

# Death and Oregon's Settler Generation

## *Connecting Parricide, Agricultural Decline, and Dying Pioneers at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*

AT 9:30 ON THE MORNING of June 20, 1895, the eight-year-old Linn County Pioneer Association convened in Brownsville, Oregon, for the second day of its annual reunions. Events that morning included the yearly roll call of members who had passed away since the previous year's gathering. The three-person "Committee on the Death of Members of This Association" read a tribute as part of the occasion. It began:

Pioneers of Linn County we have been Permitted to meet again and receive Happy Greeting. But amidst our glad Hand Shakes and cordial greetings there is a sadness and Heartache when we recall so many familiar Faces whom we were wont to see in our annual reunions. Who Have answered the Roll Call of the Death Angel and Have gone to their Eternal Home. Death has made sad Inroads Among our Sturdy Pioneers. Many who were with us the Past two and one year ago will meet with us no more on Earth. We are fast Passing Away. A few more years and the last Pioneer Shall have gone to his final reward. But we acknowledge the Divine hand in th[i]s garnering in the Ripened Sheaves and will not repine. We extend our most earnest Sympathy to loved ones thus bereaved and would admonish all to be ready for the last roll call.

The committee then submitted the names of a dozen recently departed.<sup>1</sup>

Although the cause and mood of the annual reunion of the Linn County pioneers was celebratory and forever cheerful, the annual roll call of an ever-increasing number of the dead cast more than a moment of melancholy over the occasion, as the so-called Committee on Death made abundantly clear.



*The same year as its 1887 founding, the Linn County Pioneer Association began hosting its annual reunion, an event that celebrated the area's early pioneers just as they were passing away in larger and larger numbers. Within a decade or two of this 1891 photograph, most of the grey-haired pioneers seen here had died, leaving an organization with so few members that it could no longer conduct business. It reformulated as the Linn County Pioneer Memorial Association. The reunion continues today as the Brownsville Pioneer Picnic.*

After all, an event that sought to bring together and applaud an older and inexorably aging generation necessarily had to contend with the demise of yet more and more of the very people being reunited and feted. The survivors, moreover, were always reminded, if need be by the Committee on Death itself, that their number would soon be up as well — “A few more years and the last Pioneer Shall have gone to his final reward.”

The 1895 reunion took place amid a worldwide depression that hammered at the local economy. At the time, Linn County's agriculturally based economy depended especially on wheat. But the crop's selling price in Oregon

had precipitously fallen from a high of \$1.11 per bushel in 1877 to only 47 cents in 1895. Meanwhile, transportation costs controlled by railroad and riverboat monopolies remained high. This forced farmers to produce more in order to earn what they needed to pay for the delivery of their product to a market that already bore too much.<sup>2</sup> An indication of hard times in 1890s Linn County was its shrinking tax revenue, which declined from \$170,000

to \$126,000 between 1893 and 1895. Over the same two-year period, the number of delinquent taxpayers in the county climbed from an already staggering 28 percent of the taxpaying population to a devastating 47 percent.<sup>3</sup>

Amid this financial despair, and precisely five months after the 1895 roll call of the pioneer dead in Brownsville, a branch of one of the area's most revered pioneer families, whose family tree entwined with those of countless other honored early settlers from across the Pacific Northwest, suffered a horrendous calamity. On the afternoon of November 19, during a family squabble, eighteen-year-old Loyd Montgomery murdered his mother, father, and a visiting neighbor, all at the Montgomery family home a few miles from Brownsville. Loyd coldly shot each of his victims through the head.<sup>4</sup>

At first glance, local murders, world-wide depression, and the regional commemoration of Oregon pioneers may appear to have little to do with each other.

On the contrary, this article explains that they were intimately connected and, moreover, encourages thinking about how coincident events that seem to have little correlation are in fact culturally and structurally connected. The events considered herein most obviously relate to each other through the theme of death: brutal, shocking, senseless death in the case of a pioneer family; the death of a traditional, agrarian way of a life for many as economic decline steepened at the turn of the twentieth century; and the commemoration of a dying generation who had earlier expanded the continental boundaries of a nation and founded a new state. But death serves



*Loyd Montgomery's picture appeared in the Albany Weekly Herald-Disseminator in 1895, just after he brutally murdered his parents. His crime related to the economic depression that ravaged Linn County at the time and was also culturally linked to the era's intense focus on the heroic Oregon pioneer.*

as more than simply a leitmotif in these seemingly disparate Linn County events of the 1890s — it connects parricide, depression, and celebration in a triangulation of cause, effect, and remembrance that provided meaning to how a large number of Oregonians experienced the complicated transition to the twentieth century.

The contention that death played a central role in American culture at the end of the nineteenth century is not a new notion. In his 1973 study *Wisconsin Death Trip*, Michael Lesy utilized disturbing photographic images and macabre newspaper items to show how the oppressive atmosphere that settled over rural America between 1890 and 1910 led to increased rates of paranoia, madness, murder, and suicide. It also drove large numbers of rural people from the decaying countryside to the city, where they purposely created a vibrant urban culture in direct opposition to whence they came.<sup>5</sup>

What happened in Oregon and Linn County certainly reflects elements of what Lesy discovered in Wisconsin. But the situation in late-nineteenth-century rural Oregon, and one might argue for other places in the Far West as well, was exacerbated by the concomitant mass die-off of the aging generation that had been responsible for the early American settlement of the state and region. The pervasiveness of pioneer death in Oregon at this time provided a cultural moment in which survivors and descendants created a heroic mythology of their state in memorials to the departed that ranged from the ubiquitous obituary to the full-fledged pioneer organization.

Constitutive of this cultural moment was the relentless decline of Oregon's rural economy. As depression deepened and more and more of the early settlers passed away, efforts intensified to remember Oregon's pioneer generation as representative of a cheerier and more heroic phase of the local past. Simultaneously, depression undercut any number of the families of the descendants of Oregon's pioneers. In Linn County, where a great deal of pioneer celebration and economic decay combined during the 1890s, financial despair worsened the already strained relations among descendants of one of the most honored pioneer families of the region. This resulted in unfathomable murders of some of that family's members at the hands of yet another.

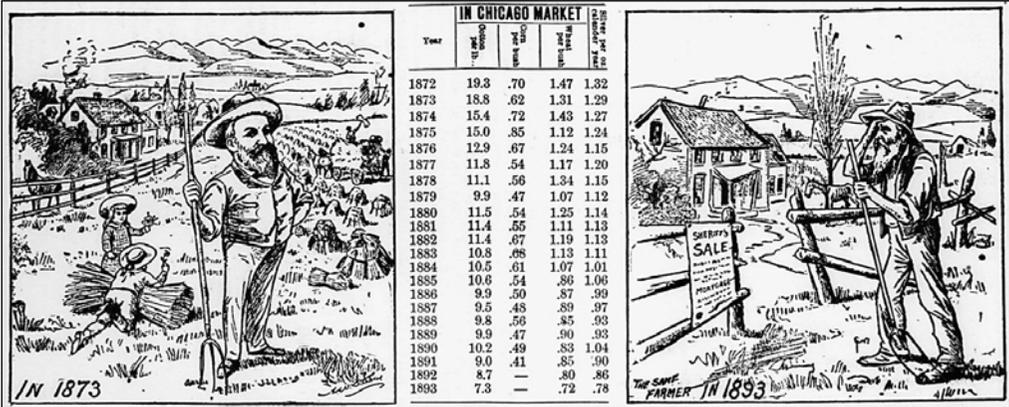
In a 2012 article for the *Oregon Historical Quarterly* on the Montgomery parricides, I argued that part of the troubling transition to the twentieth century that rural Oregonians experienced was the rearrangement of time-honored gender roles. This added to the anxieties of the era, provided a cause for the homicides, and influenced how people near and far made sense of the senseless slaughter.<sup>6</sup> In this article, I explain that the local fixation on area pioneers while depression raged added gravitas to the parricide in which both the victims and the perpetrator had been unable to live up to

the embellished example of their ancestors. Victims and perpetrators then perished in ways far different from the pioneers who were widely envisioned as meeting death nobly and then heading peacefully on “to their Eternal Home.” In this light, it is easy to imagine that the local commemoration of pioneers, the local significance attributed to them, and the effects of the depression on many of their descendants contributed to certain silences about the Montgomery murders at the time and in the years that followed. By the same token, commemoration, signification, and depression also shaped the ways in which people talked about them at the time and how they remembered them in the decades to come. As such, parricide, depression, and celebration combined during the 1890s as essential elements in locals’ construction of a history that became a memory in a specific Oregon locale.

CYCLES OF DOWNTURN in the late-nineteenth-century economy hit America’s rural areas hard. Farmers and their communities began to feel the stress of market vagaries already during the 1870s and 1880s. Suffering deepened in the 1890s, when full-scale depression enveloped the western world. Through those years, America’s farmers also reeled from climbing transportation and storage costs, a tightening circulation of currency, and a growing realization of their powerlessness in the face of monopolies that appeared to be gaining control of the nation. Thousands lost their lands and a way of life that reached far back not just into their nation’s history, but into their own families’ histories, too.<sup>7</sup>

This misery politicized farmers across the nation. In Linn County, some formed a farmer’s union and built their own warehouse in the town of Shedd in 1871.<sup>8</sup> A couple of years later, when the downturn of 1873 hit, Oregon farmers created a state branch of the national Grange. Membership reached a peak of close to 11,000 in 1875. From that year, save for brief moments when it rallied, membership continuously declined as farmers found no simple solutions to their woes.<sup>9</sup> Though considerably diminished, the Grange remained a visible institution in many communities for years to come. Linn County in 1895, for example, supported more chapters (13) and pledged more members (495) than any other county in Oregon.<sup>10</sup> The Grange even occasionally sent envoys to the Linn County Pioneer Association’s annual reunion. In 1908, for example, a lecturer from the state office provided an address to those gathered in Brownsville.<sup>11</sup>

In 1891, interest in the more politically minded National Farmers Alliance spread through the Willamette Valley. The following spring, mounting dissatisfaction with both the Republican and Democratic parties’ unresponsiveness to farmers’ deepening distress led the alliance (along with other progressive reformers) to found a branch of the Peoples or Populist Party



