

Illustrations



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

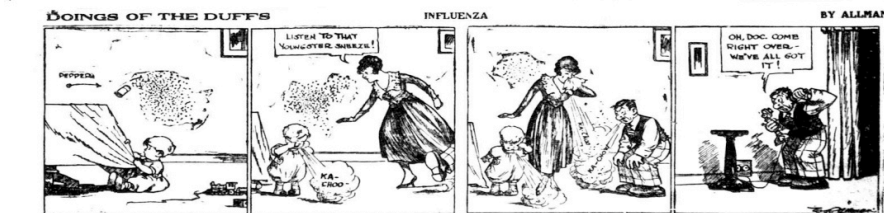


Figure 4

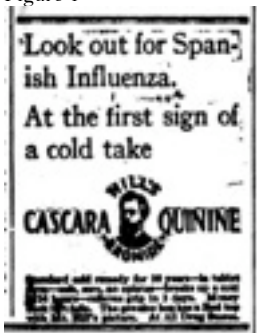


Figure 5



Figure 6

Prohibition in America: A Case Study of Small-Town America

Michael Weatherford

Michael Weatherford is a graduate student and received his bachelor's in social sciences with a teacher's certificate from Eastern Illinois University in 2009. He is a native of Charleston, Illinois and has lived in the town his entire life. He hopes to pursue a teaching job in the junior high, secondary, or junior college level. This paper was written for Dr. Lynne Curry's HIS 5160 course, America Between Wars: 1918-1940, in fall 2009

Come, friends and brethren, all unite
 In songs of hardy cheer; Our song speeds onward in its might-
 Away with doubt and fear, we'll give the pledge, we'll join our hands
 Resolved on victory; We are a bold, determined band,
 And strike for victory.
 The cup of death no more we'll take
 The cup no more we'll give; It makes the head, bosom ache-
 Ah! Who can drink and live? We give the pledge, we'll join our hands,
 Resolved on victory; We are a bold, determined band,
 And strike for victory. ¹

This song represents the changing philosophy in Illinois as prohibition became a central issue in the state and the country in the early twentieth century. The issue of prohibition was pushed particularly by the Illinois Intercollegiate Prohibition Association (ICPA) and the Anti-Saloon League. These groups helped to spread the messages of the evils of alcohol and urged that alcohol be banished from the towns of Illinois. The ICPA did their part by spreading anti-alcohol messages and circulating petitions throughout the colleges of Illinois. Participation in the ICPA grew to sixteen institutions; eleven were private liberal arts colleges including Augustana, Aurora, Creenville, Hedding, Illinois Holiness, McKendree, Millikin, Mt. Morris, Monmouth, North Central, and Wheaton, five of them were universities or theological schools; University of Illinois, University of Chicago, Northwestern University, and Garrett and McCormick theological seminaries.² The message being spread at these institutions could be summed up by the words of Mamie White of Wheaton College when he states in 1904: "Strike the rum demon Down! The date of his dethronement is at hand. Clearer than thunder at summer's first shower,

¹ Clarence Roberts, "The Illinois Intercollegiate Prohibition Association, 1873-1920," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 70, 2 (1977): 140-148.

² Clarence Thomas, 142.

in the dome of the sky, God is striking the hour of our deliverance on rum."³

The Anti-Saloon League did its own part to provoke anti-alcohol sentiment. The group used its political influence in order to get legislation passed to limit the sale and distribution of alcohol in the state. The league was successful at manipulating public opinion through publicity such as magazines. This type of publicity was particularly effective with the religious community. While the church federation furnished neither leadership nor control over strategy, it provided something more valuable: an organized constituency that placed money, voters, and the makings of a grassroots political machine at the disposal of the Anti-Saloon League. Ministers would preach of the importance of the ASL and would ask for donations to further the organization's cause. Nearly 2,500 pastors were on the ASL's side and this rise in support reflected an increase in support for prohibition throughout Illinois and the United States.⁴

Support for a Prohibition movement was at an all-time high when the eighteenth amendment was implemented in January 1920. As the clock struck midnight on the fifteenth of January, the state and country changed. What had been an orderly society, dependant on alcohol, had suddenly been transformed into a culture of chaos and confusion. Preceding the implementation of the eighteenth amendment was a period of time filled with violence, corruption, and the crumbling of the moral and social fabric of society. Prohibition caused the best and worst of people to come out and made life in most parts of the country unpredictable. Using this as a framework, the following question must be asked: What was life like in the small towns of Illinois during Prohibition? This paper will investigate this question in order to examine how prohibition impacted the lives of the citizens that lived within the borders of this geographic area. The primary goal of this study is to investigate how life in Illinois was affected by Prohibition. This will be done by examining three areas: Williamson County in Southern Illinois, McDonough County in Western Illinois, and Coles County in East-Central Illinois. An analysis of these three areas will provide the reader an idea of what life was like in Illinois during prohibition. Not only this, but, such as Chicago, were not the only areas affected by the implementation of Prohibition. Towns around Illinois saw criminal activity and chaos increase once prohibition had gripped its hand around the throat of Illinois' citizens.

