

Historical Ramblings

In 1874, the Lompoc Valley Land Company was established by a group of businessmen from San Francisco, Santa Barbara and Santa Cruz to subdivide, occupy, improve, lease or let real estate in the Lompoc Valley. W.W. Broughton, an influential newspaper editor from Santa Cruz, spearheaded the effort to publicize the area and attract settlers to the fertile valley. Influenced by the success of the Vineland Temperance Colony founded in New Jersey in 1862, Broughton and others prevailed upon the Lompoc Land Company to make Lompoc a true temperance colony. As a result, every deed included a clause prohibiting the sale or manufacture of liquor.

A temperance colony situated half way between Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo, where liquor flowed freely, was difficult to maintain. Stagecoaches were laden with alcohol, which found its way into local businesses and homes.

In 1875, a group of local ladies, incensed by the report of a correspondent from San Luis Obispo stating that there was plenty to drink in Lompoc, resolved to locate the source of the illicit supply of liquor. They determined that Green's drugstore was the source, whereupon they entered the drugstore and began destroying the liquor stock, knocking in the heads of barrels and emptying bottles containing anything that would intoxicate, from bay rum to Schedam Schnaps. Mr. Green drew his pistol, threatening to shoot just as a group of men entered displaying a rope. The druggist immediately lay down his weapon and the women continued their destruction.

As a result of the colonists' determination to keep Lompoc a true temperance colony, bootlegging was stifled for many years. In 1881, however, alcohol again appeared in town. A great temperance meeting was held in the Methodist Church, where speeches were made by leading citizens to build enthusiasm and determination not to tolerate a saloon within the colony. On May 20, at 11 p.m., the quiet town of Lompoc was awakened by a loud explosion that rocked houses throughout the valley. A bomb had been thrown into Walker's Saloon, completely demolishing the building. The Lompoc Record commented on the event: "Whether it was done by an earthquake or a nihilist from Russia, it is impossible to say, as no inquest has been held. No one is killed, missing or wounded . . . Anyone looking for a location for a saloon had better not select a temperance community where public sentiment is so nearly unanimous against saloons, and where earthquakes are so prevalent and destructive."

The most colorful story relating to the town's stance on temperance has become local legend. Ladies of the town talked to Messrs. Drum and Davis about their wickedness in selling liquor and demanded that they cease business. Drum and Davis refused, declaring that if an attempt was made to run them out of town, they would shoot. The ladies then proceeded to securely fasten a rope around the building with the proprietors inside. With a mighty tug, they pulled the building from its foundations and dragged it a half block down the street, effectively spilling its contents. This act was originally reported as being executed by the men of the town. Through the years, however, it has been attributed to a group of women led by Mrs. J.B. Pierce. In any case, the proprietors of the store learned to never underestimate the power of a woman. They did, however, file a suit against some of the leading men of the town for damage to their property. The defense based its case on the claim that the event was not a riot, but a "town meeting." A speedy verdict of not guilty was returned. A subsequent attempt to carry the case to the United States Supreme Court failed.

When the town of Lompoc was incorporated in 1888, the courts nullified the temperance provision in Lompoc's deeds, ruling that those deeds did not specify to whom the property would revert in case of violation. Later on, when bootlegging began to thrive and every incoming stage brought liquor to town, the first licensed saloon was admitted by a vote of the community. W.W. Broughton's noble attempt at temperance had officially come to an end.