The editorial cartoon “The Farmer and Demonitization,” published in the Dallas, Texas, Southern Mercury on October 19, 1893, depicts the effects of the late-nineteenth-century economic collapse on rural farmers nationwide. That collapse strained many Oregon farming families, including Loyd Montgomery’s parents, who were descendants of some of the state’s most celebrated early pioneers.

in Oregon. The Populists composed one of the most successful third parties in American history, seriously challenging the established political system from the local to the national levels during the 1890s.<sup>12</sup>

In Oregon, the Populists registered some significant successes but then quickly declined.<sup>13</sup> In Linn County, a traditionally democratic stronghold, the 1892 Populist candidate for president, James B. Weaver, carried the county, as did the Democratic-Populist fusion nominee William Jennings Bryan in 1896.<sup>14</sup> The 1896 election proved the high-water mark for the Populists nationwide and in Oregon. The party soon faded, and scholars view the decade of the 1890s, when all this happened, as a profound social, cultural, and economic turning point in American history — a turning away from rural and agrarian and to corporate, industrial, and urban interests.<sup>15</sup>

In the Pacific Northwest, rural depression and the somewhat forbidding fate of farmers’ political interests coincided with the reality that the venerated pioneer generation — those who had migrated to the Oregon Country in the 1840s and 1850s and who had founded the region’s small industries and once thriving farms — was fast dying off. The coincidence of these events made the transition from the traditions of the nineteenth century to the uncertainties of the twentieth century especially marked in Oregon. It created something of a cultural crisis evident in the fixation on, embellishment of, and memorialization of the pioneers and their demise.



*The Oregon Pioneer Association formed in 1873 at the same time as a financial panic set off an economic downturn that affected Oregon, the United States, and Europe. Over the next several decades, as depression waxed and waned, celebration of Oregon pioneers, fast passing away from old age, intensified from the state to the local level. This photograph captures a moment at the 1897 Oregon Pioneer Association reunion held at the North Pacific Industrial Pavilion (formerly located on West Burnside Street and Twentieth Avenue) in Portland.*

Memorializing pioneers thus became a fad in late-nineteenth-century Oregon. In October 1873, coinciding with a financial panic that triggered depression across North America and Europe, a group met at the historic site of Champoeg, in the northern Willamette Valley, where they formalized the Oregon Pioneer Association (OPA). Its initial membership was 145. At its commencement, the OPA opened its ranks to people who had settled in Oregon Territory prior to January 1853, later extending that date to 1855, and then to 1859 (the year when Oregon became a state) as more and more stalwarts passed away. The OPA established an annual reunion that, within a couple of years, would always meet in Portland in mid June. The event became increasingly more elaborate over time, with parades, banquets, dances, and

speeches being added here and there. The OPA published its meeting proceedings, addresses, recollections, biographies, and histories in its *Transactions*, creating an important record of pioneer memory and early Oregon history.<sup>16</sup>

Occasionally, the OPA's longtime secretary, George H. Himes, furnished Portland's *Oregonian*, by the 1890s one of the state's largest newspapers, with a list of Oregon pioneers who had passed away in a given year. Himes even tracked those individuals who had moved to other states after having helped found Oregon. In 1896, Himes estimated that only about two thousand such pioneers still lived. When the next year's list of the dead included several hundred names, the *Oregonian* frankly stated that "with each successive year, the little band of pioneers grows smaller, and soon will be recorded 'Finis.'"<sup>17</sup>

Other groups and organizations with the goals of recording Oregon's early history and commemorating its dying pioneers appeared in the 1890s.



OHS, neg. no. 11038

*The Native Sons of Oregon, one of a number of groups founded in 1890s Oregon with the intention of celebrating the state's pioneers and history, formed over a period of years and formalized on a permanent footing in 1899. This photograph, taken in about 1900, captures their visible presence at the Oregon Pioneer Association reunion.*

# PIONEER ASSOCIATION!



THE FIFTH ANNUAL RE-UNION OF THE

## OREGON

# PIONEER

WILL BE

## ASSOCIATION!

HELD ON

# THE STATE FAIR GROUNDS!

SALEM, OREGON.

June 15th and 16th, 1876.

**GRAND PARADE** At 10 1/2 o'clock A. M., on the 15th, under the direction of Thos. C. Shaw, Chief Marshal, lead by the Northwest Brass Band of Portland.

**ANNUAL ADDRESS**, At 11 o'clock A. M., by Hon. R. P. Boise, followed by a **PICNIC DINNER**, AT 1 O'CLOCK.

**PIONEER LADY'S ADDRESS**, by Mrs. Jennie E. Dawne, followed by a **MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT**, in the Pavilion, by Pioneer Young Ladies and Gentlemen.

A **GRAND BALL** will be given in the Pavilion, on the evening of June 15th. Tickets, \$2 00  
**GOOD MUSIC ENGAGED.**

**DESCRIPTIVE ADDRESS** and **ROLL CALL** of 1844, by Hon. John Minto. **PIONEER POEM**, by Capt. O. C. Applegate, followed by a **MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT**, by the Pupils of the Schools of Salem.

Arrangements have been perfected by the different Transportation Companies to return home free on the Certificate of the Secretary of the Association, who will provide A.L.I. with the same, on application at his office, on the grounds. Programmes on the Ground. For further Particulars, apply to the Secretary.

J. HENRY BROWN, Secretary.

JOHN W. GRIM, President.

CAMPING FACILITIES will be provided for all who wish to Camp on the Ground.

*Pioneer celebrations that took place in Oregon in the last decades of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth centuries grew increasingly elaborate and lengthy over the years. A broadside from the 1876 Oregon Pioneer Association reunion already advertised parades, addresses, music, and even a grand ball.*

The Oregon Historical Society (OHS) incorporated in 1898, with Himes as one of its most active early supporters and curators.<sup>18</sup> Both the Oregon Native Sons and the separate Oregon Native Daughters formed in 1899. Less exclusionary than the OPA, Native Sons and Native Daughters opened their memberships to those in the state who did not necessarily have pioneer heritage; they still had to be born in Oregon and, importantly, had to be white.<sup>19</sup> Both organizations eventually had a number of chapters, or “Cabins” as they were called, throughout the state. Members discussed business, studied Oregon history, collected various relics from the past, laid plans for special pioneer exhibitions, and listened to old-timers’ stories of pioneer days.<sup>20</sup> All cabins carried names of significant Oregon pioneers. On June 9, 1899, for example, some interested Brownsville residents instituted a local chapter that they christened in honor of James Blakely, one of the two co-founders of Brownsville. The list of the cabin’s original officers included many who were also deeply involved in Linn County politics and also read like a virtual who’s who of officers of the Linn County Pioneer Association.<sup>21</sup>

The centrality of pioneer memorialization to both the Native Sons and Native Daughters is captured in their respective pledges “to perpetuate the names and memories of [Oregon’s] pioneers.”<sup>22</sup> Working in concert with both the OPA and the OHS, the Native Sons created a Grand Librarian and charged him with the responsibility of collecting “any and all materials . . . showing the difficulties, the labors and the triumphs of the pioneers in founding our great state, and [documenting] who these heroes and heroines were.”<sup>23</sup> The Native Sons also published its own journal, the *Oregon Native Son and Historical Magazine*. In addition to organizational news, it carried legends, poems, geographical names, histories, short stories, and biographies — all related to early Oregon history. Although the Native Sons’ and Native Daughters’ racial barriers to membership excluded Native Americans, both organizations nevertheless sought to record Indian place-names and preserve Indian traditions and lore.<sup>24</sup>

The ever-present themes of the heroic nature of Oregon’s first settlers and the seemingly contradictory leitmotifs of the happier times of the past and the hardships and privations endured and overcome in a bygone era perpetually colored these varied memorialization efforts. By focusing on having overcome adversities — such as the ordeal of crossing the plains, the constant worry about possible Indian attack, homesickness, illness, disaster, and even death itself — the OPA and the Native Sons and Native Daughters attributed to the pioneers a host of virtues such as vigor, intelligence, courage, morality, and perseverance. Pioneers, they thereby implied, bequeathed those traits to Oregon, providing the state and its people the characteristics needed to successfully confront the complexities of the modern era. A focus on hardship,

more and more apparent in, for example, the annual addresses at the OPA's reunion beginning in 1888, also provided lessons by way of comparison to the difficulties Oregonians were increasingly facing as the 1890s approached and then advanced. The theme of happier days in the past likewise provided a direct contrast to, even criticism of, the contemporary era.<sup>25</sup>

Another theme that grew in significance in OPA annual addresses was, of course, the death of the aging pioneers themselves, forever drawn attention to in the annual roll call of the living and the dead. From the earliest years of the organization, however, the awareness that death continually stalked the pioneers made even more imperative the survivors' need to meet regularly and to recollect and reconstruct the fading past. In his 1875 address at the second annual reunion, S.F. Chadwick, Secretary of the State of Oregon, already expressed these very sentiments when he admonished surviving pioneers, "before starting out upon that journey from which none shall ever return" to "meet as often as possible."<sup>26</sup> This imperative provided the reunion a bittersweet tone from the earliest years of its existence.

