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Between the Devil and the Deep Sea: Immigration, Prohibition
and the Making of America

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Abstract

With the passing of the eighteenth amendment in 1919, Prohibition became law and the manufacture, sale and transportation of alcohol above .5% became illegal¹. This law was understood to have been created to apply to all Americans, regardless of race, class or geography; a law for every citizen. However, research into the ethnocultural aspect of the Prohibition era has made it clear that the underlying and, perhaps, most important goal of Prohibition was as a tool of assimilation used by the “old stock” native-born Americans against the newer immigrant population of the United States. This nativism can be seen at the national level through the activities of the Prohibition temperance organizations and various dry movements and at the local level, in the state of Wisconsin. Wisconsin, a state historically and contemporarily known for both a thriving immigrant culture and as a leader the beer industry saw a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan and local citizens groups with a mind on educating the immigrants that had settled in the state to the “American” lifestyle during the years of Prohibition.

¹ “The Constitution of the United States,” Amendment 18.

Introduction

When a concerned citizen wrote a letter in 1915 to the Immigration Restriction League, saying that President Wilson was “between the devil and the deep sea,” he was complaining about the rumor of the President choosing to veto a strict, new immigration bill.² He simply meant that President Wilson had a dilemma. His observance that the President would make some party unhappy with his decision, no matter what his vote was, was an accurate one. He could veto the bill, satisfying immigrants and angering “patriots” across the country, or, pass the bill and restrict immigration, giving in to the demands of the upper class.

Immigration was a highly contested issue in 1915, when this letter was written, as was the issue of Prohibition, the illegalization of alcohol. The metaphor of dilemma was an apt one for President Wilson’s option of veto, but it was an even more fitting one to describe America in general, in 1915; caught between. The fight for Prohibition and the fight against immigration were foremost in the minds of many in the early 1900s. The real “Americans,” as they saw themselves, attempted to use Prohibition as a weapon against immigrants, forcing the undesired faction of the country to assimilate to less ethnic ways, to become true “Americans”.

It seems that “American” in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the times leading up to and during Prohibition, were more clearly defined in the minds of the people of that time than we can interpret today. It was not just a question of where one was born, as there were many American-born children on immigrant parents that were not considered to be any closer to “American” than their parents or grandparents. It seemed as if there were really only two options to be in that

² “Seq. 2”, Immigration Restriction League (U.S.); Records, 1893-1921. Series I, Correspondence to and from the IRL; B, Circular letters; Circular letters: 1915-1919. MS Am 2245, folder 1048. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL.Hough:988418>, (accessed November 2, 2012).

time, those who were American and those who were not. Wealth, status, class and language are all examples of things that definitely played a role in determining what one was, but it was not exclusively these. As can be seen from the attempts at assimilating the immigrants using the Prohibition movement, the difference in cultures was a worry for the old stock “WASP” Americans. A loss of control could certainly be a major force in pushing the “true Americans” to try and force the immigrants to conform to their standards. What being an “American” means is a difficult question, as it is an ever revolving definition, but being an “American” during the Prohibition era something that was clear enough to the people that lived through that time.

The meaning of that term is a question still today; however, it was the thought of many that it was definitively not what the immigrants were in 1915. Traditions, values and beliefs clashed as the country sought a way to live peacefully together. The desire to control the ever increasing number of immigrants in the country and the staggering amount of alcohol consumed, or more importantly, the effects it produced, was the dilemma that defined decades spanning the late 1800s to the early 1900s, when immigration reached its peak and alcohol met its demise, if only for a short time. How does a country deal with those two immense challenges? What solution could solve the problems immigrants supposedly presented to the American ideal, as well as the trouble alcohol added?

As I argue in this paper, these “problems” of the onslaught of immigrants arriving constantly from Europe and the thought that alcohol had too much control on the country, both through the breweries created by immigrants and the challenges alcohol created in the immigrants, had “true Americans” were worried. They faced the problem of assimilating the unruly immigrant class into their idea of American society. The old-stock Americans used the Prohibition movement as a way to assimilate the immigrants at both the national level throughout

the United States and at the local level, as seen through the evidence from the state of Wisconsin in later sections. These “true Americans” created the dry movements and used them against the immigrant class, attempting to remove the last vestiges of their foreign traditional cultures by abolishing the saloons and educating the “aliens” to the idyllic American lifestyle.

And so, America stood, trapped between two forces. The “sin” of the immoral, corrupt foreigners; the “demon rum” that had ruined so many lives. The foreign masses drifting across Atlantic waters, landing on eastern shores; the seemingly endless ocean of drink that consumed the nation and her people. These two monumental forces created a dilemma for the United States, a problem that “true” citizens of the country, the real “Americans,” fought a losing battle to control. The country was in crisis; a crisis of how to control so many foreign peoples, while trying to conform them to the American ideal, when those same peoples held very “un-American” qualities, including a tradition of alcohol consumption. America had a dilemma; she was caught between the devil and the deep sea.

Background - The “Not-So-Noble Experiment”:

When Prohibition was ratified in 1919, it was a hard won success of decades of work by forces that succeeded, at least to some degree, in what had been believed as an impossible feat. Named the “Noble Experiment” in its day, and remaining so throughout history, Prohibition became the 18th Amendment to the Constitution. It was called an experiment because it was the largest attempt ever in U.S. history to regulate personal choice and behavior, and the only amendment to limit personal freedom, instead of expanding it and “noble” because it was touted as having noble intentions of purifying American society and battling the negative aspects of drink, like abuse and poverty. Prohibition became law on January 17th, 1920, making the sale, manufacture, and transportation of any alcohol over .5% illegal, except those used for medical and religious purposes.³⁴ While consuming alcohol itself was never against the law, Prohibition did make it nearly impossible to drink legally. If no alcohol was being made or sold, there should not be any available to consume. Speakeasies, bootleggers, and moonshiners are all mementos of this Prohibition era, when making and obtaining alcohol meant illegal and/or dangerous activities. These are highly romanticized aspects of the era that hold a fascination in modern American culture and are almost household names, but are not going to be discussed here.

There were three waves of prohibition legislature that pushed the actual 18th Amendment through to law. In the 1840s, Evangelical Protestants originated crusades against drinking as part of the Second Great Revival.⁵ Supporters of the revival spoke out against drunken fathers and how drink affected family life. The second wave of prohibition legislature occurred during the

³ Andrew Sinclair, *Prohibition, the era of excess* with a pref. by Richard Hofstadter (Boston: Little Brown, 1962) 25.

⁴ “The Constitution of the United States,” Amendment 18.

⁵ Jack S. Blocker, *American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989) 64.

1880s, when Evangelicals aimed to pass local and state prohibition laws. They wanted referendums to be held at the state level to secure prohibition amendments for much the same reasons as forty years prior, but with a more serious and permanent result. There was slightly less focus on the religious agenda, which made the argument for less drinking on moral standings, and significantly more focus on achieving some political consequences; making *laws* for prohibition. Accordingly, this second wave saw the formation of the Prohibition Party in 1869⁶, the oldest existing third party in the U.S., which opposed the sale and consumption of alcohol and was a fundamental part of the temperance movement. This wave also saw the creation of action groups such as The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1874⁷ and the Anti-Saloon League in 1893.⁸ Both of these groups, along with the Party itself, were major forces in the fight for Prohibition to come.

