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WHISKEY AND WRITE:  
HOW JOURNALISM SHAPED THE RISE AND FALL OF PROHIBITION

By  
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A Thesis  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science  
Major: Journalism

The University of Memphis  
May 2020

## ABSTRACT

At the dawn of national Prohibition, the movement had large support in national media; by repeal, the media was leading the charge against the Dry movement. This thesis posits that journalism of the age helped shape the narrative around the enactment of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment and was equally culpable in ultimately getting repeal passed. Study of many newspapers of the era reveal a shift in narrative over the course of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Prohibition went from movement to reality to past in just over three decades. Variables like religious affiliation, views on suffrage, organized crime and even the dichotomy between urban and rural life could and did reshape narratives over the life of the temperance movement. Research remains to be done on the subject, but this finding offers a clear change in tone from the start of Prohibition and its repeal.

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On June 29, 1917, the *Washington Times* ran an editorial from the now-defunct *Newark Evening News* entitled “Prohibition and Temperance.” This editorial framed many of the arguments making the rounds during the era. It began with a dissection of grapes and other foods being used in the making of alcoholic beverages. Somehow, the author used this analysis to attack Congress’ shirking of responsibility for allowing the war effort to become its answer to the temperance question.

During this time, Prohibition was still something of a war-time necessity, with supporters for both the pro- and anti-temperance movement seeking the appropriate moral and legal footing to abolish it completely or establish it for good. At points, it is difficult to get a read on where the author stands on the idea. But toward the end of the article, the author tips his hand toward the latter scenario:

Progress in temperance is an evolution. To be sure, it may be spurred by necessity, but it remains an evolution nevertheless. It is not finally to be accomplished by mandate, despite the beliefs of enthusiasts. Certainly it is not to be gained through merely political moves in which, one may suspect, a desire to impede food legislation and, in some degree, render the war unpopular, have a part. It is a time for legislators at Washington to keep their heads cool and their eyes wide open, and for such of them as would shift responsibility to realize that, in the last analysis, they cannot shirk it.

*Progress in temperance is an evolution.* To the author, temperance is not Prohibition per se—temperance is a choice, Prohibition a law—but it is the movement that paved the way for the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, ratified in 1919, which led in its way to bootlegging and the rise of organized crime. According to much of the available research, it also was not a significant deterrent to the drinking public. Miron and Zweibel (1991) reported that initially there was a sharp decline in alcohol consumption shortly following enforcement of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The Miron and Zweibel analysis further reports a steady increase in cirrhosis, drunkenness and psychosis from alcohol near pre-Prohibition levels by the time repeal was enacted in 1933.

The media's responsibility in the initial creation of this narrative is murky, but the very running of this piece in the *Washington Times* raises several questions. Why was this editorial, from another newspaper, in a different state, so important that it prompted a pick-up in one of the largest papers in the nation's capital? What cause did the journalists and publications of the day have to run one editorial (or advertisement or news story) over the next one?

During the course of this research, the author tried to determine whether there is a pattern of media influence in the enactment and subsequent repeal of Prohibition. There has been little investigation on the topic so the hope is that the following contributions to the research can help form a more complete understanding of journalism's role during the era. But what has become clear, as research continued, is that by the time the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment went into effect in 1920, the Dry faction—those in favor of national Prohibition—had established itself and its writers, researchers and scientists as the foremost experts on alcohol. This imbalance would need continued refutation before repeal could be discussed, let alone enacted.

Newspapers had a particular influence as the most widely consumed form of news at the time in the days before television and the internet, and radio still in its relative infancy; the first household radios did not appear until 1920. At the time, print media were the only widely available provider of news. It is this author's contention that the media's views on the matter had to evolve as the years passed, as the stark realities of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment came to the forefront and the understanding of what enacting the amendment truly wrought was finally realized. There was a tipping point, and this study sought to understand when and how the perception among newspaper journalists changed and how it manifested itself in the reporting.

What that ultimately looks like may be difficult to discern. It is unlikely there was one date or event that led to the Dry faction losing its hold of the narrative as pertains to Prohibition.

But the sequence of events that unfolded played out before a national audience like few issues ever had, and the news media of the day played a significant part in that. This thesis aims to track and delineate how the news was presented and how those patterns began to change before, during and after national Prohibition.

The newspaper business of this time period resembles the internet age of news consumption in one very tangible way: outlets could come and go at a moment's notice. While mergers, stops and starts of publication and the murkiness of historical record paint an incomplete picture, research through the Library of Congress suggests that New York City alone had at least 15 daily newspapers in circulation in 1918. For case-by-case examples in newspapers, the author examined papers that were not just of the era and extended into the 20<sup>th</sup> (or even 21<sup>st</sup>) century. The breadth of the issue at hand is not just confined to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and so it is impractical to limit the research to the time immediately preceding Prohibition or immediately thereafter. Much of the groundwork for the movement, as readers will learn, has a history based in suffrage, states' rights and other social issues spanning decades. Taking these factors into account, this study endeavored to answer one question: how did the news media shape the narrative of Prohibition during its proposal, enactment and ultimate repeal?

## Literature Review

### *Preceding National Prohibition*

The concept that alcohol was or could be problematic to people was late in coming to the New World. New England had 159 rum distilleries by 1763 and virtually every homestead had an orchard for making cider; it was understood that workers in cities would spend Mondays sleeping off Saturday and Sunday. Since 1782, part of the expected daily rations for soldiers in the U.S. Army included four ounces of whiskey. So by the 1830s, Americans were consuming roughly 90 bottles per year of liquor—a mighty number when those who abstained are factored in (Okrent, 2010).

In 1825, the Rev. Lyman Beecher preached and later published his *Six Sermons on Intemperance*, in which he defined intemperance not as drunkenness but as the daily use of spirits (Maxwell, 1950). From Rev. Beecher's words, it is possible to take a snapshot of how temperance was viewed at the time and the evils he and others believed lay in consumption of alcohol.

“What, then, is this universal, natural, and national remedy for intemperance? It is the banishment of ardent spirits from the list of lawful articles of commerce by a correct and efficient public sentiment, such as has turned slavery out of half of our land, and will yet expel it from the world.

We are not, therefore, to come down in wrath upon the distillers, and importers, and vendors of ardent spirits. None of us are enough without sin to cast the first stone; for who would have imported, or distilled, or vended, if all the nominally temperate in the land had refused to drink? It is the buyers who have created the demand for ardent spirits, and made distillation and importation a gainful traffic; and it is the custom of the temperate, too, which inundates the land with the occasion of so much and such unmanageable temptation. Let the temperate cease to buy, and the demand for ardent spirits will fall in the market three fourths, and ultimately will fail wholly, as the generation of drunkards shall hasten out of time.: (Beecher, 1830)

Temperance began to catch on. By 1834, roughly 5,000 local societies for temperance boasted membership of over a million people. In 1836, the American Temperance Society (ATS) and American Temperance Union merged under a banner of “total abstinence,” which sent membership tumbling downward; some 2,000 local societies were unwilling to commit to total abstinence, to say nothing of the individuals (Maxwell, 1950).

The Dry faction’s fervor found willing aid from those who would lose the most to alcohol: women and children. Female education of the day came through limited schooling or popular journals and emphasized purity, health, hygiene and the control of sexual desire, with the underlying theme being that alcohol jeopardized all four. Alcohol was the fuel that unleashed a plethora of urges, carnal and unnatural for women to desire, or so the belief went. The notion that these attributes, or even worse characteristics, would surely be passed on to any children born of such ill-begotten partnerships was a prevailing theme of the time. The story of Carry Nation, the one-woman wrecking crew who attacked saloons and public houses with a hatchet, hints that part of the reason she became so obsessed with the cause was a combination of being raised to fear alcohol and the Bible in equal measure. Almost all of the events in her life, from her first husband drinking himself to death, the child of that union wanting little to do with her, the inattentive second husband, and the diseases her daughter fought, suggest someone who merely needed things to go poorly to find a willing scapegoat at the bottom of a bottle. (Sinclair, 1962).

During this time, information on the success of these statewide Prohibition movements was proffered by the same people who supported the crusade, which led to their findings being skewed heavily in favor of temperance and Prohibition. Take some of the findings from *The Maine Liquor Law: Its Origin, History and Results*, culled from the middle of a long list of

testimonials from Rev. William H. Hadley, Minister at Large, included in a chapter title “Results of Prohibition”:

106. Public Health.—Our city is now one of the most healthy in the world. Health has very much improved under the Maine Liquor Law.

107. Reclaimed from Intemperance. —I have known many reclaimed by the Maine Liquor Law who were sots when it was enacted.