The OPA, OHS, and Native Sons and Native Daughters were statewide organizations. Among the most successful local groups of this type to emerge during the same era was the Linn County Pioneer Association (LCPA). On July 30, 1887, eight men met in Crawfordsville, approximately six miles east of Brownsville, and founded the organization. They also arranged for a picnic and reunion of pioneers for that September. It became an annual event, though the next year the officers moved it to the month of June. Save for a few early exceptions, it subsequently met in that month and in the town of Brownsville.<sup>27</sup>

"The object of the Association," as set out in its original constitution, "shall be to collect from living witnesses such facts relating to the Pioneers and History of the settlement of Linn County as the Association may deem worthy of preservation, and to promote social intercourse among its members."<sup>28</sup> The second goal emerged early on as the most important activity of the LCPA. Its principal work entailed the organization of the annual reunion, whose various parades, songs and musical productions, visits by politicians, prayers, baseball games, picnics and other varied events and attractions (ranging from taffy pulls and tugs-of-war to hot-air balloon ascents and parachute jumps) came to occupy three to four days. On occasion, directors set aside one day of the reunion for events sponsored by the Native Sons and Native Daughters. A good portion of the reunion was given over to speeches and addresses about the pioneers of the county specifically and of Oregon more generally. Beginning in 1888, reunion organizers set aside time for the aging pioneers to publicly recollect the very early days in the local area and to reminisce about incidents while crossing the plains during the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>29</sup>



*Both men and women engaged in the celebration and memorializing of Oregon pioneers. The Native Sons and the Native Daughters sponsored chapters or “cabins” across the state, named in honor of significant Oregon pioneer men or women. Members of the Marguerite Tuffs cabin no. 16 ride on a float they created for a pioneer celebration.*

As with the OPA, the nature of the LCPA’s membership led it early on to regularly reflect on the death of the very people for whom and by whom the organization was founded. The 1890 reunion appears to be the first for which officers appointed a special committee “to draft suitable Resolutions in Memory of our departed.” This was also the first year in which the association’s minutes recorded the names of those who did not answer the annual roll call. The 1890 report ended with the committee’s trust that the departed had ended up in “a happier land.”<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, the local newspaper, the *Brownsville Times*, dependably reported each year on the reunion and the fact that the old timers were fast disappearing. In 1901, for example, the paper carried a short piece claiming that “death has been, and is still busy, in their ranks, thinning [the pioneers] perceptibly.”<sup>31</sup> In 1907, the paper explained that during the year’s annual roll call: “It was noticeable that quite a number did not respond when their



*Following the first meeting held in Crawfordsville in 1887, the Linn County Pioneer Association met annually during the summer in Brownsville, Oregon. This photograph of its members in 1890, taken by Joseph H. Templeton, provides a list of the attendees, a number of whom were related to Loyd Montgomery. “Mrs. Robert Montgomery,” for example, was his paternal grandmother. A few short years after this photograph, she would play a key role in the parricide and its aftermath. All names of the attendees are unknown; however, the back of the photograph lists several members, numbered counting from left to right:*

*Front Row: 2, Patterson Dinwiddie; 5, Nelson Cochran; 7, Robert Glass; 8 Bert [Albert] Templeton; 9 James Templeton*



*Second Row: 1 John Brown; 7, Mrs. George Cooley; 14, Mrs. A.C. Hausman*

*Third Row: 2 William Hunter; 3, Mrs. Beemie Hunter; 8, John McKinney; 14, Mrs. Patterson Dinwiddie; 15, Mrs. Robert Montgomery*

*Fourth Row (standing): 1, Mrs. Gray Rice; 2, Mrs. Hiram Powell; 6, Samuel Templeton; 7, Robert Templeton; 10, Peter Hume*

*Back Row: 9, Harmon Swank (with vest); 10, Joseph Templeton*



*James Blakely, one of the two founders of the town of Brownsville, Oregon, was ninety-nine years old at the time of this photograph. He died at age 100 in 1913. When he passed away, he was celebrated as Oregon's oldest pioneer; the state's House of Representatives even passed a resolution in his honor.*

names were called. This recalled the fact that the honored state builders are rapidly passing to their eternal reward.”<sup>32</sup> A few years earlier, the paper printed the “Pioneer’s Song,” which a reunion attendee composed and which was sung to the mournful tune of “Auld Lang Syne.” It concluded with the sorrowfully hopeful verse,

We’re getting old and feeble now, / Our lives are nearly passed; / To some of us old  
Pioneers / This gathering is our last. / We hope to meet old Pioneers / All safely on that  
shore — / Yes, every one of our loved band, / To live forever more.<sup>33</sup>

There was no stopping the annual harvest. Between 1900 and 1907, the minutes of the LCPA recorded the names of 315 local pioneers who had died during that time.<sup>34</sup>

Arguably the most lauded local pioneer to pass away during the relatively early years of the LCPA’s reunions was James Blakely. He died on January 29, 1913, at age 100. With his uncle-in-law Hugh Brown and aunt Clarissa Brown, Blakely and his wife had crossed the plains to Oregon in 1846. The

couples then settled next to each other on the banks of the Calapooya River, where they founded the town of Brownsville, naming it for Hugh.<sup>35</sup> Blakely and his wife Sarah, who had passed away before he did, had been members of the LCPA. Blakely at times attended the Brownsville event (including when he was ninety-nine years old); he was even known to have made the long journey to Portland for the OPA's annual reunion.<sup>36</sup> An indication of Blakely's prominence beyond the bounds of Linn County came only days after his death when the Oregon House of Representatives unanimously adopted a resolution in his honor.<sup>37</sup>

Part of the memorialization of Blakely had to do with his advanced age. When he passed away, he was touted as the "oldest pioneer" in Oregon. But he also had a life that was well worth

recalling, at least to a large number of Oregonians: he had co-founded Brownsville, he had been a successful businessman in that town, he had served as the captain of a volunteer regiment that participated in the 1856 Rogue River Indian War, and he had at one time served in the Oregon Legislature.<sup>38</sup> When he turned 100 in November 1912, even the *Oregonian* newspaper in distant Portland carried news of the occasion and the birthday celebration in Brownsville. In addition to remarking on some of the aforementioned accomplishments of this "honored pioneer," the article naturally reported on his family gathered at the event.<sup>39</sup> And what a list of family members it was. Those assembled for the festivities included eight of Blakely's nine surviving children (he had ten), eleven grandchildren, thirteen great-grandchildren, and two great-great grandchildren.<sup>40</sup>

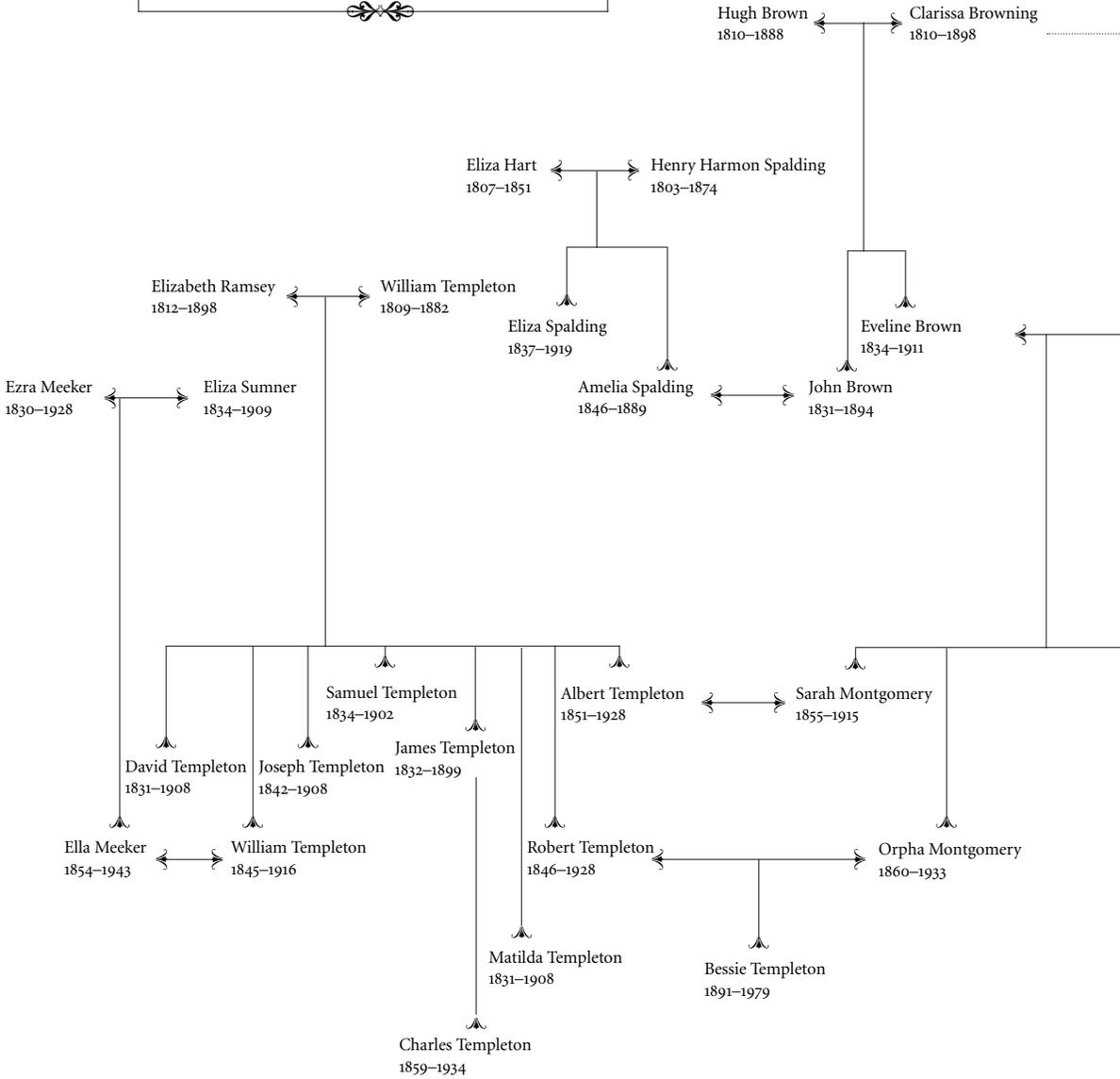
As might be imagined, Blakely's fertility along with his sixty-seven years of residence in Brownsville had, by 1913, connected him to many other celebrated pioneer families of the area (see Loyd Montgomery's relations on



