

Belly up to The Mascot Saloon

By SUSAN BREWTON

The Mascot saloon will open its doors again June 30, more than 40 years after it was vacated for storage. This time, however, the liquor is just for looks.

In the last three years, the National Park Service has spent hours of labor and \$89,000 in artifacts to return the Mascot to its saloon status. The completed project will serve as an exhibition area devoted to the commercial life in turn-of-the-century Skagway, said Karl Gurcke, resource management specialist for Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park.

Although an ornate back-bar stands stocked with liquor bottles, the smell of tobacco from the stocked cigar case permeates the front room, and drinks wait on the bar, the fixtures are there only for show. They will not be used for saloon purposes.

The total restoration on the Mascot Complex, which includes the adjacent Pacific Clipper and Hern Liquor buildings, cost NPS nearly \$1.2 million. The adjacent buildings have already been leased to Skagway Jewelers.

The park service originally bought the buildings in 1978 to use for employee housing, Gurcke said. "It was in pretty bad shape when we purchased it." The building needed emergency stabilization, he said. Wooden pilings were removed and replaced with a foundation.

The idea for an exhibition hall came later, he said, when NPS discovered that there was not enough room in the train depot to display everything they wanted.

"We wanted to talk about Skagway as a town," said Gurcke. The Mascot, he said, seemed like an appropriate place to do that.

"We're not talking about the Gold Rush period, but the settled Skagway between 1905 and 1915," he said. When the exhibition is finished in September, Gurcke says there will be pictures and explanations of Skagway's business and characters during the early 1900s.

"I think the town's going to be very pleased with the exhibits," said Jay Cable, acting

Dedication begins at 1 p.m. on June 30

superintendent Skagway park.

The opening will also celebrate the 75th anniversary of the National Park Service and the 15th anniversary of the legislation for the Klondike park. Refreshments will be served and Frank Norris, regional historian, will speak at 1 p.m.

In its heyday, more than 80 years ago, the Mascot saloon thrived as a workingman's bar that offered sickle beer and free lunch. It sat in its present location on Broadway and Third, an area known then as "steambost row."

Under the bare light bulbs, that

Pacific Clipper building. Behind the original building, he also constructed additional space to provide storage for nearly 30 barrels of beer at a time.

In addition to the food and drink, Rienert installed a telegraph on the second floor to receive direct reports on sporting events and a Victor Talking Machine downstairs to provide "an electric concert every night."

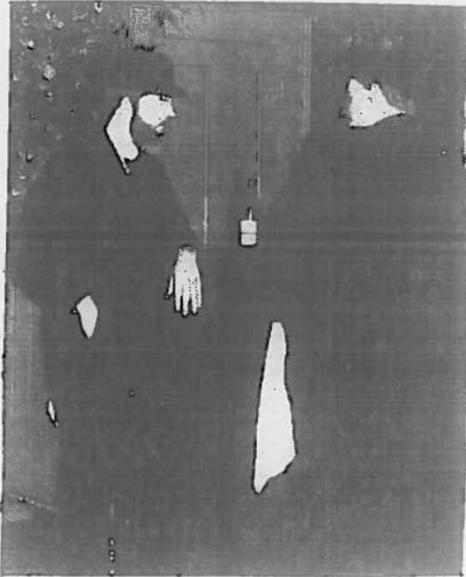
By 1916, however, prohibitionists gained the upper hand in Skagway and passed an ordinance outlawing alcohol for all but medicinal purposes. A few years later, Rienert sold the buildings and, after 1948, the Mascot became a storage house and fell into disrepair. When NPS bought the buildings in 1978, the wood pilings supporting the building were on the verge of collapse.

Twelve years later, the bar itself has been redecorated to look as it did in 1905. Floral wallpaper now hangs on the wall, bare light bulbs again hang from the ceiling, and an ornate Brunswick bar and backbar, neatly covered with liquor bottles, again dominates the front room.

The bar and back bar are not the originals, but are the same models as those installed by Rienert in 1901. They were restored in Clay City, Kan. and shipped to Skagway last year. The cigar case at the end of

the bar is also authentic, sold to the park service by Skagway resident Jim Hamilton. The shape and size of the liquor and beer bottles behind the bar and in the display windows are all based on relics discovered beneath floorboards.

