

# OREGON DREAMS

The story of Tim Hills, Historian Extraordinaire

Tim Hills knows that every building has a story buried in its past if you just dig deep enough. And his job overseeing the historical research for McMenamins, an eclectic Pacific Northwest collection of hotels, pubs and breweries, allows him to do that digging.

"It's always worth it," he says. "If you keep looking, some amazing thing is going to come up." Like the fact that Jimi Hendrix was "almost certainly" fired by Little Richard on stage at Portland's Crystal Ballroom in 1964. Or that the Secret Service came to Portland to investigate alleged Polish anarchists rumored to be meeting at the White Eagle Saloon to plan a government coup. Turned out they *were* meeting—to plan a church.

Hills' love of history bloomed in his native Vermont, where at the age of 12 he began researching local history. He traveled west to pursue a master's degree, expecting to be disappointed by the relative youth of the Pacific Northwest. Instead, he found that the ability to talk to people who had participated in historical events "lit a fire under me."

In 1995, he joined McMenamins, who had just acquired a structure with stories that begged to be told: the Crystal Ballroom. Hills was hired to dig up the dance hall's past, and he's been unearthing great stories about McMenamins sites ever since.

Hills' favorite project is always the one he's working on. "Every building has associations with people and events that define a neighborhood and a city," he says. "To help make these stories celebrated and preserved—it's a dream job."

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— KIM COOPER FINDLING

Hills at the McMenamins Kennedy School in Northeast Portland.

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