

A Walking Guide to the Art & History of the Olympic Club Hotel and Theater

Welcome to McMenamins Olympic Club Hotel and Theater!

Within these walls, monumental characters have trod, characters that rival the heroes of American Folklore. Here we had Roy the dashing but slippery train robber, Louie the mighty coal miner-turned Hollywood producer, Ione the 'tamer of the savage beasts', Jack the King of the Bootleggers, and on and on....

The people and their stories are chronicled throughout the building by the artwork of McMenamins artists Jennifer Joyce, Myrna Yoder and Lyle Hehn. Historic photos also tell the tales with great detail. A number of the images are from the Lewis County History Museum, located in nearby Chehalis (museum photos are identified by the abbreviation 'LCHM' followed by their particular file number). Other photos came from private sources and we are grateful to the many folks who loaned or donated photos to us.

So grab a beverage of your choice and ascend at your own pace the mountain of history that dwells within.

McMenamins became the giddy steward of these two neighboring landmarks--the Olympic Club and Oxford Hotel--in 1996, acquiring the property from the Vogels. The Vogel family had been involved in the Olympic Club's operation since the early 1920s.

We reopened the saloon immediately, but the hotel's reincarnation involved more energy and creativity, as it had essentially been closed for many years. In 2002, the renovation of the old Oxford was done in a flurry of art, history and craftsmanship, and in October of that year, it debuted under the new name, The Olympic Club Hotel.

At the time of its construction in 1913, this hostelry was classified as a 'Railroad Hotel', a common term for lodgings located near a depot and catering to rail travelers in particular. In fact, the impetus for wealthy millman, Joseph Robinson, to build the Olympic Club Hotel at this site, near the intersection of Tower and Pine streets, came from the city's construction a year earlier of a larger, more ornate railroad depot at a new location, the intersection of Tower and Pine. And certainly, throughout its early years, the hotel's lifeblood was the constant flow of commercial rail travelers.

The label 'Railroad Hotel' took on a new connotation in 1921 when notorious train robber Roy Gardner was captured upstairs in one of the hotel rooms. He had escaped from federal guards just days earlier. From the hotel, Gardner was manacled and escorted under armed guard to the McNeil Island federal prison, where he promptly escaped again....

Today, 'Railroad Hotel' is no longer a common term, but it still applies here. Not only does AMTRAK regularly pick up and drop off passengers at the now historic depot just steps away, but also a number of freight trains breeze

through town daily, making their presence known with a familiar whistle. While we've taken every measure to soundproof the hotel rooms, light sleepers may occasionally hear a train's mournful cry--and for those folks, we leave a pair of ear plugs on the pillow.

Olympic Club Theater

This place has no previous history as a theater, but its amazing past could easily be made into a movie!

The space was first occupied by a men's clothing store, which relocated rather quickly, perhaps not feeling like a good fit along Centralia's notorious 'saloon row.' Into the vacated store front moved a billiard parlor and for the subsequent eight decades the space harbored some kind of joint--a pool hall, saloon or card room sporting names like The Idle Hour, The High Lead, Al's Beer Parlor, and The Jet Tavern.

Artwork in the theater creatively chronicles a sampling of the characters and episodes linked to this building and the Oly Club next door.

On the north wall, starting at the front of the building and proceeding right:

a. The first panel is an abstract piece painted by Lyle Hehn. With a skewed perspective, like the viewer is looking into a bowl, the painting features a spiraling mosaic of icons, including dice, pool balls, the Olympic Club sign. At the center is the tulip motif seen prominently in the Club's original decor.

b. The next panel right shows a cosmic game of pool set in early days of the Oly Club. Artist Jennifer Joyce includes many interesting characters, not the least of which is the dog that shows up in several of the earliest photos of the Club.

c. Lyle Hehn's ode to the Gentlemen's Resort, a nickname long applied to the Oly Club. Front and center reclining in the cut of the tree is Roy Gardner, the 'Gentleman Bandit' who was captured upstairs in one of the hotel rooms. Flanking Gardner are, on the left, Charlemagne Tower, Tower Avenue's namesake, and right, George Washington, Centralia's founding father.

