

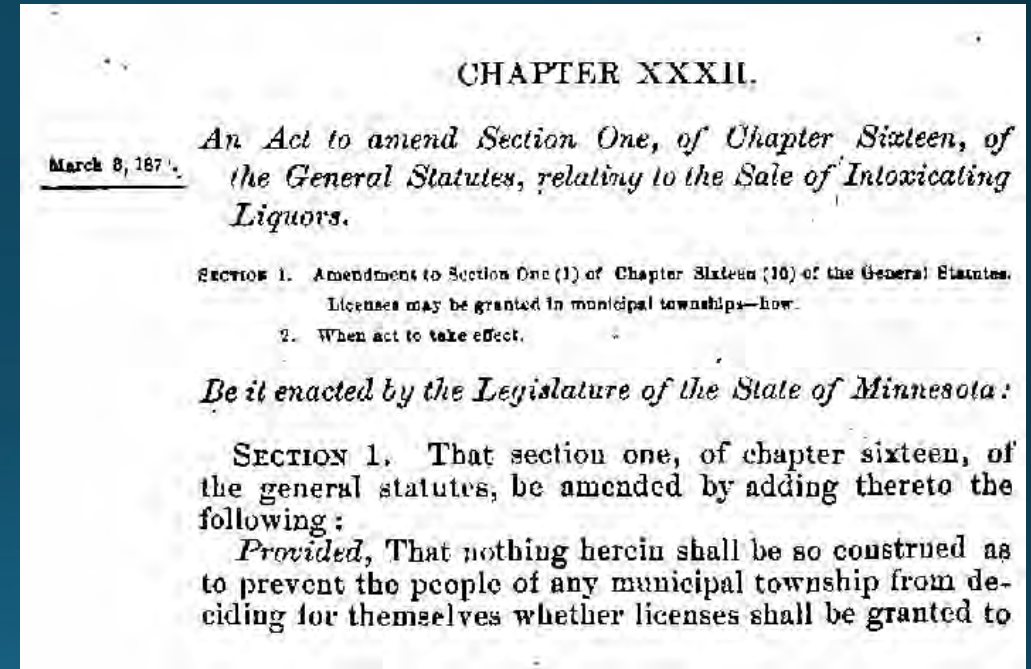
Local Option Elections

aka, the “License Question”

In Morrison County

The Story of Local Option Goes Far Back in Minnesota History

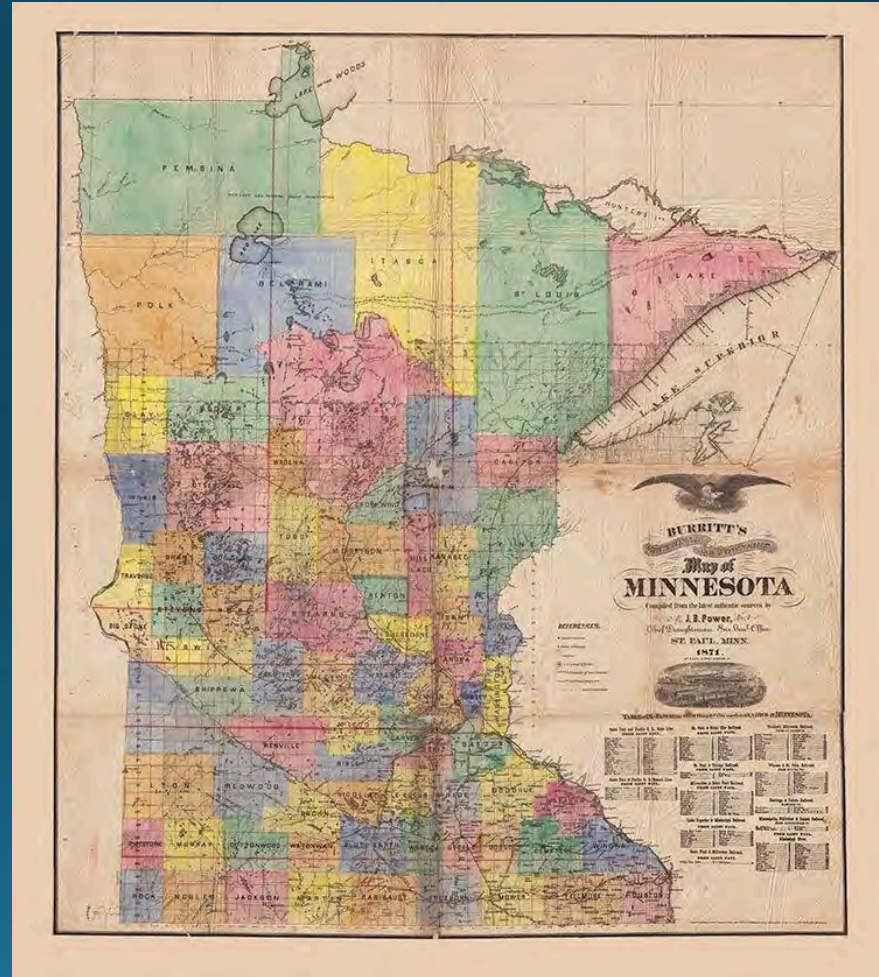
In 1870, barely twelve years after Minnesota's founding, the legislature passes a Local Option statute that allowed for organized townships to hold a vote on whether or not to permit licenses to be issued for the sale of "intoxicating, vinous, or spirituous" beverages. All it took was a petition of ten (10!) registered voters to get the question on the ballot.



