

# St. Clair Rotary Club's Competition for St. Clair's 2017 Bootlegger Balladeer And Poet Laureate

[www.StClairOnTheRiver.com](http://www.StClairOnTheRiver.com)

The challenge is who can write the best ballad or poem telling the story of "*The Mystery of the Cadillac Bear*". Many facts from this event are missing: the songwriter or poet is given the latitude to create facts that enhance his/her story.

## The 2017 Legend The Mystery of the Cadillac Bear

In Chuck Homberg's book, ST. CLAIR, MICHIGAN, he states that the Cadillac Hotel had a bear living there in the 1940's and early 50's. Very little is known about this permanent resident at the hotel, not even his or her name. It is really a shame since it had its own room and an adjoining exercise area.

Ron Brenner, a St. Clair Historical Commissioner, recalls as a youth walking by the hotel as he went to school and sometimes seeing the bear in its exercise yard. He is pretty sure that it was not a polar bear, because he remembers it as a big, very BIG, dark bear. He can't remember if it was a Michigan black bear, a grizzly from the Rocky Mountains or another behemoth. There are rumors still circulating around town about the bear, but the museum can't verify any of them, because it only has a picture of the bear's room at the Cadillac Hotel and its exercise area.

There are two facts that appear beyond dispute, the first is that almost every sighting of the bear outside of the Cadillac Hotel took place just before sunrise, the second involves an eye patch, which witnesses report seeing the bear wearing on multiple occasions.

Some say that a circus came to town and left in the middle of the night leaving behind many unpaid bills and the bear. While the arrival of the bear remains uncertain, there is little debate on the day of the bear's departure. Police reports from January 20, 1953 indicate on three separate occasion bystanders reported seeing two men and one women walking with a bear. While details remain sketchy all three witness accounts have the bear and entourage moving in a westerly direction along the Pine River.

Loren Gannon, co-owner of Gannon's Dairy at the time remembered the day clearly twenty years later:

*"The snow was hip-high and the air was cold, my chewing tobacco crunched when I put it in my mouth. As I was getting ready for work, two guys, a tall woman with dark red hair, and a bear walked right down the frozen river in front of my home. To this day, it is the darnest thing I ever saw. "*

Another rumor says that the bear was owned by Detroit's notorious Purple Gang. Apparently, the gang ran a gambling room at the Cadillac and when there was a game being played, the bear guarded the room's door, discouraging uninvited visitors from entering.

# St. Clair Rotary Club's Competition for St. Clair's 2017 Bootlegger Balladeer And Poet Laureate

[www.StClairOnTheRiver.com](http://www.StClairOnTheRiver.com)

Contestants for this year's event are encouraged to do their own independent research on the Cadillac Bear. In the past, some contestants have uncovered unknown facts by doing research in the Port Huron Library's Michigan Room. One contestant consulted a gypsy fortune teller who used her powers to communicate with the dead revealing interesting and uncontested facts. How a contestant obtains the facts for his or her poem or song is not relevant for this contest. Contestants will be judged on the best story of the Cadillac Bear's stay in St. Clair and its delivery.

## POEMS

### Abernathy the Bear

By Jaime Chan

1<sup>st</sup> Place

'Twas the winter of ninety forty-nine  
I recall because I had just turned five  
A man named Fantastico came to town  
He owned a circus and a troupe of clowns

But he came to St. Clair to sell a bear  
A gigantic beast with a one-eyed stare  
He called the bear Bert, not Abernathy  
And he left him with the same apathy

The Cadillac Hotel was his new home  
An empty room and a fenced yard to roam  
Bert was fed the scraps from the restaurant  
Not the perch and pickerel a bear wants

I met Bert on an early morning walk  
The way he sat I thought, he wants to talk

My name is Robin  
Aaaaaaargh said the bear  
Please to meet you, Bert  
Aaaaaaargh complained the bear  
Bert told me all about his circus past  
About rolling on a red ball and fast  
He told me he missed Lydia a good friend  
She'd bring him pickerel on the week end

Aaaaaaargh said Bert  
Why won't they give you a red ball?  
Aaaaaaargh explained the bear  
Why won't they feed you fish?

I had a thought so I rushed to the house  
There was my mother in her nice blue blouse  
I told her quickly what the bear had said  
We have to buy Bert a red ball, I plead

Mom did not understand; how could bears talk?  
She would not buy the ball, I was in shock  
I would not quit, I had to find a way  
Then I recalled: they had one on display!

