

Fighting an Uphill Battle: Prohibition and the Rhetoric of Sexual Hygiene in Wisconsin

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Abstract

This paper discusses the rhetoric used in the movement for prohibition in Wisconsin. It focuses on sexual hygiene rhetoric and how dry forces attempted to use this argument to convince Wisconsin citizens that prohibition would prevent the spread of venereal disease. However, the conclusion is that these types of arguments were unsuccessful in Wisconsin due to other preventative measures already in place. The paper first discusses the fight for prohibition and the role of sexual health rhetoric, then the passage of prohibition. Finally, the immediate defeat of prohibition is discussed in the context of the Matheson Bill and its veto by Governor Blaine.

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Introduction

"I tell you the curse of God Almighty is on the saloon!" exclaimed Billy Sunday.¹ This type of proclamation was commonplace in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the fight for prohibition gripped the nation. Religious zealots, more moderate politicians, and suffragettes joined together to fight against brewers, businessmen, politicians and supporters of personal freedom in the debate over temperance in the United States. On January 29, 1919 the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution proclaimed the manufacturing, selling and importing of alcoholic beverages in the United States to be illegal activities. Before this date, a long debate and movement to pass such a law held the interest of the nation for decades. Although Prohibition only lasted a mere 14 years, the debate over these laws has lasted much longer. As a result of this heated debate, "wet" and "dry" rhetoric developed in many different forms to persuade as many people as possible to either side of the issue.² Prohibition supporters used religious, economic and health concerns as a primary base for persuading citizens to vote dry. "Wets" used personal freedom, religion, economics and constitutionality as a premise for their arguments. Both sides appeared to have valid and reasonable arguments supporting their views. Although dry forces fought valiantly to ratify the Eighteenth Amendment, most of their arguments fell on deaf ears.

For temperance reformers, Wisconsin was always the last frontier. The citizens of Wisconsin ranged from those with extreme support of prohibition to moderate sentiment and further toward adamant defense of personal liberty. Although typically considered a "wet state",

¹ Andrew Sinclair, *Prohibition: The Era of Excess* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), 63. Billy Sunday, or William Ashley Sunday, was a popular twentieth century evangelist whose preaching sessions were attended by thousands during the Prohibition era. He was an adamant supporter of the Eighteenth Amendment and included religious arguments for the passage of prohibition in his sermons.

² "Wet" and "dry" refer to positions on the prohibition debate. "Wet" was used to identify anti-Prohibitionists, while "dry" was used to refer to the pro-Prohibitionists.

Wisconsin did play a part in the movement for prohibition. Politicians straddled the line between wet and dry as much as possible. Because of this mixed sentiment, heated debates over whether prohibition was necessary arose between key figures in the temperance movement.³

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As a result of the long and passionate battle debating prohibition, historians have been captivated by this topic for decades. They have written about it through many different lenses, including political, economic, social and national history. The era in which the temperance movement and prohibition took place was turbulent, and historians have proved this through their work. In the works written primarily from 1925 to 1940, historians focused primarily on prohibition and why it did not work. Among these works are many reports and monographs by government officials, such as Mabel Walker Willebrandt's *The Inside of Prohibition*, which argues that prohibition failed primarily as a result of poor enforcement.<sup>4</sup>

A shift occurred in the 1960s when historians began working on the movement for prohibition laws; discussing the politics and roles of social institutions in the passage of the eighteenth amendment. Works which focus on the national scale such as Andrew Sinclair's *Prohibition: The Era of Excess* and K. Austin Kerr's *Organized for Prohibition: A New History*

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<sup>3</sup> An example of these debates can be found in the debates between Samuel Dickie and Mayor Rose of Milwaukee, who debated the prohibition issue twice in 1909 and raised sentiment for both wet and dry forces. The main argument of Mayor Rose was the preservation of personal freedom and the fact that previous prohibition experiments did not work; where Dickie argued that alcohol was the cause of health problems, financial problems and religious corruption. A record of these debates can be found in the Anti-Saloon League Records, Box 3, Folder 8, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>4</sup> Mabel Walker Willebrandt, *The Inside of Prohibition*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1929). Mabel Walker Willebrandt served as the assistant Attorney General under President Harding, from 1921-1929. Other works which comment on prohibition's failure include *The Noble Experiment* (Fisher, Irving. *The Noble Experiment*. New York: Alcohol Information Committee, 1930.), *The Origins of Prohibition*(Krout, John Allen. *The Origins of Prohibition*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1925), *The Dry Decade*, (Mertz, Charles. *The Dry Decade*. Garden City: Doubleday Books, 1931.), and *The Bureau of Prohibition* (Schmeckebier, Laurence F. *The Bureau of Prohibition: Its History, Activities and Organization*. Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1929.).

of the *Anti-Saloon League*, fall into this category. Sinclair sees prohibition as a struggle between social groups; mainly rural versus urban people. He also sees prohibition as being caused by the protestant religious revivals of the period.<sup>5</sup> Kerr focuses her work on the influence of the Anti-Saloon League on the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, arguing that this organization used a unique combination of public speeches and government lobbying to promote their cause.<sup>6</sup> Works published since the 1980s tend to narrow down the topic of prohibition to more localized movements or the roles of certain organizations, such as the Anti-Saloon League (ASL). Historians are beginning to explore the local histories of prohibition and the effects of larger organizations on local movements.

Historians have also taken an interest in venereal diseases and the epidemic which was not commonly discussed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. John D'Emilio and Estelle B Freedman's *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* and Allen Brandt's *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880* are two key works in this field of American history.<sup>7</sup> Both look at the link between alcohol and the spread of VD, but mainly discuss the role of the saloon as a part of the unspoken fear of VD.

Although historians have briefly discussed the methods used by the Anti-Saloon League

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Sinclair, *Prohibition: The Era of Excess*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962).

<sup>6</sup> K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). For more works which focus on social trends of prohibition on the national level, please see: James H Timberlake, *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963.), Peter H Odegard, *Pressure Politics: The Story of the Anti-Saloon League* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966.) Sean Dennis Cashman, *Prohibition: The Lie of the Land*. (New York: The Free Press, 1981. ) and Norman H Clark, *Deliver Us From Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976) .

<sup>7</sup> Allen M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). John D'Emilio and Estelle B Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1998).

and the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) to fight their cause, they have not truly focused on the link between the health concerns and the fight for temperance at the local level.<sup>8</sup>

The connection between health concerns and the fight for temperance in Wisconsin is very interesting because even though temperance reformers used health concerns to promote their cause, this tactic proved ineffective in Wisconsin.

