

The Barley Mill: A Pub Evolved

"Wild Tiger, waHOO!" was the tag line of a 70-year-old, grey-haired, bearded man who came daily to the Barley Mill Pub during the late '80s. The pub crew took to calling *him* Wild Tiger. "Tiger," they'd shout out when the friendly, happy-go-lucky guy appeared at the door, and he'd respond with an enthusiastic, "Wild Tiger, waHOO!" Day after day, he'd order an R. C. or two and fill out the latest sweepstakes entries he'd received in the mail. And to all the sweepstakes nay-sayers, Tiger suddenly became living proof that the Average Joe can win. He showed up one day with the life-changing letter in hand: waHOO, he was a winner! He bade a fond farewell to his friends at the 'Mill, then rode off to enjoy his spoils in some California paradise.

Just another day in the life of a neighborhood tavern.



This place is flush with great characters and stories dating back to 1934, when Billy Hahn opened a beer parlor in the just completed building. It was a year after Prohibition ended and Portlanders were demonstrating a definite thirst for frosty mugs of brew. Hahn called his joint The Scuttlebutt, an old seafaring term for a drinking fountain.

"Red" Dorrigan, Scuttlebutt bartender in the 1950s, epitomized the atmosphere there. A big, tough Irishman, "Red" had auburn hair and a scarlet face, which, one patron remarked, "he didn't get from falling into a strawberry patch." With the juke box belting out the latest from the Hit Parade, "Red" served up drafts and ponies to the mostly young and middle-aged wage earners who crowded the place after work. There were longshoremen, former Buckaroo hockey stars, and, during Rose Festival, sailors on shore leave from visiting ships. They came to have a pop or two and a cigar, laugh with the guys, and play a game of pool, pinball, or shufflebowler. Some sat at the long, plain bar, trying their luck

with pull tabs. Others made time with the few women in the place, who were usually looking for either romance or a customer.

By the middle 1970s, about the only women to be seen in the place were employees. They danced . . . and stripped. Some even performed right on the bar.

After thirty years of beer, the 'Butt went belly up. In 1977, new owners reinvented the place with a little more attitude, more surliness, and a new name--Fat Little Rooster. This incarnation was described as the kind of place where you drank 50 beers, then grabbed a six pack for the ride home. The predominate theme of the Rooster's decor was black plywood.

The smoke was so thick there it stung your eyes; people along the back wall were just hazy, dark shapes. A smashed window, the result of one late night brawl, remained boarded up for weeks. Passersby knew it had been some unfortunate guy who had broken it, but wondered if he had crashed through from the inside or the outside.

Denizens of this dark enclave were not fresh faced college kids. Here, congregated the more experienced bar and blues types. Dressed in leather hats and boots, some bore a real resemblance to the Grateful Dead's Pig Pen. Intermixed with these folks were hard boiled neighborhood regulars, and occasionally, a clutch of Harley warriors.

Fifty-five cent Rainiers and pool were definite attractions for the place, but the Rooster's bread and butter was music--loud music! While much of the rest of city's clubs and taverns were featuring glitter and synthesizers, the Rooster strutted gut-bucket blues and other earthy, roots-based music. Some of the Northwest's best bands took their turn tearing the roof of this place, including the Robert Cray Band, Paul deLay's Brown Sugar, Steve Bradley's Sleazy Pieces, the Holy Modal Rounders, and the fabulous Clamtone. Routinely, people who either couldn't afford the cover

charge or wanted to avoid confrontations with the tough crowds inside, gathered on the sidewalk, along with roaming drug dealers, to hear the bands, which were clearly audible even out there.

The problem was that the din from the Rooster went far beyond the front sidewalk. In fact, it reverberated throughout the neighborhood. The raucous tavern had never really blended in with the otherwise serene setting of Lower Hawthorne, characterized by the florist, hardware store, CPA, and church that surrounded the Rooster. After six years of crowing, the Fat Little Rooster flew the coop and area residents took a simultaneous sigh of relief.

The pit in their stomachs returned in the summer of 1983 when neighbors learned a new pub was opening in the vacated building at 17th & Hawthorne. Tensions began to dissipate, though, when McMenamins agreed not to put on live music and then started to clean up the 50-year-old corner bar. The place was scoured inside and out and given a fresh coat of paint. The opaque mylar sheets were scraped off the windows, allowing light inside for the first time in years. Other welcoming additions were exuberant neon lights and imaginative murals painted by Norm Forsberg and Joe Cotter. Also, the pub's namesake, a very heavy barley mill (a kitty litter grinder originally) was set up with great effort in the front bay. It is a prized relic rescued from Oregon's first microbrewery, the Cartwright Brewery (1980-'82).

In July, the Barley Mill opened to little fanfare and notice. For McMenamins, though, it was a significant, new beginning. Its recent beer and wine distributorship, which had been a great learning experience, but proved less than profitable, had just bubbled under. So the Barley Mill was both a shifting of gears and a resurrection of sorts.

The B' Mill turned quietly and slowly for the first few years, but there was a loyal following right from the start. People came in for a few hours to do crossword puzzles and drink cheap Rainiers or even pints of Guinness. A basic menu, highlighted by pizza breads and burgers that were "sweated" to a hot temperature in a tiny Clark Radiator oven, however, didn't whet the appetites of too many patrons. During these years, if more than four people showed up at one time, it was considered a crush. On any given night after 9 PM, one staff person handled all the business with little difficulty.

Word got around, though, and the amount of people and fun soared, especially with the introduction of Hammerhead, Terminator and other McMenamins ales in 1985, and the installation of a real kitchen a few years later. Since then, the Barley Mill with its laid-back feel, has become a comfortable gathering spot for folks of all walks and ages. In particular, the pub's rousing summer anniversary party, with its performers, contests, and specially crafted anniversary ale, is always a day of family fun and revelry.

WaHoo!

