

COALING STATION A

The hub of Fresno County's rich sprawling west side began life as a coaling station on the Southern Pacific Railroad. Coal was dug in the mountains west of there in the early 1880's, giving the location the name "Coaling Station A." Of course, the railroad workers shortened that name to "Coaling A," and eventually shortened it even further to "Coalinga."

In the 1860's Frank Dusy, who you will remember as the early day owner of Dusy's Rockpile in Knowles and the man who gave Dinkey Creek its name, had found evidence of oil in the Coast Range not far from the present site of Coalinga, and organized a company to exploit it. But nothing really came of this venture, even though there was a small boom and some financial speculation.

But in the 1890's, oil drilling began in earnest, and oil derricks spotted the horizon in all directions for miles. When the area was in at its peak production, it was claimed that there were over 2000 wells producing oil in the Coalinga area.

With all the activity in oil, it wasn't long before the sleepy little coaling station became a fully blown town, and **what** a town at that! In all of Fresno County's colorful history, there was probably never another town as robust as Coalinga in its boom days.

The excitement of the black gold was in the air, stimulating the citizens and enriching the merchants. Saloons and gambling houses lined the main street. Coalinga was booming and broad and boisterous, with plenty of money to spend and lots of ways and places to spend it. In time, the

noisy and difficult to control camp became an incorporated city.

Not long after incorporation California made it possible for all women over 21 years of age to vote. This was not a situation that gave the men of Coalinga much of a sense of alarm, as they seemingly were able to easily control their women folk. But by 1918, wives whose voices had been hitherto muffled and muted, began to find articulation and eloquence. The women, with rolling pins grasped tightly in hand, began blocking the doorways to local establishments of male pleasure. Saloon patronage dropped, and wives began to speak of prohibition openly and in public.

The men folk snickered and sneered, but in reality, they were whistling past the graveyard. The women were serious, they were organized, and they were on a mission.

In the election of 1918, women went to the polls and cast their vote for a Coalinga option proposal which effectively dried up the town. Whiskey, beer, gin, wine, and every other type of alcoholic beverage were outlawed inside the city limits of Coalinga. But, in reality, on every corner speakeasies prospered and liquor flowed like water.

Those women, whose votes had brought about the prohibition of liquor, cried long and loud that something must be done. They expected enforcement of the new law and punishment for the wicked evil doers.

As a result, Coalinga's officers of the law made it their mission to run down, capture, and prosecute every violator of Coalinga's dry law. And they were extremely successful. Arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced, Coalinga's first bootlegger was a woman.