

Wet or dry?

Alcoholic beverages stirred a controversy in early 1900s

"We must soon again confront a controversy that will array friends against each other, cause dissension in the churches, and bitter strife among our citizens generally," wrote the editor of Bloomington's *Star* near the end of March in 1911.

What was the controversy? If you guessed alcoholic beverages, you are correct.

SECTION 8 of the state local option bill of 1908 gave counties the opportunity to determine by local referenda whether they wanted to be "wet" or "dry." In 1909 rural Monroe County dry voters had outvoted the city wet voters, and the local liquor traffic thereafter went underground. According to the *Star*, the argument put forth by the dry vote campaigners when they were lining up rural votes was that saloons in town were corrupting the rural young people.

Another argument put forth by the dries was that if the town banned saloons, it would have a

Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

real estate "boom." Observed the editor of the *Star*, "In fact the biggest boom Bloomington ever had in real estate was in 1905 and 1906 when the city had licensed saloons."

Still a third rationale put forward by dry campaigners was that the absence of saloons would lead to an increase in attendance at Indiana University. Countered the *Star*, "The fact is the attendance fell off in the two years following the dry vote . . . We were told how the boys would be 'saved' when in fact the past two 'dry' years

has made more whiskey drinkers out of the 'boys' than a dozen saloons would have done."

ACTUALLY on the temperance issue the *Star* took a moderate position. It deplored the abuses of alcohol, but pointed out on several occasions that some of the more vocal dries ordered their whiskey by mail and thus kept their own homes well stocked. Chortled the *Star* on July 10, 1910, "The public has been informed by the *Telephone*, the 'dry' organ of this town, that 23 barrels of bottled beer were received here at one depot last Saturday, and that 50 barrels came by freight over the same road. This is the first time that we have ever been able to vouch for anything that has appeared in the *Telephone*."

As the day set aside for the referendum approached, the editor of the *Star* pointed out that the outcome of the dry vote in 1909 hadn't been all that great. For example, the city and county

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