The Saloon in Eau Claire, Wisconsin 1880-1920: A Working Man’s Institution

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History 489

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Abstract

In the decades prior to prohibition, the saloon was an economic and cultural institution in industrial communities that was created, operated, and frequented by the working class. In Eau Claire, Wisconsin, the number of saloons increased and decreased with the growth and decline of the lumber industry. This paper uses city directories, censuses, newspapers, and lumber statistics between 1880 and 1920 to analyze the relationship between the saloon, the lumber industry, and the working class in Eau Claire during this period. It also explores the different economic and cultural functions of the saloon and how these functions met the needs of Eau Claire’s working class. Ultimately, the saloon in Eau Claire declined with the lumber industry, which led to increased diversification and greater upward mobility within the town’s workforce. The examination of the saloon in Eau Claire contributes to the understanding of working class formation and culture in America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
**Historiographical Introduction**

The saloon in Eau Claire was a distinct working class creation. Its success from 1880 to 1920 depended on industry in Eau Claire, particularly the lumber industry. The success of the saloon is determined by studying the number of saloons throughout these four decades using the city directories. This argument is proved first by analyzing the relationship between the saloon, the lumber industry, and the working class in Eau Claire using lumber statistics and by mapping and graphing the relationship between these three components. Next, the saloon was a working class institution operated and frequented by members of the working class shown through an analysis of Eau Claire newspapers and the United States Federal Census. Finally, as the working class decreased due to the decline of the lumber industry at the turn of the century, so did the demand for saloons and consequently their numbers. The working class was in decline due to increased prosperity among workers. More money meant more options when it came to leisure time.

The saloon has been explored in a variety of ways by historians. *The Old-Time Saloon: Not Wet-Not Dry, Just History*, published in 1931 by George Ade is the oldest published history discussing the saloon in detail. Writing during Prohibition, Ade champions and romanticizes the saloon by depicting it as a beneficial and missed institution. *The Saloon: Public Drinking in Chicago and Boston: 1880-1920*, by Perry R. Duis, published in 1983, is a source frequently cited by scholars because of its detailed analysis of the saloon in two American industrial cities. Another vital secondary source also published in 1983, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers & Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* by Roy Rosenzweig, explores working class leisure while examining the urban saloon.
Historians have analyzed the saloon from a multitude of perspectives. Some explored the saloon solely through the lens of the temperance movement. For example, *Organized for Prohibition: a New History of the Anti-Saloon League*, published in 1965 by Austin K. Kerr, describes saloons through a study of the Anti-Saloon League, a temperance organization. Kerr portrays the saloon as socially corrupt. Some historians have looked at saloons and prostitution as going hand in hand. For example, an article entitled “This Naughty, Naughty City”: Prostitution in Eau Claire from the Frontier to the Progressive Era,” published in 1997 by Bonnie Ripp-Shucha, makes the point that brothels and saloons frequently were connected or situated near each other in industrial cities. Analyzing the saloon of the old west is also a popular angle among historians. This can be attributed to the popularity of western historical culture, particularly Westerns, a genre of Hollywood movie making. An excellent example of this type of analysis can be found in *Saloons of the Old West*, published in 2006 by Richard Erdoes.

An examination of the saloon in Eau Claire adds to the literature on the working class in America. This is accomplished by exploring the working class experience in a small city in contrast to studies already done on large cities, such as Chicago, and medium cities, like Worcester. While the three have many similarities, there are also some major differences. The most important difference between these two cities and Eau Claire is that Eau Claire did not have separate ethnic communities. The reason is simple: Eau Claire was too small, its population only reaching 17,517 in 1900. As a consequence, ethnic groups in Eau Claire mingled. Also explored in this paper is how the success of one industry can influence the success of the saloon, a social institution. A similar industry in a large city would, in most cases, not have had as dramatic an impact.
Six main secondary sources helped to develop the argument connecting the saloon, the working class, and the lumber industry together in Eau Claire. These explore alcohol consumption and the role of the saloon and the saloonkeeper in the U.S., population studies of Eau Claire, and the Eau Claire lumber industry. These sources provide a historiographical foundation for this project. In the following paragraphs, each will be identified and analyzed for its contribution to this argument.

First, *Drinking in America: a History*, by Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby Martin studies the consumption of alcohol in the United States. Lender and Martin argue that “there has always been drinking in America,” and that “Americans have incorporated beverage alcohol, in one way or another, into their daily lives.”¹ Lender and Martin analyze new drinking habits that were brought by various ethnic groups to the United States from Europe during the nineteenth century. These conflicted with the Anglo-American way of drinking.² The immigration of foreigners and their unfamiliar creeds and customs made established American families feel “perplexed and apprehensive.”³ This contributes to this thesis because most of the workers in the lumber industry, and consequently those frequenting the saloons, were foreign-born.

Second, *The Saloon: Public Drinking in Chicago and Boston, 1880-1920*, by Perry R. Duis, offers an in-depth comparison of Midwestern and East Coast saloons. Legislation implemented in Boston regarding the saloon was stricter than legislation implemented in Chicago. In both settings, however, Duis argues that the saloon was thoroughly integrated into city life before

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² Ibid., 58.
³ Ibid., 65.
“The constant tension between public and private, between family and larger society, and between personal and common space, helped shape the career of the saloon.” Duis analyzes competition among saloons caused by their dependency on breweries. This dependency made the saloon “the easiest business in the world for a man to break into with small capital,” and explains how impoverished immigrants were able to become saloonkeepers. Breweries bought the liquor license for entrepreneurs in exchange for their beer being sold in that particular saloon. Also helpful was Duis’ analysis of the daily lives and duties of saloonkeepers.

Third, Roy Rosenzweig studies working class leisure in Worcester, Massachusetts, in *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers & Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920*. This is beneficial since saloons were working class leisure institutions. Rosenzweig explores “working-class recreational patterns” and looks at the “American working class in its broadest social, economic, and political context.” The questions driving his research revolve around working class traditions, interclass bonds and conflicts, and the transition working class culture made from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Rosenzweig studies the saloon from the perspective of a working class social institution.

Fourth, *A Population History of Eau Claire County from 1860 to 1900: A Growing County* by James P. Dexter discusses Eau Claire specifically. Dexter explores population, immigration,
sex ratio, fertility, and mortality statistics of Eau Claire County from 1860 to 1900. Dexter argues that Eau Claire County’s population grew in these years mainly due to immigration, which he defines as “persons moving into Eau Claire County from outside the state of Wisconsin, including foreign countries and states in the union.”

Eau Claire primarily attracted new settlers because of its successful lumber business. Moreover, as the lumber industry boomed, so did the number of saloons. Dexter states that the lumber industry had the biggest and most direct effect on population growth in Eau Claire County, and immigration from outside the United States played the greatest role. Dexter states that, “by the turn of the century, 25 percent of the Norwegians living within the United States lived in Wisconsin.” Not surprisingly, the largest immigrant group in Eau Claire was Norwegian, with the Germans trailing close behind.

