

The Ghost at Jimmy's Tavern

By Barbara Glakas

Many employees in Jimmy's Old Town Tavern say they have experienced many unexplained events that they attribute to their resident ghost whom they affectionately call "Walter."

The Tavern building at the corner of Elden and Spring Streets was built around 1899. Jimmy's Old Town Tavern is a popular Herndon restaurant/bar that opened in 1997. In the early 1900s, and for many years, the building housed the Wilkens and Brothers Bargain Store, a general merchandise store. It also had a residence upstairs. Many other businesses occupied the building after Mr. Wilkins closed his store.

Some of the Tavern employees say they believe in ghosts while others say they do not. Some started out not believing in ghosts, but now – after their ghostly experiences – say they are no longer sure what to think. Nevertheless, they all had stories to tell.

One contractor, who has worked on renovating the Tavern, said that while standing by the bar one day he mentioned Walter while conversing with colleagues. Suddenly his circular sander turned on and started spinning around on the bar countertop. He said, "I don't believe in that ghost stuff. It was probably a faulty switch."

Another female employee said that she has had several encounters with "Walter," usually in the small prep house (or catering building) next door to the Tavern on Spring Street. That small building belongs to Jimmy's Tavern and is used to store supplies and to prepare foods. At one point in time, decades ago, the building was used by the town undertaker as his carriage house. Later it was a small establishment called Hazel's Carryout Restaurant.

The female employee said that one time she and two other employees were standing in front of the prep house when they heard a huge crash inside. When they ran inside to see what happened they found several steel steam table trays – which had been stacked and nested on a metal rack – on the floor, arranged in a circle.

Another time, when this same female employee was alone in the prep house, she heard the bathroom door open and shut. She was the only one in the building. She said she felt the hair stand up on the back of her neck and she ran out of the building.

On another day, when she was standing in the alley next to the prep house with a small group of people, she was suddenly pushed from behind onto the gravel ground, scraping her hands and knees. No one was behind her. Her colleagues were surprised and asked her why she did that. She said, "Do you think I would throw myself onto the ground? I was pushed!" She went to the fire department across the street to have her cuts cleaned up.

Another male employee said that they used to have a bowling game machine inside the restaurant. The machine had pre-recorded sounds that were on a timer. The voice recordings would say things like, “Come on, let’s play!” or “Nice shot!” or it would make laughing sounds. This employee said that there were many, many times that the machine would seem to “join in with their conversations” in a very weird way. For instance, when he and a friend were teasing each other, the bowling machine would suddenly say, “Nice shot!” When they told jokes and were all started laughing, the machine would also start laughing. This employee said that it happened so often in concert with their conversations that it did not seem to be a coincidence with the timer. He said, “It just happened way too many times like that. It’s a good thing the machine’s laugh isn’t too creepy or else that would have been a lot freakier.”

Another employee, a male bartender, said a few minor incidents had happened to him that he could “explain away,” such as the bar television popping on and off, things moving on top of the bar, and liquor bottles falling off the bar shelves. He was so confident that Walter did *not* exist that he and a few friends, who stayed late one night after hours, turned off all the lights and started calling for Walter to appear, beckoning and challenging Walter to show himself. Nothing happened, but they all had a good time. After his friends left and he was getting ready to lock up the building, the disco ball hanging from the ceiling of the dining room suddenly lit up.

Still, even after the disco ball incident, which he also tried to explain that away, he continued to profess that he did not believe in ghosts, until this happened...

One night after hours at about 3:00 AM, the only three people remaining in the closed building were the bartender and two others who were playing a final game of Foosball.

The bartender was standing by the Foosball machine watching the game when suddenly “something” ran swiftly from the cash register area, behind and past the bartender, and down the stairs to the dining area, where it disappeared. The bartender made sure to explain that he had not been drinking when he saw this. The only way he could describe what he saw was that he saw “brown flannel.”

All the exterior doors had already been locked and the chairs were up on the tables. Thinking that someone was still hiding in the building he searched all over, as employees are not allowed to leave anyone locked in the Tavern after hours. He searched everywhere – the kitchen, the bathrooms, the closets, the crawl spaces, etc., but he could not find anyone. He was about to call the Herndon police to help him search for whomever was in the building. Then he realized the one place he had not yet looked was in the DJ booth.

