

Lincolnites To Vote On Liquor-By-The-Drink Proposal

Saloon Prayer Meetings Typify Early Liquor Debates In Lincoln

By Julie Morris
Senior Staff Writer

Saloons were the settings for temperance society prayer meetings in the Lincoln of 1874.

"Vote the devil down!" a Lincoln minister thundered to his congregation shortly before election day in 1946.

"The town has changed we thought we ought to give the voters a shot at it again," a former Lincoln Chamber of Commerce president said before the upcoming 1966 election.

All of these occurrences are linked with the question of whether Lincoln, the city of churches and educational and governmental institutions, should be a "wet" or "dry" town.

The liquor debate dates back to the earliest days of Lincoln when the Ladies' Temperance Society was organized in 1874, five years after the city was founded.

According to "Tower on the Plains," a centennial history of Lincoln by R. Neale Copple, "the ladies invaded several saloons, conducted prayer meetings and sang hymns," as part of their anti-liquor crusade. Finally, the narrative relates, a city ordinance curbing the ladies' efforts was passed by the City Council.

1920 'Nightclubs'

Colorful tales about the days of Prohibition in Lincoln are told yet today.

Edmund Dittmer, a Lincoln package liquor store owner for 32 years, told of the city during the "roaring 20s" when there were several well-known speakeasies in the town.

"Of course, we never used the word 'speakeasy,'" Dittmer said. "It was 'nightclub.'"

Dittmer said speakeasies like the popular High Acres at 14th and High Streets where the present Indian Village shopping center is located, served a non-alcoholic "near beer" that patrons spiked with 100-proof straight alcohol.

Local citizens also mixed their own home brew by combining malt syrup, bought at the local grocery store, with sugar, water and yeast and letting the brew ferment. Lincolnites also made wine, by gathering wild grapes, sometimes from along Salt Creek, and combining them with good grapes.

The brew made this way wasn't particularly good.

Dittmer said, but it was alcohol and it was forbidden, so people enjoyed it.

Cities Must Decide

When the Prohibition law was repealed in 1935, Nebraska ruled that all cities could have package stores and retail beer taverns but that liquor by the drink would be an issue left up to the individual cities.

Lincoln did not vote on the liquor-by-the-drink question until 1946, when it was put on the ballot by the efforts of city beer tavern dealers, who wanted to expand their businesses.

The 1946 ballot raised "quite a tempest in the city," Dittmer said. Everyone was talking about it, he said and "the churches were up in flames." Many people, including ministers, seemed to feel that it would have a definite adverse effect on the morals of the city, he said.

The proposal lost by a two-to-one margin. The vote was 18,574 to 9,469.

Three-Vote Margin

Since that election 20 years ago, the issue has not again appeared on the ballot in Lincoln. However, the village of West Lincoln had the measure on their ballot twice in recent years.

In 1960, the issue was defeated and in 1964 it was again voted down, this time by a margin of only three votes, 76 to 73.

The votes in West Lincoln spurred fears that the issue might eventually bring liquor by the drink to Lincoln, itself, because of the competition the West Lincoln taverns would give the city.

Since it was defeated, however, it did not bring the Lincoln proposal to balloting.

The city began granting bottle club licenses a few years ago. Until the 1963 Legislature passed a law prohibiting this type of establishment, patrons brought their own bottles to the restaurant or club and paid to have their drinks mixed for them.

Now the city has 30 clubs that serve liquor by the drink.

Dittmer explained there are two types of the so-called "bottle clubs." One type requires patrons to buy their liquor at retail stores; these are the private clubs. The other class, nonprofit clubs, may buy their liquor wholesale.



Police Chief Carroll . . . "It is most important how the law is administered."

City Council To Decide Law Outcome After Vote

Either way the liquor by the drink vote goes, "it can be a catastrophe, or it can be well-regulated," Lincoln Police Chief Joseph Carroll said.

"Regardless of how the vote goes, it is most important how the law is administered," Carroll said.

At the present time, Carroll noted, there is no limit on the number of bottle clubs the city may have. If the proposal to go "wet" passes, it is assumed that the City Council will set

some limit on the number.

On the other hand, if the measure is defeated, Carroll said, "I would presume that they (council) might give some consideration to limiting the licenses."

"As far as bottle clubs and liquor clubs, they'll have liquor by the drink no matter which way the vote goes," Carroll said. Carroll indicated that the police department will have an easier job of enforcing city policies if the policies are stricter than they are at present.

Lincoln May Cooperate With Housing Office

A proposal on the election ballot for Lincoln voters asks that the City of Lincoln be authorized to aid and cooperate with the Lincoln Housing Authority.

If the proposal is approved, the city will have the right to help the Housing Authority in the planning, undertaking, construction or operation of housing projects for persons of low income.

The Housing Authority will then be eligible to receive federal funds, explained Mrs. Arlyss Brown, assistant city attorney.

A federal law requires that in order to gain funds from the federal government, the Housing Authority must show a cooperation agreement with the city, Mrs. Brown said.

"The advantage of securing federal funds was the impetus for putting the proposal on the ballot," she said.

Presently, the city cannot help the Housing Authority by buying its bonds or giving it additional money.

Mrs. Brown added. If the city were authorized to cooperate with the Housing Authority, the Housing Authority could take advantage of a host of federal funds, she said.

The actual powers in the proposal go to the city to cooperate with the Housing Authority, she continued.

