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It Is This Music, You Just Can't Stop Dancing' - Lesbian Visiting the Barrio Tiberon in Tucson 1926

The early 1920's in Tucson opened with a population of 20,092 within the city's 5.7 square mile limits and for many a new need emerged for the modern, the wild, the fun, the flamboyant, and the sexual after all the seriousness of the then gone World War 1 Period (see 1900-1910's) was soon left behind. Tucson and America suddenly felt rich, free of the old days, and wanted to party to show it. The 1920's in Tucson suddenly began to ROAR! However, in the somewhat conservative Tucson, the wild students from all around the big cities of the United States attending the University of Arizona, and locals who loved a good time on the wild side contrasted sharply with the sometimes only outwardly appearing stalwart conservative leadership of Tucson.



1922 Around Town

However, if you wanted fun on the wild side, there was no trouble finding it in the Old Pueblo of the 1920's. Even while alcohol was officially outlawed in the United States in what was termed by many as The Grand Experiment that actually took effect on a cold January 16, 1920, in Tucson the booze still flowed freely.



1925 Gay Actor Ramón Navarro  
In The Movie Ben-Hur

Alcohol was being made in various size stills and even in people's bathtubs from the campus of the University of Arizona to the warehouses of the downtown area, to Congress Street area hotels, and right up to on top of Mount Lemmon.

Considering that Nogales, Mexico was only 60 miles to the south, any kind of hard liquor, wine, or beer a person ever really wanted was easily available as loads of booze constantly made their way first up to Tucson for sale to its residents, and then went on to hundreds of other U.S. towns and cities.



1924 Drag King

Tucson's two Red Light Flesh & Fun Districts of the time, one called the Barrio Tiberon located in what would one day be called Tucson's 4th Avenue Arts District, and the other downtown just off of Congress Street were in full swing 24 hours a day, but after dark the intensity of the festivities often found few human boundaries. One such establishment, The Prospector located just off 4th Avenue was operated by a Lesbian known as Choo Choo Clarissa for her unstoppable spirit who catered to Gays, Bisexuals, Lesbians, and anyone else who liked watching or participating as the genders bended at all hours of the day and night. The Music and Performances were live, the booze flowed freely, was often drank right out of each other's shoes, and the smell of marijuana drifted through the air inside Choo Choo Clarissa's pleasure house.



1930 Downtown

Local Tucson police and city officials were often not overly interested in enforcing a very unpopular federal law that split the nation and came from a Congress thousands of miles away back east in Washington, D.C. With the small size of Tucson at the time, there were seldom any of the only 1,520 Federal Prohibition Agents stationed around the United States in the city. Occasionally, small token raids might be carried out just to placate the federal officials, but they almost always turned out to be almost empty warehouses or homes used as party places containing only a few bottles of hard alcohol to be confiscated just to show they had done something. Even the federal government itself did not always willingly enforce their own new ban on alcohol. Curiously and almost ironically, one of Tucson's most avid and vocal supporter of the local citizens right to drink alcohol during prohibition were the local Catholic Churches which maintained that the Federal Government did not have the right to define the morality of citizens.



1923 Around Town

In yet another ironic twist the Ku Klux Klan strongly supported the outlawing of all alcoholic beverages throughout the entire United States for any reason.

The federal law of the 1920's did have one interesting loophole however. Certain United States farmers (a garden in the back yard often counted) were allowed to make up to 200 gallons of wine or cider each year and large numbers of people began making their own alcoholic beverages at home. To do so, they often used bricks of wine, sometimes called blocks of wine. To meet the booming demand for grape juice, grape growers in California increased their growing areas over 700% in just the first five years of prohibition alone.



1925 'Mixer' Dance

The juice was commonly sold around Tucson as bricks or blocks of Rhine Wine, blocks of port, and so on along with a warning: After dissolving the brick in a gallon of water, do not place the liquid in a large jug up in the cupboard for twenty days, because then it would turn into wine..... One enterprising grape block producer sold nine varieties: Port, Virginia Dare, Muscatel, Angelica, Tokay, Sauterne, Riesling, Claret and Burgundy.



