

# HISTORY OF BUILDING AND BUSINESS

By Christy Tengs Fowler

According to the former Haines Sheldon Museum director, the building was here in the 1890's. In 1907, it was advertised in the local newspaper as *The Hotel de France* and featured French cuisine.

A man met Lou LaMoore when she was 14 and living in France. He convinced her that she could make a lot of money in Alaska and brought her to Anchorage, where she became a well-to-do prostitute and opened up "The White House." In 1933, she brought two girls to Haines with her and opened the *Pioneer*



*Beer Parlor*, a big dance hall with a brothel upstairs. They serviced the soldiers at Fort William H. Seward, the last of a series of eleven military posts established in Alaska during the gold rush era. It was Alaska's only military facility between 1925 and 1940,



providing a policing presence for miners and for the negotiations over the nearby international border with Canada.



The *Pioneer* had its own currency called "bingles." Hazel Englund, who worked for Lou as a food

server when she was 17 (and is still alive at 102) said the soldiers would line up for bingles.

Lou married several times but never had children. She was known to take good care of the kids in town. If their parents were in the bar, she would feed them. She would put up a Christmas tree and buy them sleds and other gifts for Christmas. Lou operated a brothel out of the Senate Building in Juneau at the same time. While replacing insulation in the 1980's, we found letters between Lou and Scotty Nielson, who kept track of "her girls" in Juneau. The letters also revealed that the *Pioneer* was a speakeasy, selling bootleg alcohol during Prohibition. There are many walls in the building with boards stamped, "Mrs. John Wehringer," which was her married name at one time. Lou was also known as Andree Wehringer. Eventually, one of the men Lou was with persuaded her to sell the bar. She sold the bar to Earl and Florence Lammers. Earl was a soldier in the Fort. Lou and her husband moved to Seattle and after he spent all of her money, he left her. Lou died making beds in a hotel in Seattle.

By 1943, it was the *Pioneer Cocktail Lounge*, under the ownership of Dave Fenton and Jack Gucker. In 1945, it was owned by J.B. Carlyle. Later, it was owned by "Chief" Tolan (a Cherokee Indian), then Florence Rainy Corcoran, and later, Olav Lillegraven. At some point along the way, it became the *Pioneer Bar*.

My father, Marty Tengs, arrived in Sitka, Alaska



in 1940. He became an iron worker by day and a card dealer at the Silver Foam Bar at night. In 1952, he moved to Haines to supervise the steel placing in the military dock at Lutak. Helen Bergstrand had recently arrived

from Wisconsin to teach school. They fell in love and married in 1953. That same year, while working in Kodiak, Marty received a call from his pal, Ole Lillegraven, who said, "Hey, kid, come back to Haines and I'll put you in business." Marty became sole owner of the *Pioneer Bar* on January 1, 1954. At that time, the south side, which is now the dining room, was a liquor store and card room where Marty hosted weekly hi-stake poker games. My brother, Tony, and I spent our childhood in the upstairs apartment.



In 1956, Fran Fox leased the space and created the *Bamboo Room*, named after the bamboo curtain she hung to separate the restaurant from the bar. Marty moved the liquor store to the west side of the bar. Gloria and Vern Morey leased the space and took over ownership of the *Bamboo Room* in 1959. Twenty years later, Doug and Belle Sage bought it and managed it for several years.

In the 1980's, my parents assumed ownership of the business. The liquor store was expanded in the early 1980's.



In 1991, I began buying the business. In 1992, the *Bamboo Room Restaurant* and the *Pioneer Bar and Liquor Store* were incorporated. Later, my husband, Bob Fowler, came in as a 50/50 partner. In 1997, we sold the package store license.

Over the years, we have made significant improvements to the property. We firmed up the foundation, painted the building, replaced the roof, replaced most of the wiring and plumbing, expanded the walk-in freezer and prep room in the restaurant and remodeled the liquor storeroom to include a new walk-in cooler and workshop. We replaced the entire propane heating and hot water system with a more efficient oil system, keeping the propane system for back-up. We installed new compressor systems in the walk-in cooler and freezer in the restaurant. We built an employee bathroom and laundry area. We remodeled what had been the liquor store to create new seating for diners, expanding our food service. We tore out small, dilapidated bathrooms and replaced them with attractive, expanded facilities. We built a corridor so that underage restaurant patrons would not enter the bar to access the rest

rooms. We laid a new floor in the bar and rebuilt several walls, replacing the wiring, adding insulation and installing glass block to let the light through. We placed windows with etched Tlingit designs from authentic Chilkat Blankets between the bar and restaurant. To honor our history, we hung old photos, which we colorized and enlarged, crowning the project with a 30-foot mural on the exterior of the building. We upgraded our rental property upstairs by changing a large liquor storeroom to a finished master bedroom and bathroom. We transformed a tiny kitchen with no insulation to a modern kitchen with a 17 foot high ceiling and skylights.



In April of 2007, the Pioneer was the first bar in Haines to go smoke-free, making it a cleaner, healthier choice for patrons and employees. The next year, a local ordinance required all bars to follow suit.



My father passed away in the year 2000. My mother, Helen, has lived with us in the upstairs apartment for the last 10 years. We have raised two wonderful boys, Chevy and Marty, in this colorful old building amid the spirits of all of those who have come before.