Before discussing the three geographic areas of this survey, it is important to discuss the main arguments as to the nature of Prohibition. Since there is a very scarce body of literature dedicated to this time period, there seems to be two general arguments as to the nature of Prohibition,

³ Clarence Thomas, 144.

⁴Thomas Pegrum, "The Dry Machine: The Formation of the Anti-Saloon League of Illinois," *Illinois Historical Journal* 83, 3 (1990): 173-186.

The first argument states that prohibition was a part of the general progressive movement taking place in America during this time. This is the prevailing argument and many historians seem to attach themselves to it. Norman H. Clark is one historian who believes in this argument and in his book, *Deliver Us From Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition*, he contends that historians have stereotyped those women involved in the temperance movement as sex-starved and prudish. They were self-righteous and wanted to make sure nobody else was having fun. Clark argued that drinking was actually a big problem and was destroying families. He notes that historians characterize the eighteenth amendment as a fluke or an accident. The author argues that this is not an accurate expression of the American tradition of progress and reform. Instead, Clark states that it was a reflection of American character; similar to the anti-slavery movement. Historians do not look at abolitionists and ridicule them but look at prohibitionists as crazy and extreme.⁵ According to Clark, it was important to them because Americans were trying to define the American identity and didn't want drunkards to be a part of that identity. They were forging a new, "clean" identity after the Civil War that was free of corruption and tried to emphasize the innocence of American culture.⁶

Another historian who viewed prohibition as another step in the progressive movement was J. C. Burnham. His book, *New Perspectives on the Prohibition "Experiment" of the 1920's*, states that historians look at it as an experiment because it failed. At the same time, it fits in with the time and philosophy of the progressive movement.⁷ Therefore, Burnham maintains that prohibition was an experiment for the sake of maintaining the argument. He contends that if the citizens of the United States were not extremely dependent on alcohol and thus, the law being broken on numerous occasions, Prohibition would have worked and it would have been considered a success. This would have taken the title of Prohibition being an experiment away and it would have been known as a legitimate concept in American History. His central argument was that the lasting results of prohibition were the perpetuation of the stereotypes of the wet propaganda of the 1920's and the myth that the American experiment of prohibition was a failure.⁸ This perspective is different from Clark's, but is similar in that he contends that the concept of prohibition was part of the progressive movement that America had taken part in during this time.

On the other side of the coin are those who did not believe prohibition was part of the progressive movement at all. Richard Hofstadter, in his book *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR*, emphasizes

⁵ Norman H. Clark, *Deliver Us From Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976), 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷ J.C. Burnham, "New Perspectives on the Prohibition Experiment of the 1920's," *Journal of Social History* 2, 1 (Autumn 1968): 51-68.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

this point and gives an alternative notion to the nature of Prohibition. He states that Prohibition was a pseudo-reform, a pinched, parochial substitute for reform which had a wide spread appeal to a certain type of crusading mind." However, he does not believe that "this type of crusading mind" belongs to those associated with the progressive movement.⁹ He justifies this by stating "To hold the Progressives responsible for Prohibition would be to do them an injustice."¹⁰ This counters the argument of those historians, such as Clark, who think the progressive movement was involved in the Prohibition movement. Hofstadter states that it is not fair to characterize Prohibition as a progressive reform. Instead, he is blaming it mostly on rural people and those who follow William Jennings Bryant. Also, he blames the morality of society on Prohibition. He does this by stating: "For Prohibition in the twenties was the skeleton at the feast, a grim reminder of the moral frenzy that so many wished to forget, a ludicrous caricature of the reforming impulse, of the Yankee-Protestant notion that it is both possible and desirable to moralize private life through public action."¹¹ This idea is obviously different from that of the progressive school and allows for differing opinions on this topic and thus, such arguments to take place.

These arguments now allow for a discussion on the three counties in which this essay studies. A case study of each county provides different views of life during Prohibition and how people reacted to the enforcement of laws prohibiting the consumption and distribution of alcohol. It is important to note that this study will not discuss Chicago and how it reacted to Prohibition because it has already been heavily studied. In order to get a reasonable order in place, the case studies will go in counter-clockwise order by geography. This means that the first county that will be studied is McDonough County.

During Prohibition, McDonough County was a complex region; full of conflicting perceptions and hidden layers. These layers helped to distinguish McDonough County from the other counties in this study. The story of McDonough County, in particular the town of Colchester, is a typical caricature of the rise and fall of a coal town. Coal was discovered near Colchester in the 1850's, and the mines attracted immigrants from Pennsylvania. At first these included the descendants of Irish Protestant refugees from the Irish rebellion of 1798. Later they were joined by Irish Catholic refugees from the Irish Potato Famine.¹² This collaboration between immigrant groups combined with the establishment of other businesses made Colchester a town of great potential. In the early twentieth

⁹ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 281.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹² John E. Hallwas, *The Bootlegger: A Story of Small town America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998) 15.