The third and final wave of legislation was the push for national prohibition. In 1907, the state of Georgia passed a prohibition law that affected the entire state as a whole and not just individual towns and counties. It was the beginning of a wave of change that resulted in two thirds of all states in the United States creating some form of prohibition law by 1917. In ten short years, the work of these prohibition advocates and the general reform-minded environment of the U.S. had succeeded in turning the tide of history towards the demise of alcohol, if only for a short time.

⁶ Prohibition Party National Committee – History, <http://www.ourcampaigns.com/ContainerHistory.html?ContainerID=57786> (accessed October 21, 2012).

⁷ Jed Dannenbaum, *Drink and Disorder: Temperance Reform in Cincinnati from the Washingtonian Revival to the WCTU* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984) 22.

⁸ K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) 34.

The Anti-Saloon League made the first move towards their goal of national prohibition in 1913. They had called for a constitutional amendment.⁹ This may seem to have been counterproductive to their goal, to try and force something so large so early, but an amendment, while being harder to achieve, would be harder to change later. A series of smaller prohibition laws made the Anti-Saloon League surer of their success in reaching a nation level. Congress passed the Webb-Kenyon Act in 1913, forbidding the transport of alcohol into state with dry laws. When the United States entered WWI in 1917, the Conscription Act was passed, banning sale of alcohol near a military base. Closely related to the Conscription Act was The Wartime Prohibition Act, passed in 1918, which forbid the sale and manufacture of beverages with greater than 2.75% alcohol content. This act, passed before the ratification of the 18th Amendment, was meant to be temporary and to save grain for the war effort.¹⁰

The dry movement¹¹ gained popularity and support throughout the country and eventually began making great strides towards serious legislature aimed at illegalizing alcohol. The National Prohibition Act was passed on October 28, 1919. It was commonly called The Volstead Act and it established the legal definition of “intoxicating” liquor, essentially alcohol content greater than 0.5%. It also defined what the penalties were for producing liquor outside the designations the Volstead Act set and prohibited the sale of alcohol.¹² With the Volstead Act in place, Prohibition had gained the support of much of the country and was quickly ratified that same year and then passed into law in 1920.

⁹ Andrew Sinclair, *Prohibition, the era of excess* with a pref. by Richard Hofstadter (Boston: Little Brown, 1962) 38.

¹⁰ William D. Miller, *Pretty Bubbles in the Air: America in 1919*. (University of Illinois Press, 1991) 151.

¹¹ The supporters of the Prohibition movement were called the “drys” or “dries” because they advocated “drying up” the country by illegalizing alcohol consumption and production. Opposite of them was the “wet” movement, called the “wets”, which advocated anti-Prohibition and fought against the passing of the 18th Amendment and continued to oppose the “drys” after the passage of the law. “Wets” and “drys” continued to champion their separate causes until the country was swayed to end Prohibition, a success for the “wets”.

¹² Bob Skilnik, *Beer: A History of Brewing in Chicago*, (Fort Lee, NJ: Baracade Books, 2006) 47.

Such a law changed the course of the nation's history, its economics, and its culture, but it had taken many decades of work towards this goal of reform. The idea of temperance was not unique to the early 1900s. As long as the United States has been a country, and before then, there had been efforts to moderate the consumption of alcohol and the effects that came with it. Drunkenness, while not always a punishable crime by law, was regarded as immoral and dangerous in most towns. Abuse, neglect, poverty, and abandonment could all be associated with drinking. One of the WCTU's greater arguments for the end to alcohol consumption was the image of the drunken father beating his wife and children, of spending the money meant to feed, clothe and house a family on the "evil" drink.¹³ With the Progressive Era not quite ended, the fervor of reform and purification that had swept the nation from the 1890s to the 1920s was still heady enough to those seeking change that the general atmosphere of the country was beneficial to the idea of a full scale temperance movement.

What the temperance leagues were known for was their unapologetic hatred of the problems that came from consuming alcohol: the abuse, the poverty, the negative effect on family life and values, etc., but also of the establishment of the "saloon." However, the saloon represented more than just a place to drink and gather to the new immigrants of the United States. It was a place where they could congregate, in their own neighborhoods, with people from their own ethnic backgrounds. They could speak their own language; they could enjoy their traditional food and drink. These immigrants far from "the old country" could simply connect with others just like them, beyond the boundaries of workplaces, where many cultural backgrounds might merge together, or beyond the home, where only family could connect. The saloons were cultural centers that promoted the freedom the immigrants sought in order to hold

¹³ Anti-Saloon League – History "The Saloon Must Go". <http://www.wpl.lib.oh.us/AntiSaloon/history/> (accessed September 29, 2012).

on to their traditional beliefs and values and, therefore, it seems that Prohibition, with its dual emphasis of prohibiting the alcohol served in the saloons and the underlying nativist tendencies of “Americanizing” immigrants, would strive to abolish the saloon once and for all.

The nativism that was shown by the movement against these strongholds of ethnic culture points to a very definite display of discrimination, using the law of Prohibition against the immigrants of the United States through the abolishment of the saloon. When Prohibition was passed in 1919, it was understood that the law was created to apply to all Americans, regardless of race, class or physical geography. It was a law for the entire country and every citizen was to be governed by it. However, research into the sociological aspect of the Prohibition era has emerged with the sense that the underlying and, perhaps, most important goal of Prohibition was as a tool of assimilation used by the “old stock” native-born Americans against the newer immigrant population of the United States and in addition, and in particular to this discussion, of the state of Wisconsin, as a state strongly connected to both immigrant culture and the beer industry.

Historiography: Nativism and Discrimination in the Prohibition Era

When a more sociological or ethnocultural view of the Prohibition Era is taken, before ratification and after, themes of nativism and discrimination become more apparent. Rural versus urban came out as a leading subject when researching the Prohibition Era in general. Rural people saw the urban cities as sinful and criminal, due in part to the actual general abundance of alcohol still available in the cities as opposed to the country districts. Alcohol was easier to obtain and consume in the cities than the less populated countryside, where citizens sometimes had to resort to making their own spirits or purchasing it from the neighbors that did. The “dry” people in the rural parts of the country, as they were few who took the illegal recourse of home-brewing, saw the crime and morally corrupt behavior of the urban cities and attributed it to the massive immigrant population that made their livings from the industrial nature of the city. Europeans, to whom drinking was many times an integral part of their culture, could be seen as an opposition to the pro-Prohibition rural people, as a danger to the “dry” values.

This battle of “drys” and “wets” was not just a generalization of “rural vs. urban” peoples, although that was key. Religion was also a factor. With Anglo-Saxons being the wealthier, more established communities, their pietistic Protestant religion¹⁴ held as the country’s dominant religion, not in number perhaps, but in power. Therefore, as much of the immigrant population was Roman Catholic or, to a lesser extent, liturgical Protestant¹⁵, the law of Prohibition brought about by these Protestant beliefs favored the Protestants. It was a law created by Protestants to favor Protestants, who believed in little alcohol consumption.

¹⁴ Richard J. Jensen. *The winning of the Midwest: social and political conflict, 1888-1896*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) Chapter 5.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Many instances can be seen where nativism brought about the start of Prohibition. The Ku Klux Klan became supporters of the cause from very early on. Southerners in general were in favor of the bill, but the KKK endorsed the movement as yet another way to show their racism and discrimination towards the recent immigrants of the country. As advocates of anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant agendas, Prohibition might have seemed the perfect cause to support.

