

The Avholdsmann:
The Life and Literature of Waldemar Ager, 1869-1941

By

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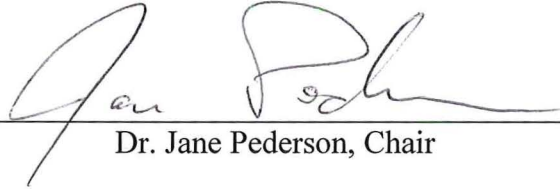
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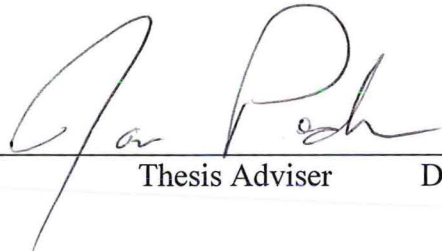
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Under the Supervision of Dr. Pederson

As a young man, Waldemar Ager was one of countless immigrants who saw opportunity in the logging community of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, during the latter half of the nineteenth century. While many immigrants believed that the lumber industry was their salvation, Ager found his calling by bringing his voice into the temperance movement. With stops in Chicago, Illinois, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Ager learned many of his temperance beliefs through life experiences both in Norway and the United States.

During his time in Eau Claire, Ager played an important role in the city's temperance movement. By writing creative newspaper articles, short stories, and novels, Ager championed the use of literature in defending the importance of temperance. In addition to his pro-temperance penmanship, Ager also found success by establishing temperance organizations, giving anti-alcohol lectures, and by joining the Prohibition Party. Ager believed in, and fought for a society free from any burdens, including alcohol.

While Ager's attempts to preserve Norwegian heritage have earned his works a great deal of respect, his beliefs on alcohol as seen through his literature, remain obscure. Despite receiving some coverage, the works that do mention his beliefs on alcohol are dated and brief. By studying a large number of Ager's writings, this study is charged with the task of shedding more light on Waldemar Ager, his life, and his anti-alcohol literature.

 4/28/2015

Thesis Adviser Date

We are three-quarters or four-fifths beasts, anyhow,
and those who drink brandy are in the best condition to prove it.

- Waldemar Ager, *I Sit Alone*

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Introduction

He was a good man and a great one, whose idealism inspired him to do everything he thought best for his fellow countrymen. He should be honored, not forgotten. He was one who kept faith with his ancestors by projecting an American he loved and wished would live up to the future it ought to have.

-Einar Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*

On March 23, 1919, a large birthday celebration occurred at the Norden Hall in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The *Eau Claire Leader* reported that almost two hundred people from across the Midwest had come together to offer their congratulations to a man who turned fifty years old. While the guests entered the hall to celebrate this distinguished soul, hundreds of telegrams streamed into Eau Claire from across the nation simultaneously. No matter their distance from Eau Claire, all wanted to convey their congratulations to Waldemar Ager, the man of the hour.¹

During the celebration many attendees spoke about Ager's abundant abilities and character, including Ager's authorship in support for the prohibition of alcohol. "All the speakers paid tribute to the honor guest's ability as an author, the sincerity of his purpose, his untiring zeal and energy in his advocacy, both by speech and pen, of that which he thought was right and best and his campaign against that which he considered an evil," reported the *Eau Claire Leader*. In celebration of Ager's goals and personal character, Eau Claire District Attorney J. C. Gilbertson boasted that he had always considered Ager to be the leading Eau Claire citizen. Ager was finally at a loss for words for once in his professional career remembered the *Eau Claire Leader*. In summation of Ager's attitude towards his distinguished past, the *Eau Claire Leader* recorded that Ager "had, he

¹ "200 Celebrate Waldeman Ager's 50th Birthday," *Eau Claire Leader*, March 25, 1919. Ager's name was spelt wrong in the title of this article.

thought, done the best he could.”² Despite the modest reaction, Ager took an unprecedented path as he advocated for a society built around temperance.

Between the years of 1892 and 1941, the Norwegian immigrant Waldemar Ager played an integral part in the temperance movement in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. As a Norwegian *avholdsmann*, or teetotaler in his native language, Ager used life experiences as inspiration to write a large number of pro-temperance works to persuade his Norwegian readers to abstain from alcohol. Although Ager faced tough opposition from many pro-consumption Norwegians, he made it his life work.

To better understand Ager’s anti-alcohol beliefs, this study is organized into three main sections. The first presents the roots of Ager’s temperance beliefs by portraying how alcohol impacted Ager’s developmental years in Norway and his early support for temperance in both Norway and the United States. The second section depicts the temperance movement in Eau Claire, the support for alcohol in the city, and some of Ager’s first actions meant to disrupt the support of alcohol. Finally the last section offers a deeper look into Ager’s temperance literature. As one of his most impressive forms of anti-alcohol protest, Ager was primarily interested in persuading Norwegian-Americans



Image 1. Image of Waldemar Ager, Circa 1941. Reproduced with permission from the Waldemar Ager Association.

Source: Waldemar Ager Association, Photographed by Author.

² “200 Celebrate Waldeman Ager’s 50th Birthday,” *Eau Claire Leader*, March 25, 1919.

to forgo the consumption of alcohol. In fighting this battle Ager's temperance works were artistic, moralistic, and written from many different perspectives. In penning his literature, Ager proved to be one of Eau Claire's most interesting citizens.

Despite Ager's importance to Eau Claire temperance history, most of the historical narratives written about Ager are dated.³ A number of historians have argued that Ager failed to meet his goal of complete prohibition. Author Clarence Kilde, in review of Ager's accomplishments, equated Ager to the biblical Moses. Kilde argued that Ager was too idealistic and, "As Moses never entered the promised land but saw it only dimly in the distance from atop Mount Nebo, so the idealist rests his case with posterity and trusts the far future for vindication."⁴

Alongside Kilde's interpretation, Kenneth Smemo, Professor of Scandinavian Studies, contended that Ager represented a modern day Sisyphus. "Smemo claims that 'his causes were all doomed to failure' and calls him the 'Norwegian-American Sisyphus,' in allusion to the classical figure who 'was condemned to spend eternity pushing a heavy stone up a hill only to have it constantly roll back down again.'"⁵

Despite the elated crowd on Ager's fiftieth birthday party, much of Ager's efforts have fallen from Eau Claire's historical spotlight. What remains is Ager's relocated

³ The last books written solely on Waldemar Ager were *Cultural Pluralism versus Assimilation: The Views of Waldemar Ager*, published in 1977 and *Immigrant Idealist: A Literary Biography of Waldemar Ager, Norwegian American* published in 1989. While Ager was partly the subject of other works, including Peter Thaler's 1998 book entitled *Norwegian Minds-American Dreams: Ethnic Activism Among Norwegian-American Intellectuals*, and a few smaller articles, theses, and dissertations Ager has not been the subject of extensive academic study in over twenty years.

⁴ Clarence Kilde, "Dark Decade: The Declining Years of Waldemar Ager," in *Norwegian-American Studies*, 28 (1979), 190.

⁵ Kenneth Smemo, "Waldemar Ager: Norwegian-American Sisyphus," in Dorothy Skårdal and Ingrid Kongslein, eds., *Essays on Norwegian-American Literature and History* (Oslo, 1986), 141, quoted in Einar Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist: A Literary Biography of Waldemar Ager, Norwegian American*, (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1989), 156.

home and a small dusty library that houses the many aging books written by Ager, his contemporaries, and other Norwegian heritage resources. While most people who know of Ager celebrate his efforts to preserve Norwegian culture, his love and determination for delivering prohibition literature is less well known. To forget this part of Ager would forgo the whole picture of a man who inspired so much hope.

The Life of Waldemar Ager: From Norway to Eau Claire, Wisconsin

His experience in mere childhood as an errand boy and house painter, left him with first hand knowledge of the common man which never shook him. He began to cope with the grim realities of life when his father sailed for America, leaving his 12-year old boy with mother at Oslo, Norway.

-“Great Throng Attends Funeral of W.T. Ager,”
Eau Claire Leader, August 5, 1941

Waldemar Ager was born in Fredrikstad, Norway, on March 23, 1869 to Martinius Mathisen Ager and Fredrikke Marie Johnsdatter Stillaugsen. In 1871 Ager’s family moved to Græsvig, Norway, where his parents enrolled him in school at an unusually early age. Unfortunately, by 1882 Ager was forced to drop out to help his family make money.⁶ He found employment as a house painter and errand boy in Oslo, Norway, where he could, along with his father, support his family.⁷

Life continued to be difficult for the Ager’s during the 1870s and 1880s as Norway experienced nationwide economic despair. A part of the international “long depression,” Norway’s dependency on imported goods had driven the country’s already

⁶ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 5.

⁷ “Great Throng Attends Funeral of W.T. Ager,” *Eau Claire Leader*, August 5, 1941.

weakened economy into an extensive slump. Deflation became so severe by the late 1880s that it took at least thirty-eight years to return to pre-depression levels.⁸

During this economic despair Ager's father resorted to consuming alcohol. Like many others, Martinius Ager hoped that liquor would offer some sort of escape from the difficult times. Due to his father's alcoholism Ager learned the negative impact of alcohol consumption on the family at an early age. One evening he witnessed his father, who had consumed a great deal of alcohol, strike his mother with such force that her nose began to bleed.⁹ Following this episode Ager joined a Christian temperance youth organization in Oslo and became a lifelong teetotaler.¹⁰

Not surprisingly, Martinius failed to find enough work in order to support his family in Norway. He emigrated to the United States in 1883 during the second of three great Norwegian migrations in search of work while the rest of his family stayed behind in Oslo.¹¹ Lured to North America by the "American fever" that had spread through Norway, Martinius became enthralled with the idea of the "personal advancement and freedom" that presented itself in America.¹²

⁸ Ola Honningdal Grytten and Arnggrim Hunnes, "A Chronology of Financial Crises for Norway," *Department of Economics*, Norwegian School of Economic and Business Administration, May 2010), 14, <http://www.nhh.no/Files/Filer/institutte/sam/Discussion%20papers/2010/13.pdf> (accessed on December 17, 2014).

