

In This Corner, the Pig 'N Whistle

By *Dennis Payton Knight*

Old timers may remember the popular Pig 'N Whistle gas station, restaurant, lounge and motel at the corner of West Colfax and Wolff in Denver. It was all the creation and love of Eddie Bohn, a genuine character in Colorado boxing circles.

I was introduced to Bohn by my father-in-law, on whose farm near Julesburg Eddie and companions would annually hunt pheasant. Tom and his wife, Kiyō, came often to the city, visiting the Pig for a meal and congenial conversation with Eddie and his wife, Janet. I was only briefly acquainted, so most of my knowledge comes from *Westwood* reporter Michael Roberts' story filed April 22, 2010, the day the Pig 'N Whistle burned down.

Born in 1902, Eddie Bohn was the son of a brush maker whose factory stood at the very location Eddie later put on the map. According to his own son, appropriately and affectionately named Punch, he went to California on an Indian motorcycle to find fortune and ended up as a sparring partner for Jack Dempsey. They became lifelong friends, like brothers. Later, when Punch was four years old, Dempsey bought him a Shetland pony.

Eddie Bohn sparred a hundred rounds with Dempsey, at a hundred dollars per. From that, he was able to save \$10,000, came back to Colorado, buy the property where the brush factory had been, and put up a gas station. It opened on Dempsey's birthday, June 24, 1924.

It was so successful Eddie soon added hamburgers to the business, and later decided to build a motel. Tom Morrissey, grandfather of Mitch Morrissey, one-time Denver district attorney, loaned him the money. It thrived, so Eddie "just kept going, putting in the swimming pool and everything else."

The Pig 'N Whistle became a mecca for boxers of all weight levels, many of whom used the motel as a base during training. Champions like Carmen Basilio and Gene Fullmer were there. Thousands would come to watch them spar and get daily roadwork around Sloans Lake.

Besides Dempsey himself, baseballers like Yogi Berra and Billy Martin, and other athletes and stars would frequent the place, and their pictures would be taken with Eddie to adorn the walls. Mayors, senators and governors would come and get their mugs hung as well.

Besides running the Pig 'N Whistle, Eddie Bohn served as Colorado's boxing commissioner for forty years, appointed by six governors. He was also heavily involved with the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame.

West Colfax suffered greatly when Interstate 25 came along and connected to Sixth Avenue instead of Colfax. As business declined, Bohn borrowed operating capital from his friend, cable TV magnate Bill Daniels. When Eddie died in 1990, followed six months later by Janet, Daniels forced the business into foreclosure and bankruptcy, effectively shutting it down. It stayed vacant until burning eight years ago. But the rusty old sign is waiting over there in its corner, still waiting for the bell.