Moving across the room to the south wall

a. Directly opposite Hehn's Gentlemen's Resort panel, is another of Lyle's imaginative creations. Here Lyle celebrates Louie The Cop, one of the hotel's greatest characters. Louis Sonney was a local boy who made a name for himself first through his John Henry-like feats as a coal miner. Sonney next joined the Centralia police force, and became a national celebrity when he captured train robber Roy Gardner in the Oxford Hotel in 1921. Months later, Sonney changed careers once more, taking off his badge and picking up a movie camera. Sonney went on to produce many movies, including a chronicle of Roy Gardner's exploits. It's this episode that Lyle eludes to in this panel.

b. This Jennifer Joyce creation is a picture menu of offerings available at the Gentlemen's Resort. Laid out like a vintage ad or postcard, the panel's various 'windows' depict the several components of the Olympic Club--bar room, pool, poker games, bar shop, shoe shine, and tobacco, all found under one roof!

c. Here is a tale of elusive Lady Luck, painted by Lyle Hehn. Central to the subject is the motorcycle side car we found stashed in the basement. According to many locals, during the 1940s and '50s, it was the mode of transportation for the chief of police. So the story goes, the chief couldn't cover his bets one night at the Club's poker game, and as payment, relinquished his side car. The actual side car is now on display in the Club's pool room.

d. This is a sight familiar to Centralians for decades: men congregated at, and in fact, spilling out of the Oly Club, and women crossing to the opposite side of the street to retain their respectability and avoid the male melange. Artist Jennifer Joyce chose the early 1920s as the setting for this panel.

Be sure to spend a little more time looking at the room's original ornate tin ceiling, stained glass windows and the plumping. Really, a close look at pipe elbows will bring a fun reward.

New Tourist Bar

The New Tourist Bar deserved a better fate and we're thrilled to be able to give it a second chance.

In 1913, A. J. Forgues spent thousands of dollars setting up a saloon in the just-completed hotel building. Upon its opening, Forgues' posh New Tourist Bar was heralded as one of the finest around. In fact, its greatest competition was right next door at the Olympic Club, which at the time was just undergoing a very costly transformation. Unfortunately for Forgues, state prohibition went into effect three years later, forcing him and most other bar owners to close down. The lavish furnishings of the New Tourist were dismantled and shipped out.

Eighty-six years later, the New Tourist is reborn in the same space. Not quite as it was, but certainly conducted with the same enthusiasm. Relics left over from Forgues' version include the inlaid tile entry, tin ceiling and some of the stained glass windows. Other windows and the dome over the doorway were created based on the originals and views from historic photos. Other furnishings of the modern-day New Tourist include bar stools, cigar case and beveled glass mirrors found in the Oly Club basement. The back bar is from the tavern that used to occupy the theater space next door.

The one ground-floor lodging room, located next to the New Tourist Bar, is named for the New Tourist's creator, A. J. Forgues, who also ran the hotel for a while in the 'teens.

The Olympic Club Hotel

The tour continues upstairs in the hotel. As you walk up the front stairwell, you can greet Pete Neitzel, the grandfatherly looking gent in the photograph on the right. Pete was a regular at the Olympic Club into the 1970s, when Don Iverson took this great portrait.

At the top of the stairs, centered on the wall facing you are two framed pieces that serve as fitting greeters:

a. This enthusiastic 1991 letter-to-the editor from the *Centralia Chronicle* was penned by longtime resident Bill Monfort who worked at the Oly Club as a young man during Prohibition.

b. Wanted: Roy Gardner! This 1921 federal-issue poster was dispatched immediately following Gardner's escape at Castle Rock, WA. Days later, Gardner spied a poster similar to this at the Centralia depot, inspiring him to, first, disguise himself as a burn victim, wrapping his head and hands in bandages, and second, check into different lodgings, this time the Olympic Club Hotel.

Next, on the same wall, left and right, are a series of photos that illustrate just who the customers of the Oly Club and hotel were:

a. Loggers, like these four, were the Oly Club's bread and butter. After working in the woods and living at a lumber camp all week, the men come Friday night, got to town by any means necessary. With their payroll checks in hand, they arrived at the Oly Club, hungry, parched, and in need of distraction, and probably a shave--all

things the Club was well equipped to remedy. This photo of a Schafer Bros. Logging Company crew was taken *circa* 1928 in the area of Bunker and Lincoln creeks, outside Centralia (LCHM P9983)

b. Perched on their handywork, this group of sturdy loggers, are from the Salzer Valley Lumber Company, a Centralia outfit. Judging by their facial characteristics, they represent a range of ethnic backgrounds (LCHM P2678).

c. Not the Invisible Man, though that was his desired result, this bandaged figure is escaped train robber Roy Gardner, as depicted by Jennifer Joyce. Before checking into the Olympic Club Hotel, Gardner cloaked his familiar face in bandages and made up a story that he had been burned in a chemical explosion. He's shown here in the hotel's stairwell, hoping everyone bought his tale. They didn't.





