



Source: Historical Society of Morro Bay. Happy Jack and Friends, mid 1920s

"Happy Jack's": Then and Now

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Although it's gone through several names and multiple owners, "Happy Jack's Tavern" – now "The Siren" – has been a bar in the same location longer than any other type of business in Morro Bay. The bar's original owner, Jack Williams, opened the tavern in 1926 during prohibition. The building was probably built around the turn of the century, and the bar got its name because of Jack's smile and good nature.

Jack originally came from the farming community of Burrton, Kansas, and he lived in a stucco house on North Main Street that he built himself. His father was a black man who married a white woman and was lynched in Burrton because of that, after Jack was conceived but before he was born.

Given when it opened, it's likely that Happy Jack's Tavern continued to operate during the prohibition years 1920-1933, possibly by bootlegging its liquor. Canadian whiskey arrived on ships that offloaded their contents at several places along California's central coast, including Morro Bay.

Jack sold the bar to Milton Rohrberg just before World War II began. The business undoubtedly served the troops stationed in SLO County and the owner cashed thousands of paychecks, which required a security guard on payday. Apparently, there were lookouts on the roof spotting for enemy ships.

Before and during the war, Morro Bay was a wild town, and Happy Jacks was apparently a rough place. Heavyweight boxing matches were held in a ring behind the bar on Friday nights. When fights broke out in the bar, the participants – men or women – had to return the following Sunday afternoon to duke it out. According to Dave Tope, owner of the bar for over two decades, Happy Jack's also served as an unofficial city hall before Morro Bay became a city. There used to be a telephone connecting the county courthouse to the bar.

Under Tope's ownership, Happy Jack's was expanded into an adjacent building, and an outdoor patio and restaurant were added. The bar has a long history of providing live music on weekends dating back to the 1970's. Casey Kelso, current owner of Legends bar, located on the opposite corner, also owned Happy Jacks for 13 years and renamed it "The Fuel Dock."

The musical tradition was expanded under the current owners, Paul and Kelly Boisclair, who bought the bar in 2014 and renamed it "The Siren." But you can still find the old "Happy Jack's" sign in the bar and the "Fuel Dock," sign on the patio.