## 1950: Number 7 on the F.B.I's Most Wanted List

RY **LOYCE MARTINAZZ** 

In March 1950 Clide Adams, Tualatin postmaster, was "a pack of lies." "To put me on the list of the

identified Orba Elmer Jackson as the handyman for Mrs. Harding at the Sweek house. Adams had been looking through a pile of wanted posters when he spotted a face that looked familiar. He asked his clerk, Bonnie Ladd, if she thought it was the man they knew as Kenneth Van Kempen. Bonnie agreed. Adams then contacted the F. B. I. Director in Portland and gave him Jackson's forwarding address, and Jackson, who had been working as a hired hand on a poultry farm in Aloha was duly arrested.

Jackson was born on a hard scrabble Missouri farm, quit school after the 6th grade, fell in with a bad companion and was arrested for auto theft at age 18. He served four years in the Missouri state pen, then pulled the same trick and served three years at Leavenworth. He kept his nose clean for a few years, then, with an accomplice, he tried to hold up a small store. That was a big mistake, because in the back of the store was a small post office, and although he got away without getting any money, it was a federal offense. He was again arrested and sentenced to 25 years at Leavenworth.

Jackson served 17 years, becoming a model prisoner and eventually a trustee when he made his escape. He came to Oregon and worked in berry fields in Gresham, and as a handyman, staying free for three years.

Funny thing, is that road next the Oregonian newspaper had been running a series of articles about the F.B.I.'s most wanted, and on March 21 Jackson was the featured criminal. But Clide Adams, Tualatin postmaster, had already contacted the F.B.I. and on March 24 Jackson was arrested.

I paid the debt I owed them,

who had previously worked **but they're still not satisfied**, for Mrs. Harding at the

Now I'm a branded man out in the cold...

## - Merle Haggard



FBI - Orba Elmer Jackson, aka Kenneth Van Kempen.



Bonnie Ladd (later Egger) with unidentified man. The Post Office was on Boones Ferry road next to the Brick store.

**Loyce Martinazzi** was born and raised in Tualatin and is passionate about Tualatin History. She is currently Lecturer of the Winona Grange, Co-Founder of the Tualatin Historical Society and Co-Author of *Tualatin...From the Beginning*.

ten worst criminals is the silliest thing I ever heard of," the prisoner said. "I haven't done anything very bad. The paper said I was dangerous and probably armed.

Hell, I haven't had a gun since I got out." "What do I want with a gun? I got enough trouble without one."

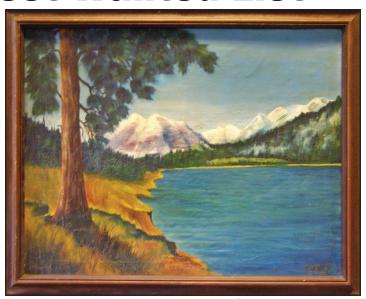
Jackson didn't know the store he tried to rob was also a post office, making the hold up a federal offense. "It was nothing but a little old country store with a measly little post office in it, and they took 25 years of my life away for it." According to the Oregonian, the Aloha family that hired him praised the man known to them as Kenneth Van Kempen as a nice gentleman, a clean fellow and a good workman

Apparently Jackson was released five years later because he obtained a social security card in Oregon in 1955. He died in California in 1993, having gone straight at last.

But getting back to Tualatin: Jackson had changed his name to Kenneth Van Kempen when he was on the lam. When he worked for Mrs. Harding at the Sweek house across from the post office, he started painting landscapes. Bonnie Ladd, (later Egger) agreed to purchase his painting, but he was captured before she paid him. Bonnie donated the painting to the Tualatin Historical Society in 1995. The painting, neither a Rembrandt nor a paint- by- number will be hung for a while at the Heritage Center.

Moral of the story is: Don't mess with the post office.

I appreciate the assistance of Yvonne Addington, for research, Don Adams for the photo of his grandfather Clide Adams, Janet Ladd Hamilton for family information, and the Oregonian newspaper files.



This painting was signed Kinney 2/50, one month before his capture. With only a 6th grade education, it's understandable that he misspelled his own alias.



Clide Adams, Tualatin postmaster who blew the whistle on Orba Jackson, aka Kenneth Van Kempen. Adams was proud of his part in the capture of Jackson, and often told his grandchildren the story.



Mrs. Lillian Harding inherited the house from her mother, Maria Sweek. She was an invalid, and the house was badly in need of care in 1950. Orba Jackson, aka Kenneth Van Kempen worked for her and often went to the post office across the street to pick up her mail.

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