

Way We Were

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Title: Park City's Seedy Underbelly: An Introduction

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"If a fellow wants to become intoxicated he can start in at one end of the street, take a drink at each saloon and store that handles liquors and before he is half way up or down unless he has the capacity of vinegar barrel, be gloriously intoxicated." Park Record October 14, 1882.

It is evident that the life of a miner and his family was stressful and full of hardship. Living in poverty their entire careers, miners made on average \$2.75 to \$3.50 per day. The likelihood of suffering from diseases such as miner's consumption coupled with the fact that they were not offered health benefits made it improbable that a miner lived past the age of 40. At times finding something to help a miner escape from the inevitable involved such things as drinking, gambling, and prostitution. And Park City was not short on any of those options. Like most Western towns in the mid to late 1800s, Park City had its fair share of saloons, pool halls, and stores providing a wide variety of beer and liquor.

At the height of mining in Park City the entertainment options were endless. Prior to prohibition there were 22 saloons in operation along Main Street. Some of those locations included Geo. Wanning's Saloon, The Oak, Golden Label Saloon, Inter-Mountain Saloon, and the Gem Saloon. However, prohibition, the period in which making, selling, and transporting alcohol was illegal, drastically hindered miners' pursuit of inebriation. By August of 1917 prohibition hit Park City in full force, two and a half years before the 18th amendment went into effect.

Most saloons, though not all, survived prohibition under the ruse of a soft drink parlor. These so called "soft drink" parlors provided a location for the illegal consumption of alcohol during prohibition. Saloon owners adapted to the times converting their places of business to soft drink parlors in order to maintain an air of legality. They renovated their spaces to include pool tables and soda fountains in order to uphold appearances, though they often continued their former activities undercover. Ultimately the transition from saloon to soft drink parlor resulted in a predicted loss of \$22,000 annually in city profit forcing the creation of a soft drink license to replace liquor license losses.

Over the next three weeks we will be touching upon some of the saloons and saloon proprietors mentioned above. You will learn about Park City's seedy underbelly, what bars didn't survive prohibition, and how certain saloons maintained open doors and sales during this time.

Main image: Bar, with caption "The Last Chance Saloon, circa 1913"

2005.27.12

Park City Historical Society and Museum



Inset: Sketch, with the caption "Caricature drawing to Mr. and Mrs. O.B. Barney"
2000.17.403
Park City Historical Society and Museum, Kendall Webb Collection



