

Off-Beat Oregon: The notorious White Eagle Saloon

By Finn John
Special to The Sentinel

The White Eagle Saloon on Russell Street in east Portland has its share of colorful rumors and claims of ghostly presences.

There was a bordello upstairs, one claims. An opium den in the basement, whispers another. Oh, and see that doorway there, the one that looks like the lid of a coal chute? That's a secret shanghaiing tunnel to the waterfront. Shh — did you hear that? A soft ghostly step from the spirit of a murdered hooker on the second floor — and the toilet at the end of the hall just flushed itself!

All of this, of course, is straight hokum. Fun hokum, but hokum just the same.

But the most interesting story about the White Eagle is absolutely true, and serious as a heart attack. It attracted nationwide attention to Portland in general and the White Eagle in particular — and not the good kind of attention, either — and possibly, if not probably, involved international espionage.

The case came to the attention of the Portland public on June 20, 1906, when they opened their newspapers to a story headlined "MARKED FOR DEATH."

It seemed that a Polish gentleman named Henry Lopasky had gone to the police in a great state of alarm. He had, he said, just been given 72 hours' notice of his upcoming assassination. A committee of three anarchists from the cell based at the White Eagle Saloon (or, more specifically, at the meeting-hall on its second floor) had informed him that "in three days he would be killed like a rat," as the Oregonian put it, "and that there was no way in which he could avoid his end."

Lopasky apparently intended to spend his last 72 hours making as much trouble for the Polish expatriates of Portland as he possibly could. So he proceeded to spill some seriously alarming dope on the White Eagle regulars: Not only were they pistol-waving, bomb-throwing anarchists, but they had actually formed a plan to assassinate President Theodore Roosevelt — had actually picked a trigger man and raised funds to send him to Washington to do the job.

The next day in court, Lopasky was joined by a fellow Pole named Walter Sealazkiwicz, who claimed he'd gone to a Polish National Alliance meeting at the White Eagle on June 17 and been assaulted and had his watch stolen. Sealazkiwicz had then gone to the police, who had raided the White Eagle and arrested sev-

eral "anar-chists." At the hearing, Sealazkiwicz also testified that a number of the arrestees were known anarchist activists who had traveled to Portland to help make trouble. And he reaffirmed Lopasky's claim that the PNA had planned to send an assassin — a fellow named John Przywara — to kill the president.

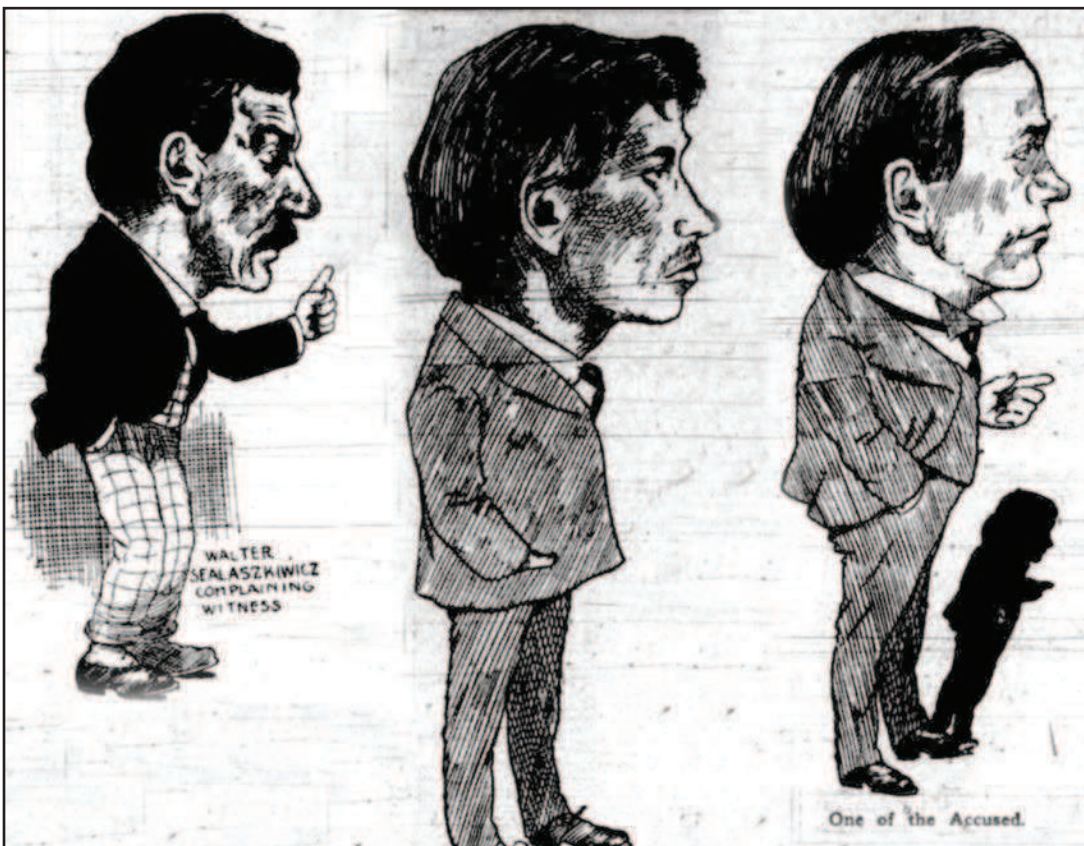
All of this must have seemed very confusing to the average Portlander, reading the increasingly strident coverage about it in the newspapers. It had been less than three weeks since an anarchist had tried and failed to kill the king and queen of Spain by chucking a bomb at them after their wedding, spattering the queen's wedding dress with blood from the 65 innocent bystanders injured or killed in the blast. Anarchism was very much on the public's mind.

