



**VISITING THE NORTHEASTERN HOTEL & SALOON  
In Cloquet, Minnesota  
By Jeff R. Lonto**

When traveling up near Duluth and the Iron Range, you might find it worth your while to make a stop in the town of Cloquet, MN, just twenty miles west of Lake Superior, on the St. Louis River. There you will find a distinct Frank Lloyd Wright-designed gas station (until recently a long-time Phillips 66 outlet), and a few blocks up on St. Louis Avenue, the historic Northeastern Hotel and Saloon.

Located across the river from Cloquet proper on Dunlap Island, the Northeastern is a genuine piece of Minnesota history with origins going back over 100 years, and is today on the National Historic Register. After years of falling into disrepair and ill repute, it was purchased in 2000 by area resident Bert Whittington, who is in the process of restoring it to its grand historic splendor.

In the summer of 2008, during a brewery collectibles show held on the grounds of the Northeastern one afternoon, I sat down with Bert at the original 30-foot one-piece African mahogany bar, beneath lit-up Fitger's beer signs and other signage of a bygone era, and he told me the story of the place over taps served up by Mandy Klevgaard, who when not working at the Northeastern is an area middle school teacher.

In its early history, Cloquet was a lumber town in an area originally settled by the Chippewa and later populated by lumberjacks of Scotch-Irish and French-Canadian heritage. Rudolph M. Weyerhauser headed up one of the two major lumber companies there, owning land on both sides of the St. Louis River, and in the interest of keeping his lumberjacks sober he prohibited alcohol on his land.

Weyerhauser, however didn't own the island, and as Bert Whittington explains, "An enterprising young Irishman named William Dunlap bought this island from a Native American named Alfred Posey and when he bought the island, he plotted it out and at one time there were seventeen bars, brothels and saloons down here, and the Northeastern was one of them."

Bert tells me that in 1885 a man named Louis Mc Cullough opened the original saloon as a watering hole for the lumberjacks in the region. The original hand-written liquor license, dated January 10, 1885 is on display in a frame inside the bar, stipulating among other things that gambling, the throwing of dice and the playing of cards would not be permitted, nor would the

serving of liquor to “any Indian...pupil or student in any public school, seminary academy or other institution of learning.”

The original two-story wooden structure burned to the ground in 1903 but a new brick building quickly replaced it at the same location and has been in continuous operation since. This brick structure survived a fire that swept through the area on August 12, 1918, leaving it as one of the few things left standing in Cloquet along with five homes and a water tower. After the fire, the Northeastern served as a makeshift hospital, post office and National Guard headquarters.

During Prohibition (1920-1933), the Northeastern served near beer and soft drinks, “and whatever else you could sell *illegally*, just like every other bar in the state,” Bert tells me. In the years after Repeal, the Northeastern came to be a well-known watering hole and landmark in the area, changing very little to this day. In 1953 a publication from the Ford Motor Company called the *Ford Times* ran an article about Cloquet that not only mentioned, but wrote extensively about the Northeastern. The description of the place from more than fifty years ago could almost have been written by a modern visitor, there has been so little physical change.

In addition to the bar downstairs and the dining room that is being restored as I write this, there were originally twenty hotel rooms upstairs with two bathrooms. Bert says in the early days the lumberjack clientele didn't stay in hotels usually, at least not overnight. Chances are after mugs of beer or shots of whiskey they went upstairs, got serviced by members of the World's Oldest Profession and left well before morning.

After Prohibition the upstairs hotel served travelers passing through town and others, and by the fifties or sixties it became something of a flophouse, according to Bert. Right now, however, he is in the process of turning it back into a classic hotel complete with original antique furniture and iron beds, but with plenty of modern amenities such as cable television, air conditioning, heating and modern lighting, and instead of twenty rooms with two bathrooms, there will be eight sleeping rooms (each with its own modern bathroom), two large party rooms, an office, an arcade/vending ice machine room, a storage room and a utility room. He expects to have it all ready by 2009.

If you plan on traveling into Northern Minnesota, it will be worth your while to visit historic Cloquet on Dunlap Island any time of the year and give Bert and the Northeastern a visit. You are sure to enjoy the old-fashioned Northern Minnesota atmosphere, the original furnishings right down to the tin ceilings and the brass spittoons, the moose head “killed [in 1936] by Hank Glassow 1 mile from town,” the friendly service and the display of old beer signs and other memorabilia. The place is quite a museum of vintage bar signs and local history.

If you are traveling north on I-35W, take the Highway 33 Cloquet exit and at the fourth stoplight turn left on Cloquet Avenue before the bridge over the St. Louis River, curve around on Broadway/Main, going north for two blocks over the railroad tracks and you are there. Traveling southbound on Highway 33, just go over the St. Louis River bridge, go right and you will see the Northeastern.