242  
Interim Pastor: Reed Webster  
Sunday School 9:30am  
Worship Service 11:00am  
Youth Wednesday 6:30pm  
cgfirstbaptist.com

#### 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.hopefellowshipupc.com  
"FINDING HOPE IN YOUR LIFE"

#### 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.penoyeravcecc.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

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