“Lillian Sedwick served as state superintendent and county director of the young people's branch of the WCTU. She later became an important WKKK leader and other women followed the same path... Elizabeth Tyler, one of the first leaders of the WKKK, was also active in the Anti-Saloon League.”¹⁶ It advocated much of what the KKK claimed they stood for: family values, strong religiousness, and American ideals.

There has been a shift over time on what scholars write about in regards to the issue of Prohibition. Initially, discussions of the alcohol problem at hand, the excessive drinking and how people reacted to the problem (forming temperance movements, anti-saloon leagues) and how they dealt with the law after it took effect (speakeasies, crime, bootlegging), were the subjects of much of the writing. In the time of Prohibition, 1919-1933, there were many scientific studies completed to determine just how alcohol affected the human body and much study done on the subject of drunkenness, as that was the leading concern tied to alcohol consumption. Afterwards, scholars started to delve into the origin behind the problem. From there, writing on the conflicts surrounding the formation of the Prohibition ideal emerged and authors were seen putting Prohibition into the perspective of the Americanization of the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. These writings focus on the topic of “American-ness” during the

¹⁶ Kathleen M. Blee. *Women of the Klan: racism and gender in the 1920s*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 44.

Prohibition era and how the people of the country responded to outside forces “intruding” upon their set of familiar values and beliefs.

There are a few authors who have written works considered by many in the history field to be great sources for evidence of the Prohibition Era. Andrew Sinclair and his book *Prohibition: The Era of Excess* is a highly regarded work on the Prohibition movement and America during the Prohibition Era. It can be used to examine the history of the movement and factual information on the laws and practices that made up Prohibition. Most of the literature now available about the Prohibition movement itself, the different perspectives on the movement or even books that focus more closely on a single aspect of Prohibition times are likely to have used Sinclair in their writing, if not just their preliminary research. His book is considered to be a classic on the theme of Prohibition and is seen in the footnotes of many sources studied for this paper.

An ethnocultural view of Prohibition is a more modern take on the movement than was previously studied right after the end of Prohibition. Sociological takes on discrimination and how they played into the era were the focus of some of the articles and books were surveyed for this discussion, but Michael A. Lerner’s *Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City* proved to be the most useful in looking at how prohibition was seen as essentially a conflict between “Americans” and immigrants and their values.¹⁷

Due to the mass influx of immigrants to the urban cities of the U.S., many individuals in the Prohibition movement associated the crime and morally corrupt behavior of the cities of America with their large immigrant populations; immigrants with less than “American” ways,

¹⁷ Michael A. Lerner, *Dry Manhattan: prohibition in New York City*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007) 54.

with their different cultures that sometimes promoted drinking. As a sort of resistance to the change in American demographics that could be seen from the influx of immigrants in the country, many prohibitionists contributed to the idea of “nativism.” They endorsed the notion that America was made great as a result of its white Anglo-Saxon ancestry, which in turn fostered xenophobic feelings towards urban immigrant communities and cultures, who typically argued in favor of abolishing prohibition.

Tied into the ethnocultural view of prohibition conflict is that of ethno-religious conflict. Susan Harding addresses this in her article “American Protestant Moralism and the Secular Imagination: From Temperance to the Moral Majority”.¹⁸ According to Harding, Prohibition can be viewed as the majority, the Protestants, making a law that favored them and their lifestyles and exploited the lifestyles of Roman Catholics, the immigrants. So Prohibition became a conflict of religions with Protestant pro-prohibition advocates and anti-prohibition Roman Catholics battling out their separate ideals and creating a culture clash of extreme proportions. Protestant churches, along Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches, were in favor of prohibiting alcohol, while Roman Catholic and German Lutheran communities were not. Harding shows, through the evidence of these churches and which congregations supported which side of the argument, that Prohibition, and American politics on some level, became a religious issue.

This religious conflict mirrors the conflict of urban vs. rural and of immigrants vs. “Americans” because the Protestants were almost always the rural Americans that discriminated against the mainly Roman Catholic immigrants, like the Irish and Italians, and the Lutheran

¹⁸ Susan F. Harding, “American Protestant Moralism and the Secular Imagination: From Temperance to the Moral Majority.” *Social Research*. Vol. 76, no. 4., 2009.

Germans, to whom alcohol consumption was not only a part of their culture, but in some fashion, part of their religion too. Catholics consumed wine as part of their official religious service, partaking of the blood of Christ during Mass. Prohibition could easily be seen as an attack on culture for the immigrants and descendants of immigrants that were told that their religion would have to change in order to coincide with new laws created by Protestant (non-Catholic) lawmakers.

Taking a slightly different view on the history of Prohibition, Ira. M Wasserman, in his article "Prohibition and Ethnocultural Conflict: The Missouri Prohibition Referendum of 1918," states that by examining data collected from Missouri during a vote on Prohibition and testing the multiple theories of the origin of Prohibition, the prohibition conflict was actually not an urban-rural struggle.¹⁹ He believed it was an ethno-religious and political conflict between two differing life-styles, that of the old American stock who disliked the unregulated usage of alcohol and the new immigrants, who happened to live mainly in the urban city centers, seeing Prohibition as an attack on their cultural main-stays. Wasserman actually agrees with some of what the other authors in the field had concluded. He sees the validity in the idea of the conflicting views of Protestants and Catholics, of "Americans" and immigrants, but didn't believe that it came from a clash between rural and urban communities. Wasserman writes:

"The prohibition conflict was not an urban-rural struggle. Opposition to prohibition was highest in large urban centers (e.g., New York, San Francisco), but this high opposition was caused by the large immigrant populations in these centers, and by the dependence of these urban centers on trade and commerce, which was facilitated by alcohol consumption. The prohibition struggle was also not merely a Protestant-Catholic battle, but was more related to the cultural orientations of various immigrant groups, with a large proportion of them being Roman Catholic."²⁰

¹⁹ Ira M. Wasserman, "Prohibition and Ethnocultural Conflict: The Missouri Prohibition Referendum of 1918." *Social Science Quarterly* 70, no. 4 (1989): 886-901.

²⁰ Wasserman, "Prohibition and Ethnocultural Conflict", 898.

The data from the Missouri referendum proved that St. Louis, an urban center, was a major component in the opposition to the Prohibition bill. However, this was not based on an urban vs. rural conflict or even a Protestant vs. Catholic conflict, but instead that it is coincidence that the urban centers that oppose Prohibition have high rates of immigrants with Roman Catholic backgrounds. He believes the cities opposed Prohibition more on the grounds of trade and commerce issues. Upon further research into St. Louis itself, we find that the city was a foremost leader in the brewing industry and so Prohibition would have been detrimental to the economy of the city. The ethnocultural conflict Wasserman insists upon seems to dispute what some scholars believe Prohibition was essentially caused by.

