

PROHIBITION POSSIBLY PROHIBITED:
IOWANS VOICING TEMPERANCE CONCERNS, 1929-1933

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Abstract. Prohibition voices supported their cause through community events as well as public speeches and political debates between 1929 and 1933, the last years before the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. Many activists and average citizens continued to believe in Prohibition with a social, moral, or economic reasoning. Although no Carrie Nations had re-emerged, Prohibition still possessed strong supporters led by strong voices. The three major leaders in Iowa were Senator Smith Wildman Brookhart, John Brown Hammond, and Ida B. Wise. Each created an activist persona. All three believed Prohibition could, should, and would work for the economic, social, and moral welfare not only Iowans of but of all Americans.

Some day historians will taste of the prohibition pottage cooked on our present political cook stove, smack their lips and tell our grandchildren or great grandchildren students exactly what the recipe was and how it could have been improved had their forefathers (ourselves) not been so utterly blind and woefully stupid. Prohibition is with us cloaked in a garb that is angel white or smeary with awful grime according to the kind of glasses one is peering through.—Fred A. Hinrichsen, Davenport, Iowa (1930)

Mrs. Albert G. Ossian, president of a local Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), delivered a short talk at the annual reception for the school faculty in Stanton, Iowa, on November 7, 1929. Ossian welcomed the teachers and explained the Scientific Temperance Instruction which the WCTU followed for school

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essays and poster contests. Another member, Marie Ossian, then served the two-course luncheon. Three teenagers from the young people's branch (Elva Ossian, Florence Anderson, and Marveline Reed) passed the plates while the forty-five members of this local chapter entertained their guests with renditions of popular songs. And so the WCTU continued its long tradition of local, state, and national participation in 1929, almost a decade since the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. Prohibition voices continued to support their cause in a variety of community social events as well as public speeches and political debates during the next three years. The trend of the temperance tide was turning quickly, however, after the 1929 Stock Market Crash, more so than Ossian or any other Prohibition leader could have imagined.¹

The WCTU of Iowa had organized in November 1874, the same month as the national organization, and it continued with strong membership for each year until the 1930s. The Union described its methods as evangelistic, educational, preventative, social, and legal. It promoted abstinence from all alcohol with various watchwords such as "agitate," "educate," and "organize" along with inspirations of love, loyalty, and light. The dues were one dollar a year with a badge of knotted white ribbon as membership symbol. The Union listed about sixty thousand Iowa women as paid members. Its official publication was *The Iowa Champion*, its song book from The Loyal Temperance Legion, and its current motto ended with the phrase, "the Eighteenth Amendment forever!"²

In 1930 this author's step-great-grandmother and other local residents still deeply believed in the Eighteenth Amendment, that Prohibition would continue until certainly their grandchildren or great-grandchildren came of age. Yet just three years later, the delightful promise or the dreadful experiment suddenly ended with the ratification of the Twenty-first Amendment. Repeal, however, had not seemed probable, much less possible, when the Eighteenth Amendment became official. An amendment to the Constitution of the United States implied constancy; certainly none had ever been considered for repeal.

In Iowa the dilemma of Prohibition did not easily resolve itself. Nor did it simply fade away. Many devoted activists and average citizens continued to believe in their cause with a social, moral, or economic reasoning. Some of the energy, organization, funding, and passion was perhaps passing while the fears were only increasing that neither the legal nor the social benefits of prohibition had been, or ever would be, revealed during those early years of the Great Depression. Still, we great-grandchildren should remember that the consumption of liquor and other intoxicating beverages had decreased during Prohibition. As historian K. Austin Kerr reminds readers in his history of the Anti-Saloon League, “the conventional wisdom overlooks one simple yet highly significant fact: prohibition worked.”³

Yet success can always be measured in many different ways. Tax revenue, legal control, and criminal enforcement had also been lost during Prohibition’s decade without enough education or money devoted to the cause. As the years passed, speakeasies, bootleggers, and troublemakers displayed an overall disregard for the law and caused many Iowans and Americans to re-evaluate their Prohibition position.

