

Ghosts In The Winery Saloons, Hotels Steeped In Legends

By Ken Levy

Travel Editor

Suddenly, the young waitress was lifted off her feet and pushed down the stairs by an invisible force to the pitch-dark basement of the saloon. Her ear-piercing screams sent the two bartenders, who were cleaning up after a long night at the White Eagle, running to her aid. But a bucket flew off the shelves as they went down, hitting one on the head....

Upstairs, in the hotel, the ghost of a young woman moans and cries, while her phantom boyfriend, who reportedly murdered her for her betrayal, drinks from tequila bottles at the bar. White Eagle bartenders have felt his hands on their shoulders or a mysterious breeze that makes their hair stand on end. But when they turn around, there's nothing...

Steeped in history, alive with tales of ghosts and eerie sightings, the unique McMenamins hotels and saloons are properties not to be missed by the visitor to Portland, Oregon.

Witness the White Eagle Café, Saloon and Rock & Roll Hotel. It sits in the middle of bustling Russell Street near downtown Portland, yet it maintains the feel of an old Western saloon and hotel. But its heritage is Polish.

"It's always been a saloon, but it was established as a social hall for Polish immigrants," said Tim Hills, McMenamins historian.

The saloon still features the massive oak-back bar and beautiful ceramic tile

floor installed when it was built in 1905. Bartenders serve McMenamins-brewed and crafted beers, ales and wines, and the kitchen serves up some truly *zafitig* pub food, such as beer-battered fish and chips and bratwurst. Live music—which carries its own legendary stories at White Eagle—continues to draw good crowds nearly every day. And the upstairs hotel features 11 comfortable and restored guestrooms, neatly yet simply appointed. The feel is that of stepping into downtown Dodge City during an episode of *Gunsmoke*.

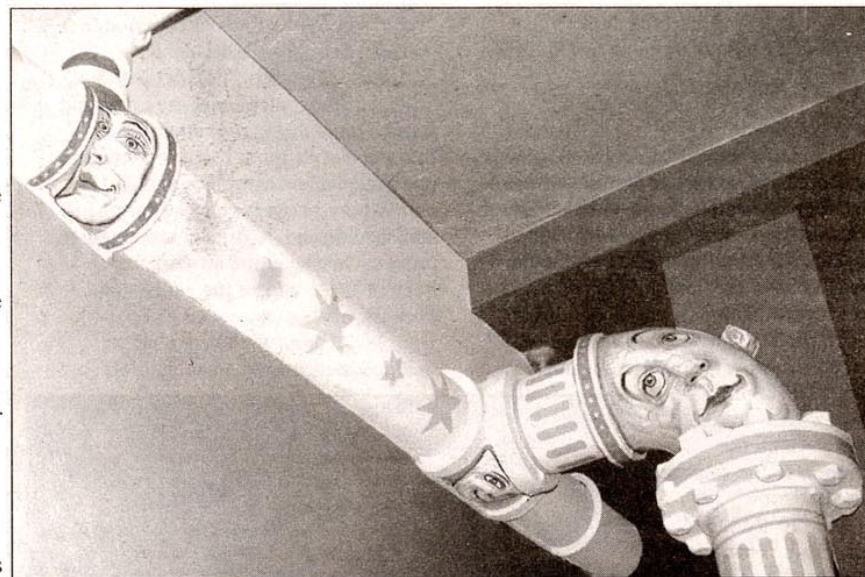
But the legends and stories associated with White Eagle still add richly-textured color to the attractiveness of this landmark. None have ever been proven, but, they simply won't go away. Stories abound of Shanghai tunnels and opium dens downstairs and brothels both upstairs and down.

But the most popular stories are the legends of the three ghosts who reportedly still call White Eagle home.

One tale relates the story of a former White Eagle bartender/janitor, who lived upstairs, coming home one night and finding his girlfriend, Rose with another man.

"In a jealous rage, he killed her, then killed himself," said Hills. "The girlfriend now haunts the upstairs, and people have sometimes seen her silhouette in the window or hear her moans and cries."

The betrayed boyfriend is said to haunt the main floor at the saloon.



Whimsical faces weave their way through the pipes at McMenamins' Edgefield Inn in Troutdale, OR. The paintings are by artist Lyle Hine. Photo by Ken Levy

"Supposedly he's thrown and unrolled toilet paper rolls and drunk from tequila bottles behind the bar," Hills said.

But not everyone guffaws at the story. Hills said bar staff have felt the presence of something behind them, a hand upon their shoulders, perhaps, or a breeze, and their hair stands on end. But nothing is there when they turn around.

The third ghost reputedly lives in the basement. His domain starts at the top of the stairs, and he's reported to be a huge Chinese sentry, who supposedly was a guard of the alleged illicit activities going on in the basement.

"No one would get past him without

a password," said Hills.

One night, at closing time, everyone had left except a couple of bartenders and a waitress. The young woman stood at the top of the stairs ready to bring items down to the basement, while the bartenders were cleaning up after a busy night.

"Suddenly, the bartenders heard a scream. They ran to the stairway and started going down. She was at the bottom of the steps," said Hills.

The bartenders headed down the steps when a bucket came flying off a shelf and hit one of them off the head.