For the purposes of this discussion, all of the theories on the cause of Prohibition (rural vs. urban, immigrant vs. “American”, Protestant vs. Catholic, etc.) fit into the view that the dry movement acted upon its nativist feelings towards immigrants and used the act of Prohibition in order to both suppress the ethnicity of the immigrants and to assimilate them to American culture. Wasserman insists that, while these theories are true, it is only to the extent that immigrants happened to live primarily in cities and they happened to be Catholic. He asserts that the religion of the immigrants was just a part of the greater ethnocultural struggle taking place, it is little more than a coincidence that the immigrants in question happen to be predominantly Roman Catholic.²¹ Most authors that support the theory that nativism against immigrants was a major portion of Prohibition would disagree that the religion of these immigrants was a deciding factor of the Protestant “Americans” in creating the Prohibition law, the desire to deprive the Roman Catholics of their traditional customs.

²¹ Ibid.

There is much material written on the various action groups that were formed in the Prohibition era. Many have their own websites still today that contain information on the group itself, like histories and statistics, as well as primary sources kept from the early 1920's. The website for the Women's Christian Temperance Union was a fascinating time capsule full of digitized artifacts such as fliers they had handed out denouncing alcohol and various slogans and pamphlets that give us a better understanding of how this particular group, and, in turn, other similar temperance groups, caught the nation's attention and gained their favor towards a success for an unlikely cause. The website detailing the history of the Anti-Saloon League is much the same as the WCTU's, but is perhaps even more relevant to the topic of nativism in Prohibition. Their history is directly related to the topic of closing the "saloon" forever and the website gives a great amount of information on the group, along with the various artifacts left from the campaign to close the saloons that one can view.²² These groups are fundamental to the discussion of nativism used within the Prohibition movement and how the "American-ness" of the country's older citizens clashed inherently with the "ethnic" minorities.

²² Anti-Saloon League – History "The Saloon Must Go". <http://www.wpl.lib.oh.us/AntiSaloon/history/> (accessed September 29, 2012).

Prohibition and Nativism in the United States

Immigration in the U.S.

It is necessary to discuss immigration into the U.S. overall before narrowing down to how true “Americans”, as they saw themselves, chose to try and assimilate those that were foreign born. The level of immigration and the general feeling towards foreigners played a role in how the country responded to Prohibition and how the dry movement used Prohibition

Between 1880 and 1920, the United States took in more than 24 million immigrants. The level of immigration into the United States had increased steadily enough from the late 1800s to the early 1900s that the citizens of the U.S. found it necessary to create laws that would restrict the flow of immigrants arriving. There were some laws created prior to the time of Prohibition, such as the Immigration Acts of 1901 and 1917, but specifically the Immigration Act of 1924 was the bill that was created during the time of Prohibition and can be seen as a reflection of the country’s general feeling towards immigration. Also called the Johnson-Reed Act, it included the National Origins Act and the Asian Exclusion Act, and limited the annual number of immigrants who could be admitted from any country to 2% of the number of people from a given country who already resided in the United States in 1890. This was a decrease from the 3% that the Immigration Act of 1921 had previously set, further narrowing the total number of immigrants allowed.

This Act was a direct response to the desire of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant “Americans” to preserve their way of life, which they saw as being threatened with so many foreigners. It restricted Europeans arriving from Southern and Eastern Europe and completely excluded immigrants from Asia: Middle Easterners, East Asians and Indians, all of whom they

saw as ethnically inferior. In all of its parts, the most basic purpose of the 1924 Immigration Act was to preserve the ideal of American homogeneity.

Senator David A. Reed, a Republican senator from Pennsylvania and the co-author of the Immigration Act of 1924, showed the nativist attitude held by those who considered themselves to be true “Americans” towards the idea that America needed to be selective in which immigrants could immigrate to the United States. He blended the idea of trying to preserve the “American” ideal and the discrimination often shown to immigrants perfectly when, in 1924, he wrote in a New York Times article about the purposes of the Immigration Act of 1924:

"America realizes that she is no longer a desert country in need of reinforcements to her population. She realizes that her present numbers and their descendants are amply sufficient to bring out her natural resources at a reasonable rate of progress...She realizes that unless immigration is numerically restrained she will be overwhelmed by a vast migration of peoples from the war-stricken countries of Europe. Such a migration... would increase mightily our problem of assimilating the foreign-born who are already here. Out of these thoughts have risen the general demands for limitation of the number of immigrants who may enter this country.

There has come about a general realization of the fact that the races of men who have been coming to us in recent years are wholly dissimilar to the native-born Americans... America was beginning also to smart under the irritation of her 'foreign colonies'-- those groups of aliens, either in city slums or in country districts, who speak a foreign language and live a foreign life, and who want neither to learn our common speech nor to share our common life. From all this has grown the conviction that it was best for America that our incoming immigrants should hereafter be of the same races as those of us who are already here, so that each year's immigration should so far as possible be a miniature America, resembling in national origins the persons who are already settled in our country. . . ." ²³

These may be the words of one man, but he spoke for many Americans. Senator Reed's words clearly showed how Americans viewed the immigrants coming into their country. He was harsh and blunt in his wording that the immigrants that were arriving were not the “right” kind of people for America. It also dealt with the question of who was considered an “American”. Senator Reed referenced the fact many times (American, our, us) that he and the rest of the “native-born Americans” needed to restrict immigration for their own nativist reasons. There

²³ Reed, David A. "America of the Melting Pot Comes to End."

was also an instance in the article where the Senator used the term “assimilation” when he spoke about a problem they had with foreigners. That, along with the idea of wanting a “miniature America” from the incoming immigrants, was just a small mention of a core problem that was



occurring during the time of Prohibition. This article was written in 1924, at the height of Prohibition and most certainly a victorious time for the dry movement. In the photo on the page, immigrants are holding signs in the street for money. This was part of a eugenics display in

New York City. Eugenics was a bio-social science that aimed at creating a more perfect human race by promoting the more desired traits in procreation. As can be inferred by these signs, the immigrants that could not read, could not fend for themselves, drank to survive and were prone to crime and insanity did not possess the qualities that the eugenics scientists deemed worthy of passing along to future generations. This incident speaks to the idea that these immigrants, while certainly having normal lives and families they loved, were at the same time far enough away from the “American” ideal in their lives that they could be blatantly put on display as the truly undesirable race.

Anti-Immigrant and Prohibition Organizations: Nativism Ties

It is also necessary to show the connection between those who advocated anti-immigrant policies and action to those that fought for the dry movement, in order to show that Prohibition was a tool to assimilate immigrants into “American” life.

It was no secret that temperance groups had strong nativist feelings. Groups like WCTU and the Anti-Saloon League hid these feelings behind an innocent message of trying to do “good”, to make the lives of the immigrants better. The conditions that the majority of the urban immigrants lived in were horrible. Many families lived together in small spaces, hygiene was extremely lacking and, without money, many dealt with hunger and cold. The message of the various temperance movements to the immigrant population at large was that Prohibition was created to benefit them. Their lives would improve considerably with the passing of the 18th Amendment. Reformers argued that the illegalization of alcohol, many of the serious and devastating problems immigrants faced would be alleviated. Fathers would no longer use their entire pay at the nearby saloon, husbands would not beat their wives anymore and there would be less crime and poverty in the immigrant neighborhoods. It made it seem as though these temperance groups were benevolent helpers that only wanted to improve the lives of the poorer immigrants by outlawing the evil drink that made their lives that much harsher and by abolishing the establishments that served the drink, the saloon. This was an easy idea for the old stock Americans to believe, because they witnessed the lives of the poorer immigrant class and they knew that alcohol was a negative influence on many as well, but the notion that this could possibly all be “cured” with the abolishment of said alcohol was unfounded. It would be only a small step towards “fixing” the major problems that immigrants faced every day.