1920's Popular Song

As the 1920's came to a close the heady "this will never end mind set", borrowing binges, taking out personal, business, property, and other loans to buy far highly inflated far over their value and often downright phony stocks by the public, business, large investors, trust funds, and even banks finally came home to roost on the morning of October 29th, 1929 when the stock market located back in New York City took a tumble that led to a roller coasting up and down whipsaw only ending in the stock market bottoming out finally in 1932 with 89% of that stock markets value having disappeared into thin air as the country's biggest but not the first or last depression or financial panic hit the entire nation hard.

Curiously, the home and property values of the time had already began their downward slide and had hit bottom four (4) years before in 1925.



1933 Around Town

Although Tucson was a remote small town far away from the big cities of the United States, its population in early 1930 of 28,546 could not escape the Great Depression of the 1930's.

Local banks closed their doors unable to return their depositors money and never reopened (at that time no FDIC Insurance existed and depositors were on their own if anything happened), many people employed in Tucson suddenly lost their jobs, property owners lost their properties unable to make the payments and slept in tents or on the ground, some children ended up homeless on the hot dusty dirt streets of Tucson as parents could no longer feed or shelter them. On Tuesday August 22, 1933 the Southern Pacific Railway Company announced that their roundtrip ticket from Tucson to Phoenix and back to Tucson would be \$2.45.



1935 Chevrolet Newspaper Advertisement Tucson

In Tucson both of Tucson's Red Light Districts, the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual club owners and customers soon pitched in to cook up huge pots of stew containing any animal that strayed by and all the vegetables they could get their hands on or steal from Tucson's numerous small roadside Truck Farms located everywhere around the area. Hundreds and even thousands were fed in the 1930's by the very establishments and people that just a short time before they had turned their noses up at, regularly had the money at one time to frequent, or simply had no idea that a Gay or Lesbian had in some way made their one bowl of soup meal a day possible. Along the way on December 5, 1933 President Franklin Delanor Roosevelt signed the 23rd Amendment that repealed prohibition, and Tucson was once again officially Wet.



1933 The "Tucson Froggy Boys" Club

That Great Economic Depression of the 1930's at the time did however bring all men and women in the Old Pueblo even closer together than they had been before. Out of that lasting bonds, friendships and at times same sex relationships were formed that flourished well into the future decades. Meantime, around Tucson the Pioneer, Congress, Mac Arthur, and Santa Rita hotels cafe's-restaurants and only a very few bars continued to be discrete places for Gays-Lesbians to meet if you knew which side of the room to be seated at, and at what times to go as long as you were totally discrete at all times when there.



1935 Pioneer Hotel  
Downtown Tucson

As the decade ending in 1939 came to a close in Tucson with 35,236 people living within the 7.7 square mile city limits. Gone (or almost) were horses-wagons on the streets of Tucson, Vaudeville Acts as Moving Pictures and Radio took over, ice delivery's for the ice box a.k.a. refrigerator, confidence in banks, making your families clothes at home by hand and or machine sewing, buttons started going out as zippers finally became accepted, 10 cents a gallon gasoline, dressing very young boys in girls clothes a.k.a. Breeching to name but a few.

The earliest known recipient of a Male to Female Sex Reassignment Surgery was Lili Elbe in Berlin, between 1930 & 1931. The operation was started with the removal of the male sex organs and performed by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld. The patient Lili Elbe went on to have four more subsequent operations that included a last unsuccessful ovarian transplant which resulted in her death.



1931 Stone Avenue Tucson

All around America there was a feeling of hope for a better future just around the corner going into the next decade. That feeling was being reinforced, and at times created by the President Franklin Delanor Roosevelt during his weekly Fireside Chats to the public heard over the radio in most people's homes and in public places. Unfortunately, here and there in the latter 1930's early newspaper articles began mentioning the Japanese Imperial Military had marched into China after starting in 1931 in Manchuria with their full attack later on China July 7, 1937. The Nazi German Army would later march into Poland in a Blitzkrieg Attack that began on September 1, 1939.



1933 Home Entertainment  
Center in Tucson

Many of the people and those in the government of the United States still remembered the last War To End All Wars (World War 1) it had sent it's young men and nurses over to the war in 1915 (see 1910's-1900's) and wanted no part of going "Over There" into "Someone Else's Problems" again anytime soon.



1932 Around The University  
of Arizona Tucson

However, like a volcano, if rumblings are a warning sign often leading up something bigger, the Gays & Lesbians of the time period would surely figure right into it along with everyone else in many ways.

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