Boss Bakery and Confectionery

Many entrepreneurs capitalized on the Klondike Gold Rush by providing necessary goods and services to the stampeders passing through on their way to the gold fields. One item that everyone needed was food, and the Boss Bakery provided food service to Skagway throughout its long history.

Brackett Trading Post

This one-story building began its history at the beginning of the Klondike Gold Rush as the Brackett Trading Post. James Brackett initially came to Skagway supplied with sheep, cattle and poultry, anticipating the profit that could be made off the high demand for these items. In the fall of 1897, he built this structure to house his prospering business.

Brackett quickly expanded beyond livestock, as revealed by this advertisement from December 1897. Profits could be made off stampeders in many areas beyond food service, and Brackett capitalized on the Klondike boom. The editor of the Skagway newspaper raved that "one of the best places in Skagway to get value for your money and to find just what you want is at J.D. Brackett's. The proprietor of this house is one of the most enterprising and best known young men among the many pushers of this booming young city."

The structure quickly became too small for Brackett's business, and he had a two-story structure built to house the expanding business. In February 1898, Brackett moved to his new location and sold this building to baker Stephen Baur.

J. D. Brackett

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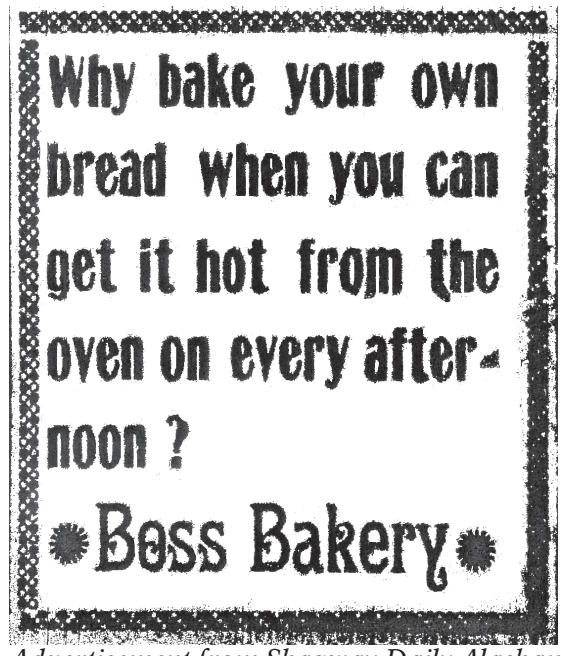
SKAGUAY : : ALASKA

Advertisement from Skagway News
December 31, 1897

Boss Bakery

Stephen Baur, the "Boss Baker," opened a restaurant specializing in fresh-baked goods just in time to catch the trade of the peak months of the Klondike stampede. An 1898 newspaper advertisement read, "For everything first class in the line of bread, cakes, pastry, call on the Boss Baker."

As the gold rush waned, Skagway's business declined, and in 1901 Baur and his family left for Seattle and sold the Boss Bakery to Fred Ronkendorf. Ronkendorf remodeled the building, adding the present double door entryway, Doric columns, and false front. Ronkendorf's Boss Bakery was known for its ice cream, fresh baked goods, and Plow's candies.



Advertisement from Skagway Daily Alaskan October 1, 1903

Later History

After losing money in mining investments, Ronkendorf left Alaska and rented the building to two young clerks, Prosper Ganty and Andrew Frandson. The pair opened the Ganty and Frandson Grocery in 1906, and this business served Skagway into the late 1930s when they retired from the business. In 1942, Malcolm Moe opened his Royal Cafe in the building.

World War II brought another "gold rush" to Skagway as the US Army arrived to build the Alaska-Canadian Highway and operate the White Pass and Yukon Route Railroad. Local businesses capitalized on this new boom, like the Royal Cafe, which became an impromptu mess hall to serve the overflow from the military mess. Moe and his help prepared meals in shifts to serve the standing-room-only crowds, and the military often sent over provisions when he ran short of supplies so he could finish feeding the troops.

During the war, a fire nearly burned the building to the ground. All but the front twenty feet of the building was destroyed, and Moe moved his business. After the war, the Skagway Emblem Club suggested that Moe turn the building into a museum, and it became the "Sourdough Harness Shop," displaying harnesses, saddles, horse bones, and blacksmith tools in the windows.

Historic Restoration and Preservation

In 1976, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park was authorized by Congress to interpret the history of the gold rush in Skagway. The National Park Service began purchasing gold rush-era buildings around Skagway from willing sellers with the intent of restoring the buildings to their gold rush-era appearance. In 1978, the Park acquired the former Boss Bakery and moved it to its current location from its original site between 4th and 5th Avenues (the lot was not included in the purchase).

The building was restored in 1985-86 using historians, architects, archaeologists, and trained restoration crews to make the building look much as it did just after the gold rush when Fred Ronkendorf owned the store.

Today, the building operates much as it did during the Gold Rush by providing goods and services to people in a hurry on their way to someplace else.

Historic Building Leasing Program

The Boss Bakery is one of over a dozen historic buildings owned by Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park. These buildings are leased to private businesses under the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Annual lease payments help offset the costs of maintaining this and other historic buildings in the park. The compatible commercial use of this structure continues Skagway's long tradition as a bustling center of business activity.

For more information about Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, please visit the Visitor Center at 2nd and Broadway. For more information on Skagway's historic district, ask for the "Skagway Walking Tour" brochure and the "Gold Rush Buildings Restored By the National Park Service" brochure.

Other building histories like this one are available at various National Park Service-owned buildings around Skagway or at the Visitor Center.