Despite their efforts to the contrary, the ASL and WCTU only reached limited success in their argument that alcohol posed a serious risk to the health of Wisconsin citizens and that the solution to these health risks was the prohibition of alcohol and the saloon. Other arguments, such as religious appeals and economic arguments had a more extensive effect, though still not profound. Legislation regarding both prohibition and prostitution created during the prohibition era and just before reflected these attitudes. Wisconsin did not pass a state prohibition law before national prohibition passed, despite the efforts of many temperance reformers.<sup>9</sup> The people of Wisconsin were torn over the issue of prohibition, but almost all letters written to the governor during this turbulent time in Wisconsin history expressed the wish to create and maintain good laws, which they defined as clear, enforceable, and which accomplished the preservation of rights.<sup>10</sup> The strong opposition to the Matheson Bill, a proposed prohibition enforcement bill, is a prime example of public sentiment in Wisconsin for good laws which are enforced above anything else.<sup>11</sup> This paper will explore the interest in the relationship between alcohol and health in Wisconsin, analyze the rhetoric of prohibition debates, and discuss various

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<sup>8</sup> For a good local history of prohibition, see Micheal A Lerner's *Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. )

<sup>9</sup> Please see Figure 4 in the Appendix.

<sup>10</sup> John J. Blaine Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison. John J. Blaine was the governor of Wisconsin from 1921-1927 and was a US Senator for Wisconsin from 1927-1933. Because he was in office for the majority of the prohibition period, his collection serves as an excellent source for public opinion and legislation regarding this topic.

<sup>11</sup> Please see the Law Glossary in the Appendix for more explanation of the Matheson Bill.

opinions of people in Wisconsin pertaining to the prohibition debate. By doing this, it will show that although Wisconsin politicians did care about social hygiene, they did not generally think prohibition of alcohol would stop the spread of venereal diseases (VD).

To do this, a discussion of two central organizations to the prohibition movement must be included. These two organizations are the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League, both of which argued prohibition was necessary for the preservation of the nation, operated on a national level, and employed many different arguments in persuading whoever would listen to pass and enforce prohibition.

### *A Brief History of the WCTU and Anti-Saloon League*

Founded in 1874 by Frances Willard, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) acted as a pivotal force in the fight for prohibition. The WCTU originated with about 50,000 women, mainly residing in the east and mid-west, "who visited saloons and prayed for drinkers to take abstinence pledges, saloon keepers to close their doors permanently and local politicians to enforce restrictive ordinances and revoke saloon licenses."<sup>12</sup> Shortly after the crusade for temperance began, the WCTU was founded in Cleveland, Ohio, "to embody permanently the ideals of the crusade and sustain temperance agitation."<sup>13</sup> The Wisconsin chapter of the WCTU was founded at this meeting along with eight other state chapters from all over the nation. The WCTU operated by setting up a model for local chapters and lobbying for support at the national level. Local chapters lobbied their local governments and protested the

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<sup>12</sup> K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 44.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 44.

saloon at every opportunity possible. However, after a few years, the WCTU divided. Ellen Foster, a leading temperance advocate, opposed Frances Willard's approach to the temperance crusade. In 1889, Foster founded a dissident Nonpartisan WCTU. This new organization "sought to provide an alternative, not damage, the WCTU"<sup>14</sup> The non-partisan group employed new tactics to gain more support for the temperance cause. Foster's strategy "was to focus attention more sharply on prohibition in order to avoid limiting appeal among dry advocates"<sup>15</sup> However, the split within the WCTU led to more fighting between temperance organizations and ultimately turned people off to the cause.

The split in the WCTU led some people to believe that a new organization was needed. This included A.J. Kynett, who, "concluded that the nation needed a permanent nonpartisan organization that would unite church members across party and denominational lines," and founded a precursor organization to the Anti-Saloon League (ASL).<sup>16</sup> The Anti-Saloon League formed out of these organizations in September 1896 at a meeting at Oberlin University under the leadership of Howard Russell. Originally, the Anti-Saloon League was a state organization specifically designed to push for prohibition in Ohio, but the leaders eventually decided to push for the formation of divisions in other states as well. "Wherever there was some nonpartisan interdenominational organization, the league pressed to have it change its name and employ at least one full-time state superintendent."<sup>17</sup> This method allowed the Anti-Saloon League to spread quickly and efficiently.

The Wisconsin division of the Anti-Saloon League was organized in 1897 along these lines. However, in later years, the Anti-Saloon League had trouble in Wisconsin. Wisconsin was

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 71-72.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>17</sup> Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition*, 122.

traditionally viewed as a stronghold for the wet forces. Indeed, the organization had trouble raising funds, and in 1915, the president of the Wisconsin Anti-Saloon League, R.H. Keller, reported, "his office was in debt and suffering politically in the legislature...and we believe that Wisconsin will share in this success, though more slowly than most states."<sup>18</sup> Before the Eighteenth Amendment passed, Wisconsin chapters of the WCTU and ASL faced difficulties in convincing the population that prohibition would solve some social problems. This difficulty is demonstrated through the heated atmosphere in Wisconsin in the debate over prohibition.

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Arguments discussing prohibition were furious in Wisconsin, as in many other states. Temperance reformers struggled against working class supporters of the saloon, which in many ways symbolized the heritage of the people of Wisconsin. Mixed views led to a plethora of arguments employed by both sides of the debate; exemplified in the Dickie vs. Rose debates of the early 1900s.¹⁹ Public sentiment in Wisconsin changed with a great deal of fluidity before and during prohibition. The troubles of the ASL and WCTU in Wisconsin did not end with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. They continued to face opposition from the legislature and private citizens. These organizations employed many different arguments to combat this strong opposition in Wisconsin.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 147. This statement was in response to the relative success of the other state chapters of the ASL at raising funds for the fight for prohibition.

¹⁹ See note three for explanation of these debates.

ASL and WCTU Rhetoric and its Influence in Wisconsin

Both the Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union were actively involved in not only making sure that the national prohibition amendment passed, but also in the legislation which governed Wisconsin residents. To get their point of view across, they appealed to a variety of concerns the people of Wisconsin were dealing with at the time of the temperance movement. These arguments included religious appeals, economic arguments, and disease and health concerns.

Religious Appeals

The Anti-Saloon League and Women's Christian Temperance Union were both organizations which saw themselves as natural allies of the church. By using religious rhetoric, they often convinced church congregations that their cause was "God's work". Many Anti-Saloon League leaders also gave speeches in churches in order to gain votes. As a leader of the ASL in Wisconsin, J.J McDonald made frequent reference to religion in his personal speech notes. In preparations for one speech, he noted, "The liquor trade is the supreme enemy of the church." McDonald believed because the liquor trade often kept people from giving their money to the church collection plate, that the saloon keeper and the preacher were natural enemies.²⁰

McDonald was not the only one to make these types of claims. In his speech "The Root of the Temperance Problem" Reverend J. W. Crooker argued that the saloon poisoned the soul,

²⁰ J.J McDonald, Personal Speech notes, date of speech unknown, Box 3, Folder 5 Anti-Saloon League Records, Wisconsin Historical Society Library and Archives, University of Wisconsin, Madison. McDonald's belief in the animosity between the saloon and the church is evident from studying his speech notes in this collection; this connection is made in preparations for more than one speech and in his personal correspondence.

simply stating, "The saloon keeps young men from salvation."²¹ He then went on to argue that many religious and historical figures, from Confucius to Abraham Lincoln, all disapproved of drinking, especially in saloons.