Dexter also analyzes the changing sex ratio in Eau Claire County. The sex ratio was imbalanced in 1880 with more men than women. However, as the lumber industry began its decline, the sex ratio began to even out, illustrating “how the county was ‘growing up’ from a pioneer settlement.” Over time, the domination of transient, single men decreased because of the increase of settled, nuclear families. Simultaneously, the number of saloons in Eau Claire decreased since these men were its most common patrons.

Fifth, *Eau Claire in Transition: the Effect of the Decline of the Lumber Industry on Occupational and Residential Mobility, 1880-1920* by Clayton Gindt, argues that “the

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characteristics of the heads of households changed with each decade as fewer and fewer households were employed in the lumber industry.”¹⁵ He also points out that “as the lumber industry grew so did the supporting businesses such as retail stores and agriculture.”¹⁶ Thus, when the lumber industry began to decline, jobs were still plentiful. In fact, Eau Claire citizens were becoming more prosperous. “In 1910, there were 98 manufacturing firms employing 2,789 workers. By 1920, there were only four lumbering companies still operating but there were over 140 other businesses.”¹⁷ Gindt contributes statistics on how Eau Claire moved from an industrial to a manufacturing city. Regardless of the decline of the lumber industry, there were still many other businesses and manufacturing companies employing workers. The saloon rose and fell with the success and decline of the lumber industry because its workers were the saloon's primary customers. Many of these workers were immigrants.

Also, according to Gindt, during the heyday of the lumbering industry, boarders were prevalent and “were a reflection of the work force.”¹⁸ Those who lived in boarding houses were usually employed by the lumber industry. However, as the lumber industry declined over time, borders made up less of the population. Gindt states that many immigrants were not locked into the lumber occupation.¹⁹ Consequently, when the lumber industry declined, former immigrants employed in the lumber industry may have achieved better jobs. Therefore, beginning in the twentieth century, the working class in Eau Claire was diminishing. Moreover, through a careful analysis of ethnicities by neighborhood wards in Eau Claire, Gindt found that

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.
¹⁷ Ibid., 7.
¹⁸ Ibid., 45
¹⁹ Ibid., 51.
residents were grouped according to occupation, not ethnicity. This largely differs from distinct ethnic neighborhoods found in a city like Chicago.

Sixth, works by two Eau Claire historians, Jane Hieb and Lois Barland, are explored. *Eau Claire, An Illustrated History: Heartland of the Chippewa Valley*, by Jane Hieb, analyzes Eau Claire from the beginning of its settlement. She pays particular attention to the lumber industry and the loggers who did the labor. Lois Barland published two books entitled *Sawdust City; A History of Eau Claire, Wisconsin from Earliest Times to 1891*, and *The Rivers Flow on: A Record of Eau Claire, Wisconsin from 1910-1960*. Lumber statistics, in the form of total board feet per year, were gathered from these two works by Barland. These statistics were important in proving the direct relationship between the rise and fall of the lumber industry, the working class, and the saloons in Eau Claire.

This paper analyzes the relationship of the growth of the working class, the lumber industry, and the number of saloons in Eau Claire from 1880 to 1920. Many workers in the lumber industry labored in lumber mills within the city limits. The saloon was a working class institution, so the number of saloons increased and decreased with the ups and downs of the lumber industry in Eau Claire during this period. The saloon was created, operated, and frequented by the working class. Mapping where saloons were situated during these years indicates how the working class and the saloons were related to the local lumber industry. In addition, this paper examines the different social functions of the saloon, and how it met the needs of the working class. Saloon numbers rose greatly in the 1880s, peaking in 1894 with 90

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20 Ibid., 38.
saloons. Their numbers then trended downward until they were made illegal by the eighteenth amendment in 1920.
Before analyzing the saloon, it is important to understand the role of drinking before industrialization, since the saloon was a working class creation. It is also critical to appreciate that immigrant groups brought their own drinking cultures to America.

Contrary to how drinking alcohol is viewed today, in the eighteenth century it was considered a necessity rather than a luxury. There were several reasons for this. Water had a bad reputation due to pollution, and alcohol was considered to be a better option. There was also a widely held belief that alcohol helped people stay warm on cold nights. Furthermore, “a few glasses made hard work easier to bear, aided digestion, and in general helped sustain the constitution.” Those who didn’t drink, in fact, were viewed with suspicion, and some even thought they could not be trusted. As Lender and Martin point out, “most [Americans] drank often and abundantly,” and therefore those who abstained were outside the mainstream. “By the 1790s, an average American over 15 years old drank just under six gallons of absolute alcohol each year.”

The saloon was not the first American public drinking establishment. Although most people drank in the privacy of their own homes in pre-industrial society, taverns were constructed because they “filled a variety of practical social needs.” Taverns were the most convenient outlets for purchasing alcohol, and they were the only places that accommodated

21 Lender and Martin, *Drinking in America*, 2.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 9.
27 Ibid., 14.
28 Ibid., 12.
travelers.  

Publicans, those who operated the taverns, were highly regarded and “not infrequently were deacons.” This is in stark contrast to the low, working class status of the saloonkeeper during the Progressive Era.

American colonists typically did not believe alcohol was a problem for themselves or for their fellow citizens. However, they did believe it was a problem for minority groups such as slaves and Native Americans. “The colonists feared that alcohol consumption among these peoples could be dangerous to overall societal stability.” This worry about alcohol consumption was also applied to immigrants who arrived in the United States during the Progressive Era. Evidently, Americans were only threatened by alcohol consumption when those different from themselves were doing the consuming.

The Industrial Revolution caused many immigrants to leave their European homelands in search of more opportunities and better lives in America. In order to understand this mass migration to American urban centers and how this affected the establishment of the American saloon, one must first understand the social ramifications the Industrial Revolution had on work.

The Industrial Revolution occurred in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, largely due to a similar revolution in agriculture that led the way toward increased mechanization. Improvements made in farm techniques and farm productivity in Europe and America created a surplus of food, which allowed the population to expand. This population increase, however, created a surplus of idle workers. In search of livelihoods, many migrated

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 13.
31 Ibid., 21.
from rural settings, where the need for labor was shrinking, to urban settings where jobs were plenty. Scores of idle, landless workers in Europe immigrated to urban centers across America and helped power the growing nation’s economy.

Work in agrarian settings differed drastically from work in industrial settings. Therefore, the “transition to an industrial society entailed severe restructuring of working habits.” Before industrialization, time-keeping depended on environmental indicators such as the sun or was related to tasks such as the amount of time needed to cook an egg. Sundials were employed to keep time, but they didn’t work on cloudy days and therefore were not absolutely reliable.

Moreover, in a rural setting, “social intercourse and labor [were] intermingled.” That is, there wasn’t a clear separation between a laborer’s free time and work time. Prior to industrialization, working and drinking often went hand in hand. “Farmers typically took a generous liquor ration into the fields...and over the years liquor remained an accustomed part of labor relations on the farm.” This was no longer the case after the Industrial Revolution. Time measurement devices, such as clocks and bells, were integrated into lumber mills and factories to standardize work schedules in order to maximize profits and exploit labor. In fact, the clock was really a “symptom of a new Puritan discipline and bourgeois exactitude.” This rigid time-keeping led to the separation of work and leisure for the working class. Life became a matter of the individual’s time versus the boss’ time in an industrial society. This new idea of separating work from leisure helped to create “the workingman’s club,” otherwise known as

33 Ibid., 58.
34 Ibid., 60.
35 Lender and Martin, Drinking in America, 10.
the saloon.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, the growth of industry and the working class was related to the growth in the number of saloons in America.

