

Ashland in the Prohibition Era

By Lori Adams

In 1919, the Volstead Act was passed by the U.S. Government and started the prohibition era. The Act was ratified by 46 of the 48 states and prohibited the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors. The Act was passed in response to current social issues such as family dysfunction and violence, poverty, morality, alcoholism, and political corruption. Many communities and states had already banned alcohol prior to implementation of the Volstead Act due to these problems.

Alcohol consumption dates back to the colonial days. Benjamin Franklin once reportedly said, "Beer is living proof that God loves us and wants to see us happy." Types of liquor available during colonial times were beer, cider, rum, wine, claret, and ratafias, which were all consumed morning, noon, and night on a regular basis. It was felt the water supply was quite often too tainted, and beer was a healthier solution for hydration. The average American consumed eight ounces of liquor each day.

In an attempt to discourage and possibly eliminate alcohol use, the American Temperance Society (ATS) was started in 1826 and served as a foundation for other groups formed later. By 1835, the ATS had grown to 1.5 million members nationwide with its chapters made up of 35-60% women.

The temperance movement in Ashland was quite active. In March 1853, women of the Methodist Church organized the Ashland Ladies Indignation Society (ALIS). The group was opposed to the sale of liquor and agreed to work "peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must." 28 women crusaded through town visiting all but one of Ashland's saloons. They emptied liquor from barrels and kegs and vowed to conduct an aggressive campaign. One saloonkeeper in Ashland was run out of town and never returned.

Despite the efforts of the ALIS, liquor sales continued in Ashland. There was an area on one side of Church Street between Main and Second which was overrun with saloons during the 1870's and 1880's. It was known as "Pious Row." There was a wide boardwalk, and the "drunkards" who frequented the "lowdown" saloons sat on their tipped back chairs lining the front of the buildings.



Barely visible is a "blacklist" hanging to the left edge of the mirror behind this unidentified Ashland saloon in the 1800's. Blacklists were common and contained the names of those banned from drinking for being a drunkard.

In 1871, Mrs. Catherine Clark actually filed suit and won \$300 in damages from saloonkeeper Samuel Davis. Davis sold liquor to Clark's husband, even after he was placed on the bar's blacklist of known drunkards.

The temperance movement was revived again in 1874 when a group of Ashland ladies organized a crusade around town, visiting saloons and drug stores who sold alcohol. They sang and prayed at all establishments in an attempt to curb alcohol sale and use. This group, or possibly another, also caused damage to a local saloon with rumors the saloon owner's wife assisted.

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City Council closed down all saloons temporarily, but allowed them to resume business two months later. Constant agitation from members of the temperance movement eventually resulted in the shutdown of all 17 saloons in Ashland after a community vote in 1907. Saloons were not only voted out of the city, but also out of the county.

Because of prohibition efforts, illegal alcohol consumption was driven underground into secret bars and nightclubs known as speakeasies, blind tigers, or blind pigs. Many continued to manufacture and stockpile alcohol prior to the actual implementation and enforcement of the 18th Amendment in 1920.

The prohibition era subsequently created other social issues in the United States. Street gangs became organized and turned their illegal manufacture and sales of liquor into a profitable business that employed attorneys, accountants, truckers, warehouse workers, etc. This created a new type of crime element in American society which included a host of large networks of organized crimes such as bootlegging, gambling, bribery, and murder among others.

On September 24, 1920, two houses on Arch Street in Ashland were raided due to multiple reports of running “a gambling house and liquor rendezvous.” Police hauled out three truckloads of raisin wine and corn mash. One of the homeowners who was nicknamed “Jiggers” told police he was storing the liquor for a friend in Akron who sold it for \$16 a gallon, which was under the going price of \$20 per gallon. The man in the other house stated he was making vinegar for the pickles and mangos he served to his boarders.

In his court report for 1924, Judge J.L. Mason reported there were 304 arrests made resulting in fines of \$5,057.40. Of those arrests, 118 were for “booze charges,” and Police Chief John D. Gordon said the small jail room was often packed with men who were “temporary residents” from the night before.



A saloon that was probably subject to the crusades of local women involved in the temperance movement

In 1933, the 18th Amendment was repealed by the 21st Amendment with the required $\frac{3}{4}$ of the states' majority, because prohibition had failed to fully stop the alcohol issue in society and had created new problems. Enforcement of national prohibition had also cost millions of dollars. Mississippi was the final state to repeal prohibition, but not until 1966.

Ashland's first state liquor store was subsequently opened on April 4, 1934, with 900 cases of whiskeys, rums, wines, cordials, and other liquors. Whiskey prices ranged from \$1.25 to \$5.10 for a pint of imported rye. The store stocked 73 varieties of bourbon, and during its first week of business, did \$800 worth of business. The store was managed by P.H. McDowell and also employed Charles Weithoff, John Briggs, Harold Kazebee, and Paul Soule.



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