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the White Eagle Saloon has spirits on the rocks

BY PAUL DUCHENE

The Portland Tribune, Dec 21, 2001

When you hear people describe haunting melodies, think about The White Eagle. This McMenamins pub has more stories than microbrews.

The rough-brick tavern and cafe at 836 N. Russell St. (technically The White Eagle Cafe, Saloon and Rock & Roll Hotel) has been a workingman's bar, sometime brothel and boarding house since 1905. There's been a bar on the site for 150 years.

Twenty years ago, Jon Koonce and Steve Bradley (still rocking out around town) and the Rockin' Razorbacks (long-since disbanded) would deafen

the biker crowd on any given evening. Now more middle-class, the White Eagle is still an amazing place to make music, a warmly lit tunnel with a stage at the end, cozy lighting and the acoustics of an oil drum.

Recent evenings found the Countryropolitans and Susannah Weaver (aka Little Sue) and Lynn Conover strumming acoustic sets, Billy Kennedy and Dover Weinberg rocking out and even veteran singer-songwriter Mark

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Alan up to his old tricks.

Originally, the White Eagle was part of a bustling row of stores and bars, but its companions are long gone, giving it the appearance of the last tooth in an ancient face.

Down the street, the Widmer brothers microbrewing empire is spreading from an impressive three-story brick structure that also missed the wrecking ball by a whisker in the late '70s.

The saloon was owned by the same family until the 1970s and bought by the McMenamin brothers two years ago. They set out to remodel the upstairs, which had been closed off since the 1950s. The redecorated cribs now can

be rented by overnight guests. There are nine double rooms and two bunk bed rooms, no phones and no TVs.

When the McMenamins remodeled, they found that the rooms were originally lit by window-

ed "light wells," with light coming down from the roof, but that they had been sealed off. Once the roof was repaired, the wells brought light into internal rooms, with the odd twist that occupants could look across at one another.

The White Eagle is reputed to be haunted, both upstairs and in the basement. Rumor has it that a shanghai tunnel led from the basement toward the docks. Former employees have reported unexplained incidents downstairs, which is where the prostitutes worked and opium was available.

The upstairs is rumored to be haunted by the ghost of a prostitute named Rose, and also by

a kitchen worker, Sam Worek, who lived and died in one of the rooms.

Worek was found dead after a bender in the early 1950s. The owners bolted the doors and closed off the upstairs, leaving his clothes in the closet and (supposedly) even his wallet on the bed stand.

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