Irish immigrants composed a significant ethnic minority in America during the Progressive Era, and a large percentage entered the ranks of the working class. Many native-born Americans disliked the Irish because they were poor and Roman Catholic, not Protestant like most of America’s established citizens.\textsuperscript{38} Consequently, many Irish immigrants experienced discrimination.\textsuperscript{39} In the face of this intolerance, some Irish resisted assimilating into mainstream American society.\textsuperscript{40} Instead, they immersed themselves and took pride in their own culture, including their traditions surrounding drinking. As a group, they were accused of being heavy drinkers, but the source of this reputation can be traced to land scarcity in Ireland. Not having land meant a man did not have the resources to raise a family. Therefore, many of these landless men banded together into “bachelor groups” and drank \textit{a lot}. “Drinking within the group turned into a communal ritual of belonging,”\textsuperscript{41} according to Lender and Martin. This only increased in America due to the hostility directed at the Irish from native-born Americans. Irish immigrants saw “drinking as a major symbol of ethnic loyalty.” Many Irish became saloonkeepers, “correctly perceiving a path to prosperity in the drinking habits of their brethren.”\textsuperscript{42}

Scandinavians, another immigrant minority, brought to the U.S. a distinct drinking culture of their own. Oddly, this was absorbed from Copenhagen, Denmark. Norwegians in the

\textsuperscript{37} Rosenzweig, \textit{Eight Hours for What We Will}, 53.
\textsuperscript{38} Lender and Martin, \textit{Drinking in America}, 58.
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid}., 59.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid}.
nineteenth century drank in their own cafés, which were equivalent to American saloons. Their main alcoholic beverages were bock beer (Spatenbrau), spirits, and port wine.\(^{43}\)

The Germans, another immigrant group, brought their traditional drinking habits to America as well.\(^{44}\) Their immigration was termed the “beer invasion” because before this time most people drank hard liquor.\(^{45}\)

The change in drinking habits brought to America by these immigrant groups alienated many native-born citizens.\(^{46}\) Therefore, as the working class saloon began to take root in urban centers, it was only those belonging to the working class who frequented it. The working class in the United States during the Progressive Era was poor, and many were foreign. Middle and upper class Americans began to look with increasing suspicion towards not only immigrants, but the working class as a whole and their perceived immoral drinking habits. No “respectable” man would be caught dead frequenting a saloon.

The saloon was a “working man’s institution” because its most frequent patrons were working class men. Industrialization enforced the notion of “separate spheres” for men and women. This made the sexual division of labor more rigid.\(^{47}\) For example, men made up the vast majority of those working in mines, factories, and on railways.\(^{48}\) The factory helped to create the “home as a private and feminine sphere” by moving the workplace outside.\(^{49}\) Therefore, the workplace and the saloon belonged in the public and masculine sphere. In fact,\(^{43}\) Anne G. Sabb, “Are Norweigens Europeans? The Bohemians Say So!” \textit{Journal of European Studies}: 2004, 247.\(^{44}\) Lender and Martin, \textit{Drinking in America}, 61.\(^{45}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 62.\(^{46}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 65.\(^{47}\) Barbara Caine and Glenda Sluga, \textit{Gendering European History} (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 32.\(^{48}\) \textit{Ibid.}\(^{49}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 33.
“the male saloon became a mirror image of the male factory.”

Married working class women who worked outside the home, usually out of necessity, sought part-time work due to the responsibility of child rearing. Employers paid women lower wages because they were seen as “casual income-earners, whose major commitment and responsibility was to marriage and family life.” The only suitable role for women was that of domestic labor.

An Eau Claire saloon in the early twentieth century, location unknown. 
_Courtesy of the Chippewa Valley Museum, Eau Claire, Wisconsin._

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50 Rosenzweig, _Eight Hours for What We Will_, 45.  
51 Caine and Sluga, _Gendering European History_, 33.  
52 Ibid., 34.  
53 Ibid.
The Relationship Between the Saloon, the Lumber Industry, and the Working Class in Eau Claire

The saloon was a working class institution that was created by the working class and for the working class. Therefore, the lumber industry, the saloon, and the working class in Eau Claire were all interrelated. To be more specific, as lumber production increased, the demand for labor increased and the number of saloons increased. Most of this labor was supplied by immigrants coming to Eau Claire from Europe.

In Wisconsin in 1889, “58% of the workers in the lumber industry were foreign born.” This foreign born dominance was also true in Eau Claire. Thus, as the Eau Claire lumber industry expanded, so did the unskilled labor force, the majority of which was born in another country. This increase in unskilled and foreign labor dramatically increased the number of saloons in Eau Claire after 1880.

The lumber industry was the primary reason immigrants moved to Eau Claire. “In the early 1880s, Eau Claire was known throughout the country as a great sawmill center.” This was due to Eau Claire's location and bountiful resources. The Chippewa Valley, “where the soil and climate were especially favorable for growing pines...often grew to yield 40,000 board feet an acre.” The location of Eau Claire, on the cross section of the Eau Claire and Chippewa Rivers, also allowed for easy transport of wood and “gave lumber companies the advantage of

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drawing logs from two different sources."

It is therefore unsurprising that “lumbering became the main source of employment in the area.”

The logging industry involves many different occupations, from harvesting trees in the forests to transporting fallen timber to cutting, drying, planing, and dressing logs into finished lumber. Those who harvested trees lived in logging camps, while those who turned the raw logs into semi-finished and finished products worked in lumber mills. Those who worked in lumber mills usually lived in boarding houses in the city. Logging camps operated in the winter, whereas lumber mills operated in the spring and summer.

Labor in the lumber industry was exhausting, often dangerous, and potentially harmful by its very nature. In these ways it presented challenges to workers that were similar to labor on farms or in the towns of rural America or Europe. Alcohol helped “deaden the pain.”

The number of saloons in Eau Claire depended on the size of the working class which in turn depended on the success and expansion of the lumber industry. When the lumber industry boomed in the 1880s, saloons began to multiply. A similar relationship existed in the 1890s when the number of saloons, in conjunction with the lumber industry, began to decline.

In 1880, the population of the city of Eau Claire was 10,118. The combined output of all eight lumber mills in Eau Claire in 1880 was 199,571,000 board feet. By 1885, Eau Claire's

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58 Ibid., 1.
60 Hieb, Eau Claire, An Illustrated History, 40.
62 Lender and Martin, Drinking in America, 10.
63 The Blue Book of the State of Wisconsin (1882), 352.
population rose to 21,668, a doubling of residents in just five years.\textsuperscript{65} The sole reason for this dramatic growth was the booming lumber industry. In 1884, 800,000,000 board feet were produced by Eau Claire mills, an increase in lumber production of 600,429,000 board feet over four years, beginning in 1880.\textsuperscript{66} The number of saloons almost tripled in these years, from 31 in 1880 to 83 in 1884.\textsuperscript{67} (See Graphs # 1, # 2, and # 5).

