

Basic History of the Sportsman's Tavern

The history and stories behind the Sportsman's Taverns comes together from several directions. For information on how the land was obtained and the initial construction of the building see the section identified as Biography of Paul Parish, since he is one that obtain the land at the Moonridge Cutoff in a very unusual way. Biographies of several of the people involved with the original Sportsman's Tavern have also been included to give a fuller understanding of people and the time.

Andy Devine and Dick Probert had a flying school at the end of World War II (see their biography section for additional information) . Anyone on the G.I. bill from World War II could take the classes, so there were a lot of veterans that took up the hobby of flying. At one time the Probert-Devine Aviation Company had as many as 19 planes with 17 instructors. Their main base of operation was at Whitman Airfield in the San Fernando Valley area. They decided to expand the operation to have three different airfields to fly to as a destination for their aviation school activities. The second location was an airfield that is very close to what is now Edwards Air Force base. The third location was the Big Bear City Airport. It was here that Devine became reacquainted with Hank Halstead, since Hank's orchestra played at many of the Hollywood functions that Devine had attended.

Devine and Probert bought into the Big Bear City Airport which was already owned by Hank Halstead and his co-owner Etienne Noir (*Little is known about this French pilot other than he was involved with several other smaller airports in the Southern California area*).

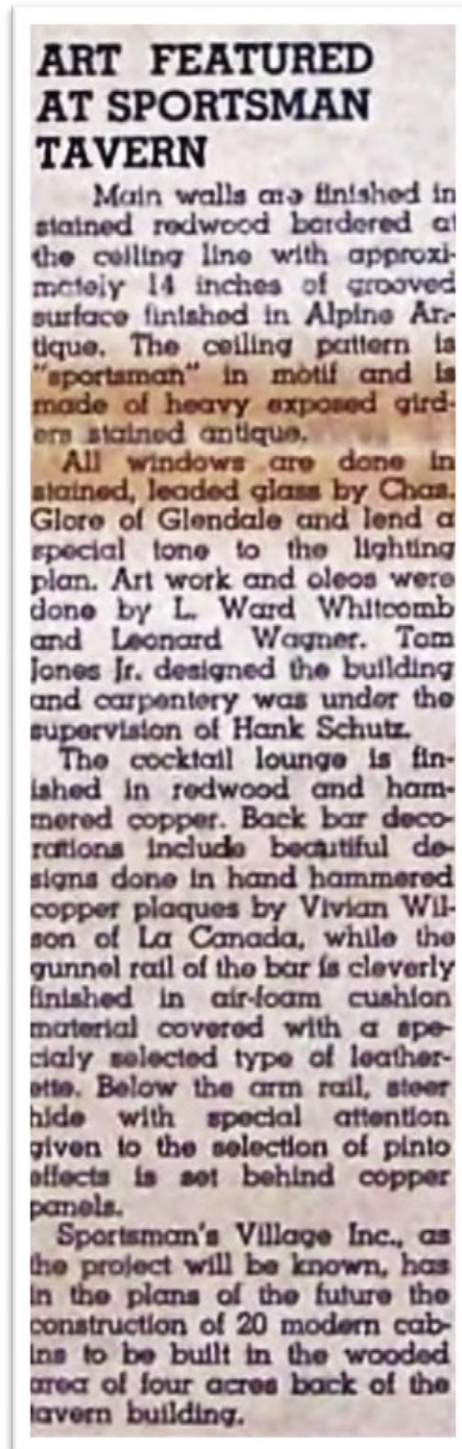


It was through an in town connection (Big Bear City) that the trio of Devine, Probert and Halstead met up with Paul Parish and Perry Warren. Parish and Warren were into building supplies business at the end of WW II. They were most likely were working with Ross Dana the contractor for the new building going up at the airport.

Parish and Warren had trouble with the Office of Price Control at the end of WW II and use what materials and profit they had to start building a restaurant (see Paul Parish Biography for additional information). They were behind on many of their bills in completing their restaurant, the Sportsman's Tavern. It was most likely Parish who was a flyer himself that approached the trio and asked for financial assistance.

