

YAKIMA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Minutes of Meeting November 21, 1999, at Yakima Valley Museum

The program subject was **Catacombs** of the City of Yakima presented by Homer Splawn. The subject does not refer to, or include, steam pipe locations from the central steam heating plant, which furnished steam heat to a number of buildings in the city.

Attached are the following copies:

March 17, 1974, Yakima Sunday Herald article by Charlie Lamb featuring a catacomb-trip of Lallooh Carpenter, Homer Splawn's sister.

Homer Splawn's map of the catacomb from his sister's description as told to him.

Information map from Sanborn Maps 1920 & 1952.

Mr. Splawn hung his hand drawn map on the south wall of the meeting room.

In 1974 the addresses on South Front Street to the alley were vacant except a self-serve city parking area off the alley. From the alley to East Chestnut Street were the following: No. 7 El Sombrero Tavern Cafe (terminus of the catacomb), No. 9 Calvary Mission, No. 13 Union Gospel Mission, No. 19 Palace Tavern, empty space, last 25 feet owned by Homer Splawn and Lallooh Carpenter (gravel parking lot).

Yvonne Wilber: city directory 1950-1951 shows as follows: No. 3½ First & Last Chance Tavern, No. 5 Baltimore Cafe (Mrs. Pappantis), No 7 Paul's Place Tavern later El Tavern, No. 15 Monterey Cafe, No 17 Sing Herb Co., No. 19 Palace Cafe.

The first building on South Front Street was the Shardlow Building. This was a two-story brick-faced building facing East Yakima Avenue.

This was a saloon. The second story for a period of time housed a place of ill repute with a long stairway from the direction of the alley. The Shardlow Building did not extend to the alley.

This space was occupied by Mrs. Pappantis' Baltimore Cafe frame oblong structure inset from the alley.

The Shardlow Building became a Golden Rule Store fronting on Yakima Avenue. Thereafter that first floor space was used for rummage sales by various organizations and a portion of that space became the First and Last Chance Tavern with the entrance on South Front Street between the Avenue and Baltimore Cafe.

Mr. Splawn related an experience with Mrs. Pappantis, who charged a young woman with giving her a swat across Mrs. Pappantis' broad rear with a broom, when Mrs. Pappantis elbowed her aside as she was sweeping the sidewalk. Mr. Splawn represented the young woman on the assault charge, resulting in the quickest jury verdict for a defendant in the history of Yakima County Superior court.

City of Yakima police officer Les Rock had discovered an entrance to an underground tunnel. The entrance was off the basement of the Montana Hotel, which had been built by Pat Mullins, ex-mayor of Butte, Montana. This is the tunnel shown on the maps attached.

The downtown library city addresses record shows for 1909 "Montana Block South First Street corner East Chestnut." This is the first reference to Montana. It is concluded that the Montana Hotel was not built before 1909. There is no reference to a building or address there before 1909. The librarian lady said that specific addresses were not recorded in the directory prior to 1930.

The speculation is raised that East Chestnut Street was a dirt street and that excavated materials from the tunnel could have been dumped there and spread. It is not reasonable to believe that the Montana Hotel was there first and the tunnel then constructed. It is reasonable to believe that, when the basement of the Montana Hotel was dug, the tunnel was exposed and walled off.

Mr. Splawn's sister, Lallooh Carpenter, told him the following.

Officer Les Rock of the City of Yakima Police Department had discovered the tunnel system and brought it to the attention of Owen Carpenter, Commissioner of Finance of the City of Yakima (before the City Council and City Manager system). Mr. Carpenter got up a party of friends and city officials and arranged with Officer Rock to introduce them to the tunnel. They gathered at the Montana Hotel. Officer Rock took them down into the

basement and pushed a portion of a wall aside, so the group could enter the tunnel. Officer Rock then left them and said that he would drive around to the front of the El Sombrero Tavern, park, notify the tavern operator that people would be coming up into the back bar from the tunnel and wait. Lallooh told her brother that she was able to walk erect through the tunnel, that it was fairly clean of rocks and debris, that it did curve to her right and then go straight, that along the way there was a room with tables and chairs, that there were offshoot tunnels, one from East Chestnut and one going toward the railroad tracks, that the bottom of the tunnel was packed hard, that there were flashlights in the group, that at the end of the tunnel there was a wood ladder, which could have been an 8-foot ladder, that she climbed the ladder, pushed a panel at the back bar of the tavern and crawled out into the back bar and stood up, scaring the drinkers on the stools, who fled out of the tavern.

This tavern building used to be a saloon building and had a false upper front with a beer barrel and reading "Puget Sound Brewing & Malting."

Wade Sheet Metal occupied a brick or stone building across East Chestnut (south side). Mr. Splawn remembered hearing that the building had been empty for years and that Filipinos used it for gambling. Whether this connects to the tunnel paralleling South Front Street is a thought.

The tunnel is still there. The entrance off the Montana Hotel basement is gone, because the hotel burned. The space is now a parking lot. The El Sombrero Tavern building is gone. But the tunnel is still there.

Questions and answers:

Question: How tall and how wide were the tunnels?

Answer: She walked erect.

Question: Where did the excavated materials go?

Answer: The geologic structure is somewhat bound together aggregate. Took out in wheelbarrow. Do not know where dumped.

Question: Any tie to steam pipe tunnels?

Answer: No.

.. Question: Nancy thinks there are or were under her building.

Answer: Central steam heating plant operated by Pacific Power & Light in Chinook Hotel basement. Prior to Chinook Hotel do not know.

Question: Would this go back to Judge Whitson, 1886?

Answer: Too early.

Comment from Paul Schafer: presumably dug by Chinese. In Port Townsend such tunnels were called "Shanghai Tunnels."

Homer: Families in North Yakima had Chinese house boys. His mother owned a house and lot at 1214 West Yakima Avenue in addition to her ranches in the Cowiche Valley. He remembers an occasion of a Chinese vegetable peddler with a single horse wagon coming up the alley ringing a bell to announce his coming and the next door neighbor, Mrs. Pat Lynch, going out to buy vegetables off the wagon. He happened to be there mowing lawn. He believes there was a large Chinese garden on Keyes Road, one mile south of Terrace Heights Drive.

Paul Shafer: Chinese built western railroads. There is a Chinese section at Tahoma Cemetery.

Yvonne Wilbur: George Donald used Chinese laborers and had a Chinese cook. He had lots of Chinese articles in his home.

Martin Humphrey took notes of the program subject.

Harmon B. Spawne
Secretary

N

N FRONT
ST.

W

YAKIMA AVE.

SO.

FRONT
ST.

SHARDLOW

1ST
PLAT
CHANCE
TAVERN

BLDG

BALTIMORE CAFE

TAVERN

ALLEY

LADDER

ALLEY

MONTANA HOTEL

E. CHESTNUT

SO.

1ST

ST.