Chapter 32, Minnesota Statutes, March 1870

Why Townships Only?

- At the time, the vast majority of the state's barely 440,000 residents lived townships, both organized and unorganized.
- Wide swaths of the state were barely settled at all.
- In 1870, the largest city was St. Paul, population 20,000.
- Map is of Minnesota, 1871.



So What Did That Mean?

- Simply put, the people of a township could decide for themselves if their town board could issue licenses for liquor sales.
- If they said “No License”, then all existing licenses were allowed to expire, and no new ones could be issued.
- It would remain that way until another vote was taken which undid the previous action.



Next Step – Villages

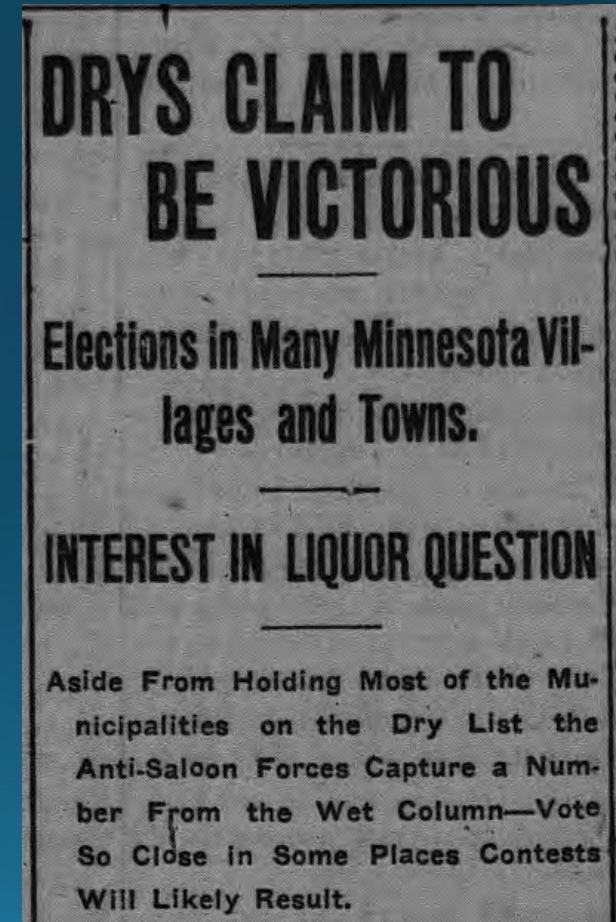
- As the population of Minnesota grew – by 1880 it was just over 780,000 – the number of incorporated cities and villages in the state had grown dramatically.
- In 1885 the legislature expanded the Local Option statute to include “villages”, which at the time, unlike today, held a specific legal meaning.
- The ten signature threshold for petitions was kept in place.



Stock village hall image, not from Morrison County.

