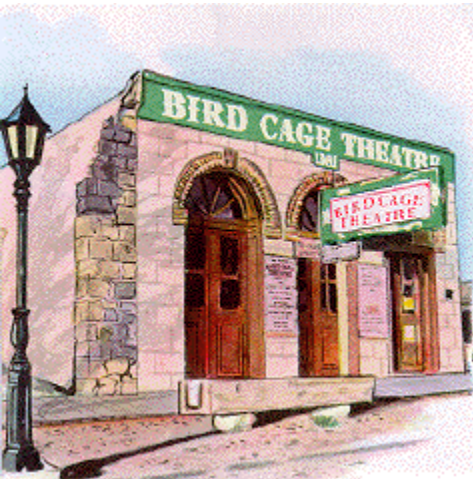


THE BIRD CAGE THEATRE STORY

The world famous Bird Cage Theatre, also referred to as The Bird Cage Opera House Saloon. This was a fancy way in the 1880's of describing a combination saloon, gambling hall and a house of ill repute. Well, that was the Bird Cage Theatre and it was known across America by its unreputable reputation. In 1882, the New York Times referred to the Bird Cage as, "the Roughest, Bawdiest, and most Wicked night spot between Basin Street and the Barbary Coast. For nine years it never closed its doors, operating 24 hours a day. During this period, 16 gun and knife fights took some 26 lives. There are still 140 bullet holes through-out the building, marking the ceilings, walls, and floors.



Many famous happenings occurred in the barroom, which is indicated by the many bullet holes, but one of the most outstanding occurrences was the brutal killing of the lovely lady of the evening, Margarita. She was sitting on the lap of gambler Billy Milgreen when suddenly Billy's regular girl, another Bird Cage trollop by the name of Gold Dollar, entered the room holding a double edged stiletto. In a fit of fury, Gold Dollar proceeded to cut Margarita's heart out. She almost had the job done when she heard that the Marshall was coming. She then ran through the Bird Cage and out the back door, covered in blood. No murder charges were filed for lack of the murder weapon which she mysteriously disposed of as she fled the back of the Bird Cage. Ironically, 101 years later this stiletto was found behind the building and is now on display inside.

"DOC" Holliday dealt Faro from time to time at the Bird Cage Theatre. One

night Johnny Ringo, who hated "DOC" with a passion, was passing "DOC'S" table. When "DOC" slurred, "care to buck the tiger, Johnny? It's the gustiest game in town." Ringo wheeled around, removing his bandana and said to "DOC", "care to grab to the other end of this bandanna, this is the deadliest game in town?" "DOC" stood and smiled, "sure Johnny, I'm your huckleberry and this may be my lucky day." When two men grab opposite ends of a bandanna, they fire at each other, at point blank range, generally killing both. Ringo was so drunk and at the last second Curly Bill grabbed at Ringo's gun and yelled, "Hell "DOC" he's drunk!" as both men fired and missed. "DOC" also in a drunken stupor answered, "Bronchos, I drink more by 10:00 AM, than he can all day." "DOC" then walked off. This event is known as the handkerchief dual and it took place in the Bird Cage Theatre, between the Faro Table and the Orchestra Pit. The ladies of the night or soiled doves, worked the customers of the Bird Cage 24 hours a day. The ladies plied their trade in cribs suspended from the ceiling in the building. There are 14 cribs which line the side of the gambling hall in the Bird Cage, 7 on each side of the room. The ladies would close the drapes to entertain their clients with champagne, kisses and other favors of the trade.

The hand painted stage and orchestra pit, with its massive Grand Piano, still stands in tribute to the many great entertainers that once performed in the Bird Cage. You can almost and sometimes can hear the songs, laughter and the music of the great entertainers who once performed to the roar of the crowd. Greats such as Eddy Foy, Lotta Crabtree, Lily Langtree, and Lola Montez, were just a few of the famous performers of the past. One afternoon, just after the Bird Cage opened in 1881, Arthur J. Lamb was standing at the bar with the great Eddy Foy. Lamb turned to Foy and said, "WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS ELITE THEATRE EDDIE" and Foy answered out of the side of his mouth, in his traditional way, "REMINDS ME OF A COFFIN, LONG AND NARROW." Lamb laughed and said, "WELL IT REMINDS ME OF A BIRD CAGE, YOU SEE THOSE GIRLS IN THEIR SCANTY COLORED COSTUMES, WITH THE FEATHERS IN THEIR HAIR, SERVING KISSES AND CHAMPAGNE AND GIVING OTHER FAVORS, THEIR NOT WEARING WEDDING RINGS.", as he pointed to the cribs overhanging the casino, and finished, "SO THAT IS WHY THIS PLACE REMINDS MY OF A BIRD CAGE. AND THOSE WOMEN, EDDIE, ARE LIKE BIRDS IN A GILDED CAGE, THEY PROBABLY DON'T HAVE A CHANCE" Foy laughed again, and said, "SOUNDS LIKE A TITLE TO A GOOD SONG." Lamb began to write the words on a napkin, from the bar. Later that afternoon Lamb sat at the Bird Cage piano putting his new song to music as Eddie Foy approached and listened. He said to Lamb, "THAT'S ONE HELL OF A SONG, BUT NOT A SONG FOR ME, THAT'S A SONG THAT ONLY A WOMAN SHOULD SING." A short time later Arthur J. Lamb gave the song to a beautiful young unknown female singer, who was booked at the Bird Cage. She sang the song that night from the Elite Theatre stage. The roaring crowd brought her back eight times, it is said. The very next day, William Hutchinson, changed the opera houses' name from the Elite to The Bird Cage Theatre. That night launched the career of the most famous star in the history of the American Stage, her name was Lillian Russel and the song, "She's Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage", which was referred by many as the song that Foy couldn't sing. The Bird in the Gilded Cage became one of the most popular songs of the nineteenth

century.

The walls on the back stage are covered with photos and stories of the many entertainers that performed at the Bird Cage. The walls on the gambling casino are covered with photos and documents of the famous people who lived in Tombstone when it was a wild and wicked town. Recently, six more rooms below the Bird Cage were opened to the public. This area had been closed and sealed off since 1889, it is 80% the size of the buildings upper floor, this is truly an extended the journey into the historic past of the Bird Cage. These rooms reveal an untouched site from over a hundred and five years ago. You can now visit the lower level, by means of the old back stage stairs. To the large private poker room with its' small bar and fixtures, which accommodated the private high rollers poker game. The game seated seven players and a house dealer. The minimum buy in was \$1,000.00 The game played around the clock for, 8 years 5 months and three days. Some of Americas' most famous business men such as, Adolph Busch and George Randolph Hearst, played along side Diamond Jim Brady, Bat Masterson, Dick Clark, Doc Holliday, and a host of other famous gamblers of the old west. \$10,000,000.00 exchanged hands over that 8 year period: and the house took 10%. At the far end of the poker room the old iron gate opens into the liquor and wine room, retaining its' wine and whiskey casts. The different bordello rooms reveal those unspoken visions of the ladies of the night and their men clientele. The ruffled-up beds and scattered clothes are real. The original faded carpets and drapes and unique furniture are complimented by the different articles of a bygone brothel. It was in the end room where Wyatt Earp And Josephine Sarah Marcus carried on their illicit love affaire; while she was working at the Bird Cage. You can see her original license, for a lady of the night, There are several thousand other exciting things one can see throughout this building. The Bird Cage Theatre is Tombstone's most authentic attraction and one of the west's most famous landmarks. A realistic trip, which is a step back into time to the old west. The Bird Cage is an experience you will never forget. One truly would miss Tombstone, if you were to miss this famous landmark.