

Passing the Time

*Local pub
celebrates
community's
past and
future*

By Lori Russell

Once a week, Emily McDonald climbs three narrow ladders of the clock tower at the corner of Third and Court streets. In the belfry high above the city of The Dalles, she opens the glass enclosure that houses the workings of the aged timepiece.

"The clock loses about 13 minutes a week," she says, readjusting the time on the mechanism, then inserting a hand crank. With a turn of the handle, the clock's counterweight—a bucket of scrap metal hung from a chain—begins to rise from the floor. When it reaches the height of the clock face above, her duty as master clock winder is complete.

At least until next week.

While the belfry offers expansive views of The Dalles and Columbia River in the 21st century, Emily's journey up and down the ladders of the tower offers clues about the evolution of the building that has stood in the city's center for 127 years.

Ceilings have been lowered and raised, rooms walled off, wiring added and abandoned in the structure that through the years has housed the county courthouse and jail, a fraternal organization and a funeral home.

When Emily is not caring for the building's historic timepiece, she is busy managing the newest business to inhabit the space, Clock Tower Ales.

While some business owners might not find clock winding a good use of an employee's time, for Mark and Chelsea Powell—who happen to be McDonald's brother-in-law and sister—it is just another step in celebrating the building's place in the community's history. The trio grew up in The Dalles and are excited to offer a gathering place that celebrates both their hometown's history and its future.

Mark has long had a vision of creating a family-friendly gathering place with food, drink, music and entertainment in his hometown. The two-story brick building at the corner of Third and Union streets seemed like the right place.



Emily McDonald winds the pub's historic clock.

"I was planning to only remodel the part of the main floor and get rid of the 1960s style décor," says Mark, who bought the building in January 2008. "I thought we'd be open by June."

As the initial deconstruction began, like many old buildings, it became obvious the grand dame on the corner held a few well-kept secrets and surprises beneath her lathe and plaster. Workers first found an old doorway boarded up beneath one wall. As more doorways and windows were exposed, Mark began looking deeper into the history of the building.

Blueprints, building plans, stories and old photos supplied by local history buffs and organizations allowed him to piece together the original floor plan of the main floor and façade of the building.

Once the largest county ever formed in the United States, Wasco had lost much of its land mass when its second courthouse was completed in 1883. As workers completed the clock tower three years later, The Dalles was a bustling center of commerce where visitors from Portland arrived by sternwheeler and trains along the banks of the river delivering freight from Portland to the upper Columbia Basin.

The main level of the courthouse housed the county records and administrative offices. The sheriff's office and a jail with five cells for male prisoners and a smaller confinement area for females were in the rear of the building. Beyond the jail where the



The historic building includes the original jailhouse door that led from the sheriff's office to the men's cell block.



Mark Powell stands outside the historic two-story brick building that houses Clock Tower Ales. Below, old tins, bottles and cans found in the basement during building renovation.



“I chipped away at the mortar around one of the bricks and noticed there was open space behind it,” Mark says. “That was strange because I knew the walls were 16 inches thick.”

He removed one brick and probed into the hole.

“I heard a clink,” he says. “I had hit metal.”

Mark’s curiosity—and a few well-placed whacks with a sledgehammer—revealed the original steel jailhouse door complete with a list of rules for prisoners glued to the

garage now stands was the prisoner exercise yard. People accused of crimes in the county were tried in the large courtroom on the second floor. From a window in his chambers off the courtroom, the judge watched the executions he had ordered carried out below. The last public hanging in the county occurred here in 1905.

The building remained in use by Wasco County until 1914. Later, as the second floor became home to the Masonic Wasco Lodge No. 15 A.F. & A.M. and Allied Orders and the Smith Calloway Chapel—a mortuary—occupied the first floor, additions and remodeling were done.

After six months of renovation—around the date he originally had planned to open the pub—Mark decided to restore the aging building to its 19th century architecture. While working alone one evening, he noticed an uneven area in the shape of a door in the painted brick wall at the rear of the building.

back side.

Excavation of the basement revealed old bottles and boots, tobacco tins, bowls from corn cob pipes, an 1893 state of Oregon election laws pamphlet, a county receipt book and a porcelain doll, among other items. The objects are now on display in the new Clock Tower Ales pub.

The establishment features 35 Northwest craft beers and a selection of soups, sandwiches and salads. Craft root beers, sodas and wine also are available. The banquet room—dubbed “The Gallows” because it once served as a viewing room for the public executions—can be reserved for private parties.

The pub features live music, and Mark will add a new deck with outdoor seating this spring. He plans to begin brewing beer on site this summer. ■

Clock Tower Ales, located at Third and Union streets in The Dalles, is open Monday through Thursday from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. and Friday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.