

Way We Were

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Valid Arrest or A Dirty Frame up?

With the onset of Prohibition many towns in Utah cracked down on law breakers, forming raiding parties to arrest and confiscate illegal liquors and paraphernalia. The Summit County police department and federal marshals from Salt Lake City banded together in order to squash the distribution of alcoholic beverages in Park City. Their combined efforts would grace the pages of the Park Record nearly every week.

One vital member of the Summit County police department was Deputy Sheriff William R. Jefford. When first reading about Jefford it is difficult not to picture him as an upstanding citizen who would stop at nothing to protect the community from the downfall associated with alcohol. He was Justice of the Peace in Park City prior to becoming a Deputy Sheriff, from as early as 1914, prosecuting felons and cleaning up the streets. As a member of the “purity squad,” Jefford helped raid and dismember many illegal activities from the inside.

On July 17, 1925 the Park Record highlighted one of many raids in Park City during Prohibition, “Last Friday night, federal officers from Salt Lake, accompanied with ‘stool pigeons,’ and assisted by Sheriff Clark, and his aid, Jefford, made a raid on the so-called ‘soft drink’ parlors of the city, arresting proprietors of seven of the fourteen or sixteen of the places licensed to sell drinks.” Of those individuals arrested were both Sam Angeles and Angelo Fontana. It was neither their first nor their last infringement.

Fighting a criminal element can at times have its backlash, especially when the crime is such an essential part of the community’s economic structure and cultural livelihood. Allegations in 1924 were brought against Jefford, by Commissioner J.D. Fisher, claiming he was receiving hush money from “soft drink” parlor owners (in order to prevent them from being raided). Fisher claimed to have in his possession evidence of the charges made by him, but the proof wasn’t enough to put Jefford behind bars.

Due to the potential backlash from the 1924 case, Jefford was removed from the police force as Deputy Sheriff and given a position as a Special Deputy. He continued to assist the Summit County Police Department and the federal officers on raids in Park City and the surrounding areas.

In November of 1927 Jefford was arrested again, this time by federal officers sent in to investigate his involvement with booze runners in Park City. The federal officers set up a sting operation, in which proprietor Angelo Fontana of The Park Hotel and the Venice Soft Drink Parlor was to draw Jefford in for his monthly installment of hush money. Jefford approached Fontana in the late hours of November 12, and, after receiving a \$50 payment, was promptly arrested.

The question at hand though is: was Jefford really guilty of taking a bribe from the soft drink parlor owner? Is it really what it seems? Or was Jefford framed by the proprietors of the many “soft drink” parlors whom he had raided and arrested throughout his time with the police department? The evidence was staggering, thirty-three affidavits and twenty-one state witnesses all prepared to testify against Jefford in a court of law. After a long drawn out battle with the federal court system Jefford was found guilty of taking the bribe and sentenced to ten months in the Summit County Jail in Coalville.

What do you think? Was Jefford guilty or not guilty?



Caption: 232 Woodside Avenue where Jefford resided until 1923 when he sold the house to Fontana.

Credit: Park City Historical Society & Museum