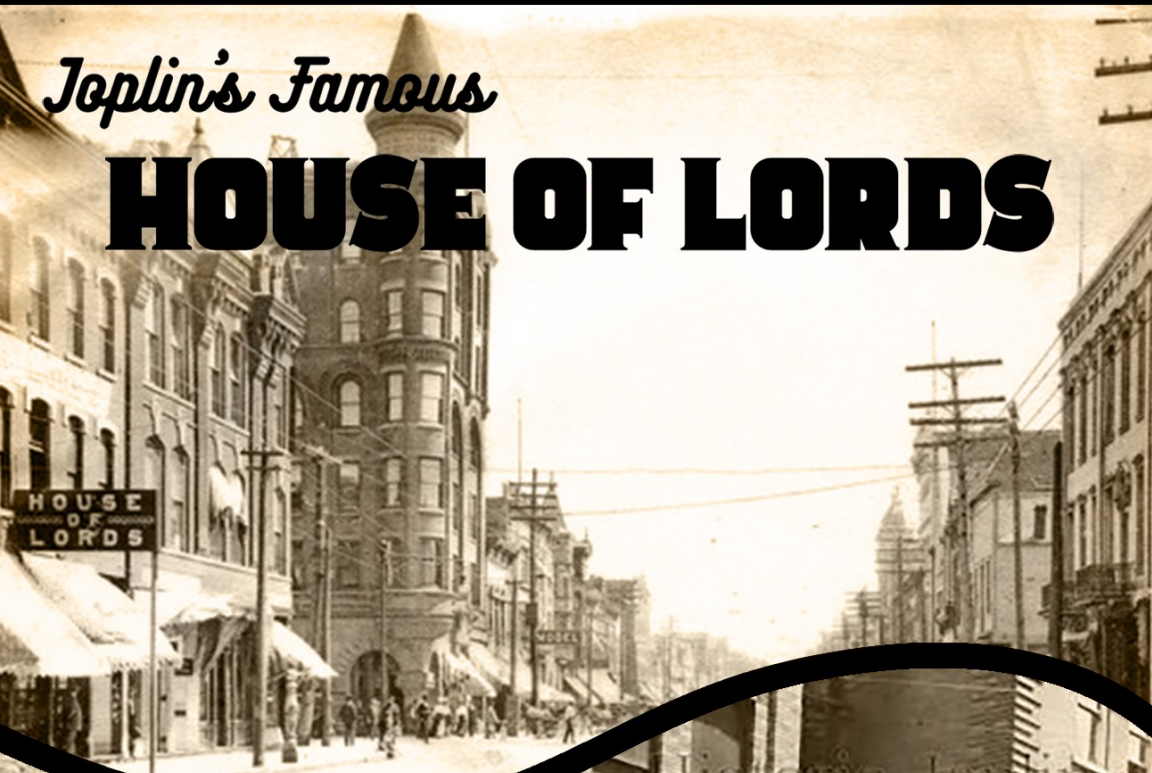


WILD WEST JOPLIN

Joplin's Famous

HOUSE OF LORDS



UNLOCK JOPLIN'S HISTORY



Dear Reader,

Joplin has always fascinated me. To me, it has never been just another Midwestern city—it has always been a true Wild West town, a place where fortunes were made and lost overnight, where law and vice walked hand in hand, and where the line between legend and history blurred with every telling. Few places capture that spirit better than the House of Lords.

The more I've researched, the more I've come to realize that this was not just another saloon. It was an institution. It was a gambling hall, a brothel, a political power center, and a stage for some of the most outrageous, violent, and fascinating stories in Joplin's past. It was a place where businessmen and outlaws rubbed shoulders, where miners wagered their paychecks on the turn of a card, and where some of the city's most powerful figures made backroom deals that shaped the town's future.

The House of Lords was Joplin at its wildest—chaotic, corrupt, dangerous, and larger than life. It was a product of a time when the town was still defining itself, still torn between progress and the outlaw spirit that built it. In researching its history, I've uncovered stories of scandal, violence, and political intrigue—of men who ran the city from the back rooms of a saloon, of law enforcement that looked the other way for the right price, and of a place so notorious that its reputation stretched far beyond Missouri.

I am thrilled to share these stories with you. Some have been whispered about for generations, some have been buried in the pages of old newspapers, and some remain unsolved mysteries that add to the House of Lords' legend. I hope that, by the time you finish reading, you'll see Joplin the way I do—a place with a history that is as wild, as untamed, and as unforgettable as the House of Lords itself.

Enjoy the journey.

Sincerely,

Joshua Shackles

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Joplin & the Demand for Vice

A City Born from the Earth

Joplin, Missouri, was not built by careful city planners or civic ambition. It was carved out of the wilderness with pickaxes, dynamite, and the relentless pursuit of buried wealth. In the late 19th century, prospectors stumbled upon vast deposits of lead and zinc hidden beneath the rolling hills of the Ozarks. Almost overnight, the landscape transformed as thousands of men poured into the region, eager to stake their claims and extract the riches from the earth. Towns sprang up almost as quickly as they disappeared, but Joplin, located at the heart of the mining belt, grew into something much larger than a temporary encampment.

Unlike the gold rush towns of California or the silver mines of Colorado, Joplin's prosperity did not rely on fleeting bursts of discovery. Lead and zinc were not just valuable—they were essential. Lead was used in everything from plumbing to ammunition, while zinc was a key component in industrial steel production. As America expanded westward and cities grew, demand for these metals soared. Railroads connected Joplin to the industrial centers of St. Louis and Chicago, ensuring that its resources flowed directly into the arteries of the country's booming economy.

With wealth came expansion, and with expansion came chaos. Mining was an unforgiving trade, and those who sought their fortunes in Joplin often arrived with little more than a shovel and a dream. Most would never become wealthy, but all of them needed a place to eat, drink, and forget about the dangers of the mines. The result was a town that grew without restraint, where opportunity and lawlessness thrived side by side. The men who flooded Joplin had money to spend and little to lose, creating an environment where vice became just as essential to the town's success as the minerals beneath its soil.

For as much as mining defined Joplin's economic rise, it was the industries that catered to the miners that truly dictated its culture. Drinking, gambling, and prostitution were not just pastimes in Joplin; they were institutions, fueling the economy and keeping the transient workforce anchored in the city. Saloons, brothels, and gambling halls outnumbered churches and schools, and few in power saw any reason to change that. What had begun as a mining town had rapidly become a city where morality took a backseat to profit, and no establishment embodied that transformation more than the House of Lords.

A Town Fueled by Money, Men, and Desperation

Joplin was a town of restless men, drawn not by the promise of stability but by the allure of wealth that could be won—or lost—overnight. Few of these men came to put down roots. Most were transient laborers, drifting from one mining camp to another, always chasing the next big strike. They worked long hours in the bowels of the earth, inhaling toxic dust, chipping away at unforgiving rock, and praying that the next blast of dynamite wouldn't bring the

ceiling crashing down on their heads. The work was dangerous, brutal, and often fatal, but the lure of fortune kept the miners coming, even as the mines swallowed many of them whole.

After spending the day underground, these men craved more than just food and rest. They needed release, a way to numb the exhaustion and the ever-present specter of death that loomed over their profession. They sought out whiskey, gambling tables, and women—anything that made them feel alive after risking their lives for a handful of ore. Saloons and brothels became more than just places of entertainment; they were sanctuaries, offering a brief escape from the reality that, at any moment, their luck could run out.

Vice did not just follow money—it thrived on desperation. The same men who risked their lives in the mines were just as willing to gamble away their hard-earned wages at the poker table, sometimes losing everything before their next shift even began. Others found comfort in the arms of prostitutes, paying for the illusion of companionship in a world where few had anything to hold onto. The businesses that provided these services were not merely tolerated; they were essential, forming the foundation of Joplin's growing economy.

The wild nature of the town attracted not only miners but also opportunists, criminals, and businessmen who knew how to profit from vice. Some came to run legitimate businesses, but many more arrived with the singular goal of exploiting the unchecked flow of cash. As Joplin grew, so too did the scale of its underground economy. It was no longer just about a few backroom poker games or lone women peddling their services—it was a full-fledged industry, one that required organization, protection, and above all, influence.

The Rise of the Vice Economy

Saloons were the first permanent structures built in Joplin. Before there were banks, before there were courthouses, and before there were proper streets, there were places to drink. By the 1890s, entire blocks of downtown Joplin were dedicated to alcohol and entertainment, with each establishment competing for the attention—and wallets—of the weary miners. Some were little more than wooden shacks with sawdust floors, where a nickel could buy a shot of bottom-shelf whiskey. Others were more elaborate, offering food, music, and companionship to those willing to pay for a taste of luxury.

Gambling quickly became as central to Joplin's economy as the mines themselves. Fortune-seekers were just as likely to try their luck at a poker table as they were in the mineshafts. Some walked into the saloons as broke miners and emerged as newly minted kings, their pockets lined with gold from a well-played hand. Others lost everything, including their self-respect, their homes, and in the worst cases, their lives. In Joplin, a man's luck could change in an instant, and for many, that thrill was irresistible.

Among the gambling halls, one establishment stood above the rest. The House of Lords was more than just a saloon; it was an empire of indulgence, offering everything a man could desire. Unlike the dingy bars that lined the streets, the House of Lords was a place of grandeur, a multi-story palace where the wealthy and the reckless rubbed shoulders. Here, fortunes were won and lost over bourbon and cigars, and the consequences of a bad bet could be swift and merciless. Cheaters were not just caught—they were dealt with, often with fists or worse.

The House of Lords became a microcosm of Joplin itself, a place where class lines blurred in

the face of greed and indulgence. Mine owners and businessmen sat at the same tables as drifters and outlaws, each man believing he could outplay the others. It was a world where the only rule was survival, and those who could navigate it well left with their pockets full. Those who couldn't often found themselves tossed into the streets, their dreams shattered by a bad hand.

A City on the Edge

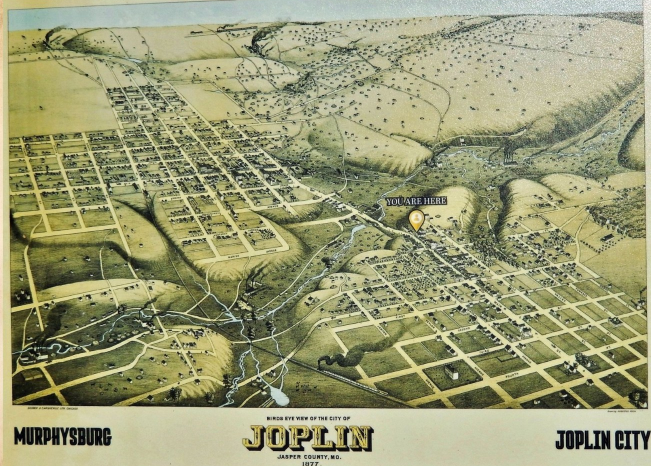
By the dawn of the 20th century, Joplin had cemented itself as one of the most notorious cities in the Midwest. It was a boomtown in every sense of the word, growing at an unprecedented rate, fueled by the unregulated wealth of its mining industry. But with that growth came scrutiny. Moral reformers, religious leaders, and state politicians began to take notice of Joplin's reputation, and not everyone was pleased with what they saw.

The House of Lords stood at the center of this conflict, a towering symbol of everything Joplin's critics despised. To outsiders, it represented unchecked corruption, a place where laws were ignored and virtue was for sale. But to those who had built their fortunes within its walls, it was something else entirely—a necessary part of Joplin's identity, a monument to the city's rise, and a business that could not easily be dismantled.

For now, vice remained king, and the House of Lords was its palace. But the pressure to reform was building, and those who thrived in Joplin's lawless economy would soon find themselves facing challenges greater than a bad poker hand. The city had built its wealth on indulgence and excess, but nothing stayed untouchable forever. The very forces that had allowed Joplin to flourish were beginning to shift, and soon, the city would be forced to confront whether it could survive without the vices that had made it great.

The House of Lords had reigned supreme in a city that refused to be tamed. But every empire has its fall, and the first cracks in its foundation had already begun to show.

Birds eye
view map
of Joplin
from 1877



The Birth of the House of Lords

The Building That Would Become Legend

In 1890, Joplin was exploding with activity. The streets were lined with miners fresh from the shafts, their pockets heavy with wages that wouldn't last the night. The town was wild, unpredictable, and growing at a pace that no one could control. Saloons, gambling dens, and brothels were multiplying like wildfire, filling every available space with the promise of whiskey and sin. Most of these establishments were hastily constructed—simple wooden buildings with nothing but a long bar, a few rickety chairs, and a barkeep who doubled as a bouncer when fights inevitably broke out.

Amid this chaos, real estate developer James H. Worth saw an opportunity to build something bigger. He envisioned an establishment that would rise above the crude saloons littering Main Street—a building that would not only house a saloon but become a landmark. Unlike the ramshackle drinking holes thrown together to make a quick profit, this place would be permanent, grand, and imposing. Joplin's mining boom had created a city full of men eager to spend their wealth, and Worth intended to give them a place worthy of their money.

At 319-321 Main Street, the three-story brick structure took shape. It dwarfed the surrounding wooden storefronts with its high ceilings, elaborate ironwork, and towering windows that gleamed under the gaslights of downtown Joplin. Unlike anything the town had seen before, it signaled to the city that something grand was coming. The saloon industry in Joplin was already thriving, but this building promised to change the game entirely.

When the final brick was laid, no one could have predicted just how notorious it would become. The structure was built to house a saloon, but in just a few years, it would transform into something more than just a business. It would become the most infamous den of vice in Missouri—a place where money flowed as freely as the liquor, where fortunes were won and lost in a single hand of poker, and where the line between wealth and ruin was razor-thin.

Billy Patton: A Saloonkeeper with a Vision

The building may have been Worth's investment, but it would be Billy Patton who turned it into a legend. Patton was a man who understood the true nature of a mining town. He knew that the men of Joplin weren't looking for just a place to drink—they were looking for a place to be entertained, to indulge, and to feel important. A simple saloon would never be enough. He wanted a spectacle.

Patton had seen the grandeur of gambling halls in cities like St. Louis and Denver, and he recognized that Joplin was ready for an establishment that would outshine anything else in town. In 1892, he opened the doors to what would soon become the most notorious saloon in Missouri. The House of Lords was unlike anything Joplin had ever seen. It wasn't just a drinking establishment; it was an experience, a place where wealth and recklessness walked

hand in hand.

The first floor of the House of Lords set the tone for what made it special. Unlike the crude bars found elsewhere in town, this was a lavish space with polished woodwork, mirrored back walls, and a bar that stretched nearly the entire length of the room. Gas-lit chandeliers bathed the space in a warm, golden glow, illuminating shelves lined with expensive liquor, some of it imported at great cost. The waiters were uniformed, the drinks were poured into fine glassware, and the entire atmosphere suggested something Joplin had never known before—refinement, even in debauchery.

But for all its elegance, the House of Lords was still unmistakably a place of danger and indulgence. Men came to drink, to gamble, and to lose themselves in the reckless energy that pulsed through its walls. Disputes were not settled with words but with fists, and sometimes, with bullets. Patton had created something unique—a saloon that carried the illusion of class while still embracing the lawlessness that made Joplin what it was.

The Goldfish Bowl Naming Contest

Patton knew that a place of this caliber needed a name that matched its reputation. It couldn't be just another saloon with a forgettable title. It had to be something that carried weight, that made men feel like they were stepping into something grander than the rough-and-tumble bars surrounding it. But rather than name it himself, he decided to leave the decision to fate—and to his patrons.

He placed a goldfish bowl on the bar counter and invited customers to submit their ideas. It was a simple but effective scheme, a way to generate excitement before the establishment had even fully opened. For days, slips of paper piled up inside the bowl, each containing a name suggested by a miner, a businessman, or a drifter hoping to make his mark on Joplin's history. Some names were predictable, evoking wealth and grandeur. Others were vulgar jokes, the kind of crude humor that spread easily in a town built by rough men.

And then, one evening, Patton pulled out the slip that would define the establishment forever. The name had been submitted by an Englishman staying at the Keystone Hotel, a traveler passing through Joplin who likely had no idea of the impact his suggestion would have. The words written on the slip were simple, yet perfect. The House of Lords.

Patton immediately knew he had found the right name. It carried prestige, an air of nobility that stood in stark contrast to the reality of what the saloon would become. In England, the House of Lords was a place of power and politics, where the wealthy and elite made decisions that shaped a nation. In Joplin, it would mean something else entirely. Here, the lords would be men of a different sort—gamblers, criminals, businessmen who thrived in the gray areas of morality.

To commemorate the name, Patton had it emblazoned in the tile at the building's entrance, along with a royal crest. From that moment on, the House of Lords wasn't just a saloon. It was a brand, an institution, and the crown jewel of Joplin's underworld.