This religious rhetoric had a profound effect on the church-going citizens of Wisconsin, but because it was mainly exercised in congregations of already temperate people, it did not spread the dry sentiment extensively. The religious citizens who heard these messages, however, tended to be very active in petitioning the governor and others in support of their cause. The following address made by Mrs. Clinton M. Barr in April of 1921 is a good example of the organization of congregations and their fight for the temperance movement under the leadership of the ASL and WCTU:

We have just organized a Federation of Church Women representing 85 churches in Milwaukee. The greatest response came because of appreciation of the Eighteenth Amendment, and the recognition of the necessity for support of rigid enforcement, and for a chance to protest in an organized way against the beer and light wine resolution.²²

Governor Blaine received this address during the debate over the Matheson Bill, which took center stage in the prohibition debate in Wisconsin. Religious rhetoric caused fear in the hearts of the faithful, and inspired many to become more involved in the temperance movement.

Economic Arguments

The Eighteenth Amendment was passed on January 29, 1919. By this time, the Americans fully understood the strain major wars put on their economic well-being. Food

²¹ "The Root of the Temperance Problem" by Rev. JW Crooker to Unitarian Christian Church, Madison WI, [3/13/1887], Wisconsin Historical Society Library and Archives, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

²² Mrs. Clinton M. Barr's Talk, [April 1921], John J. Blaine Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

shortages and economic strains were of primary interest to the citizens of Wisconsin, and the ASL used this to their advantage. They spoke, occasionally upon request of private citizens and farmers, of the effects prohibition would have on food shortages and on the soldiers' ability to fight effectively overseas.²³ They argued that because liquor was made of grain and other food products, that it was an unnecessary usage of food that could be used to feed soldiers and citizens of the United States. Such pamphlets as "Defeat or Victory?", which made these types of arguments in support of a prohibition amendment, were distributed around the nation, including Wisconsin. The leaders of the Anti-Saloon League distributed many of these types of pamphlets to the families of soldiers serving overseas.

Labor was also a major issue in the debate over prohibition. Because most of the men who frequented the saloon were from the working class, the dry forces needed strong arguments to pull their support from the wets. A common slogan appealing to labor concerns was, "The first one fired and the last one hired is the man who drinks."²⁴ This argument seemed to persuade the labor forces. Poor men wasted their money in the saloons, and the labor organizations realized this. Carl Young, President of the Michigan Federation of Labor, wrote to Mr. Hutton of the Wisconsin Anti-Saloon League, "If it were up to the labor vote, our state would remain dry. I am proud of the Wisconsin Legislature for putting into effect strong enforcement measures."²⁵

Labor leaders in Madison felt the same way. According to a questionnaire sent out by the

²³ Larve F. Smith, Waupon, to J.J. McDonald, Madison, 7 March 1918, Anti-Saloon League Records, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

²⁴ Lewis R. Hutton, *222 Shots at the Liquor Traffic*, (Spokane: Hutton Building). Anti-Saloon League Records, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

²⁵ Carl Young, Michigan, to L.R. Hutton, Madison, John J. Blaine Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Wisconsin ASL, all were in favor of the continuation and enforcement of the prohibition bill.²⁶ Employers also supported labor arguments for prohibition on the grounds that alcohol is bad for efficiency and business.²⁷

The Anti-Saloon League did not limit themselves in economic rhetoric. They also appealed to the amount of money drinkers would save if the saloon were outlawed. In a report in May 1921, the Anti-Saloon League noted that savings accounts in the state of Wisconsin "grew substantially" as a result of prohibition.²⁸ Data that proved this growth was caused by prohibition was not included in the report, but the ASL made the argument nonetheless.

Disease and Health Concerns

The ASL and WCTU utilized scare tactics to fight for the dry cause, including the fear of the effects of alcohol on health. The spread of venereal diseases was a major concern to most people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Concerned with health defects, the ASL and WCTU distributed propaganda on the effects of alcohol and saloons on health throughout Wisconsin.

One of the tactics associated alcohol and saloons with decay. Lewis R. Hutton, in his pamphlet "222 Shots at the Liquor Traffic" wrote, "The Webb-Kenyon Bill puts intoxicating liquor in the same class as diseased cattle, lottery tickets, obscene literature, immoral women and

²⁶ Anti-Saloon League of Wisconsin, Survey of Madison Labor Leaders on Prohibition, January 31, 1921, John J. Blaine Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

²⁷ On Labor and Prohibition, apparently by J.J. McDonald. Anti-Saloon League Records, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

²⁸ R. P. Hutton, "Annual Report from the State Superintendent of the Wisconsin Anti-Saloon League" (Madison, WI: John J. Blaine Papers, 1921) Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

adulterated food."²⁹ Because saloons were generally dirty in the cities, this was an easy association for the ASL and WCTU to make.

The attack on the saloon continued because of the immoral activities some men and women engaged in there. The saloon was a place of business for not only the saloonkeeper, but also for prostitutes. In their speeches, pamphlets and other propaganda, Wisconsin ASL and WCTU groups highlighted this aspect of the saloon. Most people at the time (and still today), viewed prostitution as not only highly immoral and disgraceful, but also as the way that venereal diseases spread. A common quote used in speeches and pamphlets was, "The path between the saloon and the brothel is short and well beaten."³⁰ The saloon was also used as a scapegoat for the women who became prostitutes. Josie Washburn, among other women, pioneered this argument. In a pamphlet she noted,

Thousands of girls, now in the underworld, can trace the cause of their first downward step to the first drink, urged upon them at one of these public balls by some designing young man.³¹

This argument took hold in Wisconsin. Studies presented to the legislature related prostitution and the saloon, and efforts by legislators to rid the state of the saloon grew after this time period. Although Wisconsin did not pass a prohibition law before national prohibition passed, Wisconsin was still used as an example across the nation to convince citizens of other states to pass prohibition laws. For instance, Hester T. Griffith, a WCTU prohibition activist, employed data

²⁹ Lewis R. Hutton, *222 Shots at the Liquor Traffic*, (Spokane: Hutton Building). Anti-Saloon League Records, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison. This pamphlet contains thousands of quotes which ASL leaders were to use in preparations for speeches, interviews, and arguments to legislators. For more information on the Webb-Kenyon Act, please see the Law Glossary in the Appendix.