Wood that wasn’t sold due to a lack of demand would not be incorporated into the “final cut.” For instance, Barland writes that “the figures for 1888 showed an increase in stock on hand, but a decrease in the cut from 1887.”\textsuperscript{68} This indicates that more wood might have been cut in a given year than was documented. In 1887, there were 84 saloons in Eau Claire with a cut of 212,450,465 board feet.\textsuperscript{69} The saloon numbers remained constant even with a decrease in final product. However, more wood could have been cut than was recorded and would have required the same amount of laborers.

The 1890s witnessed the beginning of “the decline of the great lumber industry in Wisconsin.”\textsuperscript{70} Not only was the lumber industry shrinking in Eau Claire, but so was the overall population, which decreased from 21,668 in 1885 to 17,415 in 1890.\textsuperscript{71} Lumber production decreased to 144,666,630 board feet in 1889, from an 1887 total of 212,450,765 board feet.\textsuperscript{72} Also, the saloon count for 1890 was 78, down from 84 in 1887.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{65} The Blue Book of the State of Wisconsin (1887), 329.
\textsuperscript{66} Barland, Sawdust City, 47.
\textsuperscript{67} Eau Claire City Directory (1880), 197-198 and Eau Claire City Directory (1884), 340-343.
\textsuperscript{68} Barland, Sawdust City, 47.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{71} The Blue Book of the State of Wisconsin (1901), 464.
\textsuperscript{72} Barland, Sawdust City, 47.
\textsuperscript{73} Eau Claire City Directory (1887-88), 202-204 and Eau Claire City Directory (1889-90), 331-332.
Surprisingly, the 1893-94 Eau Claire City Directory gives the number of saloons as 90, an all-time high,\(^74\) despite the fact that the log count for 1893 decreased to 90,800,000 board feet.\(^75\) This discrepancy may reflect an oversupply of lumber. Barland states that “the market was overstocked and had been for years. In the fall of 1897 it was estimated that 750,000,000 feet were left in the territory tributary to Eau Claire.”\(^76\) That means that while employment remained high, lumber companies didn’t sell their entire product due to a decrease in buyer demand. Jane Hieb, a local historian, reports that “in Eau Claire, lumber production reached its peak in 1892.”\(^77\) That would follow logically if saloons hit 90 in 1893-94. Nevertheless, the general trend is that as the lumber industry increased and decreased, so did the number of saloons.

By 1900, the city’s population grew slightly to 17,517, an increase of just 102 in ten years.\(^78\) Logging declined to an output of 80,000,000 board feet in 1901.\(^79\) During this same period, saloons dropped to 66 by 1901-02 from 90 in 1893-94.\(^80\) “By 1910, Eau Claire was no longer considered a lumbering town.”\(^81\) The population rose to 18,310 by 1910, an increase of 793.\(^82\) Meanwhile, in 1912, lumber industry production decreased to 25,000,000 board feet.\(^83\) Saloons decreased to 60 in 1910.\(^84\) By 1914, lumber production in Eau Claire dropped to

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\(^74\) *Eau Claire City Directory* (1893-94), 362-363.
\(^76\) Barland, *Sawdust City*, 48.
\(^77\) Hieb, *Eau Claire, An Illustrated History*, 51.
\(^78\) *The Blue Book of the State of Wisconsin* (1901), 464.
\(^80\) *Directory of the City of Eau Claire* (1901-1902), 321-322.
\(^82\) *The Wisconsin Blue Book* (1921), 454.
\(^84\) *Wright's Directory of Eau Claire* (1912), 415-416.
20,000,000 board feet.\textsuperscript{85} That same year, saloons fell to 58. By 1918, saloons numbered only 43.\textsuperscript{86} Prohibition occurred in 1920 which decreased the number of saloons in Eau Claire to zero. Lumber statistics for the years between 1914 and 1920 aren’t extant, but the numbers most likely decreased in accord with the decreasing trend.

Patterns of immigration in Eau Claire helps to link the saloon, the lumber industry, and the working class together. The saloon was known as the “working man’s club.”\textsuperscript{87} The workers in the lumber industry were “predominantly young, male, unskilled/semi-skilled, highly transient, seasonal and foreign born workers.”\textsuperscript{88} The majority of Eau Claire’s loggers were foreign born after 1880.\textsuperscript{89} More generally, in 1880, 42 percent of heads of households in Eau Claire county were native born compared to 58 percent foreign born.\textsuperscript{90} In 1885, Scandinavians made up 30.8 percent of the county’s foreign born population.\textsuperscript{91} Many Germans also moved to Eau Claire. From 1880 to 1900, those born in Scandinavia and Germany were the dominant immigrants to Eau Claire.\textsuperscript{92} The third largest immigrant group was the Irish.\textsuperscript{93} “Occupations in the lumber industry were some of the lowest paying and most dangerous jobs in the state... [therefore] these may have been some of the only jobs available to immigrants.”\textsuperscript{94} These immigrant groups brought different drinking styles and cultures from their homelands to Eau

\textsuperscript{85} Barland, \textit{The Rivers Flow On}, 337.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Wright’s Eau Claire City Directory} (1918), 357.
\textsuperscript{87} Rosenzweig, \textit{Eight Hours for What We Will}, 53.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Ibid.}, 14.
\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Ibid.}, 13.
\textsuperscript{91} Dexter, “A Population History of Eau Claire County from 1860 to 1900: A Growing County,” 18.
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Ibid.}, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Wisconsin Blue Book} (1891), 362-363.
Claire, dramatically changing the city’s “views on the consumption of alcohol.”

Over time, immigrants were identified more and more with drinking and the working class.

Geographically in Eau Claire, the saloons, the working class, and the lumber mills were situated near one another. Since many lumber workers were transient—not permanent residents—they lived in boarding houses or hotels located near lumber mills. In fact, some of the boarding houses and hotels were run by the mills themselves. Close to these boarding houses and hotels were the saloons. According to the Eau Claire City Directory in 1880, the W. Keeler Saloon was below the “Eau Claire House,” a hotel on the southeast corner of Barstow Street and Eau Claire Street. Not surprisingly, the Eau Claire Lumber Company is located just a few blocks away. (See Maps # 1, # 2, # 3, and # 4 for the locations of saloons, lumber mills, boarding houses, and hotels.)