During the Great War, at the height of the Prohibition debate, Iowa’s Senator William Kenyon asked Congress, “why should the country permit workingmen to be employed in the useless manufacture of intoxicating liquor when there is a shortage of labor in the important and necessary work to carry on the war?” War values and hysteria became deciding factors in the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, but not to the extent many contemporary Americans believed. As historian Peter Odegard states, Prohibition was not “put over” on the American people, “not like a thief in the night, not a fit of civic absent-mindedness.” Prohibition’s passage required strong, focused work by many different people who fervently believed in their cause. One decade’s time and one economic depression’s trouble would not change most minds or constitutional amendments that quickly or completely.⁴

The rural reputation of temperance still remained by 1930 with its stereotypic components of an old-fashioned, ineffective naïveté surrounding the Middle American agrarian passion for Prohibition. Although many Americans continued to believe that the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment was “the triumph of the countryside over town,” the rural/urban split was far more complex and varied than previously assumed. Sean Cashman has argued that city newspapers doubled circulation and possessed greater influence on rural readers from 1925 to 1930, and Jack Blocker has discussed the point that “the rural-evangelical virus” does not hold true—though rural states led the way to Prohibition, they often did so with urban leaders. Farmers varied as much as did their urban counterparts based on ethnicity, religion, and political affiliation. As Blocker notes in *American Temperance Movements*, “from this point of view temperance reformers appear not as quaint exponents of an archaic morality but rather as citizens who have grappled with basic dilemmas of their society and as sometime pioneers exploring new responses.”⁵

Iowans had created a long history of temperance activity, placing its success or strictness (depending on point of view) with the other leading states of Maine and Kansas. Iowa’s General Assembly prohibited “dram shops” in 1851 and passed a strong prohibition law in 1855. Legislators successfully added an amendment to the state constitution in 1882, creating a dry state, although the state’s Supreme Court declared the amendment unconstitutional the following year. Still, a strict prohibition law passed the Legislature and remained in effect until a local option or “mulct law” (in which illegal taverns paid state fines) claimed precedence in 1893. Yet in 1916, another state prohibition law took effect, repealing the questionable mulct law. Therefore, Iowa had endorsed Prohibition four years before the Volstead Act. Those outnumbered Iowans who opposed simply chanted, “humanity cannot be made virtuous by law.”⁶

Yet the national dilemma created by Prohibition had only intensified by the end of the 1920s. Would Prohibition witness the final breakdown of an extremely vulnerable law with extraordinary

burdens, or was it only the beginning of an extremely useful experiment with utopian or at least practical potential? The decision for the American people involved one of four alternatives by 1930: comply with the law, enforce the law, change conditions of Volstead Act, or repeal the Eighteenth Amendment. The latter seemed least likely.⁷

The dangers of illegal liquor activity had escalated during the decade. Iowa coped with its number of bootleggers, especially with readily available corn supplies and isolated rural stills. Templeton rye—a reddish whiskey especially good for spiking beer—was manufactured on farms in northwest Iowa near the small town of Templeton and enjoyed a national reputation in speakeasies from Chicago to Kansas City to New York City. Ronald Reagan reportedly drank such spiked beer at the Moonlight Tavern west of Des Moines when he was a radio sportscaster at WHO.⁸ When Colonel Woodcock, the national Prohibition director, visited Iowa, a state Prohibition deputy explained that spiked beer accounted for seventy-five percent of illegal activity. The deputy then demonstrated the spiking technique by adding a shot of Templeton rye to a beer without alcohol and placing his thumb over the bottle before shaking. The Colonel asked if the fizz was then killed, but the deputy assured him spiked near-beers are consumed rather quickly. Real dangers might arise from contaminated liquor which could lead to “swell head,” “limber neck,” or “jake paralysis,” as well as the physical risks in illegal production. An alcohol cooker, for example, exploded in Des Moines one summer night, “sending one of the city’s main booze sources skyward.”⁹

The *Literary Digest* attempted to measure Prohibition sentiment in 1930 with its national Prohibition Poll sent to twenty million subscribers in March. Of the 4,806,464 votes that were returned, over sixty-nine percent of the respondents voted for modification or repeal. In a total of eighteen states, at least forty percent voted for repeal. Yet five states still recorded a majority for enforcement (Arkansas, Kansas, Oklahoma, North Carolina, and Tennessee). Another five states (Connecticut, Louisiana, New Jersey, Nevada,

and New York) led the way toward repeal. However, this *Literary Digest* poll would not meet modern scientific polling techniques; it was simply a measure of some middle-class subscribers motivated to answer. Modification, which most of the answers supported, remained highly debated and not subject to a simple questionnaire. And modification did not simply mean repeal.