³⁰ Lewis R. Hutton, *222 Shots at the Liquor Traffic*, (Spokane: Hutton Building). Anti-Saloon League Records, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

³¹ Josie Washburn, *Drink and the Underworld*, (Omaha: Festner Printing Company). Anti-Saloon League Records, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

from Wisconsin legislative studies: "Senator Teasdale of Wisconsin says, 'The evidence presented to our committee tends to show that from eighty to eighty-five percent of the girls who go wrong get started in the wine room.'"³² This statement was based off a study completed in the Wisconsin legislature in 1913 which interviewed hundreds of "working women" across the state and provided key evidence that prohibition might cure social evil for prohibition activists.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union was also active in researching, educating and preventing the spread of VD. Frances E. Willard, the founder of the National WCTU outlined a plan of work for other WCTU organizations around the country in her book, *Women and Temperance*. Those lines of work within the WCTU that deal with disease were numerous, but the major categories were heredity, hygiene, scientific instruction, and work among intemperate women. The heredity departments were responsible for "enlighten[ing] the members of the WCTU by wise and careful words concerning the relation of the prenatal influences and natal inheritance to the appetite for intoxicating drinks."³³ Because many members of the WCTU believed their role in preventing the spread of venereal diseases was "God's work" the categories of work describing hygiene and work among intemperate women were sprinkled with religious rhetoric. For example, according to Willard's manual, the hygiene department, "Aims to extend the reverent study of God's health Decalogue, with a view to returning sanity to our methods of daily living." The dichotomy of this rhetoric with the scientific instruction line of work within one organization is interesting as well. The scientific instruction department sought to add sex education to the curriculum of schools all around the nation. Most Christian organizations

³² Hester T. Griffith, *Objections to California Dry Answered*, (Los Angeles: Allied Printing). Anti-Saloon League Records, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison. Date of publication unknown. The legislative study she cited was completed in 1913. In the original work, Teasdale's name is misspelled as Truesdale, however, with further research I found they are, in fact, the same person.

³³ Frances E. Willard, *Women and Temperance* (New York, Arno Press; reprint, 1972) Appendix.

opposed science in the classroom, the culmination of which came in 1925 with the infamous Scopes Trial. Still, the scientific instruction department of the WCTU, as described in Willard's model for WCTU chapters,

Aims to introduce books in chemistry physiology, and hygiene and inculcate the scientific importance of total abstinence into the curriculum of all school, seminaries and colleges, but especially into all public and normal schools.³⁴

Most local divisions of the WCTU in Wisconsin formed after Willard's model, and participated in the activities outlined for them in her book. Wisconsin women were adamant in passing legislation to prevent the spread of VD, but they also thought it important to prevent it through the above means as well. Women were not the only ones concerned with the spread of VD, and this is apparent in the amount of studies and legislation created by the Wisconsin legislature before prohibition even passed.

The American Fear of the VD Epidemic

Although Americans were concerned and fearful of many social phenomena during this period, of especial concern was the fear of venereal diseases (VD) and their epidemic-proportioned spread throughout the United States. Prostitution was common in many large cities, but occurred in small towns as well all over the nation, and Wisconsin was no exception. Studies of social conditions in Wisconsin reported vice as a major problem. A study by the Wisconsin legislature aimed to locate the major brothel centers in the state. Although Milwaukee and Madison were both prominent cities for prostitution, Janesville reported 14 "vice

³⁴ Frances E. Willard, *Women and Temperance* (New York, Arno Press; reprint, 1972) Appendix.

resorts" and Watertown reported 19.³⁵ This evidence of harlotry in rural towns contributed to the dry logic of employing VD rhetoric when they spoke to rural, church-going citizens. Because it was seen as a major source of venereal disease and a major factor in its spread, Wisconsin citizens became more adamant in their campaign against prostitution, and the institutions where it took place.

The fears of rural and urban citizens, with respect to venereal disease, were not without good reason. In 1914, the State Board of Health reported 1,173 cases of gonorrhea or syphilis. One hundred and forty-four of those cases spread through a prostitute. Although the official percentage was only 12%, 39% reported an unknown mode of infection and 42% reported contraction from "illicit intercourse", which people could easily assume came from prostitutes or extra-marital relationships.³⁶ Studies at the national level found much higher percentages, which also contributed to the fear of prostitution. In 1906, "Estimates suggested that from 75 to 90 percent of all prostitutes harbored infections."³⁷ Although the actual numbers in Wisconsin appear much lower, the national fear spread to Wisconsin and effected the rhetoric used to combat the saloon. Many "agreed that when a man left the moral path the road usually led to the prostitute, who they argued was the most prolific source of venereal infections."³⁸ Because most prostitution took place at the saloon, they became an easy target for prohibitionists.

Women, whether a prostitute or not, suffered from these assumptions. The government persecuted many women on the grounds of suspected prostitution. "More than 18,000 women were committed to institutions which received federal funding in the period between 1918 and

³⁵ John D'Emilio and Estelle B Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1998), 210.

³⁶ To see full table of data, please see Figure 1 in the Appendix.

³⁷ Allen M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 31.

³⁸ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 31.

1920. Of these women, 15,500 reportedly had a venereal disease." Several thousand more women were contacted but not charged with prostitution.³⁹ Those who were not suspected of prostitution often suffered abuse from their husbands. Men often left their wives at home to take care of the children while they were away at the saloon, squandering the little money the family had. This was especially the case with working class families, whose male figureheads felt the need to escape the "tedium, toil and poverty" of life in the cities.⁴⁰ When the men returned to their homes, they often beat their wives or spread venereal infections to them as a result of participation in prostitution. This mistreatment led to the formation of the women's temperance movement. The importance of this movement to prohibition cannot be underestimated. Women were key players in the battle for prohibition. Their view that alcohol caused health problems and decay of the family spread like wildfire, and as a result, prohibition reformers succeeded on the national level.

Alcohol and its Effects on Health

Today the negative effects of alcohol are well known to the general population of the United States, but during the Prohibition Era, the effects of alcohol were widely debated among medical professionals and the general populace. Many doctors of the time studied alcohol in conjunction with the prevalence of venereal diseases, and Wisconsin served as a major center for this research.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 89. The institutions these women were put into were often prisons or mental hospitals, where they were examined for venereal diseases.

⁴⁰ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 17.

The Sundry Bill and the Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison

The University of Wisconsin, Madison became a leader in the research of alcohol and its relation to venereal diseases during the Prohibition Era. Reports of studies completed at UW-Madison on the improvement of the treatment of syphilis claimed by 1921, "former soldiers who were confined to hospitals had been returned home to their families."⁴¹ These studies also advocated continued prevention practices, such as abstinence from alcohol and participation in prostitution; scientific sex education in public schools and further research in other areas relating to venereal diseases.

However, the Sundry Bill that was to be passed by the United States Congress threatened to take away funding for such studies.⁴² Fortunately, Wisconsin delegates realized the importance of continuing the research of venereal diseases and alcohol in the state. Not only Governor Blaine, but Randall, Classon, Lampert, Esch and Kleczka of the House of Representatives as well as Senator Fischer all promised to vote against the passage of the Sundry Bill for this reason.⁴³

Venereal Disease, Alcohol and the Military

The studies in Wisconsin were specific examples of a national interest in the effects of alcohol, which reached its height before the Eighteenth Amendment passed. The various bills presented to President Wilson during the war era helped prevent the spread of VD among soldiers. The reports of Newton D. Baker to President Wilson in 1917 are a prime example of

⁴¹ Unsigned, to Dr. T.A. Storey, Washington DC, 11 January 1921, John. J Blaine Papers, Box 1 Folder 5, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

⁴² For further explanation of the Sundry Bill, please see the Law Glossary in the Appendix.