I walked to the store and saw the red ball  
I called Dr. Ward who was down the hall  
He asked if my mother would buy the ball  
She doesn't believe me, I need that ball!

Dr. Ward smiled kindly at me and said  
Work here today and the ball will be paid  
He rang my mother and gave her the plan  
I was to greet every woman and man

# St. Clair Rotary Club's Competition for St. Clair's 2017 Bootlegger Balladeer And Poet Laureate

[www.StClairOnTheRiver.com](http://www.StClairOnTheRiver.com)

Hello, welcome to Twiss!  
Goodbye, thank you for shopping at Twiss!

Dr. Ward was so impressed with my work  
Gave me the ball and called me his best clerk

I took the red ball home and showed my mom  
She put her coat on seemed to have no qualm  
Went to the hotel to see Mr. James  
My mom explained it all, my plan, my aims

We gave the ball to Bert, who was confused  
But soon he started to put it to use  
He chased it around the exercise yard  
Now he was so happy, so enthralled

Bert became famous for his red ball tricks  
People would come to watch him just for kicks  
One day he amazed them, the crowd drawn  
close  
He learned how to spin the ball on his nose!

The bear's purchase had met the landlord's  
wish

I said to him, now can Bert have some fish?

Then one night as I looked out my window  
Three tall figures walked through a dark  
meadow  
It was Fantastico, with a big man,  
And a tall, beautiful, red-hair woman

It was Lydia, Bert's friend, here for him  
And his circus trainer, a man named Jim  
Mr. James did not want to part with Bert  
But with some hypnosis, he did convert

They walked to the river past the meadow  
When I saw them, I opened my window  
I yelled, Bert! He was holding his red ball  
They all stopped and turned when they heard  
my call

Fantastico, Lydia and Jim walked by  
Only Bert raised his paw and waved goodbye

## Beau Bear and Marie

*(a sonnet about 10-year-old Marie, and a bear named Beau)*

Submitted by Dr. Ken Schultz

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

Hotel Cadillac was wild at it's best  
With loggers and gamblers and men you'd  
detest  
The saloon downstairs each night would fill,  
With men and women who drank all the swill.

"C'mon circus bear, I know you can dance"  
But it wasn't the dance that I wished for me,  
Some where, out there, I should dance free.

"C'mon circus bear let's fight and see,  
How many rounds can you go with me"

They would yell to me with their raucous chants  
As the bar tender filled the glasses with beer,  
I wobbled to music and the drunks would all  
cheer.

I danced for fools, for nickels and dimes,  
A polka, a waltz and always ragtime.  
Said drunk after drunk as they punched at me,  
The crowd hollered and bet in their gaiety.  
I boxed and weaved as the punches were thrust  
So I humored them, sometimes bit the dust.  
But I got up each time and faced my foe,

# St. Clair Rotary Club's Competition for St. Clair's 2017 Bootlegger Balladeer And Poet Laureate

[www.StClairOnTheRiver.com](http://www.StClairOnTheRiver.com)

Knowing I could kill them, with just one blow.  
In my outdoor cage I could breath the clear air  
Sing and dance with Marie, who could blunt my  
despair.

See the clouds, feel the rain, the warm sun on  
my back,  
In winter we'd dance in the powdered snow  
pack.

"C'mon Beau Bear, please dance with me,  
I love you Beau Bear, you're my friend "mon  
amie"  
Sang my only friend who loved to dance,  
My mind was set free in her innocence.

"C'mon Beau Bear, please sing with me,  
Be my friend, my Beau for eternity"  
So I hummed and groaned as best as I could.  
And she grinned and giggled like she  
understood.

The river, the swamp, the fish, and the deer,  
All those smells that came from somewhere out  
there  
How I wish to be free, to be just a bear  
Free on my own, free to persevere.

Until that night when the saloon caught on fire  
A tipped-over lamp caused a flaming spire.  
Panicked men jumped out the windows and  
doors  
Marie and I sped past the drunks on the floor.  
As the fire blew out the windows that night  
Flames blasted the sky like meteorites.

Panicked men broke open my cage and the  
gate.

So I ran to the river, my chance to escape.

As I peered from across the river that night  
I looked back on my cage and the smoldering  
site.

While my freedom was now a reality,  
Should I go back? . . . safely find my Marie?

As the sun arose from across the shore,  
Came the familiar tune I hoped for once more.  
Yes, it was the music I longed to hear,  
It was Marie's sweet song, . . . so soft and so  
clear.

