

## Bar Hoppin' With Hops

The Keep On Hoppin' Tour  
Hops MacBarley's Ongoing  
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar #300:

### Old Town Tavern and Beer Garden

900 Duval Street

Saturday, 9/1/18, 7:00 PM

*Sierra Nevada Hazy IPA (draft)*

Tree-hunnert bahz! Tree hunnert!  
ALL of them located on the little 4-mile-by-1-mile island we know as Key West. And, though 79 of those 300 (more than 25%) have gone out of business, that still leaves a very impressive 221 of them keeping up their marvelous work of purveying booze to the thirsty masses.



Quite a few of those 221 have sprouted up in the footprint of an expired bar. Some entertained the reckless hope that they would not suffer the same fate as their predecessor, only to meet their own demise soon thereafter.



Key West Bite (#270) arose out of the ashes of Joe's Place (#246), which had been JDL's Big Ten (#45).

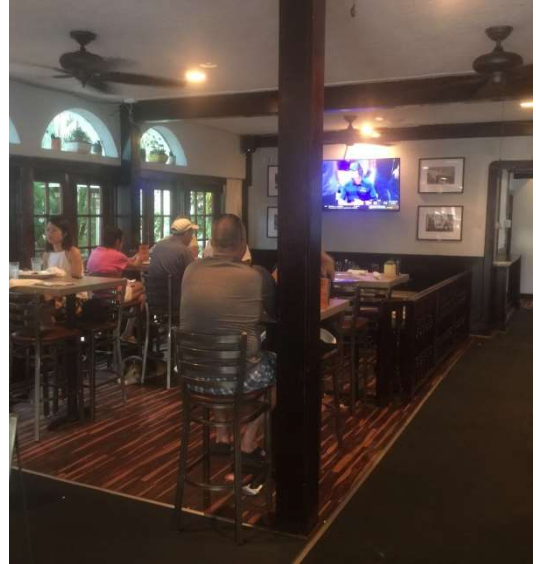
Mad Dash Bar (#252) was briefly Key West Pub (#209), after being T's Bistro (#15) and Sweet Tea's (pre-tours).

BC2 (#296) came after Chicagos (#239), the deservedly short-lived Shameless (#220), and Solo American Bistro (#108) – after being the Sports Page in BH (Before Hops) years.

Gas Monkey (#263) had been Johnny Rocket's (#221) and Cheeseburger Key West (#173). Senor Frog's (#262) followed Burger Fi (#198) and Mad Rooster

(#24). The Monkey and Frog currently sit empty, waiting for the next fool to part with his money.

It's fitting, then, that our 300<sup>th</sup> Hop was also in a familiar spot. Nine Hundred Duval, at the corner of Olivia, on the property of the Casablanca Hotel, was McConnell's Irish Pub when it was Hop #67 of the *Peace, Love & IPA Tour*, and it had reopened under its prior name of Bogart's when it we hit it again as #282.



We – that would be B&J and I – could have rung up the big 3-0-0 sooner, but we're not the impetuous young hoppers of bygone days, and the 10-block walk on a hot summer day got postponed a few times in favor of an air-conditioned sit at one of our routine haunts. And, while the *PLIPA Tour* of 2012, and the *Second Century Tour* of 2013 were predicated on a bar-a-day time constraint, our current *Keep On Hoppin' Tour* has a more laid-back "Ehhh, chill, we'll get to it" approach. I mean, it's Key West, right? The fewer deadlines the better.

But today we had impetus. (Good to have impetus *once* in a while, yes?) It was Labor Day weekend and KW's annual Brew Fest was underway. I googled the event and saw that, like recent years, the Saturday afternoon tasting session next to the Southernmost Beach Café (#99) was using a Second Line Parade to close their festivities (and clear out the drunks). That was scheduled for 8:00, so we convened here at 7:00. Actually, we convened at 430 Duval (#204) and strolled up here in the hope of catching the end of Happy Hour.



This had been the plan for the same night of 2015 when we hopped the Mad Dash Bar (#252): drink a couple, pay up, then join the parade. It was fun then, so it should be fun this time too. It's not a stream of floats and bands, after all; it's just a couple of horn players and singers leading a flock of lemming-like boozers bouncing and jouncing up the hill and down the other side, chanting our way to the promised land of The Green Parrot (#4).

So, uhhhh, yeah.

Old Town Tavern was pretty full when we walked in for #300. Much of the room was the same as it ever was – which is good cuz I’ve always liked this room. There had been couple of high-top counters that extended out from the bar into the middle of the room, though, and those have been removed. Those things probably seemed like a good idea at the time, but they did kinda clog things up in the middle. The flow is better now. The big Guinness mirror is gone, replaced by another just-as-big mirror that bears the Old Town Tavern logo. In fact, maybe the mirror is the same but the old logo was razored off and the new one vinyled on. (Two unusual verbs for ya. It’s called *creative* writing when ya make up words.)