Iowa citizens also received their *Digest* ballots that month and not quite half of the respondents favored enforcement of the dry law, but most state dry leaders insisted that their followers should deliberately ignore the poll. "In fact the Anti-Saloon League has issued a formal request to members and to drys," the superintendent of the Iowa Anti-Saloon League declared, "to pay no attention to the poll. It is generally known that Iowa is decidedly dry."¹⁰

The final Iowa numbers from the *Literary Digest* amounted to 17,543 for change and only 12,960 for enforcement. Or, the numbers can be reinterpreted: how many drys had followed the League's advice and ignored the poll based on a secure belief that dry conditions were permanent through the Constitution? Two-thirds seemed not even excited enough to vote, as one Iowa preacher pointed out. The Burlington daily newspaper conducted its own local survey of one hundred residents, and most respondents called themselves modificationist who still supported some form of Prohibition. "The 'modificationists' are neither radically wet nor radically dry," the Burlington editor emphatically explained, "but this much should be remembered: *they are for some form of prohibition* for they are opposed to the repeal of the eighteenth amendment, else they would have indicated in the poll their opposition and would have voted for repeal."¹¹

In fact, Iowa's Anti-Saloon League (District 11) and the WCTU declared from the very beginning that the *Literary Digest* Prohibition Poll simply meant nothing. They continued to say this about other polls, especially right before the public vote to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment in 1933. Other groups assessed the need for continued Prohibition in 1930. When the *Ladies' Home Journal* published its ten priorities, enforcement of prohibition topped

the list, and the editor believed that the fifteen trillion dollars saved from purchasing liquor had certainly increased “the purchase of better living.” The League of Nations child welfare division compiled its own report in 1930, stating that of the five factors leading to “the total decadence of America’s youth,” the violation of prohibition laws led its list. The enforcement of prohibition laws must remain if society were truly to benefit, despite all the increasingly vehement and organized talk against “the noble experiment.” As one Iowa dry czar had reinforced in 1930, “Prohibition is a healthy child on [its] 10th birthday.”¹²

Iowa’s Anti-Saloon League, however, faced an empty treasury at the beginning of 1930. The former Iowan and League founder, Howard Hyde Russell, visited Des Moines that spring to reinvigorate membership with “a second campaign” dry dinner meeting at the United Presbyterian church. “Supporters of the Anti-Saloon League of America must align themselves,” proclaimed Russell, “behind the candidacy of Herbert Hoover for re-election in the presidency in 1932 if they hope to carry through the organization’s program of enforcement of the Eighteenth amendment.” (from sources cited in endnote #12)

By May of 1931, the new leader of the Anti-Saloon League, Reverend B. E. Ewing, stated, “Iowa ranks first in the progress of its educational program, and it is my aim to continue the good work. By working with school superintendents and by the showing of educational films and playlets in churches, temperance sentiment will be built up among our young people.” By 1932 the Anti-Saloon League scheduled 1,500 meetings throughout the state. The Anti-Saloon League also sponsored a Prohibition Institute in 1932 with a more evangelical approach by inviting the Iowa-born Billy Sunday to work his magic on the audience. After an absence of eighteen years, Sunday enthusiastically returned to Des Moines to fight Prohibition repeal and spoke to a crowd of 8,500 supporters “who cheered him wildly.” He apparently “hurled dry thunder at rum-soaked politicians” as he called on Iowa for a second Carrie Nation.¹³

Although no Carrie Nations had re-emerged, Prohibition still possessed strong supporters led by strong voices. The three major leaders of Iowa's continued support of the Eighteenth Amendment remained Senator Smith Wildman Brookhart as insurgent Republican, John Brown Hammond as Prohibition party candidate for governor, and Ida B. Wise as current president of Iowa's WCTU and later national President after the Eighteenth Amendment repeal. Each of these three Iowans created an activist persona with an incredibly brave and consistently strong stance against repeal. All three believed Prohibition could, should, and would work for the economic, social, and moral welfare of not only Iowans but all Americans.

