

# The Changing Meaning of What Was Considered to Be •TabooŽ in the History of the Temperance Movement

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## INTRODUCTION

Originally, the term •tabooŽ referred to words, objects, and acts which should be avoided because they were religiously impure or holy. At present, however, the term is used freely in daily as well as religious life and what it might refer to has undergone change. Whatever had once been taboo might not be now, whereas whatever had once not been taboo might be now. The advocacy of birth control in the early 20th century and smoking in front of non-smokers are respective examples.

Looking into the history of temperance advocacy in America from the colonial period to national prohibition in the 1920s, we realize that excessive drinking had always been taboo. Until the middle of the 20th century, even medical associations had not officially admitted that alcoholism was a disease. Many doctors as well as ordinary citizens had thought that only immoral persons might break this taboo.

Excessive drinking was not the only taboo. Temperance reformers from the middle of the 19th century onward came to view saloons as venues for breaking taboos because they were linked to gambling, prostitution, and political corruption. What was considered to be taboo in temperance advocacy, consequently, changed and had wider implica-

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tions. The purpose of this paper is to discuss these changes while focusing on the social background of this transformation.

## I COLONIAL DRINKING PRACTICES IN NEW ENGLAND

From the beginning of English colonization both in the South and in New England, moderate use of alcoholic beverages had been permitted as an indispensable part of daily life, but excessive drinking was regarded as taboo. This was especially the case in the New England colonies, where religious leaders played an important role to build a prosperous society. Leaders in American colonization entertained misgivings about drunkenness because they had already experienced it in Britain. John Winthrop, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay colony, warned his fellow settlers against immoderate drinking before they landed at Salem in 1630, and he refused to drink ardent spirits at his dinner table.<sup>2</sup>

In the colonial period, liquor was a daily necessity for women and children as well as for men, as we can see from Increase Mather's famous description of it, "a good creature of God." Liquor was used as a substitute for such daily necessities as coffee, milk, or even unhygienic water, not as a luxury. At 11 o'clock in the morning and 4 o'clock in the afternoon, farmhands and apprentices were provided with a "rum ration," while customers were also served free drinks at local shops. By 1790, the beginning of the Republic, annual per capita consumption of liquor was 5.8 gallons, high but still 18.3 percent less than the 7.1 gallons consumed in 1810 and in 1830, the highest level in American history.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the colonial period, it was the consumer who was faulted for drinking excessively, not the manufacturer or seller of liquors. An example might be found in the words of Mather who, in 1673, called upon the Massachusetts Bay colony "to discourage tippling and to banish the habitual drunkard."<sup>4</sup> His son Cotton also warned that "Men have their Estates devoured, their Names devoured, their Hours devoured, and their very Souls devoured, when they are so besotted. . . . when [a drinker] comes to Die, he'll cry out as many have done, Ale-Houses are Hell-Houses! Ale-Houses are Hell-Houses!"<sup>5</sup> Although there were not organized efforts or a movement to combat the abuse of drinking at the time, the churches in New England played a central role in preventing excessive drinking, especially at taverns on the Sabbath.

According to the Congregational Church records in Plymouth, if a person abused liquor, the "sinner" was summoned to appear in church to

repent in writing, and a repeat offender was to be admonished publicly.<sup>6</sup> Colonial governments also imposed penalties on such a “criminal.” For that purpose the governments first had to define excessive drinking in their statutes. In the Massachusetts Bay colony, for example, it was defined in 1645 as drinking more than half a pint of wine in less than 30 minutes. At the same time, the neighboring Plymouth colony defined a drunkard as someone who “either lisps or falters in his speech by reason of much drink, or that staggers in his going, or that vomits by reason of excessive drinking, or cannot follow his calling.”<sup>7</sup>

The governments also had to determine penalties for such offenses. According to a law of 1679 in the New Hampshire colony, a convicted offender had to pay five shillings for the first offense, ten shillings for the second, and to be put in the stocks for the third. In Massachusetts, the amount of the fine was higher: ten shillings for the first offense and twenty shillings for the second. In Plymouth and Connecticut, drunkards who repeated excessive drinking publicly could not buy liquor from anyone because the sale of liquor to common drunkards was illegal and their names were made public. Moreover, they were forced to wear a sign with the letter D (drunkard) on it.<sup>8</sup>

As mentioned above, throughout the colonial period, moderate drinking was permitted by everyone as a necessary part of daily life. Drinking on the Lord’s day and public drunkenness, however, were banned by law with various kinds of penalties. The main purpose behind the efforts to avoid immoral drinking was to build a prosperous colonial society under divine protection. The colonists feared that disorder caused by excessive drinking would lead to the failure of colonization. In this sense, we should not overlook the point that advocating moderate drinking was undertaken not for personal, but for social, reform.

Although the War for Independence brought independence to thirteen of Britain’s American colonies, it also contributed to an increase in the amount of liquor consumed by soldiers. When General George Washington was forced to endure the winter of 1777–78 at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, he had difficulty procuring enough liquor and was anxious about the resulting low morale of his soldiers.

Among the people who joined the army, some military doctors such as Benjamin Rush of Pennsylvania and David Ramsay of South Carolina differed from rest in their attitudes toward drinking. Nationally celebrated as one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, Rush became one of the earliest temperance advocates in America. As early

as 1778, he wrote and distributed to soldiers the pamphlet "Directions for Preserving the Health of Soldiers," in which he urged them to drink distilled liquors moderately.