NPS also added an extra dimension with three mannequins, a bartender and two patrons, all dressed in authentic clothing. The mannequins and many of the artifacts came from the Harper's Ferry Conservation Center in Virginia.



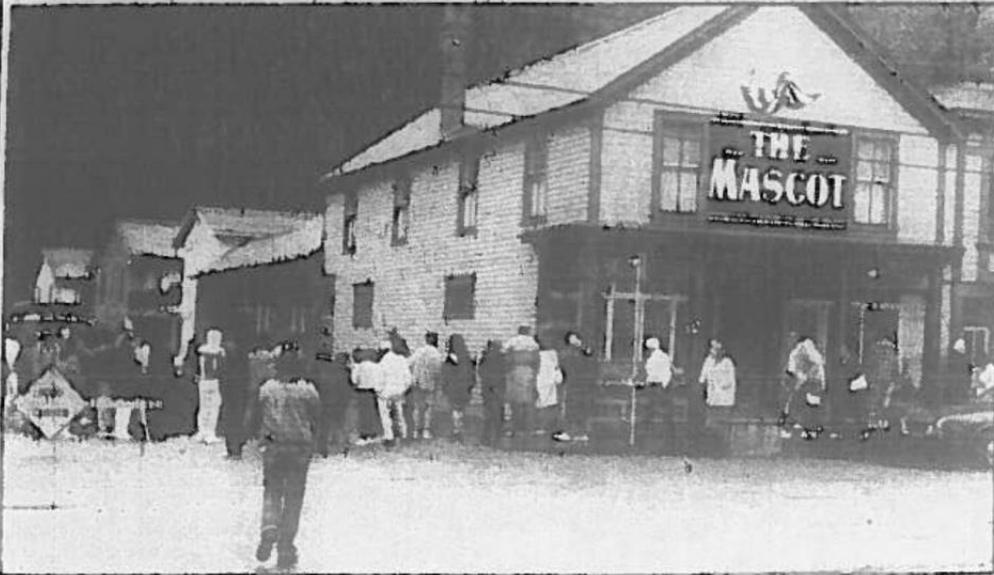
Two mannequins enjoy a long cool one at The Mascot.

dangled on wires from the ceiling, stood a 20-foot-long English oak bar with a polished cherry top, an ornate back bar with a mirror, and a pool table, shipped from Brunswick-Balke-Collender Co. in Chicago. The walls were "tastefully decorated," according to the Daily Alaskan, "and the wine rooms, upstairs (were) cozy and comfortable."

The saloon was so popular that its owner, Albert Rienert, expanded it to fill the adjacent

Sweet Tooth Cafe
Homemade soup,
sandwiches and breakfast

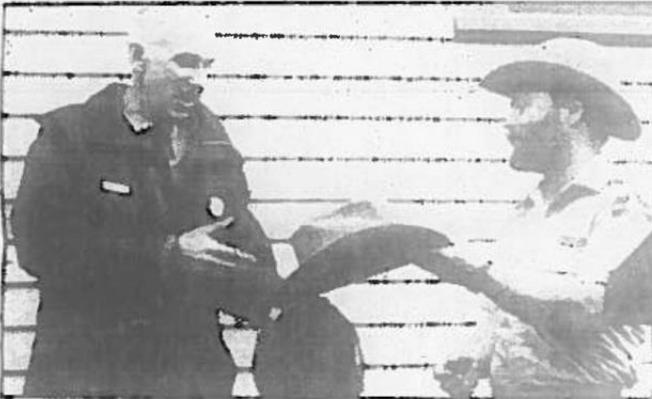
THE TRAIL BENCH
Alaska Fur Dealer



Spectators gathered outside the Mascot in the rain June 30 to listen to speeches before the ribbon was cut. JB

The Mascot Saloon

Saloons were not exactly a rare commodity at the time. In fact there were about 80 in town in the winter of 1897-98, but in a town filled with the greedy and the desperate, the starry-eyed and the purely criminal, there



Chief ranger Jay Cable receives a Canadian warden's hat from his Chilkoot Trail counterpart for his 13 years of service to the Skagway park. JB

was business enough for everyone. By the summer of 1899 things had dramatically changed ... Before long the number of saloons in town had dropped from 80 to 12. The Mascot was one of the few that remained opened ... The nicest feature was its finely carved back bar like the one we have here today."

-Frank Norris, historian