



Photo courtesy of Steve Kovach

McGuire's Tavern

101 McGuire Drive, McGrath, AK (907) 524-3582
62°57'26"N 155°35'46"W

License Issued: April 15, 1943 to Jack McGuire

CLOSED 2019

Amenities: TV, juke box, darts, pool table, food, occasional live entertainment, liquor store

Web site: None.

History and Notoriety: I am grateful to the late Sally Jo Collins of the Tochak Historical Society in McGrath who provided much of what follows.

Dave Clough opened the Clough Roadhouse in the relocated townsite of McGrath in 1937. In 1942, the U.S. Army activated the McGrath airfield. That same year, Dave opened the McGrath Tavern next door to his roadhouse. Dave and his partner Einar Carlsen ran the tavern for just a year before selling it to Jack McGuire.

Jack McGuire was a half-Irish, half Blackfoot Indian who was born in Montana in 1895. A very large man, his appetite for liquor and gambling is legendary. On one occasion, he froze his hand because he had passed out in front of the tavern. During one of his 'all drinks on the house' parties, he lost the tavern in a card game. By morning, he had won it back. He always wore moccasins and carried a wad of cash (20s, 50s, 100s, 1000s).

Even if he lost it all, he would continue playing and write an I.O.U. when he finally stopped.

By 1947, the McGrath Tavern had become McGuire's Tavern, with Jack the sole proprietor. A fire in 1962 destroyed the roadhouse next door, but the tavern survived. Jack decorated the walls with pictures of cowboys and Indians, as well as fur pelts.

Writer Cotton Moore had a column in *The Peninsula Clarion* he called *Aurora Bull or Else*. In 1975, he told a story about visiting McGuire's Tavern. Jack McGuire had a routine of taking a nap at 2 PM and would tell his customers "You boys just help yourselves...I gotta' take my afternoon nap." Jack didn't have a cash register. Instead, he had a towel folded neatly with his denominations of cash stacked on it for all to see. The cash pile grew as Jack was sleeping, and upon awakening, he would stroll in, rub his eyes, and ask "You boys enjoy yourselves?"

In 1970, Jack was diagnosed with cancer. He sold the bar to Robert "Bob" Magnuson, who had just sold the McGrath Roadhouse (now Joe's Bar) to Joe and Caroline Degnan. Jack moved to Bethel, but by the end of the year, the pain had become too much, and he took his own life.

