

The oldest pub in British Columbia celebrates

SIX MILE PUB & EATERY

est. 1855

**The venerable
Six Mile Pub and Eatery –
the oldest pub in
British Columbia –
is celebrating its
160 year history through-
out the month of July.**

In the year 1848, the site of the future 'roadhouse' was occupied by a sawmill run by millwright John Fenton, on land owned by the Hudson's Bay Company. However, with the advent of the California Gold Rush in 1849, Fenton left to seek his fortune. He was replaced by Bill Parsons (known as 'Parson'), a former London bobby.

Parsons built a bridge over the Millstream creek – providing access to the Sooke and Leech River areas – as well as a grist mill which operated until it was destroyed in a flash flood during the winter of 1854–55.

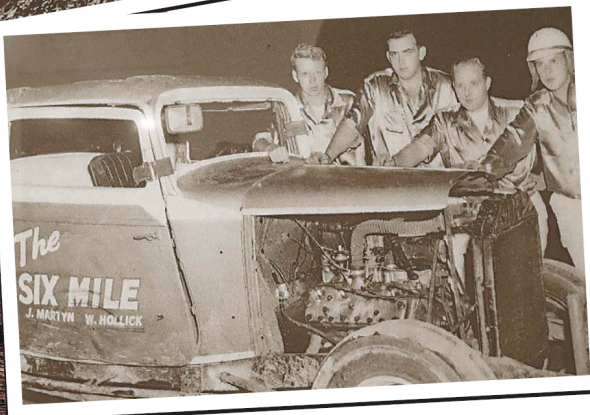
He then decided to buy 40 acres from the Hudson Bay company and built the 'Parsons Bridge Hotel'. Though the hotel opened later in 1855, Parsons didn't purchase his country retail licence until the following year (possibly encouraged to do so after paying a fine of two pounds ten shillings) – making 'official' the establishment that is now the oldest operating pub in B.C..

The hotel became a handy port of call for British sailors who filled the ships' water barrels at the mouth of the Millstream, and the tap room was a convivial

meeting place for British tars from Esquimalt naval base, established in 1864. The Six Mile was the hub of the small community and when stage coaches began to run in the 1880s, it was used as a postal address by those living close by. Roadhouses, as they were called, were dropping off points for the mail. Coaches brought mail six miles from town, earning the hotel the name 'Six Mile House'.

Over its long history, the Six Mile changed hands many times. One of the most colourful owners was Jim Price who owned it during the prohibition. Though officially closed during this time, the hotel continued to be a meeting place for many locals, who met to talk politics and drink. Bootlegging was popular and Six Mile House was rumoured to be headquarters for rum-running. Before Six Mile House was re-opened as a pub after prohibition ended, in about 1924, there was a major fixing-up. The interior and exterior were both redone, and included a red carpet on the 'ladies' side – the large windows were added to the ladies' side a few years later. Liquor laws were very strict – food was forbidden in bars, sitting while drinking was a firm rule, and beer was the pub's sole offering. The fact that neighbouring municipalities, including Victoria, were still 'dry' contributed to good business for the Six Mile for many years. Plebiscites were held after prohibition but Esquimalt was the only area to bring back licensed establishments.

During the Second World War, beer was rationed. Waiters would pay for the beer at the bar, then sell it at the tables with the best tippers. Pubs opened at staggered hours and ran until the beer ran out.



Top: Parsons Bridge Hotel was first opened in 1855.

Centre: One of the racing teams that have been sponsored by the Six Mile over the years – a practice that continues today.

Bottom: Traditional wooden beer barrels.



Above: In 1942, a provincial law was introduced which required separate entrances to two separate areas – one for men, and one for ladies with escorts.