⁹ Grytten and Hunnes, "A Chronology of Financial Crises for Norway," 20.

¹⁰ "200 Celebrate Waldemar Ager's 50th Birthday," *Eau Claire Leader*, March 25, 1919; Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 20-22.

¹¹ Odd Sverre Lovoll, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 7, 14.

¹² Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 14.

When Martinius left for America, Waldemar and the rest of his family waited patiently to hear from him. Inspired by this delicate time period Ager expressed this part of his life in a segment of his novel *I Sit Alone*:

Then came the times when we went about waiting for a letter from father. There were often long stretches between them, or perhaps it was we who thought them so long. And mother had her heavy hours, when she went about crying or lay down on the bed to cry. Or she cried when she sat sewing, and we had to thread the needle for her because she couldn't see. She had a silent way of weeping that hurt us children terribly.¹³

It was not until 1885 when Ager, his mother, and siblings joined the 780,000 other Norwegians who left Norway between the years of 1865 and 1930 and went in search of Martinius.¹⁴ They found him in Chicago, Illinois, working as a custom tailor.¹⁵ Chicago was where the Ager's made their first home. The city also presented Ager with the perfect opportunity to develop his temperance rhetoric.

By the time Ager moved to Chicago the city had become an important hub for many immigrant groups, including Norwegians.¹⁶ Most large cities had become a haven for immigrant groups due to the availability of jobs and a new lifestyle. Over the course of twenty years the American city had become even more popular. In 1880 the United States had roughly twenty cities with populations over one hundred thousand. By 1900

¹³ Waldemar Ager, *I Sit Alone*, Charles Wharton Stork, *trans.*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), 37.

¹⁴ Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 8.

¹⁵ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 20; Kenneth Smemo, "The Norwegian Ethnic Experience and the Literature of Waldemar Ager," in *Norwegian Influence on the Upper Midwest*, Ed. Harald S. Naess, (Duluth: University of Minnesota Duluth, 1976), 59.

¹⁶ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 22.

this number had nearly doubled to thirty-nine. In most of these cities the immigrant population hovered between twenty-five to fifty percent.¹⁷

Inspired by the development of American cities Fredric C. Howe, a Progressive reformer from Ohio, likened the American city to an “organism, like the human body, of which the city is the head, heart, and centre of the nervous system.”¹⁸ Unfortunately, the America city represented much more than progress and opportunity. It had also developed into centers of vice, corruption, and poor living conditions due to the increase in immigrant populations that outstripped housing and kept wages low.

To many immigrants in America’s cities, the saloon became a secondary “homeland” as many pushed to re-establish “old-world communities in urban America.”¹⁹ To many European immigrants this meant a resurgence of alcohol traditions; Germans served lager style beers, Italians drank Italian wines, and the Irish consumed whiskey.²⁰ While alcohol consumption by non-immigrant groups had not disappeared this flood of immigrants, along with their drinking customs, received an ever-increasing backlash from social reformers.²¹ As a temperance supporter and an immigrant, Ager already possessed many qualities that made him different from the other temperance supporters.

¹⁷ Maureen Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s-1920s*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13-14.

¹⁸ Frederic C. Howe, *The City: The Hope of Democracy*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905), 22.

¹⁹ Madelon Powers, *Faces Along the Bar: Lore and Order in the Workingman’s Saloon, 1870-1920*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 57.

²⁰ Powers, *Faces Along the Bar*, 58-59.

²¹ Flanagan, *America Reformed*, 42.

As soon as Ager settled in Chicago he found employment as an apprentice printer for the Norwegian newspaper, *Norden*. While not a pro-temperance publication, Ager's supervisor, and colleague, Peer O. Stromme remembered Ager as a diligent worker who refused to honor the traditional practice of delivering alcohol to the older workers.²² An act known as "rushing the growler," many workplaces used younger employees to fill large containers with beer at the nearest saloon and bring them back to quench the thirst of the older employees.²³ Ager's refusal to honor this time-honored tradition only solidified his temperance beliefs, and in 1887 he again affirmed his stance against alcohol by joining the Harmony Total Abstinence Society.²⁴

Ager gained valuable experience with temperance literature during his time with the Harmony group when he contributed to the small publication the temperance group published. A group of Ager's friends lauded the success he found:

Your battle we know is for the good cause,
A goal that you must keep in mind.
Oh, would that we might see the enemy some day
Biting the dust before your banner.
Then when you dance your last step,
Your brow will be adorned by a laurel wreath.²⁵

With the support of Ager's fellow temperance followers, and the impact alcohol made on both in his personal and social life, Chicago stimulated his resolve to continue the temperance fight. From this point on Ager's temperance rhetoric would become more creative and direct.

²² Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 22.

²³ Madelon Powers, "Women and Public Drinking, 1890-1920," *History Today* 45, no. 2 (February 1995): 46-52.

²⁴ Flanagan, *America Reformed*, 23; Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 22.

²⁵ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 23.

Following a brief stint in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Ager gained his American citizenship and wrote for the temperance publication, *The Templar Journal*, Ager moved to Eau Claire in 1892. In Eau Claire Ager found the opportunity to work for the prohibition and Norwegian-American newspaper *Reform*.²⁶ Within two years of working for the *Reform* Ager regularly contributed articles to the *Reform* and even became the manager of the *Reform* in 1896.

Following the sudden death of Ole Olson, the chief editor of the *Reform*, Ager became the primary editor of the newspaper in 1903.²⁷ Under Ager's control, the *Reform* transformed into a more complete newspaper with articles that were witty, comedic, and well edited.²⁸

As Ager began to incorporate more of his character into the *Reform* one of his contemporaries bluntly stated, "the *Reform* was Ager and Ager was *Reform*."²⁹ Throughout the *Reform's* existence Ager played an instrumental role in its representation of anti-alcohol rhetoric and delivered Ager's voice to the people of Eau Claire.



Image 2. The *Reform* printing office. Waldemar Ager is the first on the left, Circa 1908. Reproduced with permission from the Waldemar Ager Association.

Source: Waldemar Ager Association, Photograph by Author.

²⁶ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 24.

²⁷ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 50.

²⁸ Smemo, "The Norwegian Ethnic Experience and the Literature of Waldemar Ager," 59

²⁹ J. O. Evjen, *Reform*, August 1, 1941, quoted in Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 154.

Eau Claire's Saloons and Temperance: Waldemar Ager's Role in the Alcohol Debate

He was deeply concerned for the name, honor and welfare of his Norwegian countrymen. He knew that the saloons, night clubs, and taverns, of the past and present, could only serve to degrade the race and ruin our civilizations.

-“Great Throng Attends Funeral of W.T. Ager,”
Eau Claire Leader, August 5, 1941

In the late 1800s the city of Eau Claire represented the perfect location for a temperance movement because, like Chicago, it possessed a strong alcohol influence. In fact Eau Claire had quickly incorporated a large network of saloons following the founding of the first official saloon in the Eau Claire House in 1857 by Adin Randall.³⁰ Because of the importance



Image 3. Eau Claire House on the southeast corner of Eau Claire and S. Barstow Streets, Circa 1913. Wisconsin Historical Society Image ID# 30678. Reproduced with permission from the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Source: *Eau Claire House*, 1913, Wisconsin Historical Society, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/whi/fullimage.asp?id=30678> (accessed on May 13, 2013).

of the saloon in Eau Claire many groups were formed with the goal of reversing the influence of alcohol in the city. For Ager the effect of alcohol on his fellow Norwegians in Eau Claire forced him into action.

Eau Claire's saloon culture truly took off in the 1880s. By 1880 the number of saloons in Eau Claire had grown to thirty-two saloons, or one saloon for every 313 residents. In 1892 the number of saloons had increased to ninety-two and the smallest

³⁰ The Eau Claire City Directories and the Chippewa Valley Business Directory have provided residents with the operators and locations of the saloons were in Eau Claire between the years of 1870 and 1920.

number of saloons to people ratio was recorded when Eau Claire held one saloon for every 190 people. In 1890, however, the boom of the lumber industries began to slowly collapse and by 1900 the number saloons had fell to seventy-one and the ratio had increased back to 243 people per saloon.³¹ The major spike in the number of saloons in relation to the lumber industry boom meant that saloon keeping could be a very lucrative

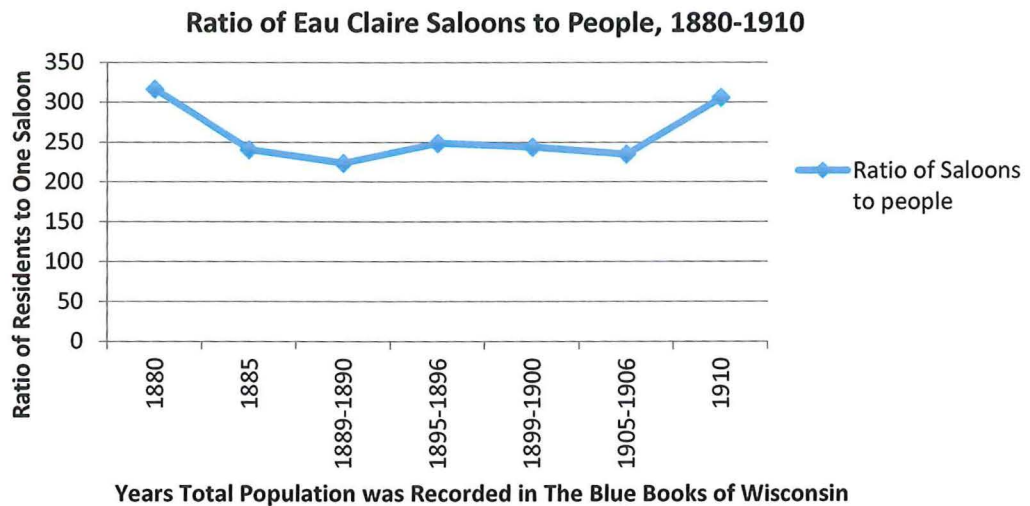


Figure 1. The ratio between the numbers of Eau Claire residents per one saloon, 1880-1910. Please see Appendices B and C for more information in regards to the trends in Eau Claire population and number of saloons.

