

= Mary 's Club =

Mary 's Club is the oldest strip club in Portland , Oregon , in the United States . In 1954 , Roy Keller bought the business from Mary Duerst Hemming , who owned and operated Mary 's as a piano bar beginning in the 1930s . Keller initially hired go @-@ go dancers as entertainment during the piano player 's breaks , then quickly hired them full @-@ time due to their popularity . Topless dancers wearing pasties were introduced in 1955 . The club also featured comics , musicians , singers and other acts . All @-@ nude dancing began immediately following a judge 's 1985 ruling against City of Portland ordinances that forbid it in places that served alcohol .

Former strippers include Courtney Love and Christine Jorgensen , though the club is known for featuring long @-@ term dancers who are loyal to the family business . Since Keller 's death in 2006 , Mary 's Club is owned and operated by his daughter Vicki . Mary 's has become a Portland institution , having been included in several " best of " lists for strip clubs , and its neon sign is considered a landmark . The club has appeared in several films , including Bongwater (1997) and Brainsmasher ... A Love Story (1993) , and has been included in walking tours of the city .

= = History = =

Mary 's Club , known as " Portland 's first topless " , is the oldest strip club in Portland , Oregon . Roy Keller , who had been a foreman at a Portland shipyard , bought the club in 1954 for around \$ 25 @,@ 000 . The former owner was Mary Duerst Hemming , who won the piano bar in a divorce settlement and operated the business " for more than 20 years " beginning in the 1930s . The bar had been popular with sailors . According to The Seattle Times , Keller initially hired go @-@ go dancers to keep the crowd entertained during the piano player 's breaks . Due to their popularity , Keller laid off the musician and employed the dancers full @-@ time . He introduced " pasties @-@ clad topless dancers " in 1955 . In that same year , two city council members advised Keller against installing pinball machines at the club . Portland then had an anti @-@ pinball ordinance that was being contested in court . A Mary 's Club team played in the Multnomah League of the Portland Basketball Association during the 1955 ? 56 season . Teams included Interstate Hauling , Kent 's Keg , Il Trovatore , Frolic Inn , Portland Air Base , and several others .

Singers , comics , and piano players performed at the club . A newspaper advertisement in 1958 announced the opening act of Tiny Watson , " 200 pounds of mirth and merriment " , comparing her to Sophie Tucker . Closing at the club was George James , " king of the keyboards " . In 1965 , an Oregonian article focused partly on a topless dancer , Bambi Darling , performing at Mary 's Club . She was said to excel in discothèque , " shaking and undulating " to the Mashed Potato , the Monkey , the Shotgun , and other dances popular at the time . Keller , said to resemble " a church deacon " , praised his dancers and described his customer base as " more refined " than in the club 's pre @-@ 1954 era . By March 1966 , Darling 's " 16 torrid acts " shared the billing with reptile wrestler Bobby Vale and with Gigi La France , promoted as the club 's answer to James Bond . Tom Waits reputedly sang about the club in the song " Pasties and a G @-@ String " , from his album Small Change (1976) . In 2012 , one author wrote that the club featured " tattooed contortionist entertainers " .

All @-@ nude dancing at the club began in 1985 after a judge ruled against City of Portland ordinances forbidding it in places that served alcohol . A lawsuit over pasties and G @-@ strings arose after Portland annexed land formerly regulated by Multnomah County , which allowed tavern dancers to perform without clothing . A tavern forced by annexation to eliminate its nude dancing sued the City and won . " As soon as we got the word [about the ruling] , we went nude , " said a Mary 's Club employee quoted in a news story in The Oregonian .

Courtney Love , whose signed picture hangs on the wall of the club , was among past strippers at the venue , according to Willamette Week . Love wrote on the photograph that she " bought my very first guitar here showing my teeny little titties " . Christine Jorgensen was also once featured at the club . However , dancers at the club have tended to be long @-@ term employees , loyal to the family @-@ run business . Keller died in 2006 , aged 90 ; the club is now run by his daughter , Vicki

Keller , who has recalled that she first worked for the business at age seven , serving as a waitress . Vicki had managed the business for the twenty @-@ five years prior to her father 's death ; her daughters also worked at the club during that period .

