Jury passes liquor ordinance

By Betsy Cook

You can please some of the people some of the time, and that is what the St. Mary Parish Police Jury had in mind when it passed an ordinance to restrict liquor sales.

In Wednesday night's regular meeting, by a vote of 15 for and one against, the jury voted for an ordinance, written by Juror Harold Clausen, that will close taverns, barrooms, saloons, lounges, and nightclubs from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. Sunday through Thursday, and 4 a.m. to 6 a.m. Friday and Saturday.

The ordinance also makes it unlawful to sell convenient food stores, grocery stores, or any holder of a license or permit to sell liquors or alcoholic beverages, from exercising that permit in those same hours that nightclubs will be forced to retire.

Several jurors qualified their vote, among them, Juror Billy Butler, who said, "Any closing is better than no closing at all, but I believe this jury is laughing in the face of the majority."

Butler was referring to his failed attempt to pass an amendment to the ordinance that would have restricted the sale of liquor and alcoholic beverages from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. every night, including weekends.

The amendment failed by a vote of 11 to 6, with Police Jury President Emory Jennings qualifying his negative vote by saying, "I am trying to pass an ordinance that will satisfy the biggest majority in the parish."


Robison pointed out the absence of penalties for violators in the ordinance.

"There is no teeth to it. I think it is a shame to present an ordinance without any teeth to back it up," Russo said.

Russo said the jury, legal advisor Ed Leonard said because a violation of this ordinance would be considered a misdemeanor, the jury could impose penalties of up to six months in jail and a maximum fine of $500. Leonard said the jury also had the option of revoking the operating license of a violator.

After ordinance approval Mrs. Aloisio offered an amendment that would establish a $500 fine and leave discretion to the judge to impose a sentence of up to six months in jail for first time offenders. Second time offenders would be subject to license review and revocation by the jury.

The amendment passed by a voice vote of the jury.

A motion was then passed for the ordinance to take effect on Jan. 2, 1983.

Controversy erupted among the jury over a clause in the ordinance that exempts specific holidays from the restrictions in the ordinance. Those holidays exempted were New Year's Eve, Christmas Eve, Mardi Gras and July 4th.

Robison and Mrs. Aloisio said they thought the ordinance specified a 4 a.m. to 6 a.m. restriction on holidays also.

Leonard said the way the ordinance read, it completely exempted holidays from inclusion in the restrictions.

Robison offered an amendment to establish a 4 a.m. to 6 a.m. restriction for all holidays. The amendment passed with two negative votes cast.

Davis objected to the vote when he said, "Everybody on this jury knows what exempt means. You lead everybody in this audience to believe that you were exempting all holidays from the ordinance," Davis said, referring to the large crowd in attendance for the meeting.

Concerning the closing hours, Leonard was questioned as to what the actual intent of the ordinance is.

The ordinance as it was passed specifies a 4 a.m. Friday and Saturday closing, but parish residents will have to wrap up their Sunday mornings at 2 a.m. after a Saturday evening out.

Leonard said, "That will be taken care of in the final preparation of the ordinance."

"It is my job to draft what is their intent, and if what I read to them is not to their liking, I will redraft it or they can vote to change the original intent of the ordinance," Leonard said.

By telephone interview Jennings said he would check on that technicality with Leonor. He said the intent of the jury was a 4 a.m. restriction Saturday and Sunday morning, and "We'll do whatever we have to do to make it legal, even if it means going back and amending the ordinance."