Later, Rush became more radical. When he wrote his best known pamphlet, "An Inquiry into the Effects of Spirituous Liquors on the Human Body and Mind," in 1784, he advocated total abstinence from ardent spirits because they adversely affected both the body and the mind, causing diseases which inhibited memory and understanding. Rush flatly denied the contemporary idea that "ardent spirits relieved fatigue, sustained hard labour and protected one against heat and cold."<sup>9</sup> Instead, he recommended the use of such fermented drinks as beer and wine.

Rush called for a total change in common attitudes toward drinking. Until his time, most people had thought that the primary factor behind excessive drinking was the weak will power of drinkers themselves. In the colonial period, they had to repent and suffer punishments imposed by both churches and governments. On the other hand, liquors themselves, distilled as well as fermented, were "good creatures of God," but Rush tried to distinguish between fermented and distilled liquors and strongly disapproved of the latter. His views helped to initiate the term "demon rum." In the late 18th century, however, Rush's advocacy of total abstinence from ardent spirits was too radical because ordinary citizens thought it acceptable to drink them moderately.

## II INTEMPERANCE AS INDIVIDUAL TABOO

The first English settlers wanted to transplant their drinking habits to America. Their first choice was beer, which was usually made with a top-fermenting yeast, called porter or ale. It was relatively highly alcoholic and strongly flavored. Beer was so bulky and perishable to ship from Britain that the colonists soon tried to brew it in America. It is interesting to point out that the first project of Harvard College was to build a brewhouse in 1637.<sup>10</sup> Realizing that brewing what they had drunk in England was almost impossible for one reason or another, the colonists soon gave up their favorite. Instead, they began to make so-called small beer, about one percent in alcoholic content, by soaking barley in water. Making small beer became a routine, weekly chore for colonial housewives.

Wine was another drink which the early settlers tried unsuccessfully to make. From the beginning of colonization to the middle of the 19th

century, most wines were imported and taxed so that only the wealthy could afford them. The wines imported from Madeira and the Canary Islands were especially expensive and became status symbols. On the contrary, gin was regarded as drink for the poor as it was in Britain.

The most popular drinks during the colonial period were apple cider and rum. Apple trees were transplanted to the northern part of the colonies by the early settlers, and apple cider could be produced cheaply and in bulk by a simple process of fermentation. In the South, where apples were not easily grown, colonists had another fruit drink known as “peachy.” Also popular at the time was rum, which was imported from the West Indies at the end of the 17th century. In the early 18th century, distilling rum became an important industry when molasses began to be imported to New England. Rum even became more than a drink as colonists used it as money when bartering for furs and lands with Native Americans and for Negro slaves with slave traders. Tens of distilleries were built in Boston and Newport, and the case of the Browns of Providence making a fortune by distilling rum and then engaging in the slave trade is well known.

When the American colonists went to war for independence from Britain, the situation regarding drinking changed rapidly. The Royal Navy dominated the Caribbean Sea and stopped the trade in molasses so that Americans had to distill their own alcoholic drink from domestic grains. From just before the War for Independence to early in the 19th century, the colonists from Scotland and Northern Ireland who settled in and around the Appalachian Mountains were highly skilled in distilling. Moreover, at the end of the 18th century, such grains as barley, rye, and corn were harvested in bulk in western Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Kentucky, so farmers there began to make whiskey from the surpluses before they went bad. As a result, a large quantity of whiskey, referred to as “liquid assets,” was marketed and fetched a low price of 25 cents a gallon. Because a farmhand could earn almost one dollar a day at the beginning of the 19th century, whiskey was so cheap that he could buy plenty of it.<sup>11</sup> Under such a condition, coupled with the popular unacceptability of even moderate drinking, it was inevitable that America would face severe problems concerning the consumption of liquor.

The most frequently cited statistics for liquor consumption in recent books and papers on the temperance movement are those provided by W. J. Rorabaugh. He estimated that the annual per capita consumption of absolute alcohol at age 15 or over in 1790 was 5.8 gallons, which was

nearly three times as much as in the late 20th century. In the early 19th century, the amount rose sharply, culminating in 1810 and 1830 at 7.1 gallons. It was the highest quantity in American history and close to the physiological limit for an average human body.<sup>12</sup> This figure was the average amount consumed by all people in America who were 15 or older, including those who did not drink, so those who did drink liquor at that time consumed much more than 7.1 gallons of absolute alcohol annually. When the temperance movement began its activities in the first quarter of the 19th century, there were three chronic alcoholics in every ten drinkers, whereas the figure was only three in every two hundred drinkers in the middle of the 20th century.<sup>13</sup>

Why did “the destruction of the republic” through alcohol almost take place early in the 19th century?<sup>14</sup> In addition to the issues mentioned above, including the fact that a huge volume of cheap liquors appeared widely on the market, we should not overlook social changes. Westward expansion to conquer the frontier had some influence on drinking. Unlike the relatively settled and stable society in the East, frontier society in the West was an unstable struggle for existence without any guarantees for life and property. The majority of early frontier settlers were therefore male, and they frequented saloons to ease their tension and anxiety.<sup>15</sup> Soldiers were also big consumers as “three quarts of whisky daily was not uncommon among soldiers along the frontier, ‘one quart . . . being required [just] to set them up before breakfast.’”<sup>16</sup>

Social changes caused by the Industrial Revolution in America also influenced drinking behavior. Before the Industrial Revolution, American society had been primarily agricultural with a few notable commercial centers such as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Charleston. Many farms were self-sufficient, and the tobacco and cotton plantations in the South produced surpluses for trade. In agrarian society, where people worked and lived at the same place, the amount of alcohol consumed was relatively low, although it was drunk several times a day with and between meals. This was known as “dram drinking” and was done mainly (in more than 80 percent of the cases) at home.<sup>17</sup> At workshops and on farms a rum ration of liquors was served to apprentices and farmhands when they rested from work twice a day, a custom which took deep root in American society. In such a society, people were not inclined to have a sense of duty and hour and were not likely to suffer from stress caused by competition or unease. Conditions such as these in preindustrial America fostered tolerance of drinking.