Source: See Appendix A.

business opportunity for many. Eau Claire historian Lois Barland portrayed the popularity and dangers of Eau Claire’s saloon and alcohol culture:

³¹ Records of the Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Federal Population Census, 1880*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, June 1, 1880) www.Ancestry.com, (accessed on May 6, 2013); Records of the Bureau of the Census. *U.S. Federal Population Census, 1900*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, June 1, 1900), www.Ancestry.com, (accessed on May 6, 2013); Records of the Bureau of the Census. *U.S. Federal Population Census, 1910*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, June 1, 1910), www.Ancestry.com, (accessed on May 6, 2013). *Eau Claire City Directory, 1880*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1880), 197-198; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1899-1900*, (Eau Claire: Eau Claire Directory Company, 1899), 383-384; A large amount of research was done throughout this record in cross-referencing saloonkeepers in the Eau Claire City Directory to U.S. Census data. While there were thirty-two saloons listed, thirty-three saloonkeepers were listed as one had two saloonkeepers listed as contacts.

In the old days there was a brewery owned by Matt Leinenkugel on Madison Street . . . You can realize that it took a good deal of beer just then to supply the many saloons and to satisfy the thirst of the hundreds of lumbermen, rivermen, and mill hands. They simply thronged the streets of the town, when off work, looking for beer and finding plenty, judging from the number of drunken men and the street fights.³²

While the social problems created by alcohol were easily portrayed in Barland's interpretation of Eau Claire's saloon and alcohol society, the city still possessed other instances of alcohol-induced violence.

In the June 20, 1867 edition of the *Eau Claire Free Press*, a reporter described a riot that happened at the John Olinger Beer Garden in North Eau Claire. "Stones, clubs, bottles, and other weapons were freely used, and a number of persons were seriously injured," reported the newspaper. The newspaper also described how disheartening it was to know that there were people who had become accustomed to "promiscuously punching every one who does not move to suit them." The writer of the article went on to state "As usual, whiskey was at the bottom of the affair."³³ While not immediately obvious, the *Eau Claire Free Press* possessed a tone, which suggested city conditions would improve with the removal of alcohol.

As Ager became accustomed to Eau Claire, he conceded that the city possessed a high number of alcohol consumers, especially the large number of Norwegian consumers. Ager confessed, "The early days were days of heavy drinking; the Norwegians made no exception to the rule." He made the case that Eau Claire was initially Irish Canadian and

³² Lois Barland, *Sawdust City: A History of Eau Claire, Wisconsin from the Earliest Time to 1910*, (Stevens Point: Worzalla Publishing Co., 1960), 84.

³³ "Riot," *Eau Claire Free Press*, June 20, 1867.

when, “the Norwegians came . . . it was a question of who were the best men. It was days of hard work, small pay, fights and heavy drinking.”³⁴

Many Norwegians were in need of jobs and the saloons, which were expanding with the growing lumber industry, seemed like the perfect economic opportunity for many of them. In fact, Norwegian saloonkeepers built and maintained a strong presence within the cities saloon culture. By the time Ager arrived in Eau Claire, Norwegians had become the dominant group in the Eau Claire saloon scene. In 1900 Norwegians were running nineteen of the cities seventy-five saloons, or twenty-five percent.³⁵ Ten years later, in 1910, the Norwegian saloonkeepers again owned and operated roughly one quarter of all Eau Claire saloons.³⁶ The number of Norwegian saloons had come a long way; in 1880 only four out of thirty two available saloons could be considered Norwegian.³⁷

To Ager it was apparent that many of his Norwegian brethren were pro-consumption and that they needed his assistance to find an appropriate “dry” path. Historian Einar Haugen contended that Ager believed Norwegian-Americans were “wasting their potential on the nearest and cheapest drug . . . Only by staying sober could Norwegians climb the ladder of American success.”³⁸ In many ways Ager’s support for

³⁴ Bailey, ed., *History of Eau Claire County, Wisconsin*, 577.

³⁵ *Eau Claire City Directory, 1899-1900*, 383-384; *U.S. Federal Population Census, 1900*.

³⁶ *U.S. Federal Population Census, 1910*.

³⁷ *U.S. Federal Population Census, 1880; Eau Claire City Directory, 1880*, 197-198.

³⁸ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 157.

Saloonkeeper Ethnicity, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 1910

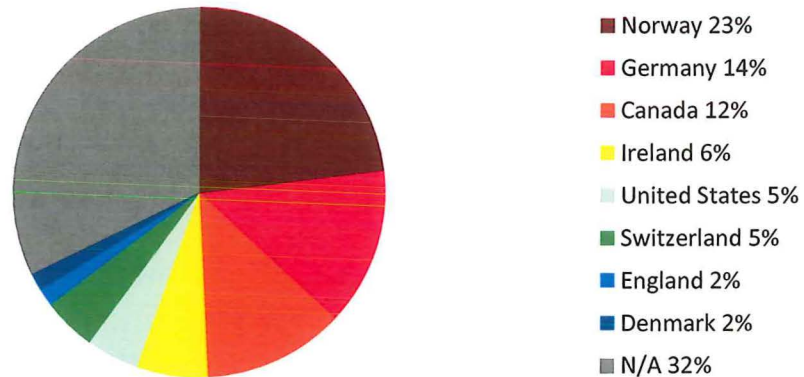


Figure 2. The breakdown of Eau Claire saloonkeepers based upon their claimed ethnicity, and their parents, in the 1910 U.S. Census data. Percentage points rounded to the nearest whole number. Please view Appendices D and E for the ethnic breakdown of Eau Claire's saloonkeepers for the years 1880 and 1900.

Source: 1910 U.S. Census and the 1910 Eau Claire City Directory.

temperance in Eau Claire was less about saving people from alcohol and more about the love he had for other Norwegian immigrants.

Over a decade before Ager's arrival to Eau Claire, the city experienced the formation of some of its first temperance groups. The Temple of Honor and Temperance (THT) was organized in 1877 by the local Masonic Temple and was one of the first major temperance groups to form in Eau Claire. "The supply of alcohol would continue as long as there was a demand for liquor," according to the THT in the October 6, 1877, edition of the *Eau Claire News*. The THT believed that the society would finally be reformed once people learned at least to moderate their alcoholic consumption.

To address the social demand for alcohol the THT began an anti-alcohol movement call the Blue Ribbon Campaign. By joining the THT during the Blue Ribbon Campaign, new members would receive a blue ribbon to display their temperance pledge. To the THT the Blue Ribbon Campaign was directed towards Eau Claire's "original

temperance men, tipplers, moderate drinkers, hard drinkers, a few old soakers, and several former liquor dealers.”³⁹ According to an 1878 *Eau Claire Weekly Free* report the THT believed that these actions were having a major impact on the demand for alcohol in Eau Claire, “1878 saw a decrease in crime and drunkenness in Eau Claire,” and “rowdiness was confined to the floating and rural populations,” affirmed the THT.⁴⁰ Unfortunately much of the THT’s success seemed to be a type of propaganda because the THT disbanded in 1882 due to the failure of its members to remain “dry.”⁴¹ While other smaller groups were formed following the termination of the THT, no Masonic Temple organization received similar support.

A defining theme of Eau Claire’s temperance movement prior to Ager’s arrival was how closely it allied itself to the men and women of Eau Claire’s social elite. As early as 1859 the lower classes, usually immigrants, received much of the blame for the Eau Claire’s alcohol problems. “Most of our villages and districts are filling up with a foreign population . . . whom are strangers to the temperance . . . and who establish at once the breweries and beer saloons, and who in this way and other favor intemperance and other immoralities,” explained Reverend W.W. McNair.⁴² As time went on Eau Claire temperance groups remained closely tied to the city’s elite.

In 1878 the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) made its presence known in Eau Claire when the group’s constitution was signed at the local Methodist Episcopal Church. The Eau Claire chapter took a leading role in recruiting temperance

³⁹ *Eau Claire News*, January 5, 1878.

⁴⁰ *Eau Claire Weekly Free Press*, November 28, 1878.

⁴¹ *Eau Claire Daily Free Press*, September 7, 1882.

⁴² *Eau Claire Daily Free Press*, December 29, 1859.

lecturers and the distribution temperance materials locally and gave the national WCTU group a voice against the “problems that alcohol use was causing for many women and children,” in Eau Claire.⁴³

In most cases the wives of prominent Eau Claire men joined the WCTU. In June 1878, Annette Shaw, wife of Daniel Shaw, owner of Shaw Lumber Company, became the first prominent woman to join the Eau Claire WCTU chapter.⁴⁴ Like Shaw most of the women who became members of the WCTU hailed from primarily old-stock backgrounds as well as the middle and upper classes. These early white-collar members included, Mary Tolles, wife of machinist Robert Tolles, Jessie Dudley, wife of Minister Joseph F. Dudley, Jane Putnam, wife of land agent Henry Putnam, Olive Howland, wife of school teacher Henry Howland, and Martha Wilson, wife of one of the earliest lumber manufacturers Richard Wilson.⁴⁵ Throughout the WCTU’s time in Eau Claire, the group remained rooted within the upper ranks.

Despite its place in the Eau Claire upper class the Eau Claire WCTU struggled to earn enough money to reach their goals at times. Georgia Culver, wife of real-estate agent Enos Culver, described many of her concerns through poetry:

This earning business, sisters
Is nothing new to me?
But now to get this dollar
I did not clearly see.

She said you make poppies?

⁴³ William Warren Bartlett Documents, 1821-1934 McIntyre Library, Special Collections & Archives, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, WI. The record only listed the date as post-1894; Flanagan, *America Reformed*, 42.

