

Three Men Escape Death As Fire Levels Night Club

Oregonian Newspaper Headline, December 13, 1936

BY LOYCE MARTINAZZI

Sharing the front page of the *Oregonian* was the swearing in of King George VI of England, who took over the reins when his brother Edward VIII abdicated, and a photo story of the luxurious and notorious Spinning Wheel roadhouse resort on the south side of the Tualatin River which burned to the ground on its site during the night.

“Three men narrowly escaped death by fire yesterday when the “Spinning Wheel,” elaborate night life habitat three miles south of Tigard on the Tualatin River, burned to the ground. The men were Al Gates, cook; Herbert Mason, his assistant, and Clarence Jurgens, watchman.”

According to the *Oregonian* clipping, the men who had retired about 3 AM were awakened by the smell of smoke, and descended three flights of stairs amid flames and dense smoke. The cook, in his pajamas, tried to go back into the building to get his clothes, and was restrained by the other two men. As the structure burned, the three men stood helpless, shivering in their long johns in the shelter of an outhouse. Roadhouse patrons were as discommoded as the three staff who would have served them: The December 12 fire meant that over three hundred persons who had made reservations for New Year's Eve would be out in the cold along with the two cooks and watchman.

The loss was reportedly \$30,000 (\$510,460.87 in today's dollars), less than a quarter of which was covered by insurance, and the road house was never rebuilt. This was the depths of the depression. Jack Wooley of Portland built the Spinning Wheel during prohibition, and local lore tells of a backdoor escape route in the woods, allowing customers to make a quick getaway when Federal agents made a raid. Prohibition ended in 1933, but the Spinning Wheel continued to do a thriving business.

The Spinning Wheel was located on Hazelbrook Road overlooking Highway 99. Its sign was a glowing neon wheel, and it drew the moneyed crowd like a magnet during the '20s and '30's. The elegant roadhouse offered dining, dancing, drinking and gambling. Admission was by a special pass and it was reportedly hard to get in.

In January of the same year, the road house was raided and the owner and 10 of his operators were taken into custody. In February the circuit court of Washington County assessed fines of \$1,050. The Spinning Wheel was too fancy for most of the locals to patronize, but it provided work. Pauline Jurgens worked in the kitchen, Bud Hess parked cars and Clarence Jurgens, known as Tut, was bartender as well as watchman.

Curtis Tigard told me recently that he attended business meetings at the resort. Bill Galbreath was just a young kid when the building burned, but he remembers his relatives talking about the neon sign being one of the first in the area. Jeanne Jurgens lived close by at Jurgens Park, and as a young child she remembers the building as being “very nice,” unlike most of the other buildings in the area.

The Quackenbush family came to own quite a bit of land along Hazelbrook Road, and they eventually built a house on the site of the Spinning Wheel. Mrs. Van Mere, who bred race horses, later owned the home and barn on the west end of Hazelbrook Road. The roadhouse was thus replaced by racehorses and so spirits remained high.

Special thanks to the Lake Oswego Library, Tigard Library, and Valri Darling of the Tigard Historical Association.



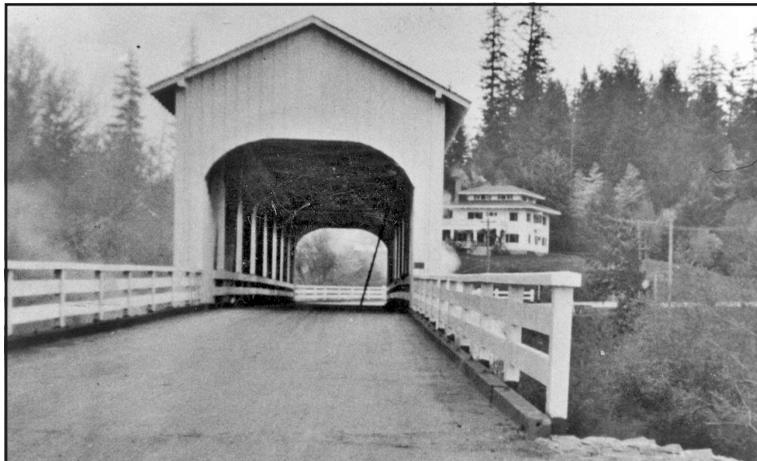
Loyce Martinazzi was born and raised in Tualatin and is passionate about Tualatin History. She is currently Lecturer of the Winona Grange, Co-Founder of the Tualatin Historical Society and Co-Author of *Tualatin...From the Beginning*.



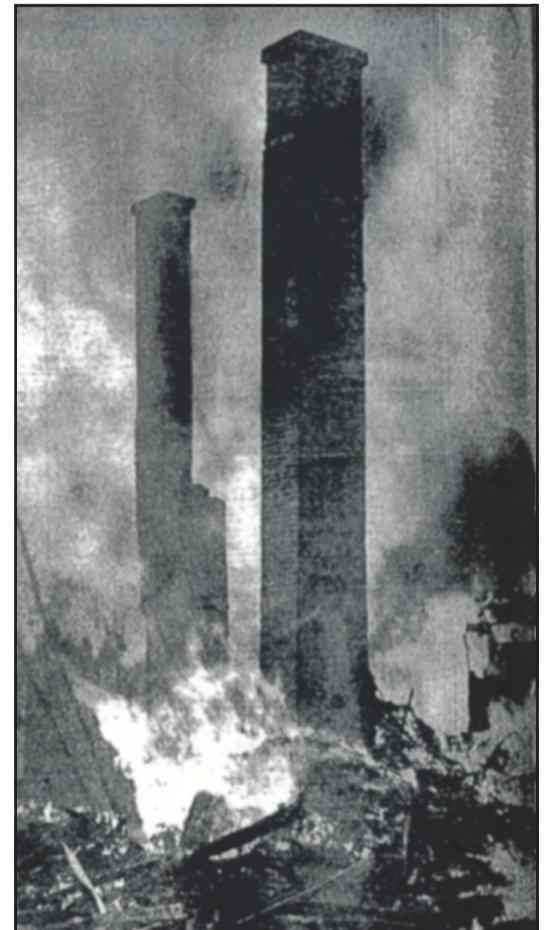
The *Oregonian* photographer caught this unusual action picture of the fire at night life resort beyond Tigard yesterday. Three employees of the “Spinning Wheel” asleep in the building narrowly escaped death. The fire, of undetermined origin, leveled the structure. As this wall tumbled to earth embers were sent high into the air. Estimated loss was \$25,000.



L to R: Rochelle Martinazzi, Curtis Tigard, 106 years young, and his son Dave Tigard who attended Tigard High School with Rochelle. Curtis remembered the Spinning Wheel.



Taylors Ferry Bridge. In the background you can see the Quackenbush house, built on the site of the old Spinning Wheel.



Spinning Wheel burns. A quick blaze, origin undetermined, yesterday razed the Spinning Wheel, luxurious night-life resort on the Tualatin River. Tall chimneys rise starkly above the ruins. Story and another picture on page 1. – December 13, 1936, *The Oregonian*.