With the beginning of industrialization in America, starting in New England after the War of 1812, people were required to change their drinking behavior. Husbands began to work away from home, which wives converted into a female sphere of influence. Women and children came to drink mainly non-alcoholic beverages such as coffee, milk, and water because they became available more cheaply and safely.<sup>18</sup> As a result, drinking alcohol became mainly a male activity. Men drank as if drinking were a symbol of “freedom and self-determination,” the ethos of the early 19th century.<sup>19</sup> Since wives increasingly depended on the incomes of their husbands and suffered from their violence, wives came to regard excessive drinking as taboo, and many women joined the temperance movement, easily agreeing to sign teetotal pledges.

The division of American society into male and female spheres of influence caused changes not only from family drinking to drinking outside the home, but also from drinking with meals to drinking for its own sake. It was after the 1820s that so-called “binge” drinking with friends became popular among men.<sup>20</sup> All people on the binge were required to get drunk, an example of the contemporary trend toward male egalitarianism since “all men were equal before the bottle.”<sup>21</sup> The emerging problem of excessive drinking had much to do with these changes in drinking behavior as well as with the tremendous amount of liquor that was consumed.

In the early 1810s, when the annual per capita consumption of absolute alcohol at age 15 or over reached the historically highest point, temperance societies began to be organized in such northern states as Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York. The prime movers of this early movement were Puritan clergymen and Federalist politicians, both from local elites. Most of them tried to address the problem of this high per capita consumption and regarded excessive drinking of cheap whiskey by minors as socially disruptive, but they never referred to their own consumption of expensive imported wines. Because the majority of Americans at that time felt that the clergymen and politicians were hypocritical, given that they too drank a lot, the early temperance movement led by social elites was soon frustrated.

When the American Temperance Society (ATS) was organized in Boston in 1826, the popular temperance movement began. While there were still many Presbyterian and Congregational clergymen as its leaders, the number of politicians was much lower than it had been in the 1810s, and rising industrial capitalists began to occupy positions of lead-



ership. The new movement did its best to seek a broad-based membership by asking recruits to sign a “short pledge” to abstain from only distilled liquors and to pay a small initiation fee. The leaders were also required to do the same so that they could be seen as equals of the general membership. The activities of the ATS included using “moral suasion” that involved distributing temperance propaganda in written form, asking people to sign a temperance pledge, and holding temperance meetings for preachers and laymen.

The ATS advocated abstinence, not moderate drinking, of distilled liquors because the situation in the 1820s was so appalling that moderation seemed to be insufficient. In this context, Rush’s advocacy of abstinence from drinking hard liquors became popular propaganda in the temperance movement, around fifty years after he published “An Inquiry into the Effects of Spirituous Liquors . . .” in 1784. His pamphlet was printed repeatedly and more than 170,000 copies were distributed by the American Tract Society alone from 1825 to 1850.<sup>22</sup>

Another temperance movement emerged in 1840, when six heavy drinkers in Baltimore organized a self-reform movement to promote teetotalism, abstinence from all liquors including wine and beer in addition to whiskey and brandy. The leaders called themselves Washingtonians simply because they respected George Washington. They advocated a “long pledge” because heavy drinkers could not draw a line between fermented and distilled liquors. For them the former was also evil because it tempted drinkers to try the latter, so their movement viewed both moderate drinking as well as excessive drinking as taboo. A prototype of today’s Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), the Washingtonian movement spread all over the country except some parts of the South in the first half of the 1840s and collected more than 600,000 signatures for the long pledge, including those of many drunkards whom the previous organizations had either ignored or regarded as enemies.<sup>23</sup>

The Washingtonians held “experience meetings,” where former drunkards spoke of their unfortunate experiences to audiences that included people suffering from similar problems. They directly and persuasively appealed to drinkers that sobriety could bring them success, self-respect, and self-discipline. It is interesting to note that there were two different reactions among drinkers who felt anxious in competitive, industrial society: one was to drink more for relief from pressure and the other was to stop drinking for the same purpose.<sup>24</sup> The Washingtonians experienced both.



As I have noted, the main reason that excessive drinking and, later, moderate drinking were viewed as taboo by the temperance movement in the second quarter of the 19th century was the belief that it brought misery to the men who drank and their families. Because of this, temperance propaganda repeatedly used pictures of individual ruin and unhappy family life. Temperance novels such as Timothy Arthur’s *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, and What I Saw There*, which dramatized the unhappy life of a very young girl whose father was a drunkard, provide other examples of how this misery was portrayed.

### III FROM MORAL SUASION TO LEGAL COERCION

From the middle of the 19th century, the nature of the temperance movement began to change, as did the reason why it regarded excessive drinking as taboo. The leaders of the movement came to emphasize the opinion that temperance contributed more to the public good than to the individual good. In doing so, the temperance movement began to transform itself from one of personal reform to one of social reform.

This transformation had already begun before the 1850s, as a new group of industrialists joined the movement as leaders. After the ATS was dissolved and a new, more centralized organization, the American Temperance Union (ATU), was formed in 1836, the movement used more secular, at the expense of religious, propaganda. Popular topics were economics, social order and security, and moral themes. Examples were drunkenness entailing losses for both employees and employers; public money being spent on taking care of drunkards in jail; and drinking causing serious railroad, stagecoach, and steamboat accidents and being linked to gambling, prostitution, and violence.