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"As I was starting down the stairs," the waitress told them, "it was like I was pushed from behind, but I didn't fall. It was like I was levitated, and floated down to the bottom, and landed here."

That was the last day the woman worked there.

Underground tunnels are legendary in Portland history, and the White Eagle has its own mystery to go with them. Designed as supply tunnels to bring in goods from ships to waiting basement warehouses, the tunnels later became a means of kidnapping men for ship duty, according to manager John McBaron. According to legend, unwitting men were doped up or plied with liquor, then dragged out through the tunnels to the ships to serve as crew.

"By the time they came out of their stupor, the ships would be sailing on their voyage," said Hills.

Supposedly, one such active tunnel ran from the White Eagle several blocks to the shorefront. In reality, McBaron said, it's a coal chute that ends at the sidewalk.

But that doesn't stop visitors from believing in a shadier White Eagle past, including a brothel supposedly occupying the second floor. The upstairs was considered the "premier" brothel of the hotel, while a "bargain basement" brothel was housed downstairs, along with an opium den, so the stories go.

While all of the stories and legends seem suspect, the second, real history of the White Eagle is of legendary musicians, especially blues players, who called the intimate saloon one of their favorite venues. Among these was the Holy Modal Rounders (later the Unholy Modal Rounders), who called White Eagle home in the 1970s. The tiny, 70-seat saloon played host to such legends as Robert Cray, Paul DeLay, Charlie Musselwhite and Big Walter Horton until the 1980s, when rock music took over.

Drop ins included the Isley Brothers

and ZZ Top, Hills said. The latter did a set with one of the local bands that frequent the popular site. Live music is featured most nights of the week, and blues and folk tend to dominate.

A sense of ghosts: The Edgefield Inn

Situated on 38 acres, the Edgefield Inn in Troutdale features about 100 European-style guest rooms, restaurant, pubs and theater, as well as golf and its own winery, brewery and distillery. Lush landscaping and gardens complement the property, and beautiful artwork from a bevy of artists adorns the walls—and even the pipes.

"The artwork here is very unique," said property manager Jeff



The original bar, installed in 1905, graces the White Eagle

Photo by Ken Levy

Bryant. So, too, are the eerie ghost stories and phenomena that come with the historical inn.

Edgefield was built as a county poor farm in 1911. During the Depression, many people came to work and get back on their feet there. The place was inundated with people who couldn't make it on their own. They grew their own vegetables and helped out in whatever way they could to earn their keep.

But many never left, even after the Depression, because it was their home.

In the 1930s, the property was converted to a rest home, and a new wing was built to house an infirmary. Now known as the Winery Wing, many of its suite rooms feature extra-wide doors.

"A lot of people spent the rest of their lives in these rooms," Bryant said. Outside is what he calls a halfway house,

where the lately deceased were kept prior to burial.

This wing, according to Bryant, is where many guests have felt "some weird energy going on at night, while they were sleeping." Guests would encounter specters, things moving around and the sensation of being shaken awake by their feet, Bryant said. That wing has become so notorious that people who come looking for those kinds of things ask for those rooms.

"Periodically we have guests who come to the front desk in the middle of the night and say they couldn't possibly stay in those rooms because of their experiences," said Bryant.

Guests have told stories of being awakened by a little girl, gently shaking their feet or talking to them. By the time the guest wakes up, they've barely caught a glimpse of her before she disappears.

Speculation about who she might be abounds. Popular theory is that she may have been the daughter in a family living at the site during the Depression.

"A lot of people would have died there, and we assume some are hanging on from their existence then, unsettled," said Hills.

Thirteen artists worked at one time or another to decorate Edgefield and the other McMenamins properties. Three full-time artists, including Lyle Hine, did much of the whimsical work on site, according to Bryant. You'll find Hine's highly detailed painted faces peering out at you from pipe elbows and other unexpected spots.


"These may have precipitated some of the ghost sightings," Bryant said. "People sometimes wake up in the middle of the night a little confused as to where they're at, and there's a face staring at them."

Guests have also experienced otherworldly feelings at the Administrator's House. Now converted to overnight lodging, it's a favorite Halloween haunt for guests.

But it's also a great place to spend a night or two. The Administrator's House features several rooms in a homelike atmosphere furnished with numerous antiques. The entire Edgefield property speaks to well-appointed yet unpretentious comfort.

And you don't pay extra for "uninvited guests."

Getting there: The White Eagle Rock 'n' Roll Hotel is located at 836 N. Russell St., Portland Ore., 97227. Call for directions. Pub: (503) 282-6810. Lodging: (503) 335-8900 or (503) 225-5555 ext. 8845. Email: eagle@mcmenamins.com. Edgefield Inn is located at 2126 SW Halsey St., Troutdale, OR 97060. In Oregon, phone (503) 669-8610. Elsewhere, 1 (800)-669-8610. Email: edge@mcmenamins.com. Take Exit 16 from I-84 in Troutdale and go south on 238th Street to Halsey Street. Go east on Halsey Street to the inn.

McMenamins has numerous other hotels, pubs, breweries and theaters throughout Oregon and Washington. Many have long and storied histories and feature unique amenities not easily found elsewhere. Check them out at www.mcmenamins.com. 

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