Along with saloons, the number of boarding houses and hotels increased and decreased with the ups and downs of the lumber industry. In 1880, there were 12 boarding houses and 15 hotels. In 1884, when the lumber industry boomed, there were 16 boarding houses and 30 hotels. In 1901-02, after the lumber industry was already in decline, there were nine boarding houses and 29 hotels. By 1910 there were seven boarding houses and 18 hotels. Finally, in 1920, there were only three boarding houses and 18 hotels. Although hotel numbers didn’t seem to change with the industry as much as boarding house numbers, hotels housed more

95 Lender and Martin, Drinking in America, 58.
96 Eau Claire City Directory (1880), 188 -197.
97 Eau Claire City Directory (1880), 179-188.
98 Eau Claire City Directory (1884), 313-335.
99 Directory of the City of Eau Claire (1901-1902), 283-303.
100 Wright’s Directory of Eau Claire (1910), 379-396.
101 Wright’s Eau Claire City Directory (1920), 436-465.
than working class patrons. Hotels also served travelers, including those visiting the city to see relatives which can explain their greater numbers (See Graphs # 1, # 3, and # 4).

**Caption:** Spittoons were common in saloons, with four visible in this photograph alone.

“Between the Acts Saloon,” owned by Alphonse Couture located at 410 S. Barstow Street. 1901-1916

*Courtesy of the Chippewa Valley Museum, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.*
The Saloon in Eau Claire

Saloons not only catered to the seemingly never-ending thirst of workers, they were also places that met the needs of the working class. “Workers developed the saloon as a distinctive working-class leisure institution.”

The saloon served different functions and possessed different traits in Eau Claire. First, the saloon was “before all else... an economic institution.” Second, the saloon became a semi-public extension of the home that was to some degree necessitated by the poor living conditions of the working class. Third, the saloon offered social and political recreation for the expanding ranks of workers.

Those who frequented and ran the saloons shared a common social class. “Social class refers to the condition in which a number of people share common life chances...determined by their power to attain goods, services, and income...” The working class was a multi-ethnic community whose members experienced life similarly. Due to the highly differentiated life experiences developed by social class, the working class developed different patterns of leisure than those in higher classes. “Social class...signified the difference between the educated and the untrained, the comfortable and the miserable, the secure and the fearful...”

Eau Claire’s dependency on the lumber industry reflected the make-up of the city’s social structure. Such an industry requires a large unskilled labor force to work in lumber camps and sawmills. Eau Claire had two predominant socio-economic groups in the 1880s.

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102 Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will, 4.
103 Duis, The Saloon, 15.
105 Ibid., 250.
106 Duis, The Saloon, 86.
107 J. Rogers Hollingsworth and Ellen Jane Hollingsworth, Dimensions in Urban History: Historical and Social Science Perspectives on Middle-size American Cities (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 65.
The first was a large, predominantly male working class, and the second was a “much smaller commercial proprietor-professional community” living apart from the workers. The former drank in the saloon, while the latter “generally drank at home, private clubs, or expensive hotels.”

Saloonkeepers in Eau Claire had much in common with their working class patrons. Even though a saloonkeeper was a proprietor and therefore would seem to have a higher status than the average worker, he was still considered part of the working class. Saloonkeepers “were destined to social equity by their poor economic prospects and shared drinking habits.” In 1880, the average age of a saloonkeeper in Eau Claire was 38.7. This is derived from a sample of 21 out of the 31 saloons listed in the Eau Claire City Directory found in the 1880 United States Federal Census. 86% of the saloonkeepers were married, compared to 14% who were single; 19% were born in Scandinavia; 43% in Germany; 14% in Ireland; 5% in England; and 5% in Canada. Only 14% of the saloonkeepers in 1880 were native-born.

In 1901-02, 44 out of 66 saloonkeepers were found in the 1900 United States Federal Census. The average age was 40.4, and 86% of the saloonkeepers were married in 1900, just like in 1880. Again, most of the saloonkeepers were foreign-born: 34% were born in Scandinavia, 16% in Germany, 4.5% in Ireland, and 25% in Canada, leaving 20% native-born. In 1910, out of a total of 60 saloonkeepers listed in the city directory, 44 were found in the census; of these, 91% were married and the average age was 45.9. Also, 40% were born in

108 Ibid., 66.
109 Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, 51.
111 Only 21 saloonkeepers could be counted because the other saloonkeepers, for unknown reasons, were not listed in the 1880 United States Federal Census.
112 Census information from 1890 was unavailable because the report was destroyed in the Eau Claire fire.
Scandinavia, 11% in Germany, and 18% in Canada, leaving 31% native-born. In 1918, 25 saloonkeepers were listed in the 1920 census out of a total of 43 saloonkeepers listed in the city directory of 1918.* Of this number, 88% were married and the average age was 47. Native-born equaled 64% compared to 46% foreign-born. All saloonkeepers were male. The median age in Eau Claire was 38 years.  

Saloonkeeping throughout these four decades was an occupation primarily for poor, immigrant working class individuals. Over time, the average age of saloonkeepers rose. This reflects the fact that Eau Claire was beginning to transition from a rough-and-tumble lumbering town to a settled community that was establishing what would become a tradition of manufacturing.  

The saloonkeepers had many commonalities with their customers. In comparison with the working class as a whole, 63% of workers in the lumber industry were between the ages of 20 and 44, 94-98% were male, and a large percentage were unmarried.  

Results from a sample taken by Gindt of heads of households in 1880 showed that the lumber work force was dominated by foreign-born heads of households, most of whom made a living in lower types of occupations.  

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* I analyzed the statistics for saloonkeepers listed in the *Wright’s Eau Claire City Directory* for 1918 because by 1920, the 18th amendment had been established prohibiting the sale, manufacture, and transportation of alcohol for consumption. Since the Census comes out every ten years, there was a two year gap between the saloonkeepers I gathered from the Directory and those listed and the census. Consequently, many former saloonkeepers might have left Eau Claire, possibly explaining why the sample is small (25 out of 43).  


114 Ibid., 10-11.  

115 Ibid., 25.
Chart # 1

Occupation By Nativity: Percent. Eau Claire, 1880.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lumber Workers</th>
<th>Non-Lumber</th>
<th>Laborers</th>
<th>No Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sample data from the 1880 Manuscript Census found in Gindt. (20% sample produced 363 households citywide).

The saloon was above anything else, a business, and the saloonkeeper’s main goal was making money. The biggest difference between the saloonkeeper and his customer was the percentage of those who were married. Saloonkeeping was a big job and most saloons were run by husbands and wives jointly. In fact, it might have been easier for a saloonkeeper to attract a wife because he owned an establishment. Also, a wife was especially important to the saloonkeeper with the advent of the “free lunch.” “The lunch was the major contribution to the business venture made by the proprietor’s wife.”

On July 12, 1884 the Eau Claire Daily Leader announced the opening of a “free lunch” at Ed Ruhe’s saloon on the east side of North Barstow Street near the corner of Wisconsin.

The free lunch was adopted by many saloons in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries largely due to competition. Its purpose was straightforward: attracting clientele.

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* There was no particular address listed. This is because in the 1880’s there weren’t addresses, there were only “descriptions” of where places were located. The other 1880’s Eau Claire City Directories also describes a place’s location in relation to streets without using a proper address.
As previously stated, when the lumber industry in Eau Claire skyrocketed after 1880, so did the number of saloons. In 1884 there were 83 saloons in Eau Claire, an increase of 51 in four years.

