



The Heidelberg Inn was the biggest saloon in the little town of Ramona.

# When Colorado City went dry, Ramona was born to be wild

Saloons, gambling, prostitution were town's livelihood

By Deborah Belgum  
Jazette Telegraph

The little town of Ramona, an enclave in what is now part of Colorado Spring's West Side, was founded 75 years ago with one purpose in mind — drinking. When Colorado City, went dry in the Spring of 1913, saloon keepers decided to outwit town officials. They would form their own town and call it Ramona. The town would be wet.

The saloon keepers pooled their funds and bought \$20,000 worth of land from Frank Wolff along 24th Street, a few blocks north of Colorado Avenue. Saloons soon sprung up on the property, near present-day Thorndale Park.

On Aug. 21, 1913 an election was held to decide whether the area would be incorporated. All 37 votes cast were in favor of incorporation.

Robert McKeynolds was named city clerk, city treasurer and police magistrate, with a salary of \$25 a month.

L.C. Marks was the chief of police, the city marshal, city detective and jailer. He earned \$65 a month. At first the jail was merely a small-sized tent.

Saloons became the business in Ramona. But gambling and prostitution also thrived, as did prize fighting.

Just about everybody in Ramona had some connection to the drinking business, including Mayor George Gogler, who had the biggest saloon in town — the Heidelberg.

(Colorado Springs and Colorado City, both of which had outlawed liquor, were outraged with the goings-ons in the tiny town with the picturesque name.) Colorado City tried to annex Ramona in order to put a stop to it all, but the effort was unsuccessful.

Then Colorado Springs officials came up with a plan. The city controlled the area's water supply. Officials decided to furnish water to Ramona's saloons. Only individual residences would get water.

Early in 1914 Colorado Springs put its plan into action by refusing to renew water permits for the saloons.

The saloon keepers were irate. The matter was taken to court, where a district judge ruled that Colorado Springs didn't have to sell water to the Ramona saloons.

However, the Ramona merchants got around the ruling by tapping a Colorado Springs fire hydrant at night and piping water through a fire hose to a big portable water tank.

The town soon earned the

## A PEEK IN THE PAST

nickname "Whiskeyville." The Ramona Athletic Club held prize fights, first in a tent then in a building. Often, the fights developed into free-for-all sing fests among the spectators. Colorado Springs, however, finally prevailed. The city led a fight for a measure that would legally prohibit alcohol throughout the state. The measure passed in 1916 and Ramona's saloons were put out of business.

The town survived as best it could — even though most of its economic base evaporated.

In 1922 the town proposed a tax on bartenders. The \$25 tax was "to be paid to any old maids the town may claim," according

to an article in the Colorado Springs Gazette.

However, there is no further news on whether the tax was really imposed.

By this time the town treasury had dwindled to a mere \$100 and residents talked about the town being dissolved. Ramona residents complained that the town government was unable to provide police protection or maintain public health standards.

But it wasn't until 1947 that the town, by a 46-4 vote, decided to end its incorporation and come under El Paso County's jurisdiction.

In 1955, the area bounded by Wolff Place on the north, St. Vrain Street on the south, 23rd Street on the east, and 26th Street on the west, was annexed to Colorado Springs.

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