

REILLY'S TAVERN

Joe Reilly, Proprietor

Joe was a robust Irish cop from Brooklyn, NY. He is remembered as playing the spoons, singing and telling jokes to his customers. The tavern walls were decorated with toilet seats and behind them photos of local community members. The major was always included.

The building which no longer exists was located at 128 W. Main St.

The Reilly's sign was one of the many types of neon on Main St.

The front awning read "Home of the Lo-Ball Club". It is a best guess that this was referring to a poker game called "Lowball". In Lowball the lowest hand wins the pot. Remember Joe Reilly was quite a character. (It's also been reported that he had a screen in the alley hooked up to electricity to shock anyone who decided not to use the men's room as their first choice. If we don't use this sentence we can remove Bill's name from the interview source)

On Main Street the town had its beginning. In spite of devastating fires in 1914 and again in 1917 the property owners rebuilt and reopened. Prior to Reilly's Tavern this building housed Jack's Place in the 1940s. Jack Rimel operated the pool hall and tavern on the first floor and rented out cots for 50 cents per night on the second floor. Today you can visualize the location from the saved concrete slabs that are marked "Jack's Place" as you are approaching and leaving the area.

Main Street was Casa Grande's commercial district and the state highway to Tucson until Hwy. 84 was relocated to 2nd Street in the early 1950's. Today, Hwy. 84 ends at the five point's intersection just before entering the historic downtown area. In the day, Reilly's was a quite the stopping place for those traveling Hwy. 84 between Phoenix and Tucson. They could grab a beer, a sandwich and be entertained by Reilly.

Also, in the day the white customers entered through the front door and there was a back door off the alley for the colored customers. There was a colored female bartender that worked the area. After the tavern was sold she spent some time working at Ruidoso Downs Race Track with Joe and his wife.

Joe Reilly sold the tavern to Harold Hanson & Bud Zimmerman in the mid-1950s. He spent time after that as the head concessioner at the Ruidoso Downs Race Track in southern New Mexico, working with his wife and his long time colored bartender from Reilly's Tavern.

Several years later, unfortunately, in a rented room above Reilly's Tavern there was a murder and fire was set to the building. There was an arrest with no conviction. The tavern wasn't rebuilt.

When Van, the artist who painted this door, was researching the color of the sign on the internet he acquired a match book cover from Reilly's Tavern that he donated to the Casa Grande Valley Historical Society. (Could we consider adding the match book cover photo for everyone to enjoy?)

Sources:

Interviewed Jimmie Kerr, William Trulove, Jr.
CGVHS

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