

On the beaten track

For a classy beginning, start your walking tour in the lobby of the **Benson Hotel** at 309 S.W. Broadway, built in 1912 by lumber baron and drinking fountain benefactor Simon Benson. Not only has the hotel provided elegant accommodation and restaurants, its **London Grill** was one of the first lounges to sell liquor by the glass in 1954. Upstairs, nearly every gay organization in town has had a banquet, fund-raiser or party in the Picadilly or Mayfair rooms. And one can't beat the relaxation of sipping afternoon coffee while enjoying the live piano music in the classic high-ceilinged lobby. The mezzanine-level men's room was the first in town to post framed copies of the front page and sports page above the urinals.

Exit through the weather-tight revolving doors and walk right to **El Gauchito**. This half of the building was the site of the grand **Hotel Oregon**, which preceded the Benson in 1910. In 1920, it was the home of Marie Equi, a lesbian doctor who provided abortions and early medical care for women in "desperate situations." She was a good Samaritan, but her radical political beliefs got her jail time in 1927.

Take a look across Broadway to the south at the one-time **Imperial Hotel**. Now called Hotel Vintage Plaza, it was built of red brick in the Richardsonian Romanesque style in 1894. The "modern" addition, now Hotel Lucia, was built with tan brick in 1922. Somewhere inside was a men's room on the lobby level with a street entrance that was very popular with men seeking an "afternoon delight" from like-minded strangers. After a few years, the hotel nipped that practice in the bud by charging a dime entrance fee to use the toilets. All activity stopped.

Turn left in front of the Benson and notice the black salon across Southwest Oak Street (225 S.W. Broadway). This was the location of the second **Hamburger Mary's** and later the **Dakota Cafe**, a popular restaurant owned by Bill Dickey. A bit further north on Broadway was the **North Dakota**, now Silver Dollar II, which became a popular gay bar in the mid-1990s.

Walk towards Powell's Books to 820 S.W. Oak St. One of Portland's longest-running gay bars existed here from 1957 until 1986. The **Family Zoo** was one of the wildest of places, with loud late parties, lots of special events, Sunday afternoon movies and pool tables that had many other uses. The structure was built in 1907 as a station on the Linnton Trolley. GIs were dropped off there when

they mustered out during the Vietnam era. Lonely horny men often found their first release at what was first called **Vince's**, then the **Tel & Tel**. Derek Akerson bought it in 1963, renaming it **Derek's Tavern**. Police noted that its customers were "gays of the higher class"; it also was visited by Johnny Mathis and Rudolph Nureyev. It was renamed again in 1965 as the **Annex**. When Bobby Hoblitt bought the tavern in 1971, it became the Family Zoo. And it was a zoo! It's been owned by the Salvation Army since 1986.

At the corner of Southwest Park Avenue, walk left. At 333 is the **Escape**, an all-ages club that is a younger sibling to the City Nightclub, originally located on 13th and run by longtime community member Lanny Swardlow.

Walking past the Escape to Southwest Stark Street, go right and up the slope to view a parking lot behind a chain-link fence. This uninviting spot is the site of the first gay bar on Stark. For years it had been the **Bali Hai Supper Club**, then reopened as the **Riptide Restaurant**. It was purchased in 1965 by John Honnegar, whose **Harbor Club** had been closed by the police for catering to homosexuals on Southwest First Street. He tried to make the Riptide a classy joint, denying entrance to women wearing long pants or leather. He was unsuccessful and made no one happy and was even picketed by gay activists. Roman Wydra bought the place in 1971. As **Roman's Riptide**, it became the first popular gay bar on Stark and the site of much early gay social and political activity.

Look across Southwest 10th Avenue to a nondescript building south of the dry cleaners. This is the site of the **Music Hall**, an infamous bar and upstairs dinner club from 1938 to 1950. Some called it **Paul's Supper Club**. Dorothy McCullough Lee, Portland's ax-wielding first female mayor, had the place investigated and shut down in 1950 when she learned that transvestites and drag queens were performing vaudeville acts there on stage, to howling laughter. Double-entendre and risqué innuendo made the acts wildly popular with the underground gay community. On the street level was another tavern, the **Back Stage Bar**.

As you finish the first leg of your tour, stop for a cup of coffee at the **Black Rooster Café**, on the east side of 10th. Larry Copeland has run the cafe for about a year, and it attracts a diverse clientele. Copeland, who was part of the Second Foundation in 1971, is an excellent source for local gay history.

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The staff at Roman's Riptide in the early '70s.



The Family Zoo kept the party going from 1957 to 1986.



The boys share drinks at the Rhondee Lounge, the original location of C.C. Slaughters.



The Imperial Hotel restroom was very popular with men seeking an "afternoon delight" from like-minded strangers.

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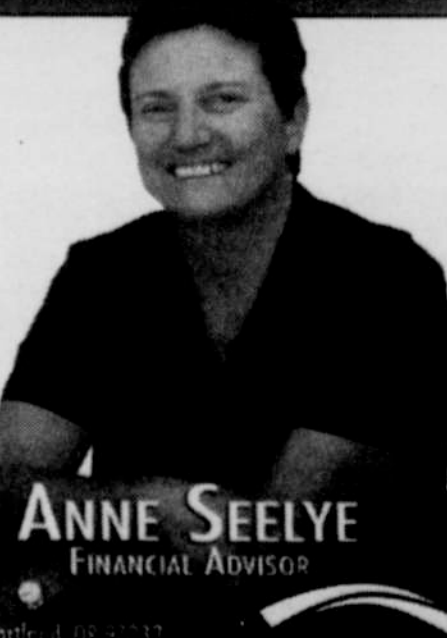
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