⁴³ Various Letters to John J. Blaine, Madison, John J. Blaine Papers, Box, 1 Folder 5, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

support for this type of legislation which "galvaniz[ed] support for the government's repression of not only prostitution but also of alcohol."⁴⁴ This suppression of alcohol consumption was directly linked to the efforts to prevent the spread of venereal infections in the United States.

In 1910, the surgeon general issued six recommendations for the control of venereal diseases within the military, which, among other things, "recommended the formation of temperance societies within the military."⁴⁵ These preventative measures were justified by the fact that venereal disease spread very quickly, especially among the armed forces fighting overseas in Europe. Because venereal infections were so widespread in Europe, American soldiers were more prone to contracting disease if they had intercourse with European women. Dr. Lloyd Thompson of the Medical Corps reported, "Eighty-five percent of the men who come to the clinics with venereal disease, new cases, have been using alcohol, enough to make them hilarious or drunk."⁴⁶ These figures from the military led to the formation of hypotheses connecting alcohol and its ability to facilitate the spread of venereal diseases.

Social hygienists reported "alcohol as a major contributing element in the acquisition of venereal infections."⁴⁷ And indeed, some of these hypotheses can be supported by data collected after the prohibition experiment took place. For example, in 1914, 1,173 cases of venereal diseases were reported in Wisconsin.⁴⁸ By 1919, the year in which prohibition passed, the number dropped to 1, 104 cases.⁴⁹ Though only a drop of sixty-nine reported cases, supporters

⁴⁴ Allen M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 72. Newton D. Baker served as the United States Secretary of War from 1916-1921.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 98.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 72.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 72.

⁴⁸ Gonorrhea and Syphilis only.

⁴⁹ For full Table of Data, please see Figure 1 in the Appendix. This data was collected at the end of 1919, while prohibition was put into effect in January of 1919.

for the continuance of prohibition could use these statistics to enhance their argument that venereal disease was commonly spread through prostitution, which often began at a saloon, and that enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment was beginning to work.

Legislation Regulating Prostitution

However, the interest of Wisconsin legislators in stopping the spread of prostitution and VD do not reflect their values on prohibition. The Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union argued through prohibition, the spread of venereal disease and prostitution could be stopped. Prohibition supporters also tried to conduct medical studies which could help argue that excessive drinking directly correlated to the contraction of VD, but at this time were unable to provide conclusive evidence. However, it appears that the vast majority of Wisconsin citizens did not agree with this argument. They were concerned with the social problems caused by prostitution; however, they did not seem to believe the abolition of the saloon and drinking altogether was the solution.

In 1913, the Senate established a committee to investigate the causes and major centers for prostitution in the state of Wisconsin. Headed by Senator Howard Teasdale, this committee,

sent questionnaires to officials throughout the state and held hearings in many cities. During those hearings, it questioned working women about their lives, asked religious and civic leaders about vice in their communities and consulted experts about how to reduce or eliminate the suffering caused by prostitution, alcoholism and other social problems.⁵⁰

The leadership of the government in curing social problems was impressive. By 1918,

⁵⁰ "A Milwaukee Brothel's Account Book Ca. 1910", Summary of Digital Manuscript, Wisconsin Historical Society Webpage <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=1567>. Accessed 16/10/2007.

Wisconsin found a 1.5-3% infection rate among white soldiers when they reported for the draft.⁵¹ Compared to Southern and even other Midwestern states, this was an incredibly low infection rate. Wisconsin was also one of the few states of the Union with a statute that penalized both sexes for participation in prostitution.⁵² The relatively low rates of infection just before passage of national prohibition became a reason that the concern over VD in Wisconsin was not reflected through widespread support of prohibition.

Also, most people in Wisconsin seemed to support the abolition of hard liquor manufacturing, but did not support the prohibition of beer and light wines. They also feared their personal freedom would be violated if they were not allowed to drink in their own home. The opposition to public drinking proves that Wisconsin citizens were concerned about the spread of venereal diseases and other risks associated with public intoxication, but did not believe that drinking in the home was harmful. For instance, when petitioning for the veto of the Matheson Bill, Alvin P. Kletzch writes, "I sincerely hope that you will veto this measure, for if it should become a law the farmers and working men will be deprived of the only method of obtaining a glass of wine or beer which is now left to them."⁵³ Like Kletzch, many others wrote to Governor Blaine in opposition to the Matheson Bill, noting that they opposed the saloon, but still did not support the bill.

The opposition to preliminary legislative efforts to enforce prohibition only increased within the next decade. Wisconsin was among the first states to repeal the legislation enforcing prohibition and became a leader in the fight for repeal of the national amendment. The

⁵¹ See Figure 2. This map must be read with a certain degree of caution, however, because it only includes white males from one year's draft in Wisconsin, so it is a very limited source.

⁵² See Figure 3.

⁵³ Alvin P. Kletzch to John J. Blaine, 28 May 1921, John J. Blaine Papers, Box 9 Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

movement for repeal had widespread support in Wisconsin, despite the continuing efforts of the Anti-Saloon League and the WCTU to prevent repeal. Wisconsin is unique in this aspect. The common association between alcohol and decay was not made there, as was so common in other Midwestern states.

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Whatever the actual effects of alcohol on the spread of venereal diseases in the early twentieth century, one fact certainly is clear: Wisconsin citizens were very interested in the effects of alcohol on health. Both wets and dries tried to manipulate health statistics to reinforce their arguments. Even after the Eighteenth Amendment passed, people continued to debate the effects of alcohol on health. For example, in 1921, Dr. J.J. Seelman, of the Medical Society of Milwaukee, wrote to Governor Blaine and requested he veto the Matheson Bill on the grounds that, "The mild stimulating and tonic action of beer, for instance, in tuberculosis is of great value in many cases of the disease."<sup>54</sup> The Anti-Saloon League and Women's Christian Temperance Union were also active in researching the effects of alcohol on health, though in a biased format. They sought to educate the populace of Wisconsin of the negative effects of alcohol in order to spread the temperance movement in a state so resistant to their efforts. Though they only reached limited success, their efforts resulted in major contributions to the field of alcohol research.

This research contributed to the rhetoric used in Wisconsin prohibition debates. Many temperance reformers attempted to convince their audiences that prohibition was necessary in order to improve the health situation, especially when it came to the spread of venereal diseases in Wisconsin. The ASL and WCTU in Wisconsin used this argument along with others, and

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<sup>54</sup> J.J. Seelman, Milwaukee, to John J. Blaine, Madison, 21 May 1921, John J. Blaine Papers, Box 9 Folder 6, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

although they did not have much success, the concerns of Wisconsin citizens were reflected through the use of these arguments.