As industrialization proceeded in America, capitalists encouraged their employees to respect “industrial morality” and advocated abolishing such “wasteful habits” and premodern customs as the rum ration.<sup>25</sup> Some laborers and artisans also supported temperance and, similar to the Washingtonians, desired to be successful financially, so they appealed to their fellow laborers to be sober. Although it is not possible to state precisely how much the early temperance activities contributed, they might have helped reduce the annual per capita consumption of absolute alcohol from 7.1 gallons in 1830 to 5.0 gallons in 1835 and to 3.1 gallons in 1840.<sup>26</sup>

However, we should not overlook the reality of this reduction.

According to Rorabaugh, the reduction “did not mean that everyone drank half as much [in 1840 as in 1830]; rather, almost half the population stopped drinking altogether, while the other half continued to drink as much as before.”<sup>27</sup> This statement oversimplified the real situation, but he rightly implied that although the time when many people drank too much had passed, and the number of teetotalers had increased, there were still many people who continued to drink excessively, and these remained as targets for perfectionists in the temperance movement. It is important to see who such drinkers were.

Industrialization needed cheap and plentiful labor, but America had always suffered from a shortage of manpower since early in its colonial period, and the industrial capitalists in the middle of the 19th century and later depended on foreign immigrants to provide labor. From the middle of the 1840s to the Civil War, most of the immigrants were either Irish or Germans. Because of the potato blight which led to famine in Ireland from 1845 and oppression by the British government, many Irish people went to America. From 1847 to 1854 more than 100,000 Irish immigrants arrived annually in America with 220,000 as the peak in 1851. Around the same time, many German immigrants went to America because of political chaos after the abortive revolution in 1848, religious persecution, and food shortages. In the first half of the 1840s, the average number of German immigrants was about 20,000 annually. The number, however, increased to approximately 66,000 annually in the latter half of the decade, and then more than 100,000 between 1852 and 1854 with 215,000 as the peak in 1854.<sup>28</sup>

Most Irish immigrants settled in such east coast cities as New York and Boston to work in factories or on railroads. The Irish who settled in Boston numbered fewer than 500 during the five-year period beginning in 1836, but they increased rapidly to more than 60,000 during the five-year period beginning in 1846.<sup>29</sup> Many German immigrants, on the other hand, went to the Middle West either to settle as farmers or to live in cities such as Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Milwaukee as factory workers.

The Irish and German immigrants who drank either whiskey or beer habitually ignored the activities of the temperance reformers and continued their drinking customs in America. They came to see temperance as nothing less than a new lifestyle being forced on them, which contributed to immigrants and excessive drinking being connected with each other by the temperance movement. This tendency might be seen in the words of one reformer who noted that the Irish “come here, with all their

vicious [drinking] habits and grovelling tastes uncontrolled, and they think they can make money at this thing, and they set to work. They have had no previous training in habits of temperance, and they die out before they are reclaimed.”<sup>30</sup>

The Irish tended to frequent saloons whose owners were Irish and to loiter in streets at night after drinking, which occasionally led to arrests because of disruptive behavior. Germans were accused of gathering at beer halls on the Sabbath, and the beer halls came to be regarded disapprovingly by old-stock Americans because they were linked to such vices as gambling and prostitution, as well as drinking, and became places for political “machines” to “buy” votes for local elections. Reformers believed that this went far beyond the ideals of society and should be rectified. Moreover, most immigrants, coming from peasant stock, tended to ignore such indispensable industrial work ethics as observing working hours. These were real problems faced not only by ordinary citizens but also by the temperance reformers.

From the middle of the 19th century, what was regarded as taboo in the temperance movement was mainly excessive drinking by laborers, many of whom were Irish and German immigrants. Incidentally, such social problems as crime, violence, poverty, and disorder were directly or indirectly linked with excessive drinking. In this context, the temperance movement broadened its outlook and began to transform its main purpose from personal reform to social reform. This transformation caused changes in the methods that the temperance movement employed.

Before the massive influx of Irish and German immigrants, the temperance movement had had considerable success by using moral suasion, which might have helped reduce per capita consumption of alcohol. At that time, viewing excessive drinking as taboo became common among Americans living in a society that emphasized “respectability” and “virtue.”<sup>31</sup> When, however, immigrants with different drinking habits settled in the cities, where the population balance between Americans of English descent and the newcomers eventually evened out, “community restraints” disappeared and moral suasion no longer seemed to work.<sup>32</sup>

As a result, temperance reformers increasingly came to support some method of “coercion” rather than “suasion.” This new approach took a definite form in the Maine Law movement, which led to temporary prohibition laws banning the manufacture and sale of liquors being enacted in eleven states and two territories after Maine had done so with its Act for the Suppression of Drinking Houses and Tippling Shops in 1851.

Under such laws, liquor, once “a good creature of God,” became a “fiend-like monster,” “desperado,” and “serpent.”<sup>33</sup> In the Maine Law movement the prohibitionists sought social “order” and “stability.”<sup>34</sup> The ATU reported that during the year before the Maine Law was promulgated, 74 persons were arrested and detained in reformatories in Maine due to disorderly conduct linked to excessive drinking, but one year after its enactment there were none.<sup>35</sup> Portland mayor Neal Dow, “the father of the Maine Law” as he was called, implied that the incidence of crimes had been reduced to the point that city officials could use “the Portland City Watchhouse” only to store seized liquors, and he claimed proudly that “the House of Correction is now empty.”<sup>36</sup> This success was frequently used to argue for extending the Maine Law movement to other states.