Devine and Probert most likely thought that it would be nice to have a place for the student pilots to dine. Parish and Warren needed \$10,000 that was supplied by the trio from the airport. In Devine's mind he may have also thought that he could fly his Hollywood friends up to Big Bear since many of the movies were still being filmed in Big Bear and Cedar Lake. These people might also need a place to stay, thus the idea of building 20 cabins behind the Sportsman's Tavern was conceived, although there is no record of them ever being built.

Two cabins were already under construction on the lot, with Parish and his family in one and Warren and his family in the other (*see Parish Biography*). So Devine, Probert, Halstead, Parish and Warren became the owners of the Sportsman's Village Company. Obviously they used Devine's name to help in advertising and to drawing in customers, so the name of the restaurant was unofficially named "Andy Devine's Sportsman's Tavern".



ART FEATURED AT SPORTSMAN TAVERN

Main walls are finished in stained redwood bordered at the ceiling line with approximately 14 inches of grooved surface finished in Alpine Artique. The ceiling pattern is "sportsman" in motif and is made of heavy exposed girders stained antique.

All windows are done in stained, leaded glass by Chas. Gore of Glendale and lend a special tone to the lighting plan. Art work and oleos were done by L. Ward Whitcomb and Leonard Wagner. Tom Jones Jr. designed the building and carpentry was under the supervision of Hank Schutz.

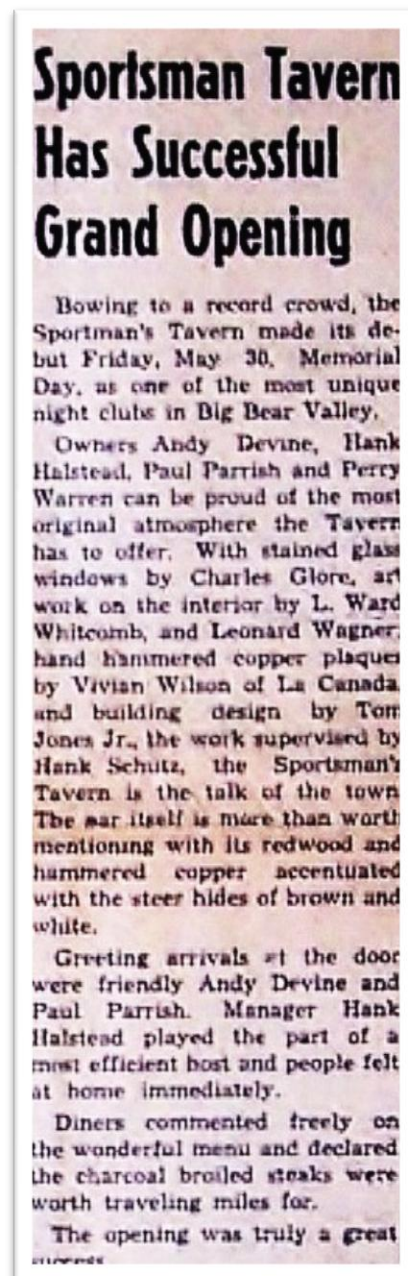
The cocktail lounge is finished in redwood and hammered copper. Back bar decorations include beautiful designs done in hand hammered copper plaques by Vivian Wilson of La Canada, while the gunnel rail of the bar is cleverly finished in air-foam cushion material covered with a specially selected type of leatherette. Below the arm rail, steer hide with special attention given to the selection of pinto effects is set behind copper panels.

Sportsman's Village Inc., as the project will be known, has in the plans of the future the construction of 20 modern cabins to be built in the wooded area of four acres back of the tavern building.