Saloons flourished to meet the needs of the growing working class. However, since most saloonkeepers were poor and foreign-born, how could one afford to become a proprietor of a saloon which required the purchase of an expensive liquor license? The answer lies in the local breweries. Between the years of 1880 and 1920, Eau Claire had two main breweries: the John Walter Brewing Company and the Michaels Brewing Company.* Eau Claire’s neighboring city, Chippewa Falls, also had a successful brewery, Leinenkugel’s, which still operates today.119

In addition, Milwaukee’s Pabst brewery established a headquarters in Eau Claire on the corner of Hobalt Street and Galloway Street. Not surprisingly, this location was adjacent to the multitude of saloons that stood on Barstow Street at this time. Establishing high licenses “took the control of the saloons…away from the saloonkeeper” and transferred it to the breweries.120 Therefore, local breweries began to purchase licenses for saloonkeepers in exchange for a saloonkeeper’s word that the brewery’s products would be sold exclusively. Due to this new dependence upon breweries, “a saloon was…the easiest business in the world for a man to break into with small capital.”121

The introduction of the high license was largely sparked by the temperance movement but also by simple economics. A high license for the saloonkeeper meant more money in taxes for the local government. Finally saloonkeepers were made to “pay their share of the increased

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119 Jeremy Trautlein, “Success in a Small Town: Leinenkugel’s Brewery Est. 1867,” (History Department, Public History Program, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.)
120 Duis, The Saloon, 35.
121 Ibid., 47.
* These two breweries went through significant name changes and transfer of ownership throughout these four decades
police and welfare costs that resulted from liquor consumption.”122 In addition, temperance leaders believed that raising the cost of a license would weed out seedy Eau Claire saloons while putting “the business into the hands of responsible men, who would not tolerate disorder nor disregard the law.”123 However, they did not anticipate that breweries would pay the license fee for saloonkeepers, driving “the individual dealers into economic dependency on their suppliers.”124 The high license movement aimed at limiting the number of saloons in Eau Claire had little impact due to the saloonkeepers’ relationship with the breweries. So, the rise and fall of saloon numbers was not determined by liquor license fees, but by the success of the lumber industry.

However, increasing saloon numbers lowered the success rate of the individual saloonkeeper. “As competition within the trade increased dramatically over the century, the chances for individual success declined.”125 Success in the saloon business was for a lucky minority.126 From 1880 to 1890, only 25% of the 32 saloons in Eau Claire stayed in business; from 1890 to 1900, only 37%; from 1900 to 1910, only 32%; and from 1910 to 1920, only 32% of the 60 saloons stayed in business.127 Clearly, it was not easy to make it as a saloonkeeper. Competition was fierce and led to a high turnover rate. In fact, “turnover became so rapid that failure became almost the norm rather than the exception.”128

An article from that time in the Eau Claire Daily Leader shows how dependent the town’s saloonkeepers were on breweries. It was published on January 8, 1904, and reported on

124 Duis, The Saloon, 44.
125 Haine, The World of the Paris Café, 119
126 Ibid., 128.
127 Eau Claire City Directories (1880-1920).
128 Duis, The Saloon, 84.
a Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) meeting that was held at Mrs. E. C. Cady’s house located at 811 South Dewey Street. The impact high license laws had on Eau Claire saloons and breweries was discussed at the meeting. “Breweries were in favor of high license because it did not hurt their business, but instead gave it a legal standing and increased the amount of liquor sold.”129 “Legal standing” might allude to the signing of a contract between the saloonkeeper and the brewery. This guarantees the sale of that particular brewery’s product in a saloon in exchange for the payment by the brewery for the saloon’s liquor license. Moreover, a June 15, 1893, article from the Weekly Free Press also discusses the impact high licenses had on saloons and breweries in Eau Claire. The article states that the “careless construction of the [license] law...may cut out [the wholesaler] entirely and compel the saloonkeeper to buy direct from the breweries.”130 The wholesaler was the “middle-man” between the saloonkeeper and the brewery before the high license was enacted into law. Breweries previously had agents that would compete with one another to win over a saloonkeeper as a customer.131 The high license made agents of breweries irrelevant by forcing the saloonkeepers to depend on the breweries. In contrast, before the high license, the breweries depended on the saloonkeepers. Another indicator of saloon dependency on breweries was the establishment of a Pabst Brewery headquarters in Eau Claire. Pabst was known for purchasing saloons as early as the 1880s.132

The saloon was a product of the working class lifestyle. As urbanization increased, work was moved outside of the home. Therefore, work and home increasingly became separate

131 Duis, The Saloon, 22.
132 Duis, The Saloon, 41.
entities. Also, many employed in the lumber industry were transient and poor. Therefore, these workers couldn’t afford nice housing like the middle and upper classes. As the population increased, landlords began to subdivide apartments to accommodate the influx of workers. Boarders were “a reflection of the work force that was a prominent feature of the lumber industry.” In May of 1884, a boarding house advertised vacancies in the *Daily Leader* by stating “board and lodging by the day or week.” This advertisement is clearly aimed at rootless, working class laborers. Not surprisingly, the majority of lumber workers in Eau Claire lived in boarding houses and many of them were transient residents.

Boarding houses could be described as “wretched, cramped, [and] barrack like housing.” Sharing close living quarters helped reduce the cost of living, greatly benefitting those in the working class. In 1880, 19.6% of Eau Claire households included extended family. Due to over-crowding, the “working class customers came [to the saloon] as often for space and sociability as for drink and food.” This is in contrast to upper classes that generally had larger living spaces where they could easily consume alcohol and entertain guests. “The bourgeoisie adopted the ideal of a selective sociability centered on entertaining…guests in the home.” The saloon became an extension of the home for the working class as well as a place to consume alcohol.

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135 Local Matters, *Daily Leader*. May 7, 1884.
140 Ibid., 34.
The saloon also enabled workers to “practice the virtues of communal sharing, camaraderie, [and] cooperation,” and they benefited greatly from the amenities the saloon provided.\textsuperscript{141} In fact, these “barrooms seemed as essential as churches to the life of many [working class] neighborhoods.”\textsuperscript{142} Singing, jokes, and storytelling were common forms of entertainment in the saloon, and the environment offered a sense of belonging and a feeling of brotherhood among workers.\textsuperscript{143} “The most important drink custom for fostering such

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{142} Duis, The Saloon, 87.
\textsuperscript{143} Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will, 54.
sentiments was ‘treating,’” especially among the Irish.\textsuperscript{144} Treating entails purchasing another patron a drink or purchasing a round of drinks. The \textit{Daily Leader}, on July 15, 1884, stated that an Eau Claire man was actually murdered because he didn’t treat his neighbors in a saloon.\textsuperscript{145} In keeping with a stereotype, the murdered man was O’Meara, an Irish name. Also, “the most common table game was billiards,”\textsuperscript{146} and on June 28, 1884, the \textit{Daily Leader} announced that Zimmerman’s saloon acquired a pool table.\textsuperscript{147}

The saloon catered to the general needs of the working class. It was open all day and accommodated the work schedule of the lumber worker who usually was on the job eleven hours per day.\textsuperscript{148} Saloonkeepers sold cigars, buttermilk, headache powders, and coca-cola for mixed drinks.\textsuperscript{149} In addition, the saloon provided a public toilet, food, warmth, clean water, and newspapers.\textsuperscript{150} Considering the ferocious winters Eau Claire is known for, it is not surprising that the working class loved saloons.

