

Title: Carson City's Jack's Bar: "A Saloon Since 1859?"

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by Guy Rocha, Nevada State Archivist

Thank goodness, the historic building housing Jack's Bar survived the April 19, 1998 fire in downtown Carson City. The conspicuous sign on the vintage structure at the northwest corner of Carson and Fifth streets says "A Saloon Since 1859." The Kit Carson Trail map makes a similar claim. Virtually everyone believes that the building and the business date back to the beginning of the town. But is it true? In a word, no! The sign is misleading. While it is true the site of Jack's Bar has been home to various drinking establishments since 1859, the current building only dates back to 1899 when it was first known as the Bank Saloon. The tavern has been known by many other names including the Bank Resort, Hernando's Hideaway, the Y-NOT Bar, Angelo's, and, beginning in 1966, Jack's Bar. Still, the site is a pioneer location. Less than a year after the founding of Carson City, a dance hall opened there on July 4, 1859. The two-story frame structure changed hands over the next few years. By 1862, it was known as the Frisbie Hotel and, in 1873, it was called the Fifth Avenue House. The building remained the property of the Frisbie family until 1892, when it was torn down, prompting a local newspaper to observe that the Frisbie building was "one of the oldest landmarks of the city." The lot remained vacant for over seven years until the Frisbie heirs sold the land to business partners Meyer and Sanger on June 30, 1898. John Meyer and Elizabeth Sanger had been leasing the Sacramento Saloon on the southwest corner of Fifth and Carson--where the Ormsby House is today--and now planned to build their own saloon. Composed principally of sandstone quarried and chiseled at the State Prison, the Bank Saloon opened on August 19, 1899. "Today Johnny Meyer will open his new saloon and he deserves all success in the new building," reported the Carson Appeal. "The place is without exception the handsomest building in this city and is an ornament that will remain for years to come, as it is built of stone and in a substantial manner." Despite at least three fires on the block, the building has remained standing for over 100 years. The Bank Resort sold bootlegged alcohol during Prohibition when Pete Pierini and Virgil Buchianeri, Sr. ran the operation, and served as one of the principal bars adjacent to Carson City's red-light district before the brothels were closed by federal order in 1942. With the State Capitol and Legislative Building across the street, nobody will ever know how many business and political deals have been made in the popular watering hole! Jack's Bar has now been closed since June 2002 and, despite its listing on the National Register of Historic Places since 1980, its fate is uncertain. However, the claim to be the oldest continuously operating drinking establishment in Carson City can no longer be made. "A Saloon Since 1859" always was a stretch! (Original version in Sierra Sage, Carson City/Carson Valley, Nevada, September 1999 edition) For the complete "Historical Myth a Month" series, visit <http://nevadaculture.org/docs/nsia/archives/myth/sitemap.htm>