"Go 'on Beau Bear, go dance and be free.  
Some day once again you can dance with me".

. . .

But there never came that chance any more  
And Marie and her song would long endure.

My heart still aches to be with Marie,  
But there's nothing so grand as to just be free.  
We still dance and sing from across distant  
shores  
And Marie will live in my soul evermore.

"C'mon Beau Bear, please dance with me,  
I love you Beau Bear, you're my friend "mon  
amie"

Go Beau Bear, go hide from the light  
I'll find you someday and we'll dance through  
the night".

# St. Clair Rotary Club's Competition for St. Clair's 2017 Bootlegger Balladeer And Poet Laureate

[www.StClairOnTheRiver.com](http://www.StClairOnTheRiver.com)

## A Tall Bear Tale

Irene Sharrard

A Bear in St. Clair? Oh, dear, I declare!  
Can't be true, but it must, in legends we trust.

A Circus in town and a Bear in tow.  
With his eye patch on, he stole the show.

When the Circus departed they left him behind.  
You think by now he would be in a bind?

But, to the Cadillac Hotel the Purple Gang came.  
The Bear watch their door with his enormous  
frame.

He had his own room as the story goes.  
An also a courtyard to stretch his toes.

He could claw his way out in 2 minutes flat.  
The only thing left would be a pile of scat.

So 70 years later to be exact.  
We sit her and wonder, was it fiction or fact?

In the middle of Pine River Mr. Gannon saw a  
sight.  
Just before dawn with few rays of light.

Two men, a woman and also the Bear.  
Walked westward, with snow up past their rear.

So the tale of the bear has come to an end.  
Just where it started, where Pine River Bend.

The soul of the Bear is no longer here.  
But his spirit is with us at LaCroix in St. Clair.

## The Cadillac Hotel's Mysterious Local Celebrity

By Arthur C. Smith

2<sup>nd</sup> Place

Way back in the 40s when the Cadillac stood  
tall,  
A strange guest kept a room there and this  
"guest" sure wasn't small.  
He wore a scary eye patch, no one seemed to  
know his name;  
He was very black and furry with a long and  
matted mane.

He would rise up early morning, watch the  
children walk to school,  
then do some exercising, seemed to be his daily  
rule.

Did he come here with the circus and decide  
that he would stay?  
Well he couldn't beat the room charge, it was  
just two bucks a day!

Some say he was a bouncer for the Detroit  
Purple Gang,  
when the gamblers grew rambunctious he'd  
show them his toothy fang.

We don't know when he got here but we sure  
know when he left,  
It wasn't hard to see him leave...he had such a  
lot of heft.

# St. Clair Rotary Club's Competition for St. Clair's 2017 Bootlegger Balladeer And Poet Laureate

[www.StClairOnTheRiver.com](http://www.StClairOnTheRiver.com)

So January twenty, the year nineteen fifty-  
three,  
t'was when this stranger left St. Clair...on this  
we all agree.  
He'd checked out of the Cadillac, this fact we all  
did know,  
And never would return, at least that's what the  
records show.

Headed west along Pine River..... thru the ice  
and snow he went,  
Was he leaving from the Cadillac because he  
owed them rent?

Police reports have stated he was traveling with  
three others;  
One gal with red hair and two guys.....a sister  
and her brothers?

Not sure this foursome ever made it up to the  
roadside,  
And with that shaggy guest..... t'would have  
been tough to "hitch" a ride....  
So the mystery continues but please do not stop  
and stare  
when I tell you that this stranger was.... the  
Cadillac Hotel Bear!

# St. Clair Rotary Club's Competition for St. Clair's 2017 Bootlegger Balladeer And Poet Laureate

[www.StClairOnTheRiver.com](http://www.StClairOnTheRiver.com)

## Songs

### The Cadillac Bear

The Barz Brothers

*(Did not perform due to a family issue)*

The circus left town in the dead of the night.  
Took the back roads; stayed out of sight.  
Crossed the county line knew they had it made.  
All they left behind a stack of bills unpaid.  
A tan grizzly bear was the star of the show  
But he loved St. Clair and didn't want to go  
So he slipped away and doubled-back  
And got himself a room at the Cadillac.