108. Trade.—I have been informed by persons in business that trade has improved as a result of the Maine Liquor Law.

109. The Sabbath.—I can speak with confidence on this subject. The observance of the Sabbath has increased wherever the Maine Liquor Law has been enforced.

110. Attendance at Church. —I have seen many at church since the enforcement of the law whom I have reason to believe were kept away before through the influence of rum.

111. Public Opinion.—The general feeling of respectable citizens is, that it is a glorious law; that it can not and shall not be repealed, but perfected until it shall drive every rum-shop out of the world. (Clubb, 1856)

As a respected leader of the church, Rev. Hadley’s word carried more weight during this time period. With little in the way of facts or fact-checking, testimonials provided the backbone for much of the information available, and testimonials from those of honorable repute such as ministers and lawyers were taken as gospel.

Neal Dow, the father of the movement in Maine, and thus the nation, first began lecturing about temperance in the decade prior to the ultimate enactment of the law (Clubb, 1856), but his origins in the movement extend as far back as 1827, when he convinced the Portland volunteer fire department to ban alcohol at its musters (Okrent, 2010).

Dow’s story is inextricably intertwined with that of Prohibition. The son of a tanner who was a member of the Society of Friends, more commonly known today as Quakers, Dow was an advocate for temperance from a young age and was a renowned proponent of moderation his

entire life (Clubb, 1856). This quote from his memoirs may help illuminate why he became such a staunch abstinence supporter:

“When I was a boy, there was a country store almost directly opposite my father's house, kept by a most estimable citizen. Liquor was on tap there, and on many a morning before the store was opened I saw, sitting on a rough settle outside the door, the wellknown [sic] toppers of the neighborhood waiting to obtain their morning drams.” (Dow, 1898)

Dow’s memoirs, which were part anti-alcohol manifesto, part history of the Maine temperance movement, offers a window into the burgeoning viewpoint that liquor was the evil that was keeping people from achieving upward mobility. Dow paints liquor as the only thing standing between the labor class and what today would be considered responsible adulthood. He described liquor as a “panacea for all complaints, a protection in all forms of exposure, a relief for fatigue and pain and other discomforts” (Dow, 1898). Citing the 1851 Prohibition Act as a “great moral awakening” (Dow, 1898), he mentions effects such as a newfound abundance of savings banks, post-Prohibition, and describes the previous condition of the state as the lowest point of its material prosperity. So incensed over this insinuation was the liquor lobby of the day that distillers and liquor distributors from around New England pitched in to bribe laborers to vote against Dow, then-mayor of Portland, ultimately knocking him out of office in 1852 (Clubb, 1856).

Maine became the first state to adopt Prohibition in 1851 and Dow, as the face of the movement, was later a Prohibition Party nominee for president of the United States (Dow, 1898). However, the “Maine Laws” proved difficult to enforce and legislative upheaval at the state level—aided in part by pro-liquor forces—led to continued strengthening and weakening of individual states’ stances on Prohibition. By 1875, only Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire

even had statewide Prohibition laws of any kind on the books, and those were largely ignored (Szymanski, 2003).

The argument against alcohol had gained some of its sturdiest roots in the homes of the Midwestern frontier in the 1850s. Families with little to nothing relied heavily upon successful farming to make the required sustenance for the year, with what little was left over to be sold. The women of the house—trying to be homemakers in a place uniquely resistant to domestication—hated the idea that the men might spend their extra time and money in town, drinking, riding back late at night in conditions that required one to keep their wits sharp at all times. The men in these environments tended to die early, whether alcohol was involved or not. Their female offspring, touched by frontier education more than their male counterparts, who often were relied upon to aid in the farm work, became the primary educators of the frontier. And they did not look upon drinking with any fondness, nor did mother or the minister—perhaps the three most influential people in a young Midwesterner’s life (Sinclair, 1962).

The region also was home to much of the audience—122,000,000 customers between 1836 and 1960—of *McGuffey Readers*, which intentionally or not helped shape the narrative for impressionable young people who got their information from the Bible and other religious texts, including those of Dr. William H. McGuffey. Rather than taking the scriptural approach of a vengeful deity whose wrath would send them to hell or worse, the McGuffey texts instead focused on the social rewards of abstinence. That the unrefined frontier ‘needed’ this education helped the WCTU push through legislation mandating temperance education in public schools, which was close to nationwide by the turn of the century. It helped that a WCTU-approved board of physicians, teachers, priests and reformers would pick the texts for these initiatives, held

powerful sway over schoolboards across the country and made it clear that temperance language was a requirement for selection. Dissenting opinions disappeared (Sinclair, 1962).

As a political tool, Prohibition transcended politics; neither a Democratic nor a Republican issue, it could make or break an election at any level, depending on who was voting and what they were voting for (Sinclair, 1962). As America struggled to regain its footing and heal as a nation in the post-Civil War era, a new political movement emerged in the form of the Prohibition Party. Like most third parties, it never found much footing in the national political arena, although it did put up a few candidates for President of the United States, including Dow. The party's defining legacy is how it did manage to tilt some elections based on who did or did not align with it. This was particularly true in 1884, when Grover Cleveland was elected president in part because the Prohibition candidate, John P. St. John, took nearly 25,000 votes in New York, many of whom would have gone to Cleveland's Republican opponent and perhaps swung a narrow election. Around this time, the political portion of the movement became allied with the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) as the forebear for the Anti-Saloon League (Webb, 2003).

Despite the Prohibitionists' stance that they wouldn't meddle in political affairs not related to alcohol reform (Brown, 1916), they would eventually become inexorably tied to the movement for women's suffrage. Not only were suffragists supportive of any measure that eliminated the perceived damage caused to home life by alcohol (Blocker et al., 2003), a study in Iowa found that support for Prohibition was strong in counties where male support for women's suffrage was also favorable (Ryan, 1983; fig. 2). And many of the advocates for suffrage who are still well-known today got their start as Prohibitionists: Amelia Bloomer began crusading in *The*

*Water Bucket*, a temperance publication, while Lucy Stone published *The Lily*, an early outlet for suffrage which also advocated temperance (Okrent, 2010).

Susan B. Anthony, the face of the movement, might not have campaigned so hard for suffrage had she been given a seat at the table for the temperance movement. After being barred from speaking to the Sons of Temperance, the New York State Temperance Society and other male-only temperance groups (Okrent, 2010), she finally joined up with Elizabeth Cady Stanton on women's suffrage, writing:

I had no personal grievances, as my own family, in common with all the Friends, or Quakers, recognized the equality of woman in all the relations of life; but I was stirred by the terrible injustice which I saw meted out to women on every hand, and I realized the especial need of their voice and influence in the two great causes of temperance and anti-slavery. The necessity for the ballot had not appealed to me, as, in those days, Quaker men were not in the habit of voting. But in October, 1850, my consciousness was awakened by reading in the New York Tribune a full and favorable account of a Woman's Rights Convention held in Worcester, Massachusetts. The next year I became acquainted with Mrs. Stanton, and she soon fired my soul with all her own zeal for the right of the suffrage. Among my old papers is the following appeal, which, as Secretary of the New York State Temperance Society, I sent out in the spring of 1852, accompanying petitions for what was then known as the Maine Law. (Anthony, 1902)

Women's temperance may have had Anthony on their side, but it was not until Frances Willard moved into the forefront that the two causes met in union. Willard, a disciple of Eliza Thompson's 1873 crusade that saw more than 100 cities and towns shut down their liquor-selling establishments (Okrent, 2010), saw the power women possessed once united. She advocated for suffrage based on "Home Protection," advocating that the fabric of American family life was at stake as long as alcohol was available, that families would go asunder as men became consumed by drink (Willard, 1886). Additionally, Willard's followers pushed for a "Do Everything" concept; emboldened by what women would do as a united front, the group were advocates for everything from suffrage to free kindergarten and prison reform (Okrent, 2010).

Any time a measure was to be put forward that would seem to regulate alcohol, there was a group ready to knock it down, via physical intimidation, bribery, coercion or some combination thereof. At the behest of the Anti-Saloon League, Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railroad once announced that, if Collinwood, Ohio, were to go Dry, it would increase plant expenditure to its repair shops there by \$1 million. Trained speakers were sent into churches to spread the word of what has been done in the name of the cause and what will be done in the future (Furbay, 1903). In 1900, the Pabst family made a “donation” on behalf of Fred T. Dubois, an Idaho rancher trying to return to Washington. At a time when Senators were chosen by state legislatures and not the vote, they essentially purchased one for themselves (Okrent, 2010).