Centralia, a significant percentage likely wound up dead or maimed. Nearly every day during the early 1900s, the Centralia papers ran stories of miners, loggers, and railroaders involved in gruesome work-related accidents. In this light, the weekly gatherings at the Olympic Club were a celebration of life, or perhaps for cheating death one more time (LCHM P4055)

e. Miners pose outside the entrance of the Tono Mine, circa 1910 (LCHM P12658)

f. Centralia's construction of a larger, fancier railroad depot in 1912 at a site several blocks south of the old depot, was the impetus for building this hotel. The hotel, which opened the following year, was just a few steps from the new depot and most of its customers were the commercial rail travelers needing lodging while in town for business (LCHM P11381)

g. The workers of the railroad machine shop, *circa* 1915. The young man second from the left is Art Vogel, who a few years later would leave his machinist job to become an employee and then partner at the Oly Club (LCHM P14279)

h. Sixty or more mechanics sit on a newly overhauled locomotive at the Centralia round house, *circa* 1915. They probably celebrated the task later at the nearby Oly Club (LCHM P14280).

i. Inside Centralia's roundhouse. This dramatic shot shows a young Art Vogel, future Oly Club proprietor, standing in front of a locomotive, *circa* 1915 (LCHM P14282)

j. A steam engine takes on coal at the old wood-frame Centralia depot, *circa* 1910 (LCHM P4371)

k. Art Vogel (right), then a machinist for the Northern Pacific Railroad, stands inside the power plant at the Centralia rail yards (LCHM P14284)

On the opposite wall, where the front stairwell descends, looking left to right:

a. *Hellcatraz: The Rock of Despair* is ex-train robber Roy Gardner's 1937 account of his incarceration at Alcatraz. "Nobody who hasn't spent time on Alcatraz," Gardner writes, "can imagine--despite all the vivid, dramatic stories written about it--just what a hell it is." He notes that Alcatraz is the United States Government's prison for the worst federal offenders, including Al Capone, machine Gun Kelly, --and himself. "The men confined there are, to all intents and purposes, buried alive.... I got off Alcatraz. I was lucky." This copy of *Hellcatraz* was autographed by Gardner in 1939.

b. Roy Gardner makes his escape from the train at Castle Rock, Washington, in June 1921. Jennifer Joyce's depiction of the dramatic incident shows the fugitive running for cover in the nearby hills. Five days later, Gardner would materialize in Centralia.

c. "Gardner Tells How He Escaped; Rode to Centralia on Cowcatcher" screams the *Seattle P-I*'s front page account of how Roy Gardner was capture at this hotel. Accompanying the article is a great photo showing the hotel.

d. Who? What? Where? The answers are at the Acme Cafe. The ad is from 1910.

e. This 1909 Memorial Day Parade scene was photographed by a man passing through town. Perhaps subconsciously his interest was more on drinking than on the parade, since the only part of the photo in sharp focus is the Olympic Club. Note the empty lot next to the Club where the hotel would rise four years later.

f. This 1910 view of the Oly Club is somewhat jarring because of the open space next door where the hotel would soon be built. Hey, is that a barbecue grill up against the Club's side wall? (LCHM Magnet Magazine)

g. Crowds line Tower Avenue to watch a parade march down the street in the 1930s. Note the Oly Club and Oxford Hotel on the right (LCHM P11581).

h. Jack Sciutto's niece dug out this early view of the Oly Club bar room from the family papers. Most interesting about this shot is what isn't shown. The left half of the photo was torn off years before, leaving us to guess what-

-or whom--appeared in the missing portion and was deemed sufficiently offensive (or compromising) to destroy it? Hmmm.

i. This 1914 view of the Oly Club shows off the eye-popping results of a major 1913 renovation. Compare it with today's view. Amazingly it hasn't changed too much (Centralia Timberland Library: *Chronicle-Examiner* 1914 Special Edition).

j. A glimpse inside the Working Man's lair at the moment the gender walls began to crumble. This photo essay appeared in the *Tacoma News Tribune* in 1971.

k. Another series of Oly Club views by Don Iverson was published in 1974 and was picked up by the wire services and reprinted in papers around the country. Copies from various cities were mailed back to the Oly Club from old friends and admirers. This one came from Pasadena, CA.