⁴⁴ *Eau Claire Weekly Free Press*, June 20, 1878.

⁴⁵ *Eau Claire Daily Free Press*, November 11, 1882.

A bunch I much desire.
It you will make them I will pay
The price you may require.

I cried, oh yes, the poppies I will make
And get them done
by noon today
Is what I'll undertake.

And from her wallet, she took out
A shining coin, silver bright.
She placed it in my hand
Then oh! My heart grew light.⁴⁶

While Georgia Culver found a way to raise money to help the WCTU, the WCTU would team up with other temperance groups in order to combine resources to meet their goals.

One of the groups that collaborated with the WCTU was the Eau Claire Prohibition Club. The goals of the Prohibition Club paralleled that of the WCTU. The main goal of the club, as reported in Article Two of the Eau Claire Prohibition Club Constitution, was to support the suppression and prevention of all the evils resulting from the liquor traffic by many means, including distributing literature, joining forces with other like-minded groups, and to see to the creation of a Prohibition Party.⁴⁷

The Prohibition Club proved to be instrumental in the Eau Claire temperance fight. By teaming with the WCTU they were able to bring the ex-Governor of Kansas and former Prohibition Party Presidential candidate, John P. St. John to Eau Claire during the summer of 1885. Referred to as the "Great Emancipator" by the *Daily Leader*, St. John's visit was scheduled to be a part of "the grandest temperance demonstrations ever

⁴⁶ Mrs E.L. Culver, Post-1894, poem. William Warren Bartlett Documents, 1821-1934 McIntyre Library, Special Collections & Archives, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, WI. For the complete poem, and others like it, please view Appendix F.

⁴⁷ Eau Claire Prohibition Club Goals: March 1, 1885, William Warren Bartlett Documents, 1821-1934, McIntyre Library, Special Collections & Archives, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, WI.

held in the Northwest will come off at Eau Claire, Wisconsin”⁴⁸ In the end, St. John addressed over ten thousand people on the importance of temperance in Randall Park on July 7, and it was reported that the city’s “cold-water men” possessed great enthusiasm following St. John’s message.⁴⁹

If Ager had been present at St. John’s lecture on that summer day in 1885 the number of people who had turned out would have impressed him. An accomplished orator himself, Ager played an integral part in delivering his political and temperance beliefs through lectures throughout the Midwest and the nation.⁵⁰ Examples of this can be found later in his time in Eau Claire when Ager traveled to Eleva and Strum, Wisconsin, on April 28 and 30, 1908, and Fargo, North Dakota, in June of the same year.⁵¹

Ager also joined the Eau Claire temperance movement by forming a temperance organization immediately after moving to Eau Claire in 1892. Using the name “Excelsior,” Ager’s group began with twelve members and offered Eau Claire Norwegians a social outlet that would hopefully replace the saloon.⁵² As reported by the *Reform*, Excelsior offered its members the chance to develop skills in “debates, speeches,

⁴⁸ “People’s Day: Great Preparations for the Coming of St. John, July 7,” *The Daily Leader*, June 23, 1885.

⁴⁹ “St. John’s Day: Great Prohibition Rally in Randall Park –Ex-Governor St. John addresses 10,000 People- - Great Enthusiasm Among the Cold-Water Men,” *Eau Claire News*, July 11, 1885.

⁵⁰ “Great Throng Attends Funeral of W.T. Ager,” *Eau Claire Leader*, August 5, 1941.

⁵¹ “The City,” *Eau Claire Leader*, April 29, 1908.

⁵² Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 7, 9.

song, music, and declamations.”⁵³ In fact during the first meeting of “Excelsior,” Ager “gave a declamation and Miss Amelia Olsen performed a number on the piano.”⁵⁴

By 1897 Excelsior had proven to be a success in the eyes of the *Reform* and Ager. Not only had group membership swollen to fifty-five members, but Ager also met his wife, Gurolle Blestaen, while attending these meeting. The *Reform* contended that each member should receive praise for how well they had weathered the pro-consumption community’s dissatisfaction with temperance groups.⁵⁵ “There is hardly any Norwegian temperance society or lodge that has kept its work going for so long a period,” praised the *Reform*. The success of Excelsior solidified Ager’s position in Eau Claire’s temperance movement. But while Ager successfully promoted prohibition to his fellow Norwegians through his lecture and organizational skills it was his literature that truly embodied the essence of his beliefs.

The Literature of Waldemar Ager

He stood for a free America, and America can only be free when its citizens are free from any and all moral depravity. Ager had not immigrated to America to become a parasite. With liberty and freedom, he realized, went along responsibilities and duties. He could not enjoy the one and shirk the other.

–“Great Throng Attends Funeral of W.T. Ager,”
Eau Claire Leader, August 5, 1941

As Ager assessed the situation in Eau Claire, he soon used his strength as a writer to combat the influence of alcohol. Ager created countless newspaper articles, short

⁵³ *Reform*, December 1897 as quoted in Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 8.

⁵⁴ Minutes in Ager Collection, Norwegian-American Historical Association (NAHA) archives, dated June 23, 1897, quoted in Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 8.

⁵⁵ *Reform*, December 1897, quoted in Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 8.

stories, and novels that highlighted the importance of abstaining from alcohol. As a Norwegian immigrant Ager found it important to consolidate his efforts toward removing alcohol from the Norwegian-American population in Eau Claire. To better capture his Norwegian readership, Ager wrote on a wide assortment of national and local topics in the Norwegian language. Throughout his creations Ager used a creative, imaginative, and artistic form of expressing his thoughts on alcohol. While J.J. Skordalsvold, a colleague of Ager's, described Ager's work as "foxy." Ager credited his creativeness to his inexperience in his early years of prohibition writing; "I had no temperance papers that I could clip things from, so I had to make up a song or story to fill up the issues."⁵⁶ Whatever the topic, Ager seemed to write as if the reader had never heard of temperance before and captured the reader's imagination by writing in an "as matter of fact" style.

One of Ager's most direct routes to influence the Norwegian population in Eau Claire was through the *Reform*. As he wrote articles Ager tended to focus on two aspects of temperance. The first aspect represented the idea that the removal of alcohol would bring social prosperity to Eau Claire. The other aspect that Ager reported was the negative impact of alcohol on families, society, and the nation.



Image 4. The *Reform* newspaper header. Circa 1941. Reproduced with permission from the Waldemar Ager Association.

Source: Waldemar Ager Association, Photograph by Author.

⁵⁶ Waldemar Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing: Stories for Eyvind*, J.J. Skordalsvold, trans., (Eau Claire: Fremand Publishing Company, 1907), 3. <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89035487289;view=1up;seq=8> (accessed on June 28, 2014); Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 24.

On the issue of prosperity, Ager wrote articles in the *Reform* about the success of statewide prohibition in Kansas on many occasions. A legally dry state since 1880, Ager argued that the success of Kansas's prohibition spoke "a powerful language" in support of prohibition in Eau Claire and America.⁵⁷ Ager argued that in the roughly twenty-one years of legal prohibition the population of Kansas experienced "an increase of almost 50%." He also claimed the number of prison occupants in Kansas had fallen; "So while the population has increased 50% the prisoners' numbers have diminished 65% in relationship to the state's present population."⁵⁸ To support his claims Ager argued that in nearby Nebraska, which still possessed legal alcohol, the occupancy of its prisons rose forty-five percent in relation to the state population during the same time period.⁵⁹ Ager suggested the quality of life improved in Kansas after prohibition and similar improvements could be made in Wisconsin.

In 1901 Ager continued his optimism about the temperance movement when he wrote an article entitled "Words or Axes," in which he commended the actions of the noteworthy Prohibitionist and Kansas resident, Carry A. Nation. Driven to take drastic action by two failed marriages due to the alcohol from the illegal saloons still in existence in "dry" Kansas, Nation famously entered numerous saloons in 1900 and destroyed them with a hatchet, "brickbats, and bottles of Schlitz-Malt."⁶⁰ Ager expressed his support for

⁵⁷ Waldemar Ager, *A Reform Sampler: Selections from a Norwegian Language Newspaper, 1898-1941*, trans. Genevieve Hagen and Tim Hjemboe (Eau Claire: Waldemar Ager Association, 1998), 10.

⁵⁸ Ager, *A Reform Sampler*, 9.

⁵⁹ Ager, *A Reform Sampler*, 9.

⁶⁰ Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 81.

this “respectable Christian women in her sixties” through a confession;⁶¹ “I have been ashamed of the trouser-wearing sex ever since I read about you. Mostly because there are so many men in Kansas and because you are so old. A brave old grandmother you are – and wise, because you remembered that you have two arms and felt your responsibility.”⁶² Inspired by Nation’s insatiable drive for change, Ager continued his own fight against the saloons and alcohol in Eau Claire.

Ager did not shy away from using national figures to describe the social improvements that abstaining from alcohol could accomplish. After the passing of the Volstead Act in 1919 and the National Prohibition Act in 1920, Ager recorded the words of Henry Ford in 1927. Ford was adamant in his appreciation of the prohibition of alcohol; “we have improved our work very noticeably. At the same time accidents at work have fallen swiftly and financial benefits are the result.”⁶³ By using people that Eau Claire residents might have read about in other local newspapers he attempted to make it difficult for people, especially Norwegian-Americans, to ignore the positive implications of anti-alcohol rhetoric and actions.

The second topic prominent in national prohibition rhetoric, and in the *Reform*, was the negative impacts of alcohol on the family and society. While there were many positives in regards to the importance of temperance, there were far more hard-hitting negative aspects of consuming alcohol to report on. On September 22, 1896, the *Reform* reported three temperance organizations wanted Eau Claire saloons to close their

⁶¹ McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 81.

⁶² *Reform*, February 5, 1901, quoted in Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 47.