The Anti-Saloon League quickly became the leader of the Prohibition movement and would ultimately prove the most effective of all temperance groups. Williams (1996) gives three reasons that the league’s strategy worked so well:

1. Redefining the Enemy – Framing themselves as an upstanding citizens movement, the Anti-Saloon League placed themselves on the side of God, religion and morality; conversely, their opposition were lawless criminals with no scruples.
2. Political Activism – The League ramped up its political movement; even though the results were not immediate (nor even particularly tangible), the mere presentation of organization elevated the group in the eyes of many.
3. Success (or its appearance) – The League, according to Williams, “create(d) an aura of success” that enhanced its standing with the common man.

Why this was different (and important) is an indication of how attitudes and strategies had changed. Rather than focus on a number of issues, with alcohol as one of many, the ASL had a single-minded focus. This was not the “Do Everything” advanced by Willard or the uneven message put forth by the WCTU; the ASL was not about abolishing vice. They longed only to get rid of alcohol (Okrent, 2010).

The Anti-Saloon League gained momentum as much for what Harvey Graeme Furbay and Co. stood against as any moral imperative. The saloon was considered “a noxious institution, in fact inextricably bound up with prostitution, gambling, police corruption and crime,” (Burnham, 1968). State and local government, it was believed, were too eager to bend to the will of the saloons, and were thus able to push the temperance agenda forward with moderates based on the eradication of these houses of ill repute (Szymanski, 2003).

As early as 1908, the distillers and brewers began feeling the heat from the ASL. What they failed to do was come together on a united front to oppose the League. The brewers believed that aligning with the distillers would torpedo their chances of doing business should the ASL start getting concessions at the governmental level. For their part, the distillers thought that reducing the licenses and knocking down the number of brewery-owned saloons would allow whiskey to flourish. Neither would ultimately be correct (Okrent, 2010).

What began, seemingly, as a rural conundrum slowly crept into the city limits. It was not enough to have Prohibition in rural areas. The bright lights of the city saloons would invariably bring in those from the countryside and return them, fully intoxicated and penniless, back from whence they came. The Drys would not accept a partition, a dividing line between what was rural and what was urban and which vice was allowed to cross the Rubicon. The census of 1910 proved that a distinct majority still lived in rural rather than urban areas, and that majority could protect itself from the evils of liquor (Sinclair, 1962).

The actions of Congress in 1913 laid the foundation for national Prohibition on two fronts. First, Congress voted—overwhelmingly, 246-95—to override President William Howard Taft’s veto of the Webb-Kenyon Act, outlawing the importation of alcohol to a Dry state and demonstrating the ASL’s power had grown considerably. The second, and far bigger, event was

the enactment of the 16<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which levied a federal income tax. For an institution that had been told for years how vital its revenue was to the American government to function, this struck a crucial blow to that rhetoric from the brewers and distillers and allowed the ASL to unite under one banner to push for national Prohibition (Okrent, 2010).

By 1916, the Anti-Saloon League would formally endorse women's suffrage—the only time it deviated from its espoused single-issue pledge. It was a match made in anti-alcohol heaven—the more brewers fought against suffrage, the more they antagonized a large segment of the populace that may have had no strong opinion one way or another on the matter. In one three-year span which saw seven states adopt Prohibition, all were states where women had earned the right to vote (Okrent, 2010). With the women's suffrage movement continuing to gain steam—by the time of the endorsement, 11 states had already granted women the vote, with four more set to join them prior to the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment (National Constitution Center, 2006)—the League's involvement made sense. Supporting an up-and-coming movement that would add a bevy of new voters to the local and national stage in the coming years was good business.

The brewers had their own backers in the form of the flood of immigrants, particularly German, during this time, but that had its pitfalls as well as its benefits for the barmen of the age. The immigrants, with traditions deeply embedded in brewing beer, were able to make it and market it to a whole new country, with beer booming from roughly 36 million gallons of beer consumed in 1850 to more than 850 million annually some 40 years later (Okrent, 2010).

Partly due to their pro-alcohol stance, America's newcomers were a direct threat to the temperance movement, but also their pervasive attitude could infiltrate the American

consciousness and undo all that the movement stood for (Okrent, 2010). A jingoistic attitude become dominant, exhibited in Willard's memoirs:

“What do these men that landed at Castle Garden a few weeks ago—whisky, beer-drinking Irish and Germans, and their wives not much better than they what do they know about using the ballot? The idea that they are the men that are in five years to make our laws is a disgrace, and we will never, never have a Christian country again until we put an educational plank in our platform.” (Willard, 1886)

Meanwhile, legislation to force the hand of the spirit-makers was gaining steam as well. Richmond Hobson, who introduced the bill that would eventually lead to the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment all the way back in 1913, had a simple fix—enact a law taxing alcohol to the point that prices would become untenable and collapse the trade due to lack of consumers (Okrent, 2010). Hobson's resolution, firmly backed by the Anti-Saloon League, would turn into the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment following the 1916 elections, although Hobson would not be in office to see it. He was ousted from office as an Alabama representative not because of his anti-liquor stance, but because of his moderate views on blacks in the military and other seemingly innocuous stances. His opponent, Oscar W. Underwood, attacked these views at every turn to win a state which cared more about disenfranchising blacks than it did about the liquor question (Okrent, 2010).

One of Hobson's final acts as a representative was to lead debate on his resolution, and on Dec. 22, 1914, he did just that, with 10 hours of debate on the House Floor. The result might be considered a winning failure. The resolution itself failed to achieve the two-thirds vote necessary to move to the Senate, but at 197 For and 190 Against, it was a stunning achievement nonetheless. Votes For came from across party aisles, from all corners of the country, from representatives from rural and urban areas alike (Okrent, 2010).

World War I changed the landscape in several ways, altering the political climate and hurtling America toward reform. War-time Prohibition was not a ratification, but a culmination

of the long-held beliefs of a few gaining traction. A full year before the United States entered the war, the Anti-Saloon League identified only four states which hadn't passed some measure of anti-alcohol legislation in the previous decade—Nevada, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania (Lamme, 2004). President Woodrow Wilson used the argument that wartime emergency dictated the government's wide-spread use of resources, which allowed for the seizure of railways, setting prices, placing an embargo on exports and punishing any careless use of resources. This action included the closing of some breweries and distilleries (Okrent, 2010). By the time national Prohibition took effect, federal laws already limited the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages as a wartime measure, its ratification in 1919, and the subsequent Volstead Act designed to make sure everything was implemented, merely made reality that which was already commonplace across much of the nation (Burnham, 1968).

Strangely, the liquor trade has to absorb at least partial credit for financing the war. At President Wilson's behest, the War Revenue Acts placed such a tax on alcohol, subsequently financing much of the war, that it was borderline patriotic to purchase it. However, with two million soldiers deployed in the war effort (many voters, many firmly on the opposite side of Prohibition), the Anti-Saloon League was able to steer the conversation toward defending the nation, successfully arguing that the amount of barley going to America's breweries could go instead toward 11 million loaves of bread for American troops. The League also denounced France for failing to provide adequate drinking water (leaving American troops susceptible to developing a taste for wine) and, with the help of the great orator William Jennings Bryan, accused distillers of focusing on the bottom line over the defense of the American people (Okrent, 2010).

America's foe in World War I also placed a spotlight on the national attention paid to the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment. While the nation was at war with Germany, anti-German bias was running rampant in the States, and the League capitalized on the fervor. Wayne B. Wheeler, the legendary head of the ASL whose rise to power coincided with the League's rise to national prominence, succeeded in getting a Senate hearing on the German-American Alliance, an organization for Americans with German ancestry or birth. This devolved into a disaster for the GAA when it was discovered that the United States Brewers' Association was one of its largest donors. In fact, after salaries and publications, funding for the GAA was the largest item in the USBA annual budget. The brewers themselves endeavored to support American troops—August Busch made it a point to wear an American flag lapel pin at all times and the Busch family donated half a million dollars to the United States' war effort, while Henry Pabst enlisted in the Marines—but the brewer's fate had already been sealed in the court of public opinion (Okrent, 2010).

On January 16, 1919, Nebraska's house would pass national Prohibition 98-0 (Okrent, 2010), bringing the movement into law as the 36<sup>th</sup> of 48 states to ratify. When the Wets demanded a popular vote instead, William Jennings Bryan argued that "any referendum on the ratification resolution is unauthorized, unprecedented, and a meaningless plebiscite to delay the operation of the date when the federal amendment will go into effect." This was ironic given that Nebraskan Republicans had gained so much influence thanks in large part to the 1912 initiative and referendum law, which allowed for direct democracy and the immediate voting on items that could not wait for the next election (Folsom, 1981).

