

Bar Hoppin' With Hops

The Keep On Hoppin' Tour
Hops MacBarley's Ongoing
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar #269:

Mary Ellen's Bar

420 Appelrouth Lane

www.maryellensbar.com

Thursday, 10 February 2017, 10 PM

Lazy Way Session IPA (draft) \$6.00

There are two other bars on Appelrouth Lane, that skinny almost-alley across from the most ornate Walgreen's in America: 2-Cent Pub (#11) and Virgilio's (#12), which were hopped just two days apart in the first month of the *Peace, Love and IPA Tour* of 2012.



Mary Ellen's occupies a building closer to Duval, and one that, I think, has been vacant since I first got here 'round the turn o' the century. From what I had read, part of their mission was to be a good hangout for the locals who work downtown, especially the late-nighters in F&B. No idea how that's been working out, though, since I rarely haunt the streets at that hour any more.



And I wouldn't be finding out tonight. Most of the evening shift staff of KW's F&B industry was still at work. This hop was a spur of the moment thing. I had forgotten to eat supper and had begun looking for a nibble. Full-scale dinner was not in the cards, and sandwich shops were closing up. A Mr. Z's steak-n-cheese was looking like the pick, and I was headed thataway when I cast an askance glance, Lance, down Appelrouth. The sign caught my eye -- not because of its bright neon and stylish design, though. I noticed it because it wasn't finished, and was hanging unilluminated above the doorway. Neon is complicated, and so is the permitting process in the city. This delay, that delay, whichever, whatever, I knew there had been snags in both because I

had the inside word from the sign makers. That was why a thought to askance-gance it in the first place. You see, the askance glance was not pure happenstance.

But that glance nudged my brain, whispering "Mary Ellen's has food, dude." Hey, brain, good point! So, I wheeled hard right, and the Hop was on.

The entrance is flanked by sets of those thick square boxes of glass that you can't really see though. Well, you kinda can, but you have no idea what you do see. They give the place an air of mystery. I remember seeing those at the local supermarket when I was a tyke and being fascinated by them.



Malt, the patriarch of Clan MacBarley, was less transfixed. "C'mon, ye litta foole, thuze are nae windows; th're glass bricks."

"Why do they make them out of glass?"

"So ye can see throo `em, ya wee doof."

"But you can't see anything."

"Thunderin' thistles, lad, that's th' point! Now, let's goo get some haggis before they run out, *again*."

I tucked my tail between my legs and followed, but I have to admit that I was impressed by his skilled use of the semicolon five lines earlier.

Only slightly less amazed by Mary Ellen's glass bricks, I ventured in. Once inside, I immediately decided that the place was well-named. Not the *Mary Ellen's* part necessarily, 'cause how would I know that, but the *Bar* part. The room just says "bar" at you. Not "lounge", not "pub", not "tavern", and certainly not "bistro." Just "bar." You walk in, and that's exactly what you see: the bar. Tall seats, taps, keepers, bar.

I looked to my right and saw an empty stool on the short side, kind of in a corner. The bar is an interrupted square. There's that short side, with three stools, which right-angles to a full side into the middle of the room, then right-angles again to another full side along the back and out of sight (from my seat, anyway), then right-angles yet again into another short side. That

short side and my short side do not meet, though. No, no, that is the interrupted part, where the walls of the kitchen stand firm.

I took my seat and was greeted promptly by the barkeep, a fairly large dude in his thirties. Before you could recite Act 2, Scene 2 of *Troilus and Cressida*, I had my tall-cold in front of me. Yes, it was that quick.



The owner, Chris, was there with a friend. He's one of those people that I "kinda know". You know how it is, you recognize him when he comes into your shop to get something, call him by name, and he recognizes you as the guy from that shop, but probably doesn't remember your name, and you're not really expecting to have a conversation anyway. A friendly nod of recognition is enough, especially when either party is engaged in social intercourse.



So, I didn't interrupt his intercourse. A true gentleman never does.

He would probably be proud to know, though, that his first foray into the KW bar scene, The Porch, was the very first of all the Hops. And when you number them in chronological order – as I do -- #1 will always be #1.

Since I had come in here feeling a bit peckish, I decided that I'd check out the specialty of the house: a grilled

cheese samich. It's not something that I typically order when I eat out, but here, they have a whole menu of them, all named after relatives of the bar's hierarchy. I thought that the Florence was right up my alley.

My barkeep informed me, though, that I had to go around the bar to the kitchen window and order it directly there. That did not seem unreasonable. Why the hell should the bar staff have to handle food too? Let them focus on the noble task at hand. Besides, the walk over there would give me the chance to take a tour of the facility, and see all its charms and wonders.



The biggest eye-catcher – largely because it took up much of the north wall – was the beer can collection. This was clearly a collector who understood commitment, and it's a very cool presentation: column after column of clean, neatly stacked cans, in an array of large display cases aligned along the wall. Nice.

You'll notice a few duplicates in this photo – Old Style, for instance – but those are probably different edition cans, with slightly different text or tweaked logo graphics or something. At least I hope so. Kinda cheatin' otherwise. He has some real classics in there too: Pabst, Schlitz, Schafer, Carling Black Label, Rheingold, Colt 45 Malt Liquor ... all the cheap swill that I used to guzzle down in high school and college. Yum.