These Iowa Prohibition voices remained strong, consistent, and vehement though ridiculed by various members of the public at times. Senator Brookhart portrayed himself as a vocal and uncompromising leader, yet some considered him simply a one-issue fool. Ultimately Brookhart lost his reelection bid for the Senate in 1932. John Brown Hammond declared a third party candidacy for governor on the Prohibition Party ticket in 1932 but lost his election by a significant margin. He only earned a few votes in the state and did not even begin to divide the Republican vote. Ida B. Wise maintained the longest and most consistent career within Prohibition work, mostly through the formal leadership structure of the WCTU rather than federal or state political roles. Her voice continued long after the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment when she left Iowa to serve as national WCTU President until the late 1940s. All three leaders represented careers and convictions devotedly dedicated to the established presence of Prohibition. None of the three seemed ever willing to compromise. To them, no dilemma existed.

Senator Smith Wildman Brookhart maintained a stance as a political outsider within the Senate system, one of the Republican insurgents known by their self-proclaimed title as "sons of the wild jackass." This agrarian group of Midwestern and Western senators opposed vested interests or monopolies but supported cooperative marketing and Prohibition. Brookhart began his national political

career with a Republican primary defeat in 1920 but won election to Senator William Kenyon's term (due to a resignation) in 1922 and a full Senate term in 1924. However, the Republican caucus removed him the following year when the Senate overturned his victory and dismissed him from office based on "voter intent" versus state law. He came back that very year by winning the other Senate seat in November 1926. Brookhart's political path always remained rather hard to follow.

Still, Brookhart was interesting. He could be rude, at times. He remained reckless and relentless. He seemed ruthless. And he was carefully scrutinized. As H. D. Culver of Clear Lake articulated, "as a woman I would like to say, I believe the women of Iowa are watching Mr. Brookhart very closely. Some of the things for which he stands we are thoroughly in sympathy with."¹⁴ But Culver and other Republicans drew the line when Brookhart began attacking Iowa-born President Herbert Hoover. Though admiring Brookhart's courage at times, Iowa's Republican voters still valued loyalty and consistency.

Along with Robert Marion LaFollette of Wisconsin, *Time* magazine declared Senator Brookhart within a group of Republicans titled "the New-line Insurgents." The magazine's writer then described Brookhart's complex character: "chunky, unbrushed, of Iowa, who loudly supported Herbert Hoover in 1928 only to denounce him just as loudly in 1929. Originator of many a tricky farm relief proposal, he affects unpolished manners, shuns a dress suit, shoots a marksman's rifle, suffers a nervous twitching of the face. Recently he has abandoned the pretence of an appalling ignorance." The *Des Moines Register* delivered only a slightly more flattering portrayal: "whatever anybody may think of the senator's program either as to liquor or as to any other government policy he has shown himself altogether too effective in debate both in the senate and on the stump to be laughed out of court. He does not wave his arms, he does not raise his voice, he always smiles. He has some basic facts that are never challenged and he sticks closely enough to them to make it burdensome for the man who opposes him."¹⁵

Senator Brookhart had been a life-long dry. Prohibition became his first issue and remained his most consistent, beginning on the Chautauqua circuit. In the fall of 1929 he argued against what he called a Wall Street Booze Party and the New York Century Club's Fish House rum punch. He once waved a folded piece of embossed invitation paper to his fellow Senators (in an earlier version of Senator McCarthy's supposed page of registered Communists) as containing a long list of wet "Wall Streeters."¹⁶