The ratification of national Prohibition did not go into effect overnight; one year from the day it was adopted, Prohibition was to be the ironclad law of the land, ostensibly to give brewers,

distillers and others in the trade a year to cease production, sell off the surplus and equipment and find a new line of work. In reality, this merely gave those who wanted booze, to consume or sell, a year to stock up and mount a business plan, or figure out how to work around the system. For the distiller, brewers, saloon-keepers and others who worked in concert with the government to keep America throats from parching, the glory days were over. For the moonshiners, rum-runners and gangsters, the glory days were about to begin.

### *Journalism and the early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century*

At the turn of the century, there were no radios, no televisions and certainly no computers. People had two ways of getting information: from newspapers and from each other. And thus journalists held significant advantage in the general world as the primary providers of news. And as with most people granted a significant amount of power, sometimes it was abused.

As the technology evolved, radios began to eat up more of the market; however, this era was not refined in the way it is today. Sure, there was news; there were also serial programs (think television sitcoms, only without the ability to see the performers), music and plenty of sensation. Yet in the post-World War I era, many of these fledgling broadcast networks were either owned by newspaper magnates or picked up their news through the same sources. Independent news, perhaps, but still being acquired from the same places. And unlike modern newspapers, printed once per day, and modern radio, which moves as the world moves, both mediums moved at roughly the same pace during the early days of radio.

It's important to acknowledge before delving into the journalistic side of the story that little research has heretofore been done on the topic of journalism and how it helped shape the national landscape. Scholars, particularly Okrent, have acknowledged some relationship between

journalism and the rise and fall of Prohibition, but the breadth of the subject is difficult to parse among other issues, which Okrent, Sinclair and others have chosen to focus more of their work on.

It all began rather simply for the brewers and distillers. As temperance movements began to gain a foothold with the American people, it was in the best interests of those who made their money via alcohol to squash those movements. One of the ways they did so was by purchasing the favor of newspaper editorials. At the time, the editors of small-town papers did not make much money and it was an easy (and wise) investment for Pabst or Busch to give those editors a small fee in exchange for a kind word (Okrent, 2010). Eventually, groups of brewers, distillers and those of like interests saw an opportunity to purchase myriad newspapers in cities such as Newark, Washington, Chicago and Montgomery. Among these were the *Washington Times*, purchased by longtime beer advocate and Hearst publisher Arthur Brisbane with seed money provided by some 15 brewers. This strategy backfired when the Wayne Wheeler-led Anti-Saloon League helped publish the names of those who helped purchase many of the so-called ‘Wet papers,’ all Germans in a time of distinctly anti-German furor in the United States. The *Washington Times* was the originator of the editorial subsequently published in the *Newark Evening News* that opened this study.

As the 1916 election season began to crystallize, the record of the day—newspapers—began to feel the squeeze from the anti-liquor establishment. Papers including the *New York Tribune*, the *Chicago Herald* and the *Boston Record* pulled liquor ads over threats from the Drys to boycott their papers (Okrent, 2010). The South, divided as it was on the issue of temperance and Prohibition, fostered the widest array of liquor laws. It was even illegal for out-of-state newspapers to show advertisements for alcohol in newspapers in Alabama (Okrent, 2010).

As the temperance movement had its share of publications dedicated solely to anti-liquor propaganda prior to Prohibition, so too did the Wets in its aftermath. However, these publications went quickly from trying to promote the industry to trying to save it, as Horatio Stoll discovered when he began producing the *California Grape Grower* in 1919. Some ideas were sound. Stoll foresaw what was coming once the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment went into full effect. What he did not anticipate was just how popular grapevines would eventually become as transported goods to the East Coast, since everyone could make 200 gallons per year of cider for home consumption. Others were more nebulous; the publication once stumped for products such as grape catsup, grape butter and grape fudge (Okrent, 2010).

Wheeler was the lightning rod for Dry and Wet press alike. In some publications, Wheeler's by-line on an article or story offered legitimacy. Other publications, such as the Wet-leaning *San Francisco Examiner*, made sport of the "paid super lobbyist" and his "wheedling, threatening, cajoling, bullying, promising and browbeating" (Okrent, 2010).

During the 1920s, America was being portrayed by the media as a lawless state. Statistics, which should be taken with the caveat that they did not necessarily encompass the whole country, particularly rural areas, showed crime merely rose slowly and steadily. However, the 1920s became the era in which the gangster was suddenly shoved into America's consciousness in an anti-hero role. Journalists began "catering to a public to whom the newly discovered 'racketeer' was a covert folk hero" (Burnham, 1968). It did not help that the supposed upholders of laws were making news for flouting the rules. In Indiana, the regional federal Prohibition director's letters instructing Indianapolis police chief Jeremiah Kinney to distribute confiscated liquor to his associates were leaked to the local paper and became known as the "Dear Jerry Letters" (Okrent, 2010).

During this time, tabloid journalism, an arm of modern reporting given considerably less credence if no less attention, came into full force. The New York *Daily News*, looking to build a readership upon booze-soaked trail of casualties left behind by Prohibition, adopted a lexicon all its own that cut right to the heart of its readership. Death and dismemberment were popular talking points in print and in conversation during the Roaring Twenties, and tabloids smartly picked up on that. Lionizing the gangsters, these papers had no trouble drawing a connection between Prohibition and the violence that followed (Okrent, 2010).

Likewise, so too did the revenuers turn into a kind of folk hero, albeit in a more upstanding, wholesome way. Isidore Einstein and Moe Smith became famous in New York for their exploits, and the more picturesque members of enforcement services became household names alongside those they chased through the streets. The more heroic the backstory, the better the copy for the newspapers. Samuel Kurtzman, who worked the northern border, was christened “The Plague of the North,” while Daisy Simpson became “The Woman of 100 Disguises” for her ability to feign an illness outside a speakeasy or underground bar and bust the unsuspecting saloonkeepers who offered her a restorative libation (Okrent, 2010).

### *The Aftermath of Volstead*

Andrew J. Volstead was the man responsible for piecing together what national Prohibition ultimately meant, and although the Act that would become synonymous with his name contained 67 separate sections, it missed a crucial one: aside from a jury trial, what should happen to those found to have broken the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment? Basking in the immediate aftermath of victory, the Drys were hardly concerned. But they soon would be, as criminality, some foreseen and some unforeseen, was on the horizon (Okrent, 2010).

One of the provisions of the Volstead Act was that any alcohol owned by an individual prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment's enactment in 1920 was theirs to keep. Many of the beneficiaries of this loophole were the wealthy, who could bulk-buy mass quantities of alcohol and also possessed a space in the home large enough to store it. Those without the deep pockets to simply buy a liquor store out of its stock or without a home large enough to devote a room or two to alcohol had to improvise (Okrent, 2010).

Much of the issue that followed the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment's enactment was that of scant resources. At the state and local level, resources were either not allocated or simply unavailable to combat the law-breaking that occurred. The courts could not keep up with the caseload. More often than not, cases would be filed but never brought to trial. Districts that were able to handle 4,000 cases annually were trying to dispose of 50,000, to say nothing of the rest of the docket. In New York, the first 4,000 arrests yielded less than 500 indictments and not one jail sentence. Perhaps the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment had forced laws into existence, but it did not bring those laws into enforcement (Okrent, 2010). This led to Emory Buckner, United States Attorney for New York's Southern District, to offer what he termed 'Bargain Day.' Exchanging light fines for guilty pleas, this early example of plea-bargaining was affirmed as constitutional in 1930 and significantly altered American criminal law.

The entire eastern seaboard from Maine to Florida became a haven for rum-running. A fleet of ships was permanently docked the required three miles off the coast to be outside United States jurisdiction. A never-ending line of ships raced from the Bahamas to these floating warehouses and back for another shipment. Smaller vessels were able to sneak the contraband to shore, usually under cover of night and often with the help of the U.S. Navy itself when, on

foggy nights, they would transmit code to the Navy's direction-finding station, which had no way of knowing who was doing the signaling (Okrent, 2010).

The citizens of the coastal towns, whose sons, brothers and husbands were trading fishing nets for rum-running and reaping those economic benefits, had no reason to help the revenuers put a stop to the trade. Boatyard operators refused to repair or house Coast Guard vessels. Collaborating with the rum-runners brought a flood of illicit alcohol into these coastal towns, and the flood of ill-gotten money that came with it (Okrent, 2010).

Jim Reed deserves a healthy amount of credit for getting the ball rolling on the actual repeal of Prohibition. The U.S. senator from Missouri, a member of a judiciary subcommittee, organized testimony in 1926 to challenge its legality and seized control of the proceedings. An ailing Wayne Wheeler could barely help his own cause as Reed attacked the ASL and anyone who stepped forward on its behalf, criticizing those in favor of Prohibition vehemently while extending olive branches to those who despised what the ASL stood for (Okrent, 2010).