Unlike the earlier temperance movement, the new one which emphasized prohibition gave rise to bitter resistance. Those opposing prohibition included not only liquor manufacturers, dealers, and drinkers but also many temperate Americans who considered prohibition to be extreme because “the right of the individual to be free from government intervention in purely private affairs received endorsement after endorsement.”<sup>37</sup> This led to public sentiment being aroused against prohibition, and Portland, where Dow tried to enforce the law strictly, experienced a bloody riot in 1855. Shortly before the Civil War, the issue of slavery became the main concern for most Americans, so politicians in every state tried to avoid other delicate issues such as prohibition. In state legislatures after 1855 there were no attempts to make new Maine laws, and state courts started to rule that all or part of their laws were unconstitutional so that only a few states, including Maine, maintained them until the Civil War.

#### IV OTHER TABOOS

During the Civil War the temperance movement was sluggish. Historically speaking, there had been a close relationship between wars and liquor consumption, and the Civil War was not an exception. Even so, there were some temperance associations in this period which helped rehabilitate drunkards. They inherited the tradition of the early temperance movement, especially that of personal reform in Washingtonianism, and they included the Sons of Temperance (ST) and the Independent Order of Good Templars (IOGT), organized respectively in

1842 and 1851. Both groups kept the names of their members secret because when backsliding Washingtonians had become the focus of public attention, it hurt the movement as a whole. Both of the new organizations were mutual benefit societies that pooled their funds to help support members and their families in times of illness or death. They were successful in rehabilitating members to a certain extent, but the IOGT in particular came to be viewed suspiciously because of its extreme secrecy. After the Civil War, the activities of the ST and the IOGT were confined to a relatively small group of drinkers, so they did not become mainstream in the postwar temperance movement. We will therefore focus on the more popular aspects of the movement.

The revitalization of the temperance movement after the Civil War depended greatly on the leadership activities of female reformers, who had been able to participate in the antebellum movement only as followers. They demonstrated leadership, for example, late in 1873 when some groups of women in such towns in Ohio as Hillsboro and Washington Court House went to nearby saloons to ask the owners to give up their prosperous but immoral businesses. Inside the saloons, these female activists sang hymns, prayed, and stayed on the premises until owners signed a pledge to close their doors. They chose saloons as their targets because they were frequented by their husbands and sons who spent money necessary for living on on drinking, gambling, and prostitutes.

These “saloon visitations”<sup>38</sup> and other political activities by women were regarded as taboo in terms of Victorian social norms, but the women acted in the name of “home protection,” asserting that the victims of excessive drinking were children and wives. This was relatively easy for many people, especially Protestant Americans, to accept, and saloon visitations soon spread throughout parts of the country. Many saloon owners conceded to shut down, but after a short time, they reopened their back doors at first and finally their front doors.

Saloon visitations were therefore not completely successful, but they did provide an opportunity for participants to organize a lasting female temperance movement in 1874 with the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) as its center. Although the WCTU was organized by women who looked at drinking and other immoral activities of their husbands and sons as taboo, its leaders thought that advocating only temperance was not enough to justify its existence as an organization for reform to women in general.

In the middle of the 1870s the annual per capita consumption of absolute alcohol by Americans over 15 years of age was less than two gallons. Moreover, the favorite alcoholic beverage for Americans was changing from whiskey to beer. In the 1840s the annual per capita consumption of distilled liquors was 3.1 gallons (including 1.4 gallons of absolute alcohol), as opposed to 1.3 gallons of beer (including 0.07 gallons of absolute alcohol). In 1900 the consumption of distilled liquors had decreased to 1.2 gallons (0.54 gallons), while that of beer had increased dramatically to 15.5 gallons (0.78 gallons).<sup>39</sup>

As a result of this shift from hard liquor to beer, cases of physiological problems caused by drinking whiskey declined dramatically. Because of this, the leaders of the WCTU broadened their outlook to appeal to and to recruit more female activists by trying to find taboos other than excessive drinking. Beyond referring only to personal drinking, they attempted to reform the surroundings of drinkers in which social evils including excessive drinking took place. This tendency was accelerated after Frances Willard became the second president of the WCTU in 1879. Using "do everything" as its slogan, the WCTU under Willard's leadership became "a school" for its members and urged them to extend their concerns to such diverse social and political issues as prostitution, public education, child labor, and female suffrage as well as temperance.<sup>40</sup>

At that time, the male temperance movement was dominated by a political party, the National Prohibition Party (NPP), which was organized in 1869 by splinter groups from the major parties, mostly the Republicans, who thought it was impossible to enact prohibition laws within the framework of the two-party system. According to the NPP leaders, after the Internal Revenue Act of 1862 forced the liquor industry to pay a large amount of taxes, it cultivated favorable connections with politicians in the Democratic and Republican Parties to protect its interests. This gave the impression that "an 'oligarchy' of the liquor traffic controlled Democratic and Republican affairs alike."<sup>41</sup> The NPP tried to win broad support by adding to its platform such diverse issues as the direct election of the President, Vice-President, and U.S. Senators, low rates for postage, telegraphic communication, and railroad and water transportation, opposition to discrimination in voting because of race, national origin, or sex, opposition to exploitation of labor by capitalists, opposition to all monopoly and class legislation, and the creation and extension of common schools.<sup>42</sup>

In the 1880s the WCTU and the NPP often allied with each other to revitalize the temperance movement, sharing the belief that temperance was an important, but not the only, issue to help reform society. The main feature of the early temperance movement, that only excessive drinking was regarded as taboo, faded away in their alliance. Although the state prohibition movement was revitalized in the 1880s, only Kansas, North Dakota, and South Dakota managed to pass state-wide prohibition laws. Even in those states, it was the temperance Republicans, not the Party prohibitionists, who contributed the most to getting the laws passed. Because the temperance movement was led by women with no voting rights and by politicians who did not belong to the two major parties, it exerted almost no political influence, so leadership again was assumed by clergymen and businessmen.

