



Photo courtesy of Nathan Caldwell

Cordova Hotel Bar (a.k.a. The Co-Ho)

First Street (Between A and B Streets), Cordova, AK (907) 424-3388

60°32'39"N 145°45'30"W

License Issued: 1934 to Gertrude Rody

CLOSED 2018

Amenities: Pool table, café, liquor store

Web Site: None

History and Notoriety: Frank Castle and Harry Thiested built the Cordova Lodging House next door to the MacCormac (Alaskan) Hotel in 1908. The Northern Café opened on the first floor that same year. A third floor was added, just like the Alaskan, in the summer of 1910. Gertrude Rody, originally from Oklahoma and living in Anchorage in

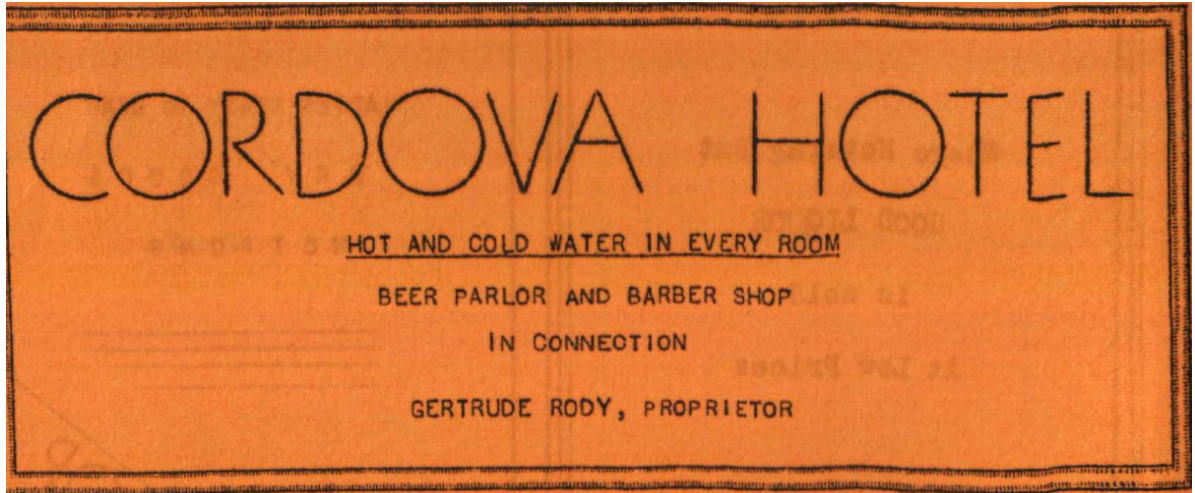
1930, moved to Cordova and bought the lodging house, which by this time was known as the Cordova Hotel. She opened a beer parlor and barber shop on the first floor, and in 1935, she renamed it the Cordova House. By 1940, she had sold the entire operation to Steve and Harry Nicholas, who chose to bring back the Cordova Hotel name. The brothers, both born in Turkey, split the duties with Steve managing the hotel and Harry the beer parlor. By 1947, Harry had become the sole owner. He sold the business to Christopher Theodore in 1960, who in turn sold it to Jay Harry Hunison and Budd Vigue in 1965.

Jay Hunison preferred to be called “Hard Luck Harry.” Originally from Canada, he was a pilot, gambler, and poet. He owned other night clubs in Anchorage and also the Big D Bar in Big Delta (see Interior section). He married Edna, also from Canada, who was a professional singer, guitar and banjo player. Edna performed many times over the years at the Co-Ho bar. Ads from the 1970’s invited folks to come to the bar for “live entertainment” and “dancing.” Vigue also owned bars in Fairbanks and in Washington State. In 1984, Hunison and Vigue sold the Co-Ho to William Reid.

The 1980’s were wild and crazy times in Cordova. The fishing was good and so was the money. There were many bars in town, and the Co-Ho was very popular. The good times dampened in 1988 when the *EXXON VALDEZ* ran aground and spilled millions of gallons of oil into Prince William Sound. The spill had a profound effect on the fisheries and the fishermen, including Co-Ho owner Bill Reid, who was also a gillnet fisherman. He sold the bar back to Hunison and Vigue in 1996. Later that same year, the bar was sold to Delbert and Dorene Wickham. Delbert died in 2010, and Dorene is the current owner.

Visiting the Co-Ho Bar: Don’t be dissuaded by the exterior. The Co-Ho is still a popular place in town, for the bar as well as the café. Customers frequently hop between the Co-Ho and the Alaskan, which is next door. The 4th of July and the Copper River Wild Salmon Days in late July are popular times at the Co-Ho.

Author’s Note: Dorene Wickham was unable to pay federal taxes, and the Co-Ho became the property of the City of Cordova. In 2018, the Co-Ho was declared surplus and was sold to the Cordova Telephone Company in 2019. The building was demolished on December 4, 2019.



Alaska Directory and Gazetteer 1934-1935



Lou Jacobin's Guide to Alaska – 1971



Jay "Hard Luck Harry" Hunison
1916 – 2003

Photo from *Alaskan Barroom Ballads* by Jay "Hard Luck Harry" Hunison



Photo by the author – 2015



Photo by the author – 2015



Photo by the author – 2015



Photo property of the Cordova Historical Society – 2018



At the Kayak Cafe, Jane Spencer displays the highly prized Co-Ho Bar Bell that she won in bidding for artifacts from the famous old building.

Photo by Dick Shellhorn for *The Cordova Times*