

Way We Were

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Vanishing Bull: The saga of a celebrated sign

David Hampshire, Park City Museum researcher

In September 1976, during a remodeling of the Red Banjo Pizza Parlour at 322 Main Street, workmen peeled a layer of imitation-brick cladding off the north side of the building and discovered the figure of a bull painted on the wood siding underneath.

It was part of a Bull Durham tobacco sign that once greeted pedestrians walking up Main Street. The sign apparently dated from the fall of 1934 when Mike Safianides, a Parkite of Turkish descent, opened the Park Tavern in this turn-of-the-century building just up from the Egyptian Theatre.

“The neatest, best arranged and most attractive beer hall in the city is the Park Tavern,” *The Park Record* gushed on October 5, 1934. “A large cash outlay was made in remodeling and furnishing the building...The sign work by Roy Fletcher lends much to the outside attractiveness.”

Roy Fletcher, husband of legendary local pianist Blanche Fletcher and father of ski pioneer Mel Fletcher, was well known in Park City for his hand-painted signs. Examples of his handiwork are still visible on the façade of the National Garage building now occupied by High West Distillery.

Safianides ran the tavern for about 28 years, surviving at least three police raids for illegally serving hard liquor. The most infamous was the April 1955 sweep orchestrated by state and federal officers that netted four taverns, a hotel and a house of ill repute.

“The night of the raid, about five of my classmates and I stopped in the Park Tavern,” Park City native Gary Kimball wrote in his book, *Of Moths and Miners*. “No sooner had we sat down than the night officer, Bob Evans, came in. I still remember him saying, ‘Not tonight, boys. Out!’”

Safianides also faced gambling charges because of the tavern’s popular blackjack table. In June 1955, Third District Court Judge John F. Wahlquist ordered the tavern closed and padlocked for three months.

By 1962, Safianides was ready to sell. He handed the keys to Mary Lou and Pete Toly, who refurbished and christened it the Red Banjo Saloon. Later renamed the Red Banjo Pizza Parlour, it is now Park City’s oldest restaurant. Mary Lou Toly and her family still run it.

When the weathered Bull Durham sign was uncovered during a later remodeling, the Tolys hired local craftsman Norm Hall to restore it.

For a brief period, the sign again was a landmark for residents, and for a wave of newcomers lured to town by the promise of great skiing. Then, in 1978, a new building went up in the empty lot next door. For the second time, the celebrated sign vanished behind a brick curtain.

Well, most of it did. Next time you're walking along the 300 block of Main Street, stop on the downhill side of Red Banjo and peer into the one-foot gap that separates the building from the one next door. If it's daylight and you look up at the right angle, you can still find the word "TOBACCO" painted on the wooden siding.



Image ID: Not in collection

Credit: Photo courtesy of Mary Lou Toly

Caption: The Bull Durham sign as it looked in the late 1970s before the view was blocked by a new building in the lot next door.