

Left Handers Club

Stars and Sun date 35 214 by Harry Zirkelbach

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In the mid 1970s

a group of young men bought the building in the 1300 block on 13th street, refurbished the interior of what had been a Social Club into a bar with food service to compete with that thriving industry on both sides of the south end of Denver's downtown Larimer Street.

In their schemes they decided to identify their effort, name the new business, **SOAPY SMITH'S**, after the vagabond who was run out of Denver following the short lived Colorado Gold Rush in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century. Smith's difficulties, various activities that were outright swindles, on a small but humorous scale. Steal one dollar at a time, from everyone. His favorite, sealing penny soap bars in which he appeared to be inserting a dollar. How could you lose.? Except, Soapy slight-of-hand removed the money before closing the soap's paper wrap. Eventually the novelty wore, and locals hounded him out of Denver,.

Years later it was learned he had moved to Alaska following their Gold Rush, began the same scam. Enraged, one Miner shot and killed Soapy.

One of Soapy's mottos retained in Denver; "I just swindled the last customer and am passing the savings onto you?" Kept, for sentimental reasons.

The building entrance had a five step walk up to the first floor, and a three step walk down to the basement, now used only for storage of supplies received. The first floor entry was to the handsome bar, kitchen behind the bar most tables to the right where steps lead to the 2nd and 3rd floors, the later Offices. That second floor had a small Service Bar and many more Restaurant tables.

The Bar had a "U" shape, the bottom arm greatly extended. Irish whiskey, scotch offerings predominated.

On the bar itself most days was a large glass jar filled with water and peeled Hard Boiled eggs, and under raw eggs; both for the discerning who loved their strong drink with an egg, raw or hard boiled. Quarter either way.

In fact Soapys' Restaurant was very good, the Chef from the CIA (Cullinary Institute of America an Eastern U.iversith. two year training School for Chefs.)

Soapys' menu had colored photos of the food, a Denver novelty, the pricing modest.

Beside good food, the bar offered, imagine, beer and liquor. And for that, Management established a LEtT

HANDLERS CLUB. Members paid a small enrollment fee, their name inscribed on a totem, left of the bar. Eventually hundreds volunteered. Member obligation, when drinking here, uses the Left Hand only to raise glass to lips. Caught using that usual right hand, fined twenty-five cents.

Annually those quarters provided a feast, food and drinks "free", Members Only. That event saluted in downtown circles and the newspaper's.

Eventually these youngsters aged, wandered off to other pursuits and the twenty year Soapy Smiths saga came to a quiet end. But, aah, memories linger in our family where at one time each of our children toiled, enjoyed.

Leaving memories galore, for I was one of the early Left Handers, contributed reluctant quarters. And gathered some memories.

For Christians, the year begins January first. For the dedicated Irish, it begins 17 March, continues twelve months. Celebrated in many ways, continually. At Soapys' that meant get ready for invasion by a green army of youngsters retreating from the equally green parade on downtown Streets, they usually sunburned, badly, almost dying of thirst, for ... you guessed it ... bottomless glasses of Green Beer, cold.

For Tom, the Bar Manager had filled the basement with kegs of local beer, spent the day earlier adding green dye in each. On St Patty's day, bottled beer was not offered here, as Saint Patrick intended.

And later in the day, the local brewery began delivering more kegs, removing empties, while saving Tom the effort of adding green dye, doing it for Soapys' thirsty.

Its urinals didn't run with green beer,
but its steps and floors did.

This Irish Saints day initially began with the kitchen offered a free breakfast of toast, meat eggs to the Left Handers who could arrive in time to eat and still meet the first moment of the Parade on their favorite downtown.corner. Later ask, why does a "free" meal always stand out?

Many a short term romance began and ended at Soapys'. Most of these young boys and girls understood, this was a temporary moment and the next sunrise would welcome the real world.

Then too, on this day especially, the Chef had a 300 pound block of clear ice delivered, placed in a tub with green sides, placed in on the main floor for all to



admire, revved his chain saw, and carved some monumental statue of Irish Lore,. All who entered eventually wiped their Left Hand of this creation, for Luck.

Any arriving at Soapys' then minutes after the Parade ended found the building filled, boys and gals already sitting on the outside steps, stein of green beer in hand, trying to add to the din inside. The occasional passing police car suggesting they drink inside, restore quiet.

On Saint Patricks day next morn early hours,, and every morn, the Bar Manager Tom had one last chore. Always a work-a-holic, approaching the alcoholic stage, tally the receipts, bag the cash in a Bank Deposit canvas bag, walk to their 17th Street Bank, pull down the Night Depository Arm, slip in the proof of those Left Handers and their providers. Then walk home.