He loves Saint Clair-that Cadillac Bear  
He loves Saint Clair-that Cadillac Bear

Under the big-top life was real hard  
Now his day is spent exercising in the yard.  
Too hot or too cold wrecks your appetite  
But at the Cadillac the porridge was "just right"  
He enjoyed all the fame as the hotel's guest  
but the city's nightlife is what he liked best  
Poker some nights with the Purple Gang  
And The Riverside pub is where he would hang.  
He would sing, he would dance, he would chase  
romance

And he liked to get into trouble  
He would drink, and get high, wore a patch on  
one eye  
Just to keep from seeing double  
Start the party early stay out really late  
"Time enough for sleep when it's time to  
hibernate"  
He drank from a bottle and he drank from a cup  
Drank 'til the morning as the sun would come  
up

He loves Saint Clair-that Cadillac Bear  
He loves Saint Clair-that Cadillac Bear

Many years later Sheriff's guard down  
Friends from the circus snuck back in town  
The Ringmaster, clown, and girl on trapeze  
Begged him to come back, she asked "pretty  
please"  
So along the Pine River the route they would go  
Bitter the weather hip-deep the snow  
Constant snowing covered his track  
But always knowing someday he'd be back

He loves Saint Clair-that Cadillac Bear  
He loves Saint Clair-that Cadillac Bear

Last time they saw him Nineteen fifty three  
And that's all there is in the books of history  
How do I know so much about that there  
grizzly?

I know him very well because that bear is me  
*Spoken: [It's me everybody!! The Cadillac Bear!  
It's great to be back here in St. Clair!]*  
So let's sing and let's dance and let's chase  
romance.

There's no time for hibernating.  
The Cadillac Bear has returned to St. Clair.  
So let's start the celebrating.  
So let's sing and let's dance and let's make  
romance.

There's no time for hibernating.  
The Cadillac Bear has returned to St. Clair.  
So let's start the celebrating.  
Please don't keep me waiting  
Let's start the celebrating  
Tonight!

# St. Clair Rotary Club's Competition for St. Clair's 2017 Bootlegger Balladeer And Poet Laureate

[www.StClairOnTheRiver.com](http://www.StClairOnTheRiver.com)

## The Cadillac Bear

By Mike Dowd

1<sup>st</sup> Place

Chorus:

*He's the Cadillac Bear. He lives in Saint Clair.  
And he roams through his town without care.  
He's got a purple tattoo and a room with a  
view. And he don't smell too bad...for a bear.*

When he's roamin' around late at night.  
He'll give you one heck of a fright.  
Cuz he's big and he's hairy. He's a little bit  
scarey. But his bark is much worse than his  
bite.

Chorus

If he's out on the town let him be.  
He'll wander back home around three.  
Where he'll fall into bed to sleep like the dead.  
Til he has to go outside and pee.

Chorus

He likes whiskey but he can't handle gin.  
If he's thirsty, well you bet let him in.  
Don't stand in his way when he's lookin' for tay.  
He never loses so you'll never win.

Chorus

He often goes walkin' at night.  
And sometimes he gives us a fright.  
With his big toothy grin he just lets himself in  
Cuz he don't know his left from his right.

Chorus

If you're out for ride in your car.  
Head down to the Cadillac Bar.  
He'll be there to greet you. He probably won't  
eat you. He prefers fruits and veggies by far.

Chorus

He's got a hair suit - it's extra-large size.  
He's got a patch over one of his eyes.  
You might think that he's ugly but he's really  
quite snuggly. He just wants to be one of the  
guys.

Chorus

On Tuesday he's down at La Croix.  
He likes hangin' with Bill and the boys.  
He eats hotdogs and beer. Then he roars out a  
cheer. He likes to sing and make a big joyful  
noise.

Chorus

We had a party up at the hotel.  
And it all was going quite well.  
Till the bear he got drunk and came back with a  
skunk. And we still can't get rid of the smell.

Chorus

**St. Clair Rotary Club's Competition for St. Clair's 2017  
Bootlegger Balladeer And Poet Laureate**

[www.StClairOnTheRiver.com](http://www.StClairOnTheRiver.com)

Well he works for the Gang at the store.  
He just sits and he waits by the door.  
If the cops stumble in they take off quick as sin.  
When he lets out his signature roar.

Chorus

You might think that I'm tellin' a feble.  
But I'll sing it as long as I'm able.  
Some say he's a myth but I've never been with  
one that drank me right under the table.

Chorus

We don't know where he came from or why.  
But the day that he left us we cried.  
They walked off on the ice, that sure wasn't  
nice. They didn't give us a chance to say bye.

Chorus