In January 1930, Brookhart began a countrywide Prohibition tour to stop any possible repeal attempts of the Eighteenth Amendment. He believed he represented part of Iowa's "new assault for the dry side," although one newspaper decried the tour as "simple booze talk." Brookhart debated New York Senator Copeland in Sioux City in January, clashed with Congressman Fiorella La Guardia in Cleveland the next month, and argued against lawyer Clarence Darrow in New York City in March.¹⁷

At the Cleveland Advertising Club, Brookhart faced a spirited but friendly debate with Congressman LaGuardia even though the crowd shouted "no" and "never" when he took the floor. Brookhart began, however, with no hesitation. "Prohibition can be enforced. I have enforced it," he thundered. "As prosecuting attorney of Washington County, Iowa, in the old local option days, I drove the bootleggers out of the county. As a National Guard officer, I drove liquor out of our camp. America is dry; there are a few wet cities, but a few wet cities cannot overthrow America." Brookhart's argument for Prohibition placed enforcement in the Department of Justice rather than the Treasury and added a Congressional appropriation of just two dollars per U.S. citizen or two hundred and forty million dollars annually. Determination and a little extra money seemed simply the key, Brookhart believed, to unlocking Prohibition's possibilities. Toward the end of the speech he cried, "I've enforced dry law." Later, in another Brookhart speech that month in Wisconsin, a reporter concluded, "But the rarin' tearin' evangelist of enforcement from 'Ioway' told the nation nothing it did not already know."¹⁸

During the next month's New York debate against famed lawyer Clarence Darrow, Brookhart encountered at the Mecca Temple an even more hostile crowd of two thousand spectators with hundreds of rude and noisy hecklers. The wet chairman "rose in rage to demand quiet." One reporter noted that, "the din became so loud, and Brookhart waited so patiently and calmly for order, that Heywood Broun, newspaper columnist known as an opponent of almost everything Brookhart stands for, lost his temper, pounded on his table, and demanded angrily that the audience give the Iowa senator a fair hearing." Brookhart said that he believed Darrow only preached anarchy because it was "the duty of every man to obey the will of the majority." After the close of the debate, Darrow succinctly described his Iowa opponent as "sincere but uncivilized."¹⁹

Brookhart's stance on Prohibition was not moral but rather a personal economic position designed for "hearty and productive living—national efficiency." However, his continued outsider role did not play well within the Senate's traditional walls nor the increasingly radical county lines of Depression-era Iowa. At times he was simply embarrassing. But Brookhart remained consistent, determined, and still reflective of many Iowans—many of those not counted within formal organizations. Ultimately his lack of style and his absolute unwillingness to compromise as a politician, as well as his turning against fellow Republicans, signalled the beginning of the end for his voluminous but not altogether productive Senate career. His voice sounded increasingly distant, and many Republicans and even some Democrats worried about his zealous political commitment and constant myopic focus on Prohibition.²⁰

Fellow Senators and press reporters continued ridiculing Brookhart's personality and passion. Wet Senator David Ignatious Walsh of Massachusetts actually composed this limerick during the midst of Brookhart's countrywide tour and read the following to a Senate session:

I come from way out in Iowa,
The home of corn and many an art,

Where bootleggin's so bad
It makes all of us sad
That everyone knows it but BROOKHART

One reporter joked that the Iowa senator's favorite song must certainly be "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes." Brookhart, steadfastly proud of his ruthless and perhaps reckless temperance reputation, stated simply, "to me liquor is a poison and drinking is a crime."²¹

In the spring of 1932, Senator Brookhart lost the Republican primary bid for Senator in a five-way race to a popular political rookie, Henry Field of Shenandoah. Brookhart dropped out of public view for a few months, only to re-emerge in the fall as an independent third-party candidate. He felt Republican party regulars had betrayed him but the people of Iowa would not. Again, he lost. Brookhart barely polled twenty thousand votes compared to over half a million cast, and both he and Field lost to their Democrat opponent Louis Murphy. The *Madisonian* described election day results: "voters of Iowa awakened Wednesday morning to find themselves buried under an avalanche of snow and another of Democratic votes. Both were record breakers, the November snow storm the worst within the memory of the eldest inhabitant and the democratic landslide, the most sweeping in the history of political parties."²²