The design of the Sportsman's Tavern building is unusual with a restaurant being two stories. It is unknown as to how this design came about. One story is that this building was initially designed to be a building to be used as a hardware store but later changed to a restaurant. This was at a time that the Sportsman's Village was owned solely by Parish and Warren. Either way the restaurant patrons most likely did not like to go up and down stairs for seating and this layout also had to be hard on the servers as well. To help out with the staff a second kitchen (most likely a warm up kitchen) and dumb waiter was created on the second floor. But still it is an unusual design. One thought that is that the design was originally conceived to have a "back room" for gaming. See *Gambling in Big Bear and at the Sportsman's* for additional information.

In any event the restaurant was opened in May of 1947. Halstead was the major individual that was managing the restaurant at that time. Devine and Parish were there for the grand opening of the restaurant. Probert was more interested in their aviation school and just plain flying and was not mentioned as being in attendance. Also it should be noted that Perry Warren was also absent at the opening. Perry's involvement appears to have been minimal.

An interesting point from the newspaper article is that the reporter refers to the place "*as one of the most unique night clubs in Big Bear Valley*". This gives the impression that entertainment was a more important point and that gambling may have been there from the beginning.

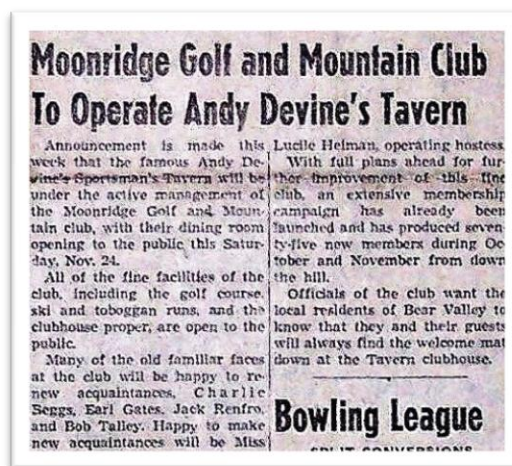


It is generally accepted that Halstead was not a good business man. Various bills had run up to an amount some where between \$90,000 to \$100,000. *(These figures are substantiated by two sources- Wesley Parish, Paul Parish's son and Timothy Devine, Andy Devine's son)*. Most of the bills were for food and liquor, two substances that can be easily resold and or consumed without any accountability. Various staff members (chefs and bartenders) may have been taking items. Halstead was the individual that was being held responsible for the loss. In order to save the place Devine had to sell several pieces of property in the L.A. and in the Big Bear area to make good on the losses. In the case of Paul Parish he just lost all of his interest in the restaurant. In any case it was at this time (1948) that both Warren and Halstead left the business and the area. Little is known of what happened to with these men and their families after this time. It is known that Devine and Halstead did not leave on friendly terms. Similarly Warren and Parish had their problems and did not part on friendly terms as well.

As can be seen by the History of Sportsman's Tavern Timeline section, a series of general managers, dining room managers, chefs, musicians and bartenders came and went in quick succession. Although Devine may have owned the building, the restaurant business was being operated under several different managements, but always under the same name. In 1948 Paul Parish attempted to operate the restaurant for a year. Details on this information can be found under a section titled Biography Paul Parish. It was in 1948 when the restaurant was under Parish's control that gambling for certain was being conducted. It is unknown as to when the gambling started or when it stopped. From an interview with Wesley Parish, Paul's son, he remembers as a child seeing two men carrying the slot machines up the stairs to the back room. See *Gambling in Big Bear and at the Sportsman's* for additional information.

Devine, who's main interest in the Big Bear area was for flying, trap shooting and working in the film industry, had lost enthusiasm for the Sportsman's Tavern by this time. It just seemed to him that the restaurant was always costing more money. The restaurant had always been a financial drain for him. He personally had been involved with the restaurant from 1947 to 1951.

On November 23, 1951 the news article on the right appeared in the LimeLight. In an attempt to cut costs the Sportsman's Tavern restaurant business became part of the Moonridge Golf and Mountain Club (MGMC), although the Devines still owned the building. They (MGMC) brought in their own manager by the name of Lucile Heiman.