century, Colchester was still surviving despite its economy taking a hit late in the nineteenth century because Colchester had several thriving businesses within its borders. In industry there was mining of coal and clay, and the manufacturing of pottery. For trade there were general stores, clothing stores, hardware stores, dealers in agricultural machinery and automobiles, and an elegant movie theater. The railroad promised prosperity in the latter nineteenth century, and paved roads promised it again in the twentieth. But both, eventually, merely passed through Colchester on their way to more important places.¹³ This discontent with the rest of the region left Colchester hurting economically. Many businesses closed and those businesses that found success saw that it did not last long. "Our little town had many good qualities to it," Emma Getche, a long-time resident of the town at the time stated. "It just couldn't last all the trials the town faced during the years with the economy going bad and the struggles within the town."¹⁴ The coal mining industry, which was the industry Colchester depended on the most, couldn't salvage the economy of the town by itself. Many lost their jobs and had to resort to other activities in order to pass the time. This led many to seek the sweet escape of alcohol. When Prohibition was enforced in 1920 and there was the elimination of alcohol, it created a lot of tension and violent acts started to take place.

In terms of the town itself during Prohibition, Colchester had two sides. One side represented that of most towns in the United States. There was the joy of popular amusement: a new movie theater in 1926, saloon camaraderie and new roadhouses, baseball, and the freedom of automobiles. There were also friends and family, each with a nickname that symbolized belonging and unity. It is easy to see that the people of Colchester loved their town. "We had a nice little town," John Calahan said. "Despite the hard times, we were a close-knit community."¹⁵ However, there was the other side of Colchester, the underside of small town life: spousal abuse, prostitution, gambling, poverty, premarital pregnancy, and violence. This other side was emphasized during the years of prohibition. Prohibition was responsible for creating disputes among men and women as well as drastically increasing criminal activity in the area. According to the local newspaper of Colchester, the level of crime in Colchester doubled during Prohibition.¹⁶ Adding additional chaos to a town already dealing with uncertain times. Prohibition also created a division in the community as the Ku Klux Klan marked bootleggers as its number one enemy; not Jews, Catholics, or blacks. ¹⁷ Though the Ku Klux Klan was vicious in their

¹³ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁴ *The Gazette News*, January 12, 1920.

¹⁵ *The Gazette News*, June 24, 1921.

¹⁶ *Gazette News*, November, 25, 1929.

¹⁷ See Andrew Sinclair, *Prohibition: The Era of Excess* (Boston, MA: Little and Born, 1962)

attacks on the bootlegger, it did not get rid of them and the bootleggers became a major cause of crime. Bootleggers during this time were a thorn in the side of the authorities and the Ku Klux Klan. At the same time, they represented a symbol of hope for those longing for the thirst for the sweet nectar of alcohol.

As with the town of Colchester itself, bootleggers in this area had two sides to them; the law-abiding proper citizen, and the bootlegging criminal. This double life of the bootlegger was exemplified in that of Henry "Kelly" Wagle. On one hand, he was courageous and caring. To the people of Colchester, Wagle was a hero. He helped the poor and paid for the local high school's first football uniforms. "He did us a great service," head football coach Bill Campbell said. "We would have been in trouble without Henry's help."¹⁸ The bootlegger remained loyal to his hometown and his friends. In his support of those who he claimed to be his friends, he was known to have driven ten miles through mud to take supplies and money to a family in need. After his death people forgot the dark side of his life; his daring deeds grew in memory and in stories told and retold about the small-town gangster/hero. An example of such heroics took place when in 1926 Edna Bell Clark, a little girl of approximately seven years old, was dying of strangulation after her windpipe had been pierced by glass in an automobile accident. Acting fast, Wagle grasped the child in his arms and lifted her into his automobile and sped toward Macomb. He made the six-mile journey to the hospital in six minutes and an operation was quickly performed and the little girl's life was saved.¹⁹ When reporting on her condition, the doctor that operated on her stated, "We operated on her just in time. If Mr. Wagle wouldn't have gotten her here in the timely manner that he did, she wouldn't have survived."²⁰ Acts such as this were not uncommon for Kelly and show why Colchester held him in such high regard.

Of course, there was the other side of Kelly. Kelly Wagle was a notorious bootlegger in the Western and Northern part of the state. He was known for having ties with Al Capone and was involved with the production of alcohol as well as the transportation of it from Chicago.²¹ Under the disguise of driving a taxi, Wagle transported alcohol from Chicago to Colchester and distributed it to his customers as a trusted and very successful businessman. He was persuasive in his selling of alcohol, though he never sold to drunkards or children. Wagle was also a man of violence and brutality. He almost certainly killed his second wife, a fact unknown to his neighbors until his own violent death, allegedly at the hand

of another mobster.²² He allegedly killed or hurt countless others in order to help his business and his friends. Added to his list of crimes was carjacking, which was reported on by other gangsters.