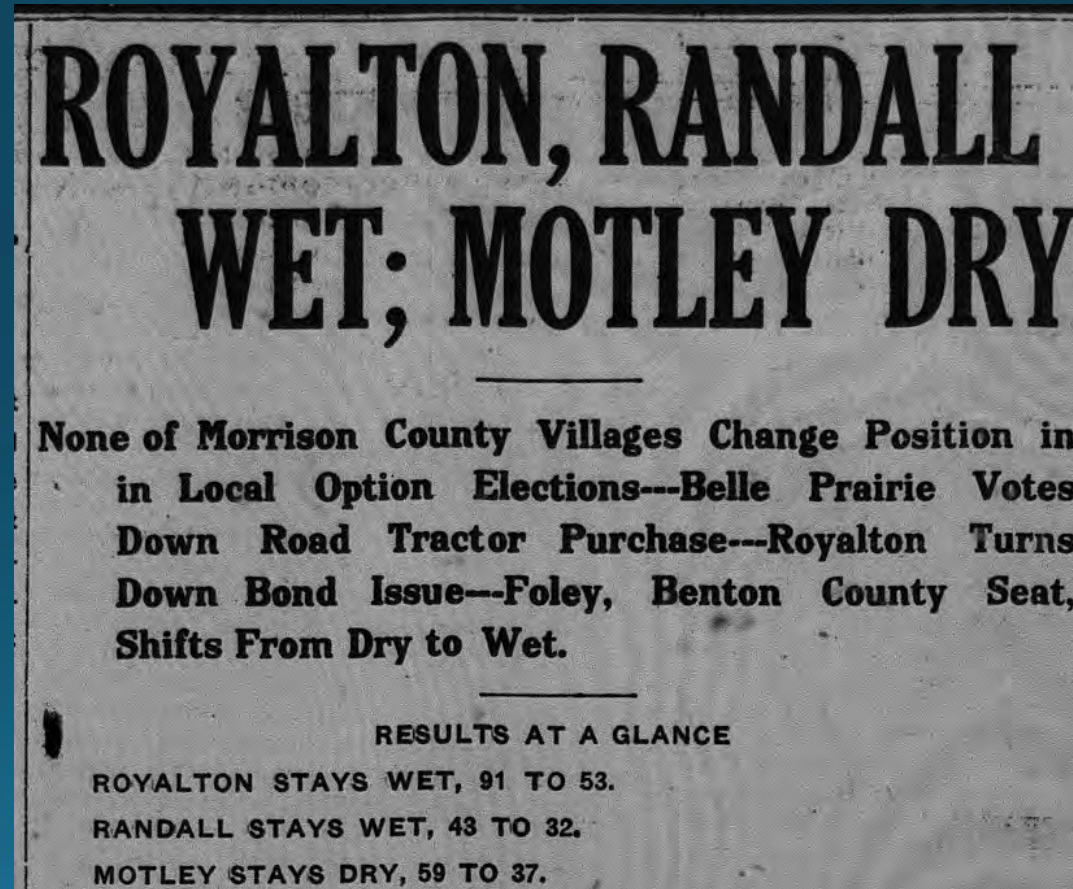
How Many Elections Were Held Each Year?

- Tracking all the elections held is not an easy task.
- There are no comprehensive roundups of these elections.
- Media coverage was inconsistent.
- The annual yearbook of the Anti-Saloon League did its best to record all the villages that were considered “dry”.



Morrison County Saw Its Share of Local Option Elections

- Despite its demographic leanings, Morrison County was not immune from seeing Local Option elections.
- Three villages in particular saw the most occurrences.



Randall

Town Elections.

Annual town meetings were held in the various towns throughout the county Tuesday and following is the result of the elections:

RANDALL.

Liquor license carried by a majority of 46, and 113 votes were polled. Supervisors, Frank Lucas, chairman, Peter Nilan, J. R. Wood; treasurer, A. P. Thelan; town clerk, Fred Boulter; assessor, Chas. Regnel; justice of the peace, S. A. Wood; Constable, Sam Crow.

March 1894

ELECTIONS IN THE COUNTY

Village of Randall Votes no License by 14 Majority, Motley by 20 Majority

PUT LID ON HUNTING

Belle Prairie Town Takes Matter Up at Election Tuesday—Hard on Sportsmen

RANDALL VILLAGE
 President—C. O. Dahlquist.
 Councilmen—Wm. Strahl, I. N. Davis, F. L. Willey.
 Recorder—N. O. Olson.
 Treasurer—C. E. Chapman.
 Justice—Hans Gosch.
 Constables—H. L. Decker, Galen Campbell.
 License—22
 No License—36.