## V BEFORE AND AFTER NATIONAL PROHIBITION

Around the turn of the century, another large wave of immigrants went to America, and most of the more than one million people arriving annually in the early years of the 20th century were from eastern and southern Europe. This increased the ethnic diversity of America and created an environment for revising cultural norms. As a response, the temperance movement at the turn of the century was strongly supported by Protestant Americans, as in the 1850s, because they saw it as a vehicle for assimilating the new immigrants.

From the late 19th century the movement was led by the Anti-Saloon League of America (ASL) which was strongly linked to Protestant churches. It was organized nationally in late 1895 and tried to enact national as well as state prohibition laws. Learning much from the less successful movement led by the WCTU and the NPP, the ASL focused solely upon temperance. It became a powerful pressure group to support politicians who espoused prohibition regardless of party affiliation. The prohibition movement led by the ASL was successful in getting the 18th Amendment added to the U.S. Constitution, which went into effect at midnight, January 16, 1920.

At the turn of the century, small, local communities were further integrated into the national economy and society with the completion of five transcontinental railways and the emergence of national markets as symbolic events of this transformation. At the time a broad movement called Progressivism emerged to promote reforms to cope with the new, high-



ly industrialized consumer society of the early 20th century. It aimed to strengthen the regulatory powers of local, state, and federal governments to correct problems that had arisen from the practice of laissez-faire capitalism in the 19th century.

The prohibition movement under the leadership of the ASL also aimed at social reform through governmental regulatory powers as the 20th century approached. In this context, the prohibition movement was one aspect of Progressivism and therefore differed greatly from the temperance movement almost one hundred years earlier, which had regarded excessive drinking as dangerous only for the drinkers. The new movement for prohibition had two ultimate purposes: social and political purification and labor efficiency in an industrializing society. As for the former, the ASL tried to disrupt the liquor industries by focusing mainly on saloons and breweries. Saloons, as mentioned previously, were considered to be immoral because they were linked to gambling, smoking, and prostitution as well as binge drinking, and they were also thought to be evil because they had become bases for machine politics. These “poorman’s clubs,” as they were often called at the turn of the century, were frequented mainly by laborers, many of whom were newcomers from the same ethnic background as the owners of the saloons.

Light diversion was not the only reason that customers frequented saloons after a long day of hard work. The newcomers gathered to seek someone to help find places to stay and jobs to make money, while speaking to other patrons in their own languages. Many saloon owners were elected to office by ethnic voters, and some of them became “precinct bosses” who assisted opponents of prohibition aspiring to public office by gathering votes at their saloons. If such a candidate won an election, he would then distribute many public jobs such as those in police and fire departments through the “precinct bosses.” This activity served as a form of social welfare for many newcomers, but from the perspective of the ASL leaders, it was political favoritism and corruption that needed to be eliminated.

The other ultimate purpose in the prohibition movement was to meet the requirements for labor in an industrializing society. Industrial capitalists intended to build safer factories and to increase productivity by reducing the consumption of liquor by factory workers. When they joined the temperance movement in the middle of the 19th century, they had the same intention of increasing productivity. Capitalists at both times, although the stages of industrialization were different, shared a

common anxiety about their workers drinking excessively, and they were convinced that correcting this problem would lead to fewer absences and accidents and more productivity.

It is not important to discuss here how much national prohibition accomplished these purposes. Journalism, in any case, tended to address such “side effects” as waves of crime, the tendency to disregard laws, and the illegal production and importation of liquors. Moreover, the Great Depression which started in 1929 accelerated public opinion against the 18th Amendment and the Volstead Act, the law that enforced it. Eventually the 18th Amendment was repealed by the 21st Amendment on December 5, 1933, which ended one cycle in the temperance movement. It did not, however, mean the end of the whole movement.

As suggested in Section 2 of the 21st Amendment—“The transportation or importation into any State, Territory, or possession of the United States for delivery or use therein of intoxicating liquors, in violation of the laws thereof, is hereby prohibited”—the repeal of the 18th Amendment did not automatically allow limitless manufacture and sale of liquors. Liquors were legal again, but they were subject to regulations on advertising, places to sell, and business hours, as well as to taxation. Fifteen states went as far as imposing state sales monopolies to enforce such regulations and taxation.<sup>43</sup> Even though many state prohibition laws, often called “little Volsteads,” had been repealed before December 1933, some remained in effect until well after World War II: Kansas until 1948, Oklahoma until 1957, and Mississippi until 1966.