OHS Research Library, file no. 115

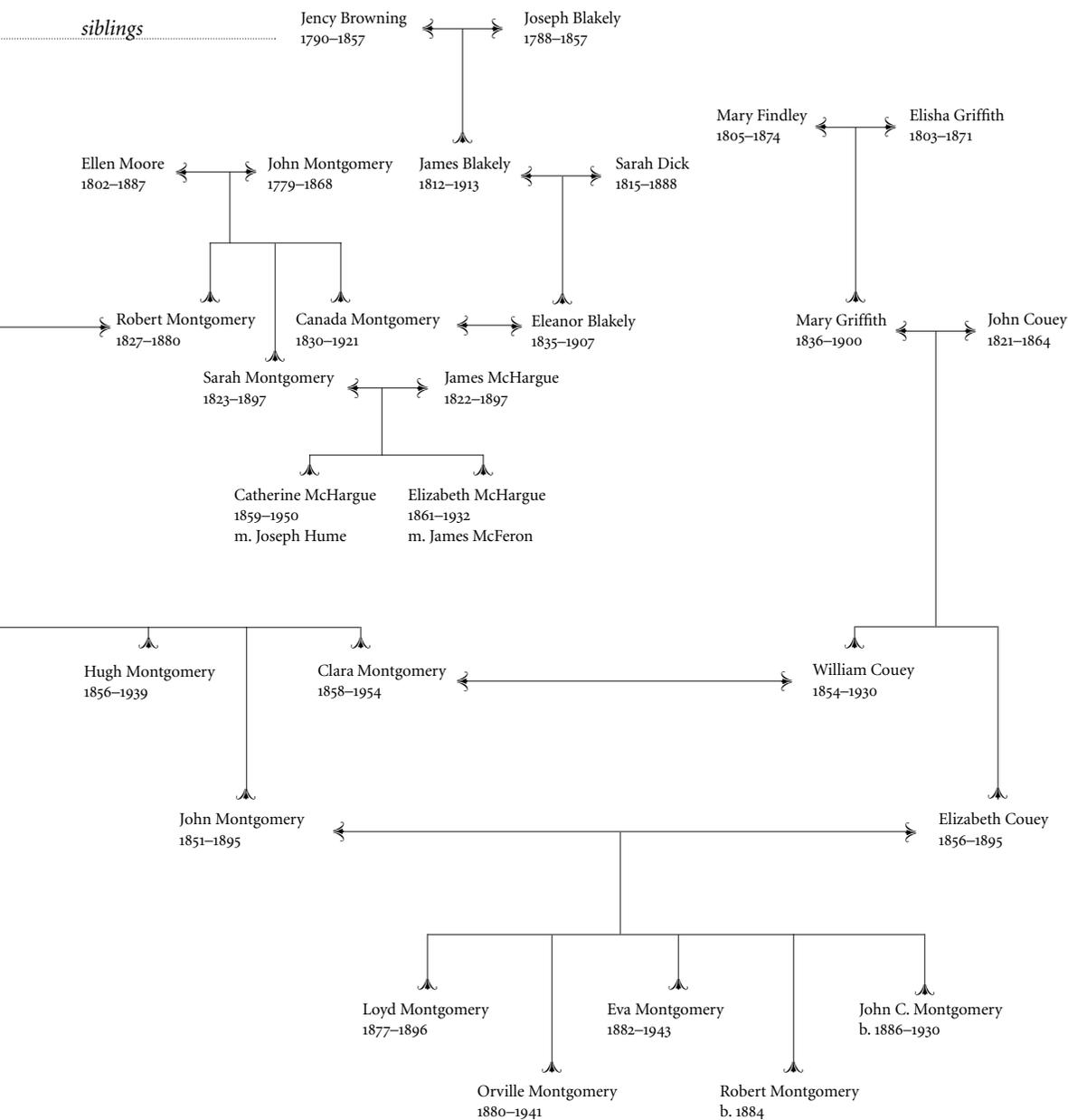
*Honored as one of Oregon's most valued pioneers in the last years of his life, James Blakely was also related, through both blood and marriage, to Loyd Montgomery who became known as Linn County's most notorious son after 1895.*

# LOYD MONTGOMERY'S RELATIONS



\*Compiled by the author and OHQ editorial staff from newspapers, gravestones, death certificates, and obituaries. Note that some sources include conflicting information.

*siblings*





*Murderer Loyd Montgomery was related to many prominent early Oregon pioneers, including Henry Harmon Spalding, pictured above. Spalding crossed the continent with Marcus and Narcissa Whitman in 1836 and established a mission to the Nez Perce Indians in present-day Idaho.*

p. 360). They also connected him through blood and marriage to the person who had by then emerged as the area's most notorious native son, Loyd Montgomery, who, back in 1895, at merely eighteen years of age, brutally murdered his parents and a local visiting businessman at his parents' home in the vicinity of Brownsville.<sup>41</sup>

Montgomery's father John and mother Elizabeth endured tough economic times through the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, mirroring the plight of many other rural Oregonians. By 1895, the Montgomerys were reduced to residing with their brother-in-law Samuel Templeton, sharecropping on his small hop farm near Brownsville. A newspaper described their home, which they did not even own, as "of unpretentious style, unpainted and plainly finished, one and a half story in height, blackened by exposure to the elements . . . devoid of paint."<sup>42</sup> The Montgomerys had four children. Loyd was the oldest. He and his brother Orville, who was two years his junior, worked with their father trying to scratch a living from Templeton's property. But Loyd seems

only to have carelessly attended his duties and had long caused his parents problems — running away, engaging in vandalism and petty theft, and developing a reputation as being unruly and ill-tempered.

On November 20, 1895, Loyd unexpectedly returned home after an unaccounted-for two-day absence. "Father asked me where I had been," Loyd later explained, and then got "after me for going away from home and neglecting my work." Tempers flared and John, "slapped me in the face," Loyd

further reported, “and told me to go and cut some wood. [It] made me so angry that I did not know what I was doing.”<sup>43</sup> He nevertheless went into the house, retrieved his father’s rifle, and proceeded to shoot both his parents and the visitor. The coldness and brutality of the murder and the fact that it involved a youth killing his parents created a sensation. Linn County authorities arrested Loyd the next day. He was tried and convicted in December and executed by hanging behind the Linn County Jail in Albany at the end of the following month.<sup>44</sup>

As the Montgomery murder story evolved over the next two months, the economic woes of the family forever lurked in the background of news reports. Some laid the parricide directly at its door, as the *Oregonian* did a few days after the event. “It is not unusual,” the paper’s editor proposed, “for farmers’ boys, whose homes represent the pinching economies of life to the exclusion of its pleasures, to feel and nurse a grievance at fate and its supposed arbiters, their plodding, hard-worked parents. Happily, this grievance seldom takes a more violent form than that of ‘running away.’ That it does sometimes, however, take on a homicidal feature has been clearly proved.”<sup>45</sup>

Despite their poverty, both John and Elizabeth Montgomery descended from and were otherwise related to some of the most celebrated and successful Linn County pioneers, such as Brownsville founders James Blakely and Hugh Brown (Loyd’s great grandfather) and (possibly more notable) the famed Henry Harmon Sand Eliza Hart Spalding. In 1836, the latter couple accompanied Marcus and Narcissa Whitman to Oregon Country, where they co-founded missions to Native Americans in present-day southeastern Washington and northern Idaho. After the Whitman incident of 1847, which took the lives of Marcus and Narcissa, the federal government forced the Spaldings to abandon their endeavors in the eastern portions of the region for a number of years. They resettled for a time in Brownsville near their longtime friends the Blakelys and Browns.<sup>46</sup> One of the Spalding daughters, also named Eliza and known as the first white child born in Oregon Country, married and lived for a number of years in Brownsville. She often attended the pioneer reunion and even served as a speaker there.<sup>47</sup> Her sister Amelia married John Brown, John Montgomery’s maternal uncle.<sup>48</sup>

John Montgomery’s sisters Sarah and Orpha married the brothers Albert and Robert Templeton. The Templetons had arrived on the banks of the Calapooia in 1847 and developed a reputation in Linn County that rivaled those of the Browns and Blakelys. Albert served on the Brownsville City Council. Several in the family took up Donation Land Claims and, despite the grim economic climate in the 1880s and 1890s, succeeded in establishing prosperous farms.<sup>49</sup> One source claimed of Robert in 1903 that “he has made many fine improvements, and in his manner of conducting his property is abreast of the

times, having the latest of agricultural implements.” The same source noted that he devoted a portion of his 317-acre farm to hops.<sup>50</sup> Samuel and another brother, Joseph Templeton, brought those hops, as well as hop horticulture more generally, to Linn County (perhaps even to Oregon itself). Their other brother William married the daughter of Ezra Meeker, resident of (at the time) Washington Territory. Meeker became one of the most famed Pacific Northwest pioneers, in part because of his tireless efforts to mark and memorialize the route of the Oregon Trail. He also helped introduce and popularize hops in the region. The Templetons acquired their stock from him.<sup>51</sup>

The Templetons’ stature and importance were reflected in their work for and loyalty to the Linn County Pioneer Association. Albert served as its vice president as early as 1889 and as president between 1919 and 1926. He also oversaw the “Sons and Daughters” wing of the organization for many years, beginning in 1895. Five of his brothers and nephews also served as president, vice president, secretary, director, or some other officer in the LCPA during the first thirty years of its existence. The Templetons also often appeared on the reunion’s programs, for example giving addresses at the gathering.<sup>52</sup>

Among other illustrious local pioneer families related to the Montgomeries were the McHargues. They crossed the plains to Oregon in 1847. James McHargue married John Montgomery’s aunt, Sarah. When he passed away in 1897, even the *Oregonian* remarked on his “pioneer” status. Indeed, he had a life notable for its contributions to local and state history, having helped found the first flouring mill and then later a woolen mill in Brownsville. Back in 1852, with the digging of the grave for his oldest daughter, who died at the age of seven, McHargue established a cemetery on the corner of his Donation Land Claim. John and Elizabeth Montgomery were interred there in a single grave after their murder in 1895. John’s parents were also laid to rest there; a massive tombstone that calls attention to their Oregon pioneer background and commemorates the years in which they arrived in Oregon Country still marks their grave.

