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A walk through Kodiak's historical bars

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IRIS SAMUELS/Kodiak Daily Mirror

While the B&B, a well-known Kodiak watering hole, takes pride in being the oldest bar in Alaska, Douglas Vandegraft says otherwise.

Vandegraft, author of "A Guide to the Notorious Bars of Alaska," now in its second edition, is visiting Kodiak for the Alaska Museums & Alaska Historical Society 2019 Conference, taking place this weekend.

The B&B received its first license in 1899. It was founded by Perl Blodgett and Jess Blinn, whose surnames make up the original namesake of the bar.

According to Vandegraft's research, the B&B officially closed in 1917 and did not exist again until 1933, when it reopened as a pool hall.

In 1944, the B&B was reinaugurated where the pool hall had been. By then, Blodgett was gone and B&B stood for "booze and beer," according to Vandegraft.

"This ends their claim to being the oldest bar in Alaska," he said. "For the purpose of my book, Prohibition reset the clock. Therefore, no bar in Alaska is older than April 7, 1933."

While writing his book, Vandegraft consulted various resources, including the Kodiak Historical Society, phone books, and the Kodiak Daily Mirror archives.

One ad printed in the Mirror in the 1940s boldly claimed that B&B alcohol prices were so low, "customers had to shop on their hands and knees."

In 1944, Kodiak had 12 bars, including the B&B, Beachcombers, Belmont, Casino, Fisherman's, Idle House, Mecca, Montmartre, Ships, Tony's, Town Club and Club Unique.

Of those, some still exist, including the B&B, Mecca, Tony's and Club Unique, now called the Village Bar.

But the 1964 tidal waves damaged many of these bars, which were located in downtown Kodiak, and almost all are now in different locations and buildings than their original structures.

Some bars, like the Casino, never reopened after the damage. Others were buoyed by crab fishing money. In 1980 alone, Kodiak crab fishing raked in \$195 million.

"During that time, we had some pretty successful Kodiak bars," Vandegraft said.

While Vandegradt is a retired cartographer who spent his career working for the federal government, Alaska's notorious bars are his passion. He has given tours of historical bars in many of Alaska's cities, including Anchorage, Juneau, Fairbanks, and Nome.

Vandegraft will be sharing more stories about Kodiak historical bars during a tour today at 9 p.m. The tour will begin at the Kodiak Convention Center and will take participants to some of Kodiak's oldest bars, including Tony's, which Vandegraft says is his personal favorite.