In 1935, a new cycle in the temperance movement began when Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was established in Akron, Ohio, by two alcoholics (formerly “drunkards”), William Wilson, a former Wall Street manipulator, and Robert Smith, a doctor. This new organization bore a close resemblance to Washingtonianism in its emphasis on rehabilitating chronic drinkers, and both began in periods of national economic difficulty. The AA appealed directly to the self-respect of drinkers by holding clandestine meetings that were designed to instil courage to refrain from drinking. By protecting the privacy of its members, the AA succeeded in recruiting and reclaiming many alcoholics throughout America. Because of its policy of secrecy, it is not known precisely how many people joined, but its membership has been estimated to have had more than 100,000 Americans in 1951 and to have included 350,000 Americans and Canadians in the 1970s.<sup>44</sup>

Medical doctors who specialized in the digestive system, physiology,

and psychiatry also joined the temperance movement after alcohol was legalized again. They organized the Association for the Study of Inebriety and focused on the problem of excessive drinking in terms of physiological diseases. In 1940 the Center of Alcohol Studies was founded at Yale University with E. M. Jellinek as its director. The doctors and researchers at Yale argued that alcoholism was a mental as well as a physiological disease so that “patients” should be treated with “medical and psychiatric attention,” and they published the results of their studies in their *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*.<sup>45</sup>

Benjamin Rush, in the last quarter of the 18th century, was one of the earliest medical experts to suggest that habitual drinking was a disease and should be treated medically, but the majority of doctors since then had not accepted the idea that drunkenness was a disease.<sup>46</sup> Rather, they had tended to view it as taboo in moral terms, which indicated that excessive drinking was done only by weak people. Finally, in the middle of the 1950s, the American Medical Association officially recognized alcoholism as a disease. As a result, patients could receive insurance benefits, and specialists could obtain more research funds to study alcoholism.<sup>47</sup>

In the liberal atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s, the annual per capita consumption of absolute alcohol rose from 2.0 gallons in 1960 to 2.8 gallons in 1978. Female drinkers and adolescent drinkers contributed much to this increase. In the late 1970s intoxicated drivers caused about half of nearly 50,000 annual automobile accident fatalities. Under these circumstances, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) was organized in 1980 as a new pressure group. This organization, concerned about the increase in fatal automobile accidents caused by drunken drivers, especially young ones, demanded federal legislation to put pressure on the state governments to ban the sale of alcohol to anyone under 21 years old. Their effort succeeded in 1984 when Congress coerced the states to adopt such a policy.

As for female drinking, in the 1970s scientific research discovered that even as little as a few drinks during early pregnancy caused high risks of birth defects. Because of such laws and findings, the consumption of absolute alcohol declined in the 1980s and 1990s and stabilized at around two gallons per capita. In this regard, the modern temperance movement—involving the likes of the AA, medical research and attention, and legislation stemming from pressure groups such as MADD—experienced some success in reducing the consumption of alcohol.

## CONCLUSION

As discussed, excessive drinking had always been regarded as taboo in the temperance movement for two reasons. First, the immoderate use of alcohol was taboo because it was harmful to drinkers and brought misfortune to their families. Second, it was taboo because it caused or was otherwise linked to other social evils. When the temperance movement focused on the former, it emphasized personal reform, and social reform was its aim when it turned its attention to the latter. It has shifted between the two according to temporal perceptions of problems associated with alcohol abuse.

Especially in the second quarter of the 19th century, the temperance movement was concerned with personal degradation which prevented the formation of an ideal society. At the time “moral suasion” had proved to be relatively effective because many drinkers voluntarily gave up alcohol or dramatically reduced how much they consumed. Then, during the period from the Maine Law movement to the repeal of the 18th Amendment, a perfectionist impulse to purify society dominated the temperance movement. By means of prohibition laws, it specifically attacked urban saloons as a symbol of social evil. Saloons were viewed by reformers as places not only for drunkenness, but also for political corruption, prostitution, gambling, smoking, and other vices.

The repeal of the 18th Amendment caused the temperance movement to go in a different direction, one that was not new but which looked to an earlier stage of the movement. The temperance movement then re-incorporated moral suasion, while still depending on legal measures. In the process it abandoned the long-held belief that temperance was an instrument for social reform and the panacea to deal with various kinds of problems. The history of excessive drinking and the temperance movement shows how the consumption of alcohol changed as a taboo in American life.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, “temperance” is used flexibly. The term basically means the “advocacy of moderation” so that it meant “moderate drinking of distilled liquors” in the early 19th century. “Temperance,” however, came to assume the more severe tone of “abstinence from distilled liquors” when the American Temperance Society was organized in

1826. Later, it came to mean “total abstinence from all liquors including fermented drinks.” At first, methods to advocate “temperance” fell within the domain of “moral suasion”: distributing printed propaganda, holding meetings for religious sermons, and signing pledges, for instance. From the middle of the 19th century, however, the temperance movement assumed a political character, advocating a coercive measure known as “prohibition.” This movement is usually isolated as the “prohibition movement,” but in this paper it is categorized within the temperance movement.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Dorchester, *The Liquor Problem in All Ages* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1884), 110.

<sup>3</sup> W. J. Rorabaugh, “Estimated U.S. Alcoholic Beverage Consumption, 1790–1860,” *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 37 (1976): 361.

<sup>4</sup> John Krout, *The Origin of Prohibition* (New York: Russel & Russel, 1925), 52.

<sup>5</sup> Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, ed. Kenneth B. Murdock (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 192.

<sup>6</sup> The New England Society in the City of New York, *Plymouth Church Records* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1975), vol. 2, 157.

<sup>7</sup> Dean Albertson, “Puritan Liquor in the Planting of New England,” *The New England Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1950): 485.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 488; Edward G. Baird, “The Alcohol Problem and the Law: The Beginnings of the Alcoholic-Beverage Control Law in America,” *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 7 (1946–1947): 280; John Kobler, *Ardent Spirits: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1973), 35; Charles W. Taussig, *Rum, Romance & Rebellion* (London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1928), 210–211.

<sup>9</sup> Krout, *The Origin of Prohibition*, 72.