⁶³ Ager, *A Reform Sampler*, 93.

windows. To the groups, the open saloon windows allowed women and children to learn about the evils that took place in “Hell’s front yard.” They believed the information about saloons would lead women and children down a path of destruction.⁶⁴ This fear was validated on July 10, 1906, when Ager reported on two boys who were charged with drunkenness. They each received a \$5.40 fine while the two saloonkeepers who sold the boys the alcohol faced a \$29.40 fine.⁶⁵

The impact of “Hell’s front yard” was not felt by children or women alone; working class men also fell victim to the saloon. On May 18, 1897, the *Reform* recounted an incident when a man came home from the saloons extremely intoxicated. He began to tear his home apart, even managing to flip over a cast iron stove in his drunken rage. His family retreated to a neighbor’s place until the police could restrain him.⁶⁶ As examples of the destructive power of alcohol, the impact of alcohol on children, the family, and adults can clearly be seen in these three articles. Ager used many more examples like these to promote the need for the prohibition of alcohol.

Not only did Ager portray the negative implications of alcohol in the *Reform*, he also directly criticized those who were in the public eye. In 1900 Ager “dissected a speech by William Jennings Bryan, who called for taking good care of young people but failed to mention the saloons and their influence on the young.”⁶⁷ For this, Ager distinctly called Bryan’s stance stupid and full of nonsense.⁶⁸ Ager also attacked the

⁶⁴ *Reform*, trans., John Peterson, September 22 1896.

⁶⁵ Ager, *A Reform Sampler*, 41.

⁶⁶ *Reform*, trans., John Peterson, May 18, 1897.

⁶⁷ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 47.

⁶⁸ *Reform*, October 2, 1900, quoted in Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 47.

Chicago publication, *Skandinaven*, for publishing false information about prohibitionists and temperance.⁶⁹

Ager even attacked the President of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), Samuel Gompers. In a letter to Washington Senator Wesley Jones, Gompers expressed his dissatisfaction with the talk of prohibition; "If PROHIBITION shall become a law and the apprehension I have as to discord and dissension among our people result, there is no way by which the harm done, the injury inflicted, the discord aroused can be rectified."⁷⁰ In critique of this stance, Ager argued that,

Samuel Gompers does the workers a very poor service on their behalf by appearing as one of intoxicating drink's formidable defendants. He could learn much from the English labor leaders. They have gained a far greater influence than whatever has fallen or will fall in Gompers's time; but they have been wise enough to not bind the labor cause's interests with the sinking intoxicating drink-traffic's destiny.⁷¹

Through the *Reform*, Ager routinely protested the views of others in regards to alcohol. As evident in these passages, Ager was well versed in knowledge of the major players on national level.

Not only did Ager criticize national figures, he also disapproved of the national government's failure to address the alcohol problem. During World War One Ager proved to be an isolationist by disapproving of the U.S. government's involvement in the war. Ager used a letter written by Minnesota Senator Knut Nelson to strengthen his call

⁶⁹ *Reform*, January 15, 1901, quoted in Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 47.

⁷⁰ Samuel Gompers to Wesley Jones, June 26, 1918, in *Wesley Jones Papers 1918*, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Seattle, WA, <http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/ref/collection/pioneerlife/id/19793> (accessed on February 14, 2015).

⁷¹ Ager, *A Reform Sampler*, 86.

for both a national prohibition amendment and for the United States to maintain its isolation:

People have, of course, endless more important things to deal with such as protecting those traveling against the German underwater boats. To warn the approximately 70,00 to 80,000 citizens who every year go to the grave because of intoxicating drinks from the saloonkeepers and whiskey traffic is a cause of much-too-lowly meaning to have to take up man's time with it now.

The thousands of Americans which the German brewers have killed do not have the same meaning to Americans as those who come in danger on account of German submarines. They don't pay any license of course, and we do not have the trace of profits for them.⁷²

Ager held so much confidence in a political answer to alcohol that he ran for the Wisconsin State Treasurer position on the Prohibition Party ticket in 1908.⁷³ While the *Reform* remained Ager's primary medium to sway readers towards the national prohibition of alcohol, he did not limit himself to only newspaper articles. Short stories offered Ager the chance to be more creative in his attack of alcohol.

The short story offered Ager a unique opportunity to focus on the impact of alcohol.⁷⁴ Unlike the *Reform*, short stories offered Ager the freedom to expand on his expressive and artistic writing style. As Ager wrote his short stories, he continued a tradition set by former temperance writers of appealing to a reader's emotions through "implicit rather than explicit" descriptions of the impact of alcohol. Temperance writers prayed that readers would be "moved to disgust and outrage," as they read stylized examples of why alcohol negatively impacted society.⁷⁵ A perfect example of this style

⁷² Ager, *A Reform Sampler*, 71.

⁷³ *Eau Claire Sunday Leader*, Page 3, October 4, 1908.

⁷⁴ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 54.

⁷⁵ W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 198.

of writing can be found in Ager's 1907 collection of short stories entitled, *When You are Tired of Playing: Stories for Eyvind*. In this collection, Ager embedded moral lessons about the negative nature of alcohol into simple, yet relevant tales.⁷⁶ Ager's short story entitled, "The Lapdog" represented this style well.

In "The Lapdog" Ager began with a description of a "very good and Christian family."⁷⁷ This family attended church on Sunday regularly, even going during the week sometimes. They helped the needy and everyone respected the family because, "the family kept peace with everybody and treated everyone kindly, as a Christian family ought to do."⁷⁸ Ager framed this story within the tenants of Christianity as a basis for appropriate social behavior. As an iconic symbol of his creative style Ager introduced the idea of alcohol into the family in the form of a puppy.⁷⁹

In the beginning, according to Ager, "this sweet little puppy was so fine and his fur as soft as silk." It "was so small that he could neither bark nor bite." Both young and old fell in love with this puppy.⁸⁰ However, the soft exterior of this puppy slowly faded into problems for this peaceful family. The puppy began to bite. Small nibbles at first, but soon those bites grew in intensity until one of the sons in the family was bitten so bad he bled.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 55.

⁷⁷ Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing*, 14.

⁷⁸ Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing*, 14.

⁷⁹ Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing*, 14.

⁸⁰ Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing*, 15.

⁸¹ Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing*, 15.

The family continued to forgive the puppy even while it continued to hurt the family and those they knew. A neighborhood boy saw the family caressing the puppy so he went over to pet the dog and the dog bit him; the boy died soon after.⁸² Another day a passing stranger saw the cute puppy and went over to pet it but was bit. Again the man died.⁸³ The family continued to think the dog would get better. Unfortunately, they were wrong, as the devil had possessed the puppy in the same fashion as alcohol possessed the drinker; “For he had such a soft tongue, and his fur was like silk. He had a charming tail to wag, and he was irresistible when he licked papa’s face and mamma’s hand in such a winning way. But the devil laughed.”⁸⁴

In another section entitled “A Fish Story,” Ager took a different, even wilder turn. To explain a recent run of bad luck at catching fish, Ager took the form of a bullhead and created a world beneath the waves to explain that the fish were having a discussion in regards to whether or not they should be biting at food on a fisherman’s hook. Ager fashioned “A Fish Story” as an allegory of the human debate over alcohol.⁸⁵ Ager began with the opening of the meeting:

A beautiful trout opened the meeting by explaining its object. They had assembled, he said, to consider what might be done in view of the destruction, which was always lurking in their way thru the cunning of man. One after another was pulled up into the jaws of death, neither relatives nor friends were spared, and he made a gesture which suggested frying after death and which made the assembly shudder and crowd more closely together.⁸⁶

⁸²Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing*, 15-16.

⁸³ Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing*, 16.

⁸⁴ Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing*, 19.

⁸⁵ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 56.

⁸⁶ Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing*, 25.

Following the statement of the trout many other fish spoke on the topic from many different perspectives. A chub, which represented Eau Claire's alcohol supporters, responded by asking a question; "but what is the real purpose of life? . . . Is it not all one whether we go up into man or down into the pickerel, since we must die anyway and no longer have a chance to catch flies and bask in the sun. . . .When I see a bait – pop! I take it and slap the cork to boot. That's my view of the matter. Let everyone take care of himself," professed the chub.⁸⁷ While the chub represented an extreme viewpoint, to Ager it was the perfect antithesis to his anti-alcohol character.

While Ager never described why he chose to be represented by the bullhead, the reason can be inferred by his description of his bullhead character; "I am only a simple fish . . . my life-work is to keep rooting at the bottom of society, but my life is as dear to me as theirs to them." Ager continued on through the voice of the bullhead in regards to alcohol;

I admit that I have a desire for what is on the hook, and I try to struggle against it as long as there is daylight. But there are dark hours in the life of every fish, and what cannot be done in the day will happen in the dark. We bite. I am ashamed to confess it; but only the most radical law can save us . . . my dear fellow fishes, I mentioned as a trait of our character that we are voracious in our enjoyments, and our tough nature makes it impossible for use to get loose again. In the name of all bullheads, let us pass this bill and make it a law!⁸⁸

At the end of the meeting a law was passed to limit the temptation of food on a fisherman's hook and no fish were ever caught again. Even the chub stayed away from the hook; a portrayal of the success prohibition would supply. In regards to the "Fish Story," Historian Einar Haugen agreed that, "The allusion here is clearly to the vice of

⁸⁷ Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing*, 27-28.

⁸⁸ Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing*, 30.

drinking.”⁸⁹ The evil of alcohol remained Ager’s key focus throughout his entire collection of short stories in *When You are Tired of Playing*.