When Wayne Wheeler died in 1927, the ASL was thrown into tumult. Wheeler's right hand, F. Scott McBride, believed that law enforcement would lead to Prohibition's success, while Ernest Cherrington and his followers did not believe the law alone could solve the problem and urged for more education and advertisement. Wheeler's passing, coupled with the Rockefeller family's sudden withdrawal of support (they did not like mandatory jail time for offenders) gave the Cherrington faction the opportunity for a last-ditch push for power. It failed and McBride—nowhere near the political operative Wayne Wheeler was—became the de facto head of the movement (Okrent, 2010).

Wheeler's absence was felt throughout every level of Prohibition. The face that had graced hundreds of newspapers, becoming as identifiable as the movement itself, was gone, and in its stead were those seeking political, personal and profitable glory the likes of which Wheeler rarely sought. Worse, his experienced hand was no longer there to guide them through their missteps or their triumphs. Such was the case following the 1928 election, a landslide victory for Republicans and, ostensibly, the Dry faction but based more heavily on anti-Catholic rhetoric than pro-Dry fervor. Flush with this success, Bishop James Cannon Jr. and his allies became more aggressive, getting legislation passed that made any Volstead violation a felony carrying a minimum of five years in prison for first-time offenders (Okrent, 2010).

A public that had been largely ambivalent regarding Volstead beyond mild annoyance was suddenly in an uproar, and they had a voice to spearhead their rage. William Randolph Hearst, who had begun Prohibition as a Dry, called the Jones Law, named for its sponsor, Wesley L. Jones of Washington, "the most menacing piece of repressive legislation that has stained the statute books of this republic since the Alien and Sedition Laws" (Okrent, 2010). The newspaper magnate launched an essay contest to poke holes and question Volstead's true nature. With 28 newspapers in some of the nation's biggest markets at his disposal, Hearst had gone from welcome ally to formidable foe.

While relatively small-time operations and private citizens were easy targets, prosecutors could not make this new law stick against the bigger outfits it was designed to take down. With money at their disposal and judges in their pockets, the actual gangland rum-running continued unabated. Here again, the media succeeded where the law failed. The Detroit River had devolved into a warzone of rival factions moving liquor out of Canada and into the United States and then racing back for more. Newly-elected President Herbert Hoover knew about this problem, but his

two choices were to send in the army and cede that the law had failed, or do nothing and ensure his government was helpless. Those were not really choices at all. (Okrent, 2010)

And so the media moved in. *Outlook* ran a “War on the River” piece. *The New York Times* dispatched correspondents. These stories captured the imagination in a way that did nothing to aid the Dry cause, as did the poster child of gangster bootlegging in Chicago, Alphonse Capone. (Okrent, 2010) Capone was perfect fodder for newspapers during the Roaring Twenties—accessible, garish and smart. He also committed more than his share of murders and was a racketeer, bootlegger and overall felon of the highest order. But where his organization’s product was mediocre and trail of blood (comparatively speaking) lighter than some of his contemporaries (Winkeler, 2011), Capone stood out because he wanted to stand out. The newspapers of the day loved him, he loved that they loved him, and all the ink he was able to get was very bad news for the Drys.

While Capone was winning the war of public opinion in his way, Pauline Sabin was winning it in hers. A prominent Republican, Sabin was so disillusioned by President Hoover’s inaugural address, wherein he lambasted states not taking enforcement seriously, that she flipped completely, establishing a stronghold faction which cultivated the media and became a sensation because its members, mainly women of upstanding social standing who sought to effect change on one of the days’ great issues. Sabin’s faction innately understood that their message would carry greater weight because it was they who delivered it. (Okrent, 2010) This political empowerment, so in the spirit of Carry Nation and the ultimate creation of the WCTU, and yet its complete opposite, was to be one of the great prongs of Prohibition’s ultimate downfall.

Things got progressively worse for the Dry faction. Convinced of their own success, they began to make mistakes. The WCTU declared war on Coca-Cola. Henry Ford swore he would

shut down his plants if repeal happened. Meanwhile, an increasingly visible and hostile media were jumping on every misstep and making certain that it found a home in print. Congressmen slithered out of Jones Law convictions through various machinations and the newspapers were there to cry foul at every turn, particularly against those who had voted the Jones Law into being but used tactics such as freedom of port for sitting Congressmen. Many at this time used “official study” of the Panama Canal to take off for dripping-Wet Panama and return with no troubles at customs, as they were on national business (Okrent, 2010).

As bad as 1929 was for the ever-shrinking Dry faction, the dawn of the Great Depression might as well have been a death knell for the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The Association Against the Prohibition Amendment (AAPA), with Pierre du Pont at its head and hungry to earn himself the same victory his nemesis President Wilson had won with the Revenue Act of 1916, suddenly had an opening. Nearly seven years prior, *The Wall Street Journal* had estimated some \$2 billion in taxable revenue was available, more than enough to abolish the income tax. The AAPA, whose wealthy membership bore the brunt of the income tax, was not looking to save the nation. They were looking for a tax cut, and they could get it by making the working man pay for it. By the time the nation was in the throes of the Depression, any revenue that could be generated was revenue worth having (Okrent, 2010).

When Repeal came, it came quickly. Unlike the decades needed to drum up support for Prohibition and the seemingly endless, circular talks that ultimately shaped it, the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment first showed up for a vote in Congress in February 1933. The House of Representatives debated for 40 minutes before passing the measure by a better than two-to-one margin. Barely a month into Franklin D. Roosevelt’s first presidential term, 3.2 percent beer was

legal again. By December 1933, the whole thing was finished and America was Wet once more (Okrent, 2010).

### Methodology

The South was represented by the *Commercial Appeal* and *The Atlanta Journal* (now doing business as *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*). For the Midwest, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* and *Des Moines Register* are the papers of record, while New York—the hub of the industry and melting pot of the era—features viewpoints from the white-collar *New York Times* and the working-man's *New York World*. On the West Coast, the *Los Angeles Times* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*. This selection offers a wide array of views from media during the era and a snapshot of how those views changed over time.

All research began from the year 1900 (or as close as each historical paper can be found and verified) until the year of repeal. A sampling spanning 30 years from eight of the most respected outlets in the country should offer the reader a thorough understanding of how Prohibition came to be viewed by the public, and how that narrative was shaped by newspapers of the day.

An era-spanning search through selected widely available works would be impractical; the rise, expanse and fall of national Prohibition spanned more than three decades and gripped an entire nation. The choice of which parts of the story to dive into was the first step in identifying the methodology.

In many ways, some of the most important moments of the movement were tough to pinpoint even when they were happening. For example, in 1908, the Anti-Saloon League began to apply pressure in media and within its political sphere to bring temperance to the forefront.

But that is a moment with no defined date; rather, it was a sustained build that became impossible to ignore. Further, instances such as the ASL's pressure on the media developed inroads in different parts of the country at different times; where this political and media maneuvering might have been common knowledge in New York City in 1908, it could have been some days before that knowledge made its way to Des Moines.

So the following dates were researched, with a buffer of three weeks (21 days) after the initial date, to give publications time to acquire, absorb, digest and print the news and any subsequent, relevant developments to come from it. This offers a wide range of dates and viewpoints, and allows the research to reveal whether or not the newspapers were tipping their hand in one direction or the other. The dates:

- June 7, 1900 (Carry Nation attacks her first saloon)
- Dec. 10, 1913 (The WCTU and ASL march on Washington)
- Dec. 22, 1914 (The Hobson filibuster)
- Nov. 21, 1918 (Wilson institutes wartime Prohibition)
- Jan. 16, 1919 (18<sup>th</sup> Amendment ratified)
- Oct. 28, 1919 (Volstead Act passed)
- April 5-24, 1926 (Reed Committee; will take a broader search for this for two weeks from March 27-May 2, 1926)
- Sept. 5, 1927 (Wayne Wheeler dies)
- Feb. 14, 1929 (St. Valentine's Day Massacre)
- Dec. 5, 1933 (Repeal ratified)

The Austin Peay State University library microfilm library keeps both *The New York Times* and *The Commercial Appeal* in its standing archive. Newspapers.com was the primary source for the other six papers of record—the *Des Moines Register*, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, *New York World*, *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Atlanta Journal*.

### *Findings*

While the reliable historical sources accrued during literature review would have researchers believe that temperance was the topic of the day, pinpointing singular events through the prism of their time seems to differ, at least during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For three weeks following the Carry Nation attacks and Women’s Christian Temperance Union’s march in Washington, the *Des Moines Register* had no mention of either event. In fact, the Carry Nation attacks were remarkably local items in the beginning; no mention of her hatchet jobs were found in a newspaper outside the state of Kansas until a December edition of the *Deseret Evening News* in Salt Lake City—and that was for smashing a nude painting of Cleopatra at a bar. A few days later—Dec. 28, to be exact—the nation began to learn the story of the Kansas woman smashing saloons, almost seven months after the initial attack.

