

McMenamins Broadway Pub



Overlooking the intersection of NE 15th and NE Broadway is one of McMenamins' little known gems. Hidden in a modern building, the second-story pub has been part of this historic and chic neighborhood since 1990—before it was so chic. Its vaulted ceilings and large windows give an unparalleled perspective of one Portland's most fashionable districts, but they also belie the historic significance of this spot. A look past this modern building reveals that a house once dominated this corner, one that was residence to two notable Portland families.

One of Portland's earliest east side electric streetcar stops slowed to a halt right here at NE 15th and Broadway. In 1904 one could hop off the car, look around and see a hardware store, a drug store, a warehouse, and, on the pub's corner site, a brand new home belonging to Samuel and Elsie Barr.

Samuel Barr was a Portland pioneer who built the Barr Hotel in 1892. The hotel, located on Portland's west side just two blocks from Union Station in what is now Old Town, was Barr's proudest achievement. He ran the successful business for almost twenty years, living here at 15th and Broadway towards the end of that time. Tragically, a fire swept through several blocks in Portland's North End in July 1908. *The Oregonian* wrote, "The Barr Hotel...made the most spectacular fire of any building in the district. The brick hotel was completely engulfed by the flames." The loss was enormous, and the stress proved too much for Samuel. He succumbed to a heart attack less than a year later at his home on Broadway. Samuel's family remained at this location for another decade, continuing in the hotel business.

The Barr house itself was a large brown home built in 1904 during the area's residential resurgence that followed the depression of the late 1890s. Like many of the old houses that still line Broadway, there was a five-foot embankment down to the sidewalk, raising it above street grade. The house fronted on NE 15th and featured three columns on the front porch, six

fireplaces, a dumb waiter and large yard.

Jumping off the streetcar at this same intersection in 1920, an individual familiar with the neighborhood would note several changes: the Wascher Brothers grocery store in the prominent brick building, an auto repair garage, and a butcher shop. The Barr house remains, but now it belongs to the Fred Fritz family. Fred Fritz was the proprietor of several of the city's most infamous and controversial saloons, well known for nearly 30 years as one of the ruling spirits of Portland's North End, the once gritty section of downtown just north of lower Burnside. The place bearing his name, Fritz's Theater and Saloon, was a grand theater that included a saloon, grill and vaudeville performances. His other establishment was the notorious Erickson's Workingman's Club

Even casual followers of Pacific Northwest history ought to recognize the name of Erickson's. With a record-setting 624-foot mahogany bar and well-earned reputation for the rough and tumble antics of its clientele, Erickson's Workingman's Club is perhaps the most famous of the Northwest's old-time saloons. A mammoth place, Erickson's poured more liquor than any joint in Portland, and since the early 1880s many an adventure-seeking man had lost his week's pay there. Named after its infamous founder Augustus Erickson, Fred Fritz bought the joint in 1907.

Both of Fritz's places were considered foundations of Portland's skid row, subject to incredible



A gritty portion of the cardroom in the famed Erickson's Workingman's Club. ORHI 21750

public scrutiny and frequent police raids. More than one Portland mayor made cleaning up Fritz's places his priority, and Lola Baldwin (namesake of McMenamins Lola's Room), head of the city's Women's Protection

Division, railed against Fritz. City ordinances were passed to regulate his places into conformity or bankruptcy, whichever came first. When Fritz moved into the house here on the corner of NE 15th and Broadway in 1919, it was at the start of Prohibition and at the height of his ongoing legal troubles.

Fritz passed away before he had the chance to see liquor pour legally again, and his house and business interests were passed to his wife and son. The post-Prohibition era was good for business (incredibly, Erickson's remained open until Christmas Eve of 1980); likewise, the Sullivan's Gulch neighborhood radiating from NE 15th and Broadway was good to the Fritzes. Fred Jr. married and started his family here. One of the sons, Fred III, fondly recalled his childhood in a 2005 interview. As a boy, he played army in the gulch, ran around Lloyd's field and fetched errant golf balls from the nearby Lloyd golf course to sell back to golfers. He climbed the cherry trees in the backyard and raced the streetcars up and down Broadway. The Irvington Pharmacy was kitty corner to the house, and single-scoop ice cream could be had for a nickel, or doubles for a dime. With the streetcar stop right outside, a ride into town to see his dad at Erickson's or off the other way towards grade school could always be had for cheap.



Looking west from 16th. By 1960 the Fritz house was gone and Broadway was a one-way street. *City of Portland Archives.*

The Lloyd Corporation purchased the Fritz home in 1952 and quickly leveled the house. A small building was constructed mid-block, fronting Broadway, that served as a physician's office, but the corner remained empty. Ralph Lloyd had dreamed of building a vast shopping mall and hotel in Northeast Portland as early as the mid-1920s. His earliest efforts were stifled by the Depression and then WWII, but he

resurrected the endeavor in the early '50s. Lloyd died before he realized his dream, but in his memory his four daughters pressed on. In August 1960, the nation's largest urban shopping center to date—and the only one with a skating rink—opened for business with great fanfare, permantly transforming this area.

While huge by 60s standards, the finished shopping center was not as expansive as Ralph's original plan. Much of the real estate his corporation had purchased in the neighborhood became surplus and no longer of use. The cleared lot at NE 15th and Broadway was among this surplus and for years functioned primarily as a parking lot. Every holiday season, though, the corner transformed into a Christmas tree sales lot. For decades folks from this neighborhood returned here year after year to pick their perfect tree, the McMenamins family among them. Mike and Brian McMenamins fondly recall coming annually to the lot around Christmas time.

In late 1989 developers took a fresh look at this underused block, and McMenamins moved in early the next year. At the time it opened McMenamins Broadway Pub was a bit of a departure from our other pubs. Instead of simple burgers, pool tables and psychedelic posters, the Broadway featured skylights, Oriental carpeting, a veritable forest of greenery, and menu selections like the Brie-on-Broadway sandwich. It was the first pub to focus on food service and, as such, altered the face of McMenamins. The second-story atmosphere is unique among McMenamins' locations too, and the place caught on almost immediately. For years it was not uncommon to see lines stretch down the stairs and people milling about waiting for a table. The opening of McMenamins Kennedy School in 1997 humbled its popularity a bit, but the Broadway still remains a busy neighborhood favorite.

It was not so long ago that the noisy streetcar regularly clamored to a stop here at the intersection of 15th and NE Broadway. One can envision Fredrick Fritz, on his way home, bounding off and eagerly flashing smiles to the people milling about the street before climbing the stairs to his door. Fresh from the Workingman's Club, he's left the toasts, laughter, and devil-may-care dazzle of his saloon behind him. You are sitting where he sat. While the Broadway Pub bears little resemblance to the bawdy, raucous Fritz joints of an earlier era, you may still stop in and have a drink at the same site where Fritz, one of the last connections to Portland's Old West heritage, enjoyed his.