The lights were off in the DJ booth. He went inside the booth and flipped the lights on. No one was there. Suddenly he started feeling very scared for some unknown reason and the door shut behind him. He did not shut the door himself. He tried to open the door but it would not open. The door does not have a lock on it. He said he felt pressure on the outside of the door as if someone was pushing against it on the other side, but it was not the Foosball players. He said it

was like he and whoever was on the other side of the door were having a “pushing contest” for about 20 seconds.

A brawny man, he decided to force his way out. He backed up a couple of steps and did a running tackle into the door. He blasted right through the door and landed on the floor.

As the bartender was telling this story he was nervous and started sweating. “Now,” he said, “I am undecided about whether or not ghosts exist. I just don’t know what to think.”

The next morning the bartender called his boss to tell him what happened. The boss told the bartender that the ghost was “known to be a pusher,” something that had been relayed to him by other business owners who had previously occupied the building. Two of these previous businesses were Roberts Carpets and another bar called Foot Anakins. Owners and employees of these establishments told their own ghost stories. For instance, the Foot Anakins owner had once spoke about how he was alone in the bar standing by the cash register when he felt someone tap him on the shoulder, but no one was there.

The owner of Jimmy’s Tavern said he had a friend who happened to be a “ghost enthusiast” who once asked to come into the Tavern to try to catch the ghost on camera. This was in the late 1990s before the ghost hunting shows became popular on television. One evening the friend came into the Tavern after hours with his equipment, and set up a video camera that had a type of night vision capability. The friend set up his camera so it pointed into the dining room, while the owner and a couple of other employees sat at the bar. The employees were instructed to sit and remain silent at the bar. All the lights were turned off and the cameraman started walking around the dining room, talking to Walter. Nothing happened for a while. Then, while looking into the camera’s view finder the cameraman starts yelling, “There he is!”

Everyone ran over to the camera. The tape was re-wound tape and they all watched it again. The owner said everyone could see a green tear drop, or tadpole-shaped thing, over by the windows which face Elden Street. The green thing floated across the floor and then went up the leg of a table and disappeared.

They started videotaping tape again, all standing around the fold-out viewfinder on the side of the camera. After about 20 minutes they again saw the green teardrop come out from underneath a piece of baseboard on one side of the room. It floated across the dining room floor and then slid underneath another piece of baseboard by the DJ booth. The cameraman said, “It’s living in the walls.”

Another incident is described by a former female bartender who worked at Jimmy’s Tavern for the first ten years that the business was in operation. She and a co-worker were closing up the bar late one night. All the lights were off and they set the alarm. They were both standing outside the front door of the Tavern. Her co-worker started walking off toward his car as she turned the key to lock the front door. Just as she turned the key she saw through the glass door a

man inside the Tavern, sitting on a bar stool which was located in front of a small wooden table just inside the door. The person on the stool looked right at her.

She described the man as a white man in his 20s or 30s, with an average build and short dark hair. She said his hair was straight with a front bang cut, with the bangs brushed to one side.

She said to herself, “D***! We left someone inside!” She called out to her co-worker. He came back over and she told him they had left someone inside, but when she turned back to look inside the bar, the man on the stool was gone. The coworker did not see the man and told the bartender that she must have been tired and was seeing things, but she said, “I know what I saw. We made eye contact. It was creepy.” She said she must have seen Walter.

Where did the name “Walter” come from? An employee who had previously worked in the Foot Anakins establishment said the owner just randomly picked that name for no particular reason. The identity of the ghost remains a mystery. But no matter who Walter is, it is clear that he has been a resident of the Tavern building for a long time.

About this column: “Remembering Herndon’s History” is a regular Herndon Patch feature offering stories and anecdotes about Herndon’s past. The articles are written by members of the Herndon Historical Society. Barbara Glakas is a member. A complete list of “Remembering Herndon’s History” columns is available on the Historical Society website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org.

The Herndon Historical Society operates a small museum that focuses on local history. It is housed in the Herndon Depot in downtown Herndon on Lynn Street and is open every Sunday from noon until 3:00. Visit the Society’s website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org, and the Historical Society’s Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/HerndonHistory> for more information.

Note: The Historical Society is seeking volunteers to help keep the museum open each Sunday. If you have an interest in local history and would like to help, contact HerndonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com.