March 1912

The village election Tuesday went on very quietly with the drys coming out victorious. Village ticket elected:

President—C. O. Dalquist.
 Council—F. L. Willey, I. N. Davis, H. N. Elvig.
 Recorder—N. O. Olson.
 Constables—H. L. Decker, N. E. Lattimer.
 Justices of peace—A. Kennedy, Anton Bermel.
 Assessor—A. Kennedy.
 Treasurer—C. E. Chapman.

March 1913

Village of Randall

F. Schwanke, president.
 Geo. Nelson, W. J. Cole, John Thompson, trustees.
 Dennis Sheedy, clerk.
 August Schwanke, treasurer.
 Roy Quimby, justice of the peace.
 Barney Bentler, constable, 2 years.
 Wet by 2 votes. Total 80.

March 1916, very close

RANDALL VOTES FOR LICENSE

Motley Also Goes Into the Wet Column—Other Results of Tuesday's Election

March 1914

VILLAGE OF RANDALL
 Mayor—Wm. Schermerhorn.
 Councilmen—Hans Gosch, Geo. Nelson, M. Jasorka.
 Treasurer—C. E. Chapman.
 Clerk—P. L. Melberg.
 Assessor—Angus Kennedy.
 Constable—Thos. Lambert.
 Dry—27
 Wet—34

In March 1918, Randall voted "dry" by five votes.

Motley

RESULTS IN THE COUNTY

Officers Who Are the Choice of Voters in Different Towns and Villages

A no-license issue, which was placed before the voters in the village of Motley at their Tuesday election, was defeated, the vote on this issue being 58 favoring the granting of licenses in the village and 34 opposing the granting of liquor privileges. The newly elected officers of the different towns and villages are:

MOTLEY VILLAGE

President of council—B. F. Cale.
Councilmen—V. Lockwood, John Blake, Geo. Brown.
Recorder—G. W. Mosher.
Treasurer—Sherman Tower.
Justices of the peace—Z. Harrison, Rodney Hanks.
Constable—Geo. Davenport.
For license—58.
Against license—34.

March 1910

MOTLEY

Motley, March 13.—In a hard fought contest here the drys won a sweeping victory in the annual village election yesterday, when they defeated the saloon advocates by 22 majority and elected an entire dry council. Practically every business man in town worked against the saloons being returned, this being the third successive year they have been voted out. Village officers elected were Alfred Wilson, mayor; A. P. Holm, Ed. Brazier and George Palmer, councilmen; W. E. Little, recorder; Charles Bierwagen, treasurer; Chas. Akin, constable. Motley township officers were W. N. Mersy, supervisor; W. E. Little, clerk; Chas. Bierwagen, treasurer; U. A. Winslow, justice; Charles Akin, constable.

March 1913. Article noted that this was the "third successive year" saloons had been rejected.

MOTLEY

President—G. W. Mosher.
Councilman—George Palmer.
Clerk—Arthur J. Johnson.
Treasurer—C. H. Bierwagen.
Justices—Thomas Goggin, Chas. Trickle.
Constable—Ralph Lyon.
Recorder—R. T. Benedict.
Dry—45.
Wet—47.

March 1914 – Wet by 2!

Village of Motley

V. Lockwood, president.
Lou Brauer, Jesse Hanks, Chas. Brazier, councilmen.
J. O. Johnson, clerk.
H. A. Mosher, treasurer.
John Newcombe, J. O. Torgerson, justices of the peace.
Ralph Lyons, constable.
Dry 62. Wet 30.

March 1916 – Stayed Dry.

March 1915 – Back to Dry

Motley Village

President—Fred Sears.
Councilmen—J. O. Johnson, L. Brauer, Geo. Palmer.
Recorder—R. L. Benedict.
Treasurer—Chas. Bierwagen.
Justices—John Newcomb, Clyde Townsend.
Constable—Chas. Aken.
For license, 45; against license, 55; 100 votes cast.

and Royalton

ROYALTON.

The election was the hottest one held at Royalton in years, as the license question was brought before the voters; as a result the village will be dry after the liquor licenses now in force expire, which will be in June and December. Following is the ticket elected with the exception of one trustee and constable whose names we were unable to get: president, J. H. Russell; trustees, J. C. Higgins, P. McKee, R. C. Muncy; recorder, H. Galley; treasurer, C. Gillpatrick; justice of the peace, Wm. Drago.