The WCTU and ASL’s united march in Washington was the first event that seemed to register as even a somewhat big deal in the moment. Not only did the *Cincinnati Enquirer* have a piece on the day of the event announcing delegates from the Ohio Valley region scheduled to be among the more than 2,000 scheduled to march, included in the Dec. 10, 1913 article was a paragraph regarding the disagreement between the ASL and WCTU on the part each body should play in the presentation of petitions at the Capitol. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* and *Los Angeles Times* published pieces on the event the next day, both running celebratory Associated Press

copy (including descriptions of how the senators were cheered as they climbed the stairs to address the assembled crowd).

The *Cincinnati Enquirer* kept up its part of the narrative the following day, with a ‘special dispatch’ no doubt written by an ally on the ground during the next portion of the event, when demonstrators invaded the House of Representatives to cheer on Rep. Richmond Hobson as he addressed his colleagues on the issue of national Prohibition. Hobson, from the description supplied, stirred the crowd into a frenzy with “...arms waving in the air and shaking his head almost literally in the faces of members who sat near him.... [H]e drew from the packed galleries prolonged cheering and even the stamping of feet to increase the pandemonium.” The *Los Angeles Times* gathered a similar dispatch, heavier on the speech descriptions of Hobson and Underwood, from the Associated Press.

Rep. Hobson next made headlines almost a year later with his infamous filibuster. Once again, coverage was sporadic; despite Hobson’s filibuster being part of a larger push for national Prohibition, it fell to the *Los Angeles Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle*—two papers as far west as can be in the continental United States—to cover the details of the eight-hour march to get to Hobson’s point. However, it should be noted that the *Des Moines Register* did run a piece with Hobson vowing national Prohibition would be enacted within five years on Dec. 28, 1914—to his credit, Hobson nailed that one.

Predictably, the enactment of war-time Prohibition was covered broadly, as it affected the entire nation. What was notable about the aftermath was the tone with which it was discussed in print; it seemed as though pundits saw this as a practice run for the inevitability of actual nationwide Prohibition. Perhaps this was due to the influence of Williams Jennings Bryan. The great orator addressed a worldwide conference in Columbus, Ohio, at the behest of the ASL on

the subject the night before President Woodrow Wilson signed the national wartime Prohibition bill. Bryan declared that the sale of intoxicating beverages in North America was nearing its end, a declaration that found its way into the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Atlanta Constitution* and *Des Moines Register* the day Wilson signed the document into law. In fact, the first sentence of the *Atlanta Constitution* stated as much in black and white:

Columbus, Ohio, November 20.—That Prohibition throughout the United States soon will be an established fact is the expression of Dry leaders who are attending the worldwide Prohibition conference here.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* had another story concerning alcohol in its Nov. 21, 1918 edition—that of The United States Brewers' Associations connection to the German-American Alliance and subsequent suspicions of pro-German propaganda and plotting to boycott large American companies. This shared the same third page as a (much smaller) celebratory proclamation of Bryan and the report that national Prohibition would soon be on the way.

More integral to the research in this edition of the *San Francisco Chronicle* was a piece buried on the back page, under a broad subheading titled “Thoughts and Comments” that begins: “The Chronicle has no particular interest in respect to legislation affecting the use of alcoholic drinks than it has in respect to other important issues, and that is that the legislation shall be wise and statesmanlike and calculated to accomplish the purpose sought by the majority of the electorate.” It goes on to argue that the people of California have made their opinion heard on the matter of Prohibition, and that as a matter of good governing, should allow the will of people to stand rather than on the personal convictions individual legislators might possess.

Two days later, the *Atlanta Constitution* offered more insight into the suspicions into the Brewer's Association outlined in the *Chronicle*. It was suggested that the Association, with the

help of the Hearst Newspaper conglomerate, had tried to find writers for pro-beer propaganda by offering a price for the best essay on the solution of the “saloon problem,” with Hearst papers the basis for the this publicity. It should be noted that the *Atlanta Constitution* was not a Hearst paper, nor was a later *Los Angeles Times* piece on the same subject. This same article also accused the Association of attempting to coerce Judge Jeter C. Pritchard, a United States circuit court of appeals judge, into soliciting funds from a brewer with an eye on discrediting him.

The ramifications of war-time Prohibition continued for weeks after Wilson signed the bill into law. A Dec. 10 piece in the *Des Moines Register* chronicled extensively how newspapers helped carry Dry forces to victory in Ohio. After temperance measures were defeated in 1914, 1915 and 1917, the Drys turned to advertising in 1918, running thousand-line advertisements for two weeks in the run-up to the next vote on statewide Prohibition. The ploy worked, strengthened by the businessmen on the Dry committee who knew the power of advertising through journalism.

One paper took a more tactical view of the matter. The *New York World*, rather than look at the short-term link between wartime Prohibition and eventual national Prohibition, was pragmatic: 50,000 would be out of work, the city would lose \$8 million annually just from licensing alone and various industries would feel reverberations. Teachers, fire fighters and the police would all have their pensions cut after the loss of the \$8 million that the city used to pay its share of the annuities.

Wartime Prohibition wound up not mattering very much in hindsight—the war ended before any of the actions could take effect. But it laid out a blueprint that would ultimately lead to the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment and its ratification, a process that had begun more than a full year before Wilson instituted wartime Prohibition. Such was the build, the inevitability, of something that

both the president had already signed off on in a fashion (Wilson would actually use his veto powers on national Prohibition, but was overruled by both the Senate and House of Representatives). Both houses of Congress had pushed through to the states that ratification was all but done when it came to pass in January 1919. Pass it did, more than a full year after Mississippi, the first state to ratify, did so in January 1918. With 36 states needed for ratification, and 33 having already done so, the aftermath of the January 16, 1919, votes that saw North Carolina, Utah, Nebraska, Missouri and Wyoming join the national movement was not as vociferous as would be expected. It was covered—every publication had something to say on the subject—but with an air of formality.

On the morning of the event, the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and others put it plainly: as multiple state legislatures get back underway today, this is happening. “Groundwork for this has already been laid”; “becomes effective”; “are expected to take action.” These are not the tropes used when decisions are still up in the air.

Instead, many focused on what would happen next. The *Des Moines Register*, *New York Times* and others speculated that July 1, 1920—the initial date for wartime Prohibition—would be the start date. The *New York World* pointed out that this had happened without its state even participating in the vote yet. Multiple sources reported that the California Grape Growers Association was already planning an injunction to stop its governor from signing the bill and that a dozen other states could attempt the same.

The *New York World* was in a unique position—printing twice daily, it could cover both the build-up and the aftermath on the same day, and did so in its evening edition on Jan. 16 with a number of editorials. The consensus? Prohibition would foster Bolshevism and curtail personal liberty. At the time, New York more than doubled the population of every other U.S. city.

Perhaps these were sour grapes from those who lost their beloved booze; perhaps they were the genuine distress of a populace that felt unrepresented. New York had not ratified the amendment and would not for another 13 days, by which point it really didn't matter.

October should have brought clarity with the Volstead Act, but right away things became more muddled. When the House of Representatives sent President Wilson HR-6810, he returned it unsigned in part because it made no distinction between war-time emergency that had halted alcohol manufacture in the first place and the constitutional amendment which was now law. This was a stunning development to many, and it was conveyed in the description of the day: "... hit Congress like a crack of lightning," (*Des Moines Register*); "the 'Drys' were up in arms over the veto as soon as the message was presented to the House late in the afternoon," (*San Francisco Chronicle*); "Bare Quorum in Chamber" blared a headline (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, with 231 present and 204 absent).

Many papers had Wilson's full statement, which read in part:

"In all matters having to do with the personal habits and customs of large numbers of our people, we must be certain that the established processes of legal change are followed. In no other way can the salutary object sought to be accomplished by great reforms of this character be made satisfactory and permanent."

This was received with exultation—*The New York Times* ran lengthy quotes lauding the president from the Brewers Board of Trade and the New York State Brewers Association—but it was short-lived. By October 30, the *Evening World* was reporting 40 arrests in connection to Volstead-related violations as the House of Representatives and Senate quickly passed by the measures required to circumvent President Wilson's veto. The *World* was quickly becoming a vociferous voice against Volstead; in this same edition, one column to the right, a Brooklyn magistrate suspended the sentence of a man charged with public intoxication because "... a good

many hypocrites in Congress have created a condition whereby you and a good many Americans will be deprived of their personal rights.”