1. Forgues Wants To See You! A. J. Forgues established The New Tourist Bar, a posh resort opened in 1913 in the just-completed hotel building. Though fabulously furnished to rival the neighboring Oly Club, New Tourist sadly was wiped out by State Prohibition laws that went into force on January 1, 1916--four years before federal prohibition became the law of the land. McMenamins' New Tourist revival occupies the same space as the original (Centralia Timberland Library: *Chronicle-Examiner* 1914 Special Edition).

m. The Astor Wine Company had about the same short life span as Forgues' ill-fated New Tourist. Opened in 1913 in the space now occupied by the Oly Club's pool room, brewery and meeting room, the Astor, too, was a casualty of the 1916 Washington State Prohibition law. According to lore, the Oly Club cafe's back bar with its mother-of-pearl inlays, had been the centerpiece of the Astor's bar room. It was purchased and moved at the time the shuttered bar was being dismantled (Centralia Timberland Library: *Chronicle-Examiner* 1914 Special Edition).

n. This view of the 1919 Armistice Day parade in Centralia is one of the only surviving photos to capture the event on film. Shortly after it was snapped, three of the servicemen (recently returned from WWI) shown marching here would be killed outside the Wobbly union hall, setting off a series of events known as the Centralia Massacre (LCHM P4428).

o. This storefront view, taken in 1910, shows the Anex Cafe and Mint Saloon, which occupied the space where the Oly Club's pool room, brewery and meeting room are today. These popular businesses thrived in this spot from 1908 to 1913 (LCHM: Magnet magazine).

p. Gunmen robbed the Olympic Club in 1969, as reported in this *Centralia Chronicle* article. The Club's regulars knew right away it was done by 'outsiders.' Anyone who spent much time at the Club knew the real money was kept elsewhere on the premises.

q. When the hotel opened in 1913, one of the initial businesses was Joe Wilkins' bowling alley. Set up in the basement, the alley apparently didn't find steady patronage. But while bowling was just a fleeting thing at the hotel, Joe Wilkins was not. He returned, after a stint of professional baseball, to run the Idle Hour pool hall for several years in the north storefront of the hotel.

Before leaving the front hallway, notice the quotations that run along the front wall. These are the words of (or about) Roy Gardner, the train robber. The quotes continue around the entire outside perimeter of the upstairs hallways. Follow along and you'll get a good sense of who this notorious character really was.

Also, check out the lyrics that serve as a border along the top of the interior wall.

Now, as you face the front stairwell, turn left and proceed down the north hallway, and look along the left (south) wall.

Between the Ray Bush and Jim Fasano rooms:

a. This Don Iverson photo focuses on two elder denizens of the Olympic Club, including Joe Honek at right, engaged in a checkers battle, while a third, Charlie Pace, watches intently.

Between the Jim Fasano and Bath rooms:

a. This broad, bustling view of North Tower Avenue was taken in the mid 1930s. A delivery truck is shown doubleparked outside the Olympic Club. The photographer Billie Wilcox later entered into a partnership with Olympic Club proprietor Ernie Rector in a company that provided photo-finish equipment to horse tracks in the region (Washington State Historical Society: Lot 198/Folder 1).

At the end of the north hallway, turn around and return. Along the opposite (north) wall. Between the Lucien Christin and Ione Sellards rooms:

a. The dashing young sport portrayed here by Jennifer Joyce is Lucien Christin. By the time he came to work at the Oly Club in the mid-1940s as a card dealer, Lucien was a little older and had a lot more tales to tell. In the nearby town of Pe Ell, where he was raised, Christin got into the bootlegging business as a teenager. When local authorities expressed concern over these activities, the youth took off with a friend on a cross-country adventure. They eventually ended up in Chicago and quickly found themselves in the employ of one Alfonse Capone. After building a fence around one of the mobster's illegal breweries, the two boys decided it best to hit the road rather than accept an offer to be drivers on one of Capone's liquor-hauling routes.