Although the most common saloon customers were men, there were women patrons, too. In fact, prostitutes were quite common, a result of a male workforce dominated primarily by young, single workers.\textsuperscript{151} Interestingly, in a manner similar to the ups and downs of the saloon, Ripp-Shucha states in her article “This Naughty, Naughty City: Prostitution in Eau Claire from the Frontier to the Progressive Era” that the amount of sex-for-sale in Eau Claire was influenced by the success of the lumber industry. Saloons and brothels were closely related,
and like saloons, most brothels were located near the lumber mills. In fact, brothels were often located above saloons in the same building. Women seen frequenting saloons were often equated with prostitutes and therefore, “suffered a low social status.” This may help to explain why most women stayed away.

Men did most of the work in the lumber industry. However, there were also working class women who took jobs outside of the home. Many of these women became domestic servants, which were seen as “a desirable way to educate working class girls in the domestic arts and customs of the middle class.” The Eau Claire Daily Leader, for example, advertised “servant girl wanted...none but good ones need apply” on July 26, 1984. Similar advertisements appeared in other newspapers during this time.

Customers of the saloon “went there not simply to buy a product but also to experience an amiable and social ambience [on the part of the saloonkeeper].” The saloonkeeper began to take on the role of informer as well as drink distributer and had three main duties. First, he had to make a living. Second, he had to have good social skills and understand human relations. This is because the saloonkeeper not only sold a product, but he also sold an experience. Third, the saloonkeeper had to regulate the behavior of his patrons, being that many drunken conflicts led to fights.

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152 Ibid., 33.
153 Ibid., 46.
154 Ibid., 37.
155 Caine and Sluga, Gendering European History, 46.
156 City of Eau Claire and the Chippewa Valley, Daily Free Press, July 26, 1884.
157 Haine, The World of the Paris Café, 118.
158 Ibid., 118.
Saloonkeepers in some respects were at the center of working class life. Many became influential people and were “the primary source of information about the...world.”\textsuperscript{159} Therefore, the saloon was often a hot bed of political discussion. Labor strikes in Eau Claire most likely were planned in saloons, and they were not uncommon. For example, one took place in 1884, and the Eau Claire \textit{Daily Free Press} reported that “about seventy river men in the employ of [several lumber companies] withdrew from their work, asking $1.50 per day in place of a dollar per day...”\textsuperscript{160} A few days later, the Eau Claire \textit{Daily Leader} announced that “somebody stopped to talk politics on Barstow Street yesterday, and in two minutes the sidewalk was impassable. The police dispersed the mob.”\textsuperscript{161} This political discussion probably began in one of the many saloons on Barstow Street.

\textsuperscript{159} Duis, \textit{The Saloon}, 127.
\textsuperscript{160} \textit{Daily Leader}, July 14, 1884.
\textsuperscript{161} Local Matters, \textit{Daily Leader}, July 17, 1884.
The Fall of the Saloon in Eau Claire

The number of saloons in Eau Claire decreased in the early twentieth century, mainly due to the shrinking lumber industry. By 1900, the decline of the saloon was well underway from its peak in the 1880s and 1890s as shown by graph # 2. In fact, the lumber industry was no longer the dominant industry in Eau Claire by 1910. Instead, “manufacturing endeavors really [started] to [take off and] become established in the city.”162 Since the saloon was a working class institution, an increase in the overall prosperity for Eau Claire residents decreased the demand for the saloon because it reduced the number of working class citizens. As Eau Claire began to prosper, “the percentage of the population that held jobs as unskilled laborers” decreased.163 However, the working class did not disappear entirely. It was only diminished as Eau Claire moved away from “primary, extractive activity toward secondary manufacturing as its economic base.”164

Social and economic forces helped to transform working class culture in Eau Claire. These include a decrease in immigration, the assimilation of immigrant offspring into the American mainstream, and the emergence of a “more complex, diversified economy.”165 By 1920, there were 140 businesses operating in Eau Claire in addition to the four lumber companies that were still running.166 New and better jobs in Eau Claire resulted in increased social mobility. This applied to both foreign- and native-born residents.167

163 Hollingsworth and Hollingsworth, Dimensions in Urban History, 65.
164 Ibid., 59.
165 Ibid., 64.
167 Ibid., 46.
As Eau Claire moved away from a rough-and-tumble logging community, “the lumber and frontier characteristics of [its] residents” began to disappear.\textsuperscript{168} There were several frontier-like qualities prominent in Eau Claire in 1880 that were replaced by those of a more settled, established city by 1920. First, the persistence rate in Eau Claire was on the rise, reflecting a more stable community. The persistence rate describes the percentage of Eau Claire citizens who stay in Eau Claire over time. Second, white collar and skilled occupations increased while unskilled occupations decreased, regardless of place of birth. Third, the number of persons residing in the same household decreased marking an increase in wealth among residents. Fourth, the increasing age of heads of households indicated a less frontier-like community. Fifth, heads of households were increasingly those born within the United States.

The period of 1900 to 1920 was characterized by high growth and prosperity for residents in Eau Claire on an individual and community level. In 1910, unemployment was almost nonexistent.\textsuperscript{169} Therefore, the persistence of Eau Claire’s citizens increased, as more citizens remained long term members of the community. “The persistence rate for 1900 to 1920 doubled that of 1880 to 1900, 29.2 percent to 14.7 percent.”\textsuperscript{170} In addition, the persistence rates for both foreign- and native-born heads of households were about the same from 1900 to 1920.\textsuperscript{171} This indicates that increased prosperity was not just reserved for native-born residents, but instead affected foreign-born residents as well. Foreign-born residents constituted a larger percentage of the working class during this period. From 1900 to 1920,

\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Ibid.}, 47.
\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Ibid.}, 48
\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Ibid.}, 52
“the residents of Eau Claire were half as transient as the residents were” from 1880 to 1900.\textsuperscript{172} Decreasing transience among Eau Claire residents shows that the working class was declining along with the lumber industry, which affected the number of saloons.