### *Passage of the Eighteenth Amendment*

Although they did not have widespread support in Wisconsin, the dries triumphed in 1919 with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. Their argument that alcohol was the root of many of the problems of the American people had won. Their innovative use of religious, economic and health rhetoric captured the attention of influential politicians and many voters during this time period. Their long battle for moral decency was won. In the years to come, however, prohibition supporters were required to fight for their cause harder than ever. In Wisconsin, the immediate defeat of prohibition was evident in the veto of the hard-line Matheson Bill.

### *Legislation*

When the Eighteenth Amendment passed, the law required each state to approve its own law requiring the prohibition of the manufacture or sale of alcohol. In Wisconsin, this law was the Mulberger Law.<sup>55</sup> However, the Mulberger Law did not provide for the enforcement of prohibition, and it was also found to be inconsistent with the national amendment. In Wisconsin, the debate over such enforcement laws and the office of Prohibition Commissioner was a point of interest to many citizens, and turned out to be a major discussion to clarify the values of Wisconsin residents.

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<sup>55</sup> Please see the Law Glossary in the Appendix for further explanation of the Mulberger Law.

## *The Matheson Bill*

In early 1921, Assemblyman Alexander Matheson proposed a bill which would add to the Mulberger Law, "such sections of the Volstead Act that were not in the law."<sup>56</sup> This called for stricter enforcement of prohibition law. However, the law itself had vague language and many opposed it. This sparked arguments between radical temperance supporters, moderates and radical prohibition opposition.

Supporters of the Matheson Bill included the Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union along with many zealous supporters of the temperance movement. As noted previously, the ASL had considerable influence on legislation dealing with prohibition. They pushed for the unrevised passage of the Matheson Bill, even though Assemblyman Matheson himself wished to amend it to make the law more clear. The ASL and WCTU wanted to pass the Matheson Bill in its original form mainly because; "The original Matheson Bill would have prohibited absolutely the manufacture of near beer..."<sup>57</sup> Governor Blaine received numerous appeals from members of the Wisconsin WCTU and ASL that plead for the passage of the Matheson Bill. Their influence even spread to the District Attorney of Milwaukee County. In an interview published in the *Milwaukee Journal* he stated,

"I am in favor of passing the Matheson Bill, which makes the Mulberger Act similar to the Volstead Law. I was asked to oppose it, but I refused, I hope that it will pass, and if it does, I shall prosecute every violator with the utmost vigor."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Summary of Collection, John J. Blaine Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison. For more information on the Volstead Act, please see the Law Glossary in the Appendix.

<sup>57</sup> Ralph Jackman, Madison to John. J. Blaine, Madison, 17 May 1921, John J. Blaine Papers, Box 8 Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>58</sup> *Milwaukee Journal*, (Milwaukee), 12 May 1921 as quoted in Rev. D.P French letter to Senate Chamber, 19 March 1921, John J. Blaine Papers, Box 6 Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Many other supporters of prohibition enforcement called for removal of local sheriffs and other officials and the replacement of these officials with men who promised to support prohibition more forcefully. Citizens of Appleton, Wisconsin, passed a resolution concerning their support for the Matheson Bill which was then sent to Governor Blaine himself. This resolution argued,

"Whereas, our state legislature will probably pass the Matheson Bill, which will be an effective measure in securing a better enforcement of Prohibition in this state, Therefore we, a body of citizen of Appleton, earnestly request that the governor of this state, Mr. Blaine, to affix his signature to this measure when it comes before him for consideration."<sup>59</sup>

The legislature passed the Matheson Bill in 1921, and then presented it to Blaine for his approval. It became clear, however, the Anti-Saloon League, the WCTU or those citizens who pleaded, "with all the power and pleading of [their] hearts... to sign the Matheson Bill,"<sup>60</sup> did not influence Governor Blaine. He vetoed the Matheson Bill when it came to him.

### *Opposition*

Although the Anti-Saloon League and Women's Christian Temperance Union in Wisconsin made valiant efforts at recruiting as many people as possible to the temperance crusade, they met with only limited success. This was especially reflected by politicians in the state, who resented the influence the ASL and WCTU had on effective law making. Governor Blaine noted this in his address to the Wisconsin Legislature accompanying his veto of the Matheson Bill.

I cannot blink that fact which is of public notoriety that a dictatorial lobby drew the bill, had it presented and demanded its passage without change...

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<sup>59</sup> JB Wood, Appleton, to John J. Blaine, Madison, 5 May 1921, John J. Blaine Papers, Box 8 Folder2, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>60</sup> John Strange, Menasha, to John J. Blaine, Madison, 28 May 1921, John J. Blaine Papers, Box 9 Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Without that lobby a good bill no doubt would have reached me.<sup>61</sup>

The press quickly assumed that the Governor and Anti-Saloon League had some sort of a falling out, and immediately sided with Governor Blaine. For instance, one article in the *Milwaukee Journal*, the Anti-Saloon League was blamed for the corruption of the legislature: "The shattering of factional lines on this vote is characteristic of what the Anti-Saloon League has been able to accomplish in the legislature..."<sup>62</sup> Although breaking factional lines is normally considered the opposite of corruption, many politicians were swayed to vote not according to the principles of their constituents, but according to the wishes of lobbyists, and according to this author, the concessions of legislators to the ASL were harmful to the protection of personal freedom and the democratic system of government in Wisconsin. The Anti-Saloon League quickly issued a statement to Governor Blaine and the public to save support, which noted,

We assume that Governor Blaine honestly desire that this and all laws shall be vigorously and efficiently enforced; that he appointed Mr. W. Stanley Smith as Prohibition Commissioner in good faith for that purpose; and trust that the future will confirm our faith.<sup>63</sup>

However, their battle for prohibition support in Wisconsin continued to be difficult. Governor Blaine had extensive support in the veto of the Matheson Bill, which attempted to restrict the use of beer and light wines, but also was vaguely written and proved to be a bad bill. Overall, Wisconsin residents continued to express concern with upholding the law above their personal opinions on prohibition. When prohibition was forced upon Wisconsin residents with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, Wisconsin complied with the law for the most part.