It is at this point the narrative becomes somewhat suspended—the gap from Volstead being enacted until the Reed Committee, which began turning lawmakers toward repeal, is five and a half years. A study of the era between events leads to a reasonable conclusion: some were thrilled with the results. Others, less so.

In an October 5, 1920 dispatch picked up and run in the *New York World*, Federal Prohibition Commissioner John F. Kramer derided remaining Wet apologists to be ‘good sports’ in the face of defeat. He also stated it was unthinkable that 36 states would ever vote for repeal.

On June 5, 1922, the *Atlanta Constitution* ran a lengthy piece on Atlanta-area ministers using their pulpits to attack the remarks of Judge Arthur G. Powell, who had given a speech at a meeting of the State Bar Association at Savannah in which he declared Dry laws were doing more harm than good. In asserting that some laws, even those with the best of intentions, could result in unforeseen consequences, area ministers were not pleased and said as much. Many used the opportunity to declare Prohibition permanent and here to stay.

On June 17, 1923, the *Los Angeles Times* detailed the setbacks New York Governor Al Smith endured on his swing through the South. The most damning anecdote came from Senator Kenneth McKellar of Tennessee, who made it plain that not only would Smith fail to unite the south but any Wet would face the same obstacles.

In a piece appearing in its March 9, 1926 issue, the *Atlanta Constitution* detailed a lengthy session in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee wherein a dozen states brought forth their disagreements and disapproval of the Volstead Act. While most of the piece centered on

quotes from the various principles involved, it was the description of Senator Thaddeus Caraway that made the biggest mark—"the most persistent of questioners," Caraway was "a senatorial hawk," who "took especial delight in baiting the suave protagonist," and whose coup de grace was this quote: "If there had been as much propaganda against the rape and murder laws as there has been against the Prohibition laws the crimes of rape and murder would have been doubled. Why should congress sit down to hear everybody who doesn't want to obey the laws?" Rare have been the descriptions throughout this research so pointedly critical of the Dry advocate.

The tenor of media coverage may not have overtly changed during this time, but the media no longer had the zeal for Dry work that was exhibited during Wayne Wheeler's heyday. When another enigmatic personality like Jim Reed came along to play a similar role for the Wets, the media were eager to get another compelling voice into print.

Reed's questioning of Lincoln Andrews, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and one of the men in charge of Prohibition enforcement, on April 6, 1926, provided enough headlines for a week in the following day's edition. "Andrews Bares Corruption; Admits Volstead Impotency," was the top headline in the April 7 *Cincinnati Enquirer*, but sub-heads before the reader ever encountered the multi-page spread devoted to the subject included, "Only 95 Percent of Stuff is Landed—That's All!" "More Than 100 Fall Into Bribery Traps," "Reed Attacks Dry Czar Upon New Proposal."

Andrews endeavored to explain his side of things—which amounted mostly to conceding mistakes but adding that new enforcement laws should eliminate many of the loopholes the enterprising bootlegger could flaunt—were given almost a paragraph and a half in print. The rest of the sprawling spread described Reed and his attacks on the whole endeavor of Prohibition while also setting a courtroom scene that bordered on the surreal:

“The committee room again was packed to capacity and the men and women present frequently burst into laughter when the innermost secrets of Prohibition and bootleg circles involved discussion of terms common in the anti-Volstead days.”

Andrews didn't do himself any favors, although he looked to be in an impossible situation given the circumstances. When Senator Reed questioned Andrews on the turnover in the Prohibition enforcement force, he lamented that many of his hiring practices would give Andrews' force as many crooked agents as it had always had. Andrews response: “Yes, but we drop them awfully fast,” before adding, “It's not the crooks who bother us so much as the men who are stupid.” Later, when explaining why Prohibition agents might sometimes become intoxicated, he stated that the only way said agents could get evidence for the courts that liquor was, in fact, liquor was to consume it, sometimes to the point of intoxication. The assembled were amused at Andrews' description of this “unpleasant duty.”

An odd part of the coverage of this period is how everyone seemed content with the notion that even though national Prohibition was the law, re-litigating everything from scratch seemed like the natural thing to do. “Ultra Drys to Have Inning in Liquor Battle,” blared an April 16, 1926 *Los Angeles Times* headline. “Row Interrupts Liquor Inquiry; Reed Decries ‘Unfair Ways,’” declared the *Cincinnati Enquirer* five days later. For an actual amendment on the books, the media was still willing to declare the situation fluid even years following the amendment's enactment.

Reed was painted by the media of the time and by scholars now as a blustery figure, a Congressional bulldog aiming to get his result at all costs. He was reported to have asked generals if they requested neighbors spy on one another, wore down a U.S. District Attorney to the point where he admitted that the Volstead Act should be modified (albeit slightly) and accused the government of paying government employees to spread the good news about how

great Prohibition is on the taxpayer dime. This, he argued, helped showcase how the ASL flexed its muscle to make certain that no matter the situation, the power always rested with the Dry faction.

It wasn't all roses for Reed; the *Los Angeles Times* reported on April 21, 1926, that, because he was outflanked and outnumbered on his committee, Reed's unhappiness with the proceedings bubbled to the surface multiple times. Whether he simply wore his heart on his sleeve or was being cantankerous to the detriment of his cause is unclear, but Reed's presentation often made as much news as what he was presenting. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* also noted this in an edition the same day, also noted that a frustrated Reed essentially gave up and announced to the Senate that he was protesting continuing the hearings unless he could get cooperation from within the committee; that he had other responsibilities than wasting his time for people who didn't want to work with him. This helped the Dry faction claim victory regardless of the actual facts, but it was a hollow win.

If the Reed hearings were seemed hollow, the death of Wayne Wheeler was an incalculable loss. On Sept. 5, 1927, Wheeler succumbed to kidney disease; in the aftermath, he was hailed as a visionary leader, remembered for his victories as the dead often are. Wheeler was an important enough figure in American life to spawn multi-page eulogies in multiple major American newspapers—in the *Los Angeles Times*, actor Will Rogers compared Wheeler's construction of the ASL out of nothing more than his will to Benito Mussolini rising to power in Italy, but he appeared to mean it as a compliment. Much of the media focus in the immediate aftermath of Wheeler's demise centered on two things: his potential replacement and the future of the movement he helped spawn.

*The Cincinnati Enquirer* was basically the paper of record in Wheeler (and by extension, the ASL) backyard, and they devoted a lot of time to deciphering the ASL's future, complete with prognostication regarding his replacement and reaction from both the Wet and Dry communities. While the Drys saw the cause as "... too big for the passing of any one man to injure," the Wets saw opportunity.

"Wheeler's passing," one Wet advocate said, "will cause chaos in Dry land."

While Wheeler had been in poor health for some time, the reverberations of his death were felt immediately. According to one eulogizer in the *Des Moines Register*, Wheeler had the ability to:

"[when] applying pressure to Congress, as he did very often during the years preceding the passage of the Volstead Act, he did it in a way that has since become pattern for other organizations. He did not waste time button-holing or pleading with members. He found out where they stood and then wired the news back to their respective bailiwicks."

This uncommon hand was not to be found easily, and a later dispatch from Des Moines acknowledged it would take something akin to a miracle to find another Wheeler. The hope and optimism so often associated with his movement was vanishing in the aftermath of Wheeler's passing.

As the Dry faction continued running its operations following Wheeler's death, something happened that they could not anticipate nor could even a great uniter like Wheeler have helped navigate. On Valentine's Day 1929, seven members of Chicago's North Side Gang were lined up and executed by four men posing as police officers in a warehouse as the struggle for the city's organized crime leadership raged on, in direct relation to Prohibition. Al Capone and George Moran were vying for control of the bootlegging trade in Chicago; Moran was the last rival standing between Capone and ownership of the Chicago underworld.

The backlash was swift and overwhelming. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* said it succinctly: Trouble in the liquor business is blamed for the massacre, and those in the “industry” are “in the know.” A few days earlier, the *Enquirer* had no less an authority than Federal Prohibition Administrator F.L. Silloway state in its pages that, while he did not believe Chicago policemen pulled the trigger, there was a close connection between the Chicago police department and organized crime within the city and that policemen and politicians in the city knew more than they were admitting.

While the murder of seven people over bootlegging territory was awful news, it also was the last gasp for the Dry faction. The *Atlanta Journal* reported that, in the wake of the killings, Chicago’s status as America’s Wettest city had been suspended, with 10,000 speakeasies going dark either through police influence or voluntarily shutting down to avoid visits from Prohibition enforcement. This was reported two days after the killings took place; in the second graf, the *Journal* was explicit: “There was only one answer to the whole shooting—liquor,” and stating later in its pages that all enforcement agreed that the slayings were motivated by the beer wars, but nobody could work out which faction was directly responsible. The *Los Angeles Times* had talk of the massacre being what finally forced Chicago to get tough on Prohibition and end gangland violence.