Due to the relative prosperity in Eau Claire beginning in 1900, occupational mobility increased. “Laborers as well as lumber workers were able to move out of these typically low paying jobs and into more lucrative occupations.”\textsuperscript{173} Gindt gives the example of a Norwegian worker named Jans Orbeck who in 1900 worked as a saw filler for a lumber mill. By 1916, Orbeck worked for Svend Lund and Company as a clothier.\textsuperscript{174} White collar jobs increased the most in these two decades. According to statistics gathered by Gindt, from 1900 to 1920, unskilled occupations were on the decline for foreign-born heads of households, while white collar and professional occupations were on the rise.\textsuperscript{175} From “1880 to 1900, the largest category was the unskilled/semi-skilled workers. By 1920 the largest was the skilled category...”\textsuperscript{176} In 1880, 60.2% of heads of families in Eau Claire were unskilled laborers. In 1905, this dropped to 28.4%.\textsuperscript{177} These statistics indicate that Eau Claire residents were moving away from relying on the lumber industry dominated by seasonal, low paying, and dangerous occupations. Instead, Eau Claire was shifting to a more stable, manufacturing community.\textsuperscript{178}

\textsuperscript{172}ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{173}ibid., 52.
\textsuperscript{174}ibid.
\textsuperscript{175}ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{176}ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{177}Hollingsworth and Hollingsworth, \textit{Dimensions in Urban History}, 68.
The Eau Claire saloon served as an extension of the home for the working class due to the “large number of boarding houses and boarders.”\textsuperscript{179} Boarding house living was cramped and miserable, with privacy almost nonexistent. For many boarders, the saloon offered an escape. However, as manufacturing began to replace the lumber industry after 1900, the number of boarding houses declined drastically.\textsuperscript{180} This decrease in boarding houses in Eau Clare is another indicator that workers were moving up the occupational scale. An increase in income allowed workers to rent or buy their own homes, resulting in more privacy. More privacy enabled workers to entertain guests in their own homes, decreasing the need for the saloon. “In 1880, the mean family size was 4.38 and the mean persons per dwelling was 5.73. By 1920, family size dropped to 3.63 and persons per dwelling to 4.18.”\textsuperscript{181} These statistics indicate a transformation in the working class of Eau Claire. Gindt sampled 799 residents in 1920, and only one resident had more than ten boarders. “This was an enormous change from the boarding houses of forty or more workers that were prevalent in the 1880s.”\textsuperscript{182}

The age of Eau Claire residents was also increasing. “In 1880, when Eau Claire was predominately a lumber and frontier community, the median age...was 38. By 1900 the median age had risen to 43 and by 1920 it was 46.”\textsuperscript{183} Residents in Eau Claire were getting older, implying that the workers were no longer “the young work force so typical of the lumber industry.”\textsuperscript{184} One conclusion that might be drawn from this statistic is that the saloon’s clientele was aging, too. “Many who had made the saloon a social center in the 1880s still used

\textsuperscript{179} ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{180} ibid.
\textsuperscript{181} ibid., 58.
\textsuperscript{182} ibid.
\textsuperscript{183} ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} ibid.
it in the same way in the 1910s, but now they were in their sixties rather than in their thirties.”\(^{185}\)

In fact, evidence suggests that “the ethnic working class was...moving gradually from the margins to the mainstream of American life.”\(^ {186}\) In other words, the working class was assimilating into the mainstream culture at the turn of the century. We have seen that the saloon was the center of working class life. However, the twentieth century brought new modes of affordable leisure to the working class. Movies, poolrooms, and dancehalls began to spring up in Eau Claire, giving residents—especially young workers—more entertainment options.\(^ {187}\) On March 3, 1912, the Eau Claire Leader announced the building of a new pool room on Farwell St. It reported in depth on the pool room's characteristics, including that it has “three tables, one billiard and two pool, with the best playing equipment money can buy.”\(^ {188}\) Also, dance halls gave young male workers more opportunities to meet women than the saloon. However, dancehalls seemed to be just as controversial. An article entitled “The Dance Hall Question” in the Eau Claire Leader on February 29, 1912, stresses that “[Fourier’s] dances ...are as much in need of regulation as any, as far as attendance by young girls is concerned.”\(^ {189}\) The article argues for “an ordinance [to] be passed prohibiting the attendance of girls under a certain age...”\(^ {190}\) Nevertheless, these two competitors to the saloon indicate a changing working class culture for the young.

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185 Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will, 188.
186 Ibid., 221.
187 Ibid., 188.
188 “Dedication Week A Full Program,” Eau Claire Leader, March 3, 1912.
189 Voice Of The People, Eau Claire Leader, February 29, 1912.
190 Ibid.
By 1920, Eau Claire increasingly was dominated by native-born heads of households. “In 1880, the city had been predominately foreign-born householders and was even more so in 1900. By 1920, foreign-born heads of households had dropped to 34 percent.”¹⁹¹ This impacted the success of the saloon since the saloon was created and attended by a predominantly foreign-born working class.

Conclusion

Saloons in Eau Claire were ultimately eliminated by the passage of the 18th amendment, which established Prohibition in 1920. What replaced the saloon for the working class? The speakeasy. Saloon numbers declined but what remained of this nineteenth century institution went underground after 1920. Speakeasies were secretly located in basements, backrooms, or in the upstairs of buildings.192 Sometimes, speakeasies were labeled as soda fountains, barbershops, or coffeehouses.193 The only real difference between a speakeasy and its predecessor was “instead of [having] a swinging door, the entrance was locked and had a peephole.”194 Upper class residents continued to drink in their homes as before or attended nightclubs, born during prohibition and proving alluring to patrons due to their “exclusiveness.”195

This paper argues that the saloon was a working class institution that was created, worked, operated, and frequented by the working class. Therefore, the success and ultimate decline of the saloon was not determined by Prohibition, but rather by the rise and fall of industry in Eau Claire, particularly the lumber industry. It was also dependent upon the size of the working class. This is evident first by the direct relationship between the saloon, the working class, and the lumber industry in Eau Claire. As the lumber industry boomed, the number of saloons increased. As the lumber industry declined, so did the number of saloons. Second, the saloon catered to the needs of the working class. It served as a social and political

193 Ibid.
194 Ibid.
195 Ibid., 45.
leisure institution, while catering to the seemingly never ending thirst of workers. The creation of the saloon also gave some members of the working class a livelihood as saloonkeepers.

The fall of the saloon was linked to the decline of the lumber industry in Eau Claire. The lumber industry was replaced by a more stable manufacturing community after the turn of the century. This increased the prosperity of Eau Claire’s residents, and thereby diminished the working class. Prohibition in 1920 eliminated the American saloon, but in Eau Claire its heyday had already passed.
Graph # 1

Number of Eau Claire Saloons (1880-1918)

Source: Eau Claire City Directories (1880-1918).

Graph # 2

Eau Claire Lumber Production (Board Feet) 1880-1914

Graph # 3

Eau Claire Boarding Houses (1880-1920)

Source: Eau Claire City Directories (1880-1920).

Graph # 4

Eau Claire Hotels (1880-1920)

Source: Eau Claire City Directories (1880-1920).
Map # 1: Saloons and Sawmills, 1884.

Information Source: Eau Claire City Directory (1884).
Map Source: Eau Claire County Map, 1876.
Reproduced with permission of MCIntyre Library Special Collections & Archives, UW - Eau Claire, Eau Claire, WI.
Map # 2: Boarding Houses, 1884

Information Source: Eau Claire City Directory (1884).
Map Source: Eau Claire County Map, 1876.
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Map # 3: Hotels, 1884

Information Source: Eau Claire City Directory (1884).
Map Source: Eau Claire County Map, 1876.
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Map # 4: Sawmills and Saloons, 1918

Information Source: Wright’s Eau Claire City Directory (1918).
Map Source: Eau Claire County Map, 1876.
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