What Set the House of Lords Apart

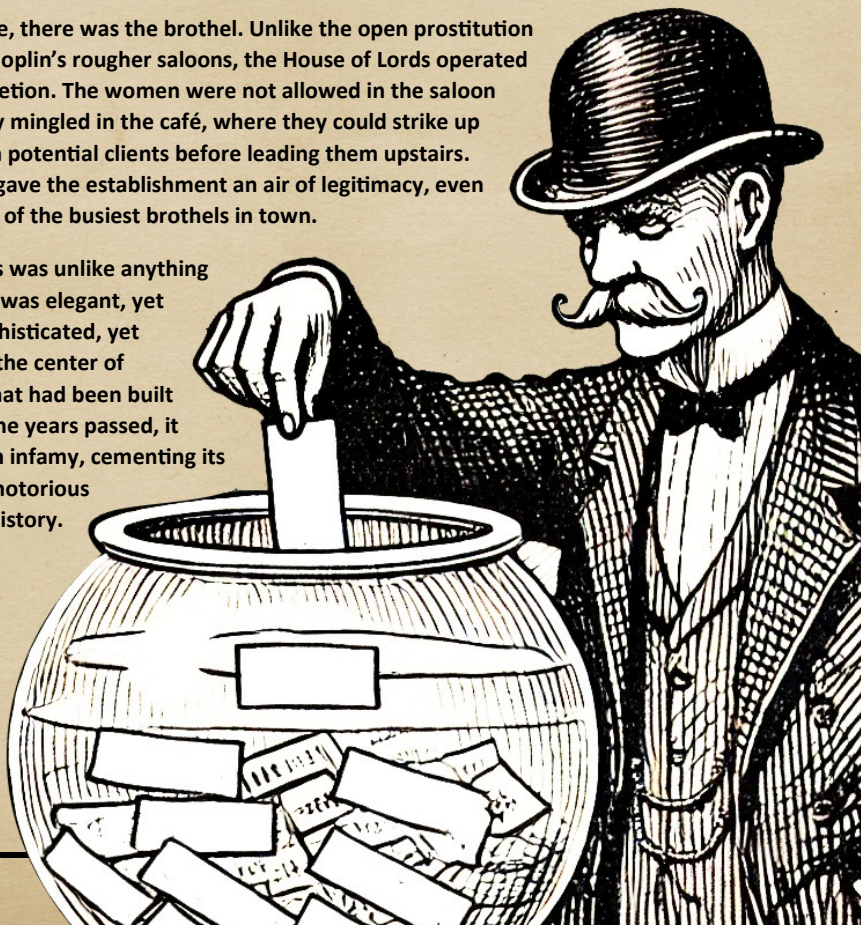
Joplin was already home to dozens of saloons, but none could match what Patton had created. The House of Lords wasn't just another drinking hole—it was a statement. It was designed to attract not just miners and drifters, but also the city's elite. It was a place where men could feel powerful, where they could indulge in excess and still maintain the illusion of respectability.

The House of Lords quickly gained a reputation for serving the best food in town, a distinction that set it apart from its competitors. Its restaurant became known as the "Delmonico's of the West," offering fine dining in an era when most meals consisted of little more than salted meat and stale bread. The chefs employed by the House of Lords were considered some of the finest in the region, and the kitchen prided itself on preparing extravagant dishes that miners and businessmen alike were eager to pay for.

But beyond food and drink, it was the gambling that made the House of Lords legendary. The second floor was devoted entirely to high-stakes games, a place where fortunes could be made or lost in the span of a single evening. Unlike the cheap card tables in other saloons, these were games that attracted powerful men—mine owners, investors, and professional gamblers who knew how to manipulate both cards and people. The stakes were high, and so were the risks. A man who won big might leave with more money than he'd ever seen in his life. A man who lost might not leave at all.

And then, of course, there was the brothel. Unlike the open prostitution that took place in Joplin's rougher saloons, the House of Lords operated with an air of discretion. The women were not allowed in the saloon itself. Instead, they mingled in the café, where they could strike up conversations with potential clients before leading them upstairs. This arrangement gave the establishment an air of legitimacy, even as it remained one of the busiest brothels in town.

The House of Lords was unlike anything else in Missouri. It was elegant, yet lawless. It was sophisticated, yet dangerous. It was the center of power in a town that had been built on chaos. And as the years passed, it would only grow in infamy, cementing its place as the most notorious saloon in Joplin's history.



The Layout & Operations

A Carefully Designed Empire of Vice

The House of Lords was more than just a saloon. It was an empire of vice, an intricately designed system where drinking, gambling, and prostitution blended into one seamless experience. Unlike the hastily built shacks that made up most of Joplin's saloons, the House of Lords was a fortress of indulgence, standing three stories high, each floor catering to a different craving. It wasn't just a place to drink—it was an institution built to capture and hold a customer's attention until his pockets were empty and his desires satisfied.

Its success wasn't an accident. Everything about the House of Lords was engineered to keep men inside, spending money. From the moment they stepped through the door, they were greeted by luxury, temptation, and an overwhelming sense of possibility. Some would walk away richer than they had ever imagined, while others would leave with nothing but regret and an empty wallet. Either way, the House of Lords always won.

Unlike most gambling halls and brothels, which operated in separate districts, the House of Lords stacked its attractions on top of one another, creating a cycle that fed itself. The first floor welcomed men with liquor and fine food, the second lured them into high-stakes gambling, and the third offered them the comforts of the brothel. The result was an establishment that kept customers inside for hours, if not days, making them forget that a world existed beyond its walls.

It was a system that ran like clockwork. The men who came through the doors were already primed to spend—they were miners, investors, and drifters looking for something to break up the monotony of their lives. They wanted an escape, and the House of Lords was designed to give them exactly what they needed. From the finest whiskey to the thrill of a risky bet to the privacy of a third-floor bedroom, every detail was planned for maximum profit.

The First Floor: Whiskey, Cigars, and Fine Dining

The first floor was where the night began, and it set the tone for everything that followed. Unlike the dark, grimy bars of most mining towns, the House of Lords' saloon was bright, open, and grand. The moment a man stepped inside, he was greeted by the warm glow of gas-lit chandeliers reflecting off polished mahogany and brass fixtures. The bar stretched the entire length of the room, an impressive slab of wood that gleamed under constant polishing, with a brass rail running along the bottom where men propped their boots as they leaned in for a drink.

Behind the bar, mirrored shelves displayed row upon row of liquor, ranging from the cheapest whiskey for miners to imported scotch and brandy for the wealthy elite. The bartenders were professionals—uniformed, efficient, and trained to know every regular's drink before they even had to ask. Unlike in rougher saloons, where a fight could break out over a spilled beer,

the House of Lords maintained a level of calm, controlled debauchery, where a man could spend his entire paycheck without ever feeling like he was being hustled.

Beyond the bar, a full-service restaurant offered something unheard of in most saloons—fine dining. While the rougher establishments of Joplin served little more than salted pork and beans, the House of Lords prided itself on steaks aged to perfection, fresh oysters shipped in on ice, and elaborate multi-course meals that catered to the city's elite. This was a place where mine owners and businessmen could eat like kings, sealing deals over plates of perfectly seared beef while sipping imported wine.

The combination of alcohol, food, and the presence of well-dressed waiters gave the first floor a deceptive air of respectability. It was here that men let down their guard, loosened their wallets, and allowed themselves to be drawn deeper into the experience. From their tables, they could hear the distant sounds of the second-floor gambling hall—the clatter of dice, the cheers of winners, and the groans of men who had just lost everything. It was an invitation, an unspoken challenge, and for most, it was impossible to resist.

The Second Floor: The Gambling Hall – Where Fortunes Were Won and Lost

If the first floor was where men eased into the night, the second floor was where they took risks they wouldn't dare elsewhere. The gambling hall was the heart of the House of Lords, the place where money changed hands at a speed that could make a man's head spin. Under the dim glow of gaslights, men crowded around poker tables, roulette wheels, and Faro games, betting everything from gold nuggets to deeds for entire mining claims.

The air was thick with smoke, the scent of whiskey mingling with the unmistakable tension of men who knew they were one card away from changing their lives—or ruining them. Unlike the chaotic, rowdy energy of lesser gambling dens, the House of Lords maintained an eerie sense of control. The floors were carpeted to muffle noise, and the dealers—many of them professionals from St. Louis and Chicago—ran the tables with calm efficiency, never showing emotion, never letting the games descend into madness.

This was not a place for the weak-hearted. Poker games could last all night, with pots that climbed to staggering sums. Some men walked in with nothing and left with enough money to buy a house. Others lost everything, their faces pale as they realized they had just gambled away their future. And then, there were the unspoken rules—cheating was not tolerated, and men who tried to swindle their way to victory often found themselves dragged out onto the street, or worse.

The most dangerous men in Joplin spent their nights here—outlaws, mine owners, businessmen, and drifters all seated at the same table, each trying to outplay the other. The dealers had seen it all: fists slammed against tables, guns drawn in anger, men storming out into the night with nothing left to their names. But for every man who left the gambling hall in despair, there was another waiting to take his seat, eager for the same thrill.

The Third Floor: The Brothel – A Business of Desire

The third floor of the House of Lords was where the night often ended. Unlike the openly advertised brothels of other cities, the House of Lords maintained a thin veneer of discretion, structuring its business in a way that gave it an air of legitimacy while still catering to the oldest profession in the world. The women were not allowed in the saloon or gambling hall—they stayed in the café, where they could sit at tables, sip coffee, and strike up conversations with potential clients.

For a price, a man and a woman could leave the café together, making their way up the grand staircase to the third floor, where the real business took place. The brothel was well-managed, clean, and well-furnished, a stark contrast to the dingy backroom setups found elsewhere in Joplin. Each room was private and well-kept, offering a level of comfort and discretion that kept clients coming back.

The women who worked here were both independent and exploited—some had come willingly, hoping to make money in a town where women had few other opportunities, while others had been drawn into the business through debts they could never repay. Whatever their circumstances, they were part of the machine that made the House of Lords unstoppable. A percentage of their earnings always went back to the house, ensuring that the business remained profitable and protected.

Despite the obvious illegality, the brothel never faced serious police intervention. Like every other vice in the House of Lords, it was protected by bribes, political connections, and the simple fact that too many powerful men had too much to lose. It was not just a business—it was an institution, one that ensured the House of Lords remained the single most profitable operation in Joplin's history.

The Beating Heart of Joplin's Sin City



The House of Lords was not just a saloon, not just a gambling hall, and not just a brothel—it was all three, woven together in a way that ensured its dominance. Men came here to drink, to gamble, and to lose themselves in the kind of indulgence that could only exist in a boomtown on the edge of law and order.

It was a place where a man could enter rich and leave penniless, or enter penniless and leave rich. It was a place where disputes were settled over cards, where alliances were formed over whiskey, and where the most powerful figures in Joplin gathered to celebrate, to plot, and sometimes, to destroy each other.

This was not just a business. This was Joplin's beating heart. And as the years passed, it would only grow more infamous, more dangerous, and more deeply entrenched in the city's identity.

Redell Manufacturing & Supply

The True Power Behind the House of Lords

The House of Lords may have been Joplin's most infamous saloon, but it was not an independent empire. Its grandeur, its ability to operate without interference, and its seemingly endless supply of liquor and gambling tables were not the work of the men who stood behind its bar. The true power behind the establishment rested with a company that few outside of Joplin even knew existed—Redell Manufacturing & Supply Company. While the House of Lords dazzled patrons with whiskey, poker, and fine dining, Redell quietly ensured that the saloon remained stocked, furnished, and, most importantly, profitable.

At a glance, Redell appeared to be just another business supplying the growing mining town's bars with essentials. It was known for providing high-quality furniture, bar fixtures, and liquor to saloons across Joplin, but its reach went far beyond simple commerce. Redell did not just sell to saloons—it controlled them. It determined who could open a saloon, who got access to the best liquor, and who stayed in business. The company operated in the shadows, ensuring that only those who paid into its system were able to flourish.

The House of Lords, as grand as it was, was merely one piece of Redell's carefully constructed vice empire. Men like Billy Patton and Riley F. Robertson may have managed its daily operations, but they were not the true owners. They were tenants in a larger system, operators who ran a business within the empire that Redell had built. It was a system designed to ensure that no single man could ever truly control the House of Lords—only Redell held that power.

This arrangement allowed the House of Lords to outlast its competitors. While other saloons struggled to maintain their liquor supply or faced pressure from law enforcement, Redell's financial influence kept the House of Lords protected. It was untouchable, insulated by the wealth and connections of the company that ensured its continued dominance. The saloon could change hands, and different men could step in as operators, but as long as Redell controlled the lease and the liquor supply, the House of Lords never truly changed ownership.

The Business Model That Made Redell Untouchable

Unlike typical saloon owners, who purchased their liquor and furnishings outright, the House of Lords operated under a different structure—one that ensured Redell maintained absolute control. Redell leased the building, owned the bar fixtures, controlled the liquor taps, and even provided the gambling tables and chairs. The men who ran the saloon were not true owners, but rather business partners whose success depended on Redell's continued support.

This model was brilliant in its simplicity. If an operator failed to run the House of Lords

successfully or ran into legal trouble, Redell could replace him without losing control of the establishment. The saloon could cycle through managers and investors, but its foundation remained unchanged. The furniture, the bar, and the liquor supply belonged to Redell, ensuring that no single man could take the House of Lords from them. It was a system that allowed for consistent profits without the risks of direct ownership.

For Redell, the House of Lords was its crown jewel, but it was far from its only venture. The company held leases on multiple saloons across Joplin, ensuring that its influence extended far beyond a single establishment. It controlled where liquor was distributed, who could operate, and which businesses received priority access to supplies. This stranglehold on Joplin's vice industry made Redell one of the most powerful businesses in the city, with more influence over the local economy than even some of the city's mining moguls.

As long as Redell controlled the supply chain, it controlled the industry. Saloons that refused to work within its system often found themselves unable to secure liquor shipments, making it impossible to compete. Redell had no need for strong-arm tactics or overt intimidation—its economic control was enough. A saloon without Redell's backing was a saloon doomed to fail, and everyone in Joplin's vice economy knew it.

Riley F. Robertson and the \$100,000 Investment

One of the men who recognized Redell's power and sought to capitalize on it was Riley F. Robertson. Unlike many saloon owners, Robertson was neither a drinker nor a gambler. He was a businessman first and foremost, and when he saw the amount of money flowing through the House of Lords, he knew he wanted a share of the profits. Rather than opening a saloon of his own, he went straight to the source—he bought into Redell itself.

In one of the largest private investments in Joplin's history, Robertson purchased a 50% stake in Redell Manufacturing & Supply Company for \$100,000, a staggering sum at the time. This investment gave him partial control over the House of Lords, but more importantly, it tied him into the supply chain for nearly every saloon in Joplin. Through Redell, he controlled the distribution of liquor, the gambling equipment, and even the ice supply, a crucial commodity in an era before widespread refrigeration.

Robertson's investment was not just about owning a share of Redell—it was about controlling Joplin's entire vice economy. Through Redell, he ensured that every saloon in the city either worked with him or struggled to survive. His business was not running a single bar—it was running an empire of bars. As long as Redell remained strong, Robertson's wealth and power would only continue to grow.

However, his investment came with risks that he did not anticipate. The same system that made Redell profitable also made it vulnerable. One moment of weakness, one financial misstep, and the entire structure could collapse. And for Robertson, that moment came sooner than he expected.

The Collapse of Redell and the Unraveling of Joplin's Vice Empire

For years, Redell operated flawlessly, maintaining its grip on Joplin's saloons with ruthless efficiency. But greed and betrayal would ultimately bring the company to its knees. At the height of Redell's success, one of Robertson's business associates embezzled \$200,000 from the company, a sum that crippled its finances overnight. The theft was more than just a financial loss—it was a direct threat to the foundation of Joplin's vice economy.

Robertson had no choice but to file a lawsuit against Redell in an attempt to recover his investment. The lawsuit exposed the company's financial structure, dragging its shadowy dealings into the public eye. What had once been a well-oiled machine operating just outside the law was now under scrutiny, and the legal battle triggered a chain reaction that shattered Redell's influence.

As the lawsuit dragged on, other investors panicked. If Redell collapsed, their saloons would go under with it. Local politicians, once willing to protect the company in exchange for bribes and favors, began to distance themselves, unwilling to be caught in the fallout. Without its political protection, Redell was left vulnerable, and its financial troubles made it impossible to maintain the control it once held over Joplin's saloon industry.

By 1910, Redell Manufacturing & Supply Company was effectively dissolved. Its assets were liquidated, its business structure dismantled, and its grip on Joplin's vice economy was permanently broken. While the House of Lords continued to operate for another decade, its foundation had been permanently weakened. Without Redell ensuring its dominance, the saloon would soon face the growing pressures of reform movements, legal crackdowns, and the eventual specter of Prohibition.



A Scandalous Tradition

The House of Lords was infamous for many things—high-stakes gambling, an elite brothel, and its deep ties to Joplin’s political underworld. However, for those who stepped through its doors, one of the most unforgettable sights was the nude painting that hung behind the bar. Bold, provocative, and steeped in legend, the painting became synonymous with the saloon itself. Over time, however, a strange truth emerged—there wasn’t just one painting.

As ownership of the House of Lords changed hands, so too did the artwork above the bar. When a proprietor left, they often took the painting with them, preserving it as a token of their tenure. The next owner, not wanting to break the tradition, would commission or acquire a new nude painting in a similar style, ensuring that customers hardly noticed the difference. This cycle continued over the years, creating a legacy of scandalous yet elegant artwork that became as much a part of the House of Lords as its whiskey and poker tables.

By the time the saloon closed for good, at least seven different paintings had graced its walls. While all followed the same general theme—a reclining nude woman—each had its own distinct style, artist, and story. Some were created by local painters, while others were imported from larger cities. One, if rumors are to be believed, may have even been painted by the future American art icon Thomas Hart Benton.

The Women in the Paintings: The Scarlet Order Connection

One of the longest-running rumors surrounding the House of Lords nude paintings is that some of the women depicted were real—specifically, members of the Scarlet Order, the secretive auxiliary group that controlled the brothel operations on the third floor.

Unlike the city’s lower-class brothels, which were often exploitative and run by abusive madams, the Scarlet Order operated differently. The women were independent contractors who paid dues and rental fees but retained control over their earnings. This arrangement made working at the House of Lords far more desirable than other locations in Joplin’s red-light district.