On September 11, 1921, members of the disgraced Chicago Black Sox baseball team played with the Colchester city team in a baseball game against nearby Macomb. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, Kelly Wagle paid to bring the players to Colchester. It was reported that Macomb was overpowering every team in the local league and that they were most certainly going to win the championship. In order to stack the odds in Colchester's favor, Kelly bought the rights to Black Sox players Joe Jackson, Charles Risberg, Buck Weaver and Eddie Cicotte.²³ They all performed well in the game and Colchester won 5-0. Kelly Wagle was managing Colchester at the time and took great pleasure in the victory. Macomb tried repealing the victory, but to no avail. "This game was not fair," one Macomb player stated after the game. "That damn Kelly Wagle cheated!"²⁴ This symbolized the kind of corrupt acts Wagle participated in to help him and those around him get a step up in life.

Despite these transgressions, the *Gazette News* in Carthage, Illinois reported that over one thousand people attended Wagle's funeral in 1929.²⁵ Those attending weren't celebrating a man of numerous crimes, but a man that contributed greatly to the community. One unnamed man at the funeral reflected on Kelly Wagle's life by stating "He was a good old boy...he didn't do anything wrong. He helped this town out in so many ways and was a valuable member of this community."²⁶ This type of two-sided view of Kelly symbolized how Colchester operated during Prohibition. In the eyes of the citizens of this small town, Wagle wasn't committing a serious crime when he was bootlegging. Instead, he was breaking an unjust law that should not have been in effect in the first place. According to one woman at Wagle's funeral, "He was a beacon of hope in an otherwise dreary society."²⁷ This type of double life for the town was common in this part of Illinois. However, the next case study examines a county that had a different approach to handling Prohibition. The next study is of Williamson County.

The story of Williamson County is one of prosperity, violence, bootlegging, and warfare between rivalry gangs, bootleggers, and the Ku Klux Klan. This study will be divided into two sections: the conflict between the bootleggers and the Ku Klux Klan and the wars between the gangs within Williamson County. However, in order to set up these conflicts, it is important to discuss the most important factor to the quality

¹⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, April 12, 1922.

¹⁹ *Chicago Tribune*, August 23, 1927.

²⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, August 24, 1927.

²¹ Hallwas, 42.

²² *Ibid.*, 159.

²³ *Chicago Tribune*, September 12, 1921.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Gazette News*, August 13, 1929.

²⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, August 15, 1929.

²⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, August 17, 1929.

of life in this county: coal. Williamson County is in the center of southern Illinois, which, according to Masatomo Ayabe, was known as the "largest high grade cheaply mined, continuous deposit of bituminous coal in the world."²⁸ From 1883 to 1924, the county led the entire state in coal output. In fiscal year 1920-1921, for example, there were seventy-two mines (fifty shipping mines) in operation employing over 11,000 miners and producing more than 10 million tons of coal. Williamson County was also a wholly unionized community. All miners belonged to the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). The Sub-district No.10 with headquarters in Herrin was one of the strongest in the state UMWA (District No. 12), which was reputedly the most powerful unit of organized labor in the United States. By 1920, the number of UMWA-card holders exceeded eleven thousand, about sixty percent of all the males over twenty-one years of age.²⁹ The miners' union was an integral part of the community and dominated local politics. Union officials entered the elite segment of the community and shared civic-political leadership with businessmen and professionals. Since many of the coal mines in Williamson County were under absentee ownership local bankers and businessmen had little power to control the economy of their community. Their survival depended solely on the well-being of the coal miners, the businessmen stood solidly behind organized labor, ready to help unemployed or striking miners.³⁰ This gave the coal industry great power within the context of politics and government policies. Many of these coal miners happened to be in the Ku Klux Klan, and would be a part of the struggle between the Ku Klux Klan and the bootleggers. This was similar to that of Colchester, but to a greater extent. The conflict between the Ku Klux Klan and the bootleggers presented difficulties for citizens and daily life in the area. One example of how the conflict spilled over to the neighborhoods is detailed in the following story about John H. Smith:

On the night of April 14, 1926, John H. Smith was standing in front of his auto garage with countless bullet holes. According to the Chicago Tribune, he said, "Look at my garage. It is like a sieve. I'm through. I want peace. For six years I've fought for law enforcement, but I'm through now. For the last two years I've slept up here in my garage with a sheet of steel screen around my bed. Yes, I'm tired of it all and I want peace. They can open up a saloon on both sides of my place if they want to. I won't fight no more." The next day Smith sold his business and left the town.³¹

²⁸ Masatomo Ayabe, "Ku Kluxers in a Coal Mining Community: A Study of the Ku Klux Klan Movement in Williamson County, Illinois, 1923-1926," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 102, 1 (Spring 2009): 45-73, 46.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

³¹ Paul Angle, *Bloody Williamson: A Chapter in American Lawlessness* (Chicago, IL: University of Aurora Press, 1993) 23.