Ager’s colleague, and translator of *When You are Tired of Playing*, Skordalsvold considered Ager’s writing to be on par with the Norwegian playwright Ibsen; some consider Ibsen to be one of the most influential playwrights since William Shakespeare.⁹⁰

Skordalsvold summarized Ager’s writing style:

If I were to say anything about the general character of these stories it would be, that they breathe the author’s feeling against the great public crime of this day. Thru page upon page he seems to subdue this feeling by a skillful manipulation of the language. But it is always there, a perennial, fiery hate that consumes the author, and is very apt to kindle a kindred fire in the sympathetic soul that follows him closely.⁹¹

Through his short-story collections, Ager was able to represent the wide range of his creativity. While these collections proved to be entertaining, Ager’s novels proved to be an outlet for more mature perspectives related to temperance and the evils of alcohol. Norwegian heritage expert Einar Haugen argued that Ager’s novels were a departure from his temperance literature. Despite this argument, it is sensible to argue that Ager incorporated his temperance beliefs into more detailed narratives.⁹²

In *Christ Before Pilate*, Ager’s 1910 novel, Ager described a foggy day in a small town. Those who knew where they were going, because they abstained from alcohol, were bundled up and finding their way through the weather with ease. Contrary to these surefooted residents, “a drunken man staggered along with uncertain steps; he slipped but

⁸⁹ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 56.

⁹⁰ Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing*, 3.

⁹¹ Ager, *When You are Tired of Playing*, 4.

⁹² Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 65.

regained his balance – pulled himself together and went against a lamp pot, braced himself up again and went against a wall.”⁹³ Alcohol obviously affected the drunkard’s ability to maneuver through the poor weather, while people who abstained from alcohol found their way around with relative ease. Using the weather as an analogy of life, Ager used his “foxy” writing style to entertain the reader and deliver his temperance message.

In Ager’s 1917 novel, *On the Way to The Melting Pot*, Ager presented his concern with the economic wellbeing of his fellow Norwegians. In this novel Ager initially portrayed alcohol and the saloon as an escape from society. To make this point, Ager’s main character claimed that in the saloons, “There was no one there who was ashamed of being Norwegian . . . There was always someone who understood him and could sympathize with him or praise him.”⁹⁴ But while Ager began with a positive view of the saloon, Ager’s main character was negatively affected economically. “It happened that he could squander a couple of dollars in a single evening, and . . . he was alarmed at his extravagance.”⁹⁵ Ager argued one could spend an entire week’s worth of pay in a single evening and continue to buy drinks as if it was of no consequence.⁹⁶ This selection proved Ager believed Norwegians were, as Historian Einar Haugen put it, “wasting their potential on the nearest and cheapest drug . . . Only by staying sober could Norwegians climb the ladder of American success.”⁹⁷

⁹³ Waldemar Ager, *Christ Before Pilate: An American Story*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1924: 1910), 266.

⁹⁴ Waldemar Ager, *On the Way to the Melting Pot*, (Madison: Prairie Oak Press, 1995; 1917), 35.

⁹⁵ Ager, *On the Way to the Melting Pot*, 35.

⁹⁶ Ager, *On the Way to the Melting Pot*, 35-36.

⁹⁷ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 157. This selection was Historian Haugen’s attempt at summarizing Ager’s overall belief in the economic impact of alcohol consumption.

While Ager could be quite cryptic and artistic in his writing, he could also be extremely blunt. In *Sons of the Old Country*, Ager's 1926 novel, he included one of his darkest descriptions of the impact of alcohol. In it he described an interaction between a man and a woman resulting in a rape:

Looking at her – a bit hazily now – Adams got the idea that she felt he was not a gentleman, and could not be trusted. By God, he'd show her! And she was going to have to prove that she trusted him by taking off her coat – and her dress, too, by God! He'd show her he was a gentleman even though she didn't have a stitch on her back! "Off with the coat!" he suddenly shouted. Annie didn't answer, but quickly started for the door. It was locked. "Off with the coat, I say!" Adams got up and started toward her with an insane fire in his eyes. Now Annie began to understand, and she let out a shrill cry as she fled first in one direction, then in another, trying to evade Adam's outstretched hand. As the pursuit continued, her screaming grew louder . . .⁹⁸

Although this passage is quite different for Ager's usual style it is important because it represented the extreme measures Ager took to persuade people to forgo alcohol.

While Ager included the evils of alcohol in many different ways throughout his literature, the impact of alcohol was never presented in more detail than in his 1931 novel, *I Sit Alone*. In what proved to be Ager's final novel, *I Sit Alone* portrayed the importance of abstaining from alcohol through the experiences of Christian Pederson, a Norwegian-American immigrant. While it has been argued that *I Sit Alone* was a biographical look at Ager's early life, it better represents a general experience of a Norwegian-American immigrant attempting to make a living in America.⁹⁹

In *I Sit Alone*, Christian's marriage to his wife Rachel and alcohol's destructive force on their union took center stage as the primary temperance message. Despite

⁹⁸ Ager, *Sons of the Old Country*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983: 1926), 135.

⁹⁹ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 129.

Christian and Rachel's peaceful beginning, they experienced a turning point when Christian teamed with a Danish immigrant, Niels Nielson, to run a women's clothing store. Rachel ended up pulling away from Christian and both found relief from the stress through alcohol.

While their business was growing into a very successful establishment Niels, Christian, and their wives would come together on occasion to enjoy each other's company. Niels and his wife were pro-consumption and they did not let Christian forget that fact; "He often used to declare in fun that beer, wine, and brandy were not for Norsemen. They weren't civilized enough, they were like the Irish, he said. They hadn't learned to indulge in such things intelligently."¹⁰⁰ But while Christian did not give in to their peer pressure, Rachel did.

Rachel learned to enjoy wine at the Nielson's gatherings. She enjoyed it so much that she could not help but talk about the different kinds of wine she liked and how they tasted once she returned home to Christian. "She was not under any pledge, and . . . she appeared to enjoy wine. . . . I never saw her drunk, but I had a strong antipathy to intoxicants, and her loquaciousness and hilarity when she had been drinking annoyed me," complained Christian.¹⁰¹ Christian believed Rachel did it because she secretly hated him and, "it was a pleasure to her to see me in an overwrought condition of mind."¹⁰² Seemingly straight out of a passage in the *Reform*, alcohol continued to stress Christian and Rachel's marriage.

¹⁰⁰ Ager, *I Sit Alone*, 171.

¹⁰¹ Ager, *I Sit Alone*, 189.

¹⁰² Ager, *I Sit Alone*, 190.

As a consequence of their strained relationship, Christian walked to a saloon to find something to settle the consuming anxiety he felt about Rachel's drinking. As he sipped his first alcoholic drink, Christian felt his anxiety melt away as his "feet became strangely light and . . . head grew tired and settled." He concluded this trip to the saloon seemed to do him good.¹⁰³ Unfortunately Christian's conclusion was premature because while he enjoyed his drink, he remembered his former teetotaler beliefs and left the saloon in a hurry. "We are three-quarters or four-fifth beasts, any-how, and those who drink brandy are in the best condition to prove it," remembered Christian.¹⁰⁴ But as the tension with his wife continued, Christian would again find security in the local saloon.

Ager continued Christian's saloon escapades by describing the saloon's security for Norwegian-American immigrants.¹⁰⁵ At the saloon Christian found friends to whom he could confess his secrets; the alcohol also assisted in settling his nerves about his home life and Rachel.¹⁰⁶ In defense of the saloon Christian recalled that, "Allick Halvorsen's saloon, where I got into the habit of going, wasn't nearly so wild a place as I had imagined such resorts would be."¹⁰⁷ He also remembered that,

There were half a dozen of us who used to sit there of an evening to praise our wives and children and shoot of a lot of talk which we, at least, thought was sensible. We murdered nobody, never fought, swindled no simple farmer lads who might happen in, and we kept ourselves entirely clear of the white-slave traffic. We might talk of quite serious matters when the conversation took that turn, and we were moved to tears over things that might touch the sentiments of a

¹⁰³ Ager, *I Sit Alone*, 195.

¹⁰⁴ Ager, *I Sit Alone*, 195.

¹⁰⁵This description is almost identical to the description of security found in the saloon by a Norwegian-American immigrant in Ager's *Christ Before Pilate*.

¹⁰⁶ Ager, *I Sit Alone*, 206.

¹⁰⁷ Ager, *I Sit Alone*, 206.

respectable man anywhere. We would even find fault with men who drank so much that they neglected wives and children and made them suffer for it.¹⁰⁸

Ager's description of the saloon Christian visited appeared positive initially. Based on how Ager described Christian's experience in the saloon, it is hard to describe a saloon patron as "beastly."¹⁰⁹ While it may appear that Ager went against everything he had fought for in regards to temperance, it is quite easy to notice that Ager is incorporating his "foxy" style of writing. To Ager the saloon's positivity was only a cheap façade, as he described a situation that was equivalent to the devilish puppy in *When You Are Tired of Playing*.

A turning point for Christian was when he was handed a Salvation Army temperance pamphlet:

Once a Salvation Army girl came into the saloon and rattled her tambourine, and we all laid our mites in it. Each of us got in return a pamphlet with a picture of the prodigal son, a thoroughly miserable-looking specimen of humanity, clad as he was in rags and surrounded by swine. We stared at this picture uncomprehendingly. In so far as we were prodigals, we were prodigal fathers and husbands who wouldn't admit we were such. But surrounded by swine we often were. It was disgusting to see them root in the free luncheon with their dirty hands.¹¹⁰

Ager believed those who had become enthralled with saloon culture had strayed away from the appropriate path a father and husband should follow. "That our own families might suffer a bit didn't occur to us. My wife and children certainly lacked for nothing;

¹⁰⁸ Ager, *I Sit Alone*, 206; International Convention for the Suppression of the "White Slave Traffic," May 4, 1910, 211 Consol. T.S. 45, 1912 GR. Brit. T.S. No. 20, *as amended by* Protocol Amending the International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic, and Amending the International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic, May 4, 1949, 2 U.S.T. 1999, 30 U.N.T.S. 23, *entered into force* June 21, 1951, <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/whiteslave/traffic1910.html> (accessed on August 23, 2014). The White Slave Traffic, as described in the supplied link, related to the luring of women and girls into immoral acts. The need for punishment is discussed. In *I Sit Alone*, Ager described that Christian was a moral man by not taking part in this organization.