Given the prestige associated with the Scarlet Order, it’s plausible that the women depicted in the paintings were not just imagined figures, but real courtesans who

worked within the establishment. Local legend suggests that one of the paintings featured Lilly Belle Murphy, a well-known beauty whose past remains shrouded in mystery. Some say she was the daughter of a wealthy businessman who fell from grace, while others claim she was a former socialite who chose to reinvent herself in Joplin's underworld. Whether or not she ever truly posed for a painting is unknown, but her name has remained tied to the House of Lords for over a century.

Some historians suggest that the paintings may have been modeled after multiple women, either drawn from memory by the artists or subtly altered to avoid identification. Others believe that the paintings were selected based on their artistic quality rather than their resemblance to any particular individual.

While no definitive evidence exists proving that the women of the Scarlet Order were immortalized on canvas, the theory remains one of the most enduring pieces of the House of Lords' legend.

Thomas Hart Benton and the Lost Painting

Of all the stories tied to the House of Lords, one of the most intriguing is how a single painting hanging above the bar may have played a role in shaping the career of one of America's most celebrated artists.

In 1906, a 17-year-old Thomas Hart Benton found himself in Joplin, Missouri, working on a surveying crew. It was a job meant to set him on a stable career path—one encouraged by his politically ambitious father, who wanted Benton to become a lawyer. But fate had other plans. One Saturday night, Benton wandered into the House of Lords, lured by the bright lights and lively energy spilling onto the street.

Inside, his eyes were drawn to the massive painting above the bar. The image, scandalous yet beautifully rendered, depicted a masked nude woman reclining in a brothel, while a man in the background appeared to recognize her in horror. The drama of the scene, the storytelling woven into the brushstrokes—it captivated young Benton. He studied the painting intently, tracing the brushwork in his mind, imagining the artist's hand as it brought the image to life.

Unfortunately for Benton, his fascination did not go unnoticed. The bar's regulars, a rough mix of miners, gamblers, and drifters, found his serious concentration amusing. They began heckling him, making lewd jokes about his interest in the painting. Embarrassed and caught off guard, Benton blurted out a bold lie—he was an artist, he claimed, and he was simply studying the technique.

His words set off a chain of events that would change his life. One of the hecklers, eager to test Benton's claim, dragged him out of the saloon and straight to the *Joplin American*

newspaper office. The editor, amused but skeptical, handed Benton a pencil and asked him to sketch a caricature of a local druggist. Benton, who had drawn casually but never professionally, rose to the challenge. His sketch was so impressive that the newspaper immediately offered him a job as an illustrator, paying \$14 a week—more than what many clerks in town made at the time.

It was the moment that set Benton on his path. No longer bound to his father's plans, he pursued art full-time, eventually studying in Chicago and Paris before becoming one of the leading figures of the American Regionalist movement. And it all started with a single painting in the House of Lords.

Did Benton Paint a House of Lords Nude?

For years, art historians and local researchers have speculated about the full extent of Benton's connection to the House of Lords. While it's well-documented that he was mesmerized by the painting above the bar, another question lingers—did he eventually contribute to the tradition himself?

Over the decades, at least seven different nude paintings graced the walls of the House of Lords. When a proprietor closed the saloon or passed ownership to someone new, they often took the painting with them. The next owner, wanting to maintain the tradition, would commission a new one, ensuring that customers never noticed the difference.

By the early 20th century, Benton was honing his skills as an artist. If the House of Lords needed a new painting at any point during that time, could a young Benton, looking for commissions, have been the one to paint it?

While no concrete evidence exists to confirm this theory, it is tantalizingly plausible. Benton was no stranger to creating murals and large-scale works—his later career would be defined by them. And given his early ties to Joplin and his first job as a newspaper artist in the city, it's possible that a commission for a saloon painting could have fallen into his hands.

Some Joplin collectors claim that one of the final House of Lords paintings was created by a well-trained artist with an expressive, fluid style—hallmarks of Benton's work. Others believe that if Benton had painted a nude for the House of Lords, he likely would have done so anonymously or under a pseudonym, given the subject matter and his growing reputation.

If a lost Benton painting from the House of Lords still exists, it would be one of the greatest historical art discoveries in Missouri's history. To this day, relics from the saloon occasionally surface in antique stores and private collections, with furniture,

bar fixtures, and old photographs appearing on the market. Could one of the long-missing paintings someday emerge as an early work by Thomas Hart Benton?

The possibility only deepens the mystique of both Benton's career and the House of Lords itself. Whether he simply admired the painting that launched his career or contributed one to the tradition, his connection to the House of Lords remains one of the most fascinating intersections of art and history in Joplin's past.



One of the seven paintings that hung behind the bar at the House of Lords

Owners & Managers

The Men Who Built an Empire

The House of Lords was more than just a saloon. It was an institution that shaped Joplin's economy, politics, and reputation for decades. Throughout its existence, different men stepped in to manage, expand, and profit from its success, each leaving their own mark on its legacy. While customers may have seen only bartenders, waiters, and card dealers running the show, the real power was always in the hands of a select few. These were the men who controlled the money, brokered the deals, and ensured that the House of Lords remained untouchable.

Each of these figures had their own motivations. Some were entrepreneurs, drawn to the immense profits that a well-run saloon, gambling hall, and brothel could generate. Others were political power players who used the House of Lords as a tool to strengthen their influence over Joplin. And some, like the investors behind Redell Manufacturing & Supply Company, were content to remain in the shadows, knowing that the real money was in controlling the supply lines rather than the operations themselves.

The House of Lords saw many faces come and go over the years, but its identity never wavered. Each new operator understood that they were not just running a business; they were preserving a legend. They were responsible for maintaining the illusion of refinement while ensuring that the wheels of vice kept turning. Their ability to balance these opposing forces determined whether they thrived or disappeared.

As the years passed, these men built a network of influence that extended far beyond the walls of the House of Lords. The saloon was a cornerstone of Joplin's underworld, and those who controlled it often found themselves wielding power far greater than that of an ordinary businessman. They shaped city policies, dictated law enforcement priorities, and ensured that the House of Lords remained at the heart of Joplin's vice industry.

Billy Patton: The Visionary Who Built Its Reputation

The House of Lords as Joplin knew it would not have existed without Billy Patton. He was the man who took James H. Worth's newly constructed building and transformed it into the city's most legendary establishment. From the moment he took control in 1892, he had a vision for something grander than a typical mining town saloon. He saw an opportunity to create a space that was as luxurious as it was lawless.

Patton was more than just a businessman—he was a master showman. He understood that a successful saloon needed more than just liquor and gambling. It needed spectacle, atmosphere, and a sense of exclusivity that made men feel like they were part of something special. With that in mind, he spared no expense in crafting an experience unlike anything else in Joplin. His House of Lords featured a gleaming, mirrored bar, fine dining, and a gambling

hall that drew some of the biggest players in the region.

He also knew the value of branding. The House of Lords was not named on a whim. Patton's famous goldfish bowl naming contest ensured that the establishment had a title that evoked power and prestige. Though the British House of Lords was a seat of aristocratic governance, in Joplin, it would become a symbol of wealth, corruption, and excess. Under Patton's leadership, the saloon became the centerpiece of Joplin's nightlife, a place where deals were made, fortunes were won and lost, and the line between respectability and vice blurred.

Despite his success, Patton eventually sold his stake and moved on, leaving behind a thriving business. But his legacy was already cemented. The House of Lords he built would survive long after his departure, and every owner who came after him would be operating in the shadow of his original vision.

Louis N. Rahn: The Man Who Elevated the Dining Experience

In 1899, the House of Lords found itself under new management with the arrival of Louis N. Rahn. While the gambling and liquor business had always been profitable, Rahn saw an opportunity to elevate another aspect of the operation—fine dining. He recognized that Joplin was not just a city of miners and drifters. There was a growing class of businessmen, mine owners, and politicians who wanted more than just a stiff drink and a game of cards. They wanted refinement, and Rahn intended to give it to them.

Under Rahn's leadership, the House of Lords' dining experience became one of the best in the region. The saloon's restaurant, already known as "The Delmonico's of the West," solidified its reputation for high-end cuisine. The menu featured expertly aged steaks, fresh seafood, and multi-course meals that rivaled the offerings of larger cities. Eating at the House of Lords became a status symbol, a place where the wealthy could dine in luxury while remaining close to the vices they enjoyed.

Rahn's influence extended beyond the dining room. He understood the importance of maintaining the House of Lords' reputation as the city's premier gambling hall. He ensured that the second-floor gaming area continued to attract high-stakes players, keeping the House of Lords profitable. His time in charge was relatively brief, but his impact on the saloon's image lasted for years.

Even after Rahn left the House of Lords, his emphasis on fine dining remained a key part of its appeal. Later operators would continue to market the restaurant as one of its defining features, ensuring that the House of Lords remained a destination for both luxury and excess.

Riley F. Robertson: The Investor Who Controlled the Industry

Not every man connected to the House of Lords was involved in its daily operations. Some, like Riley F. Robertson, preferred to control things from behind the scenes. Unlike most saloon investors, Robertson was not a drinker, a gambler, or a showman. He was a businessman, and

when he saw the staggering amount of money flowing through Joplin's vice industry, he knew he wanted a share of the profits.

Rather than buying the House of Lords outright, Robertson took a different approach. He invested \$100,000 into Redell Manufacturing & Supply Company, the business that controlled the liquor, gambling equipment, and bar fixtures for Joplin's saloons. By doing so, he didn't just gain influence over the House of Lords—he gained control over nearly every major saloon in the city.

Robertson's strategy was simple but brilliant. The men who ran Joplin's saloons could come and go, but as long as Redell controlled the supply chain, he would always profit. The House of Lords might have been the most famous saloon in town, but it was just one piece of the larger empire that he helped control. He made his money not from selling drinks or running poker games, but from ensuring that every saloon in Joplin relied on Redell to function.

His investment paid off handsomely—until it didn't. When Redell collapsed due to internal corruption and legal troubles, Robertson lost his fortune along with it. The empire he had helped build crumbled, and the House of Lords was left weakened without the financial backing that had once made it invincible.

The Men Who Defined Joplin's Vice Empire

The House of Lords was never just about one man. It was shaped by a revolving cast of operators, investors, and power players, each of whom left their mark on Joplin's most infamous establishment. Some were showmen, building the House of Lords into a destination of indulgence. Others were businessmen, ensuring that it remained profitable and untouchable. And some, like Gilbert Barbee, used the saloon as a tool for political influence, ensuring that it could continue operating without interference.

Each of these men understood that the House of Lords was more than just a business—it was a machine that powered Joplin's economy and controlled its underworld. They worked together, sometimes as partners, sometimes as rivals, to keep it running for nearly three decades. But no empire lasts forever. As the forces of reform gained momentum and legal pressure mounted, the men who had once controlled Joplin's vice industry found themselves fighting a battle they could not win.

For years, the House of Lords had stood as the crown jewel of Joplin's wild era, but change was coming. The men who had built it were either gone, ruined, or struggling to hold onto the past. What had once been untouchable was now vulnerable, and the golden age of vice in Joplin was beginning to fade.



Riley Robertson

Political Power & Corruption

The House of Lords: Joplin's Shadow Government

The House of Lords was more than just a saloon, a gambling hall, or even a brothel. It was the beating heart of Joplin's power structure, a place where laws were ignored, political deals were made, and corruption thrived in plain sight. Anyone who wanted to run for office, secure a mining contract, or buy favor from law enforcement did not go to City Hall. They went to the House of Lords. It was there, in the dimly lit corners of the gambling hall and the backrooms of the saloon, that the real business of Joplin was conducted.

The establishment had long been infamous for its excesses, but it remained untouchable. It was protected by a well-oiled network of politicians, businessmen, and law enforcement officials who ensured that it operated without interference. Bribes, backroom deals, and carefully orchestrated political favors allowed the House of Lords to function as more than just an entertainment empire. It became a shadow government, one that dictated how Joplin ran, who held power, and which businesses thrived or failed.

At the center of this network was Gilbert Barbee, the owner of the Joplin Globe newspaper and one of the most influential political figures in the city. His direct ties to the House of Lords ensured that the establishment would never face serious legal trouble. Through his connections with city officials, judges, and police, he transformed the saloon into more than just a house of vice. It became a political headquarters where Joplin's future was decided over whiskey and poker hands.

While reformers and religious leaders occasionally attempted to crack down on Joplin's vice industry, their efforts were futile. The House of Lords was not just another saloon—it was an institution deeply embedded in the city's infrastructure. Too many powerful people had too much to lose if it were shut down. It was a self-sustaining cycle, one where wealth, influence, and corruption fed into each other, ensuring that the House of Lords remained untouchable for decades.

The Shield of Political Protection

The House of Lords should have been shut down countless times. Joplin had laws against illegal gambling, prostitution, and after-hours liquor sales, yet the House of Lords remained untouched. The reasons were simple: the people who should have been enforcing those laws were the same people benefiting from the saloon's continued operation. The political elite, law enforcement officials, and judges all had a stake in keeping the House of Lords open.

The saloon's operators understood that paying off the right people was far more effective than following the law. Politicians received bribes in exchange for ensuring that new ordinances did not interfere with gambling or liquor sales. Police officers were handed envelopes of cash to look the other way. Judges dismissed cases before they ever reached

trial. Mining contracts were negotiated over high-stakes poker games, with the House of Lords serving as a neutral ground where business deals and political alliances were solidified.

Joplin's vice industry was not a lawless accident—it was a carefully controlled machine, one that relied on corrupt alliances to function. Anyone who tried to disrupt the system faced swift consequences. Saloons that refused to pay into the network found themselves unable to secure liquor shipments or suddenly faced surprise police raids. Business owners who spoke out against corruption mysteriously lost contracts or were harassed by authorities. The House of Lords thrived because those in power had a vested interest in keeping it that way.

While other gambling halls and saloons occasionally faced minor raids, the House of Lords was never seriously threatened. It was simply too valuable to the city's economy and too deeply intertwined with its leadership. The law did not apply in the same way to an establishment that had the backing of Joplin's most influential figures. In many ways, the House of Lords was not just protected by the system—it was the system.

Gilbert Barbee: The Power Broker of Joplin

To understand why the House of Lords never faced legal trouble, one only needed to look at Gilbert Barbee. As the owner of the Joplin Globe, Barbee controlled the city's media, ensuring that negative press about Joplin's vice industry was either downplayed or ignored altogether. He was a political kingmaker, using his influence to handpick candidates for public office. Those candidates, once elected, knew exactly who they owed their loyalty to.

Barbee's ties to the House of Lords were so blatant that he built a private walkway from the Joplin Globe offices to the saloon. This allowed him to move freely between the world of journalism, politics, and vice without ever stepping foot on the street. The walkway became a symbol of Joplin's corruption, a physical representation of how closely intertwined the press, politics, and the underworld had become.

Barbee did not just protect the House of Lords—he used it. The saloon was his personal meeting ground, a place where he could summon politicians, law enforcement officials, and businessmen to discuss deals behind closed doors. Over poker hands and drinks, laws were shaped, elections were decided, and political enemies were dismantled. For Barbee, the House of Lords was more than a saloon. It was a tool of control, one that allowed him to shape Joplin's future according to his own interests.

So long as the House of Lords kept the right people happy, it would never fall. It was a self-sustaining cycle of corruption, one where the people responsible for upholding the law were the same ones ensuring that the city's most notorious saloon remained untouched. It was not a question of whether the House of Lords was legal—it was a question of how long those in power could keep the system running before the world around them changed.

The Beginning of the End

For years, the House of Lords seemed untouchable. Reformers and activists had tried to challenge its existence, but they were powerless against the web of corruption that kept it

protected. However, as the nation's attitudes toward vice changed, so did the political landscape. Prohibition was looming on the horizon, threatening to outlaw alcohol completely. Joplin's population was shifting, with a growing number of residents demanding an end to corruption and lawlessness.

While the House of Lords had been able to avoid local scrutiny, it could not escape the attention of state and federal authorities. Newspapers outside of Barbee's control began reporting on Joplin's reputation as a city of sin, drawing the interest of law enforcement agencies that were beyond the reach of local bribes. The very politicians who had once protected the House of Lords began to distance themselves, realizing that public sentiment was shifting against them.

For the first time, the House of Lords faced a real threat. The same political machine that had kept it alive for decades was beginning to crack. The saloon was no longer just a profitable enterprise—it was a liability. As state and federal crackdowns on vice became more aggressive, even the House of Lords' most powerful allies had to consider whether protecting it was still worth the risk.

The fall of the House of Lords was not immediate, but the warning signs were clear. The world was changing, and the saloon that had once been the center of Joplin's political universe was losing its grip on power. It had survived countless challenges before, but this time, the forces aligned against it were too great to ignore. The golden era of vice in Joplin was coming to an end, and the House of Lords would not escape the consequences.

The True Seat of Power in Joplin

The House of Lords was not just a saloon. It was a political machine, a financial powerhouse, and a sanctuary for corruption. For decades, it operated above the law, protected by a web of bribes, backroom deals, and powerful men who ensured that nothing could touch it. Its influence extended beyond its walls, shaping the future of Joplin through the hands of the men who controlled it.

But change was inevitable. The forces that had once allowed the House of Lords to thrive were beginning to turn against it. As reform movements gained momentum and legal pressure mounted, even the most powerful figures in Joplin found themselves unable to stop what was coming. The House of Lords had built its empire on a foundation of corruption, and when that foundation finally crumbled, there was nothing left to save it.

For now, the saloon still stood, its doors open, its tables full. But the world was watching, and for the first time in its history, the House of Lords had to face a reality it had long been able to ignore. The days of untouchable power were numbered, and soon, the most infamous establishment in Joplin would face its reckoning.

The Gambling Empire

If whiskey was the heartbeat of the House of Lords, then gambling was its soul. While the first floor drew men in with its elegant bar and fine dining, it was the second floor that made and destroyed fortunes. Here, under the glow of flickering gaslights and the haze of cigar smoke, money changed hands at a dizzying pace, and the rich and reckless alike wagered everything on the turn of a card or the spin of a wheel.