March 1894

The Royalton Election.

The village election held at Royalton on Tuesday was an unusually hot one and the no license club was turned down. They voted to permit the licensing of saloons, and elected the following village officers:

President—J. Lonsdale.
Trustees—N. P. Fidler, John Sjoberg, B. Fietsam.
Recorder—H. M. Logan.
Treasurer—Chas. Rhoda.
Justice of the Peace—J. D. Logan.
Constable—J. D. Boyd.

March 1895

THREE WET AND DRY FIGHTS ON

ROYALTON, MOTLEY AND RANDALL VOTING ON LOCAL OPTION TODAY

ROYALTON VOTING ON BOND ISSUE, BELLE PRAIRIE ON TRACTOR

Towns and village elections are being held today and, with three local option fights on and other matters of importance to be balloted on, besides the usual election of officers, they are of more than usual interest.

Royalton, Randall and Motley are villages which are voting on the license issue. Royalton was dry for one year about 20 years ago, Motley is now dry and Randall has shifted back and forth several times. Just now it is wet.

March 1917

ROYALTON, RANDALL WET; MOTLEY DRY

None of Morrison County Villages Change Position in Local Option Elections—Belle Prairie Votes Down Road Tractor Purchase—Royalton Turns Down Bond Issue—Foley, Benton County Seat, Shifts From Dry to Wet.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

ROYALTON STAYS WET, 91 TO 53.
RANDALL STAYS WET, 48 TO 32.
MOTLEY STAYS DRY, 59 TO 37.

Some Townships Also Saw The Question On Their Ballot

BELLEVUE.
Supervisors, Frank Renick, chairman, J. B. Lambert, J. P. Leigh; treasurer, A. C. Wilson; town clerk, A. W. Swanson; assessor, P. B. McDougall; justices of peace, Wm. Dragoo, M. N. Miles; constable, J. J. Martin. Against restraining cattle, 214; in favor of restraining cattle, 9; against license, 130; in favor of license, 92.

Bellevue Twp, March 1894

Considerable interest was taken in the annual meeting at Belle Prairie. Besides the election of town officers the herd law and license questions were voted upon. Cattle will be allowed to run at large and the citizens will buy their hock at Little Falls or go without. Following are the names of the town officers: Supervisors, F. J. Farrand; chairman, F. Branchaud, M. Heroux; clerk, H. Rasicot; treasurer, Jas. Gravel; assessor, Peter Picott; justices of the peace, C. W. Little, F. Bedow; constable, M. L. Little.

Belle Prairie Twp, March 1893

BELLE PRAIRIE.
Supervisors, Barome Doucette, chairman, John Bastian, N. Gravel; clerk, Henry Rasicot; assessor, P. Picotte; treasurer, James Gravel; justices of the peace, Moses Coe, Thomas Wilcox; constable, Ferdinand Rocheleau, M. C. Little. Restraining of cattle, no. Liquor license, no. 122 votes cast.

Belle Prairie Twp, March 1895

Since the state's inception, Township elections were held on the second Tuesday in March. Which is still true today unless voters choose to move their election to November.

