



OLDEST SALOON IN SKAGWAY—The Pack Train Inn is said to be the oldest bar in Skagway, the historic city that seethed with the activity of thousands of 'gold seekers during the 1880's. The street is Broadway on which the legendary Soapy Smith often rode his white horse. The famous outlaw was shot and killed on the waterfront on July 8, 1898. See the story on page 4 of this issue about Soapy Smith.

—Photo by LAEL MORGAN

SKAGWAY-CITY WITH ROMANTIC PAST

Oldtimers In Doubt Frank Reid Killed Outlaw Soapy Smith

The City of Skagway—a city with history behind it, the evidence of which still stands to give it authenticity. The city looks old with grayed ruins of the old original buildings that were built in the late 1800's.

Here, the notorious Jefferson R. Smith, better known as Soapy Smith, held sway along with his ruffian henchmen and practically ruled the city in an underworld atmosphere laying the foundation for the legendary past of the present City of Skagway.

It was inevitable also that Soapy Smith himself was to become a legendary figure in Alaska, especially in Skagway. Surprisingly enough, Soapy is now regarded in a kindly manner in that city even to the point of affection by some of the present-day residents.

"Soapy Smith built this city," said an oldtimer. "He may have been sort of rough on the well-to-do but he was a kindly man to the poor. He even donated \$300 to the first Presbyterian church built in Skagway. He wasn't as bad as he was made out to be. It was his henchmen that made

him look bad. They were real bad men, those fellows."

PERSISTENT OPINION

And there is a persistent opinion among some of the oldtimers that Soapy Smith was not killed by Frank H. Reid, the man who headed the "Law and Order Committee of Three Hundred and Three."

This opinion, however, is not openly discussed in Skagway but is done from the corner of the mouth, so to speak. The reason for this is not clear but it may have dated back to 1898 when Soapy Smith was killed.

"The two men were facing each other, Soapy on his white horse and Frank Reid on the wharf," said an oldtimer. "It was on the old Jouseau Wharf Soapy was killed and Frank Reid didn't kill him. Reid's gun misfired. Soapy was bushwhacked by one of his own men is what I've heard, and the bullet hit him on his left side under his armpit.

"As he was falling backwards, Soapy's gun went off and hit Reid in the groin."

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How Jefferson R. Smith Became 'Soapy Smith'

How did Jefferson R. Smith come to be known as "Soapy Smith"?

"He would bet five dollars and much more than the gamblers could not tell in which hand a small cake of soap was," said an oldtimer at

Skagway. "He was a very clever man with his hands. He would slide the soap up his sleeve and, of course, whichever hand that was picked would be empty.

"When he didn't do that, and when the hand was picked

in which the soap was, he would switch it to the other hand with such trickery that you didn't notice because it was done so quickly.

"That's the way he made some of his money and that's why he came to be known as Soapy Smith."



SOAPY SMITH'S BAR—George Rapussi of Skagway, who owns the original Soapy Smith's parlor, is serving a drink to Soapy, a dummy constructed by the late Martin Itzen who owned the parlor and willed it to Rapussi. Rapussi is holding on to a novel drink mixer operated with a crank that revolves

three containers by three series of leather belts on pulleys. The mixer operates efficiently. Rapussi is furnishing the Soapy parlor with historical material from his vast historic collection of the early days of Skagway.

—Photo by LAEL MORGAN

Tourists Keep Spiriting Soapy's Headstones

Fame would not let Soapy Smith of Skagway rest ever since he was killed on July 8, 1898. Three of his headstones have been spirited away from his grave since that time, most likely by tourists.

"One of them was a marble headstone," said George Rapussi, oldtime resident of Skagway.

"Tourists started chipping away at it for souvenirs so my old friend, the late Martin Itzen, put a heavy metal netting around it and fastened it so nobody could possibly pull it off.

"And you know what happened? Someone came around one day and dynamited the thing clear off and it's been missing ever since. You can see what's left of it here on the grave—down there. See it?"

George Rapussi is the owner of Soapy Smith's original parlor or bar. The building was owned by Martin Itzen before his death and he willed it to Rapussi.

The building is a long, narrow structure with the parlor in front, gambling room in the center. Soapy Smith is believed to have lived in the rear of this building.

There is a dummy of Soapy at the end of the bar and it was constructed by Martin Itzen.

Rapussi is presently working to make the Smith parlor a historical museum furnishing it from his vast historical collection.



THE GRAVE OF SOAPY SMITH—This is the grave of the famous, and notorious Jefferson R. Smith, better known as Soapy Smith, whose underworld tactics greatly influenced the early days of the City of Skagway. Soapy was a bar owner and gambler who surrounded himself with henchmen of criminal

intent. Soapy Smith met his end in a showdown with the vigilantes known as the Law and Order Committee of Three Hundred and Three led by Frank H. Reid who supposedly shot the outlaw. Reid died ten days later after Soapy Smith wounded him.

—Sketch by HOWARD ROCK

Soapy Smith . .

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This account of the killing is said to have been born out by "an old lady" who died some years ago. She was eleven years old when the shooting took place. She is said to have told friends that "Reid didn't kill Soapy Smith."

At any rate on the evening of July 8, 1898, the vigilantes had gathered "armed with magazine guns and revolvers" at the Juneau Wharf, incensed by a recent robbery of a man robbed of his poke of gold. This thievery was credited to members of Soapy Smith's gang. After pressure was put to bear by the newly formed vigilantes, part of the poke of gold was recovered and the victim felt relieved and lucky to get some of his "dust" back.

This, however, did not placate the "Law and Order Committee of Three Hundred and Three" and on the evening of July 8, 1898, sometime between the hours of 9 and 10 p.m., Soapy Smith met his death on the planks of the Juneau Wharf and Frank Reid lay mortally wounded a few feet away from the famous outlaw.

Frank Reid "lingered" and ten days later died of his wound. Rightly or wrongly, he was made a hero of the then bustling city of Skagway which reportedly had about 20,000 people at the height of the goldrush. About 700 people live there today.

The two men are buried in the old cemetery north of the city, about 35 feet apart. Reid has a 12-foot high cement monument inscribed, "He gave his life for the honor of Skagway."

Soapy Smith's grave is simple with iron pipe railing mounted on four posts and on the whitewashed wooden headstone is written, "Jefferson R. Smith Died July 8, 1898 Age 38 Years."

And on the front of the headstone lay colorful artificial flowers, a mute tribute by some unknown person. There were none on Frank Reid's grave.