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Nightlife in a dry town

Residents remember good times

By Jennifer Blumberg

The half a dozen breweries and more than 30 taverns in Fort Collins today hardly reflect the city's long history as a dry town.

Beginning in 1896, the city prohibited liquor sales for almost three-quarters of a century, making its stance on the subject well-known long before federal law banned the sale and purchase of liquor in 1920. Even after Franklin D. Roosevelt repealed Prohibition in 1933, the city maintained its anti-liquor legislation.

Local historian Wayne C. Sundberg recalls stories of bootleggers from the Prohibition Era, including Lady Catherine Moon. Behaving in an unladylike manner, she tucked bottles of alcohol under her dress and sold them to customers in town. Wild West showman Frank C. Miller Jr. reportedly smuggled beer across the Wyoming border by diverting authorities with his pet black bear. He hid alcohol under a blanket situated next to the bear in the back seat.

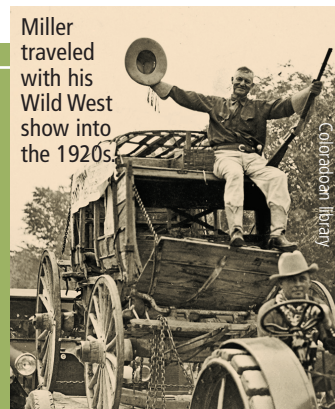
Although she wasn't much of a drinker herself, longtime Fort Collins resident Liz Case remembers "cause of great rejoicing" when the city's liquor laws finally changed in 1969. Voters went to the polls in near-record numbers and approved liquor sales within city limits by a 3-2 margin. Greeley lifted its ban the same year, putting an end to citywide

prohibition, which also was implemented in the late 1800s.

Colorado native John Roberts remembers Fort Collins as a "squeaky clean" small town with unpaved side streets. He recalls being fascinated by the horse-drawn wagons that still passed by his childhood home on Loomis Avenue in the 1940s.

When Franklin Avery surveyed the town in 1873, he wanted to make the streets wide enough to allow a horse-drawn wagon to turn around without backing up. Decades after Avery's vision turned into reality, locals still referred to Fort Collins as the city with "wide streets and narrow minds."

Memories of growing up in Fort Collins inspired Harper Goff to model parts of Disneyland's Main Street USA after the city's streets in the 1950s.



FUN IN THE FORT

Although the Fort Collins of old could not rival today's volume of restaurants and entertainment venues, residents found many ways to enjoy life during the mid-20th century.

Roberts has fond memories of dancing at Club Tico in City Park as a Fort Collins High School student.

"Everybody went, every Friday and Saturday night," he says. "It started in the '40s, and by the '50s it was really the hot thing to do."

When the city of Fort Collins took over the club in 1973 and changed its



Courtesy Bob and Marian Swerer

name to City Park Center, Club Tico remained alive in the hearts of those who knew it in their youths. Club Tico reclaimed its name and function as a dance club in October 2005.

Charco Broiler's location on Mulberry Street, just outside city limits, made it a favorite hangout for the older crowd during Fort Collins' dry period.

"That's the place where everybody went at midnight when you turned 21," University of Northern Colorado history lecturer Bill Virden says of the restaurant that opened in 1957.

The combination of good food and drink, live music and exotic decor drew crowds of all ages to Club Safari. African-inspired wicker furniture, zebra carpeting, mounted animal heads and bone door handles set the mood for "wild" nights.

Club Safari owner Bob Swerer was known on the radio as country band Sons of the Rockies frontman long before

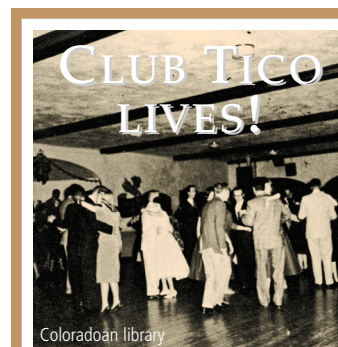
he entertained audiences in his own club.

Those looking for entertainment within city limits during Fort Collins' dry period often found it in coffeehouses. Roberts remembers going to the Purple Grape on Mason Street as a high school senior in 1960 to listen to beatnik poetry readings and folk music.

It has been more than 100 years since

Fort Collins adopted its staunch anti-liquor legislation, and what was once a rural small town has transformed into a city boasting a vibrant nightlife. ■

Colorado State University journalism student Jennifer Blumberg is an intern with 25 North magazine.



Following a summer hiatus, DJs plan to once again play dance favorites from the 1950s, '60s and early '70s at City Park's Club Tico from 8 to 10 p.m. the second Saturday of each month, starting Oct. 14.

Fundraising committees are working in conjunction with Oldies 102.9 radio station to renovate the space and revive the club.

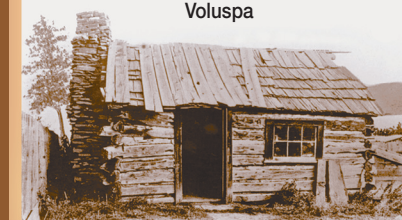
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