In the mid-1920s, John H. Smith was a member of the Herrin chapter of the Ku Klux Klan (Herrin Buckhorn Klan). From December 1923 to April 1926, Williamson County was in a state of civil war in which Klan and anti-Klan factions engaged in fierce battles over Prohibition enforcement; on the streets as well as at the polls. Led by a freelance detective named S. Glenn Young (not a resident of the county), Klan vigilantes conducted a series of massive raids on illicit liquor joints during the winter of 1923-1924. The raids were very successful, resulting in fifty-five jail sentences and \$55,025 in fines assessed at the federal court.³² The following April, the triumphant Klan had its members elected in the city, township, and county elections. These raids were violent; Klan vigilantes kicked doors open, beat up men and women, and stole money and other valuables. The raids angered the bootlegging gangsters, including Charlie Birger and Earl Shelton (they were among the arrested), and the officials allegedly in league with them, notably Sheriff George Galligan.³³ The gunfights between the two factions left nineteen men dead and brought state troopers into the county five times in a little more than two years.³⁴ John H. Smith played a part in the Klan war, and two of the five major gun battles took place at his Herrin garage. "We just wanted the bootleggers out of the area," Smith said. "We wanted to bring morality back into a town that hasn't had it in a long time."³⁵ During the last of these battles, the "election day riot" of April 13, 1926, was when anti-Klan gangsters poured hundreds of shots into the Smith garage, making it look like a "sieve." This riot concluded the civil war in favor of the bootleggers and put the hooded organization out of existence in "Bloody Williamson" County.³⁶

Before the departure of the Ku Klux Klan, the unifying force behind this group was a desire to make Williamson County a morally fit place to live in and to vindicate the community before the nation. The Lester Mine riot of June 1922 and the "miscarriage of justice" afterwards ruined the county's reputation. The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* called the massacre "butchery utterly without excuse, an appalling disgrace to organized labor, a disgrace to the state of Illinois, a disgrace to the American nation."³⁷ When the court acquitted all the defendants, the *Chicago Tribune* wrote, "Herrin is a murderous community. The courts cannot convict its residents of murder and punish them physically, but the civilized opinion of the entire United States convicts them of wholesale murder and perversion of justice, and will punish them by contempt and ostracism from the society of decent people."

³² Ayabe, 50.

³³ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁵ *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, May 5, 1925.

³⁶ Angle, 53.

³⁷ *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, August 18, 1922.

Williamson County became a despicable blot on the country, an extremely violent, semi-civilized place that no sane American would dare to visit.³⁸ The people of the county felt an intense need to remove the dishonorable label of “Bloody Williamson.” The Ku Klux Klan was unable to do this and the bootleggers continued to further the lawless and corrupt stereotype of Williamson County.

Gang warfare made life in Williamson County, and Southern Illinois as a whole, difficult; particularly when it came to Charlie Birger and the Shelton Brothers. With headquarters in Williamson and Franklin counties in Southern Illinois, and close ties to East St. Louis, Charlie Birger and the Shelton brothers had a thriving business in bootleg liquor, roadhouses, and stolen cars until a feud turned into a full-scale gang war, leaving at least ten people dead.³⁹ “They were a menace to society,” police officer John Carlson stated, “they are hard to control and almost impossible to stop. They have a lot of people under their control and its hard telling who will be the next person to give into their pressure.”⁴⁰ With a history of violence dating back to the 1860s, and an acceptance of murder that resulted in a failure to convict any defendant for 100 years; Williamson County was the natural locale for the Birger-Shelton War. Twenty-one people, nineteen of them strikebreakers, had been killed in Herrin during a mine strike in 1922, and another eighteen were killed between 1924-1925 as the Ku Klux Klan battled “sinners” in the county.⁴¹

Birger and the Sheltons presented a united front to the Klan, but when that threat dissolved they turned on each other. Fitting out trucks like armored tanks, the two gangs cruised country roads, firing at enemies. Birger's fortress, Shady Rest, a cabin with foot-thick log walls located outside of Harrisburg, was a special target. On November 12, 1926, an airplane dropped three homemade bombs on the site. The bombs fizzled, but on January 9, 1927, Shady Rest exploded, possibly bombed by Birger himself.⁴² According to the *St. Louis Dispatch*, four persons were found dead in the ruins.⁴³ These deaths only reaffirmed the notion of bootlegging and violence going hand-in-hand to control Williamson County during this time. The only thing that could stop such violence and law breaking would be the repeal of the eighteenth amendment. This came in 1933 and the criminal activity and illegal distribution of alcohol in Williamson County ceased to exist. As a result of this decline in illegal activity, three entities lost power: Charlier Birger, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Sheldons. Charlie Birger was eventually caught and hung and the Ku Klux Klan lost its power

³⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, August 19, 1922.

³⁹ Gary DeNeal, *A Knight of Another Sort: Prohibition Days and Charlie Birger* (Danville, IL: Interstate Printers and Publishers, 1981) 31.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴¹ Angle, 55.

⁴² DeNeal, 90.

⁴³ *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, January 10, 1927.

after coming into conflict with Birger and the Sheltons. The Sheltons were the only group that came out of Prohibition still intact. However, they would eventually split up when two of the brothers involved in the bootlegging of the 1920's were murdered. Despite the decline of crime in the 1930's, the title “Bloody Williamson” is still given to Williamson County. Whether it was the massacres, the war between the Ku Klux Klan and the bootleggers, or the bootlegger's illegal activity itself, one can see that this title is well deserved and not over-dramatized.