And Portland's Polish "anarchists" at the White Eagle had now come to the attention not just of Portlanders, but of the entire country: in the June 23 issue of McClure's Magazine, the "muckraking" magazine famous for its brutal exposés of the Standard Oil and U.S. Steel trusts, Portland was called out as "becoming one of the worst centers of anarchy of Russian origin, producing a plot to kill the president late in May of this year."

To understand what was happening in Portland during that hectic month, a little history is needed. The nation of Poland, in 1906, existed only in the hearts and minds of its patriots. The country itself had been carved up like a Christmas ham in 1795 and annexed into the empires of Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Prussia. In the Russian portion, things got especially ugly, as the czar pursued policies that basically amounted to a war on Polish culture and identity — confiscations of property, closure of universities, forced Russification in primary schools, forced military service, and so forth.

The result was that many of the Poles in America were not immigrants, but refugees. They had no interest in assimilating and becoming Americans; they needed a place to hang their hats and earn an honest living while making plans to take their country back.

This made them a very un-



Three of the men involved in the rumored anarchy-and-Presidential-assassination scheme headquartered in the White Eagle Tavern, as drawn by the Portland Journal's staff artist for the June 22, 1906, issue. (Image: UO Libraries)

welcome addition to the American Catholic church, which had public-relations problems of its own at the time — half the country regarded Catholics as inherently seditious, since their primary loyalty was (their critics charged) to the Pope rather than to their country. So there was already great tension in the Polish-American community between assimilators and refugees.

There was also clear evidence that Czarist Russia was taking a strong interest in the refugee communities, and had agents provocateur in the field working to exploit those differences.

And there's pretty good reason to suspect that Lopasky — he of the "you're dead in three days" claim — was just such an agent. According to the Chicago Polish community's magnificently-named newspaper Robotnik (Polish for "The Worker"), Lopasky had been the skipper of a Russian torpedo boat captured by the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese War, and was a well known agent of the Russian secret police.

All of which seems to have been of considerable interest to a certain reporter at the Morning Oregonian. The paper never mentions his name, but identifies him as having been born and raised in Russian Poland.

This reporter, watching the

situation spiral out of control (with a great deal of help from an overzealous agent of the U.S. Secret Service), talked his editor into letting him go down to the White Eagle to get the story straight.

The resulting article, which was also run in the Evening Telegram, was like oil on troubled waters. "POLISH SOCI-

ETY NOT ANARCHISTIC," the headline read, adding, "ARE MERELY SOCIALISTS."

The article also made Lopasky's status as a suspected Russian spy clear and also pointed out, for the first time in print (so far as I have found), that Sealazkiwicz was the former president of the group he was denouncing — having been

stripped of his rank and expelled from membership over disagreements about activism tactics.

After that, the story faded quickly away. The federal Secret Service agent, although he claimed to stand by his story of danger and anarchy, consistently refused to release any of the evidence he'd seized from the raid on the White Eagle, implying that it was too terrible and seditious for the public to be exposed to it. No one seems to have bought that, but it served as a cover story for him, enabling him to save face while everyone got busy forgetting the whole thing had ever happened.

Today, of course, the White Eagle Saloon is one of the McMenamins properties, and it's one of the oldest taverns still in operation in Portland. One can sit at its gorgeous antique bar and nurse a glass of Hammerhead knowing that one is sitting in the establishment that, for two wild and hectic weeks 115 years ago, was known as the hottest hot spot in the nation for the forces of terror and anarchy.

With a story like that, who needs a bunch of made-up bunk about ghostly prostitutes and spooky toilet-flushings?



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Pastor: Riley Hendricks
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Worship: 11:00am
The Journey: Sunday 5:00pm
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Calvary Chapel Cottage Grove
1447 Hwy 99 (Village Plaza)
541-942-6842
Pastor: Jeff Smith
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9am & 10:45am
Youth Group Bible Study
Child Care 10:45am Service Only
www.cgcalvary.org

Center for Spiritual Living
700 Gibbs Ave. (Community Center)
Rev. Bobby Lee
Meets Sunday 3:00 p.m.
cslcottagrove@gmail.com

Church of Christ
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Sunday Service: 10:30am

Cottage Grove Bible Church
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541-942-4771
Pastor: Bob Singer
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Sunday School: 9:45am
AWANA age 3-8th Grade,
Wednesdays Sept-May, 6:30pm
www.cg bible.org

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Youth Wednesday 6:30pm
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Sunday School: 10:00am
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Worship: 9am
Coffee Fellowship: 10:15am
Bible Study: 10:30am

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100 S. Gateway Blvd.
541-942-2061
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Bible Study: 7:00pm Wednesday
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Sunday Worship: 10:50am & 5:30pm
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Sun: 10:30am
Confession: After daily mass,
Sat. 4-5pm or by appointment
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541-895-8686, Sunday: 8:30am

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Trinity Lutheran Church
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Pastor: James L. Markus
Sunday School & Adult Education
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Sunday Worship 10:30 am
Comm. Kitchen Free Meal Tue & Thur
5:00pm TLC Groups
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Pastor: Lura Kidner-Miesen
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1st & 3rd Monday 5-6:00pm
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