Shanghai Tunnels Give Rare Glimpse of Old Portland



Michael Jones is trying to restore some of Portland's underground tunnels and open them for guided tours.

JOSEPH B. FRAZIER THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

It would start with a thirsty working stiff on the town with his back pay, swaggering into the halfbars/half-bordellos called boarding houses and hard on the heels of whisky, women and song.

But soon the ceiling would start to spin, his legs wouldn't obey, and oblivion moved in like a fog. He would awaken on a ship at sea.

He had been Shanghaied, addled with a drugged drink, hustled into an alley or dropped through a trap door to an underground tunnel leading to the harbor, bundled in a blanket and sold for a few dollars to a captain in need of a crew.

The practice flourished on Portland's rough-and-tumble Skid Road waterfront from the 1860s until it began to wane around World War I. The laws, such as they were, weren't enforced. Sailors of the day weren't considered worth the effort. Some of the tunnels are still there, and they have provided a lifetime of fascination for Michael Jones, who is trying to restore them to their original condition and open them for guided tours, something he already has begun on a limited basis.

Portland was known as the worst port on the West Coast for Shanghaiing, putting even wicked San Francisco in the shade. Many of the boarding houses were owned by the Shanghaiers, or "crimps" as they were called.

"Portland was vice-ridden and corrupt," Jones said. "It catered to people who played as hard as they worked, and those are the people who were Shanghaied."

Jones does not romanticize the Shanghai days. "There is nothing romantic about it," he said. "It was human abuse at its worst. It's a piece of our history that's not very nice."

Jones, 49, who has relied heavily on decades of oral histories and the little that has been written for his information, says he hopes enough time has gone by so that Portland can confront this aspect of its past.

Even now, he says, when he meets people whose forebears had first-hand knowledge, they say something like "The family talked about it in whispers."

Some of the men who were Shanghaied would be gone for years before they could work their way back. Some were fatally drugged, Jones said.

"The knockout drops were powerful," Jones said. "They had to last from 13 to 16 hours, until the ship was at sea, because if they didn't, the man might jump overboard and try to swim to land."

"The first thing they did was take away their boots," he said. "They sprinkled broken glass on the floor, so that if someone got free he wouldn't get very far very fast." Jones plans a museum in one Accounting of the subterranean rooms for the things he has found there.

"What was found in the underground will stay in the underground," he said, ducking through the low brick archways that connect rooms to the tunnels.

Jones says he thinks the tunnels were built for Shanghaiing, but others are skeptical.

Piedmont to Vote on a New Neighborhood Affiliation

STORY CONTINUED FROM METRO FRONT

The city guidelines state, "There must be a substantial reason to move," and that such changes "must not be done lightly nor as a result of momentary problems or personality disputes." Such "problems or personality disputes" have often played an unstated role in the movement of neighborhoods from one coalition to another. They were suspected of being a factor in the transfer of the Alameda, Grant Park and Sullivan's Gulch neighborhoods from Central Northeast Neighbors to the Northeast Coalition in the early 1990s.

Radigan and Fisher say that they have developed an ongoing affiliation with the north neighborhoods over common issues such as concerts and events at Portland International Raceway and Portland Meadows, and the future development of the Expo Center.

Radigan makes no overt criticism of the Northeast Coalition, but it is implied in what she does say. Asked why Piedmont has sent no representative to NECN board meetings she says, "We couldn't find a volunteer who was willing to go." She also says that she and other long-time leaders will be leaving soon, and that North director Tom Griffin Vilade can provide the "leadership and support"

the newcomers will need.

Vilade told the Portland Observer, "It doesn't make any difference to our office whether they're in North or Northeast. They'll make the decision on where they make common values." However, he clearly is not opposed to the idea. "We see Piedmont as people tuned in to the same issues and adding additional strength." Northeast Coalition president Willie Brown is frustrated both by the move and the way it has come about. "I am opposed to it until we get all the information," he told the Portland Observer. "If Betsy Radigan wants her neighborhood to leave, she should come and tell us about it instead of going to ONI first."

Referring to some of Radigan's comments, Brown said, "When they were dealing with the Rosemont property redevelopment, they didn't go to Kenton for help...It doesn't matter what coalition you're a part of. If you don't participate, you won't get support." Brown and other NECN leaders say they fear losing their influence on issues affecting inner northeast. "The City Council says they want to keep the coalitions strong, but we have the Portland Development Commission and Tri-Met doing projects without working with us,"



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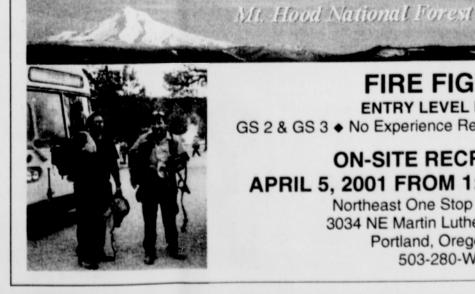
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