

Way We Were
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Risky Business: Soft Drink Parlors in Park City

Prohibition was a tumultuous time for Park City. It brought many changes to the town, from the creation of “soft drink” parlors and licenses to federal raids uncovering illegal paraphernalia. It is clear that people in all positions in the town were eager to find a balance. Saloon owners appeared to be compliant and converted the bars into soft drink parlors. In the book *Saloons of Old Park City* by Gary Kimball, it was noted that on August 1st 1917, Park City’s twenty saloons locked their doors and the next day twenty soft drink parlors opened up for business¹. These parlors allowed people to congregate, play billiards, buy tobacco, and drink nonalcoholic beverages.

Many soft drink parlors, however, were a facade and actually illegally served liquor. Across the United States locations for the illegal consumption of alcohol, including establishments known as speakeasies became popular during Prohibition. One had to speak softly and easily when ordering alcoholic beverages during this time, hence the name speakeasy. However in Park City, since soft drink licenses allowed businesses to operate legally (even though parlor raids uncovered illegal consumption and selling of alcohol), it was a legitimate source of income for the city.

The city council instituted soft drink licenses in order to maintain the economy and allow legal businesses to thrive. An application was needed in order to apply for a soft drink license, and once it was approved there was a three hundred dollar tax upon the business. However, most proprietors took advantage of the ordinance by serving and making alcoholic beverages illegally.

Needless to say, the police agencies had their hands full during Prohibition. One of the largest busts conducted was at the Venice Club located at the Park Utah Hotel owned by Angelo Fontana. The police raided the parlor and in the cellar discovered a hollow floor located under a pile of coal. They broke through the floor and found a sub-cellar, which housed an intricate distillery that connected to the city’s sewer pipes. In the end, the raid discovered a “fifty gallon still, 600 bottles of beer, two twenty gallon barrels of beer, 300 gallons of wine, and twelve gallons of whiskey”². Fontana was fined \$299.00 and he continued to conduct business as usual, “but with less paraphernalia”³

Not all soft drink parlors dealt with risky business; some chose to abide by the law. For example, Charles Hiltz made it very clear to the Park Record that he was opening a genuine soft drink parlor in the Miners Union Building.⁴ Nevertheless, from beginning to end Prohibition challenged both local and federal law enforcement to maintain the law, and proprietors to maintain business as usual regardless of it.

If you’re interested in learning more about saloons in Park City, stop by the Museum to pick up Gary Kimball’s book *Saloons of Old Park City*.

¹ Kimball, Gary. *Saloons of Old Park City*. P. 74

² Park Record, January 27, 1928

³ Ibid.

⁴ Park Record, July 4, 1924



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Caption: Windsor Billiards located at 447 Main Street in 1927. Today it is No Name Saloon.

Credit: Park City Historical Society & Museum, Pop Jenks Collection