Within all of this violence, something stunning shows up in Williamson County. The violence is peculiarly American-family hatreds, labor strife, religious bigotry, nativistic narrowness, a desire for money and to hell with the rules.⁴⁴ Aside from a fairly recent arrival of Europeans, Williamson County residents were largely from Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and North and South Carolina. As quoted by William L. Cheney's 1924 article in the *Dispatch*: “Socialism, Communism and other doctrines have played no part in the violence and murder which have brought such ill fame to this 'queen of Egypt.' The issues are strictly American, and the wrongs done are the native products of the United States.”⁴⁵

This idea of American-based conflict differs from that of McDonough County because immigrants played a big role in the disputes during prohibition. McDonough County had a large population of immigrants that added tension when Prohibition was put into effect.

The issues in these two counties are similar: both were involved in the coal mining industry and depended heavily on the manufacturing capabilities of the mines; both had notorious bootleggers who boosted the legend of the bootlegger; and both counties had to deal gang warfare, and the conflict between the Ku Klux Klan and the bootleggers. These counties do not, however, present a picture of “normal life” during Prohibition since the mines were involved and the nature of the conflicts that arose. In order to get a clearer picture of what the average town in Illinois faced during Prohibition, one would have to look at Coles County. This county presents a better idea of what every other county was going through because it deals with much of the same influences other counties faced. This leads into the third and final case study: Coles County.

When the *Mattoon Journal Gazette* published the title “24 Hour Reprieve for J. Barleycorn” on January 15, 1920, it symbolized the enforcement of Prohibition and a change in Coles County. No longer could Coles County depend on alcohol as a source of escape from the world. As depicted in a cartoon illustration by the same newspaper on the same day, the decision was not well liked. The cartoon depicted in one cell people celebrating the enforcement of Prohibition and in the other cell a funeral

⁴⁴ Angle, 153.

⁴⁵ *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, July 7, 1924.

for alcohol with many mourners.⁴⁶ As stated before, this shows the negative sentiment that Prohibition and its enforcement had in Coles County. However, in the early stages of Prohibition, the citizens of Coles County did not seem to be affected by the elimination of alcohol. They went about their lives with limited change in the crime rate of the county. "I think Prohibition was probably a good thing," Edna Miller said, "people were going crazy when they were drinking and that can't be good for the children growing up in this time."⁴⁷ Despite this sentiment, there were attempts to consume and distribute alcohol despite the ban. On January 27, 1920, the first arrest in Coles County was made for illegally making and distributing alcohol. Larry Bailey, a Mattoon man, was arrested for making liquor.⁴⁸ Cases such as this were rare in Coles County at the start of Prohibition, especially because there were no notable bootleggers in Coles County during this time. Williamson County had Charlie Burger, McDonough County had Henry "Kelly" Wagle, but Coles County had nobody as notorious as these two figures. Despite this, police still had to keep a keen eye on the violators of Prohibition in order to show that the law would be followed to the fullest extent. An example of such enforcement took place on June 20, 1920, when the police arrived at the house of John Savage when they got a tip from a neighbor that illegal activity as were taking place. They went to his house only to find that he was breaking the Volstead Act by making alcohol.⁴⁹ These minor instances became more common as Prohibition went on.

As police took charge of the streets, particularly in the towns of Mattoon and Charleston, people had to find other ways of getting a 'buzz.' On July 8, 1920, "Bitters," a type of medicine, was confiscated from a pharmacy near Mattoon. The medicine allegedly contained 18% alcohol and people were buying it in bulk to feel alcohol-type effects.⁵⁰ Another alternative for drinking alcohol was Schlitz, "near beer" produced in Wisconsin. The brewery that made this beverage was turned to making "near beer" when Prohibition was implemented. On July 8, 1920, a Schlitz ad in the *Charleston Daily News* stated: "Beware of home brew, instead, go for near beer." They claimed their beverage was a non-alcohol malted barley beverage and that it was safe medically and legally to drink.⁵¹ This represented an alternative for those with the long thirst for alcohol. Those people wanting alcohol itself, just had to look for it. On March 20, 1920 a stash of booze was discovered in an abandoned coal mine in Mattoon. The local newspaper stated that it belonged to the owners of the coal mine and that the alcohol would be confiscated. Despite this, people went in search of

⁴⁶ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, January 16, 1920.

⁴⁷ *Charleston Daily News*, January 17, 1920.

⁴⁸ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, January 27, 1920.

⁴⁹ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, June 21, 1920.

⁵⁰ *Charleston Daily News*, July 9, 1920.

⁵¹ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, July 8, 1920.

any alcohol that was left from the mines. They bought shovels and picks from hardware stores and went out to the mines in search of the "lost booze." This was immediately broken up and the order of the town and county stabilized.⁵² This would not only represent the desperate attempts by the citizens to find any kind of alcohol, but also symbolized the stronghold the police had on the town when it came to Prohibition.