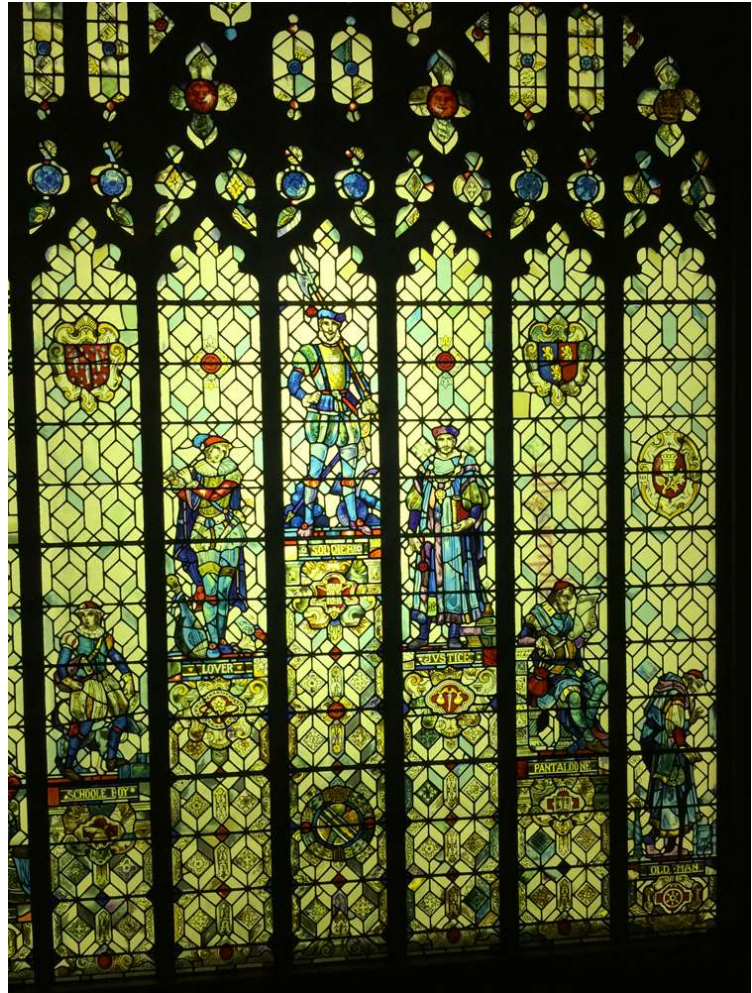
As I walked further around the bar, there is a DJ station/stage, which was not being used this night (but the piped music was excellent), and a little bit o' stained glass. It showed the stages of life, from Schoole Boy, through Lover, Soldier, Justice, Pantaloone (whatever the fuck that is) and Old Man. I wondered if I was ever a Pantaloone, or if I skipped that stage, or, indeed, if that's where I am right now. I wasn't sure how I felt about that; Mr. Pantaloone didn't look all that slick.

Since it's the Information Age, I wouldn't be wondering for long. Google or Siri would tell me if I qualified.

But first, food. I ordered up my Florence with the kitchen staff. No middle person here. I spoke my order directly to the man and woman who would be preparing it. They were like Mighty Mike, the intrepid barkeep at Alabama Jack's in downtown Card Sound, who always takes my order with his "Too easy" reply. These cheesers were on the case, and my confidence was high.

I returned to my seat with my funky palm-sized buzzer thingo in hand, and began my social intercourse with my Lazy Way. Google informed me that a Pantaloone, in a nutshell, was a character in Venetian plays who was usually a "skinny old dotard who wears spectacles, slippers, and a tight-fitting combination of trousers and stockings" and was usually a merchant who was "head of the household, generally lascivious, and frequently deceived in the course of lovers' intrigues." Yikes. Definitely not me. Not yet. Except, maaaaaybe, for the lascivious part. Sometimes.

Anyway, my buzzer starting freaking out with its lights and doing its spidery dance on the bar, so I fetched my Florence and ordered up a second Lazy Way to wash it down with.



You may think that grilled cheese is grilled cheese, and you're partly right, cuz, well, it is. But MEB has gourmet grilled cheeses. I mean, look at the pic of the menu on page one and read the ingredients. Anything that makes me say either "I probably won't like that" or "I don't even know what that is" is either gourmet, foreign, or shitfood. In this case, I rule out shitfood and foreign -- it wasn't *fromage* or *quesa*, it was *cheese*, Louise.

The Florence was the safe choice: three cheeses – though I admit unfamiliarity with Havarti – between nice thick slices of Texas toast. Freshly grilled, hot and oozing flavor. Ahhhhhh. `Twas dandy, Randy.

I wolfed it down. Some foods you need to eat hot. Grilled cheese and mac-n-cheese are high on that list. Once they chill, the effect is compromised. The chee gotta flowwww, Moe.

It was one filling beast too. I have to admit, though, that I felt like I was eating a heart attack on a plate. My arteries were cowering as the cholesterol orgy tumbled their way. But so what? I'll go back to eating healthy tomorrow. If I was that concerned I would have ordered the damn Kale Salad.

I knocked off the rest of my LW, saluted the barkeep, and waited till I was back out on Appelrouth to unleash my contented belllllch.