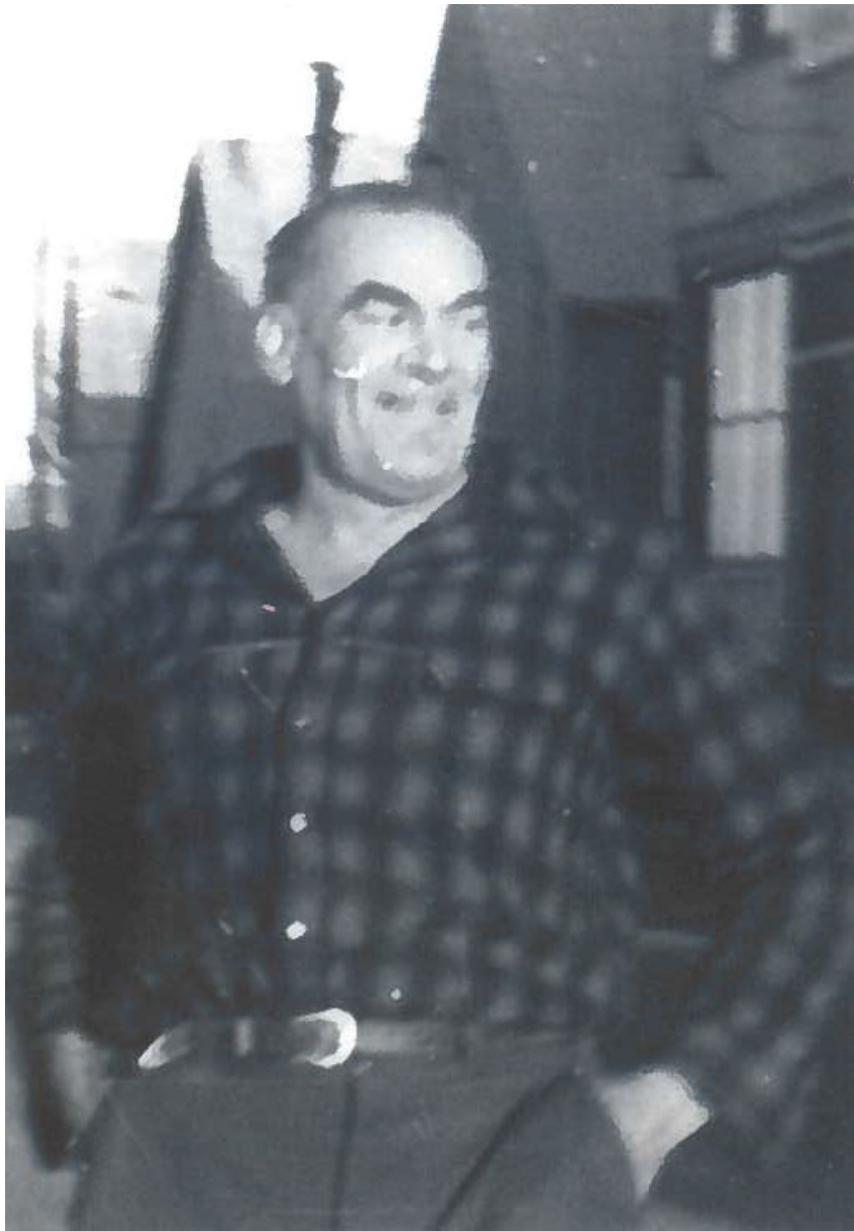
The first Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race was in 1973. The early years saw many of the mushers taking their mandatory 24-hour break in McGrath, and spending much of that time at McGuire's. Musher Myron Angstrom recalled those early years and has written that "...at least two Yukon River racers probably lost the Iditarod by staying too long at McGrath, and most of that time was spent at McGuire's. By too long I mean a day or so."

In a 1999 article about McGrath and the Iditarod in the *Anchorage Daily News*, author Lew Freedman described the tavern and the changing times. "McGuire's Tavern -- with walls decorated in Iditarod memorabilia, a nude painting, and a borderline-obscene framed award presented to the bartender by the 'Horny Bastards of the Upper Kuskokwim' still operates. But it was not a gathering point for mushers this week."

Bob Magnuson sold the tavern to his brother William Magnuson and Allan "Eep" Anderson Sr. in 1979. Eep became the sole owner in 2000. His wife Dorothy "Pudden" would entertain the patrons with her singing and guitar playing until she passed in 2009.

Visiting McGuire's Tavern: Like Joe's Bar, McGuire's Tavern has undergone some exterior renovations in recent years. It is known by the locals as the Anderson family bar and still has the same old charm, albeit without the rowdiness of the Jack McGuire days. All of the major holidays are celebrated here, and the first week of Iditarod is still a busy time.

Author's Note: Allan "Eep" Anderson Sr. died in 2018. In his will, he left the tavern to his son Allen Jr. However, the ABC Board protested, and the bar was in limbo when the COVID-19 pandemic happened. The tavern has not reopened.



Jack McGuire 1895 - 1970.
Photo courtesy of Tochak Historical Society.



Jack McGuire.
Photo courtesy of Tochak Historical Society.



McGuire's Tavern in the mid 1960's. The door on the left was the liquor store, door on the right the bar entrance. Photo courtesy of Tochak Historical Society.



McGuire's Tavern (left) and McGrath Roadhouse.
Photo courtesy of Tochak Historical Society.