As a result of the implementation of Prohibition, not only did less people drink, but more people in Coles County searched for religion to fill the gap left by alcohol. Religious revivals sprouted up around the area and the number of people "saved" increased drastically, especially in the Loxa region where numerous reports of religious revivals took place. On April 31, 1920, for example, 200 people showed up to a small Loxa church in order to "find" God.⁵³ Many turned to God as a way to deal with the hardships while many others turned to God to change their beliefs and lives. As the pastor of the church, John Campmore, stated that "people need a place to go and I think God presented a door to new possibilities. I think God will help those suffering from the lack of alcohol consumption to get on track and get through the hard time in their lives."⁵⁴ As time passed, however, these feelings of acceptance changed.

The years passed and the growing resentment toward Prohibition became evident. As this anti-Prohibition sentiment grew illegal activity and alcohol-related deaths increased drastically. As Prohibition went on, the illegal alcohol started coming on the rail cars in Mattoon for distribution around the area; more specifically, quickly distributed in Charleston.⁵⁵ This would especially create problems for people traveling between Mattoon and Charleston with the alcohol; causing wrecks and sometimes resulting in deaths. An example is Mrs. Roy Dawson who died after consuming bad alcohol, purchased in Charleston. It was reported in the *Mattoon Journal Gazette* that she, a family friend, and her husband were from Mattoon, but had gone to Charleston to get the alcohol. They drank the alcohol on the way back to Mattoon and she died from the consumption. The husband was highly criticized for letting her drink so much in the presence of others.⁵⁶ This symbolizes the feeling during that time that women should be proper and not engage in "manly activities," like excessive drinking. It seems that the crucial connection between alcohol and the two towns was the road that connected them. This was not the case in all situations, but Mattoon citizens prevalently got their alcohol from Charleston. The most notable stories of the time included those who were drinking on the way back to

⁵² *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, March 21, 1920.

⁵³ *Charleston Daily News*, April 1, 1920.

⁵⁴ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, April 2, 1920.

⁵⁵ Marta Cates Ladd and Eds Constance Schneider, *History of Coles County, 1876-1976* (Charleston, IL: Charleston and Mattoon Bicentennial Commission, 1976) 75.

⁵⁶ *Charleston Daily News*, January 12, 1929.

Mattoon and either got arrested or got in a wreck. Another example casualties caused by breaking the law was drunk drivers. According to the *Charleston Daily News*, two men crashed into a parked car because while driving under the influence of alcohol. One man died as a result of the crash and another was severely injured; his eyeball was cut out of its socket.⁵⁷ Such instances occurred frequently in Coles County as people were tired of the elimination of alcohol. The Coles County criminal court cases are an example of how crime affected the county. For February 6, 1929, out of a total of ten trials taking place in Charleston, six were alcohol-related; ranging from trafficking to consumption.⁵⁸ This shows a complete disregard for the law and the consequences of breaking such laws.

The citizens of this area were not the only group getting tired of Prohibition; the government of Illinois was growing weary of it as well. The *Mattoon Journal Gazette* reported that on March 28, 1929, the state legislature held a vote to repeal the state prohibition laws.⁵⁹ During the state legislature debates over Prohibition, Representative Thomas O' Grady stated his case for repealing Prohibition: "99% of the murders and homicides committed in this country in the last ten years were laid at the door of Prohibition."⁶⁰ On April 24, 1929, with a vote of 77-65 in the state legislature, the referendum to repeal state liquor laws passed and the prohibition of alcohol was done away with in Illinois.⁶¹ However, this ruling did not take any effect because the federal eighteenth amendment had precedent over any of the state decisions. It did, however, symbolize the anti-Prohibition sentiment common in the United States during this time. Once this law was passed, the police did not seem to enforce the liquor laws to the extent they once had. An example of this was in the case of Virgil "Mack" McNary. He was a porter at the Charleston House, a hotel on the square, and late one night entering the hotel with a pint of alcohol. Unfortunately for him, the pint in his pocket was sticking out so the cop saw the neck of the bottle. Before McNary could get inside the hotel, the cop called him to his car. When McNary walked over to the car and asked the cop what he needed, the cop pulled the pint out of McNary's pocket and said "this." The cop put the pint into his car and told McNary to keep it clean. Instead of arresting McNary, the cop let him go about his business.⁶² This happened more and more as Prohibition became less and less accepted among the people of Coles County and the United States.

Despite this, religious figures tried to keep the anti-prohibition sentiment strong in the area. On August 16, 1929, Billy Sunday spoke on Prohibition at a Mattoon-Chatauqua big tent revival meeting. He tried

stressing the spiritual advantages of living an alcohol-free life.⁶³ Coles County had grown too weary of Prohibition to listen to the words of one individual. They heard the same thing for ten years, but the desire for alcohol got the best of them and they wanted it back in their lives. This sentiment was common among the towns and cities of Illinois and the United States. The citizens of the United States were weary of the eighteenth amendment and they wanted something done to change the chaotic conditions of the 1920's. The citizens of Coles County represented most towns in the United States and kept consuming alcohol despite the eighteenth amendment. Despite this fact, alcohol consumption did decrease. The eighteenth amendment halted alcohol consumption in most towns in America, including Coles County. Therefore, the eighteenth amendment did what it was set out to do; limit the alcohol consumption and the subsequent actions of such consumption in areas such as Coles County.