Later on a husband and wife team that had worked on and off at the Sportsman's Tavern in various capacities came back to manage the establishment after Heiman had left. Their names were Mike and Rosemary Pittenger.

MGMC was basically a real estate development company that sold residential real estate, controlled the golf course and used the Sportsman's Tavern as a club house. This business connection went on from 1951 to 1954.

Various other management personnel worked the restaurant businesses from 1954 to 1957. A husband and wife team by the names of Harry and Toni Wham attempted to run the business along with another local restaurant in town known as the Pine Cone. (*The Pine Cone was a restaurant and bar owned by Barney Ostrow and was located on the corner of Village Drive and Bartlett Road.*) This combination also did not work out well.

The restaurant and building was up for sale in 1959 thru 1960. The ad at the right was from Aug. 4 1960. A more interesting point to the ad is the comment in small print in the middle of the ad, “Includes Two Knotty Pine 2 Bedroom Houses with Fireplaces”.

The two knotty pine houses were most likely the original cabins built by Paul Parish in the late 1940s. There are no ads in the local papers to suggest that the restaurant was open for business at that time.



It appears that the doors remained closed from 1959 to 1967, when it was again reopened still under the name of the Sportsman’s Tavern. Devine had removed his name from the restaurant. *(It should be noted that there is some verbal information that the building and property had been sold by Dorothy Devine to a Dr. Woodrow Meier in the mid 1960s. Dr. Meier still owns the property and business as of this date).* The new operators only lasted the one year,

It was during this period that Devine family would come up to Big Bear to enjoy skiing with local skiing celebrity Tommi Tyndall. The Devine family would stay at one of the two original cabins on the Sportsman’s property that were originally built by Parish and Warren in the late 1940s. One year when there was a major snow storm and the Tyndall’s opened their newest ski venture to a very large unexpected crowd. *(This new area was known as Snow Summit.)* They needed kitchen utensils and dining room tables and chairs for their restaurant. The Devines helped out by raiding the already closed Sportsman’s Tavern for all the kitchen and dining room equipment for Tyndall’s use. In return Tommi Tyndall gave the Devines free ski passes for life.



It was somewhere in the mid to late 1960s that ownership of the restaurant was turned over to Dr. Woodrow Meier who has retained ownership of the building to this day.

In 1967 the restaurant again was reopened *"after being closed for 8 years"* by a Michael and Betty Kilpatrick. The restaurant was operating under the name of the Sportsman's Tavern for the last time. They attempted to change the venue from a steak house to serving both American and Mexican food. This last only a couple of years.

**Sportsman's Tavern
Sets Opening Date**

After being closed for eight years, the Sportsman's Tavern under the owner-manager team of Mike and Betty Kilpatrick will open to Bear Valley residents and visitors in July.

"Grand opening is actually July 14 and 15," Mike, who will also be the chef, said this week. "For now our plans call for keeping the doors open 7 days a week."

The tavern, formerly a popular gathering place, has been closed for 8 years. But plans of the new operators call for a "young and energetic staff," steaks, lobsters, with serving hours 11 until 2 for

luncheons, and from 5 p.m. until 2 a.m. for dinners.

"We'll also cater to special parties and banquets on arrangement," Mike said.

Bear Valley

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Advertisements for the Sportsman's Tavern continued through 1968, and for the summer of 1969. There were no special news articles on the restaurant. In November a real estate ad appeared that is shown below. Note that the ad reads that "Seller will include buffalo at the end of sale". This most likely led to the restaurant's next name, "Buffalo Inn". Note that building looks very similar to what is currently being used as the Captain's Anchorage.



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Another husband and wife team by the name of Peter and Rose Wagner operated the restaurant under the name of the "Buffalo Inn" from 1969 to 1970.

In May of 1971 the restaurant was then operated by a Dr. James Milliron under the name of the "Stein 'N' Sirloin", before finally being operated as the Captain's Anchorage in 1972. See separate sections for information on these other restaurant operations.