Raids, arrests and questioning continued for some time following the massacre, which curtailed organized crime in the city for an extended time. But Capone, who was never convicted of anything in connection to the bloodshed, got what he wanted: Moran’s power was effectively demolished and Capone ruled Chicago. No one ever went to prison for the slayings. Which meant that sooner rather than later, liquor once again ran unabated through the Second City.

Soon, liquor flowed once more everywhere. December 5, 1933—after all the legislation, continued squabbling, the criminal empires built—national Prohibition was repealed. The intervening years between the Valentine’s Day Massacre and repeal was fraught with the Great Depression. President Herbert Hoover gave way to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who campaigned on a pro-repeal platform. Almost four years to the day after the Valentine’s Day Massacre, the Senate opened the floor for repeal. The referendum at hand was straightforward: to avoid the pitfalls of lobbying from both Wet and Dry forces, the House and Senate would only vote to send the referendum to the states; the states would then send delegates to a convention to vote yes or no on appeal in that state (The Repeal of Prohibition).

By this point, the Wet mindset was firmly optimistic. As the proceedings began in February 1933, Senator John Blaine—whose term would expire in less than a month—felt he had the numbers to get a resolution passed through the Senate, and he needed less than a week to prove it; the Blaine Act was through the Senate and House by Feb. 20. What’s unique was the lack of coverage given to this event; the Hobson Filibuster or the Reed hearings of yore had pages and columns detailing every argument, peppered with plenty of speculation, yet the Blaine Act entered the public consciousness with little to no fanfare—just some matter-of-fact statements in myriad publications, but short on the details of what was proposed, aside from the repeal of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

This is likely because, almost daily, states were taking the fight to their own legislatures; Indiana, New Mexico and even Ohio were among the states which had put forth repeal amendments at the state level before the national debate gained traction in February. In the aftermath of Roosevelt’s election as President, there was also a certain inevitability to it—the *Los Angeles Times* reported that, as part of the lame-duck Congressional session likely getting

cut short in April and with Roosevelt the ultimate arbiter for awarding non-elected jobs until after that time, he would want assurances that his policies were at the forefront over the final months of the session.

It was posited that it could take the states years to convene and find the votes necessary to enact the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment or keep the 18<sup>th</sup> as the law of the land. The *Los Angeles Times*, even when describing Wet leaders as jubilant in a Feb. 21 issue, quoted a prediction from Jouett Shouse, leader of the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment, that a decision would come within 18 months to find the votes necessary for repeal. In fact, it didn't take very long at all—states were quite keen to get the revenue available via legally bought and sold alcohol back in the coffers.

Soon after Roosevelt was elected, the Volstead Act was amended to allow 3.2 percent beer back on the market. Now, the chance to wipe the law from the books was at hand. An *Atlanta Constitution* headline from Feb. 21, 1933, captures the prevailing feeling of the day, describing President Roosevelt as 'elated' over the House's quick attention to the matter; of the states 'planning action' on repeal.

The *Commercial Appeal* voiced a similar opinion once repeal was enacted, as "Roosevelt Carries Out Party Platform,"; the big concern was then how to regulate pricing and move quality product as quickly as possible. For the final days ahead of repeal, it does not appear anyone could spare many thoughts for the Dry faction; whether the fight waged on in the face of overwhelming odds was not mentioned in any of the papers perused for this research. One *Cincinnati Enquirer* piece asked only what to do with those convicted of Prohibition-era crimes after repeal? After more than 80 years, the Wet movement appears to have gone out with little fanfare in the press.

## Conclusion

Something changed the tenor of the national discussion on Prohibition as it relates to the enactment and then repeal of Prohibition on the national level. However, discovering whether the press helped this narrative change or merely observed it is more difficult to parse.

It appears likely that the media narrative tired greatly of constantly having the same discussion about an issue that had already been decided on a legal level. Whose fault it is that this discussion continued—the Wets furiously trying to undermine Dry laws, Drys taking the opportunity to point out that it was the law of the land and therefore unlikely to change or papers which had mountains of text to fill every day of the week—is up for debate, but it's likely everyone had their reasons for the narrative continuing.

As enigmatic orators like Wayne Wheeler, Richmond Hobson and William Jennings Bryan receded to the background of the fight, the next crop of big personalities to take up headlines that emerged did so firmly on the side of the Wet faction. Thaddeus Carraway, Jim Reed and even Franklin Delano Roosevelt—whether they were true friends of the Wet cause or simply unable to stomach the idea of government exerting that much control over the lives and choices of citizens—were the kinds of forceful personalities required if repeal was going to become reality, and each played their part in seeing it to fruition. As they grew in stature and importance, both to the fight in general and on the national stage, their figure dwarfed those of the Dry faction.

In a way, organized crime might have harmed the narrative surrounding Prohibition for its ability to make larger-than-life myths out of figures like Al Capone, Bugs Moran and others. Detailing the exploits of the gangsters was a profitable enterprise; again, there was a lot of ink that needed to be spilled on a given day. But the Valentine's Day Massacre appeared to finally topple that narrative irrevocably; even though Capone won control of Chicago, he began to lose the court of public opinion before ultimately going to prison on income tax evasion charges. People liked drinking; that never stopped. They didn't like fearing they might die in a hail of gunfire from being in the wrong place at the wrong time as rival bootleggers duked it out for supremacy.

One consequence of the media coverage of crime factions seemed to be that this coverage replaced the heartfelt editorials and pro-Dry pieces newspapers had a habit of producing before Prohibition. The rise of tabloid journalism, which exploded in the 1920s, may not have been given much credence as a respectable endeavor but no doubt proved that simply reporting the news was not what sold newspapers. Another area deserving of further research is a more comprehensive study of when Al Capone and his ilk replaced Wayne Wheeler and the ASL as the headline-grabber that held sway across the nation.

There was a tiredness to it all by the time repeal ultimately came up for vote; the papers of the day read like the final chapters of an epic novel. The narrative instead moved to the tying up of loose ends, brief speculation of the bright and shining future which awaited the country after the noble experiment ended and resolutions for some of the longer-running characters. In the period preceding national Prohibition, there were studies conducted about the effects of alcohol on the body, on the family, on home life and a man's ability to make it to work each day. Such Puritanical concerns had no place in the discourse by the time repeal became a reality. No

longer was the soul of the nation up for grabs. It's unclear if it ever was to more than a handful of zealots.

If this sounds familiar, it's because direct parallels can be drawn between the Prohibition era and marijuana, the substance controlled in much the same way today. Like alcohol, marijuana was demonized by a large populace that saw it as the evil by which society would ultimately fall; like alcohol, marijuana is now viewed as a true danger by few. In a twist, marijuana seems to be working backward from how alcohol went from legalized to forbidden and back again; marijuana is being decriminalized or legalized at the state level first yet remains a federal crime, while alcohol was limited at the state level before it began to be a federal issue.

Once Roosevelt was elected, the fight was out of most of the Dry faction. The era following Wayne Wheeler's death had not been kind to the movement, and lifelong politicians weren't about to risk career suicide on a cause they believed in with any less than their full hearts. True believers became few and far between following Wheeler's passing, and with Roosevelt holding many futures in his hand by 1933, there was simply no one to keep taking the fight to the Wet movement on a large scale. The realization of the inevitability of repeal seems to be why the Blaine Act received less attention compared to not only Hobson and Reed but also Volstead, which captured the nation for months on end. Walking back repeal was far less exciting for readers than enacting it in the first place had been, and this is because the writing was on the wall for all to see that the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment's time had come to an end.

However, further research remains. Yes, context can tell us all we've discovered in this research: that the fight for Prohibition galvanized a large part of the country, and that its steady rise for sixty years was joined by a meteoric fall after less than two decades. The national attitude changed; the coverage from newspapers changed. Pinpointing a specific moment for either of

those changes is less likely than the erosion of ideals over time and as the national interest moved from, “How does Prohibition help us keep the nation for the meek, God-fearing and others helpless to the ill effects of alcohol,” to “How can we create a sudden influx of revenue for the nation at the poorest moment in national history?” during the Great Depression. As alcohol was a way to soothe the fears presented by the first question, it turned out to be a large part of the answer to the second. Further study will want to find a more detailed accounting of the early days of the Great Depression and when it was realized that the federal government was sitting on the means to help the citizenry through taxing a product everyone was still using illegally anyway.

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