There were two barstools available at the front corner, so B&J took those and I volunteered to stand. By the time we ordered and got our beverages, though, the couple next to them moseyed on out, so I moseyed on in to my new seat. Happy Hopsy. Sometimes, things just work out. Gotta celebrate these minor victories.

The crowd looked to be mostly locals. Several familiar faces around. Happy Hour might have had something to do with that. KWers are big on HH. OTT&BG does an early-shift HH (4-7 pm) and a late-shift HH (11 pm – 1 am) daily. All beers are 25% off. I don’t think I’ve ever heard of that one before. I’ve seen 2-for-1, I’ve seen half-price (which is NOT the same as 2-for-1), I’ve seen roll-the-dice, and, more recently, the lame “dollar off” deal. A dollar off? Seriously? Maybe when beers were \$3, that woulda been cool, but when you’re charging \$7 for a plastic cup of Stella draft (are you listening, Duval Central?), telling me a Buck Off makes me want to tell you to ... well, figure it out.



Our barkeep was a bearded chap. He was too busy to be especially friendly, but that was fine by us. I’d rather have a keeper who puts business first than have to wait on a dude who’s jabbering away with his buds while we drum our fingers. So, he got a thumbs up. When he was at our end of the bar, and we had an order or a question, he took care of things promptly.



And, hey, this MUST have been a special occasion: Jan drank beer! This is rare, indeed! It took 300 bars, but, she finally consumed that delectable malt beverage that B and I routinely quaff.

Now, it's not like she ordered a pint o' Guinness and pounded it down. Hardly. But it *was* a dark brew. And she didn't exactly *order* it. And it was not *instead* of her usual. She was enjoying a glass of Sauvignon Blanc, as is her common wont, when opportunity came a knockin' in the form of a brewery rep lady.

From my end seat, I had seen the curly-haired woman progressing down the bar, holding a trayful of small, clear plastic cups half-filled with very dark liquid, and offering samples to the patrons as she went. When she reached Jan and told her what it was, I was surprised to see Jan happily take one. Brian – Mr. Coors Light -- followed suit, and she offered one to me.



"What is it?" I asked, ever the skeptic.

"It's a coffee porter," she smiled, "brewed right here in Florida by Hop Life Brewery."

Hop Life? Bullseye. Hops *gotta* have that. It was the "coffee" that hooked Jan. It was the "free" that snagged Brian. But, whatever it took, she got us all. And it was a right tasty brew, I'll tell ya. Well worth the money! 😊

I was hungry. I knew that we'd be spending an hour here, so I saved supper for the Hop. Hadn't really had much of a lunch either. The menu was proving to be entertaining. Things like Beermisu, Bangers & Mash, the Hangover Burger (with fried egg), and the LBLT (featuring lamb belly and pikliz, whatever the fug that is) all struck me as amusing. I'm sure they're yum, but I was still getting a chuckle out of them.

"You know," Brian said, "after all this, you're just going to order a burger."

"Of course I am!" I replied cheerfully. And I did. A piping hot half-pound of Angus (Pudgorney?), topped with cheddar, bacon, lettuce, mayo and a couple of thinly-sliced pickles on a brioche bun, thank ya please. Everything a growing carnivore could want.

I'm not really a pickle fan (like you give a crap), but two or three *really thin* slices – especially when placed *under* the patty -- add a nice tang to the burger. Thick slices suck, and I'm going nowhere near a pile o' pickles like you get with the Sliders at Jack Flats (#48). You'd have to bribe me with a few IPAs to get me to munch into a dill. But two wafer-thin slices, yaaah, that works.

A few minutes later, after some focused woofing, the burger was history. B and I were well into our second beers, and J had most of her Sauvignon Blanc chugged down, when we saw flashing blue lights outside.

My immediate thought of "they found me!" passed quickly as I realized that KWPD was beginning to clear the runway for the Second Line Parade. We swilled down what remained and primed ourselves to go parading. Trouble was, we had to pay. Well, **I** had to pay. In my carried-away celebration of our milestone, I was picking up the tab – yes, even the three coffee porters.



At the moment, the barkeep was otherwise occupied, so I had to wait. I had plenty of cash, so you'd think I'd just leave enough to cover tab, tax, and tip and then blow out there, but the bill came to something like \$37.80 and all I had in my wallet was a wad o' twennies. A \$2.20 tip would not have cut it, and a \$22.20 tip would have been waaaay over the top, so I waited for change.

Meanwhile, the Second Line came bouncing by and B&J bounced off with them. I received my change a moment thereafter, dropped a sawbuck on the bar, and bounced on out and up Duval.