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<sup>61</sup> John J. Blaine. Veto Message to Wisconsin Legislature, 30 May 1921, John J. Blaine Papers, Box 9, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>62</sup> *Milwaukee Journal* (Milwaukee) 24 April 1921. JC Ralston. John J. Blaine Papers, Box 7, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>63</sup> Wisconsin Anti-Saloon League Press Release, 25 April 1921. John J. Blaine Papers, Box 7, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Apart from the Milwaukee Grand Jury's appeal concerning beer and light wines, the trials in Kenosha and the early abandonment of prohibition, Wisconsin did not become infamous for gangs trafficking alcohol from Canada, like other states with large northern metropolises, and for the most part Wisconsin legislators did all they could to align their laws with the national laws concerning prohibition.<sup>64</sup>

### *Effects of the Matheson Bill and its Veto*

Many supported Blaine's veto of the Matheson Bill. Blaine received ninety-eight letters of support for his action concerning the Matheson Bill in the months following his decision. Blaine, who remained vague on his position on prohibition before his veto of the Matheson Bill, explained in his message to the Assembly, "The so-called Matheson Bill is only a feeble and pretentious attempt to comply with the Eighteenth Amendment."<sup>65</sup> Although widely supported, Blaine's veto caused him to lose some support in Wisconsin. Five very strongly worded letters were written to Blaine notifying him of the withdrawal of support solely because he vetoed the bill. Later, when he was up for reelection, his decision to veto the bill came back to haunt him. As George Hartman put it, "The dries... are classing you with the wets because of your veto of the Matheson Bill and your opinion regarding home brew and light wine as gathered from your

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<sup>64</sup> Directly after the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, the Milwaukee Grand Jury appealed to Congress requesting an amendment to the Volstead Law which would permit the manufacture and sale of beer and light wines. This request was denied and shocked the nation's prohibitionists. Wisconsin continued its infamy concerning prohibition when a scandal in the Kenosha police department revealed police were ignoring prohibition violations in 1921. For more information, please see John J. Blaine Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>65</sup> Veto Message to Wisconsin State Assembly, Madison, John J. Blaine, 26 May 1921, John J. Blaine Papers, Box 9 Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

addresses."<sup>66</sup> Prohibition was seen as an important issue in the election of Wisconsin government officials for two reasons; one, the temperance reformers saw it as necessary to uphold prohibition at all costs, and two, most Wisconsin residents wanted the law to be upheld, regardless of what that law was.

In fact, after later analysis, many realized that the Matheson Bill was not a good bill. It did not clearly provide for enforcement of prohibition, and did not really align the Mulberger Law with the Eighteenth Amendment. Even though Governor Blaine later wrote, "Moonshine is a menace to the health and morals of our people,"<sup>67</sup> he also was wise enough to give thorough analysis to the Matheson Bill and explained in June of 1921, that, "The fact is that the bill is in some respects a very, very bad bill, from the standpoint of enforcement."<sup>68</sup> Blaine was not the only one to see the problems with the bill. The recently appointed Prohibition Commissioner, W. Stanley Smith came under heavy fire for his denouncement of the Matheson Bill. Many letters written by members of the WCTU notified the governor of their opposition to his appointment because they believed him to be a wet. When Smith went before the Senate Committee to advise the revision of the Matheson Bill, he came under such heavy criticism that he had to address the legislature and the people of Wisconsin to clarify his reasoning. In this address, he explained,

"Any criminal law that is ambiguous and uncertain is very difficult of enforcement... it was for this reason that I appeared before the Senate Committee at the hearing on the Matheson Bill and called their attention to several ENFORCEMENT PROVISIONS that are not sufficiently definite

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<sup>66</sup> George A. Hartman, Juneau, to John J. Blaine, Madison, 6 December 1921, John J. Blaine Papers, Box 13 Folder 2, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>67</sup> "Law Enforcement", Madison, John J. Blaine, 12 July 1921, John J. Blaine Papers, Box 10 Folder 5, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

<sup>68</sup> John J. Blaine, Madison, to P.W. Gullord, Greenwood, 4 June 1921, John J. Blaine Papers, Box 9 Folder 2, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

to be most efficiently enforced."<sup>69</sup>

Even with this justification for his actions, many prohibition supporters continued to push for his resignation. He did not resign, however. In the years to come, his job proved very difficult as Wisconsin residents continuously ignored the Prohibition Laws and found loopholes that allowed them to drink alcoholic beverages.

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In 1921, the state legislature passed the Severson Act, which enforced national prohibition.⁷⁰ This law was more clearly written than the Matheson Bill, but it was not in effect long. Wisconsin continued to resist prohibition efforts; they became the leader in repealing prohibition, and only five years after the Severson Act passed, it was amended and later, repealed.

Repealing Prohibition in Wisconsin

By 1926, Wisconsin was growing more and more disgruntled with Prohibition. In the same year voters passed a referendum allowing beer manufacturing to resume. Many voters argued Prohibition was not enforced properly, and that if the desired effects of prohibition were not occurring now, prohibition was never going to work. Wisconsin repealed their prohibition amendment in 1929, four years before repeal of national prohibition. The repeal of prohibition enforcement in Wisconsin was opposed in some areas, however the majority of the state supported this decision. Also, despite the increase in the occurrence of public intoxication, the

⁶⁹ Address to Wisconsin State Assembly and Citizens, W. Stanley Smith, April 1921, John J. Blaine Papers, Box 8 Folder 2, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

⁷⁰ For more information on the Severson Act, please see the Law Glossary in the Appendix.

people of Wisconsin remained concerned with the spread of venereal diseases and did all they could to prevent it.

The ASL and WCTU tried to prevent Wisconsin citizens from repealing the enforcement legislation, and some counties kept their laws regulating prohibition in effect. In 1929, the Wickersham Commission reported 20 counties in Wisconsin, mostly in border areas, that continued to enforce prohibition.⁷¹ Forty-one counties were considered wet, and five were considered undecided.⁷² This majority of wet sentiment was reflected in the words of Frank Buckley, of the Bureau of Prohibition, "Wisconsin...is commonly regarded as a Gibraltar of the wets--sort of a Utopia where everyone drinks their fill and John Barleycorn still holds forth in splendor."⁷³ Evidence of this statement lay in the number of arrests for public intoxication in major cities of Wisconsin. For instance, in 1918, there were 10,331 arrests made in select cities.⁷⁴ By 1928, that number rose to 17,372 and even more in 1929 to 20,578.⁷⁵ It appears that before prohibition, public intoxication was not prevalent in Wisconsin, but during and especially after prohibition, public intoxication was either more prevalent or more heavily enforced.

⁷¹ The Wickersham Commission was the more popular name for the National Committee on Law Observation and Enforcement, established by President Herbert Hoover in 1929 and charged with the responsibility to identify the causes of criminal activity and make recommendations for appropriate adjustment of public policy.

⁷² "Enforcement of the Prohibition Laws: Official Records of the National Commission of Law Observance and Enforcement: A Prohibition Survey of the State of Wisconsin.", *Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Collection*, <http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/u?tp,9928>, pp. 1100-1102, accessed 23 October 2007.

⁷³ "The Federal Government Investigates Prohibition Enforcement in Wisconsin, 1929" Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Collection, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints>, accessed 23 October 2007.

⁷⁴ "Select cities" refers to the major urban centers of Wisconsin, such as Milwaukee, Madison, La Crosse, Eau Claire, Wausau, Green Bay and Stevens Point.

