

## **Sam Adler**

**By Diane Sterne**

A prospector's hunger for gold was frequently shadowed by his thirst for alcohol. The two seemed to go hand in hand. Savvy entrepreneurs made lots of money fulfilling that appetite. Sam Adler was such a businessman. He was also a prospector.

Samuel Adler was born on November 24, 1831 in Baltimore, Maryland. At the age of 18, in Sacramento, California, he had his first taste of bartending. In 1861 he partnered with future brother-in-law, William Prosper Barry, as owners of a saloon in Quesnel Forks (spelled Quesnelle back then). They also undertook the challenge of constructing a 200-foot wooden, foot traffic bridge over the south fork of Quesnel. Twenty-five cents was charged per person to cross the bridge and \$1 for pack horses or mules. First Nations People were allowed to cross for free. Quesnel Forks was the supply center for the Cariboo Gold Rush. The partners were greatly enriched in their venture. William Barry chose to stay in Quesnel. Sam moved on.

In 1863, Jewish Sam, married Roman Catholic, Mary Augustine Barry of Ireland. They had two children.

Sam and another brother-in-law, Thomas Barry, found themselves in Barkerville operating the Gazelle Saloon. This saloon became infamous in 1868 when a fire started above it, incinerating the entire town of Barkerville. Sam and Thomas lost an estimated \$18,000 in the fire and left town.

Not ones to lick their wounds, Sam and Thomas carried on and purchased 150 Mile House in 1869. A few years earlier, Frank Laumeister and friends purchased 23 two hump camels from Arizona to use for packing items into the Cariboo during the gold rush. They believed the animals would be able to carry larger loads and travel for days without water, only feeding on local vegetation. Reality proved the camels' feet weren't suited for the rocky terrain. They also discovered camels stink and are vicious. After numerous complaints, the government banned them from the Cariboo Trail. Laumeister and his partners released the camels. Some were captured and kept on farms, some died from the harsh winter weather and at least one was hunted and shot. Sam purchased the camel meat to sell to hungry prospectors. Even in death, the camels smelled, and no one would buy the meat. He then tried (unsuccessfully) to disguise it and serve it to his guests at 150 Mile House. Sam learned the hard way a camel will always be a grumpy, humpy, dromedary no one wants to eat.

In 1875, during the Cassiar mining boom, Sam ran a saloon at Dease Creek called the Saloon of Barry and Adler. In 1881, Sam and his wife were living in Bird Cage Walk in Victoria, B.C.

Word of the 1885 Granite Creek gold rush, enticed Sam to the bustling town where he opened the Cariboo House. One event that occurred during Sam's time as the proprietor stands out. In many gold towns, men held "stag dances" because women were rare. During one such dance, a man bringing mail knocked at the door with a young woman. These are the words of Walton Holmes as he remembered that day: "They asked for Sam Adler and the lady wanted to know if

he had a room for her. He said he had. The door opened into the bar room and the stairs started up to the bedrooms, from the bar room. The dance was going on in the inside room. You could see the other room from the door. Sam took the lady's grip and led her up the stairs. The dance stopped. You could have heard a pin drop; everything was so quiet. Then Adler came downstairs, and everybody wanted to know who the lady was. He said he did not know. Pretty soon the dancing started again, and the lady came downstairs and wanted to know if she could join them. Everybody wanted to dance with her. She took one or the other on till supper time. We had supper and everyone was on their best behavior. Not a word spoken but a preacher could not listen to. As soon as supper was over the girl jumped up on the table, threw off her dress, she was in men's clothes and it was Sam Adler's son, but he made a dandy girl."

Sam spent the remainder of his life travelling between British Columbia and the United States. Forever the entrepreneur, he dipped his toe in countless enterprises resulting in fortunes made and lost. He claimed when in the Cariboo, he rocked enough gold for his wife's wedding ring. In Granite Creek, he rocked gold for his daughter's wedding ring. In Atlin, he rocked gold for his grand daughter's ring. Sam died of pneumonia in Reno, Nevada in April, 1908, only three months after his wife's passing in Victoria, B.C.