

RECOLLECTING THE OLD WEST: BUCKHORN SALOON & MUSEUM

*Featuring Its Original Antique Back Bar From 1881 Along With A Two Story
Museum Filled With Exhibits Of The Cowboy Era*

In 1898, when Theodore Roosevelt arrived in San Antonio to recruit and train his Rough Riders in the run-up to the Spanish-American War, he knew just where to go. “He hit every saloon in town,” local history expert Texas Bob tells The Buzz. “Only two of them are still open today, the bar at the Menger Hotel and the Buckhorn.”

Texas Bob has been the greeter at the Buckhorn Saloon and Museum for 20 years. On any given day, you may find him dressed as Buffalo Bill Cody, Wild Bill Hitchcock or another famous figure from the Old West. “I like to portray Hollywood cowboys, too,” Bob says. “Clint Eastwood as the Outlaw Josey Wales is one of my favorites.”

Any of those figures, whether historic or fictional, would feel right at home inside the swinging doors of the Buckhorn. Founded in 1881, the saloon features its original antique back bar stocked with bottles of whiskey and Texas craft beers on tap.

But the Buckhorn is much more than a saloon. Its two-story, 50,000 sq. ft. museum is filled with exhibits on the history and traditions of cowboy era. “We get people from Japan, Russia, all over,” Bob says. “Everybody loves the Old West.”

One of the most unusual features of the Buckhorn are the antlers, horns and mounted animal heads that crowd every inch of wall space, the legacy of the saloon’s founder. Albert Friedrich learned the Victorian art of crafting horn furniture from his father and, once he entered the bar business, he offered a beer to anyone who brought in horns or antlers to add to his collection.

“He took them in trade for drinks,” Texas Bob says. “We still do. What you see here is the result of 135 years of collecting.”

Albert’s wife Emilie enjoyed crafts as well. She offered a shot of whiskey to any cowboy who brought in a jar filled with rattlesnake rattles, which she used to create works of art. The results can be seen throughout the museum today.

After he became president, Teddy Roosevelt came back to town in 1905 and visited the Buckhorn. “Albert gave him a chair made of the horns of 52 buffalo and Emilie made him a picture of a whitetail deer using over 600 rattles,” Bob says. “We have

both in our collection.”

According to Texas Bob, Friedrich especially liked to collect oddities. “We have the largest collection of non-typical horns and antlers in the world,” he says. “Upstairs we have an 1800-lb., world-record moose from Canada, a 1056-lb. black marlin, also a world record, and a couple of 8-foot diamondbacks. We call them Texas worms.” One of the stars of the collection is a 78-point buck, bought by Friedrich himself in 1890, which hangs today on the bar’s central mirror.

A record-setting longhorn bull, Old Tex, is another of the Buckhorn’s earliest residents. “His horns measure more than 8 feet tip to tip,” Bob says. “For most of the 1900s, he held the world record. Albert used to lock his horns up in the safe every night at closing time.”

Old Tex is surrounded by powder horns, flasks, firearms and saddles, including one that belonged to Country Music Hall of Famer Gene Autry, as well as photos of celebrities who have visited over the years. Carol Burnett, who grew up in San Antonio, devoted a page in her autobiography to the downtown landmark and its gorilla mascot, whom she called King Kong.

“If I had to pick one favorite item in the collection, it would be the Winchester rifle presented to Buffalo Bill Cody by Queen Victoria,” Bob admits. “It’s never been fired.”

In addition to the items collected by Albert Friedrich, the Buckhorn received many donations over the years from big game hunters. Examples of more than 500 different species from every continent are represented in the collection, each with information on its life cycle and habitat. “It’s a chance for people to get up close and personal with these animals, to learn about them,” Texas Bob explains. Other exhibit areas display sideshow curiosities in the tradition of Buffalo Bill and P.T. Barnum, including a legendary chupacabra and genuine shrunken heads.

One of the newest additions at the Buckhorn is the Texas Ranger Museum, with displays on 15 famous lawmen, complete with badges, firearms and details of their famous cases. A replica of the Bonnie and Clyde getaway car, riddled with bullets fired by Ranger Frank Hamer, is a favorite photo op.

The Texas Ranger Association moved its museum to the Buckhorn about 10 years ago, according to Buckhorn tourism ambassador Karen Bippert. “We’ve built a replica of San Antonio from the late 1800s to showcase the Ranger exhibits,” she says. “There’s a jail, a telegraph office, a newspaper, a blacksmith and a full-size replica of the original 1881 Buckhorn Saloon.”

Located in the heart of San Antonio, a block from the Alamo and two from the

Riverwalk, the Buckhorn today is not far from its original location. As the collection grew, the museum moved several times, including a stint as the Lone Star Brewery's tasting room. In 1997, Mary Friedrich Rogers, Albert's granddaughter, acquired the collection and moved it back to downtown.

"Anyone can drop by for a drink or a bite to eat," Bippert says. "If you decide to browse the museums, one ticket is good for both, and you can come and go all day."

Texas Bob claims he sees something new every time he strolls through the exhibits. And with the bar so convenient, it's easy to "keep your whistle wet," he says. "This is the only museum I know where you can walk through with your beer."

If funds are running low, bring along a set of antlers. The Buckhorn still takes them in trade for a drink.

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A graduate of Franconia College in Social Psychology, Renee has worked as Travel Editor for Charlotte Magazine and has written three travel guidebooks for Countryman Press among other writing assignments. She enjoys food and camping.

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