Between the Ione Sellards and Gertrude Howell rooms:

a. This panoramic shot of the Oly Club pool by Don Iverson is a prime view of the Club's rough-hewned atmosphere that prevailed into the 1970s.

b. The short-lived Astor Wine Company, located in today's Oly Club's pool room, had an impressive array of offerings. Can't beat those prices!

c. This dramatic view of North Tower's 100-block has a Film-Noir quality about it. Taken around 1914, it shows the Idle Hour pool hall at its original location (108 N. Tower), with the Astor Wine Bar next to it, followed by the Oly Club. Check out the logger with the high pants and caulk boots coming out. At the extreme left, you can just make out the stained glass dome over the entrance to the New Tourist bar and the bottom of the Oxford Hotel's sign (LCHM P14294).

Between the Turkey Red and Don Iverson rooms:

a. 'King of the Bootleggers' was the tag hung on Sciutto by the *Centralia Tribune* in 1923. He certainly had earned it. Sciutto was busted at the Oly Club on liquor charges for the first time in 1916, just months after state prohibition went into effect. The next bust came around pretty soon after that, followed by another and another. By 1923, certain influential parties--namely local churches and the Womens Christian Temperance Union--felt the Oly Club's violations had become too flagrant and too many in number, and they called for the Club's termination, via the revoking of its business license. This was done, but it didn't stick; Sciutto flashed some of his clout, and within days, the Club reopened its doors brandishing a new license.

Between the Mike Solomon and George Barner rooms:

a. The ancient Aztec legend of the Mystery Beauty Birds states that to possess such a bird was to have the blessings of the Gods--the Gods of Good Omen, Good Fortune and Good Luck. For many years, the Oly Club proprietors gave Mystery Beauty Bird calendars out as gifts to their employees and friends. This selection dates from the late '50s to the mid-'60s.

Between the George Barner and George Washington rooms:

a. Ione Sellards, the Olympic Club's first-ever female employee, is wonderfully portrayed here by Mryna Yoder. Ione came to work at the Club's cafe in the mid-1960s and at first her presence drew disbelief and scorn--crowds of men congregated outside the cafe on the sidewalk to glare in at this foreign species--a woman in the Oly Club. Quickly, though, Ione's exceptional cooking and congenial personality won over the Old Guard.

Between the George Washington room and the hallway's end:

a. It's the Water?! Lyle Hehn's marvelous send-up of vintage beer ads replaces the expected waterfall with the Oly Club's Mighty Twin Urinals.

At the end of the hall, turn around and return. Along the opposite (south) wall. Between the Louis Sonney room and the other hallway:

a. It's all in the details: Don Iverson's photographic study of the science of setting up a shot.

Between the hallway and the Charlemagne Tower room:

a. The body may be failing but the sight is still keen--so long as the glasses are on. Don Iverson's great take of Joe Honek lining up a shot.

Between the Charlemagne Tower and Elmer Smith rooms:

a "We Shall Cleanse our City of Illegal Liquors," proclaims this stolid member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, as portrayed by Myrna Yoder. Encircled though she is by a halo of copper, this woman can't quit manage to blot out all the "BEER" and "ALE" around her.

Next, turn around and return to the back hallway, and proceed into it.

On your left, between the bathrooms:

a. This fancy, young dude is the teenaged Art Vogel. Even at this age, there are gravel, spit and savvy evident in that boyish face, a combination which made him a great poker player and a legendary saloon keeper.

Opposite wall, on your right:

a. Pete Neitzel shows up again in this panel by Lyle Hehn. The towering Round Oak provides warmth for Ol' Pete and a pliant surface for the woodpecker--at least in Lyle's imagination.

b. This collection of Oly Club items includes early ads and a sparkling 1913 review of the newly renovated place.

c. In the days when loggers burned as much as 9,000 calories a day, they needed solid sources of replenishment. The Oly Club Cafe fit the bill, being held in high esteem for many years for its large portions of good food. This 1935 menu illustrates the point.

On your left, above the back stairwell:

a. A majestic nod to the hotel's days as a brothel, this nude is the creation of Myrna Yoder. Inspired appropriately by Manet's famous nude, "Olympia," Myrna distinguishes this work with the Oly Club's tulip pattern.