While the temperance organizations hid their deeper nativist feelings behind a façade of social reform, anti-immigrant groups, as was displayed earlier with the words of Senator Reed and the Immigration Acts themselves, were not so subtle in their designs on the change awaiting immigrants’ lifestyles. Groups like the Immigration Restriction League and the Ku Klux Klan were much more unsympathetic to the plight of the immigrant class. They did nothing to hide

the blatant racism that could be seen in both their actions and their words. Letters to the Immigration Restriction League from citizens were not unique in their phrasing. Examples can be seen in one letter here. They write, “Do we want these people? We do with restriction and reservation. We should take the best...those who will assimilate and with whom we wish to assimilate.”²⁴

Nor was such an extreme thought singular to only a few in the country. Generations of native-born “Americans” faced this new era of immigration with an attitude of bigotry. The following quote comes from another letter sent to the Immigration Restriction League, but with a direct quote from the President of the United States in 1924, President Woodrow Wilson:

“...there came multitudes of men of the lowest class **** and men of the meaner sort ****, men out of the ranks where there was neither kill nor energy nor any initiative nor quick intelligence; and they came in numbers which increased from year to year, as if the countries of the south of Europe were disburdening themselves of the more sordid and hapless element of their population, the men whose standards of life and work were such as American workmen had never dreamed of before.”²⁵

These new immigrants were seen as vulgar and sordid in the eyes of both the dry movement and the anti-immigration groups, forcing a conflict between the two monumental forces that appeared in the early 1900’s. Problems with immigration and problems with alcohol were seen as the two most important factors in the lives of early 20th century “Americans”. It was only a matter of time before the two opponents to immigrants worked together and it came as no surprise. Temperance groups, with their nativist notions, were closely tied to anti-immigration organizations. World War I had played a role in garnering anti-German prejudice in

²⁴ “Seq. 2”, Immigration Restriction League (U.S.); Records, 1893-1921. Series I, Correspondence to and from the IRL; B, Circular letters; Circular letters: 1915-1919. MS Am 2245, folder 1048. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL.Hough:988418>, (accessed November 2, 2012).

²⁵ “Seq. 2”, Immigration Restriction League (U.S.); Records, 1893-1921. Series I, Correspondence to and from the IRL; B, Circular letters; Circular letters: 1915-1919. MS Am 2245, folder 1048. Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL.Hough:988418>, (accessed November 2, 2012). Asteriks in original

America, but the rest of the immigrant population was just as discriminated against with the action of the temperance and anti-immigration groups. In the eyes of the old-stock “Americans”, all of the immigrants without Anglo-Saxon or Nordic lineage were considered beneath the ideals of America and living outside the American lifestyle.

The Ku Klux Klan, one of the most recognizable names in history for its hatred of foreigners, among many others, made a huge resurgence in the early 1900s, particularly the 1920s. As Prohibition started around the same time, it is believed by many to be a major factor in the revival of the KKK. As it happens, “the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) strongly supported Prohibition and its strict enforcement”. The KKK, as a notorious anti-immigration force, was also a major advocate of the Prohibition bill because it had far reaching effects on immigrants and culture. The Ku Klux Klan actually funded WCTU charters in some areas where the Klan was prevalent and well-funded itself. “The Klan made large financial donations to the WCTU in many communities. Similarly, the WCTU often lent its support to the Klan's anti-alcohol activities.”²⁶ They saw the advantage of having the Prohibition law in place and wanted to help sustain the dry movement until it could reach its victory. “The Klan's resurgence in the 1920s partially stemmed from their role as the extreme militant wing of the temperance movement. In Arkansas, as elsewhere, the newly formed Ku Klux Klan marked bootleggers as one of the groups that needed to be purged from a morally upright community. In 1922, 200 Klansmen torched saloons that had sprung up in Union County in the wake of the oil discovery boom. The national Klan office ended up in Dallas, Texas, but Little Rock was the home of the Women of the Ku Klux Klan. The first head of this female auxiliary was a former president of the Arkansas

²⁶ Kathleen M. Blee. *Women of the Klan: racism and gender in the 1920s*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 27.

WCTU."²⁷ The support that the KKK, and to a lesser extent the Immigration Restriction League, gave to the dry movement and its various advocacy groups showed a connection between anti-immigration groups and pro-Prohibition groups, making the claim that Prohibition worked towards assimilating immigrants into American culture more valid.

Saloons: “Clinging to Ethnicity”

When the immigrants came to America, they brought with them their traditions, customs and cultures; everything from food and clothes to languages and religions. Their drinking culture might have seemed like a minor thing next to all these other cultural aspects, but it was still a part of their ethnicity and they brought it to America the same way they brought all rest of their culture. It is important to remember that drinking alcohol, albeit in the form of beer or other lower alcohol content varieties, was considered almost necessary both long before and very recently up till the time of Prohibition came about. Water and milk were often foregone in favor of alcohol because water could be easily polluted and milk could cause disease until the time of pasteurization in the 1860s.²⁸

While the “saloon” was the not the first public drinking establishment in America, it was one of the prominent features of the Progressive Era, when the fight for Prohibition really gained momentum. “The workingman’s club”, as the saloon was often referred to, was a place where the immigrant working class, and in some cases just the general lower class, would frequent outside of their time at various jobs.²⁹ The idea of separating work and leisure came about from

²⁷ Ben Johnson. “John Barleycorn Must die! The War Against Drink in Arkansas: 1920-1950”. (Little Rock, AR: Old State House Museum exhibit). (oldstatehouse.com/exhibits/archive/john-barleycorn/default.asp) and (oldstatehouse.com/exhibits/archive/john-barleycorn/1920-1950.asp).

²⁸ Charles W. Bamforth., *Beer: health and nutrition*. (Oxford: Blackwell Science, 2004) 2.

²⁹ Jon M. Kingsdale., "The "Poor Man's Club": Social Functions of the Urban Working-Class Saloon." *American Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (1973): 472-489. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2711634> (accessed December 3, 2012).

the Industrial Revolution where immigrants coming from mainly agricultural backgrounds in European countries were forced to live out their days by a clock and a schedule, when such had never been the case for many used to working farmland, where time was measured with daylight and labor and social intercourse were intermingled. Now that the immigrants had to separate their social interaction from their labor, the saloon took on an even more important role.

Because so many of the immigrants to the U.S. were, unlike the established citizens of America, poor and Roman Catholic, they experienced discrimination and resisted the assimilation that was expected of them upon arrival into the country. Because of the intolerance that they faced from the native-born Americans from the beginning, many believed that the immigrants resisted assimilating into mainstream American life and, instead, held on that much more to their own individual cultures. This translated into holding on to their drinking cultures the same way.

In the face of the intolerance that has been stated previously many times and specified by words and actions in this discussion, the saloon became a place of freedom for the immigrant class. None of the old stock, native-born “Americans” frequented these establishments; these were almost solely for the leisure of the immigrants and the working class, many of whom were poor and foreign-born as well. These saloons were looked down upon with increasing disfavor and suspicion by wealthier Americans. They were seen as immoral and dirty and the people who patronized them even more so. Saloons were thought to be the places where you would not find respectable men, in the eyes of society.