The McHargues’ connections to the Montgomery parricide did not end at those grave sites. One of James and Sarah (Montgomery) McHargue’s daughters married James A. McFeron, the Linn County Sheriff; he arrested Loyd (his distant relation) after his murderous acts. Another of the McHargue daughters married Rev. Joseph Hume. He met with Loyd on the day of his execution and was finally able to extract from him an entire confession, something others had frustratingly been unable to do, and something that therefore put to rest any lingering doubts as to Loyd’s guilt.<sup>53</sup>

These and a host of other pioneer relations of the Montgomeries were the very people for whom, as papers reported in the aftermath of the murders, “much empathy is expressed.” They were, after all, “people of the best stand-



*Loyd Montgomery was also related to the Templetons, who arrived in Linn County in the 1840s. He went on his murderous rampage at the home of his uncle-in-law Samuel (back row left), where he and his parents resided at the time. Several of the Templetons played key roles in the early years of the Linn County Pioneer Association. Pictured here are also Elizabeth (Ramsey) Templeton (front row) with her other children (left to right) James, David, and Joseph in the front row and Samuel, Matilda, Robert, William, and Albert in the back row.*

ing in this community, of acknowledged moral worth, and financially well-to-do.”<sup>54</sup> They were also therefore the sort of people from Oregon’s pioneer generation who were effusively eulogized in their own deaths; for example, no less than the impressively entitled *History of the Pacific Northwest* stated of John Montgomery’s grandfather Hugh Brown, a year after his 1888 death, that “there is usually something distinctive and characteristic about one who leaves the impress of his name upon any region of locality. This we find to be the case with reference to [Hugh Brown].” The same piece went on to describe his wife Clarissa, who yet survived, as “a noble and beautiful woman.”<sup>55</sup> When John Montgomery’s mother Eveline (Brown) Montgomery passed away in 1911, the *Brownsville Times* reported of her husband, Robert, an 1847 arrival in Linn County who had died some thirty years before, that “his memory” was still “held in high esteem by all who knew him.” Of Eveline herself, the paper maintained that: “Her life will remain as a constant testimony to the reality of the hope of immortality. . . . Her memory will be a constant invitation to her children and her friends to meet in the land of endless day.”<sup>56</sup>

This contrasted sharply with the ways in which the Montgomerys were eulogized in death. A couple of days after John and Elizabeth met their tragic fate at the hands of their own son, for example, a reporter from the *Oregonian* caught up with one of John’s older nephews, Charles Templeton. He had grown up with John in the Brownsville area and knew his life well, recounting for the press various childhood anecdotes and remarking on John’s history of farming failures. He “did not seem able to make much of a success,” Templeton soberly explained, “never getting more than a living out of it. He moved from one farm to another, and it was about a year ago that he rented the place where the murder was committed from my uncle. . . . the venture was not a profitable one for Montgomery.”<sup>57</sup>

In language and a reference appropriate to the era, given its fixation on Oregon’s founding generation, Templeton also offhandedly added that John’s “people [are] pioneers.”<sup>58</sup> But, given the Montgomerys’ deep roots in Linn County and their remarkable list of pioneer ancestors and relatives, and given the social and cultural atmosphere of the 1890s with regard to Oregon pioneers, it is both conspicuous and comprehensible that in the more than one hundred newspaper articles — published from the local to the state level — that I have read about the Montgomery murders, only twice have I come across the word *pioneer* or anything remotely resembling it in connection with the victims.

The silences on this score speak loudly about the meaning of *pioneer* to the generation of Oregonians grappling with the cultural and economic difficulties of the 1890s. The John Montgomery family, illustrative of so many failing Oregon farmers at that time, served locally and statewide as the antith-

esis of the pioneers from whom it descended. First, while the Montgomerys experienced deprivation and hardship, instead of overcoming them, they succumbed to them in the most horrific way imaginable. Second, instead of inheriting the stalwart traits of his pioneer ancestors that led to the reported vigor and promise of the state and its people, John Montgomery “did not seem able to make much of a success.” Third, as more and more newspaper reports came out, it became clear that Loyd had also failed to inherit such traits. His personality was portrayed as opposite to that predicted for the descendants of the pioneers. “The boy was extravagant for a plain farmer’s son,” one report claimed, “and did not seem anxious to help his parents to any extent.”<sup>59</sup> Rather than seeing Loyd as “not different from most pioneer’s boys,” the emerging opinion was that he was anything but, being known rather as “unruly,” “bad-tempered,” “a great deal of trouble,” “a tough lad,” “a very cheerful liar,” “not a good boy — very passionate, headstrong and hard to control,” and having “a very hard name in the neighborhood.”<sup>60</sup> His history of crime, vandalism, and violence also contradicted what was expected of “pioneer’s boys.”<sup>61</sup>

It may also be that the Montgomerys’ status as failed heirs of the esteemed pioneer generation persuaded those who controlled the local legal system that neither John nor Elizabeth would be the best choice on which to mount a prosecution against their own son. When Loyd went to trial, therefore, he did so for neither the murder of his mother nor father. Rather, he was tried only for his third victim, Daniel McKercher. McKercher had recently arrived in Linn County, migrating there from Canada in about 1888. A couple of years later, he and his brother purchased an old gristmill on the Calapooia River. It was through this enterprise that he became well known and highly respected, as a newspaper explained, by a large number of farmers in the area. By unfortunate coincidence, McKercher was visiting at the Montgomery home the afternoon that Loyd went on his homicidal rampage. When McKercher died, he was relatively young (thirty-four years old), single, and he had been supporting his parents in their dotage.<sup>62</sup>

Respected, innocent, young, dependable, loyal, generous, successful, well known, well liked, and more importantly a recent arrival without pioneer connections, McKercher provided the ideal victim on which the Linn County legal system could mount a prosecution of a person who committed a crime that might otherwise reveal the dark underside of local pioneering life. Unsavory secrets of the pioneer generation and its offspring might very well have come to light in a trial that involved John and Elizabeth Montgomery. Controversial and disputed reports of a history of physical abuse at the hands of John Montgomery, for example, had surfaced in the press shortly after the parricide, reports that, whether true or false, locals and family members vigorously denied.<sup>63</sup>

In trial, domestic abuse might have been traced to Elizabeth Montgomery's own family background. As was the case with her husband, discussion of the pioneer roots of Elizabeth was avoided in the press. Indeed, it is impossible to find any reference to her background at all, despite her own storied pioneer ancestry and possibly because of her somewhat tragic past. Elizabeth's mother was Mary Griffith, a daughter of Elisha and Mary Griffith, who had crossed the plains to Oregon as part of the famous migration of 1845, a feat that also made them earlier arrivals in Oregon than many who eventually settled in the Brownsville area.<sup>64</sup> In 1859, Elizabeth's parents, Mary (Griffith) and John Couey, divorced in a high-profile case that the Oregon legislature twice considered before granting. During the proceedings, Mary presented evidence, replete with witnesses, of her husband's severe neglect of his family, including during times of her own confinement, and even his physical abuse of one of his infant children, allegedly striking it in the mouth when it was not more than four months old. Only a few months after the apparently bitter divorce, the couple strangely reunited in a second marriage. At that time, 1859, the press not surprisingly remarked on the occasion due to the divorce that had only shortly preceded it.<sup>65</sup> By 1870, John Couey was dead and Mary was married to another man. Elizabeth and two siblings were by then residing with their grandparents, Elisha and Mary.<sup>66</sup> While all this family history was politely not mentioned in the press, locals likely gossiped about it, given the interwoven nature of the Linn County pioneer families: one of Elizabeth's brothers was even married to a sister of her husband, John Montgomery.

The roll call of the dead at the 1896 meeting of the Linn County Pioneer Association did not include mention of the Montgomerys. Given the financial circumstances of the family, they likely did not belong to the organization, although John and Elizabeth both would have qualified for membership in the Sons and Daughters branch that their brother-in-law Albert Templeton presided over at the time of their murders. To be completely accurate, however, in these early years, the association only included mention of the deaths of member pioneers; a few years later, it would include all Linn County pioneers who passed away in a given year, regardless of their affiliation with the association.

With this said, it is still noteworthy that the so-called "Necrology" report at the 1896 reunion — the first to take place after the triple homicide — was by far the most elaborate and reflective to date. "Death and the Grave are never satisfied," the report began, then continued:

They are ever crying give give; During the Past year they have taken from us seven (7) of our number, who shall Heed no more our Roll Call. . . . But are numbered with the

Generations of the Dead. Viewed in a Proper light However, who would disterb [*sic*] their Peaceful Sleep; They Rest from the long and Sometimes tiresom[e] Journey of Life. . . . Fellow Pioneers, we who remain are no longer of the young but of the Old. Life's work is almost done; Let us not therefore live repiningly [*sic*] [,] fretfully, or gloomily, but let us live cheerfully, gladly and Hopefully Expecting soon a reunion with All the Pure; the blessed and the Good, not only of our own association but of all the generations of the Past ages.<sup>67</sup>

It is impossible to know whether the three-person committee that penned the tribute thought about the Montgomery murders when doing so. The homage included specific reference to and biographical sketches of only the actual members of the association who had passed away since the 1895 reunion. But it is worth noting that one of the committee members, James Templeton, was the brother-in-law of the lately slain John and Elizabeth Montgomery. He was also uncle of the more recently executed Loyd Montgomery. Because of all this, it is an appropriate and thought-provoking exercise to reflect on the possible ways in which the unfortunate decline and horrible demise of John, Elizabeth, and Loyd Montgomery factored into this 1896 lamentation over dying pioneers and the hopefulness expressed that in the welcome slumber and restfulness of the grave one would be reunited with "All [only?] the Pure; the blessed and the Good, not only of our own association but of all the generations of the Past ages."

While the minutes for the LCPA's 1896 reunion in Brownsville do not indicate any obvious influence that the recent tragedy might have had on the atmosphere of the gathering that year, it is difficult to imagine that those who attended the affair did not talk about it. After all, the crime had occurred just a few miles away and was inflicted on longtime residents with notable pioneer roots and extensive family networks. Immediate and distant family members still resided in Brownsville and surrounding environs. No doubt they or many others involved in the case attended the popular event. We know that some appeared on the formal program. In addition to serving on the necrology committee, Templeton also delivered an address at the reunion.<sup>68</sup> The reverend J.E. Snyder, who had prayed with Loyd Montgomery in his cell the evening before his execution on January 31 of that year, provided an invocation.<sup>69</sup> Also giving a speech was the reverend R.C. Martin, the father of a youth who was a longtime acquaintance of Loyd and who served as a witness in his trial.<sup>70</sup> We do not know the actual content of any of these or other reunion addresses. It is unlikely, however, that anything official was spoken about the Montgomerys, given the aforementioned ways in which they, their lives, and their deaths either did not live up to or completely subverted the Oregon pioneer ideal. The probable official silences surrounding them at the reunion, hanging as a pall, likely could not muzzle the unofficial buzz of the attendees.



