

Way We Were

Wednesday, January 23, 2013

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The Night Utah Went Dry

By late 1913, George Wanning was out of business. With too much debt owed to his creditors and increasing health problems, he was forced to close his saloon and move to Ogden. However, when one bar closed in Park City another was quick to take its place.

On January 31, 1914, W. J. Kappus held a grand opening for his Gold Label Liquor Co., which had moved into 591 Main Street after Wanning closed. Large ads for the Gold Label appeared frequently in the Park Record, and by October of 1915 Kappus had a large advertisement painted on the side of his building. Business seemed to be going well, but changes were coming that would force Kappus and other saloon owners to adapt or risk losing everything.

On August 1, 1917, Park City went dry. Utah had passed a law making it the twenty-fourth of forty-eight states to outlaw the manufacturing of alcoholic beverages.¹ Prohibition had begun, and with it came the closing of all saloons. The Park Record described the “wild scene” on Main Street in the hours before the bell tolled at midnight, “proclaiming to the populace that King Booze was dethroned and dead.”² Citizens desperate for one last drink roamed the streets, buying up every last drop of alcohol they could get their hands on. One can only imagine the chaos, in which “empty barrels... and everything else that would roll down the paved street were set into motion amid drunken yells and loud hurrahs.”³

One by one the saloons ran out of liquor and closed their doors, until only the Gold Label remained open. In the last two hours before midnight, the Gold Label bartenders struggled to manage the crowd that rushed to their doors looking for the last drops of drink. What the Park Record describes could almost be viewed as a mob, in which “those who could not be waited on helped themselves, and bottled goods, no matter what the contents, were stolen, and broken and emptied.”⁴ But when the bell tolled at midnight, even Kappus had to lock his doors.

However, like many saloons proprietors, Kappus adapted. The same month he closed his liquor company, he started renovating the space into “club rooms” with new pool tables. Soft drinks, cigars and cigarettes, chewing gum, and candies were available for purchase.

¹ Kimball, Gary. Saloons of Old Park City. P. 73.

² Park Record, August 3, 1917.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Park Record, August 3, 1917.

The Gold Label Club Rooms operated successfully for the next ten years. Kappus seemed to avoid the fate of other “soft drink parlor” proprietors, rarely getting arrested for running slot machines or serving illegal booze. In April of 1928, Sam De Angelis, another well-known businessman in town, purchased the Gold Label building from Kappus. Kappus retired but remained in Park City, and Sam De Angelis took his turn at the Gold Label.

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Caption: The Park Record took notice of the large ad on the side of 591 Main Street, commenting “that the Gold Label Company has a swell sign on the side of its building...it was done by local sign-writers—and compares favorable with any ‘Big Four’ work.”