Now turn left and proceed to the end of the next (south) hallway. Turn around and face the front of the building. On your left, between the south hallway's end and the Tom Churchill room:

a. Tower Avenue in the 1920s looking north. Note the Oly Club and Oxford Hotel on right. (LCHM P11547)

b. Tower Avenue around 1909 looking south. Note Oly Club on the left and the undeveloped lot where the hotel would later be built.

c. Laying the street car rails on Tower Avenue, 1910. Note Olympic Club on right. Hotel has not yet been built. (LCHM P11551)

d. Horse-and-buggy days on Tower Avenue, *circa* 1905. The wooden buildings on right, where the Oly Club stands today, all burned in a devastating fire in June 1908 (Courtesy Jeanette Gum)

Between the Tom Churchill and F.B. Hubbard room:

a. Charlemagne Tower, as portrayed by Jennifer Joyce, wielded much influence on early Centralia, though he never set foot in the city. Tower was a Philadelphia millionaire and director of the Northern Pacific Railroad. He acquired 40,000 acres in Southwest Washington from the railroad's federal land grants and laid the groundwork for large-scale lumbering, and coal mining in the area. For that, Centralians renamed their main thoroughfare Tower Avenue in honor of the wealthy Easterner.

Between the F.B. Hubbard and Joe Robinson rooms:

a. Lyle Hehn's panel of Olympic Club icons depicts the building's front pediment and 'bookend' Olympic discus throwers. Lyle borrowed the floral design from the Club's1935 cafe menu.

Between the Marie Lotz and Lester Webster rooms:

a. "When pigs fly..." might be an apt title for this fantasy scene painted by Lyle Hehn. Victorian-age women lording over a pool table inside the Oly Club while the ostracized gents peer in through the door. In the early '70s, the proverbial pigs did fly, when women did finally break down the gender barrier and began frequenting the longtime gentlemen's resort.

Between the Ernie Rector and Roy Gardner rooms:

a. This sepia-tone bar scene reveals the Olympic Club as it originally was laid out in 1908. Proprietor Jack Sciutto is at right behind the bar. Note the statuette of the Olympic discus thrower that stands on the back bar. The Club was completely renovated in 1913 to look essentially as it does today (LCHM P14287)

b. This 1933 Washington Retail Purveyor's license was issued to the Oly Club at the time Prohibition was repealed, permitting the Club to sell beer *legally* for the first time in 17 years. The license was found in storage at the Oly Club.

c. In 1929, armed with this search warrant, the local sheriff and his deputies came to the Olympic Club to scour the place for bootleg liquor. Because the local newspapers never mentioned the raid, one can assume either the officers found nothing, or the Oly Club managers flexed their influence again and got off.

d. The Nugent Brothers opened this saloon, the Oxford Bar, in 1906, on the south half of the lot where the hotel stands today. This photo shows how little the Nugents cared about appearances. Check

out the hole in the ceiling in the upper left corner. The bar was destroyed by fire in 1908, making way for the hotel, which for years was called The Oxford, perhaps as a tip of the hat to the Nugent's establishment.

At the end of the hall, turn around and return. Along the opposite (north) wall. Between the bathroom and storage room:

a. Beginning in the 1960s, the old hotel went into a steady decline, until finally closing completely in the 1980s. This stark view, painted by Myrna Yoder, shows how the rooms looked when McMenamins first saw them in the late 1990s. Myrna includes pool balls and an old dog for good, dramatic effect.

Between the two storage rooms:

a. Tools of the game, a stool, triangle and cues in the Oly Club pool room, by Don Iverson.

Between the front hallway and the Don Schultz room:

b. George Washington was Centralia's founding father. Jennifer Joyce portrays the distinguished character in a pin-striped vest and accompanied by a favorite four-legged friend.

Between the Don Schultz and Nugent Brothers rooms: a. A study of Oly Club relics, a chair and spittoon, by Don Iverson.

Between the Nugent brothers room and the back hallway: a. An old logger, Pete Neitzel, warms himself by the Oly Club's great stove in this 1970s photo by Don Iverson.

Whew! That's the end of the guided part of the tour. Now, grab another beverage of your liking and go explore on your own. Enjoy!