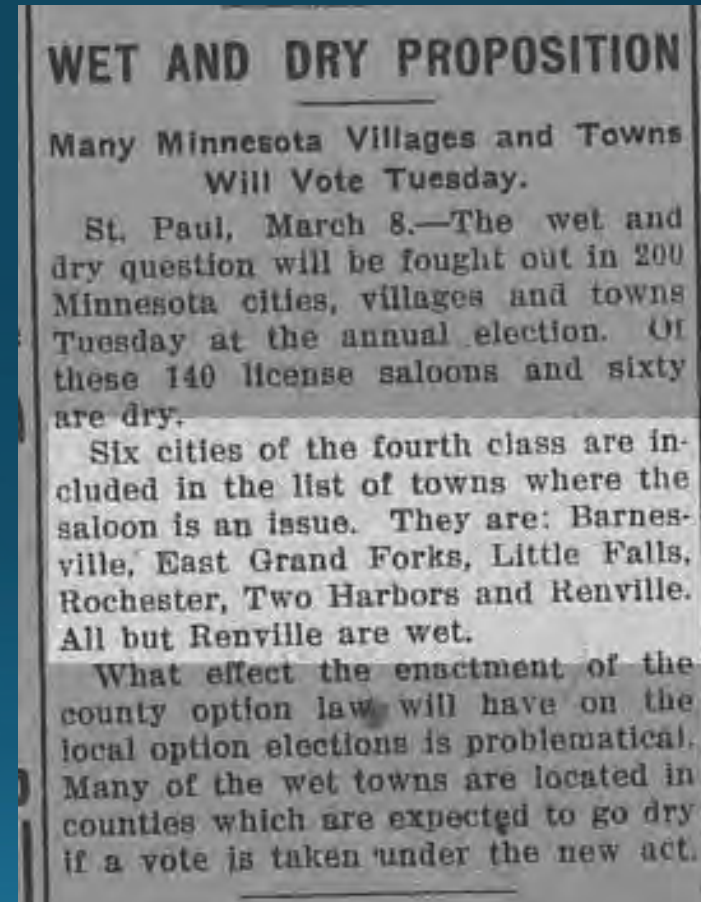
Insert County Option Here

- In March 1915, Gov. Hammond signed a County Option statute, allowing for entire counties to vote themselves dry.
- By the end of that year, 46 of Minnesota's 86 counties had gone dry.
- By the end of 1917, 55 were dry.
- Morrison County was not amongst that number; no vote was ever held on the question.



But What About Little Falls?

- Good question – Why didn't Little Falls hold local option elections?
- Originally incorporated in 1879 as a "village", it reorganized in 1889 as a "city" and thus could not hold an election on the subject. Until...
- In 1913, the state legislature expanded the Local Option statute to include cities of the "fourth class", of which Little Falls was one. It also upped the number of signatures required for those cities. Villages and townships remained the same.



Little Falls Daily Transcript, 8 March 1915

The 1915 Election

The 1915 election saw intense interest, including several large ads by a local citizens committee who wanted the saloons to go.

**LITTLE FALLS TO VOTE
ON SALOON QUESTION**

Petition Circulated Saturday Has More
Than Required Number of
Signatures

10 Per Cent of Voters Must Sign to Place
Question on Ballot at Spring
Election

**Archbishop John Ireland
Said:** "The saloon is the deadly enemy of the health, of the home, of the family, of the country and of God. And America demands, and will demand in stronger tones yet, that this American saloon shall disappear from the face of our fair land. We must work and bend every effort so that Catholics in political matters will be arrayed against the liquor interests."

Paid Advertisement. This advertisement, costing \$1 per issue, is authorized and paid for by the Citizens' Committee, 217 John Watson, Little Falls, Minn.

**When You Vote Next Tuesday
Remember**

**You judge every industry by ability to
PRODUCE RESULTS**

The farm by location, buildings, soil, crops.
The store by aggregate sales, net results.
The bank by loans, discounts, safety, dividends.
The sawmill, the flour mill, the paper mill, in fact
every industry stands on the same basis.

You hire the carpenter, the bricklayer, clerk, teamster,
machinist, ditchdigger, printer, doctor, lawyer, teacher, minister,
on the understanding that they, each and all, can deliver
"The Goods"

The sawmill's finished product is high grade lumber,
good in house, barn, furniture for a 100 years.
The flour mill stands for food for the million.
The paper mill for national necessity.

Judge the liquor business by the same rules--Why not?

**Does it produce efficiency, prosperity,
permanency OR poverty,
pauperism, crime? Which?**

Paid Advertisement. This advertisement, costing \$1 per issue, is authorized and paid for by the Citizens' Committee, 217 John Watson, Little Falls, Minn.

Voters, Read Carefully

Let this be understood. We are not
studying the Distiller, Brewer, Saloon-
keeper or Bartender, but the
BUSINESS
We cast no reflection on any of these men
BECAUSE
They are Sanctioned, Secured,
Protected by Law, and are the
Greatest Monopoly in the World.

The Credits we have given are
Greater than the Facts Warrant
We are willing to discuss the matter thro
the press or on the platform with any au-
thorized agent of the business on this basis:

**Products. Personal Liberty.
Partnership. Profits.**
Tomorrow and Thursday---Products.
Friday---Personal Liberty.
Saturday---Partnership.