When the eighteenth amendment was implemented in early 1920 it marked a monumental victory for those seeking the elimination of alcohol and the violent, corrupt acts from consuming it. For members of the American Prohibition leagues it was the end of a long and hard-fought crusade. In all, more than seven thousand anti-liquor speeches had been delivered by college orators and approximately \$25,000 in prize money had been donated by well-intentioned supporters.⁶⁴ The twenty-six-year mission of anti-alcohol groups such as the Illinois Intercollegiate Prohibition Association for "a nation free from the grasp of the monster drink had been noble and idealistic. Prohibition prevailed for slightly more than a decade but failed to bring the lasting improvements its youthful adherents had hoped for. In a sense, Prohibition contradicted the very thing anti-alcohol groups emphasized: a moral uplift and a reformation of society to break the overwhelming grip alcohol had on the country. Instead, the time period brought bootlegging, illegal acts, and corruption. The media put the ineffectiveness of Prohibition into perspective in an article on the ten-year anniversary of the ratification of the eighteenth amendment. According to the *Charleston Daily News*, since January 16, 1920, federal officials arrested 483,474 alleged violators of the liquor laws; 269,584 persons was sent to jail or prison for a total of 26,613 years; more than 200 citizens were slain by hair trigger dry agents, 38,087 automobiles were confiscated and a total of \$44,574,832 in fines was levied in federal courts.⁶⁵ These statistics show how people disregarded the enforcement of the eighteenth amendment in order to make and drink alcohol. However, some areas were worse than others in terms of

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Coles County Criminal Court Cases, February 6, 1929.

⁵⁹ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, March 29, 1929.

⁶⁰ *Charleston Daily News*, April 1, 1929.

⁶¹ *Mattoon Journal Gazette*, April 25, 1929.

⁶² *Charleston Daily News*, April 7, 1929.

⁶³ *Charleston Daily News*, August 17, 1929.

⁶⁴ Roberts, 147.

⁶⁵ *Charleston Daily News*, January 15, 1929.

violence and corruption. Varying areas acted differently to Prohibition and the events that followed; some with corrupt and illegal acts, while others tried to maintain a normal life without alcohol.

This essay looked at three counties in Illinois to see how Illinois reacted to the implementation of the eighteenth amendment and Prohibition. One can see there were major differences between the three areas and the geographic, economic, and cultural variables affected how each area responded. An overwhelming theme within these areas seemed to be the readiness to break the law for both a drink and what the citizens believed in. Alcohol did not just represent an intoxicating drink; it represented freedom. Bootleggers represented the liberators of the tyrannical rule of the eighteenth amendment. No matter how hard the authorities tried to break down the structure of the illegal consumption and distribution of alcohol, it was almost impossible to stop. The only thing that could stop this illegal activity from taking place was, ironically enough, the repeal of the eighteenth amendment. When it was repealed in 1933, the bootleggers were out of business and Americans were allowed once again to consume alcohol. Despite Prohibition and its flaws, it did teach America one thing: they were willing to break the law in order to reinforce their beliefs. This was first shown during the Boston Tea Party and continued during the corrupt period of Prohibition.

“No Occasion for Coffins”: Humanitarianism and the Bengal Famine of 1770

Adam Morrisette

Adam Morrisette, a graduate student in History, wrote this paper in summer 2009 for Dr. David Smith's HIS 5400 course on Eighteenth-Century Europe.

In 1771, newspapers across London were printing a letter from an anonymous writer describing a horrific scene half a world away. The letter was from a servant of the East India Company in Calcutta. The scene he described was that of a horrible famine ravaging the Bengal province of India. Drought, greed, and mismanagement caused a famine so severe that, according to this writer:

By the time the famine had been about a fortnight over the land, we were greatly affected at Calcutta; many thousands falling daily in the streets and fields, whose bodies, mangled by dogs, jackalls, and vultures, in that hot season . . . made us dread the consequences of a plague.¹

By the end of 1770, the famine may have eradicated as many as one-third of the population of Bengal. David Arnold writes, “In terms of the enormous loss of life and the intensity and extent of human suffering involved, the Bengal famine of 1770 must count as one of the greatest catastrophes of the eighteenth century and, indeed, of modern times.”²

Despite the magnitude and tragedy of the Bengal famine, relatively little was written about it in the British press. Only a few accounts of the famine appeared in the newspapers and often the same accounts were printed over and over. Early accounts of the scale and potential repercussions of the famine were varied and contradictory. Initially, the greatest concern was how the famine would affect the value of East India Company stocks. Gradually, the debate shifted to what role the East India Company may have played in the famine and whether or not the East India Company needed more oversight and regulation. Interestingly, very little discussion of the famine as a humanitarian crisis occurred initially. The famine was seen largely as a natural disaster. Furthermore, Arnold asserts,

¹ *The Annual Register, or a view of the history, politics, and literature, for the year 1771* (London, 1779), 206, www.gale.cengage.com/EighteenthCentury.

² David Arnold, "Hunger in the Garden of Plenty," in *Dreadful Visitation: Confronting Natural Catastrophe in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Alessa Johns, 81-111 (New York: Routledge, 1999), 86.