¹⁰⁹ Ager, *I Sit Alone*, 195.

¹¹⁰ Ager, *I Sit Alone*, 220.

but I know that I, for my part, would gladly give a year or two, possibly ten, of my life to get back a single evening of those we wasted there, if I could spend it with my children now,” remembered Christian remorsefully.¹¹¹

Ager incorporated a popular social reform belief that husbands and fathers should return to their rightful role within a family. Those who visited saloons, like Christian, were astray and could, like the biblical prodigal son, come home to their families. But the damage done on Christian’s family was too great for any such reform to occur. Following a fiery death of one of their children, Rachel and Christian divorced, as both were increasingly unhappy in their marriage.¹¹² In *I Sit Alone* Ager portrayed lives that were negatively impacted by emotional and physical loss due to alcohol. Not only was this narrative present in *I Sit Alone*; it was also a constant theme of Ager’s within his other novels.¹¹³

Following the publication of *I Sit Alone*, and the failure of the National Prohibition movement in 1933, Ager continued to write articles advocating his causes in the *Reform* during the last decade of his life. In the face of falling readership due to the Great Depression and lack of interest, Ager “became, if not the last man, at least the last warrior on the bastion of Norwegianness in America.”¹¹⁴ It appeared that once the national prohibition of alcohol failed, despite small incidental comments on drunkenness

¹¹¹ Ager, *I Sit Alone*, 207.

¹¹² Ager, *I Sit Alone*, 337.

¹¹³ It is interesting to see Ager portraying the impact of alcohol in this fashion. Most temperance literature, both fiction and nonfiction, tended to portray women as the victims. Many temperance groups such as the WCTU also aligned themselves with the victimization of women to plead for temperance. Ager reversed this tendency by portraying Christian as the victim.

¹¹⁴ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 144.

in the *Reform*, Ager gently retreated from making outlandish arguments in support of temperance, even if he believed otherwise.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him.

-Psalms 49:17

After complaining of feeling sick on June 28, 1941, Waldemar Ager's health deteriorated quickly until, on August 1, 1941, he died due to complications from colon cancer. The news of his death spread so quickly that even the funeral sermon commented on its swiftness; "Grace and Peace! 'Waldemar Ager is dead.' This news passed from home to home, it was talked on the streets, it was sent over wire and radio, and it was blazoned on the front pages of newspapers." Following Ager's passing, the *Reform* was quickly disbanded within weeks and all that remained of Ager was his literature and slowly fading memories.¹¹⁶

The impact of Ager's death on all who knew him pointed to his importance. While the tone of this gathering was one of grieving, Ager's funeral resembled his fiftieth birthday celebration in that there were a number of messages sent to Eau Claire in Ager's memory. "Scores of floral offerings were received, and there were many messages of sympathy, including one from Wilhelm Morgenstiere, Norwegian minister to the U.S. at Washington D.C., who wired: 'I am grieved to learn about Waldemar Ager's death.'" Morgenstiere continued his lamentation; "He was one of the most gifted and faithful men

¹¹⁵ Ager, *A Reform Sampler*, 100.

¹¹⁶ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 153.

of Norwegian origin in this country.”¹¹⁷ Despite all of Ager’s important work, his legacy was not solidified until after his death.

Ager’s legacy is one of love, passion, and conviction. Beginning in Norway, surrounded by economic distress and alcoholic abuse, Ager felt the sting of alcohol from an early age and became a supporter of abstinence. Primarily focused on saving as many Norwegian-American immigrants as possible, Ager used his strengths as a storyteller to write articles, short stories, and novels to convince others to abstain from consuming alcohol. Ultimately Ager’s temperance literature was fueled by his love for Norwegian-Americans and the fear that alcohol would remove any chance of economic, social, and ethnic development in the United States. Ager thrived disputing socially accepted vices in the attempt to save his fellow Norwegians.¹¹⁸

While Ager may have represented a Norwegian Sisyphus to Kenneth Smemo or a modern day Moses to Clarence Kilde, it is reckless to claim that Ager’s life was anticlimactic. While Ager experienced national prohibition for only thirteen years, his legacy cannot be defined by end results. Historian Einar Haugen stated, “fighting against the inevitable has long been regarded as the very hallmark of the hero. In his modest sphere, Ager had qualities that allied him with that noble tradition.” “He [Ager] loved temperance and Norwegian culture, and he hated drinking and assimilation, but he loved controversy more.”¹¹⁹ Ager even argued that he knew he would not be solely responsible for ending alcohol consumption; “Every victory costs something. Never have

¹¹⁷ “Great Throng Attends Funeral of W.T. Ager,” *Eau Claire Leader*, August 5, 1941.

¹¹⁸ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 157.

¹¹⁹ Haugen, *Immigrant Idealist*, 157.

circumstances happened without someone paying the price. . . . In large reforms many people must become bridge builders for higher and better things.”¹²⁰

Such a legacy must not be forgotten as it has added a new narrative to the alcohol debate in Eau Claire. To many novice readers of history, the alcohol debate was simply an ideological conflict between immigrants who possessed alcohol traditions and “old-stock” Americans who saw alcohol consumption as an inherent vice; Waldemar Ager’s legacy disrupts that mold. While many immigrants drank heavily, Ager did not. Many temperance groups were primarily “old-stock” Americans and yet Ager sided with them in order to fight for and with his fellow Norwegians. In surveying Ager’s life, and his creative literature, the words of Norwegian poet Welhaven seem fitting:

If you through strife and tears
Keep your childlike gleam to the last,
Then have you a rainbow over your tears,
Then have you the halo over your coffin.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Ager, *A Reform Sampler*, 92.

¹²¹ Clarence Kilde, “Dark Decade: The Declining Years of Waldemar Ager,” in *Norwegian-American Studies*, 28 (1979), 177. Authors Clarence Kilde and Einar Haugen have also used this poem in a similar fashion as I have.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

The Blue Book of Wisconsin, 1887. Edited by Ernst G. Timme, Milwaukee: The Milwaukee Litho & Engr. Co., 1887. <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?type=header&id=WI.WIBlueBk1887> (accessed on January 31, 2014); *The Blue Book of Wisconsin, 1899.* Edited by William H. Froehlich. Milwaukee: Northwestern Litho Co., 1899. <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?type=header&id=WI.WIBlueBk1899> (accessed on January 31, 2014). *The Blue Book of the State of Wisconsin 1901.* Edited by William H. Froehlich. Milwaukee: Northwestern Litho Co., 1901. <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?type=header&id=WI.WIBlueBk1901> (accessed on January 31, 2014); *The Blue Book of Wisconsin, 1911.* Edited by J.D. Beck. Madison: Democrat Printing Company, 1911. <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?type=header&id=WI.WIBlueBk1911> (accessed on January 31, 2014); *The Blue Book of Wisconsin, 1921.* Edited by The State Printing Board. 1921. <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?type=header&id=WI.WIBlueBk1921> (accessed on January 31, 2014); *Eau Claire City Directory, 1880,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory Co., 1880), 197-198; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1882* (St. Paul: Wright Directory Co., 1882), 225-226; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1884,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1884), 340-343; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1885,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1885), 350-352; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1887-1888,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1888), 373-376; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1889-1890,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1890), 330-332; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1891-1892,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1892), 342-343; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1893-1894,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1894), 362-363; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1895-1896,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1896), 375-376; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1897-1898,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1898), 317-319; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1899-1900,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1900), 383-384; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1901-1902,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1902), 320-322; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1903-1904,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1904), 354-357; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1905-1906,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1906), 373-375; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1908,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1908), 422-423; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1910,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1910), 415-417; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1912,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1912), 410-411; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1914,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1914), 402-403; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1916,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1916), 462-463; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1918,* (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1918), 357. Records of the Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Federal Population Census, 1880.* Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, June 1, 1880. www.ancestry.com, (accessed on May 6, 2013); Records of the Bureau of the Census. *U.S. Federal Population Census, 1900.* Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, June 1, 1900.

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Appendix B

Total Population of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 1880-1920

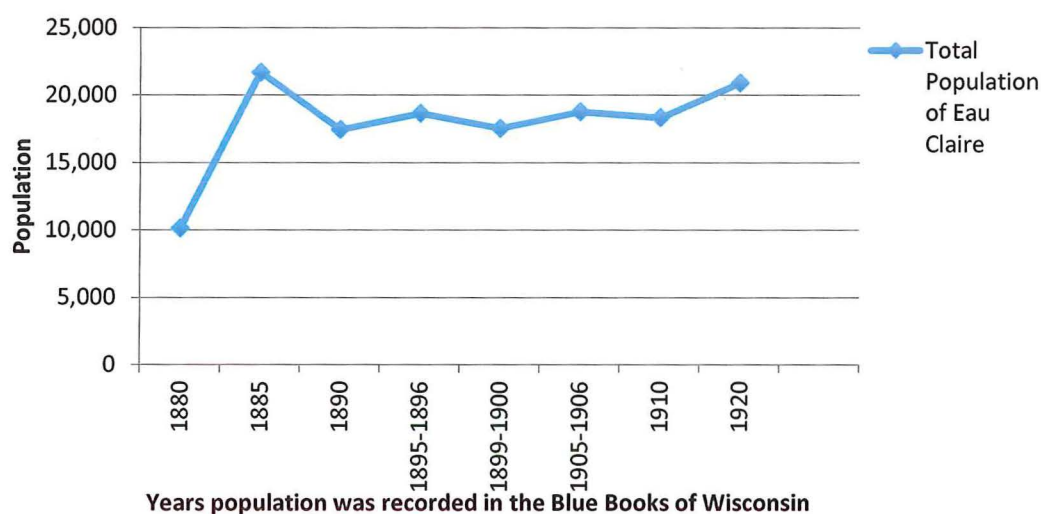


Figure 1. The population of Eau Claire, Wisconsin from 1880-1920.