Usually men were the patrons found in the saloons, spending their time there before or after leaving their jobs, hence the name “the workingman’s” place. While the saloon was

considered to be a part of the masculine sphere, it was also a place of culture for an entire neighborhood. Women were most commonly found at home in the private sphere, tending to children, the household and any male boarders that the family had staying with them. To supplement income, some families would rent out extra rooms in a house to male boarders, as many of the “immigrants” coming to America were single men striking out on their own to try and make a living, connecting with established family members already in the States or setting up for their own families back home to come join them. This was an effect of the industrial nature of the cities or towns in America.

Saloons were thought of as strongholds of ethnicity. They were places that the immigrant could continue their culture in the way that they wished to. Their days were filled with trying to live in a country that actively worked to change them to fit a generic mold of “Americanness.” The saloon was so much more than just a “bar” as it would be thought of today. The social significance of the saloon cannot be stressed enough. It was a place where parties, weddings, and funerals were held; a place where an immigrant could speak in his own language, eat his traditional food and drink as he and his fellow people wanted. The saloon was the lifeblood of a neighborhood. It was a meeting place when almost all were too poor to have a living room in their homes. It was a place to socialize with others from your home country. The saloon was a last holdout of cultural ethnicity in the lives of most of the immigrants in the U.S. They conformed to much of what American society expected of them, in what jobs they worked, in what pay they received, etc., but the saloon was a place that they could still go and feel like they had never left the old country.

With the introduction of Prohibition to America in 1920, this last haven for ethnic culture was threatened. The creation of Prohibition was at least in part meant to assimilate the

immigrants of the U.S. It was a law created by wealthy, white Protestants who did not have strong ties to drinking as part of their culture. As Michael Lerner argues, “While purporting to advance a social agenda that would apply to all Americans, it had in fact promoted a campaign that singled out the urban, ethnic working class. It had done so not out of noble sentiments but out of distrust and fear of those who did not fit in to the dry crusade’s vision of America.”³⁰ Immigrants, like Germans or Slavs, on the other hand, had a strong drinking culture that they engaged in almost daily. As such, immigrants violated the new Prohibition Laws more so than any other group. A newspaper in Washington state posted an article entitled “Foreign-Born Violators of Prohibition Laws”, where a Judge Neteror, in Spokane, WA, in 1923, is quoted as having said “About 90 per cent of the violations of the prohibition laws that come under my observation are by men not born in our country; they do not seem to appreciate or respect our laws.”³¹ This is a prime example of how the Prohibition laws affected the immigrant class. 90% of the violations of the dry laws was an obvious example of why the dry laws seemed to be targeted at controlling the immigrant class and helped confirm the belief of the old stock Americans that these immigrants were definitely not “American.” Breaking the Prohibition laws as often as the immigrants did showed the rest of the country in favor of Prohibition that the immigrants weren’t interested in conforming to the American ideal because they could not seem to respect the laws of the country that had taken them in. The “American” Protestants did not violate the laws nearly as much for various reasons. However, this could be because they were not targeted nearly as much as the immigrants were within the law. They had created the laws to favor themselves, the people wealthy enough to stock alcohol before the law took effect in 1920

³⁰ Michael A. Lerner, *Dry Manhattan: prohibition in New York City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007) 126.

³¹ “Foreign – Born Violators of Prohibition Laws.” *The Spokesman-Review*, April 22, 1923, final edition, in Google News Archives (accessed October 17, 2012).

and wealthy enough to purchase the bootleg liquor available for a hefty fee and to gain access to the speakeasies seen in the bigger cities. The poorer, working class immigrants had neither the time nor the money to drink wisely to escape the law, and so, were more often convicted of breaking Prohibition law.

WISCONSIN

Immigration in Wisconsin

Wisconsin, as a state located in the Middle West of the America, did not illicit nearly as intense a response for Prohibition and nativism as urban centers like New York and Chicago did. The bigger cities, with their abundant saloons and millions of immigrant peoples, with more arriving every day, drew the focus of the Anti-Saloon League and other Prohibition and anti-immigration forces more than anywhere else. These places were seen as the most in need of liberation from the evil clutches of the “demon drink” and the violence of the uncontrollable foreign born “aliens”, as they were called. These cities were the target of the greatest efforts to expand the dry movement before the ratification of the 18th Amendment. They were seen as the biggest challenge to the fight to outlaw alcohol and the ultimate goal to win over to the “dry” side.

That is not to say that there was no opposition to the immigrants that came to Wisconsin. Nativism still existed. If anything, the strength behind the dry movement and the anti-immigration sentiment in the country was really shown by the reactions that Prohibition created in Wisconsin, a state that had both large amounts of immigrants and participation in the brewing industry. Wisconsin was unique from many of the other states in the U.S. for these factors. The urban city centers of New York and Chicago drew the most focus from anti-immigration forces and temperance groups because they had great numbers of immigrants in a single location and had the correct conditions. The poverty, the violence and the alcohol abuse was highest in these city centers and those conditions made the arguments brought forth by the temperance groups

most valid. Wisconsin, on the other hand, had high numbers of immigrants and a fraction of the mean circumstances of the urban cities.

Milwaukee – “The German Athens”

During the time of Prohibition, German-Americans were the highest immigrant percentage found in the state of Wisconsin. The high number of German immigrants in the Milwaukee area and the rest of the state settled in the state, like many of the other immigrant groups that found a home in Wisconsin, because of the rich farmland that was so readily available. Milwaukee, the largest city in Wisconsin, was home to so many German immigrants and such a stronghold of German culture that the area was referred to as “Germania”, a hybrid of Germany and America, or the “German Athens.”³² “By 1880, native Germans made up 27% of the city’s population, the highest concentration of a single immigrant group in any American city.”³³ In fact, the influence the German immigrants wielded in the city was so great, in 1919, after WWI had ended and the country was still reeling from the first wave of anti-German reaction, the Milwaukee Journal was awarded the Pulitzer medal for “the most disinterested and meritorious public service rendered by an American newspaper”³⁴ because they had continued to print “American”, or anti-German, material in an area where the presence of Germans was far greater than other areas of the country. The Journal printed the congratulations to the newspaper from key members of society, all containing approximately the same message. “The Milwaukee Journal has been awarded the Pulitzer medal for the splendid work it has done in connection for

³² "Milwaukee Timeline « Milwaukee County Historical Society." Milwaukee County Historical Society. <http://www.milwaukeehistory.net/education-outreach/milwaukee-timeline/> (accessed December 11, 2012).

³³ "Milwaukee Timeline « Milwaukee County Historical Society." Milwaukee County Historical Society. <http://www.milwaukeehistory.net/education-outreach/milwaukee-timeline/> (accessed December 11, 2012).

