

For an enioyable evening . . .

The BEACHCOMBERS

Kodiak's New and Popular Nite Spot

- **OPEN DAILY AT 4 PM**
- **Saturday & Sunday at 2 pm**

FIVE PIECE ORCHESTRA

Kodiak Mirror – October 7, 1944



Interior of the Beachcombers – Circa 1943 (or 1944)
Kodiak Historical Society P-353-73



**The *Beachcombers* being beached at Kodiak
December 1964
Photo courtesy of Toby Sullivan**



The *Beachcombers* – Circa 1965
Photo courtesy of Toby Sullivan

Sea Stories: True Stories of Kodiak's Maritime Heritage

The Beachcombers Bar

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By Toby Sullivan, Executive Director, Kodiak Maritime Museum

Like many other businesses in Kodiak, the legendary Beachcombers Bar was first destroyed, and then transformed by the tsunamis of March 1964. Originally established in 1957 in a log cabin on Mission Road by Henry "Legs," Lagrue, and his wife Edie, the original nightclub was swept into Potato Patch Lake by the tsunami and the wreckage was burned on the shore of the lake. Within weeks however, the Legrues had hatched a plan to rebuild their bar, but not in an expected way.

Ray Lagrue, Legs and Edie's son, was fourteen years old when he saw the first tsunami come across Mission Rd late in the afternoon of March 27, 1964. From the hillside above Potato Patch Lake he watched the water flood, but not destroy, the building. Half an hour later, after the wave receded, he helped the bar's band members stack their instruments on chairs on the stage, thinking they would be safe if the water rose again. During the night however, four more tsunamis returned at 50-minute intervals, each higher than the one before, and the building was swept into the lake behind it.

A few months later, while other business owners in Kodiak were ordering lumber and hiring contractors to rebuild their businesses, the Legrues purchased the former *Princess Norah*, a 250 foot steamship. The ship had been launched in Scotland in 1929, and served as a coastal steamer on Vancouver Island and in Alaska's Inside Passage for thirty-five years. Renamed the *Queen of the North* in 1955, and then the *Canadian Prince* in 1958, the ship had seen better days, and as air travel replaced steamships in the early 1960s, had outlived its usefulness. The Legrues had it towed to Kodiak in late 1964.

In December, on the highest tide of the year, the ship was nudged by two tugs and pulled by three bulldozers into Potato Patch Lake through a channel cut across Mission Road. The bulldozers built a gravel parking lot around the hull and filled in the channel through Mission Road. An exterior stairway was constructed up to the saloon deck, and the ship became an instant landmark featuring a dining room and a nightclub with live music. Legs even built a wine cellar below the dining room in an effort to convince customers to buy wine instead of drinks, which had to be fetched by the waitresses from the main bar a hundred feet and one deck above the dining room.

The Legrues were naturals at the hospitality business- Legs was a people person from the word go- but they had timed it right too. The Kodiak King Crab fishery was booming, and through the 60s and 70s the ship was a legendary watering hole, known among mariners from Mexico to Nome.

At first, the Legrues planned to operate the establishment as a bar and restaurant only, but in the Kodiak's perennial housing shortage, people begged to stay in the ship's staterooms and the ship soon became the Beachcombers Bar and Hotel. Located just outside the Kodiak City Limits, the

establishment escaped the city sales tax other bars in town labored under, which made it that much more of a successful business.

In January 1976 however, with maintenance costs rising and the ship falling into disrepair, the Legrues closed the Beachcombers, and after several deals to sell it fell through, they shut it up for good. In 1977, with the ship dark and empty, they built a new nightclub next door with the same name. With the *Princess Norah*'s wooden masts holding up the ceiling, and her hardwood capped railings set around a stainless-steel dance floor, the new Beachcombers became again, for a few more years, a happening night spot in Kodiak.

The bar was not without its dark side however. The drugs and alcohol which imbued Kodiak's nightlife in those years lent a seamy and sometimes dangerous aura to the Beachcombers. In July 1982 a 27 year old fisherman, Tom Carbine, was stabbed to death between two parked cars outside the bar. Although the murder happened with hundreds of people close by, no witnesses ever stepped forward and one was ever arrested for the crime. It remains unsolved.

In the mid-1980s, as Kodiak's culture evolved and the bar business became less lucrative, the Legrues sold the building to the Salvation Army, which owns it to this day. For a short time, the Legrues operated the bar at night and the Salvation Army conducted services in the main room on Sunday mornings, a circumstance that caused amusement among many in the community.

The ship however was done. In the late 1980s Ray Legrue, now running the business, had the hull scrapped. When the hull was cut away, a residue of decades old bunker fuel was revealed in the bilge, and to the consternation of neighbors, was burned off in a controlled, but very smoky fire. Some of the steel went to shore up the bulkheads at TT Fuller's boat yard and on residential beachfront on the channel, but the keel remained in the ground, cut off at ground level and buried beneath the Salvation Army parking lot. Even now, the bow stem can still be seen, a black knob of steel embedded in the grass beside Potato Patch Lake, an artifact from a Scottish shipyard and the glory days of Kodiak's King Crab years.

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Personal Recollection from Doug Vandegraft: I was working in Kodiak in 1987 and visited the Beachcombers. The bar offered entertainment at that time – two young men who imitated the Blues Brothers. The men lip-synched and danced to the entire 1981 album *Best of the Blues Brothers*. The crowd at the Beachcombers loved it, as did I. I was told later by a friend who lived in Kodiak that when the men would walk around town, they remained in character the entire time.



Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi as the Blues Brothers