*Pictured here in about 1890, Brownsville early became the home to the Linn County Pioneer Association and its annual reunion. On November 20, 1895, Loyd Montgomery murdered his parents and a visiting neighbor only a few miles away. The pioneer reunion continues today in Brownsville as an annual picnic; people in and around Brownsville also still talk of the Montgomery murders.*

These speculations on the 1896 reunion's happenings are better evidenced in other ways in which the infamous Montgomery murders have been remembered and recalled, and simultaneously suppressed and forgotten, in Linn County's pioneer history. However much the parricides affected the lives of the surviving members of the immediate and extended Montgomery family, when such people passed away over the next several years, no mention was made in their obituaries of what no doubt constituted the single most significant tragedy to affect their lives. The obituary of James Blakely is an example, albeit he was something of a distant relation.<sup>71</sup> Most notable are the silences in the obituary for Eveline (Brown) Montgomery, the mother of the murdered John and the grandmother of the murderer, Loyd. When she passed away in 1911, the *Brownsville Times* explained that she had given birth to eleven children; it provided the names of the nine who survived her. But no mention was made of her son John, nor of the impact on her life of his murder or the crime that her grandson had committed. Rather, her eulogy commented at great length on her steadfast faith in the Lord, the glorious afterlife that awaited her, and the cherished memory she provided her many survivors.<sup>72</sup>

Obituaries typically focus on the positive aspects of people's lives rather than on the tragedies that befell them. But in fact the substance of many pioneer obituaries of that era was to celebrate their subjects' lives by recalling, among other things, that they had overcome past adversities. These particular Brownsville obituaries, on the other hand, eliminated reference to the greatest hardships of their subjects' lives. Taking their places in Linn County's history as the official record, the obituaries removed from it one of the area's most significant and psychologically shattering events.

On the other hand, in silencing certain hard realities of the past, these death biographies were really not that different from the pioneer promotionals of the LCPA, the OPA, the Native Sons and Native Daughters, and the many publications of the era, such as the *History of the Pacific Northwest*, which had carried Hugh Brown's assumed triumphs. They likewise wrote incomplete histories that tended to portray only the heroic side of the pioneer story, explaining that they were people who bequeathed only positive character traits to the subsequent generations, and who now, at the end of long and commendable lives, were peacefully passing to the distant shore where they would be reunited with loved ones who had gone before and would come later.

The story of Eveline (Brown) Montgomery and her relationship to the murders of her son and daughter-in-law and the execution of her grandson had actually been dark and complicated, as one might easily imagine. She was one of the first to learn the news of the slaughter, and from her own grandson's mouth. Shortly after the murders, "Loyd came to my house," she later recounted. "He appeared excited then and was making a good deal of noise. He rode up and said: 'Grandma, come quick pa and ma and Daniel McKercher are shot and killed.'"<sup>73</sup>

It had also been only a little while before this incident that Eveline had actually concluded a visit to her son and daughter-in-law. Had she extended her stay by even just a few minutes, her life might also have been lost. Of this she seemed well aware. She cautioned law officers after the arrest of her grandson: "Be sure and have a strong guard over him, or he will be back and murder a lot more of them."<sup>74</sup> Long aware of Loyd's "character," as the newspapers put it, Eveline even "declared immediately" that her grandson committed the crime.<sup>75</sup> She also later appeared as a witness in her grandson's trial, testifying that during her visit just before the murders, Loyd had returned from his unaccounted-for absence and "look[ed] guilty as if he did not want to meet his parents, as a child would look if it was ashamed of something."<sup>76</sup>

In the weeks after the murders and Loyd's incarceration, newspapers also remarked that none of Loyd's surviving family had visited him in jail, which the press also claimed was hardly surprising, given the "blackness of the crime."<sup>77</sup> But after Loyd was found guilty and sentenced to die for his offense,

his grandmother relented. Eveline took Loyd's younger siblings with her and finally visited him in jail, remaining about an hour. We can only imagine what happened during that time. What we do know is that upon their departure, Loyd "broke down and wept bitterly when he bade them goodbye."<sup>78</sup>

In the 1950s, Eveline's granddaughter Bessie E. (Templeton) Leonard provided a fuller account of the effects that the Montgomery parricide had on Eveline's life. Leonard had accompanied her grandmother on her visit to her Montgomery relatives on that fateful day back in 1895. In her account, she first explained, in a sentiment similar to Eveline's 1911 obituary as well as to period pioneer memorials more generally, that she "marvel[ed] at the courage and fortitude of that precious Grandmother as she faced life without her helpmate and large family of small children." But after enumerating a short list of some of what Eveline had accomplished in her life in the absence of a husband who had passed away all too early, Leonard did not hesitate to describe the slaying of her uncle and aunt at the hands of her cousin and how this affected her grandmother's life, noting specifically that she took in and raised her surviving Montgomery grandchildren, one of whom had been named after her.<sup>79</sup>

Bessie Leonard's recollections in the 1950s also indicate that the triple murder, however much it was silenced in certain ways, was nevertheless long remembered in the Brownsville area. It might seem perverse to claim that it had also been celebrated. But in one sense of the word, it had been, already from the earliest days in their wake. Thurston Pierce Hackleman, a Linn County resident wrote in his diary the day after the murders: "It is the most dreadful tragedy that this County has seen in many respects."<sup>80</sup> Press reports mirrored this sentiment. The local *Brownsville Times* the same day called it, "one of the most horrible crimes that has blackened the criminal calendar of Linn [C]ounty for many years."<sup>81</sup> A newspaper in Albany, the Linn County seat, called it "one of the most heinous offenses ever recorded in this country."<sup>82</sup> And Portland's *Oregonian* carried a letter to the editor from a Brownsville resident who characterized the crime as "the most hideous . . . ever committed in the Pacific Northwest."<sup>83</sup>

In utilizing superlatives — the *most* dreadful, the *most* horrible, the *most* heinous, the *most* hideous — to describe the Montgomery-McKercher murders and attributing to them both local (Linn County) and regional (Pacific Northwest) historical significance, witnesses and bystanders elevated the event to celebrity status. This imparted to it a notoriety that rivaled the honor attributed to the pioneers that local and statewide organizations were concomitantly laboring hard to establish, embellish, and draw attention to.

At the same time, remarkable silences surrounded the murders, silences that likewise related to the period's deafening roar of the memorials to the

pioneer generation. The Montgomery family exemplified the declining fortunes of many a pioneer family and its descendants as depression raged across rural Oregon in the 1890s. The Montgomery parricide subverted the story of triumphal progress of the pioneer generation and the legacy it had imparted to its descendants, indeed to the entire state. The timing and nature of their deaths ran counter to the celebrated pioneer who overcame adversity, lived to a ripe old age, and then peacefully departed the world surrounded by loved ones who somberly and joyously reflected on a future reunion with the departed. The whole Montgomery story also symbolized the loss of a role that pioneers had earlier played in Oregon society, culture, and economy. Thus the reaction to the murder-parricides necessarily had to include removing them from any association with the pioneers. As such, the Montgomery murders, running contrary to the meaning imparted in obituaries, local histories, and celebrations, were both early memorialized and early silenced in ways inversely related to the growing commemoration of the pioneers. Both the silencing and the recollection of the Montgomery parricides, then, have played strategic roles in how the memory of Oregon and Linn County pioneers has been constructed. Likewise, the memorialization of the pioneers has influenced the ways in which the Montgomery parricides were dealt with in the 1890s and how they have been understood since.

Each of the events that this article considers — the Montgomery parricide of 1895, the relentless depression of the last decades of the nineteenth century, and the intense fixation on vanishing pioneers in the 1890s and 1900s — relate to each other as cause and effect. They help explain the significant changes confronting Oregonians as they left the rural and agricultural traditions of the nineteenth century behind and entered a new and uncertain era. Fundamental to each of these events was *death*: the inglorious death of representatives of a once proud and prosperous farming and pioneer family; the death, for many, of a traditional, agrarian way of life; and the death of the celebrated founders of Linn County and the state of Oregon. The connections among these events, the ways in which they were understood and given meaning at the time, and the ways in which they mark the end of an era, demonstrate that *death* strongly influenced how Oregonians came to grips with the harrowing transition to the twentieth century.

## POST MORTEM

The Montgomery parricides and the memorialization of the Oregon pioneers directly connect to the long agricultural depression of the 1890s, a depression that resulted in an upsurge in farmers' participation in politics. The spectacular growth and development of the Grange, the Farmers Alli-

ance, and the Populist Party are the most obvious manifestations of this. It was a coincidence of history that the rise of these organizations happened at a time when large numbers of Oregon's pioneer generation were fast dying away. It was no coincidence, but rather an effect, that at this time there occurred an incredible upsurge in interest in the pioneering generation, the people who had founded Oregon's farms, small industries, rural communities, and agrarian traditions, the very things under assault as the nineteenth century came to its conclusion.

Unsurprisingly, just as the Grange, Farmers Alliance, and Populist Party met with reversal, decline, and in some cases death, some of the organizations and associations founded with the intention of commemorating Oregon's pioneers also passed into oblivion; others underwent fundamental reformulation. Both the Native Sons and the Native Daughters of Oregon folded by 1905. With the actual numbers of qualified members sorely diminished in the OPA, in 1901 the Sons and Daughters of Oregon Pioneers succeeded it. While the latter still exists, the *Transactions* of the OPA ceased publication in 1928.<sup>84</sup> In Linn County, the continued reduction in qualified members had made it difficult, at times impossible, for the LCPA there to conduct its business by 1921. As a result, in that year those who remained in the organization, led by its president Albert Templeton, elected to change its name to the Linn County Pioneer Memorial Association.<sup>85</sup> It continues today and hosts the annual reunion in the form of the Linn County Pioneer Picnic, which still takes place in Brownsville and in June.

