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Florida's oldest saloon built in 1878

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



FLORIDA'S OLDEST SALOON BUILT IN 1878

By HAMPTON DUNN

FERNANDINA BEACH --- Old-fashioned swinging doors welcome thirsty visitors to the Palace Saloon here. It's Florida's oldest bar, built in 1878, and has changed little since its construction nearly a century ago.

A facade behind the bar was imported from Europe at the time the saloon was established. It's made of hand-carved black oak and two busty, black-oak ladies support it. A carbide lamp hangs overhead and brings back memories of the "good old days." There are hand-painted murals on the walls, painted after the turn of the century, about 1907.

Adding to its decor, the bar has 14 pound brass cuspidors. Although heating and air-conditioning were added to the old building in recent times, neither are used much. Ceiling fans and seven-brick-thick walls provide insulation. Beveled glass windows bespeak of the age of the building.

There was a period in its history when the fancy Palace Saloon couldn't serve the hard stuff which made it famous. That was during the years of Prohibition. It was able to serve for awhile, since the law permitted proprietors to sell all the beer and liquor on hand, and the Palace owners had stocked up well, but the long, dry spell continued. For a period, the old saloon, ironically, was turned into an ice cream parlor!

Fernandina Beach is a quaint and colorful community, just loaded with history of the state's early days of existence. Once one of the state's most important ports, the historic town has been under eight flags: 1. France; 2. Spain; 3. Great Britain; 4. "Patriots" with Gen. John McIntosh as governor; 5. Green Cross of Florida under which Scotsman Gen. Sir Gregor McGregor ruled; 6. Mexico; 7. Confederate States of America, and 8. United States.

Florida's first Atlantic to Gulf railroad ran between here and Cedar Key, completed in 1861, by the Florida Railroad Company headed by David L. Yulee.