³⁴ Bishop Walter Webb, “Recognition of the honor that has come to Wisconsin through the journal,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 4, 1919, final edition, in Google News Archive (accessed October 13, 2012).

its fight for Americanization in this city, where there is a very large foreign element” writes Bishop Walter Webb, one contributor.³⁵

This article is evidence that it was fully acknowledged by the people of the city, and of the general United States, that Milwaukee was a city that both had a considerable amount of German people and that they were powerful as a community. Herbert C. Noonan, the President of Marquette University located in Milwaukee, also wrote, “It was a colossal task to offset German propaganda in Wisconsin and to convince German-Americans that the fatherland they loved was being no longer guided by the traditional principles of right and justice.”³⁶ The very language used in the article lends support to the idea that many of the people in Wisconsin, and in the rest of the country, did not see these immigrants as true “Americans”. While some might argue that because most immigrants had not been born in the U.S., or even spoke English, they were not technically Americans, others would see entire generations of families as un-American, even if they were born in the U.S. These views go far beyond just the geography of their birth. These immigrants were different. They “clung” to their culture and ethnicity when the true “Americans” of the U.S. thought they should be integrating wholeheartedly into American culture. The immigrants had come to America to have the freedom they desired, only to be confronted with the adaptation attempts that they native-born Americans seemed set on thrusting at them. They would be considered “foreigners”, invading the U.S. with their strange cultures and traditions, until they submitted.

Due to this “large foreign element”, Wisconsin was a major force in the brewing industry. The German people brought with them the knowledge of brewing beer and it was not long before

³⁵ Bishop Walter Webb, “Recognition of the honor that has come to Wisconsin through the journal,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 4, 1919, final edition, in Google News Archive (accessed October 13, 2012).

³⁶ Herbert Noonan, “Recognition of the honor that has come to Wisconsin through the journal,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 4, 1919, final edition, in Google News Archive (accessed October 13, 2012).

some of the biggest names in the brewing industry were German Wisconsinites, selling their wares out of the Milwaukee area. Pabst, Schlitz, Miller and Blatz, some of the most famous beer makers, and most prominent German citizens, of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were all started and maintained in the city of Milwaukee.³⁷ The brewing began in the 1830s and only sixty years later, almost every community in the state had at least one operating brewery. “By the turn of the century, led by Pabst, the big breweries of Milwaukee were the country’s leaders in beer production.”³⁸ The brewing industry did so well in Wisconsin for many reasons. The raw products of hops and grain grew well in the Wisconsin countryside, there was available lumber and a good harbor, as well as plenty of steady employment and knowledge from the hundreds of thousands of German-Americans that settled in the state³⁹ and a close proximity to the urban center of Chicago, where beer was sold to millions, are all contributing factors of Wisconsin great success in brewing.⁴⁰ By 1860, nearly 200 breweries operated in Wisconsin, over 40 in Milwaukee alone. Nearly every town had a brewery and in some cases, towns formed around breweries.⁴¹

However, despite the success that Wisconsin enjoyed from the brewing industry, there was opposition from the start. Wisconsin seemed as though it was have a huge interest in keeping the 18th Amendment from being past due to the many major brewing companies located in the Milwaukee area and the drinking culture of their countless immigrants, but it had its share of resistance.

³⁷ Thomas C. Cochran, *The Pabst Brewing Company: the history of an American business* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1948) 22.

³⁸ "Milwaukee Timeline « Milwaukee County Historical Society." Milwaukee County Historical Society. <http://www.milwaukeehistory.net/education-outreach/milwaukee-timeline/> (accessed December 11, 2012).

³⁹ Jerry Apps, *Breweries of Wisconsin* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) 12.

⁴⁰ Thomas C. Cochran, *The Pabst Brewing Company*, 28.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 28.

Prohibition Club in Chippewa Falls

Evidence of that resistance was found in the personal belongings of a Chippewa Falls man, dated to the late nineteenth century, by the name of William W. Bartlett. Bartlett was a Chippewa Falls resident and local prominent historian that kept items and records pertaining to the town of Chippewa Falls and the Eau Claire area and those items were given to the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire for use in the archives. Among his things were the records he kept from his time in the Prohibition Club.⁴² This club was started long before the actual time of the Prohibition law, in the late 1800's, and contains a list of the members of the society and their addresses and affiliations, along with some meeting minutes and stories. There were alternate lists for the different towns and counties, as well as an alternate list for the members of the club who were ladies.

It is interesting to first note that the ledger that was kept to count the members of the club showed, along with their names and addresses in the town, what their political party was (Democrat, Republican or Prohibition) and what their ethnicity was. There were four columns for ethnicity: American, Scandinavian, German and Irish. Any other ethnicity was tallied under the last column, Irish, with a note next to it naming the actual nationalities, most were Canadian.⁴³ The significance of this ledger of names is that it is a glimpse at who really supported the idea of Prohibition and who did not, as it was still a far way from becoming a law at this time. There were a total of 351 names in ledger, with the “Americans” far outweighing any other nationality, William W. Bartlett being one of them. The fact that “American” was both

⁴² William W. Bartlett papers, 1821-1934, 1944-1962. Eau Claire Mss BY. Wisconsin Historical Society. Records housed in Special Collections & Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin--Eau Claire. Eau Claire, WI.

⁴³ “Ledger”, William W. Bartlett papers, 1821-1934, 1944-1962. Eau Claire Mss BY. Wisconsin Historical Society. Records housed in Special Collections & Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin--Eau Claire. Eau Claire, WI.

a nationality that one could put down and that they were so sizeable in comparison to the others is noteworthy.

Of the 351 names written in the ledger, only four of them were listed as “German” by ethnicity.⁴⁴ It is already known that German people were intimately tied to the brewing industry and that their interests lay with preserving it, but this ledger clearly shows just how accurate that knowledge is. Even though it was before the actual law of Prohibition was passed, this club was started during a time when the fight for temperance and the race to achieve legal victories against alcohol were reaching a fever state. Clubs, just like this one started in Chippewa Falls, WI, were cropping up all over the country, furthering the belief of the dry movement that gaining support anywhere and from anyone, no matter how small the town, could move them closer to defeating the wets.

That this club could, and did, exist in a state that stood to lose much if Prohibition was passed supports evidence that the temperance movement gained popularity and following as time went on. While it is clear that the Germans did not support these Prohibition clubs, as evidenced in the miniscule number that joined in the fight against alcohol, they existed nonetheless. The true “Americans” in these clubs and temperance societies were working towards an end to alcohol and, one could argue, an end to some of the foreign power in their cities, as seen in the breweries and saloons.⁴⁵ Taking away the drink that meant so much to the ethnic cultures meant that the immigrants were forced to assimilate to the ideals of the true “Americans” of the States and what they believed, which was that there was no important need for alcohol to remain.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Michael A. Lerner, *Dry Manhattan: prohibition in New York City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007) 122.

Within the ledger that William W. Bartlett owned and kept record of the Prohibition Club, was pasted the Preamble and Constitution of the Eau Claire Prohibition Club.⁴⁶ Part of it reads as follows,

“Believing that the best interest of our country demand the suppression of the public traffic of alcoholic beverages; that a political party, every member of which , is opposed to the traffic, is needed to bring about this great reform; that neither the republican nor the democratic party either will or can enact and enforce such laws as are needed to do this work; and that the prohibition party is the only political organization that can and will do these things, we, the citizens of the Eau Claire county of Eau Claire, State of Wisconsin, in order to secure the blessings of liberty, peace and good order in society, by the prohibition of the manufacture and the sale of alcoholic beverages, do adopt the following constitution.”⁴⁷

This asserted that both in “the best interest of the country” and “in order to secure the blessings of liberty, peace, and good order in society”, alcohol needs to be abolished. Best for whom? Whose liberty and peace will be secured? It is not the German people of Wisconsin, nor is it the immigrants in the rest of the United States. Alcohol had a cultural and traditional significance to millions of people in the United States, and it still does today. The temperance organizations, much like the Prohibition Club that Bartlett was a part of, used the innocent excuse that they were trying to serve the people by bringing great reform to the country in doing away with alcohol. It had caused so many problems and had been the ruin of more than a few. These assertions were somewhat truthful, but it was also a case of an example of some being made for the whole. Not every immigrant had problems with alcohol and perhaps not even as much violence occurred as was claimed. There were immigrants that supported the cause of Prohibition, joined clubs and groups and generally believed that alcohol was a harmful as WCTU or the Anti-Saloon League claimed it was. Some believed that their lives or the lives of their fellow neighbors would be greatly improved by the abolishment of alcohol.