<sup>10</sup> J. G. Furnas, *The Life and Times of the Late Demon Rum* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1965), 20.

<sup>11</sup> The price of one bottle of whiskey was about five cents. This was relatively cheap because a farmhand could earn almost one dollar a day at that time.

<sup>12</sup> Rorabaugh, “Estimated U.S. Alcoholic Beverage Consumption,” 361; *Encyclopedia of American Social History*, 1993 ed., “Alcohol and Alcoholism,” 2137.

<sup>13</sup> E. M. Jellinek, “Recent Trends in Alcoholism and in Alcohol Consumption,” *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 8 (1947): 9.

<sup>14</sup> Peter D. Slavcheff, “The Temperance Republic: Liquor Control in Michigan 1800–1860” (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 1987), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Norman H. Clark, *Deliver Us from Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1976), 225.

<sup>16</sup> James H. Cassedy, “An Early American Hangover: The Medical Profession and Intemperance 1800–1860,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 50 (1976): 406.

<sup>17</sup> Jed Dannenbaum, *Drink and Disorder: Temperance Reform in Cincinnati from the Washingtonian Revival to the WCTU* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 4.

<sup>18</sup> For example, in 1830 the tariff on coffee was abolished. As a result, its price fell from 25 cents per pound in 1825 to ten cents, which made coffee a popular drink. W. J. Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 100.

<sup>19</sup> Clark, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 224.

<sup>20</sup> Slavcheff, “The Temperance Republic,” 12. Incidentally, more than 90 percent of absolute alcohol was consumed in the form of distilled spirits; see Selden D. Bacon, “The Classic Temperance Movement,” *British Journal of Addiction* 62 (1967): 7.

<sup>21</sup> Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic*, 151.

<sup>22</sup> Alice F. Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), 314.

<sup>23</sup> According to Maxwell, out of the 600,000, only about 100,000 were heavy drinkers and the rest included many female non-drinkers and children. Milton A. Maxwell, “The Washingtonian Movement,” *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 11 (1950): 426–427.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph F. Kett, “Review Essay: Temperance and Intemperance as Historical Problems,” *Journal of American History* 67 (1981): 880.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Faler, “Cultural Aspects of the Industrial Revolution: Lynn, Massachusetts, Shoemakers and Industrial Morality, 1826–1860,” *Labor History* 15 (1974): 368.

<sup>26</sup> Rorabaugh, “Estimated U.S. Alcoholic Beverage Consumption,” 361.

<sup>27</sup> *Encyclopedia of American Social History*, “Alcohol and Alcoholism,” 2138.

<sup>28</sup> Amerika Shomusho Hen, *Amerika Rekishi Tokei* [Historical Statistics of the United States] (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 1986), 106.

<sup>29</sup> Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 242.

<sup>30</sup> A. Farewell and G. P. Ure, *The Maine Law Illustrated: Being the Result of an Investigation Made in the Maine Law States* (Toronto: Canadian Prohibitory Liquor Law League, 1855), 49.

<sup>31</sup> Ian R. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800–1860* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), 317.

<sup>32</sup> Dannenbaum, *Drink and Disorder*, 5.

<sup>33</sup> James R. Rohrer, “The Origins of the Temperance Movement: A Reinterpretation,” *Journal of American Studies* 24 (1990): 230.

<sup>34</sup> Clark, *Deliver Us from Evil*, 120. See also Jack S. Blocker Jr., *American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1989), 53.

<sup>35</sup> American Temperance Union, *An Appeal to the Public from Well Authenticated Results of the Maine Law* (New York: ATU, 1854), 6.

<sup>36</sup> Neal Dow, “Operation of the Liquor Law in Portland,” January 15, 1852 in the Neal Dow Papers (Portland: Maine Historical Society).

<sup>37</sup> David E. Kyvig, ed., *Law, Alcohol, and Order: Perspectives on National Prohibition* (Westpoint, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 6.

<sup>38</sup> Saloon visitations might be interpreted as a form of rebellion against male domination of society and seen as a precursor to the activities of Carry Nation, who attacked saloons with a hatchet early in the 20th century since she saw them as such a symbol. See Masaru Okamoto, *Amerika Kinshuundo no Kiseki* [History of the American Temperance Movement] (Kyoto: Mineruva Shobo, 1994), 169–172.

<sup>39</sup> Rorabaugh calculates that the absolute alcohol content of distilled liquors was estimated at 45% and of beer, 5%. See his “Estimated U.S. Alcoholic Beverage Consumption,” 361.

<sup>40</sup> Frances E. Willard, *My Happy Half-Century: The Autobiography of an American Woman* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1889), 379.

<sup>41</sup> K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 42.

<sup>42</sup> Donald B. Johnson, comp., *National Party Platforms*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 45–46.

<sup>43</sup> Blocker, *American Temperance Movements*, 135.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 143. Membership worldwide was estimated to be 1,000,000 in the 1970s.

<sup>45</sup> John Ewing and Beatrice Rouse, eds., *Drinking: Alcohol in American Society—Issues and Current Research* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1978), 54.

<sup>46</sup> When the temperance movement began in the early 19th century, many doctors did not cooperate with it. They continued to use liquors as medicine, while drinking them as luxuries. For a long period of time they agreed with religious leaders that drunkenness was an evil which affected only degenerated people with weak wills. Drunkards were therefore often treated as lunatics and put in jail or an asylum. It was during the 1920s that the term “alcoholism” began to replace “drunkenness” or “inebriety.” See Cassedy, “An Early American Hangover,” 407; Ewing and Rouse, *Drinking*, 43–44 and 51.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.