

## THE FACE By Joan Black

Should you stop into the bar of The Teller House Hotel in Central City, just 35 miles west of Denver and sometime while you are sipping on your second beer you happen to glance down and notice the fuzzy image of a beautiful woman staring back at you from the floor boards - don't panic, don't tell the Bartender to cut you off.

Go ahead, continue to enjoy that icy cold brew - there really IS a beautiful woman gazing back at you from the wooden planks. You might choose to ignore her, finish your beer and head for home. On the other hand your curiosity might be piqued and you order a 3rd. Brown Ale and request the Host to tell you the Tale of The Face on the Barroom Floor - and this is what he will say:

Back in 1872 when the Teller House and the Opera House were built, side by side, they were considered the finest Hotel and Theater west of the Mississippi. Legend has it that The Face is the one described in the well-known poem "The Face on the Barroom Floor" by Hugh Antoine D'Arcy (No, that poem was NOT composed by Robert Service). The poem was written in 1887 and The Face at the Teller is of more recent vintage.

Central City was a boom Silver Town but when the mines gave out it became a ghost town by the 1920s. So, a group of citizens met together to work for the preservation of the town and The Central City Opera House Assn. Hired a Denver artist named Hendon Davis to create a series of paintings. At the time, Davis was an illustrator for both *The Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News* and moonlighted as a murals artist. Ann Evans, the granddaughter of the territorial Governor John Evans, and a prominent member of Denver Society, was the Project Director and she and Davis quarreled over his portrayals of gunslingers, outlaws, miners and whores. Either she fired him or he quit, no-one knew for sure.

However, preserved in The Historical Archives of The Denver Press Club is an account of an interview between Davis and The Denver Post conducted in 1954 in which Davis tells how he was hired to do a series of paintings which were to be used to rejuvenate the town and attract Tourists. He stayed at The Teller House while working and on a whim, wanted to paint a face on the floor of the barroom, similar to the one in the famous poem, but the Hotel management would have none of such tomfoolery and would not give their permission. Still, the idea haunted him and on his last night in Central City he persuaded the bell boy, Jimmy Libby to sneak down to the bar and hold a candle for him while he painted "The Face" - finishing about 3 a.m.

Well, it turns out that the Management loved the unsigned painting and decided to keep it, instructing their employees to tell guests that it was the actual painting that had inspired the poem. Davis left Colorado for some years and when he returned in 1936 he heard about the now famous attraction and stomped back to the Hotel and signed his name on the portrait. But the Hotel management removed the signature to "Preserve the Mystique". Davis died from a massive heart attack in 1962 and is buried at Fort Logan.

The model for the painting was actually Davis' wife, Edna Juanita Cotter and she was NOT happy about having her likeness on the floor of the bar and she begged her friends not to reveal her name until after her death in 1975.

The Face is now protected by a frame. So visit sometime, sip a cold one and make up your own version of how, why and when the Face got on the floor.