Likewise, over the years in and near Linn County, the Montgomery paricide and McKercher murder still occasionally resurface as an important episode in the lore and history of Brownsville. In the 1930s, for example, a Works Progress Administration employee collected Linn County history by interviewing many surviving children of the area's pioneers. On November 23, 1937, he talked with Hugh Leeper Montgomery, younger brother of John, who retold the story of the murders, referring to them as: "One of the first tragedies of this region."<sup>86</sup> Corvallis, Oregon's *Benton County Herald* recapped the story in 1970.<sup>87</sup> Local historians Margaret Standish Carey and Patricia Hoy Hainline recounted the triple murder in their "Past Times" column for the *Brownsville Times* in the 1980s.<sup>88</sup> The *Linn County Historical Society Newsletter & Journal* also carried a piece on the murders in its October 2000 edition.<sup>89</sup> And most recently, while researching this story in Brownsville, it quickly became clear to me that many locals there still know and talk of the Montgomery paricide. In these ways, ignominious deaths of more than a hundred years ago curiously remain alive today, illustrating how things long-considered dead continue to shape and even haunt us long after they happened.

## NOTES

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1. Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, Book 1, June 20, 1895, p. 44–45, Pioneer Picture Gallery, Brownsville, Oregon [hereafter Pioneer Picture Gallery].
2. Margaret Kolb Holden, “The Rise and Fall of Oregon Populism: Legal Theory, Political Culture and Public Policy, 1868–1895” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1993), 78, 581 (Table 2).
3. Linn County Tax Records, 1893, reel 5, p. 449, Linn County Tax Assessor’s Office, Linn County Courthouse, Albany, Oregon; Linn County Tax Records, 1895, reel 8, n.p., located at end of Tax Assessment for 1895, p. 447, and beginning of Delinquent Tax Assessment for 1895, p. 1.
4. See Peter Boag, “‘He took up arms against the loins from which he sprang and the womb that bore him’: Gender and Parricide during the American Agrarian Crisis—A Case Study,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 113:2 (Summer 2012): 134–63.
5. Michael Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip*, with a preface by Warren Susman (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973). For another view on the relationship among society, culture, and death at the end of the nineteenth century in America, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage, 2008).
6. Boag, “He took up arms against the loins from which he sprang and the womb that bore him,” 134–63.
7. On the plight of America’s farmers, see, for example, Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).
8. Linn County Farmer’s Union minute book for meetings, 1871–1885, Linn County Farmer’s Union Records, MSS 566, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, Portland, Oregon [hereafter OHS Research Library], 1–3. See also Edna A. Scott, “The Grange Movement in Oregon, 1873–1900” (M.A. thesis, University of Oregon, 1923) for the general contours of early Oregon agrarian organizing.
9. Scott, “The Grange Movement in Oregon,” 6, 16–17.
10. *Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual Session of the Oregon State Grange of Husbandry* (Oregon City: Enterprise Electric Power Plant, 1895), 28–29, 72–73.
11. “The Pioneers of Linn County Celebrate: Annual Reunion Held in Brownsville Last Week Was a Great Success,” *Brownsville Times*, June 26, 1908, 2.
12. The literature on the Populists is vast. Among the most influential works are the classic Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); and the more recent Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Literature on Oregon includes Holden, “The Rise and Fall of Oregon Populism”; Jeff LaLande, “A ‘Little Kansas’ in Southern Oregon: The Course and Character of Populism in Jackson County, 1890–1900,” *Pacific Historical Review* 63:2 (May 1994): 149–76, and LaLande, “Insurgent Decade: The People’s Party in Jackson County, Oregon, 1890–1900” (M.A. thesis, University of Oregon, 1992); David B. Griffiths, “Populism in the Far West, 1890–1900” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1967), 87–147; Joan Cross, “The Populist Movement in Oregon” (M.S. thesis, University of Utah, 1962); and Marion Harrington, “The Populist Movement in Oregon, 1889–1896” (M.A. thesis, University of Oregon, 1935). A good overview of Oregon is Lawrence Lipin, “Populism in Oregon,” *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, [http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/populism\\_in\\_oregon](http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/populism_in_oregon) (accessed August 10, 2014).
13. For example, the democratic governor Sylvester Pennoyer joined the Populist cause in 1892, and in 1894, Populists took control of the government in Jackson County and held it for a four-year period. See Griffiths, “Populism in the Far West, 1890–1900”, 97;

and LaLande, "A 'Little Kansas' in Southern Oregon," 149–76.

14. Holden, "The Rise and Fall of Oregon Populism," 508, Map 10.2; and *Oregonian*, November 5, 1896, p. 1.

15. See, for example, John Higham, "The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s" *The Origins of Modern Consciousness*, John Weiss, ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965).

16. Abner Sylvester Baker, "The Oregon Pioneer Tradition in the Nineteenth Century: A Study of Recollection and Self-Definition" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 1968), 48–55.

17. "The Last Roll Call," *Oregonian*, January 1, 1896, 26; "The Last Roll Call," *Oregonian*, January 1, 1897, 6 (quoted). The 1895 article specifically mentions Himes's record-keeping. Although the 1895 article does not mention him, likely he supplied the information for the piece. On the *Oregonian*, see Harry H. Stein, "The Oregonian," *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, <http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/oregonian> (accessed August 17, 2014).

18. Baker, "The Oregon Pioneer Tradition in the Nineteenth Century," 49–50.

19. *Constitution and Laws: Grand Cabin, Native Sons of Oregon and Constitution for Subordinate Cabins* (Portland, Ore.: W.A. Wheeler, 1899), 4, Article II; and *Constitution and Laws of the Grand Cabin, Native Daughters of Oregon, and Constitution for Subordinate Cabins* (Portland, Ore.: W.A. Wheeler, 1899), 39, Article II.

20. See, for example, various items in Native Daughters of Oregon Records, MSS 107 and MSS 772, OHS Research Library.

21. "James Blakely's Cabin, No. 18," *Oregon Native Son* 1:5 (September 1899): 283. I have found one news article that lists party affiliations of some of those who became the first officers of the James Blakely Cabin. Several of those men were elected delegates to Republican and Democratic county conventions in 1894. While high ranking officers in the James Blakely Cabin at the time of its founding came from different political persuasions, it is clear they worked together

in such organizations as the Native Sons as that organization expressly forbade political (and religious) discussions because of their bitter and divisive nature. Native Sons was designed to bring its members together in common cause of celebrating history and for building up the state. See *Constitution and Laws: Grand Cabin, Native Sons of Oregon and Constitution for Subordinate Cabins*, 1. For the officers of the Cabin and their 1894 political affiliations, see "James Blakely's Cabin, No. 18"; and *Oregonian*, "Brownsville Primaries," April 1, 1894, 2.

22. Eugene D. White, "Native Sons of Oregon," *Oregon Native Son* 1:1 (May 1899), 4. See also, "Native Daughters of Oregon," leaflet, contained in Associations and Institutions Collection, MSS 1511, box 23, folder 14, OHS Research Library.

23. "Purple and Gold," *Oregon Native Son* 1:1 (May 1899): 38.

24. *Ibid.*; "Native Daughters of Oregon" leaflet.

25. Abner Sylvester Baker, on whom I relied in this and the following paragraph, has explored these themes in his study "The Oregon Pioneer Tradition in the Nineteenth Century," especially Chapter Four. A couple of examples of these themes in the literature and meetings of the Native Sons and the Native Daughters can be found in "Pioneer Day and Pioneer Era," *Oregon Native Son* 2:2 (June 1900): 97–98; and Minutes of the Elizabeth Thurston Odell Cabin, No. 8, Salem, Oregon, February 25, 1901, contained in folder 2, Native Daughters of Oregon Records, MSS 772, OHS Research Library.

26. Hon. S.F. Chadwick, "Address," *Constitution and Quotations from the Register of the Oregon Pioneer Association; together with The Annual Address of Hon. S.F. Chadwick, Remarks of Gov. L.F. Grover, at the Re-Union June 1854 and Other Matters of Interest*" (Salem: E.M. Waite, 1875), 16. See also Baker, "The Oregon Pioneer Tradition in the Nineteenth Century," 97–99.

27. Margaret Standish Carey, "Past Times," *Brownsville Times*, March 25, and April 8, 1887, "Past Times" clipping files, Brownsville Community Library, Browns-

ville, Oregon (hereafter Brownsville Community Library).

28. Constitution of the Linn County Pioneer Association, contained within the Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, Book 1, p. 1, Pioneer Picture Gallery.

29. Linn County Pioneer Association Programs, 1890, 1891, 1892, and 1893, Pioneer Picture Gallery; Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, Pioneer Picture Gallery; and numerous newspaper reports, for example "The Pioneers of Linn County: Annual Reunion Held in Brownsville Last Week Was a Great Success," *Brownsville Times* June 21, 1907, 1; and "The Pioneers of Linn County Celebrate: Annual Reunion Held in Brownsville Last Week Was Greater Success Than Ever," *Brownsville Times*, July 1, 1910, 1.

30. Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, Book 1, June 4, 1895, p. 18–19, Pioneer Picture Gallery.

31. *Brownsville Times*, June 7, 1901, 2.

32. "The Pioneers of Linn County Celebrate: Annual Reunion Held in Brownsville Last Week Was Greater Success Than Ever," *Brownsville Times*, July 1, 1910, 1.

33. Mrs. Jane M' Cully, "Pioneer's Song," *Brownsville Times*, June 14, 1901, 1.

34. Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, Book 1, p. 78–79, 83–84, 87, 91, 95–96, 100, 103, 106–07, Pioneer Picture Gallery.

35. John Miles and Richard R. Milligan, comps., *Linn County, Oregon, Pioneer Settlers: Oregon Territory Families in Linn County, Oregon, to 1855* (Lebanon, Ore: John Miles, 1983), 1:5–6; Miles and Milligan, comps., *Linn County, Oregon, Pioneer Settlers: Oregon Territory Families in Linn County, Oregon, to 1855* (Lebanon and Albany, Ore.: John Miles and Richard R. Milligan, 1989), 11:5–6.

36. "Pioneer Picnic Notes," *Brownsville Times*, June 23, 1911, 1; "Pioneers of Linn," *Brownsville Times*, June 29, 1906, p. 1; "Pioneers in Attendance," *Transactions of the Twenty-Third Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1895* (Portland: [Oregon Pioneer Assn.] George H. Himes, 1895), 19; "Linn County Pioneers Picnic is Big Event at Brownsville," *Oregonian*, June 30, 1912.