Needed to run one saloon a day: \$15 profit to pay run-
ning expenses, so must sell \$35. This means 400 "beers"
at 5c each, 150 whiskies at 10c. This for 18 saloons is
7,200 beers and 2,700 whiskies daily.

Despite The Effort, Little Falls Voters Chose To Keep Their Saloons Open

REMAINS "WET" BY MAJORITY 225 VOTES

Ellenbecker Beats Signor for Assessor; Lyon Elected Municipal Judge; Dr. S. R. Fortier Beaten for Alderman by Geo. H. Johnson on West Side; Schallern has Biggest Majority of Any.

Results At a Glance
City remains wet by 225 majority.
Mayor—G. M. A. Fortier.
City clerk—Victor Schallern.
Assessor—Frank Ellenbecker.
Municipal judge—F. W. Lyon.
Treasurer—John Vertin.
Alderman-at-large—G. F. Moeglein.
Alderman First ward—F. E. Hall.
Alderman Second ward—J. S. Murphy.
Alderman Third ward—Geo. M. Johnson.
Alderman Fourth ward—H. J. LaFond.
Tabulated results in another column.

The "wets" won by a majority of 225 at yesterday's election, according to the unofficial returns. They had 74 majority in the First ward, 33 in the Second, 27 in the Third and 91 in the Fourth.

A big crowd waited at each polling place while the judges counted the vote and the crowd stood up patiently and waited while the general ballots, which were counted first, were finished. Almost everyone in the crowd was keeping track of the vote. Neither side manifested any great surprise

at the result, although it was generally expected that the "wets" would get a larger majority, the prediction most often heard being of a "wet" victory by 300 votes.

The vote cast on the license issue was not nearly so large as was expected, the total being 975. Several blank license ballots were found in each box. The total vote on the general ballot is larger than that on license.

In the general city election the greatest surprise was the defeat of Dr. S. R. Fortier for alderman from the Third ward by Geo. M. Johnson, who will succeed Geo. H. Peterson. City Clerk Schallern has the biggest majority of any of the candidates who had opposition, being returned to his present office by a margin of 574. The fight in which the most interest was shown was that for city assessor, Lyman Signor, the present incumbent of that office, being defeated by Frank Ellenbecker by 11 votes.

The new office of municipal judge, created by an act of the state legislature about a month ago, will be filled for the first term by F. W. Lyon, who defeated Justice of the Peace Geo. Gerritz for the office by a vote of 571 to 408.

The other candidates were elected without opposition. In spite of the liquor issue, it was one of the quietest elections ever held.

It really was not even close.



Official Election Returns						
March 16, 1915						
	First Ward	Second Ward	Third Ward	Fourth Ward	Total	Majority
MAYOR—						
Fortier.....	258	202	177	156	793	.....
CLERK—						
Schallern	265	195	169	148	777	574
Doherty.....	66	56	35	46	203	.....
ASSESSOR—						
Signor.....	125	148	112	115	500	.....
Ellenbecker.....	216	106	105	84	511	11
TREASURER—						
Vertin.....	259	185	184	148	776	.....
JUSTICES—						
Turner.....	138	118	122	92	480	.....
Randall.....	244	164	147	122	677	.....
MUNICIPAL JUDGE—						
Gerritz.....	148	100	85	75	408	.....
Lyon.....	179	152	122	118	571	163
ALD. AT LARGE—						
Moeglein	261	193	174	154	782	.....
ALD. 1st WARD—						
Hall.....	245	.....	.....	.....	245	.....
ALD. 2nd WARD—						
Murphy .....	.....	193	.....	.....	193	.....
ALD. 3rd WARD—						
Fortier.....	.....	.....	93	.....	93	.....
Johnson.....	.....	.....	115	.....	115	22
ALD. 4th WARD—						
LaFond.....	.....	.....	.....	162	162	.....
For License.....	233	146	123	148	650	275
Against License	109	113	96	57	375	.....

1917 Election

Two years later the same citizens committee tried again.

LOCAL OPTION PETITION FILED

**ASKS THAT LICENSE QUESTION
BE SUBMITTED TO VOTERS
AT SPRING ELECTION**

A petition asking that the local option question be submitted to the voters of this city at the spring election was filed with City Clerk Victor Schallern Tuesday afternoon by F. A. Nelson, member of the committee which circulated it. The petition contained 103 signatures. The law requires that a petition of this kind contain the signatures of at least ten per cent of the voters of the city, according to the last city election. The vote last spring was 864.