Source: The Blue Book of Wisconsin, 1887. Edited by Ernst G. Timme, Milwaukee: The Milwaukee Litho & Engr. Co., 1887. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/WI.WIBlueBk1887> (accessed on January 31, 2014); The Blue Book of Wisconsin, 1899. Edited by William H. Froehlich. Milwaukee: Northwestern Litho Co., 1899. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/WI.WIBlueBk1899>, (accessed on January 31, 2014); The Blue Book of the State of Wisconsin 1901. Edited by William H. Froehlich. vol. 19. Wisconsin: Secretary of States office, 1901. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/WI.WIBlueBk1901>, (accessed on January 31, 2014); *The Blue Book of Wisconsin, 1911*. Edited by J.D. Beck. Madison: Democrat Printing Company, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/WI.WIBlueBk1911> (accessed on January 31, 2014); *The Blue Book of Wisconsin, 1921*. Edited by The State Printing Board. 1921. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/WI.WIBlueBk1921> (accessed on January 31, 2014)

Appendix C

Number of Saloons in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 1873-1918

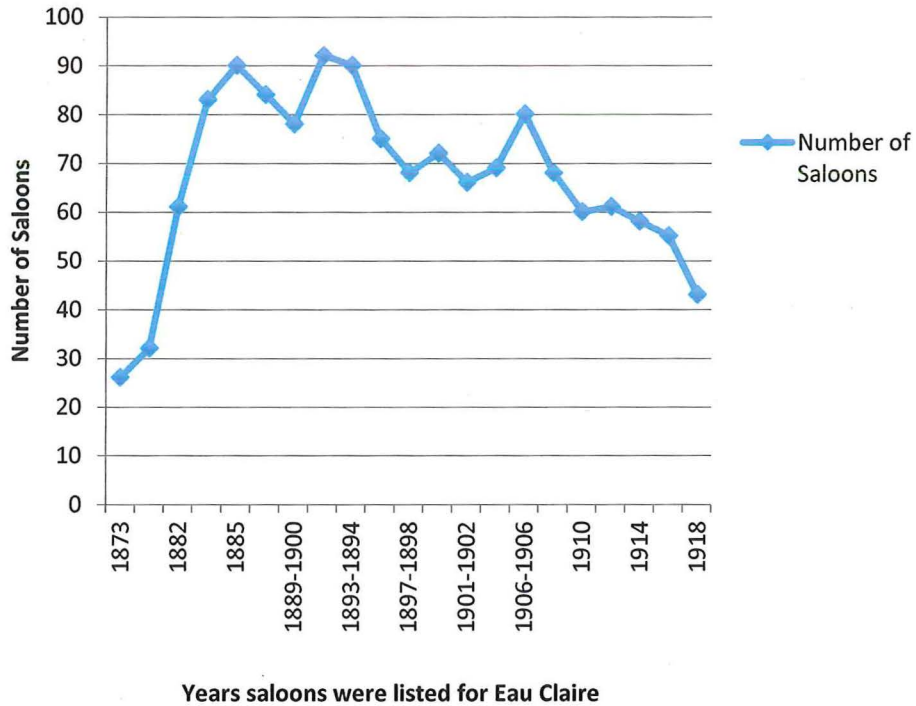


Figure 2. The number of saloons in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, from 1873-1918.

Source: *Eau Claire City Directory, 1880*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory Co., 1880), 197-198; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1882* (St. Paul: Wright Directory Co., 1882), 225-226; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1884*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1884), 340-343; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1885*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1885), 350-352; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1887-1888*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1888), 373-376; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1889-1890*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1890), 330-332; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1891-1892*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1892), 342-343; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1893-1894*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1894), 362-363; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1895-1896*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1896), 375-376; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1897-1898*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1898), 317-319; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1899-1900*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1900), 383-384; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1901-1902*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1902), 320-322; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1903-1904*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1904), 354-357; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1905-1906*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1906), 373-375; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1908*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1908), 422-423; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1910*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1910), 415-417; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1912*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1912), 410-411; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1914*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1914), 402-403; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1916*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1916), 462-463; *Eau Claire City Directory, 1918*, (St. Paul: Wright Directory CO., 1918), 357; Gorner & Ludlow, publishers, *Chippewa Business Directory, 1873*, (Eau Claire: Free Press Print, 1873), 23-26.

Appendix D

Saloonkeeper Ethnicity, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 1880

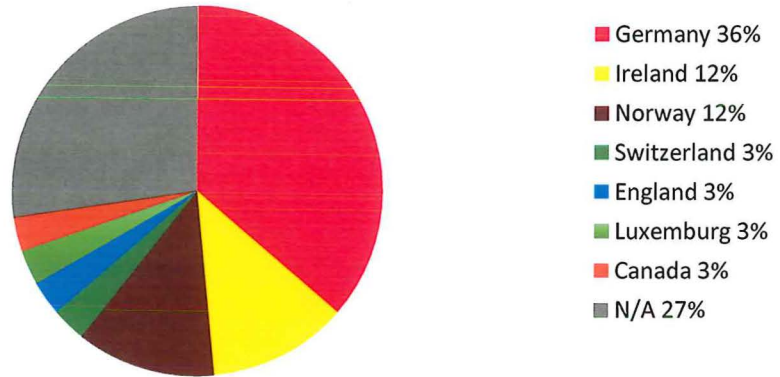


Figure 4. The Breakdown of Eau Claire saloonkeepers based upon their claimed ethnicity, and their parents, in the 1880 U.S. Census Data. Percentage points are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source: Data from the 1880 U.S. Census and the 1880 Eau Claire City Directory.

Appendix E

Saloonkeepers Ethnicity, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 1900

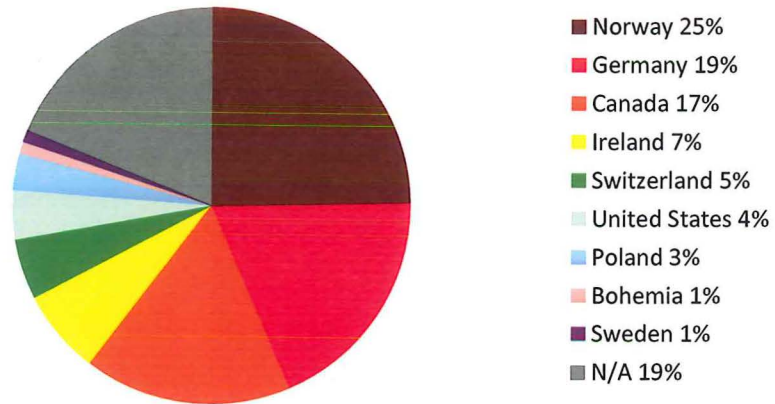


Figure 5. The breakdown of Eau Claire saloonkeepers based upon their claimed ethnicity, and their parents, in the 1900 U.S. Census data. Percentage points rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source: 1900 U.S. Census and the 1900 Eau Claire City Directory.

Appendix F

Georgia Culver, Post-1894, Poem.

We sisters meet in conclave
And solemnly proposed
To raise some money someway
To help defeat our foes.

Where's sister Avery
She who is president
In silence waited all the clan
To hear what she'd present.

We all might come together
And tell the many ways
That we have earned money
Throughout the passing days.

Then some one made a motion
That we'd adopt a plan
T'was second quite promptly
And voted by the clan
the meeting then adjourned and visiting began.

How shall I earn my dollar?
The Parsons wife explained
You knit lovely holders
A sister near explained.

Said one I'll buy a holder
I too if I've the chance
So on the spot she sold hers
Productions in advance.

Professors wives and Parsons
Are always very fast
To hit on something practical
And come out all sight at last.

For didn't sister [Siveringin]
I know it was all fair
Informs us she would earn hers
By cutting husband's hair.

It strikes quite well for her though
That he accepts her care
Not many men would trust their wives
To take them by the hair.

One proposed to put to rhyme
Experiences for pay
Ah! That to easy, All explained
I wouldn't take a day.

You must work and earn your money
Not just scribble off some rhyme
We can tell our own experience
You need not spend the time.

This earning business, sisters
Is nothing new to me
But now to get this dollar
I did not clearly see.

I thought about all the day
And dreamed of it all night
I worried over many plans
No money come in sight.
And much I pondered in my mind
If such a thing were right.

I thought I'd call upon my friends
And talk the matter over
A snowstorm come and hindered me
But a friend came to my door

She said you make poppies?
A bunch I much desire
It you will make them I will pay
The price you may require.

I cried, oh yes, the poppies I will make
And get them done
by noon today
Is what I'll undertake

and from her wallet, she took out
A shining coin, silver bright
She placed it in my hand
Then oh! My heart grew light.

Next Mon. was the lecture night.
The University Extension
T'was was across the river too
In this case I must mention.

The way was long, the night was dark
Professor Scott was talking
At length, I got my courage up
And saved a dime by walking.

by working, walking, talking
This doll I have earned
And how to earn 1,000 more
I'm greatly now concerned.

Selina Frizzell, Post-1894, poem.

Last Wed night, twas a fine sight

To see the preparations
The ladies made, who lent their aid
To furnish temperance rations

At the sociable, great, which was held in state
At Kepler's home
The supper was fine, without any wine
The bar glasses did not foam

Twas an event, which those who attend
Will long in memory hold
The receipts of which did much [emish]
Full eighty dolls were pulled

As that was where, the West Eau Claire
Fine W.C.T.U. did such relate
Her experience, great. I'm earning a dollar true
Form the mammoth dues of the temperance cause

These experiences were written
In jingling rhyme, which were all prime
The writer of this was smitten
With a desire to tune her lyre, and this is the result

If it is printed and read 'tis' hinted
They'll very much exalt
This union must be
As all could see

A real poets corner
What other city
Has as many witty
Fine poets to adorn her?

Margeret Lyons, Post-1894, poem

Here is a dollar, free as the river.
The Lord loves a cheerful giver.
Who trusts in Providence for what may follow
So tending the boys ducks I earned this dollar.