37. "Captain Blakely Remembered," *Oregonian*, February 1, 1913, 8.

38. Miles and Milligan, comps., *Linn County, Oregon, Pioneer Settlers: Oregon Territory Families in Linn County, Oregon, to 1855* (1983), 1:5–6.

39. "100 Years Attained," *Oregonian*, October 27, 1912, 8.

40. Miles and Milligan, comps., *Linn County, Oregon, Pioneer Settlers: Oregon Territory Families in Linn County, Oregon, to 1855* (1983), 1:6.

41. The following account of the parricide is drawn from Peter Boag, "He took up arms against the loins from which he sprang and the womb that bore him," 134–63.

42. *Brownsville Times*, Supplement, November 20, 1895, photostatic copy on file at the Linn County Historical Museum, Brownsville, Oregon (hereafter Linn County Historical Museum).

43. *Oregonian*, November 26, 1895, 1.

44. Peter Boag, "He took up arms against the loins from which he sprang and the womb that bore him," 134–63.

45. *Oregonian*, November 24, 1895, 4.

46. Bessie E. Leonard, "Family Historical Sketch," (unpublished manuscript, 1955–57), p. viii, contained in Family Files: Templeton, Brownsville Community Library.

47. Eliza's married name was Warren, see Linn County Pioneer Association Minutes, Book 1, June 7, 1894, p. 40 and June 19, 1895, p. 44, Pioneer Picture Gallery; *Brownsville Times*, June 20, 1902, 2.

48. Miles and Milligan, comps., *Linn County, Oregon, Pioneer Settlers: Oregon Territory Families in Linn County, Oregon, to 1855* (1989), 11:4.

49. Templeton-Brown-Montgomery Genealogy Vertical File, OHS Research Library; Templeton Family, Brownsville Community Library; Templeton Genealogy File, Linn County Historical Museum; Miles and Milligan, comps., *Linn County, Oregon, Pioneer Settlers: Oregon Territory Donation Land Claim Families to 1855* (Lebanon, Ore.: John Miles Publisher, 1984), 5:95–102.

50. *Portrait and Biographical Record of the Willamette Valley, Oregon* (Chicago: Chap-

man Publishing Co., 1903), 1237.

51. Margaret Standish Carey, "Past Times: Templeton Hop Yards," clipping, Linn County Historical Museum Genealogy Files: "Templeton"; "Hops and Tobacco Grown by Pioneers," *Northwest Passages* 6:6 (July–August 1991), p. 2; Bessie Templeton Leonard, "Templeton Brothers Planted Oregon's First Hop Yard, 1875," *Northwest Passages* 6:6 (July–August 1991), 3; Ezra Meeker, *Hop Culture in the United States* (Puyallup, Washington Territory: E. Meeker & Co., 1883); "Meeker, Ezra (1830–1928)," HistoryLink.org, *The Free Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History*, [http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file\\_id=7737](http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=7737) (accessed May 3, 2014).

52. Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, Book 1, July 5, 1889, p. 14, and June 4, 1890, p. 18, Pioneer Picture Gallery; *Brownsville Times*, June 16, 1905, p. 1; "Souvenir Booklet and Program: Linn County Pioneer Association 56th Reunion, Brownsville, Oregon, June 17, 18, 19, 1943," p. 3–4, box 20, folder 4, Linn County Pioneer Association, 1943–1948, Associations & Institutions Collection, MSS 1511, OHS Research Library; Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, Book 1, June 10, 1896, p. 51, Pioneer Picture Gallery.

53. "WPA Interview: Catherine Louise (McHargue) Hume, July 7, 1939," Linn County Genealogical Society, <http://www.lgsoregon.org> (accessed August 10, 2014); *Oregonian*, October 8, 1897, 3; *Brownsville Times*, Supplement, November 20, 1895, photostatic copy on file at the Linn County Historical Museum; *Oregonian*, February 1, 1896, 3.

54. *Oregonian*, November 22, 1895, 1.

55. Quoted in Miles and Milligan, comps., *Linn County, Oregon, Pioneer Settlers: Oregon Territory Families in Linn County, Oregon, to 1855* (1989), 11:5, 6.

56. "Obituary," *Brownsville Times*, July 28, 1911, 2.

57. *Oregonian*, November 22, 1895, 1.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Oregonian*, November 23, 1895, 8.

60. *Oregonian*, December 1, 1895, 20; *Daily Oregon Statesman* (Salem), November

21, 1895, 1; *Oregonian*, December 29, 1895, 10; *Weekly Herald Disseminator* (Albany), January 23, 1896, 5.

61. *Oregonian*, November 23, 1895, 8; and *Oregonian*, November 22, 1895, 1.

62. *Oregonian*, January 10, 1896, 3; *Oregonian*, November 21, 1895, 1 (quoted); "McKercher Murder," *Linn County Historical Society Newsletter & Journal*, October 2000, 15–16; Patricia Hoy-Hainline, "Past Times: An 1890s Triple Murder," "Past Times" clipping files, Brownsville Community Library.

63. See, for example, *Oregonian*, November 26, 1895, 1. The issue of domestic violence continued to arise in the press well after the trial and even Loyd's execution. See *Oregonian*, February 11, 1896, 4.

64. H.O. Lang, ed., *History of the Willamette Valley* (Portland, Ore.: George H. Himes, 1885), 895; Manuscript Population Census Returns, Linn County, 1870, Albany Precinct, lines 3–9, p. 47, and Brownsville Precinct, lines 19–23, p. 5.

65. The divorce documents are contained in Oregon Provisional and Territorial Government Records Access Project, Reel 75, Provisional and Territorial Documents, manuscript 1226, Items 11573–11832, held at the OHS Research Library. Item 11823, an affidavit from Alexander Seavey, reports the instance of physical abuse. On the history of the divorce petition in the legislature, see *Oregon Statesman* (Salem), September 27, 1859.

66. Manuscript Population Census Returns, Linn County, 1870, Albany Precinct, lines 3–9, p. 47, and Brownsville Precinct, lines 19–23, p. 5.

67. Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, Book 1, June 11, 1896, 53–55, Pioneer Picture Gallery.

68. Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, Book 1, June 10, 1896, 51, Pioneer Picture Gallery.

69. Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, Book 1, June 10, 1896, 50, Pioneer Picture Gallery; *Oregonian*, February 1, 1896, 3.

70. Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, Book 1, June 11, 1896, 52, Pioneer Picture Gallery; *Weekly-Herald Disseminator*

(Albany), December 19, 1895, 4; Manuscript Population Census Returns, Lane County, 1880, Enumeration District 63, p. 7, lines 23 and 30. The youth in question was Egbert Martin.

71. Another example is Orpha (Montomery) Templeton's obituary: "Native Daughter Passes," *Brownsville Times*, January 26, 1933, contained in Montgomery Genealogy File, Linn County Historical Museum.

72. *Brownsville Times*, July 28, 1911, 2.

73. *Weekly Herald-Disseminator* (Albany), December 19, 1895, 4.

74. *Weekly Herald Disseminator* (Albany), January 5, 1896, 5.

75. *State Rights Democrat* (Albany), November 29, 1895, 3.

76. *Weekly Herald-Disseminator* (Albany), December 19, 1895, 4.

77. *Oregonian*, December 16, 1895, 3. For a similar report, see also *Oregonian*, December 18, 1895, 4.

78. *Weekly Herald-Disseminator* (Albany), December 26, 1895, 3.

79. Bessie E. Leonard, "Family Historical Sketch" (unpublished manuscript, 1955–57), p. x, contained in Family Files: Templeton, Brownsville Community Library.

80. Thurston Pierce Hackleman Diary, November 20, 1895, manuscript microfilm 32, reel 1, OHS Research Library.

81. *Brownsville Times*, Supplement, November 20, 1895.

82. *Weekly Herald-Disseminator* (Albany), January 30, 1896, 6.

83. *Oregonian*, January 9, 1896, 4.

84. Baker, "The Oregon Pioneer Tradition in the Nineteenth Century," 42–45; Merle Miller, "Sons and Daughters of Oregon Pioneers," *The Oregon Encyclopedia* [http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/sons\\_and\\_daughters\\_of\\_oregon\\_pioneers](http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/sons_and_daughters_of_oregon_pioneers) (accessed August 13, 2014).

85. In the original constitution, all male and female immigrants who arrived in the county prior to January 1855 were eligible to join. It is not clear why the association's founders chose this date, save the possibility that it coincided with the termination of the Oregon Donation Land Claim Law, federal

legislation that had been fundamental to encouraging early migration to Oregon generally and the southern Willamette Valley specifically. See Constitution of the Linn County Pioneer Association, contained within the Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, book 1, p. 3, Pioneer Picture Gallery. Already in 1892, likely because of diminishing numbers of those who had arrived before 1855, association members amended the constitution to admit those to their ranks who had arrived up to 1860. This date is not particularly significant in local history, save that in 1859 (the last year of membership eligibility) Oregon left territorial status and became a state. Precisely ten years later, in 1902, the association voted to expand membership to "Pioneers Coming to Oregon by Wagons across the Plains to the year 1870." In 1921, when the organization's name was changed, so too were the qualifications for membership. In addition to all white immigrant males and females who came to Oregon up to 1870, the organization's membership was also opened to the descendants of these pioneers, practically ensuring that the organization's ranks would be constantly replenished. See Carey, "Past Times," *Brownsville Times*, March 25 and April 8, 1987, "Past Times" clipping files, Brownsville Community Library; Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, book 1, June 12, 1902, p. 86; and miscellaneous loose papers contained within Minutes of the Linn County Pioneer Association, book 1, Pioneer Picture Gallery.

86. Hugh L. Montgomery interview by Leslie Haskin, Brownsville Community Library.

87. *Benton County Herald* (Corvallis), November 5, 1970, clipping in Montgomery Genealogy File, Linn County Historical Museum.

88. Margaret Standish Carey and Patricia Hoy Hainline, "Past Times: An 1890s Triple Murder," *Brownsville Times*, January 24, 1985, "Past Times" clipping files, Brownsville Community Library.

89. *Linn County Historical Society Newsletter & Journal*, October 2000, p. 15–16.