The local option question was voted on here two years ago, with the result that it was defeated by a majority of 275 votes.

LOCAL NEWS

WEATHER
Partly cloudy tonight and Tuesday; probably snow flurries northeast portion; warmer east portion tonight; moderate to fresh winds, mostly southwest.

Harry Doten spent Sunday at St. Cloud.
You'll enjoy the Radisson, Minneapolis.—Adv.

PAID ADVERTISEMENT
(This advertisement, costing 45 cents per issue, is authorized and to be paid for by the citizens' committee, F. A. Nelson, chairman.)

Do Your Duty!
Harry Haum went to St. Paul on business Sunday afternoon.
Mabel Tallafiero in "The Dawn of Love" at Milo tonight.—Adv.
W. L. McGonagle of Royaltown was in Little Falls on business Monday.
The hotel of character and comfort, Hotel Radisson, Minneapolis.—Adv.
G. W. Firstahl returned home Saturday afternoon after a business trip to the Twin cities.

Vote Early!
The Professional Five Hundred club will be entertained at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ed. M. LaFond Tuesday night.
Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Nichols of Montana are visiting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. George Kay, south of the city.
The Buckman home at 112 Fourth street southeast was today sold to Ed. M. LaFond, possession to be taken June 1.

Vote Dry!
Mr. and Mrs. Henning Landahl returned Saturday evening from a month's visit in Chicago, St. Louis and other points.
When in Minneapolis don't fail to

Much less attention was paid, and the results were the same. Voters said: "We want to keep our saloons!"

**CITY REMAINS WET
BY 181 MAJORITY**

**Wets Poll 601 Votes to 420 for Drys—Option Forces
Make Much Better Showing Than Two Years Ago—
Andrew Johnson Defeats Victor Schallern and J. W.
Crossfield for Clerk—Majority Over Schallern is 62
Votes—Record Vote of 1,032 is Cast.**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

WETS WIN BY 181 MAJORITY.
MAYOR—N. N. BERGHEIM.
CLERK—ANDREW JOHNSON.
ASSESSOR—FRANK ELLENBECKER.
TREASURER—JOHN VERTIN.
JUSTICES OF THE PEACE—GEORGE GERRITZ, PHIL S. RANDALL.
ALDERMAN-AT-LARGE — GEORGE MOEGLEIN, SR.
ALDERMAN, FIRST WARD—FRANK E. HALL.
ALDERMAN, SECOND WARD—J. W. FALK.
ALDERMAN, THIRD WARD, TWO-YEAR TERM—N. J. PETERSON.
ALDERMAN, THIRD WARD ONE-YEAR TERM—GEORGE H. PETERSON.
ALDERMAN, FOURTH WARD—HENRY J. LAFOND.

Thus Cometh Prohibition

The ratification of the 18th Amendment to the United States Constitution, aka Prohibition, brought an end to the Local Option debate...for the time being.

Little Falls Daily Transcript,
16 January 1919

NATION BONE DRY IN ONE YEAR

Lincoln, Neb., the home state of William Jennings Bryan, was the thirty-sixth state of the United States to ratify the federal prohibition amendment. Prohibition thus becomes a part of the constitution one year from today and the nation becomes bone-dry. Ratification by the Nebraska legislature was accomplished at 10:25 this morning when the senate concurred in the house resolution passed earlier in the day. The senate two days ago ratified the amendment but as passed by the house it was amended. The senate then concurred.

Thus Endeth Prohibition

- Following Prohibition's demise in 1933 – thanks to the ratification of the 21st Amendment – the Local Option debate returned, but not nearly to the degree seen prior to 1919.
- County Option remained in place, but also not to the same level.
- It does not appear that any local option elections have been held in Morrison County following the end of Prohibition. (Though we do reserve the right to correct that record 😊.)

Little Falls Daily Transcript,
6 December 1933.



FINIS

- If you have any questions about Local Option in Morrison County, or questions about county history in general, please contact us.
- Phone: 320-632-4007
- Email: staff@morrisoncountyhistory.org
- The museum is located at 2151 Lindbergh Drive South in Little Falls. Please call ahead to ensure we are open.
- Thanks and we hope you enjoyed this presentation.
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