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Referred to as “the history no one wanted to talk about,” the story of the Pendleton Underground has many twists and turns. Originally, the tunnels were built for downtown merchants to bring in supplies while

avoiding muddy streets and the local riffraff. According to Brooke Armstrong, the Underground’s executive director, they cover more than 12 city blocks, centered around Main Street and extending to the railroad depot. Some tunnels existed before the current buildings were in place.



Pendleton Underground Tours/Contributed photo  
Tunnels beneath Pendleton businesses were used to move merchandise and gold from the railroad.

“We know of a Chinese laundry that was advertising in 1885,” she said.

Other uses sprang up over the years, some legal, some ... not so much. In adjoining buildings, “you had the Oak Rooms, you had the Cozy Rooms from 1928 to 1953, run by Madam Stella. There were a lot of escape tunnels, to get to alleys if there was a raid,” Armstrong said.

Below ground, police often roused clients using the opium dens.

“People used to say you could smell it from the street. There were several in town — we take you to one on the tour,” she said.

There was also a small bowling alley and billiard hall, an ice cream factory and a butcher shop that supplied stores above. And, of course, a speakeasy, serving thirsty customers during Prohibition. Historian-guides cover all this and more, as they walk visitors through the tunnels and re-created scenes on the 90-minute Pendleton Underground Tour. The first hour is underground, then tour-goers head up to the Cozy Rooms bordello

on Main Street.

This summer, the Underground’s Shamrock Card Room & Saloon is open for drinks on Saturdays from 4-7 p.m. through Sept. 4, hosted by barmaids and barkeeps in period outfits. There are also semi-annual events, like Pendleton Underground Comes to Life, usually in May, with 75 live actors staging reenactments in every room. This year Armstrong plans a repeat on Oct. 9.

“We also host murder mysteries with a full dinner. The next one may be the end of October,

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and New Year’s Eve for sure,” she said. “We post those on our Facebook page.”

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