The House of Lords was not just another saloon with a few card tables—it was Joplin’s premier gambling hall, a place where miners, businessmen, outlaws, and politicians all sat side by side, chasing the thrill of easy wealth. It was a place where men walked in with nothing and left richer than a mine owner, or entered a king and crawled out a beggar.

Here, amid the sound of shuffling cards and rattling dice, deals were made, reputations were built, and—when tempers flared—blood was spilled.

The Games: A High-Stakes Playground

The House of Lords’ second floor was a gambler’s paradise. Unlike smaller saloons that might host a few casual poker games, this was a full-scale gaming hall, with multiple tables, professional dealers, and an atmosphere that rivaled the grand casinos of St. Louis and Chicago. The air was thick with cigar smoke, the low murmur of tense conversation punctuated by the occasional outburst of triumph or despair. Gaslights flickered over the polished tables where fortunes were made and lost in the span of a single evening. For men who sought the thrill of high-stakes gambling, there was no better place in Joplin.

Poker was the undisputed ruler of the House of Lords. The saloon attracted some of the best poker players in the region, men who had made their names in the gambling dens of Kansas City, Denver, and New Orleans before making their way to Joplin. Five-Card Draw, Stud, and Faro were the most popular games, each table crowded with hopefuls ready to test their luck against seasoned professionals. Bets ranged from modest wages to entire mining claims, and it was not uncommon for a man to wager his horse, his house, or even his business in a single hand. Luck was fleeting—one minute, a player could be stacking gold coins in front of him, and the next, he was walking out with nothing but the shirt on his back.

In a corner of the hall, a roulette wheel spun constantly, drawing in both seasoned gamblers and wide-eyed miners looking for an easy win. The wheel itself had been imported from New Orleans, a beautifully crafted piece of gambling machinery that seemed to hypnotize those who watched it spin. Men placed their chips with shaky hands, watching as the ball danced over the numbered slots, each second dragging out their anticipation and dread. It was a game of pure chance, and that was exactly what made it so addictive. For many, a single turn of the wheel was the difference between a night of celebration and a long, bitter walk back to the mines.

Faro, a fast-paced card game popular in the American West, was another staple at the House of Lords. Unlike poker, where players competed against one another, in Faro, everyone played against the dealer—which meant that a good house always won in the long run. It was a game

known for its fast action and high turnover, perfect for those looking to make a quick fortune or lose everything in minutes. The Faro dealers at the House of Lords were professionals, many of whom had been working in gambling halls for years. They had seen every trick in the book—and they knew how to deal with cheaters. The wrong move could get a man permanently banned, and in some cases, the consequences for dishonesty were even worse.

A Den of Fortune-Seekers: The Players Who Made History

The clientele at the House of Lords was as diverse as the games themselves. Unlike many gambling halls that catered exclusively to either the wealthy elite or the rough-and-tumble miners, the House of Lords welcomed anyone with enough money to play. It was a place where men of vastly different backgrounds sat side by side at the same tables, united by the thrill of risk and the pursuit of fortune. From mine owners to outlaws, everyone had a seat if they could afford it, and everyone had a story to tell.

The wealthiest men in Joplin—mine owners, investors, and railroad barons—could often be found at the high-stakes tables, sipping imported whiskey and placing enormous bets. For them, gambling was more than a game—it was an extension of their business dealings. Some of Joplin's biggest mining contracts and property disputes were settled over hands of poker, with fortunes changing hands in a matter of minutes. It was not uncommon for entire mines to change ownership in a single night, the fate of hundreds of workers resting on the luck of a draw. These men weren't just here to win money; they were here to test their nerve, to prove their dominance, and to reinforce the hierarchy that defined Joplin's booming mining economy.

At the opposite end of the spectrum were the miners and railroad workers, men who had just finished grueling shifts underground and were ready to risk their week's wages for a chance at something greater. The House of Lords was their escape, a place where they could drink, gamble, and, for a few fleeting hours, imagine a life beyond the mines. Most of them lost their paychecks within hours, but that never stopped them from coming back. The same miner who struck it lucky at eight in the evening might be broke again by midnight, his winnings slipping through his fingers as quickly as they had come. When the inevitable losses piled up, many of them found themselves at the first-floor bar, drowning their sorrows in cheap whiskey and making desperate promises that next time, luck would be on their side.

Beyond the businessmen and the laborers, the House of Lords also drew a darker crowd—the gamblers, drifters, and outlaws who made a living hustling cards and running scams. These men were professionals, sharp-eyed and quick-handed, always looking for an easy mark. Professional card sharks prowled the tables, sizing up newcomers who didn't yet know the tricks of the trade. Some of the most infamous outlaws of the time passed through Joplin, many of them stopping at the House of Lords either to play or to scout for their next target. Every now and then, a game would turn sour—a man would accuse another of cheating, voices would rise, and tensions would escalate. In those moments, the real nature of the House of Lords was revealed. It was a place where fortunes were made, where reputations were shattered, and where, at any given moment, a single wrong move could lead to violence.

Cheating and Deadly Consequences

Where there's money on the table, there are always men willing to cheat to win it. The House of Lords, with its high-stakes games and endless flow of cash, was a magnet for skilled card mechanics—men who could manipulate the deck with sleight of hand or slip extra cards up their sleeves without detection. Loaded dice were another common trick, used to tip the odds in favor of the gambler rolling them, but experienced players had learned to spot the difference. Marked cards, subtly altered to give certain players an unfair advantage, were another method of deception, though dealers and enforcers at the House of Lords made a habit of inspecting decks regularly. Any suspicious cards that were discovered were immediately confiscated and burned, serving as both a warning and a reminder that, while gambling was welcomed, outright fraud would not be tolerated.

But cheating at the House of Lords was a gamble in itself—one that could end in far worse consequences than losing a few dollars. If a man was caught dealing from the bottom of the deck, switching cards, or attempting to manipulate the outcome of a game, he wasn't simply thrown out onto the street. More often than not, he was dragged outside, beaten, and in some cases, he never returned. The House of Lords had little patience for cheaters, and those who thought they could outsmart the establishment quickly learned that the price of dishonesty was far steeper than any amount of money lost at the table.

Gunfights were not unheard of, especially when large sums were at stake. A gambler who felt he had been cheated—whether it was true or not—might accuse another player of dishonesty, and tempers would ignite in an instant. More than once, a drunken loser, convinced that he had been swindled, reached for his pistol in a fit of rage, only to be met with a drawn gun from across the table. Some of these disputes ended in tense stand-offs that were quickly deescalated by the House of Lords' staff, while others resulted in bloody shootouts that left bodies sprawled across the gambling floor.

And yet, no matter what happened, the games always resumed. The House of Lords was a place where money never stopped flowing, where gamblers were always willing to risk it all, and where the thrill of winning kept men coming back, no matter how many times they lost. A few bullet holes in the walls or a body carried out onto the street didn't slow the business of the second floor. The moment the blood was mopped up and the chairs were set back in place, the cards were dealt once again, because at the House of Lords, the gambling never stopped for long.



The Brothel – How It Worked

While gambling and liquor kept the House of Lords financially thriving, there was another side to its operations—one that was whispered about in polite society but well understood by anyone who stepped through its doors. The third floor of the House of Lords was no ordinary hotel. While it was technically a place where "guests" could rent rooms, those who knew the establishment well understood that the upstairs accommodations were used for something far more profitable than overnight stays.

Unlike the gambling hall, where men openly celebrated victories or cursed their losses, the brothel at the House of Lords operated under a thin veil of discretion. It was not hidden, nor was it particularly secret—but it maintained just enough formality to avoid scandal, at least in the eyes of Joplin's more influential citizens. The women who worked there were never seen in the saloon itself. Instead, they followed a set of rules that kept the business running smoothly while keeping the House of Lords' high-class reputation intact.

The Café: Where Deals Were Made

Unlike the seedy brothels of Joplin's red-light district, the House of Lords maintained a degree of sophistication in its operations. The women who worked upstairs were not allowed in the saloon, nor were they seen lingering near the gambling tables. Instead, they conducted their business out of the café, located on the first floor. This arrangement gave the establishment a thin veneer of respectability, allowing it to function without drawing too much scrutiny from authorities or moral reformers. It also ensured that the clientele felt a sense of discretion, knowing that their transactions would be handled with subtlety rather than open solicitation.

The café provided a setting where the women could sit at tables, sipping coffee or wine, and casually chatting with male patrons. Customers who were interested in companionship would strike up a conversation, sometimes over a meal or a drink. This approach allowed for a sense of normalcy, blurring the line between business and social interaction. Unlike in other brothels, negotiations were not rushed or crude—everything had an air of civility, a necessary illusion of decorum to keep the establishment in good standing. To an outsider, it may have appeared as nothing more than a lively café where men and women conversed freely, but those who frequented the House of Lords knew better.

Once a price was agreed upon, the couple would excuse themselves, making their way upstairs under the guise of simply renting a room. The transition was seamless, lacking the open exchanges of money or overt propositions that characterized lesser brothels. The upstairs rooms, always kept in immaculate condition, provided the necessary privacy, allowing the women to conduct their business without interference. No one in the café asked questions, and no one needed to. It was an unspoken rule that what happened beyond the staircase was never discussed.

This process kept the brothel running smoothly, allowing it to operate in plain sight without ever being directly acknowledged. By keeping its affairs discreet and maintaining an illusion of class, the House of Lords ensured that its most lucrative side business could continue without

disruption. It was this balance of indulgence and discretion that made the establishment unique among Joplin's many houses of vice. Those who ran it understood that as long as everything appeared respectable, the authorities would have little reason to intervene, allowing business to thrive under a carefully maintained façade.

The Hotel Rooms Upstairs: More Than Just Lodging

The third floor of the House of Lords was technically a hotel, but few men booked rooms for sleeping. While it operated under the guise of a respectable lodging house, those who frequented the establishment knew better. The rooms were rented by the hour, catering to the discreet transactions that took place between the café's women and their customers. Unlike the rundown brothels in Joplin's red-light district, the House of Lords maintained a level of refinement, ensuring that even its most illicit business was carried out with an air of class. Privacy was paramount, and each door was equipped with a lock and a heavy curtain, offering seclusion without total isolation.

The rooms were well-furnished, not in the extravagant way of the saloon below, but clean, warm, and comfortable enough to uphold the House of Lords' high-class image. A small writing desk sat in the corner of each room, accompanied by a simple chair and a pitcher of fresh water, a small but notable touch that set it apart from the city's dingier establishments. A lamp provided soft lighting, casting a dim glow over the space, making it feel less transactional and more intimate. The attention to detail, while subtle, reinforced the idea that the House of Lords was a place of refinement, even when it came to its most shadowy dealings.

The beds were sturdy and well-maintained, a far cry from the dirty, flea-ridden cots found in the city's lower-class brothels. This was intentional—those who ran the House of Lords knew that comfort was part of the experience and that patrons with deep pockets expected a certain level of quality, even in vice. Clean linens were changed regularly, and the rooms were discreetly attended to, ensuring that no trace of the previous occupant remained before the next guest arrived. Each room also had a quiet service system in place, allowing the women to exit unnoticed once their work was done, avoiding the awkwardness of running into another customer in the hallway.

The illusion of operating as a standard hotel was maintained through careful bookkeeping. In the official ledger, rooms were marked as rented, with no indication of the true nature of their use. Should an outsider ever demand an inspection, everything appeared to be in order—just another successful business offering lodging to travelers. But no one ever did. The political protection surrounding the House of Lords ensured that questions were never asked, and as long as the money kept flowing, no one in a position of authority had any reason to look too closely. The third floor continued to operate in plain sight, hidden behind a veil of discretion that no one dared to challenge.

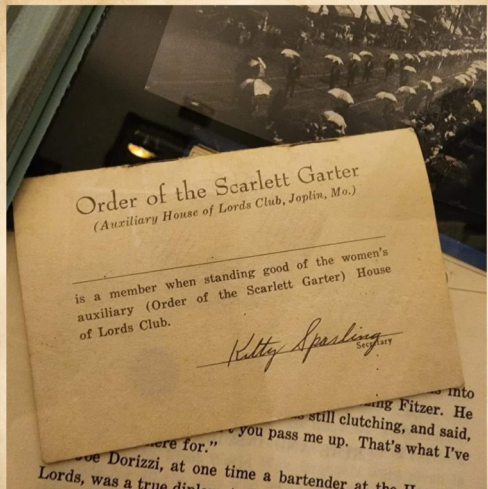
Who Ran the Brothel?

The women who worked in the House of Lords' brothel were not employees in the traditional sense, nor were they controlled by a singular madam or overseer. Instead, they were independent contractors who operated under the banner of an exclusive and secretive auxiliary club known as the Scarlet Order. This was not just a group of prostitutes working in a high-end establishment—it was a structured organization that ensured both the financial success and personal protection of its members. The Scarlet Order was a self-governing network of women who understood the power of discretion and control, allowing them to operate in one of Joplin's most infamous establishments while maintaining a degree of autonomy that was rare in their profession.

Membership in the Scarlet Order was not automatic. Women had to be accepted into the group, and once they were, they paid dues and rental fees to the House of Lords in exchange for the privilege of working there. This system set it apart from the city's other brothels, where women often worked under oppressive conditions, forced to answer to a madam who took the majority of their earnings. In contrast, the women of the Scarlet Order kept the bulk of their profits, pooling their resources to cover expenses, security, and political protection. The House of Lords provided the space, the clientele, and the discretion necessary for their work, but within that framework, the women maintained a level of agency that was unheard of in most brothel operations of the time.

The structure of the Scarlet Order ensured that business was conducted smoothly and professionally. Unlike in the more chaotic brothels of Joplin's red-light district, there was no open solicitation or public display. Instead, arrangements were made discreetly in the café on the first floor, where members of the Scarlet Order interacted with potential clients over drinks and conversation. Once a price was agreed upon, the couple would retire to one of the third-floor rooms, which were rented by the hour and maintained to a high standard. The process was seamless, allowing the brothel to function in plain sight while keeping up the illusion of respectability that the House of Lords had carefully cultivated.

Despite their independence, the women of the Scarlet Order understood that maintaining order was crucial to their continued success. If a client refused to pay or became violent, he was dealt with swiftly by the House of Lords' enforcers, who ensured that the establishment remained a place of business, not chaos. The system worked because everyone involved—management, clients, and the women themselves—understood that maintaining discretion and professionalism was the key to longevity. Through their



membership in the Scarlet Order, the women ensured not only their financial security but also their place within one of the most well-connected and powerful vice networks in Joplin.

Profit from the Oldest Trade

The House of Lords approached its brothel operations as it did everything else—first and foremost, it was a business. Unlike the grim, exploitative brothels that operated in Joplin's red-light district, where women were controlled by madams and forced into debt traps, the House of Lords provided a different model. The women who worked there were independent contractors, but they were also members of the exclusive Scarlet Order, a secretive auxiliary club within the establishment. Membership came with privileges—access to the wealthiest clientele, security from both unruly customers and outside threats, and the ability to work within one of the most well-connected vice networks in the city. However, those privileges came at a cost.

Each woman kept the majority of her earnings, but she was required to pay dues and rental fees to the House of Lords. This included a percentage of her income, which ensured her continued membership in the Scarlet Order, as well as a rental fee for the use of the third-floor rooms. In return, the House of Lords provided a level of protection and professionalism that could not be found elsewhere in Joplin. The establishment's enforcers—bartenders, gambling hall attendants, and other trusted employees—were always present to ensure that customers paid what they owed and that no one mistreated the women. If a patron became violent or refused to pay, he was quickly removed from the premises, sometimes by force. The Scarlet Order did not tolerate clients who failed to respect the arrangement, and the House of Lords made sure that no debts remained unpaid.

This system of shared profits allowed the brothel to function with minimal interference from management. As long as the women paid their share, they were largely free to conduct business as they saw fit. Unlike other brothels, where madams controlled every aspect of their workers' lives, the House of Lords offered a rare level of autonomy. It was this independence—combined with the establishment's exclusivity and high-class reputation—that made it one of the most desirable places to work in Joplin's underground industry. While the work itself was still grueling and often dangerous, the women at the House of Lords had more power over their financial futures than most in their profession.

Even with this relative freedom, the women were still part of an empire that profited from their labor. The House of Lords remained the ultimate beneficiary of the Scarlet Order's success, ensuring that the business thrived without ever appearing as an openly run brothel. Those who failed to pay their dues did not work there for long. The system functioned because everyone involved—management, clients, and the women themselves—understood that discretion, order, and financial discipline were non-negotiable. In an era where many women in the sex trade were at the mercy of those who exploited them, the Scarlet Order provided a rare form of structure and security—though always within the confines of a larger business designed to ensure that Joplin's most infamous establishment remained profitable.

The Police & City Officials: The Silent Beneficiaries

Despite the fact that everyone in Joplin knew what was happening on the third floor of the House of Lords, the brothel was never raided, never shut down, and never faced serious legal trouble. Other brothels in the city's red-light district were occasionally targeted by police crackdowns, either as political theater or due to genuine public pressure, but the House of Lords remained untouched. It was not because authorities were unaware of its existence, nor was it due to a lack of evidence. The House of Lords thrived in plain sight because it was protected by a carefully cultivated network of bribery, influence, and political connections that ensured no one in power had any interest in stopping its operations.

Joplin's police force and city officials had no real motivation to shut down the brothel—in fact, many of them profited directly from it. Police officers were known to frequent the House of Lords themselves, often enjoying free drinks, special accommodations, and other unspoken perks of their unofficial alliance with the establishment. City officials received regular "donations" from the saloon's management, ensuring that no inconvenient laws were suddenly enforced against them. Even judges in Joplin's court system quietly dismissed cases related to prostitution at the House of Lords before they ever reached trial. If a complaint was made or an arrest occurred, it rarely amounted to anything more than a fine—one that was paid without question, treated as just another cost of doing business.