According to a 2013 profile by Portland Monthly , the club includes a full cocktail bar , more than two dozen varieties of beer and wine , and a menu with mostly Mexican cuisine . Mary 's has a one @-@ drink minimum and a \$ 2 cover charge on Friday and Saturday evenings .

= = Murals and marquee = =

Between 1956 and 1958 , Keller hired La Monte Montyne to paint murals throughout the club 's interior . The fluorescent murals depict scenes that Roy thought patrons would appreciate . Several of them feature women in exotic locales , such as the Orient and the Pyramids . One depicts an " island beauty " watching sailors load bananas into a ship , and another shows merchant seaman working in front of a ship docked in a " Portland @-@ like " harbor . The mural with pyramids depicts a lounging Cleopatra @-@ esque woman , while another features an " exotic priestess " performing a sacrifice and a volcano . According to Mary 's , the murals receive " almost as much attention as the girls do ! " Mary 's " retro " neon marquee has been called a " landmark for locals and tourists alike " . In 2014 , one Willamette Week contributor said of the signage : " The marquee , blue and star @-@ spangled and coyly advertising an evening of ' Dine and Dance , ' is as iconic as the neon on the ' Made in Oregon ' sign and the line outside Voodoo " . Its cocktail waitress logo is featured on clothing . The marquee also includes an epitaph to Keller .

= = Reception = =

Mary 's Club has been called a " downtown institution " and a " Portland nightlife landmark " . In 2001 , The Portland Mercury said Mary 's was " a must @-@ visit for any true strip club connoisseur " for offering both " friendliness and sexiness " . One reporter found the interior to be " cozy " , with conversational dancers who seemingly enjoyed interacting with guests . Following Keller 's death , Willamette Week said the club " has cemented its place in history far beyond the city limits " , both for once featuring Love and Jorgensen , and for offering nudity to a loyal customer base . The newspaper 's Mary Christmas wrote that Keller had achieved status of " regional celebrity " and could be credited for starting a local industry . In 2011 , one contributor to Portland State University 's student newspaper , the Daily Vanguard , included Mary 's in his list of the city 's top five strip clubs , writing : " if you visit only one dance club in this town it should probably be Mary ? s . The inside is stuffy and sleazy , but embodies that red @-@ light district feel that fits right in with rowdy environment . " In the same year , Willamette Week described the club as " the undisputed grande dame of West Coast strips " and " a stubbornly degenerate landmark " . The publication 's Matthew Korfhage quipped that entertainment came in the form of " Girls / ladies , friendly also brassy , oddly classy , with sterling taste on the juke , who let you see all of their piercings and tattoos . Also , video poker . " In 2013 , Portland Monthly named the club an " editor 's pick " for its dancers and all @-@ female staff , and for having a " welcoming and relaxed " environment . Thrillist.com included Mary 's in its " definitive guide " to Portland 's best strip clubs . The website complimented its " glorious flashing sign that welcomes you to Downtown " and called the club " a part of Portland 's past we should all cherish " . Men 's Fitness included Mary 's in its list of the " Top 10 Best Strip Clubs in America " , calling it a " neon landmark " with blacklight murals and a " relaxed , hole @-@ in @-@ the @-@ wall vibe " .

Thomas Lauderdale , known for his work with the Portland @-@ based band Pink Martini , has shared his affinity for the club and considers it one of his favorite places in the city . Portland Monthly published a video of Lauderdale giving a tour of the club . Lauderdale interviews Vicki Keller and shows the interior murals . He wears a Pink Martini bomber @-@ style jacket inspired by one sold by the business in the 1950s . Films that include scenes shot at Mary 's include Bongwater (1997) , Brainsmasher ... A Love Story (1993) and Dangerous Pursuit (1990) . Mary 's has also been included in walking tours of Portland , including one by Lonely Planet called " Underground

Portland " . In 2013 , the club was the last stop on the " Seedy , Seamy and Sinful Portland " history tour , which takes adult visitors to sites in Old Town to examine the city 's " darker elements " . Led by a historian , the tour otherwise includes saloons , opium dens , gambling halls , and bordellos that operated in Portland in the past . This was repeated in the same historian 's 2014 tour called " Shanghaiers , Saloons and Skullduggery : A Walking Tour of Portland 's Sinful Past " .