



The Great American Bars and Saloons

Kathy Weiser

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Dust jacket notes: "When we think of a 'saloon' we conjure up a nostalgic picture of an Old West icon, complete with a wooden false front, a wide boardwalk flanking the dusty street, a couple of hitchin' posts, and swinging doors brushing against a cowboy as he makes his way to the long polished bar in search of a whiskey or a beer to wet his parched throat. Certainly, saloons sprang up together with the great move West in the 19th century, wherever new towns and cities were built, though some were not much more than shacks. And, in the days of the rush to find gold, many saloons were mere grubby tents situated near the mine heads, where miners could grab a beer and swap stories that were hard to swallow about intrepid frontiersmen, or boast about the fortunes they had gained and lost, or make predictions concerning the rich seam they were bound to dig into someday soon. The more sophisticated saloons had long polished wood bars, hand and foot rails for leaning on, mustache wipes, and spittoons at which to aim long-chewed tobacco. Many displayed hunting trophies on their walls, while others had enticing pictures of ladies to remind the patrons of creature comforts; some had the real thing - ladies to dance and drink with, for a fee, or even 'painted ladies' working the red light districts. Gambling was common, with cards or even roulette wheels, and some offered billiard tables to keep the customers amused while they drank. Some were peaceful places for rest and relaxation, while others were rowdy or even places of sudden violence where new and old scores were settled with a gunfight. A great many of the saloons disappeared as quickly as they came, as gold mines were emptied of their precious nuggets, or as organized development of respectable townships took place. And many just closed up as Prohibition took its toll across the nation in the early years of the 1900s...."

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