The House of Lords remained untouchable because it had two things the city valued above all else—money and control. The saloon and its brothel brought in a steady stream of revenue, ensuring that Joplin's economy continued to thrive. Unlike the disorderly and often violent brothels of the red-light district, the House of Lords was seen as a well-run, respectable operation. Its clientele included wealthy mine owners, businessmen, and political figures, all of whom had a vested interest in keeping it open. Closing down such an establishment would not only disrupt a major financial hub but would also put city leaders in direct conflict with the most powerful men in Joplin. The House of Lords was not just a business; it was an institution that kept money and influence flowing, and as long as that remained true, it was immune to legal interference.

And so, the brothel continued to operate, year after year, protected not just by its owners but by the very system that should have been trying to shut it down. The police, the courts, and city officials all had their reasons for keeping their hands off, and the House of Lords took full advantage of that reality. In Joplin, vice was not something to be eliminated—it was something to be managed, controlled, and, most importantly, profited from. The brothel was as much a part of the city's foundation as the mines that fueled its economy, and for as long as that was the case, it remained untouchable.

Crime & Violence at the House of Lords

The House of Lords was more than just a saloon, a gambling hall, and a brothel—it was a stage where violence, greed, and revenge played out in real-time. Despite its reputation for luxury and high-stakes gambling, the House of Lords was still a product of its environment—a rough mining town where money and tempers ran hot.

At any given time, miners, outlaws, politicians, and businessmen drank side by side, each with their own motives and ambitions. With money flowing freely and egos colliding, it was inevitable that fistfights would break out, knives would be drawn, and guns would be fired. The law was barely enforced in Joplin, and in places like the House of Lords, men often settled disputes the old-fashioned way—with their fists or their pistols.

The House of Lords was not just a center for crime—it was a place where crime was tolerated, even expected. And when trouble erupted, the establishment had its own ways of dealing with it.

Fistfights, Stabbings, and Shootouts: A House Built on Lawlessness

Violence was woven into the fabric of Joplin's saloon culture, and the House of Lords was no exception. It was a place where fortunes changed hands in an instant, where men drank themselves into oblivion, and where egos clashed as quickly as whiskey glasses. The thin veil of civility that covered the establishment could be torn away in an instant, and when it was, chaos often followed. Poker games became battlegrounds when accusations of cheating arose, drunken brawls erupted when men had too much whiskey and too little patience, and guns were drawn over unpaid debts, unpaid women, or simply the wrong look at the wrong man. At any moment, the energy inside the House of Lords could shift from rowdy entertainment to outright mayhem.

The first floor—the bar and restaurant—was usually the safest area, but even there, fights were not uncommon. A simple disagreement over a spilled drink or an ill-timed joke could spiral into an all-out brawl. Chairs crashed to the floor, glasses shattered against the bar, and more than one man found himself thrown out onto Main Street with a broken nose and bruised pride. The unlucky bartender often played the role of mediator, attempting to calm tempers before fists started flying. Sometimes he succeeded, but just as often, the fight had to burn itself out. These disturbances rarely lasted long, as the House of Lords valued keeping business flowing over indulging in petty skirmishes.

The gambling hall on the second floor was where tensions truly ran high. With fortunes won and lost on a single hand, emotions boiled over with alarming frequency. Men who suspected cheating were not the type to calmly discuss their grievances. Instead, accusations turned to threats, threats turned to blows, and sometimes, the disputes escalated to deadly levels. The sound of a chair scraping the floor or the sudden silence of a tense table could be a warning that trouble was coming. On more than one occasion, blood was spilled over a game gone

wrong, and gunfire brought the entire hall to a temporary standstill—only for business to resume minutes later as if nothing had happened.

The third floor—the brothel—had its own share of dangers. While the women who worked there were protected by the House of Lords' enforcers, the men who visited were often unpredictable. Jealous lovers, furious husbands, and drunken outlaws sometimes forced their way upstairs, leading to violent confrontations that could turn deadly. Though security did its best to maintain order, there were nights when even they couldn't prevent the chaos from reaching the top floor. But no act of violence at the House of Lords was more legendary than the night Riley F. Robertson fought James Dalton of the infamous Dalton Gang—a brawl that would cement the saloon's reputation as a place where even the most dangerous outlaws were not untouchable.

Riley Robertson vs. James Dalton: The Infamous Saloon Fight

Riley F. Robertson was not the kind of man one would expect to find in the middle of a saloon brawl. Unlike the rough-edged miners, drifters, and outlaws who frequented the House of Lords, he was a businessman first and foremost. He did not drink to excess, nor did he gamble recklessly or engage in petty fights. His interest in the House of Lords was purely financial—he had invested heavily in Joplin's vice industry and had a direct stake in keeping it profitable. But despite his composed nature, Robertson was not a man to be pushed around. One fateful night, he found himself locked in a brutal fight with none other than James Dalton, a member of the infamous Dalton Gang.

The Dalton Gang was one of the most feared outlaw groups of the time, responsible for a string of violent bank robberies, train heists, and deadly shootouts across Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma. Though their crimes were usually carried out in rural areas, the gang often drifted into cities like Joplin when they needed a place to lay low and spend their stolen money. The House of Lords was a natural draw for men like them—a place where they could drink, gamble, and enjoy the company of women without too many questions being asked. James Dalton, one of the more hot-headed members of the gang, was a known regular at the saloon. He had a reputation for being a reckless gambler, losing large sums of money in a single night, then trying to drink away his frustrations. On one particular evening, however, his luck ran out completely, and his temper got the best of him.

The night started as many others had, with Dalton at the gambling tables, riding a wave of bad luck. Losing hand after hand, his frustration grew, and when he finally lost a particularly large sum, he snapped. He accused one of the House of Lords' dealers of cheating, his voice rising above the usual noise of the saloon. When the dealer calmly dismissed his accusations and refused to return his money, Dalton's rage turned physical. He flipped the table over in a violent outburst, sending chips and cards flying, and in the next instant, he drew his gun. The entire room went silent, with every pair of eyes locked on the outlaw, waiting to see what he would do next.

Robertson, who had been overseeing the night's business, stepped in to defuse the situation. He knew that a shootout in the House of Lords would be disastrous, bringing the kind of law enforcement attention that the saloon's operators worked so hard to avoid. However, Dalton

was already too far gone—his blood was hot, and he wasn't interested in reason. As Robertson attempted to calm him down, Dalton suddenly threw a punch, knocking Robertson backward into a nearby chair. But rather than backing down, Robertson fought back. The two men brawled in the middle of the saloon, fists flying as onlookers scrambled to get out of the way. The fight quickly spilled out onto the street, with Dalton attempting to reach for his pistol, only for Robertson to knock it from his grip before landing another devastating blow. The fight only ended when the House of Lords' enforcers stepped in, separating the two and tossing Dalton—bloodied and humiliated—into the street.

It was one of the few times a member of the Dalton Gang had been beaten in a public fight, and though Dalton never forgot the humiliation, he never returned to the House of Lords. For Robertson, the fight became the stuff of legend, proving that, despite his businessman's demeanor, he was more than capable of defending himself when the moment demanded it. The incident cemented his reputation as a man who was not to be underestimated, a rare figure who could walk the line between legitimate enterprise and the lawless world of Joplin's vice industry. The House of Lords remained a sanctuary for those who played by its rules, but after that night, everyone knew—whether outlaw or miner, gambler or drunk—Riley F. Robertson was not a man to be crossed.

Security at the House of Lords: How Order Was Maintained

With so much money changing hands and so many dangerous men passing through its doors, the House of Lords could not operate without a strong security presence. The saloon, gambling hall, and brothel were all high-stakes environments where tempers flared, fortunes were won and lost, and men indulged in whiskey-fueled bravado. Without enforcers to keep the chaos in check, the establishment would have been overrun with violence, making it impossible to conduct business. The security at the House of Lords wasn't just about protecting the establishment—it was about preserving the atmosphere of controlled vice that made it successful.

Bartenders and dealers were trained to manage unruly customers, acting as the first line of defense when a situation began to escalate. If a miner, businessman, or outlaw got too drunk and started causing trouble, the staff knew how to de-escalate the situation before it turned into an all-out brawl. But when words failed, muscle took over. The House of Lords employed large, imposing men—many of them former boxers, lawmen, or soldiers—whose job was to enforce order. These enforcers weren't there to intimidate the regulars; they were there to ensure that the patrons followed the unspoken rules of the establishment.

If a man refused to back down, he was swiftly and violently dealt with. Anyone who caused too much trouble, refused to pay a debt, or became a danger to the House of Lords' business was forcibly removed from the premises. Some were simply thrown into the street, left to sober up or nurse their bruises. Others weren't so lucky. Stories circulated of men being beaten within an inch of their lives in the alley behind the building, a clear message to anyone else who thought about disrupting

business. In extreme cases, particularly dangerous men simply “disappeared,” with little effort made to investigate their whereabouts.

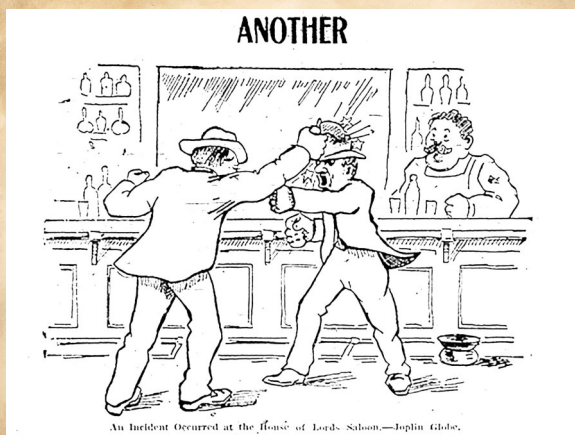
The enforcers at the House of Lords weren’t just hired thugs; they were an essential part of keeping the saloon profitable. Gamblers wouldn’t play if they felt unsafe. The brothel would lose money if the women weren’t protected. If fights got too out of hand, the city’s officials—many of whom were paid off—would be forced to act. Violence was inevitable in a place like the House of Lords, but it was controlled, calculated, and managed to ensure that business always came first.

The Criminal Underworld of the House of Lords

The House of Lords was more than just a saloon; it was a crossroads where the worlds of wealth and crime collided. While it was a favorite haunt of gamblers, businessmen, and politicians, it also attracted some of the most notorious criminals of the era. The rumor that Jesse James himself had once visited in his early years only added to its mystique, though whether he actually passed through its doors remains a subject of debate. What was undeniable, however, was that smugglers, conmen, and fugitives regularly found temporary refuge within its walls. With money constantly changing hands and an unspoken rule of discretion, it became a haven for those who lived outside the law.

The clientele of the House of Lords included more than just notorious outlaws—it also drew miners, some of whom could be just as rough and unpredictable as the criminals passing through. Mining was dangerous, backbreaking work, and many men who labored underground carried that same hardened mentality into the saloon. A miner who had just been paid could go from celebrating to violent in an instant, especially when alcohol and gambling were involved. The combination of dangerous men and high-stakes games meant that tensions always simmered just beneath the surface, waiting for the slightest provocation

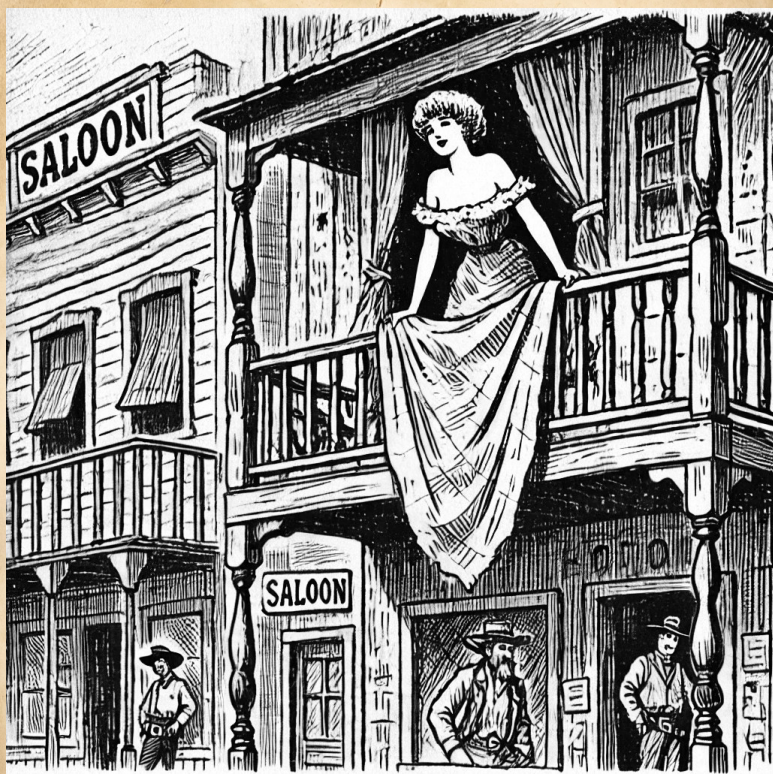
to ignite them into full-blown violence.



Despite being a magnet for criminals, the House of Lords was never a place where lawlessness was allowed to interfere with business. Management understood that order was necessary for profit, and anyone who stepped out of line was swiftly dealt with. The enforcers who worked for the saloon were well-trained in handling troublemakers,

whether that meant forcibly ejecting a drunken miner, escorting an angry gambler out before he could pull a gun, or dealing with an outlaw who had become too comfortable. For those who didn't take the hint, removal was not always a gentle process—many men were thrown into the street with broken noses and bruised egos, a warning to others that the House of Lords would tolerate no disruptions.

For most criminals, the House of Lords was not a place to start trouble—it was a place to enjoy the rewards of a life outside the law. Smugglers and conmen spent their ill-gotten gains at the gambling tables, outlaws relaxed with fine whiskey, and fugitives blended into the crowd, hoping to avoid the eyes of bounty hunters. But that didn't mean violence never erupted. When tensions escalated too far, the results could be deadly. Whether it was a gambler catching a cheater in the act, an outlaw pushing his luck too far, or a long-standing feud finally reaching its boiling point, the House of Lords saw its fair share of bloodshed. And yet, no matter how many fights broke out or how many bodies hit the floor, the gambling, drinking, and business never stopped for long. In a place built on vice, the criminal underworld was simply another part of the scenery.



The Naked Woman in the Window

The House of Lords had always been a place where scandal thrived behind closed doors. Its reputation as Joplin's most infamous saloon, gambling hall, and brothel was well known, but for the most part, its operations remained carefully managed and out of direct public view. However, in 1906, the House of Lords found itself at the center of a public spectacle unlike any before it—one that sent shockwaves through Joplin and threatened to bring unwanted attention to an establishment that had long operated in the shadows of legality.

It all started with a single moment of recklessness, a brief lapse in discretion that led to one of the most infamous scandals in Joplin's history—the night a prostitute stood naked in the third-floor window, exposing more than just herself to the people of Joplin.

The Woman in the Window: The Night That Changed Everything

No one knows for certain what led to the scandalous display that would be whispered about for years to come. Some say it was a drunken dare between the working women of the House of Lords. Others believe it was an attempt to lure in customers, a marketing stunt gone too far. And then there were those who swore the woman in the window was flaunting her defiance, throwing the town's morality back in its face.

Whatever the cause, the result was undeniable.

Late one night, a woman from the third-floor brothel stepped up to a window overlooking Main Street. At first, passersby assumed she was just peering out, perhaps watching the lively street below. But within moments, gasps and whispers filled the air as she shed her clothing, standing fully naked in the large window for all to see.

For the people below, it was a sight unlike any other. Some laughed and cheered, finding it nothing more than a shocking bit of late-night entertainment. Others were horrified, especially those who had been campaigning against the city's growing reputation for vice.

It took only minutes for the word to spread, and before long, a small crowd had gathered in the street, pointing, gawking, and calling out in shock or admiration.

The House of Lords had always been Joplin's worst-kept secret, but now, its hidden world was on full display—literally.

The Public Outrage: Scandal Hits the Newspapers

By sunrise, Joplin's newspapers were already running with the story. The next day's edition of the *Joplin Globe* carried dramatic accounts of the incident, describing "a shameful display of immorality in the heart of our city." The scandal spread quickly, fueling outrage across town. Local ministers wasted no time in condemning the House of Lords from their pulpits, railing against the establishment as a blight on Joplin's moral fabric. While vice had long been tolerated as an open secret, this public display was too much for many to ignore. For the first time, the House of Lords found itself facing widespread scrutiny, not just from reformers but from the very people who had previously turned a blind eye to its operations.

Moral reform groups, which had already been waging a battle against Joplin's vice industry, seized on the event as undeniable proof that the city had lost control. They argued that as long as places like the House of Lords were allowed to operate, incidents like this would only continue, further degrading the community. Local politicians, many of whom had quietly accepted financial contributions from the House of Lords and its allies, suddenly found themselves under pressure to act. Even those who privately enjoyed the establishment found it harder to defend in the face of such a blatant and public scandal. The House of Lords had always relied on discretion to keep itself safe, but now that it had drawn so much attention, the discussions about shutting it down became more serious than ever before.

But despite the uproar, something unexpected happened—business at the House of Lords didn't suffer. If anything, the scandal only made it more famous. Men who had never set foot inside the saloon before now wanted to see what all the fuss was about. The story spread beyond Joplin, reaching neighboring towns and even larger cities, making the House of Lords infamous far beyond its usual circle of patrons. Travelers passing through made a point to visit the establishment, eager to witness firsthand the saloon that had caused such an uproar. Even those who publicly condemned the incident were unable to resist the allure of curiosity, and many who claimed to be disgusted by the House of Lords found themselves inside its doors soon enough.