⁷⁵ "Enforcement of the Prohibition Laws: Official Records of the National Commission of Law Observance and Enforcement: A Prohibition Survey of the State of Wisconsin.", *Wisconsin Historical Society Digital Collection*, <http://content.wisconsinhistory.org/u?tp,9928>, p. 1107, accessed 23 October 2007.

However, this increase in public intoxication did not result in an increase in the spread of venereal diseases. A report from the federal government conducted in 1929 noted, “Milwaukee police are especially active against prostitutes of the street-walker type. An able corps of policewomen keep the streets clean of such games. Prostitutes are kept out of respectable hotels.”⁷⁶ This crackdown on prostitution shows that although Milwaukee was one of Wisconsin’s more wet counties, many residents were still concerned with the spread of VD and did not think that prohibition of alcohol was an effective method of stopping it. These efforts to stop prostitution had a slight effect. In 1920, the State Board of Health reported 3,794 cases of venereal disease, and in 1929 that number had decreased to 2,579 cases.⁷⁷ It is hard to determine whether it was the initiative of citizens to stop prostitution or if it was the outlaw of saloons which produced these results, however, when compared with rates of infection before prohibition, the rate of infection during prohibition was much higher than before prohibition.

The concern over the spread of venereal disease in Wisconsin influenced the prohibition movement, but not to the extent that the ASL and WCTU might have expected. Many people in Wisconsin believed that VD was a problem that needed to be solved, but not through prohibition of alcohol. Wisconsin residents sought other methods to control venereal diseases, such as legislation regulating prostitution, and the treatment and reporting of venereal diseases. Along with proper enforcement efforts, these measures succeeded. This success contributed to the resistance of prohibition in Wisconsin.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 1107.

⁷⁷ C.A. Harper, *Thirty-third Report of the State Board of Health of Wisconsin*, Wisconsin State Board of Health, Madison, 1930, (96).

Conclusion

On December 5, 1933, the twenty-first amendment to the United States Constitution was passed, which completely repealed the Eighteenth Amendment. Prohibition was officially over. Before the passage of this amendment, a long battle for the repeal of prohibition was fought. Wisconsin was a leader in this fight. Having already amended their laws to allow the manufacture of beer and light wines in 1926 and completely repealing the legislation regarding prohibition in 1929; Wisconsin served as a signal to the rest of the United States that the prohibition experiment was a failure. John J. Blaine, the former governor of Wisconsin during the beginning of prohibition, and later a United States Senator, proposed the constitutional amendment for the repeal of prohibition. Blaine's proposal was widely supported and only slightly modified before its passage as the twenty-first amendment in 1933.

Historically, Wisconsin proved to be the last frontier for prohibitionists in the early 20th century. The people of Wisconsin resisted temperance legislation for decades, and only submitted to prohibition when the Eighteenth Amendment was passed in 1919. Once prohibition was forced upon Wisconsin, many still did not wish to comply with the law and tried earnestly to resist legislation, such as the Matheson Bill, which aimed to strictly enforce prohibition and outlaw the use and manufacture of light wines and beer.

The Anti-Saloon League and Women's Christian Temperance Union encountered many obstacles in their fight for prohibition, especially in Wisconsin. Despite their efforts, the arguments these organizations used to support the movement were insufficient. Relying on the concern over the spread of venereal disease in Wisconsin, the ASL and WCTU argued that prohibition was necessary to stop venereal disease in its tracks. However, many people who lived in Wisconsin during this time thought otherwise. The people of Wisconsin relied on other

measures, such as legislation and the effective enforcement of that legislation to stop the spread of VD. The ASL and WCTU also employed economic and religious arguments, which reached limited success, but not to the extent that Wisconsin would ever be considered a dry state.

Appendix

The original version of this appendix included various charts, maps and political cartoons which are described here, but could not be reproduced due to copyrights. The included citations can direct you to the original versions of these helpful figures.

Figure 1. C. A Harper, M.D., 25th Report of the State Board of Health of Wisconsin, Madison, Democrat Printing Company, 1914. This chart was only part of the report on venereal disease. The author uses this chart in conjunction with an explanation of the newfound interest in the spread of venereal disease and the efforts people began to make to stop the spread of this “epidemic”. Although an interesting perspective, the prevalence and prevention of venereal diseases was included in every report from the State Board of Health beginning in 1908. This chart describes the age, duration, mode of infection, conjugal state, sex, race and nature of the venereal diseases and the people who reported them in Wisconsin for the year ending June 30th, 1914.

Figure 2. “Social Hygiene Legislation Manual, 1921”, The American Social Hygiene Association, New York. (35). This map shows the percentage of venereal disease among white army soldiers during 1918 by state. Wisconsin falls into the category of 1.51-3.00%, along with 15 other states. The other categories on this map are 0-1.5%, 3.01-4.50%, 4.51-6% and 6.01% and above.

Figure 3. “Social Hygiene Legislation Manual, 1921”, The American Social Hygiene Association, New York. (16). This map of the US shows the legal statutes in place penalizing prostitution by state. The categories included on this map are: No law penalizing prostitution, States with statutes under which only the woman may be punished, and States with statutes penalizing both sexes. Wisconsin is among the 15 states which penalized both sexes for participating in prostitution.

Figure 4. Andrew Sinclair, *Prohibition: The Era of Excess* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962). This map of the US shows the third prohibition wave, which lasted from 1907-1919. This map describes states which had a prohibition law before 1919, states which passed one during 1919, and states without a prohibition law before the 18th amendment. Wisconsin is among the 12 states without a prohibition law before the 18th amendment.

Figure 5. K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). This cartoon, depicting the downward spiral of drinking was a common viewpoint of the prohibitionists. These types of cartoons were distributed and printed in dry newspapers during the pre-prohibition years.

Figure 6. Clipping from the wet newspaper *Progress*, listing their beliefs and denials concerning prohibition. *Progress*, (15 February 1917.) Wisconsin Anti-Saloon League Records, Box 3, Folder 10, Wisconsin Historical Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Law Glossary

Mulberger Law: Wisconsin law which outlawed the manufacture and sale of alcohol in accordance with the Eighteenth Amendment to the constitution.

Sundry Bill: National funding bill which threatened to take away funding for sexual health education, rehabilitation facilities, and research which aimed to connect alcohol with venereal disease.

Matheson Bill: Wisconsin prohibition enforcement bill which was vetoed by Governor John J. Blaine and caused much debate in Wisconsin. This bill was very strict, but also very vague in its language.

Severson Act: Wisconsin prohibition enforcement bill which was passed. This bill was in accordance with national prohibition laws and was written less vaguely than the Matheson Bill.

Volstead Law: National prohibition law passed on October 18, 1919 which officially outlawed the manufacture or sale of alcohol except for religious or medical purposes. Possession and consumption of alcohol were not regulated by this law.

Webb-Kenyon Act: National prohibition law passed in 1913 which allowed individual states to pass prohibition laws, but did not regulate prohibition at the national level.

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