

## 100 Bars in 100 Days

Hops MacBarley's 2012  
Key West Bar Boondoggle  
"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

### BAR 80:

Captain Tony's Saloon  
[www.capttonyssaloon.com](http://www.capttonyssaloon.com)  
428 Greene Street  
Thursday 10/4, 9:00 pm

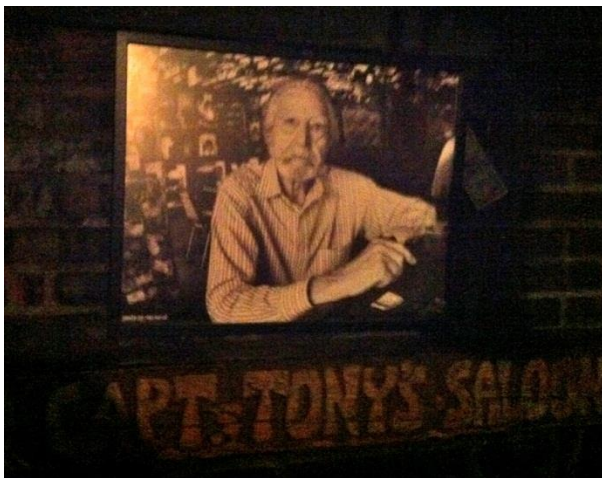
Capt. Tony's Amber Bock (draft) \$5.25

I could try to be polite, respect tradition, admire Key West character and all that, but screw it, this place is a dive. And, if you've been paying attention as the *Peace, Love & IPA Tour* has gone along, I like dives. I feel at home. I can wear scrubby clothes. I can belch and break wind with impunity. Ahhh, sweet underbelly. The Tour hasn't had a nice dose of underbelly since, hmmm, I guess it would be Dons' Place.

I never knew Tony Tarracino, the iconic character for whom this bar is named, but his legend is legendary. His storied past is filled with stories. His fame is infamous and his infamy is famous.

Strangely, he was not a Conch. He was born and raised in New Jersey but, at age 32, he ran afoul of Tony Soprano and friends and wound up one night as a battered pulp, left for dead in the Newark city dump. He somehow

dodged that end and skedaddled to Key West, where he even spent a term as mayor. Check out his [Wikipedia page](#). A dude has to be a Dude to have his own Wiki page.



Even though he sold the bar in 1989, I think Tony played a large role I keeping it a dive. His political motive was to keep KW safe for "eccentrics and renegades." He was not a shopping mall kinda guy; he was in favor of rough edges.



When I was on my 2010 New England Brew Pub Tour, I was sitting in a log cabin of a bar called The Shed in northern Vermont, enjoying my in-house-brewed National IPA (8% ABV) and serenely checking out the eclectic wall decorations. The mounted deer head with the paper bag over its snout got my attention, but what stopped me cold was the framed photo right next to it. For a second, I merely thought, "Huh, It's Captain Tony." But then I remembered I was 1700 miles from the Conch Republic, and I thought, "Hey! It's Captain Tony!!" The caption of the photo identified him as *The Salt of Key West*.



I called the barkeep over and asked where he had gotten the photo. "Dunno," he shrugged in his bland New England hick way, "Owner must have got it somewhere when he went on vacation." Hmm, I wonder where he went?



The outside of Captain Tony's Saloon looks tidy enough: the bright yellow walls, and the big fish hangin' there being all fishy. The inside, though, tells a different tale. You look around the bar and it just screams "shabby." Bras are stapled all over one wall, and I mean a **lot** of them. I had to wonder how long it had been since some them had cradled breasts. And I'm sure they were never laundered before they were hung up – and certainly not since. Yahh.

Around the whole bar, thousands of business cards and calling cards are stapled, taped and stuck on just about every inch of pole, beam, and rafter. It made me wonder what the oldest one was, or the one from farthest away, or if anyone I knew long ago was pinned up there somewhere. So, I decided not to check.

There were only a few empty bar stools, so I took one on the side near the pool room. The barkeep filled me in on the house brew deal: a heavy duty 22-ounce cup of Captain Tony's Amber Bock cost \$5.25 (not bad), and if I

keep the cup, they'll refill it for only \$4.25. Good enough, my good man! Fill one up for me!

I apparently had pulled up a stool in Police Patchland. The ceiling and posts were thickly adorned with shoulder patches of first responders from far and wide; New Jersey State Trooper, Philadelphia Police, Providence PD, and even Flossmoor IL were just a few represented.



A solo guitarist was just finishing up his final song as I took my first swig. Good timing, Hoppo. This cued the departure of several of the patrons. I thought about following their lead, but I decided to be true to my heavy duty CTAB, and wander around some more.

This, of course, was the real Hemingway Boozed Here venue. They make that very clear on their signage. They don't directly say, "Hey, screw that place, Ernie did his drinking in this building," but they do stress that this was the location of the *original* Sloppy Joe's, from 1933 (immediately after Prohibition ended) to 1937.



Now, here's *my* question: Hemingway was only 38 when Sloppy's relocated. He lived to be 62. Mighta lived longer if he didn't shoot himself smack in the head. But, where did he do his swillin' and swiggin' from 1937 to

1961? Hmm? I doubt he just stopped drinking when Joe's moved a block away. Did he move with the bar? I'm guessing he did. It's unlikely that a new bar opened here the day after that one vacated. So, their proud boast seems a little shallower, duddinit? *Hemingway drank here ... for four of his 40-year drinking career.* K...

Tony's Amber Bock wasn't really singing to me. What do you expect from a generic beer with the bar's name slapped on the tap. Tattoos & Scars had the same schtick going, as you'll recall. (Man, that was 55 bars ago, almost two months! Jayzuz!!)

I could save a buck when I got a refill, but, really, one Captain Tony's Amber Bock was plenty. I still wanted more beer, yes, just not *that* beer.

I took a short visit to the classically no-frills-dive-bar men's room, and headed on out. I had one more thing to do, though. I had to try to feed the fish. The fish eats quarters.

Sometime, somehow, a tradition grew where you stand on the sidewalk, with your back to the bar, and directly under the big hanging fish. You toss a quarter back over your head and try to get it in the fish's mouth. It's pretty funny to watch late at night when some already-unsteady salooners try to accomplish this. The head goes back and just about anything can ensue.



I had one quarter, and at first I thought that meant that I only got one try. Then, duhhh, I realized that if I missed, I got my quarter back, even though I may have to grovel on the pavement to retrieve it. Ha! Like I was going to miss.

Didn't even hit the fucking fish. My coin went straight up and came straight down, almost hitting me in the head. Stupid quarter.

That shot is impossible. I decided to invest my two bits more wisely elsewhere.

So I moved on. I had left my card, but not my bra.