Rather than damage its reputation, the scandal became an inadvertent advertisement. The café and bar were suddenly busier than ever, filled with men hoping for another scandalous show. The gambling hall saw an increase in new players, some of whom had come to Joplin specifically to visit the now-legendary saloon. Even the brothel, despite the backlash, continued to thrive as the House of Lords remained the most exclusive and well-run establishment of its kind. But even as it profited from the controversy, management recognized that they had gone too far. The veil of discretion that had protected the business for so long had been momentarily lifted, and if they wanted to continue operating without government intervention, they would need to take steps to ensure that such an incident never happened again.

How the House of Lords Adapted to Avoid Future Scandals

The House of Lords had survived plenty of controversy in its time, but the 1906 scandal made one thing abundantly clear—it could no longer afford to be so reckless. The incident had pushed the boundaries of what Joplin's leaders were willing to tolerate, and if the establishment wanted to remain open, it needed to maintain at least the illusion of control. For years, the House of Lords had thrived on the balance of indulgence and discretion, but with the eyes of reformers, politicians, and the public now watching more closely than ever, it became imperative to make changes. It was not a question of stopping business but rather ensuring that its most profitable operations remained hidden from those who might use them as an excuse for a crackdown.

One of the first steps taken after the scandal was tightening security within the establishment. Management cracked down on public displays that could draw unwanted attention, starting with strict new rules for the women who worked upstairs. They were expressly forbidden from standing near windows unless fully dressed, a direct response to the incident that had thrown the House of Lords into the headlines. Curtains were permanently drawn on the third-floor rooms facing Main Street, preventing any accidental—or intentional—spectacles from spilling onto the street. Even the bartenders and floor managers were given new orders: remove overly drunk or rowdy guests before things got out of hand. The House of Lords had always been a place of indulgence, but after 1906, it ensured that those indulgences remained behind closed doors.

At the same time, management took a more proactive approach in keeping city officials content. The House of Lords had long relied on bribes and political influence to operate without interference, but in the wake of the scandal, it became necessary to increase these efforts. Local law enforcement found themselves on the receiving end of larger payments, ensuring that they would continue looking the other way. Politicians, some of whom had been rattled by the public backlash, were reminded that the financial support of the House of Lords came with expectations—chief among them being the promise that no new restrictive laws would be passed. Even the *Joplin Globe*, which had reported on the scandal with such moralistic fervor, soon softened its stance thanks to well-placed financial incentives. Money had always kept the House of Lords protected, and now, more than ever, it was used to smooth over any lingering tensions.

In the months that followed, the House of Lords set out to repair its public image, rebranding itself as a more refined “gentleman’s establishment.” Advertisements that once focused on excitement and entertainment shifted their language to emphasize fine dining and high-class gambling, avoiding any mention of the other services that had made the saloon infamous. Businessmen and wealthy patrons were encouraged to bring guests, reinforcing the idea that this was a respectable place to entertain rather than just a den of vice. More emphasis was placed on luxury, discretion, and exclusivity, ensuring that future scandals would be avoided at all costs. The House of Lords did not change what it was—it simply became better at hiding what it had always been.

The Police Raid of 1906

By 1906, the House of Lords was more than just a saloon, a gambling hall, and a brothel—it was an institution, a symbol of Joplin’s unchecked vice and corruption. For years, it had operated freely, protected by political connections, bribes, and the sheer power of its profitability. It was an open secret, a place where powerful men came to drink, gamble, and conduct business, all while turning a blind eye to the illegal activities happening under the same roof.

But the scandal of the naked woman in the window had pushed the city’s patience to its limits. The event had made national news, casting Joplin in an unflattering light as a lawless, debauched mining town. The House of Lords, once able to keep its worst excesses behind closed doors, had suddenly become the center of public outrage.

This was the moment when Mayor Guy Humes decided to act.

Mayor Guy Humes’ Crackdown on Vice

Guy Humes had been elected mayor of Joplin on a platform of reform, but until the 1906 scandal, he had done little to challenge the city’s deep-seated corruption. The reason was simple: Joplin’s economy thrived on vice. Saloons, gambling halls, and brothels poured money into city coffers, keeping businesses afloat and ensuring that cash flowed freely through the hands of politicians and law enforcement officers. Many of the people who worked under Humes were on the payroll of establishments like the House of Lords, making it difficult—if not impossible—for any real reform to take place. As long as the money kept coming in, the city’s leadership had little incentive to crack down on the institutions that made Joplin what it was.

But after the naked woman incident, the pressure on Humes intensified. Moral reform groups and religious leaders, who had long been fighting to “clean up” Joplin, seized on the scandal as their rallying cry. They demanded action, calling for a full-scale crackdown on gambling, prostitution, and public indecency. National newspapers had embarrassed the city, portraying Joplin as a lawless haven for vice, and business leaders worried that the scandal would tarnish the city’s reputation, discouraging investment and respectable commerce. Even some of Humes’ own political allies, men who had previously tolerated the House of Lords and other saloons, urged him to do something—anything—to restore order before the outrage spiraled out of control.

Faced with growing public pressure, Humes saw no choice but to stage a dramatic show of force. He needed to prove to the reformers and the press that Joplin was not entirely under the control of its gambling bosses and saloon owners. He also needed to show his political allies that he was capable of maintaining order. A small, symbolic raid on a lesser-known gambling hall or brothel wouldn’t be enough. To make a real statement, he had to go after the biggest target in town. If he wanted to show the people of Joplin that things were changing, there was only one place to start.

On a cool autumn night in 1906, Mayor Humes ordered the largest police raid in Joplin’s

history. Officers were assembled, given strict orders, and sent into the city's underworld in numbers never before seen. The House of Lords, the crown jewel of Joplin's vice industry, was the primary target. For the first time in its history, the most powerful saloon in Joplin would find itself at the mercy of the law.

The Raid: A Saloon Caught Off Guard

The House of Lords had survived countless threats over the years, but no one inside the establishment expected what was about to unfold that evening. For decades, the saloon had operated with near-total immunity, protected by bribes, political connections, and a city leadership that had little interest in shutting it down. The idea that law enforcement would dare to raid the most powerful establishment in Joplin seemed unthinkable. But on this particular night, everything changed. The usual sense of untouchable luxury that filled the air was about to be shattered, replaced by something the House of Lords had rarely encountered—fear.

At precisely 10:00 PM, Mayor Humes himself led a team of uniformed officers straight through the front doors of the House of Lords. Many of the policemen in attendance had taken bribes from the saloon in the past, yet now they were following orders to shut it down. The sight of armed officers storming into Joplin's grandest saloon sent an instant wave of shock through the establishment. The bar, usually filled with raucous laughter and lively conversation, fell silent as officers pushed past stunned patrons, their boots clacking against the polished mahogany floors. Gamblers on the second floor hesitated, gripping their cards mid-play, unsure if they should attempt to flee or remain seated and hope for the best. Upstairs, the women of the third-floor brothel scrambled for their clothes, some slipping out through back exits while others stood frozen in place, waiting to see what would happen next.

This was not a simple inspection or a half-hearted show of force—this was a full-scale raid. Officers moved through the House of Lords methodically, leaving no room untouched, no business operation unchecked. What had long been an open secret was now being dragged into public view, exposed under the unforgiving eye of law enforcement. The House of Lords had thrived on discretion, on carefully maintaining the illusion of legitimacy, but the raid stripped away that pretense. For the first time, the establishment was forced to face the weight of its own excess.

As officers searched the premises, they uncovered exactly what they expected to find—and then some. The gambling hall was in full operation, with high-stakes poker games, roulette wheels spinning, and Faro tables filled with eager players. Cash and gambling chips were swept up and confiscated, evidence of the vast amounts of money that flowed through the saloon each night. Upstairs, the brothel was exposed, with rooms occupied and women taken into custody, though many had managed to escape in the chaos. Illegal liquor was seized in large quantities, a rare occurrence given the House of Lords' usual practice of keeping its most valuable contraband protected from raids. What was happening inside the House of Lords that night was more than just a police action—it was the public exposure of an empire of vice, a moment that would be talked about for years to come. And now, the entire city knew just how vast its reach had been.

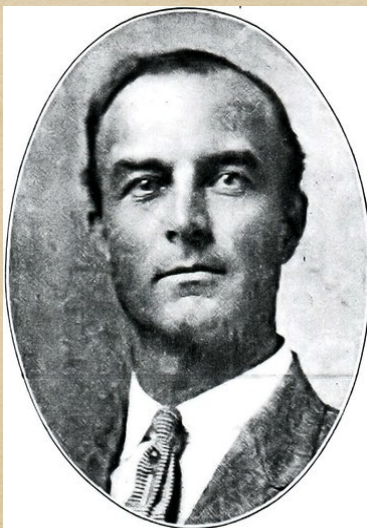
Why the House of Lords Wasn't Shut Down Permanently

Given the sheer amount of illegal activity uncovered in the raid, many believed this would be the end of the House of Lords. Reformers and moralists saw the dramatic police action as a turning point, a sign that Joplin's days of unchecked vice were finally over. But what they failed to understand was just how deeply embedded the House of Lords was within the city's political and economic structure. It was not just a saloon—it was a powerhouse of influence, a gathering place for the most important figures in Joplin, and a cornerstone of the local economy. Shutting it down completely would have been nearly impossible, and those in power had no real intention of doing so.

Despite the boldness of the raid, the police force itself had long-standing ties to the House of Lords. Many of the officers who had stormed through its doors that night had, at one point or another, been on the establishment's payroll. Some had been quietly receiving bribes for years, while others were regular patrons themselves. As a result, the arrests made during the raid were largely symbolic. A handful of gamblers and prostitutes were taken into custody, only to be quietly released the next morning. Not a single major figure behind the House of Lords was charged, and there was no real attempt to prosecute the saloon's owners or financiers. Even the evidence gathered during the raid—large sums of gambling money and confiscated liquor—mysteriously vanished, almost certainly returned to the saloon in secret. For all the spectacle, the police had no real interest in dismantling an institution that had been lining their pockets for years.

Joplin's legal system was just as compromised as its law enforcement. When cases related to the raid eventually reached the courts, they were delayed, dismissed, or settled with fines so minor they barely qualified had been known to Lords themselves had no their favorite permanently shuttered. connections, the city itself generated by Joplin's vice gambling halls, and into local businesses and crackdown on the House of powerful men, but it would effects that the city was not eyes of Joplin's legal and made a point, but taking their best interests.

Perhaps the most House of Lords' survival the highest levels of Joplin's Barbee, the influential ensured that coverage of



Joplin Mayor Guy Humes

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important factor in the was the support it had in power structure. Gilbert owner of the *Joplin Globe*, the raid was carefully

managed. While newspapers outside the city had turned the scandal into a spectacle, the *Globe* softened its stance, downplaying the raid's significance and shifting the narrative toward defending Joplin's business interests. Wealthy mine owners, railroad executives, and businessmen—many of whom had long enjoyed the House of Lords' services—put quiet but effective pressure on city officials to move on from the incident. And, as always, money exchanged hands in all the right places. Bribes were paid to ensure that while the House of Lords had been publicly embarrassed, it would not be permanently closed. In the end, the raid was more performance than policy—a calculated move by Mayor Humes to show the public that he was taking action while ensuring that Joplin's vice economy, too powerful to be eliminated, remained intact. The House of Lords had been shaken, but it had not fallen.

The Aftermath: What Changed, What Stayed the Same

Though the House of Lords wasn't shut down, the raid did bring some consequences. While it had successfully weathered the storm, it could no longer afford to operate with the same level of brazenness that had defined its earlier years. In response, management took immediate steps to ensure that such a dramatic police action would never happen again. The brothel operations became more discreet, with increased efforts to keep the women out of public view. The first-floor café remained a meeting place where arrangements were made, but upstairs, extra precautions were taken to prevent another scandal like the one that had triggered the raid. Curtains were drawn at all times, and the presence of security ensured that no guest would risk drawing attention to what went on behind closed doors.

Gambling at the House of Lords continued as always, but with tighter security measures in place. The second-floor gaming hall had once operated as an open secret, with little concern for legal consequences. After the raid, things changed. Patrons were more carefully screened, and employees were instructed to be on high alert for any signs of another crackdown. House dealers became more adept at spotting undercover officers, and private gambling rooms were used more frequently to keep high-stakes games away from prying eyes. The House of Lords could not afford another public embarrassment, so while the games went on, they did so with an extra layer of caution.

Perhaps the biggest change came in the way the House of Lords handled its political relationships. Bribes had always been a part of its business model, but after the raid, those payments increased significantly. City officials and law enforcement were given even greater financial incentives to ensure that future police actions would be less aggressive—or avoided entirely. The establishment's owners doubled down on their influence, ensuring that key figures in local government remained loyal to their interests. In many ways, the House of Lords adapted and emerged stronger. It had survived its first real challenge from city officials, proving that despite the noise from reformers, it was still too profitable, too connected, and too valuable to be destroyed.

However, the raid marked a shift in the city's attitude. The House of Lords was no longer untouchable. Though it had endured this storm, others were brewing on the horizon. Joplin was changing. Reform movements were growing in influence, and the era of unchecked vice was beginning to wane. The House of Lords was still standing, its influence still formidable, but for the first time, there was a real question of how long it would last.

The Myth of the Secret Tunnel

For decades, whispers of a hidden underground tunnel beneath the House of Lords have persisted in Joplin's folklore. It was said that a passageway connected the infamous saloon and gambling hall to the opulent Connor Hotel, allowing smugglers, gamblers, and corrupt politicians to move unseen beneath the streets. Some claimed the tunnel was used to escape police raids, while others believed it was a direct line for illegal liquor distribution—especially during the years of Prohibition.

The idea of a secret escape route, hidden just beneath the feet of unsuspecting pedestrians, captured the imagination of historians, treasure hunters, and ghost story enthusiasts alike. But was there any truth to the legend? Did the House of Lords truly have an underground passageway that allowed its patrons to slip away unnoticed when trouble arose? Or was it merely another piece of Joplin's colorful, exaggerated history?

The Origin of the Tunnel Legend

The stories of Joplin's underground tunnels have been around for nearly as long as the city itself. From the late 1800s onward, local rumors swirled about a network of hidden passageways beneath downtown, used for everything from bootlegging to human trafficking.

But the legend of the House of Lords tunnel specifically gained traction in the early 20th century, when the saloon's reputation for illegal activity reached its peak. Given the high-stakes gambling, prostitution, and corruption tied to the establishment, it wasn't difficult to imagine that those who ran the House of Lords might have built a secret escape route to avoid arrests or to move goods unseen.

The most commonly repeated version of the legend claims that a tunnel ran between the House of Lords and the Connor Hotel, which stood directly across the street. The Connor, a luxurious hotel frequented by wealthy mine owners, politicians, and businessmen, would have been the perfect exit point for someone looking to disappear without a trace.

But for all its intrigue, the question remains—was there ever real evidence to support this claim?

What Historical Maps and Excavation Records Say

In an attempt to separate fact from fiction, historians and local researchers have combed through old city records, excavation reports, and historical maps of Joplin's underground infrastructure. The search for a secret tunnel leading from the House of Lords to the Connor Hotel has fascinated many, but the findings remain inconclusive. While countless rumors suggest that such a passage existed—used for discreet exits, liquor smuggling, or other clandestine activities—there is little in the way of documented proof. The allure of hidden passageways beneath Joplin's most infamous saloon has persisted for generations, but

confirming its existence has proven to be a challenge.

Early city maps from the late 19th and early 20th centuries show no officially recorded tunnel connecting the two buildings. While these maps provide a detailed look at Joplin's underground infrastructure, they are far from complete. Many structures had basement extensions and hidden spaces that were never included in official records, either because they were built without permits or intentionally kept secret. Excavation efforts beneath what was once the House of Lords site have uncovered old foundation structures, drainage systems, and remnants of basement storage areas—but no clear evidence of a tunnel leading directly to the Connor. Additionally, workers who helped demolish the Connor Hotel in the 1970s reported no discovery of an underground passageway that linked back to the House of Lords, though by then, any such structure could have long been sealed off or collapsed.

However, the absence of official records does not necessarily mean the tunnel never existed. Illegal construction was rarely documented, and given the deep political corruption surrounding the House of Lords, it is entirely possible that such a tunnel could have been built in secret, known only to those who needed it. Underground routes were commonly used for illicit activities during this period, especially in cities where prohibition laws, gambling restrictions, or brothel regulations were selectively enforced. Establishments like the House of Lords had the money and the connections to construct hidden spaces that never appeared on official blueprints.

Adding to the mystery are firsthand accounts from old-timers who claimed to have seen bricked-up passageways in the basements of buildings near the House of Lords. Some former workers and longtime residents spoke of underground routes running between key locations in Joplin's historic downtown, including a known tunnel that ran between the Keystone Hotel and the Connor Hotel, originally built for laundry carts. While this tunnel's existence has been confirmed, its presence raises the question of whether additional underground passageways once existed in the area, potentially including one linked to the House of Lords. Whether intended for smuggling, discreet escapes, or some other purpose, the legend of Joplin's hidden tunnels continues to spark curiosity, leaving open the possibility that the House of Lords had more secrets buried beneath its foundation than history has yet revealed.

Could the Tunnel Have Been Used for Bootlegging During Prohibition?

Even if a tunnel did exist beneath the House of Lords, its most likely period of heavy use would have been during Prohibition (1920-1933). With the nationwide ban on alcohol, former saloons and gambling halls across the country turned to underground smuggling operations to keep their businesses afloat. The House of Lords had always thrived on vice, and it is unlikely that its operations simply ceased when alcohol became illegal. Instead, like many other establishments, it would have found new ways to operate in the shadows, and a hidden tunnel would have been the perfect tool for such an enterprise.

