

Happy Birthday Bodie!

By Dave Maryo

Bodie California celebrated its 150th birthday August 8th, 2009. The Friends of Bodie hosted the celebration with many special events and made it quite an interesting day. The streets were filled with people in period costumes representing different times in the town's history. A band played in the main street as people gathered to listen. A medicine show was held in a field across from the general store. Early cars were parked at the Bodie Mercantile and later at the church. Thousands of visitors wandered around the town peeking into the dusty windows to see the items that have been in the same place for a hundred years. The ghost town was alive again, even if it was just for one day.

The birth of Bodie was in 1859 when William Bodey discovered gold near Bodie's Bluff. The area started an immediate boom in population. Homes and businesses sprang up and by 1880 the town was believed to be home to more than 10,000 individuals. At the high point of the population, Bodie was the third largest town in California. Bodie's large population in the 1860s to the 1880s made it a great source of early Western bottles. The town was reported to have had 65 saloons operating at one time. Just imagine the miner's gold being spent on the best beverages that money could buy. And of course some of these expensive beverages were bottled in very fancy bottles. Today, bottles marked with the Bodie name can bring thousands of dollars.

Just recently, American Bottle Auctions sold a greenish aqua Pearson Bros. gravitating stopper soda for \$3,600. Bodie will always have a place in the

bottle collecting hobby, but it has much more to offer than old bottles.

When the gold in the mines at Bodie dwindled, the mining companies could no longer continue to be profitable and started closing their businesses. The town of Bodie started in a downward decline and never recovered. Due to the remote location of the town, when people moved away many of their belongings were not worth the cost of transportation and were left behind. This left the buildings standing with many of the items from the past to collect dust.

The Bodie ghost town era began in the 1930s after most of the town's residents left in search of a new life and source of income. In 1962, Bodie became a California state park in an effort to preserve the ghost town and made removing artifacts illegal. California's state park system is now preserving Bodie in what they call an "arrested state of decay" leaving visitors to see the abandoned town in the same way it looked nearly a hundred years ago. Bodie is a time capsule back to the day when gold was mined, gamblers frequented saloons and gunfighters roamed the streets. In the heyday of Bodie there were nearly two thousand buildings stretching over a mile in length. A number of fires in the late 1800s and early 1900s left less than 200 buildings standing. They now appear very much like they were when the town was abandoned. Today, its empty buildings are the only reminder of the glory days of this unique town. I would encourage anyone that has not visited Bodie to take a look at this place that stands still in time. You could also join the friends of Bodie and help preserve the town. Maybe someday with your help the park system will retrieve more artifacts for a museum.



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