⁴⁶ “Preamble and Constitution of the Eau Claire Prohibition Club”, William W. Bartlett papers, 1821-1934, 1944-1962. Eau Claire Mss BY. Wisconsin Historical Society. Records housed in Special Collections & Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin--Eau Claire. Eau Claire, WI.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

This club's existence in Wisconsin shows the opposition that immigrants faced even there, in a state that had gained so much from the knowledge of immigrants, and the nativism that seems tied intimately with the Prohibition movement. Wisconsin prospered from the brewing industry and that was thanks to German influence, but the call for dry towns and less "foreign" control was more acceptable to an "American" lifestyle.

Wisconsin Ku Klux Klan

Perhaps the most convincing evidence for the connection between the nativism shown towards immigrants from "true Americans" and the use of the Prohibition movement as a tool of assimilation is the resurgence around the country of the Ku Klux Klan. In the state of Wisconsin, this can be seen in the Women of the KKK collection in the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire archives. This collection contains meeting minutes, programs, forms and newsletters, as well as many mentions of the Prohibition movement, from a Klan of women from the Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls area in western Wisconsin.

As was previously mentioned, the KKK experienced a revival in the 1920's, but it appeared for the first time ever in Wisconsin in 1920 as well. This is not a coincidence. This was an obviously racist organization that experienced a resurgence in popularity in the exact time of Prohibition and had expanded outward from its home in the southern states to form Klans as far north as Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. In 1927, there were reportedly 28 chartered Klans in the state, each with less than 100 members, with Milwaukee having the largest Klan and being considered the WI headquarters.⁴⁸ As with the Bartlett ledger, the names of the members of the

⁴⁸ Women of the Ku Klux Klan Klan 14 (Chippewa Falls, Wis.) Records, 1926-1931. Eau Claire Small Collection 18. Wisconsin Historical Society. Records housed in Special Collections & Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin--Eau Claire. Eau Claire, WI.

group are indicative of what ethnicity they are, or more appropriately in this case, what they aren't. Women who held office in the Klan had names like Hoover, Campbell, Lange, Fisher and Tracy. There were no obviously German names on the minutes, or other ethnicities either. The general fact that there was a Klan for women in Wisconsin speaks to how strongly the Klan presence in the state had to have been. The men's Klan is mentioned in some of the material, and men were much more likely to have created a Klan before the women, therefore it shows the KKK had a strong following in the state.

The particular piece of the collection can be seen to support the idea of Prohibition being used to assimilate immigrants was the "A Program to Follow" document in the Women of the KKK collection. It is a list of ten items that the ladies of the WKKK were to use as their program to live by, a list of things that they use as a sort of action statement for their organization and as a guide to how to live life as a proud Klanswoman. There were a few different items on the list that could be seen as both promoting "alien assimilation" and Prohibition on some level. Some of the items are standard for what one would assume such a document would look like, including: "1. DEVELOPE LEADERSHIP: To do this educate protestatant⁴⁹ men and women in Klancraft and they will make leaders for any Klan, State or National office..." or "4. Make a complete study of the negro situation. Know the man or woman is white before voting for him." There was even an interesting principle to follow for the idea of further immigration into the U.S., an area of concern for the anti-immigrant Klan, "7. Americanism. Make a special study of proper limitations of immigration. Definite limit to the

⁴⁹ Misspelled in original document

period allowed for naturalization. Working toward specific requirements for admission of immigrants.”⁵⁰

However, the one principle that really connected Prohibition to the Klan was “3. Make Prohibition a study and find who can be candidates for office who are dry leaders.”⁵¹ This was an order sent to the Chippewa Falls Klanswomen from the state headquarters in Milwaukee, and to Milwaukee from the national headquarters in Little Rock, Arkansas. It was a program that was sent to every Klanswoman, and presumably Klansman, as a guide to follow in their lives to make them true WKKK members. The fact that this was a document produced for those reasons is significant. It is a true link between a notorious anti-immigrant organization and Prohibition. It is unclear if the “office” the program talked about refers to an office within the Ku Klux Klan or to an office of power within the U.S., but either way the WKKK was actively seeking out candidates that had ties to the Prohibition movement. Even if the office in question was within their own organization, which they likely saw as just as important as any real political office, the fact that whether a person was “wet” or “dry” would be a deciding factor in their eligibility for office is notable.

The creation of the Prohibition club in Chippewa Falls and the beginning of the KKK in Wisconsin are only a couple events that furthered the notion that the country was trying to assimilate the foreign masses in American, both those newly arrived and those already established. Wisconsin was a suitable test case for this idea of nativism tying the anti-immigration groups to the dry movement because it was rich in both immigrant culture and alcohol industry.

⁵⁰ “A PROGRAM TO FOLLOW”, Women of the Ku Klux Klan 14 (Chippewa Falls, Wis.) Records, 1926-1931. Eau Claire Small Collection 18. Wisconsin Historical Society. Records housed in Special Collections & Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin--Eau Claire. Eau Claire, WI.

⁵¹ Ibid

Epilogue – The End of Prohibition

While it had gained a strong following and power where the votes counted, Prohibition was not to last. Efforts to repeal the law had come immediately following its passage. The opposition of the wet movement were always no more than a step behind and making strides every year. “As early as 1925, journalist H. L. Mencken believed that Prohibition was not working.”⁵² As Prohibition became more and more unpopular, in no small part to both the loss of federal income from alcohol sales, it was clear that the law would live only a short life. President Franklin Roosevelt signed an amendment to the Volstead Act on March 22, 1933, known as the Cullen-Harrison Act. This act allowed the sale and manufacture of drink that was 4% alcohol. Then, on December 5th, 1933, the Twenty-first Amendment was ratified and the Eighteenth Amendment repealed.⁵³

But what did the end of Prohibition mean for the assimilation attempt by the old stock, native-born Americans against the new immigrant class? Attempts at assimilating immigrants, and the subsequent successes and failures to do so, still persisted beyond the time of Prohibition. More research is needed to tell to what extent the attempts at assimilating the immigrants during the time of Prohibition succeeded and if the abolishment of many of the saloons the immigrants relied on played a hand in forcing immigrants to accept “American” lifestyles.

⁵² Sylvia Engdahl, *Amendments XVIII and XXI: Prohibition and Repeal* (Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven, 2009).

⁵³ Bob Skilnik, *Beer: A History of Brewing in Chicago*, (Fort Lee, NJ: Baracade Books, 2006) 93.

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