The advantages of an underground passageway for bootlegging operations were undeniable. Tunnels provided an ideal means of moving alcohol unnoticed, allowing barrels of whiskey and crates of beer to be transported beneath the streets without fear of police raids or federal agents. If such a tunnel existed, it could have served as a lifeline for Joplin's liquor syndicates,

ensuring that speakeasies, hidden bars, and exclusive backroom establishments remained stocked despite the nationwide crackdown. It would have also allowed prominent figures—politicians, businessmen, and gamblers—to continue enjoying their vices without drawing public scrutiny. Given the House of Lords’ long history of catering to Joplin’s elite, it’s entirely plausible that an underground network was used to maintain its most profitable trade in secret.

Some researchers have pointed to similar underground tunnels in cities like Kansas City and St. Louis, where bootlegging operations flourished during Prohibition. These passageways provided a critical infrastructure for illegal liquor distribution, helping criminal organizations smuggle alcohol without detection. If Missouri’s larger cities had sophisticated tunnel systems for this purpose, it raises an intriguing question—could Joplin have had its own version of these secret passageways, designed to keep its vice economy alive even as federal agents attempted to shut it down? Given Joplin’s reputation for embracing vice rather than suppressing it, the possibility is far from far-fetched.

While no definitive proof of a bootlegging tunnel beneath the House of Lords has ever been uncovered, the circumstantial evidence makes the idea more than just a wild story. Joplin’s saloons and gambling halls did not simply vanish during Prohibition; they adapted, rebranded, and in some cases, went underground—both figuratively and literally. Whether through bribes, secret rooms, or hidden tunnels, the House of Lords likely found ways to continue its operations during one of the most restrictive eras in American history. The truth may remain buried beneath the streets of Joplin, but the legend of an underground liquor route beneath the city’s most infamous establishment remains a compelling piece of its Prohibition-era history.

The Case for the Tunnel’s Existence

Even without hard evidence, the tunnel theory remains a compelling possibility for several reasons. The first and most obvious justification for such a passage would be the need for secrecy. The House of Lords was built on vice—gambling, liquor, and prostitution—activities that often required discretion, especially when law enforcement or reform movements threatened to interfere. An underground escape route would have been invaluable, allowing high-profile patrons, illegal liquor shipments, or even employees to move undetected between buildings. Given the establishment’s deep political connections and ability to manipulate city officials, it is entirely possible that such a tunnel could have been constructed without official documentation, ensuring its secrecy for decades.

The layout of downtown Joplin during the late 19th and early 20th centuries further supports the tunnel theory. Many buildings from this era had basements that connected to drainage tunnels, shared storage areas, or neighboring businesses. The presence of an underground passageway would not have been entirely unusual, and such a structure could have easily been adapted for illicit purposes. In fact, tunnels were not uncommon beneath cities of this period, particularly in districts where smuggling or organized crime played a role in the local economy. If such a tunnel did exist, it may have originally been built for a different purpose—such as moving goods or supplies—before being repurposed for the House of Lords’ more secretive operations.

Eyewitness accounts add another layer to the mystery. While anecdotal, multiple stories exist

of bricked-up doorways and sealed passageways in the basements of old buildings near Main Street. Several longtime residents and workers in downtown Joplin have spoken of unusual basement structures that seemed to lead nowhere, sparking speculation that tunnels were once a part of the city's underground landscape. While memories and oral histories can sometimes exaggerate details, the consistency of these accounts across different sources suggests that something was hidden beneath Joplin's streets. Whether it was a fully functioning tunnel system or merely a collection of abandoned basement extensions remains unclear, but the possibility continues to intrigue historians and researchers.

Perhaps the strongest argument for the tunnel's existence comes from Joplin's connection to Prohibition-era bootlegging. During the 1920s, the illegal transport of liquor flourished across Missouri, with underground tunnels serving as critical supply routes in major cities like St. Louis and Kansas City. Given Joplin's own reputation for vice and its established network of saloons and speakeasies, it is not unreasonable to suspect that similar methods were employed here. A hidden tunnel would have provided the perfect means of moving alcohol discreetly between buildings, keeping the city's liquor trade alive despite the federal crackdown. While no conclusive proof has been found, the circumstantial evidence makes the possibility difficult to dismiss entirely.

The Case Against the Tunnel's Existence

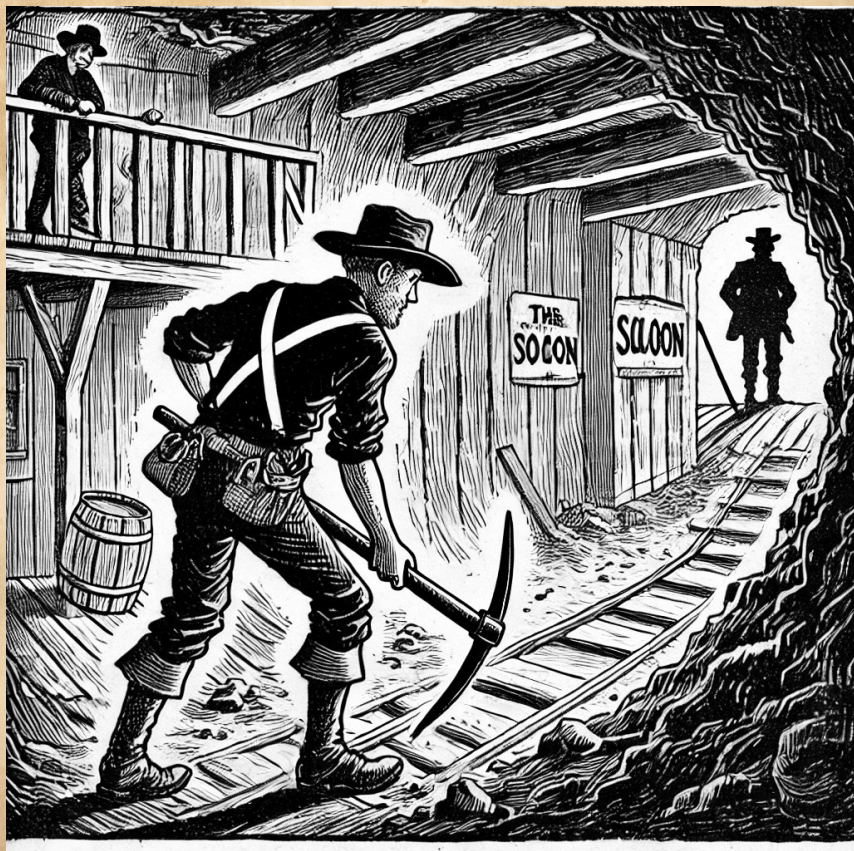
Despite the compelling legends, there are also logical reasons why the tunnel may never have existed. The most obvious issue is the lack of physical evidence. While rumors persist, no clear tunnel entrances or passageways have ever been uncovered, even during demolition and excavation projects in the area. Unlike the confirmed laundry cart tunnel between the Keystone Hotel and the Connor Hotel, no structure linking the House of Lords to the Connor has ever been verified. Without concrete proof, the tunnel remains a story passed down rather than a documented fact.

Architectural limitations also raise doubts about the feasibility of such a tunnel. The distance between the House of Lords and the Connor Hotel, while small, would have required significant underground construction, which would have been difficult to conceal. Digging a tunnel deep enough to avoid disruption from street-level construction or maintenance would have taken considerable effort, particularly with the technology available at the time. While it is possible that a passageway was created, the logistical challenges make it less likely than some of the more widely accepted underground tunnels in larger cities.

Finally, alternative explanations could account for many of the rumors surrounding the tunnel. Some researchers believe that stories of hidden underground routes may actually be referencing old drainage systems, which were common beneath Joplin's downtown buildings. Others suggest that what people recall as bricked-up tunnels may have been old storage cellars, which were often built beneath businesses to house supplies, barrels of alcohol, or dry goods. Without direct access to these blocked-off spaces, it is impossible to determine whether they were truly secret passageways or simply remnants of Joplin's early commercial architecture.

In the end, the legend of the House of Lords tunnel remains one of Joplin's most enduring

mysteries. While no definitive proof exists, the history of the city and the circumstantial evidence surrounding its underground spaces suggest that there may be more to the story than mere myth. Whether fact or fiction, the tale of a secret passage beneath Joplin's most infamous saloon continues to captivate those who seek to uncover the hidden past of a city built on fortune, vice, and intrigue.



The Impact of Prohibition

By the time the Volstead Act was passed in 1919, ushering in the era of Prohibition, Joplin had already developed a reputation as a city that thrived on vice. The town had been built on the backs of miners, gamblers, and businessmen who embraced liquor, gambling, and other indulgences as part of the culture. The House of Lords, more than any other establishment in the city, was a symbol of this era of excess. It had survived police raids, political crackdowns, and public scandals, but Prohibition presented a new and far more insurmountable challenge.

When alcohol became illegal, the very foundation upon which the House of Lords had been built began to crumble.

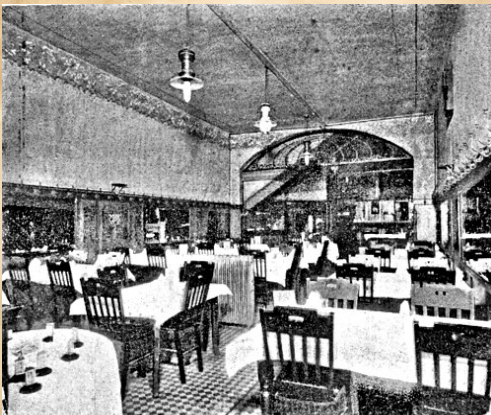
The Volstead Act and the Crippling of Joplin's Saloon Business

The Volstead Act, passed in 1919 and enforced in 1920, made the sale, production, and transportation of alcohol illegal in the United States. It was a death sentence for Joplin's once-thriving saloon industry, which had operated openly and lucratively for decades. Bars, saloons, and gambling houses that had been integral to the city's economy suddenly found themselves in a dire situation. Some attempted to adapt, while others simply shuttered their doors and disappeared. The House of Lords, Joplin's most notorious establishment, now faced an unprecedented challenge—how to survive in a city that could no longer legally serve alcohol.

For establishments like the House of Lords, which had built its reputation on liquor sales and the rowdy customers they attracted, the impact was devastating. The boisterous crowds of miners, gamblers, and businessmen who once filled the saloon were no longer gathering in the

same numbers. Without the free flow of whiskey and beer fueling long nights of indulgence, the atmosphere of the once-lively gambling hall dimmed. The laughter, shouting, and occasional brawls that had defined the House of Lords began to fade, replaced by an uneasy uncertainty about what came next. Even for a business as politically protected as the House of Lords, the sweeping federal crackdown on alcohol could not be ignored.

Law enforcement, now under pressure from federal agents, had no choice but to crack down on saloons—



even those that had once been shielded by political connections. Local police officers who had once turned a blind eye or accepted bribes to keep their silence were now being watched more closely. Joplin's city officials, many of whom had long profited from vice, found themselves forced to appear as though they were cleaning up the town. Raids became more frequent, and bars that had operated freely for decades were suddenly forced to close or find new ways to survive. Speakeasies and hidden drinking rooms emerged, but they could not fully replace the grand establishments that had once dominated the city's nightlife.

Without liquor to keep men drinking, gambling, and spending money, the House of Lords lost its edge. The saloon that had once been the beating heart of Joplin's nightlife was now struggling to find a new identity. While gambling still remained a draw, it was no longer enough to sustain the business on its own. The energy that had once defined the House of Lords was waning, and the city itself was changing. Prohibition was not just a legal restriction—it was a cultural shift, one that threatened to wipe out the very institutions that had built Joplin's reputation as a place of indulgence and excess. For the first time in its history, the House of Lords faced a reality in which its primary business was no longer legal, and its days of dominance were numbered.

A Failed Reinvention: The House of Lords as a “Respectable” Restaurant

In an effort to adapt to the new law, the owners of the House of Lords attempted a drastic rebranding—turning the once-infamous saloon into a high-end restaurant. With the days of open liquor sales gone, they sought to shift the focus to fine dining, hoping to maintain their reputation as a premier establishment in Joplin. The first floor, once dominated by its grand mahogany bar, was cleared to make room for additional tables and a refined dining space. The goal was to attract a different clientele—wealthy businessmen and influential figures who still needed a place to eat and conduct deals, even if they could no longer drink openly.

To further distance the House of Lords from its past, advertisements were carefully crafted to present it as a sophisticated dining establishment. Instead of being known for whiskey and gambling, it was now marketed as a restaurant that prided itself on gourmet meals and impeccable service. The menu was designed to rival the best eateries in Missouri, offering high-quality meats, fresh seafood, and expertly prepared entrees. The owners hoped that, by focusing on luxury and elegance, they could erase the decades of scandal tied to its name.

Despite their best efforts, the attempt was doomed from the start. The House of Lords' reputation was too deeply ingrained in Joplin's culture as a saloon and gambling hall. The wealthy businessmen they hoped to attract still associated the establishment with its wild, lawless past, and many preferred to dine elsewhere rather than be seen frequenting a place so notorious. Meanwhile, the working-class miners and gamblers who had once filled the building had no interest in fine dining—they had come for cheap drinks and entertainment, neither of which were now legally available.

The loss of liquor sales was an insurmountable blow. No matter how extravagant the meals or how refined the setting, the energy that had once pulsed through the House of Lords was gone. Without alcohol, without the thrill of high-stakes gambling, and without the rebellious allure of vice, it struggled to retain its former patrons. In the end, the transformation into a

restaurant was little more than a desperate attempt to survive in a world that had moved on. The House of Lords, once the crown jewel of Joplin's nightlife, was now a fading relic of a bygone era, and its decline had begun.

Why the Restaurant Concept Failed

The House of Lords had a reputation it could never escape. No matter how elegant the dining room became or how carefully the owners tried to reshape its image, everyone in Joplin knew what the House of Lords had been. For decades, it had been the epicenter of the city's gambling, drinking, and prostitution scene—no amount of fancy table settings could erase the memories of the wild nights spent there. The very name still carried a sense of scandal, making it difficult to attract the refined clientele they desperately needed. Respectable families and prominent business leaders had plenty of other places to dine, and they were not about to bring their wives and children into a restaurant synonymous with vice.

Even with its rebranding, the House of Lords simply could not make the kind of money it once had. The real profit had always come from alcohol, and with Prohibition in full force, that revenue stream had disappeared. Even with quality food and good service, the restaurant could not replicate the profit margins that liquor sales had provided. Customers who had once spent freely on whiskey and high-stakes gambling had little interest in a fine dining experience stripped of the indulgences that had made the establishment famous. Without a steady flow of liquor, the energy of the place had vanished, and so had its biggest spenders.

To make matters worse, while the House of Lords was trying to play by the rules, other businesses were not. Illegal speakeasies were popping up all over Joplin, run by former saloon owners who weren't afraid to break the law. These secret drinking establishments operated in hidden rooms behind storefronts, in basements, or even in private homes, providing customers with the alcohol they could no longer get legally. Many of the House of Lords' former patrons had moved on to these underground establishments, where they could still drink, gamble, and indulge without fear of prying eyes. Instead of struggling to reinvent themselves, these speakeasies simply continued the old way of business, making them far more appealing than a rebranded House of Lords trying to present itself as respectable.

Within a year, it was clear that the House of Lords' attempt at reinvention had failed. The restaurant business could not sustain the building, and without alcohol or gambling to keep the crowds coming, the grand establishment that had once defined Joplin's nightlife was now a shadow of its former self. What had once been an empire of vice was now just another struggling business, clinging to a past that no longer existed. The end was inevitable, and the House of Lords—once untouchable—was finally on the verge of collapse.

The Rise of Joplin's Speakeasies: Why the House of Lords Struggled While Others Thrived

While the House of Lords tried and failed to go legitimate, other former saloons in Joplin took a different approach. Rather than conforming to Prohibition laws, they embraced the black

market, transforming their once-legal bars into hidden speakeasies that operated right under the noses of law enforcement. These establishments found ways to continue selling alcohol, adapting to the new restrictions with secrecy, innovation, and well-placed bribes. What had once been a city known for its open and thriving saloon culture now became a hub for underground drinking, with backroom bars, private clubs, and even hidden tunnels used to move whiskey and beer throughout Joplin's streets.

Many of these secret establishments thrived because they had direct connections to bootleggers who smuggled liquor from outside the state. The bootlegging trade was booming across the country, and Joplin's location along key railroad lines made it an ideal stop for smugglers bringing in alcohol from Kansas, Oklahoma, and even as far away as Chicago. Speakeasies protected their operations with secret entrances, password systems, and hidden rooms, ensuring that only trusted patrons could gain access. Meanwhile, as long as bribes were paid to the right officials, law enforcement turned a blind eye to these illegal drinking dens, allowing them to continue operating despite the nationwide crackdown on alcohol.

The House of Lords, however, was too big, too well-known, and too exposed to go fully underground. It had been the most famous saloon in Joplin for decades, and its history of



Picture provided by Historic Joplin

scandal made it nearly impossible to discreetly transition into a speakeasy. The building itself was large and conspicuous, a landmark in the city that had already been raided multiple times. Any attempt to covertly serve alcohol would have drawn immediate suspicion. Local authorities, now under increased pressure from federal agents, kept a particularly close eye on high-profile establishments, making it far riskier for the House of Lords to continue liquor sales in secret.

Meanwhile, smaller establishments were more adaptable, able to move quickly and quietly in ways that the House of Lords could not. These hidden drinking dens operated out of basements, behind false walls in storefronts, and in private homes, adjusting their locations as needed to stay ahead of the law. While these speakeasies flourished, the House of Lords withered, unable to find a foothold in a world that had left it behind. What had once been the grandest saloon in Joplin was now little more than a relic, struggling to survive in a city that had moved on to newer, more discreet ways of indulging in vice.