Lincoln Dentist On ADA Panel

Dr. Norman Carlson, Lincoln dentist, will be a member of a five-man panel on operative dentistry at the annual American Dental Assn. meeting Nov. 14-17 in Dallas.

Nebraska Dental Assn. delegates include Drs. Donald W. Edwards, Donald T. Waggener and Harold P. Hellweg of Lincoln; Donald K. Phillips of Nebraska City, Lyle W. Furst of York, Donald L. Herzog of Grand Island, Herbert Seberg of Hastings, and Frederick A. Breeze of Omaha.



MRS. GILMER . . . liquor measure would lead to "more drunken drivers."

WCTU Head Gives Reasons For Stand

The president of the Lancaster County Women's Christian Temperance Union, Mrs. R. Lee Gilmer, documented the WCTU's reasons for opposing liquor by the drink for Lincoln.

Mrs. Gilmer said the city and county WCTU groups oppose the measure for the following reasons:

—If passed, the measure would "definitely lead to more drinking" of alcoholic beverages.

—More drinking would result in more drunken drivers.

—More money would be spent on alcoholic beverages.

Mrs. Gilmer said that drunken drivers are one of the major hazards of the nation's streets and highways. She cited the National Safety Council statistics that state that "with each two drinks a driver's ability and judgment are impaired."

If the measure passes, Mrs. Gilmer said, the WCTU feels there will definitely be an increase in the number and locations of liquor outlets in the city.

She said that "for many years it was the city's policy to keep outlets in the

downtown area" but that this policy was changed several years ago and since that time the number of bottle clubs has jumped from 16 to 30.

The WCTU, whose program is aimed mainly at educating the public, is a nation-wide organization



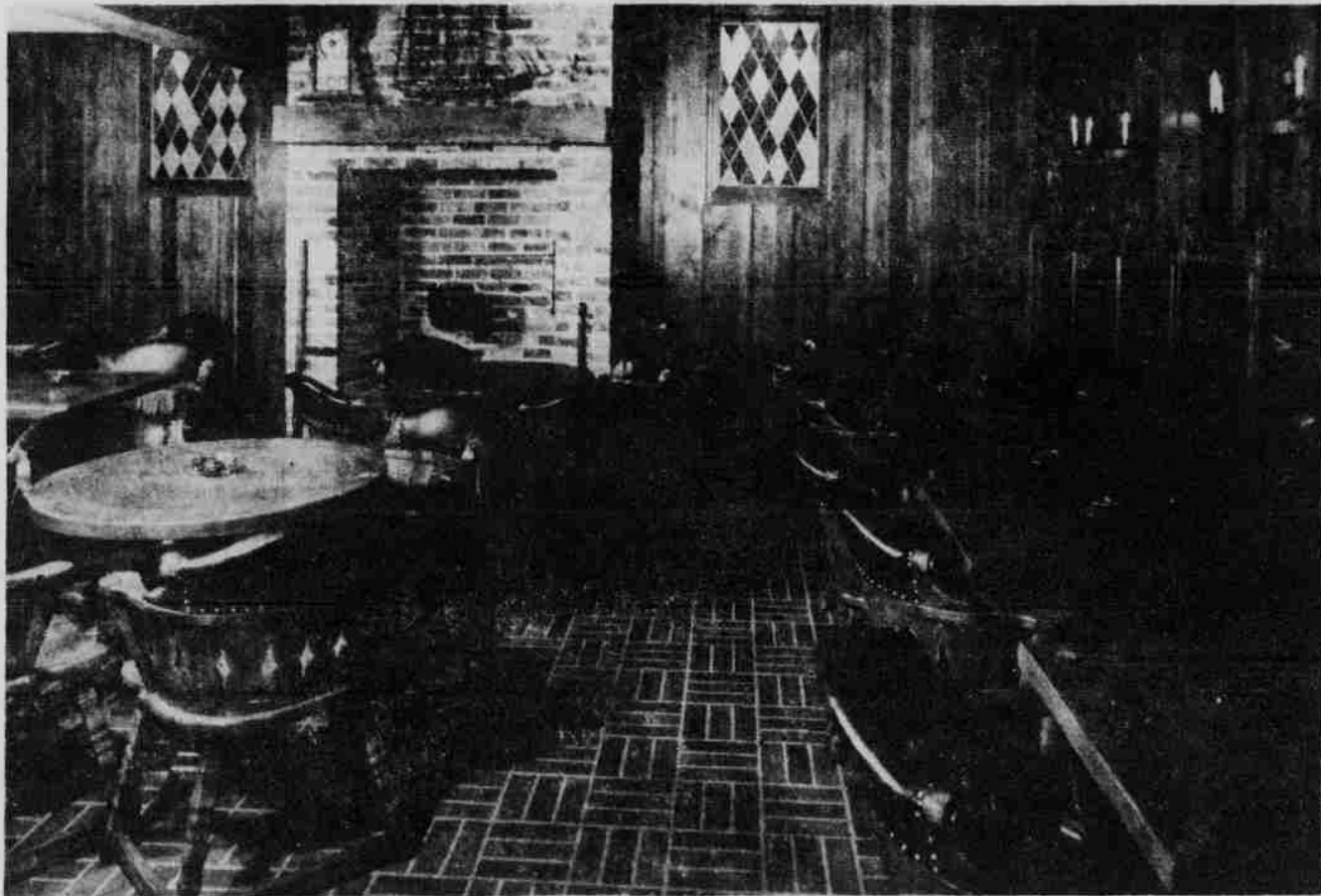
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