

# McMenamins Corvallis Pub



Given its proximity to two major crossroads in a college town, it seems as no surprise that neighborhood folks, OSU faculty and students and visitors from all around the country end up here, gathered around the fire. What may come as a surprise to those visitors is that this busy intersection was for decades part of a quiet residential neighborhood known as Dixon's 2<sup>nd</sup> Addition.

While it may not be the most inventive of names, Dixon's 2<sup>nd</sup> Addition has an interesting history nevertheless. Arriving here in 1845, Joseph Avery and William Dixon were the first non-natives to settle this area. Not long after their arrival, the two platted a portion of their original land claims to form Marysville, named for Mary's River, and together began promoting their new town. Dixon, who built his home less than two blocks from the future site of the pub, just north of what is now Harrison Boulevard and 1<sup>st</sup> Street, established a ferry service that crossed the Willamette.

At the headwaters of the Willamette, Marysville (now Corvallis) grew steadily from the start. In 1854, Dixon, responding to the

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pressures of growth, added an additional 13 blocks to the city grid, creating this neighborhood known as his "2<sup>nd</sup> addition." While Dixon's first addition along the waterfront was primarily commercial, his 2<sup>nd</sup> addition was intended to be a new residential area. Almost immediately, homes sprang up throughout the neighborhood, and by at least 1890 there were two houses on this block. It's uncertain who originally constructed the home that sat where the pub now sits, but it is

likely that it was built in 1885 by a man named Robert Buchanan, who had recently retired from his farm and moved to this spot with his wife Jane.

Interestingly, Robert Buchanan was one of the most well-known pioneer settlers of Benton County. After a stint of gold mining in California, Buchanan settled on some farmland in Benton County in early 1853. He worked hard on the untamed land, constantly improving the property so that it became quite productive. When he retired to this spot in 1885, his son Arthur took over operations at the farm. That property, along with the original Buchanan House that was built there in 1863, remained in the family for generations. Today, descendants

of Robert and Jane run the Tye Wine Cellars and Vineyards on the Buchanan Family Century Farm, about 10 miles south of the pub.

When Robert and Jane first moved into the house here, it was probably the only building on the block. But by the time Robert passed away in January 1910, neighbors surrounded the house. To the south, on the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Harrison, sat the



The intersection of N. 3rd and Van Buren during the flood of 1890. The courthouse is in the foreground right, the Buchanan house is just out of frame left. Courtesy Benton County Historical Society.

home of Louis and Rose Corl and their children. Louis, along with son Leland, are known in town for their involvement in Corl's Books. Louis founded the popular downtown bookstore in 1914, at first selling magazines to passengers of the Southern Pacific Red Electric Line. Leland, who left Corvallis after receiving a Bachelor of Science degree from Oregon Agricultural College (now OSU) in 1915, returned with his wife in 1923 to take over his father's bookstore. He operated Corl's until he retired in 1965.

Between the Corls and the Buchanans on what is now the pub's parking lot lived Charles and Ellen Merritt. The two came to Corvallis in 1907 and two years later moved to this spot. Charles worked at the Buxton Central Planing Mill for 36 years and is credited with most of the ornamental wood working still visible in the Corvallis Methodist Church. Ellen was the proprietor of Merritt's Millinery, located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the acclaimed J.M. Nolans department store. The Merritts lived at 410 NE 3<sup>rd</sup> until Charles finally passed away in 1955. Their 46 years here was the longest tenure to date. By the time the Merritt's place became vacant, the neighboring Buchanan house had been divided into a five-room apartment house, the list of residents constantly changing.

The advent of 1969 changed this corner for good. Not long after the completion of the New Willamette River Bridge at Harrison Street, the homes that stood here for more than five decades were razed. A little round building was erected on the corner, and State Savings and Loans began servicing drive-up customers. That same year, construction began on this eccentric, Bavarian-styled building. It was occupied for a short time by a realty company and then, in 1972, became the storied Tower of London Pub.

The Tower, owned by feisty local restaurateur Gary Baker, was known for its fish and chips and seafood-centered pub menu. Though it was a popular spot when it first opened, the Tower struggled in later years. After a summers-long chain of events that pitted owner Baker against area

lenders, county officials and the IRS, the place closed its doors early in 1988 after sixteen years of business.

Today, intimate lighting and the cozy fireplace illuminate the comfortable interior of plants, art, rich woodwork and decorative antiques. Since McMenamins Corvallis opened back in 1991, the friendly neighborhood feel that once defined this district has percolated back to the surface. While traces of the houses that once stood here are long gone, folks in the neighborhood have come to feel just as at home here, and the oddly styled building brings in many regulars on a daily basis.

The pub's confines lend themselves to a casual work meeting or a casual sip of a cocktail, and lunches, thanks in part to the Hewlett-Packard crowd, are often bustling affairs. OSU professors and students stealing away from the other (ivory) tower are a familiar sight, and OSU home games really make this place hop. Civil War games pack this place like no other event.

After nearly fifteen years of serving the community, McMenamins Corvallis has amassed many stories of its own, like the memorable Oktoberfest of 1995, when Higher Ground shook loose the dust in the rafters and we served more sausages than we thought possible. In memory of the employees and guests that have come and gone through our doors, it's the stories that really give this place its life. From Benton County pioneers right to you sitting here now, we hope you'll become a part of the new history being recorded here every day.