The Beginning of the End

By 1922, it was clear that the House of Lords was no longer the powerhouse it once was. The grand establishment that had once been the centerpiece of Joplin's nightlife was now a shadow of itself, struggling to remain relevant in a city that had moved on. The gambling halls, once filled with high-stakes games and the clatter of poker chips, had emptied. Many of the wealthier patrons who once played at the House of Lords now held their games in private, underground gaming rooms, where the risks were lower and the eyes of law enforcement were easier to evade. The days of open, extravagant gambling in Joplin were over, and with them went one of the House of Lords' most profitable ventures.

The attempt to transform the establishment into a high-end restaurant had been an undeniable failure. The costs of running such a large operation far exceeded the money it brought in, and despite the best efforts to attract a more respectable clientele, the stigma of the House of Lords' past could not be erased. Families and businessmen who wanted fine dining had other places to go—places without the baggage of a decades-long reputation for vice and scandal. Without steady income from gambling or liquor, the restaurant simply could not generate the profits needed to sustain such a large and once-lavish building.

The biggest blow, however, had been the loss of liquor sales. For nearly three decades, the House of Lords had thrived on whiskey, beer, and fine spirits, fueling long nights of indulgence and excess. But Prohibition had done what no police raid or political scandal had ever managed—it had stripped away the very foundation of the establishment's success. The energy that had once pulsed through the saloon was gone, leaving behind empty tables, dwindling crowds, and an undeniable sense of decline. Even if illegal liquor was available elsewhere in the city, the House of Lords had been unable to fully transition into a speakeasy, leaving it without the one thing that had always ensured its survival.

For nearly 30 years, the House of Lords had ruled Joplin's nightlife, standing as a symbol of the city's lawless spirit and untamed indulgence. But by 1922, its time had passed. Prohibition had changed the landscape of the city, forcing former saloons to either adapt or die. And for the House of Lords, there was no escaping the inevitable. The doors closed for good, bringing an end to one of the most infamous establishments in Missouri history. The building that had once been the epicenter of Joplin's vice stood empty, its legacy fading into memory as the city

moved forward without it.

The House of Lords' Struggle to Survive

Prohibition had reshaped the landscape of Joplin, forcing the city's once-thriving saloon industry to either adapt or vanish. The days of open gambling, free-flowing liquor, and brazen vice were over, and only those businesses willing to operate in the shadows could hope to survive. The House of Lords, once the uncontested king of Joplin's nightlife, had failed to evolve. Unlike the nimble speakeasies that had taken root in back rooms, basements, and hidden alleys, the House of Lords was too large, too infamous, and too deeply tied to its former glory to successfully transition into this new era of secrecy. Its reputation, once its greatest asset, had become an anchor, weighing it down in a world where discretion was now the key to survival.

For decades, the House of Lords had been Joplin's crown jewel of vice, a place where fortunes were won and lost over poker tables, where whiskey poured freely, and where men of all backgrounds came to indulge in every pleasure the city had to offer. It had been more than just a saloon; it had been an institution, a political power center, and a gathering place for the city's elite, criminals, and businessmen alike. But without the ability to sell alcohol openly, without the crowds that had once filled its grand halls, and without the protection of a political system that had long since begun to change, the House of Lords found itself standing alone, a relic of a bygone era. It had tried to reinvent itself as a respectable restaurant, a last-ditch effort to shed its scandalous past and appeal to a different class of clientele. Yet, in the end, its name was too notorious, its identity too entwined with indulgence and excess, and its business model too reliant on vice to sustain itself in the new world of Prohibition.

While smaller establishments found ways to secretly continue selling alcohol, the House of Lords remained too exposed. The grand saloon that had once laughed in the face of the law was now at the mercy of it. Law enforcement, which had long looked the other way, could no longer afford to ignore the blatant presence of such an infamous institution, especially as public sentiment continued to shift. The political protection that had once shielded it was eroding, and reform movements were gaining ground, pushing for a cleaner, more controlled city. Even the customers who had once sworn their loyalty to the establishment had moved on, finding their way to hidden drinking dens, private gambling rooms, and secret clubs where the old ways still thrived—just out of sight. The House of Lords had been built on extravagance, on an open defiance of moral convention, and on a belief that Joplin would always embrace its wild side. But the city had changed, and the House of Lords had not changed with it.

The saloon that had defined Joplin's golden era of lawlessness was now little more than a ghost of its former self. The grand staircases, the polished bar, the once-raucous gambling halls—all had fallen silent. The men who had built empires within its walls had either moved on or been driven out by the changing times. And though the building still stood, its very existence now felt out of place, an artifact from a world that no longer existed. The end was near. The only question that remained was how long the House of Lords would continue to linger before finally fading into history, swallowed up by the march of time, its stories becoming legend, and its legacy left to be remembered only in whispers of a wilder, freer, and more dangerous Joplin.

The Final Closure

By 1922, the House of Lords—once the crown jewel of Joplin’s nightlife, a palace of gambling, liquor, and indulgence—was barely a shadow of its former self. The grand saloon that had once echoed with laughter, clinking glasses, and the shuffle of playing cards now stood eerily quiet. The once-bustling bar, where fortunes had been won and lost over whiskey and high-stakes poker, had been stripped of its purpose by Prohibition. The restaurant experiment had failed. The gambling halls had emptied. The brothel had long since faded into secrecy or scattered to more hidden locations.

After three decades of dominance, the House of Lords closed its doors for good in 1922.

For many, it was the end of an era. For others, it was a necessary step toward transforming Joplin from a Wild West town into a modern city.

But no matter which side of the debate one stood on, there was no denying the House of Lords’ impact. It had been a symbol of excess, power, and corruption, and with its closure, Joplin was officially leaving its rowdy past behind.



Joplin-News-Herald-Apr-24-1964-p-10

The Joplin Globe's Obituary for a Saloon

On the morning of its closure, The Joplin Globe ran an article marking the saloon's demise—a fitting obituary for one of the city's most notorious institutions.

The article, with a tone of nostalgia rather than condemnation, recounted the days when miners, outlaws, and millionaires drank side by side at its grand bar. It described the roaring nights of gambling, the way Joplin's elite and its roughest characters had rubbed elbows in an establishment that had defied both the law and morality for decades.

But times had changed. Prohibition had won. Reform had taken hold. The House of Lords—once a monument to unchecked vice—was now just another casualty of progress.

The article did not celebrate the closure but instead mourned the passing of an era. It acknowledged the sins of the establishment, but it also recognized that the House of Lords had been woven into the very fabric of Joplin's rise.

With its closure, something more than just a saloon was disappearing—it was the final nail in the coffin of Old Joplin, the last piece of a wilder, lawless past that no longer had a place in the new cityscape.

What Happened to the Building, the Owners, and the Employees?

With the House of Lords shuttered, the people who had once filled its grand rooms were forced to find new paths. The bartenders, waiters, and saloonkeepers who had once worked under its chandeliers now faced an uncertain future. Some managed to transition into legitimate work, finding jobs in the growing number of legal restaurants that were opening in Joplin, catering to a more respectable clientele. But many others, unable to let go of the profitable world of vice, drifted into the underground economy of speakeasies, bringing their skills and connections to the hidden bars that had sprung up across the city. They adapted, pouring drinks behind locked doors, whispering passwords at entryways, and keeping the flow of illegal liquor alive despite the government's best efforts to stop it.

The gamblers, once the kings of the second floor, also found ways to continue their trade. Private clubs and secret backroom card games became the new hubs of high-stakes gambling in Joplin. While the public spectacle of the House of Lords was gone, the thrill of the game remained. The same men who had once played for mining claims, business fortunes, and entire livelihoods now met in more discreet locations, behind closed doors, where the risk of discovery was ever-present but the lure of winning was too strong to resist. Gambling had not

died with the House of Lords—it had simply become quieter, more exclusive, and, in some ways, even more dangerous.

The women who had once worked in the brothel faced the most difficult choices. Some left Joplin altogether, moving to other cities where the underground economy of vice still thrived. Others attempted to find more legitimate work, though the stigma of their former profession made this transition difficult. Many continued their trade in smaller, less conspicuous establishments, as prostitution remained a profitable but hidden industry in Joplin. The Scarlet Order, the secretive society of women who had worked in the House of Lords' upstairs rooms, may have continued in some form, operating in different locations with the same careful discretion that had kept them protected for so long. Though the House of Lords itself was gone, the network of vice it had helped build was far from dismantled.

And then there was the building itself. For a time, it stood empty, its once-opulent rooms dark and lifeless, waiting for a new purpose. Without the liquor, the gambling, and the air of scandal, it was just another old structure in a city that was trying to move forward. Eventually, it was either demolished or repurposed—historical records on its final fate are unclear. By the late 1920s, the physical presence of the House of Lords had vanished from Main Street, its place in Joplin's skyline erased. But while the building was gone, its legend remained. The stories of the House of Lords—the naked woman in the window, the high-stakes poker games that changed men's fortunes, and the political deals brokered over whiskey and cigars—were passed down through generations. Even as Joplin changed, the memory of its most infamous establishment refused to be forgotten.

Joplin's Transformation: Leaving the Wild West Behind

The closure of the House of Lords marked a turning point for Joplin, signaling the end of an era where the city openly embraced vice and excess. For decades, Joplin had thrived as a rough-and-tumble mining town, its economy fueled by saloons, gambling halls, and brothels just as much as by the wealth extracted from the earth. The House of Lords had been the pinnacle of this culture—a place where fortunes changed hands over a poker game, where powerful men brokered political deals in the glow of gaslights, and where corruption and lawlessness were simply a way of life.

But by the 1920s, the city had begun to shift. The leaders of Joplin, many of whom had once benefited from the same vice economy they now sought to dismantle, were pushing for legitimacy and order. They saw a future in which Joplin was not just a mining camp with paved



roads, but a true city—one with industry, commerce, and respectability.

Prohibition had forced a reckoning. Without the constant flow of liquor sales, without the grand saloons that had once been the heart of Joplin's nightlife, the city had to redefine itself. The days of the open town—where bribery kept the police at bay and politicians held court in back rooms of saloons—were slipping away. Civic leaders paved streets, built new infrastructure, and worked to attract law-abiding businesses that could sustain Joplin without the need for underground economies. Reform movements that had once been mocked as the complaints of moral crusaders now had real influence, reshaping Joplin's public image. As Prohibition cracked down on the industries that had once made the city wild, the institutions that had thrived on vice found themselves increasingly irrelevant.

That did not mean that vice disappeared. Illegal speakeasies replaced the grand saloons, hidden gambling dens took the place of once-public poker halls, and brothels continued to exist in the shadows, catering to those who still sought out the old ways. But these operations no longer defined the city's identity. They were no longer the main economic force driving Joplin's growth. The city had evolved. It was no longer the lawless frontier town where outlaws and mine owners shared drinks at the same bar. It was a place with aspirations of permanence, of prosperity beyond the fleeting wealth of the mining boom. And in order to achieve that vision, Joplin had to shed the remnants of its wilder past.

The Wild West was gone. The city had grown up. And the House of Lords—once the most infamous landmark in Joplin's landscape—became just a story. Its walls were gone, its rooms emptied, and its legendary halls reduced to memory. But the echoes of its presence remained in the whispered tales passed down through generations. The stories of the high-stakes games, the scandalous spectacles, the corruption, and the power struggles that played out behind its doors continued to shape the way Joplin remembered its own past. The House of Lords had been more than just a saloon—it had been a symbol of Joplin at its wildest, and now, even as the city marched into the future, it remained a testament to the era that had made Joplin what it was.

What Artifacts Still Exist?

The House of Lords, once the epicenter of Joplin's vibrant and, at times, notorious social scene, has long since vanished from the city's streets. Yet, its legacy endures through a collection of artifacts that offer a tangible connection to its storied past. These relics, preserved in museums and private collections, provide a window into the establishment's opulent ambiance and multifaceted operations.

Preserved Artifacts in the Joplin History & Mineral Museum

The Joplin History & Mineral Museum, particularly within the Dorothea B. Hoover Historical Museum wing, houses several notable artifacts from the House of Lords, preserving a tangible connection to the city's most infamous saloon. These relics serve as physical reminders of an era when Joplin thrived on vice, wealth, and lawlessness, offering modern visitors a glimpse into the grandeur and excess of the House of Lords.



One of the most striking artifacts on display is an original 1890s roulette wheel, which once sat in the second-floor gambling parlor of the House of Lords. The wheel, worn smooth by decades of use, is a silent witness to the high-stakes games that played out beneath the flickering gaslights of Joplin's most famous saloon. It was around this wheel that miners gambled their wages, businessmen wagered their fortunes, and outlaws risked everything for a spin of fate. The roulette wheel was a centerpiece of the gambling hall, drawing in hopeful players night after night, each one believing that luck would turn in their favor.

Another significant artifact is an ornate, embossed cash register, a remnant of the House of Lords' commitment to opulence and grandeur. Unlike the plain, functional registers used in most saloons, this one was crafted with intricate detailing, reflecting the establishment's

emphasis on luxury. Every transaction that passed through it—whether from the bar, the dining hall, or the gambling tables—contributed to the immense wealth that flowed through the House of Lords. The mere presence of such an item in a mining town saloon speaks to the level of sophistication the establishment aimed to maintain, despite its reputation for vice.

These artifacts are displayed alongside other historical treasures, including jewelry recovered from Bonnie and Clyde's hideout in Joplin, further emphasizing the city's connection to outlaws, crime, and larger-than-life stories. Together, these relics paint a vivid picture of Joplin's past, one where fortunes were made and lost over a hand of poker, where political power was traded alongside whiskey, and where the House of Lords stood as the pinnacle of the city's golden age of vice. Through these preserved pieces of history, the spirit of the House of Lords lives on, allowing visitors to step back in time and experience a taste of the legend that once defined Joplin's wild and untamed frontier days.

Artifacts in Private Collections and Lost Treasures

Beyond public exhibitions, numerous artifacts from the House of Lords likely reside in private collections, passed down through generations or acquired by enthusiasts of Joplin's history. These privately held relics may include vintage photographs, personal mementos, gambling chips, barware, or even architectural elements salvaged from the building before its eventual disappearance from Main Street. The exact whereabouts and details of these items often remain undisclosed, adding to the mystique surrounding the House of Lords and leaving much of its material history in the hands of collectors rather than museums.

One of the most intriguing privately held artifacts is a surviving painting from the House of Lords, one of the infamous nude portraits that once adorned its walls. At least one of these paintings is known to be in a private collection in Joplin, though its full provenance and the identity of its subject remain debated. The House of Lords was once home to several large-scale nude portraits, rumored to have been commissioned specifically for the saloon. Some believed these paintings depicted real women who worked in the establishment, while others thought they were simply artistic



embellishments meant to enhance the allure of the gambling hall and brothel. Regardless of their origins, they became iconic symbols of the House of Lords' unapologetic decadence, and their survival into the present day makes them some of the most sought-after relics from the era.

Occasionally, artifacts from the House of Lords surface on online auction sites such as eBay, offering brief glimpses of the past to those who are lucky enough to come across them. These finds can range from small bar tokens and vintage postcards to more substantial pieces such as antique furniture or gambling paraphernalia. Each of these objects, whether authentic or merely rumored to be from the establishment, contributes to the ongoing fascination with the House of Lords and its legendary status in Joplin's history. Collectors and historians alike scour estate sales, antique shops, and online listings in hopes of uncovering lost pieces of the saloon's legacy, but many of its most valuable artifacts may still be hidden away in attics, storage rooms, or forgotten corners of private estates.

Additionally, some treasures may have been lost to time, whether through the building's eventual demolition or the dispersal of its contents following its closure. Items left behind when the House of Lords shut its doors likely found their way into the hands of former employees, patrons, or those who saw an opportunity to own a piece of history. These lost

House of Lords Cafe

"The Place of Quality"

Joplin's leading Restaurant, catering to those who care. The best of everything the markets afford awaits you here, prepared to your liking by expert cooks, and invitingly served. Our service is exclusively a la carte, charging you only for what you get, which experience has demonstrated is the only satisfactory method.

Our special lunch and dinner bill (ready-to-serve) meets with the approval of the man whose time is limited. Our prices are the lowest possible consistent with the best in quality and service.

HOUSE OF LORDS BAR

Supplies us, for those of our patrons desiring it with their meals, the choicest imported and domestic wines and liquors and the standard brands of beer.

House of Lords Cafe

J. E. MOATS, Mgr.

T. C. NOLAN, Prop

Thank You!

Joplin has always fascinated me—a city born from the earth, shaped by ambition, and defined by the untamed spirit of those who sought fortune within its borders. Nowhere was that spirit more alive than in the House of Lords. It was more than a saloon; it was a symbol of the raw, unfiltered energy of a boomtown on the edge of civilization. It was a place where fortunes were won and lost, where political deals were made over whiskey and cigars, where scandal and spectacle thrived, and where history unfolded in the flickering gaslight of a bygone era.

This book has been my way of preserving the legacy of that time—a way of gathering the scattered stories, the rumors, the legends, and the truths that made the House of Lords a defining chapter in Joplin's history. But more than that, it has been a reminder that the past is never truly lost. It lingers in the streets we walk, in the buildings that remain, in the artifacts that resurface, and in the stories we choose to tell.

My hope is that by sharing the tales that have inspired me, I can pass that inspiration on to the next generation. That they might look at Joplin not just as a city, but as a frontier—a place that once pulsed with the spirit of the Wild West, where anything felt possible, where history was made in real-time by those bold enough to seize it.

The House of Lords is long gone, but its legend endures. As long as we continue telling its story, Joplin will always be a little bit wild.