John Brown Hammond, another Iowa voice for Prohibition, had only turned four years old when his second cousin and infamous namesake John Brown was hanged on December 2, 1859, for the failed raid on the Harpers' Ferry federal arsenal. In 1899 John Brown Hammond, also prone to some violence, took a chair and wrecked "a blind tiger" at Bunker Hill, Iowa. Later, straight from a Center-ville coal mine with a soot-blackened face, Hammond once argued with several well-dressed and well-groomed brewing industry representatives sitting in a new hotel lobby against their petition for the reopening of local saloons. After a move to Des Moines, Hammond turned to more professional associations in 1915 such as the

WCTU, the World Purity Federation, and the Bone Dry League. He also championed campaigns against prize fighting, marathon dancing, and apartment house living as well as any type of alcoholic beverage, including near-beer. Hammond has been credited with drafting nearly ninety-five percent of Iowa's statutes applying to liquor and moral behavior.

By the 1920s, Brown's list of accomplishments for temperance was quite extensive. He headed the state liquor law enforcement during the Great War, reduced the number of Des Moines druggists who held liquor permits from 410 to twelve, and seized half a million dollars worth of alcohol at a wholesale drug firm while deputy sheriff in 1922. When chief of the Des Moines Police Force, Brown also had law enforcement raid Raccoon River railroad jungles where "bums" strained "canned heat" through handkerchiefs, and he also abolished several red light districts. He later ordered police officers to close up with sledgehammers the near-beer "temp bars," discharged his entire police force after rumors that the liquor squad was selling confiscated product, and later demanded the repeal of the Volstead Act to be substituted with even stronger measures. After an extended fifty-year fight, Hammond's supporters still called him, upon his death, "an uncompromising foe of liquor."²³

According to the *Des Moines Register* in 1931, a third party could have been feasible because a rather large number of voters voiced increased dissatisfaction with both the Democrats and the Republicans, finding themselves dry on Prohibition yet concerned with growing corporate monopolies.²⁴ However, John Hammond polled only 1,415 votes on the Prohibition party ticket in Iowa's 1932 campaign for governor. Still, Hammond never grew discouraged. During all his policing, organizing, drafting, and campaigning, he also continued writing for almost thirty years a large manuscript titled "The Rise and Fall of Prohibition," stopping only when cataracts compromised his vision. After a successful operation in 1936, he returned to the book work as well as his extensive correspondence with "his companion fighters" against "demon rum." Four months before his death in 1938, he was still organizing from

his nursing home had a group tentatively titled “The Eighteenth Amendment Rescue Association.”²⁵

Shortly before his death, Hammond assured his son, “in years to come this country will be through with liquor forever—not right away, but eventually.” His friend and often supporter, Ida B. Wise, said of her colleague’s life, “when the history of the moral welfare and law enforcement in Iowa is written, my old friend and fellow worker, John Hammond, will come into his own.” Wise continued, “few Iowans know of all the worthwhile contributions he made to the life of the state he loved so well. Courage, bravery, and consecration were marked attributes of his character.”²⁶

Perhaps the early 1930s should not be remembered as such a cynical time, but one in which men and women actually dared to hope and believe that conditions would be better. Jeane Westin, author of *Making Do: How Women Survived the '30s*, has argued that this idea of togetherness, however, began to be lost with the possibility of Prohibition’s repeal. Westin found that repeal organizations “drowned the hopes for a dry America for which the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union had worked so long and earnestly.”²⁷ The WCTU had celebrated the Iowa Dry Law’s Fifteenth Birthday on January 16, 1930. They also held a victory day program in January 1931 for the eleventh anniversary of the Prohibition amendment with the theme, “Observance and Enforcement, Not Repeal.”²⁸

Ida B. Wise, a catchy name for a Prohibition leader, was born to Eliza and Robert Speakman in 1871, but her name changed creatively with her first husband Wise. She liked to tell the childhood story of her first impression of a local saloon in Hamburg when at age five she noticed its “evil odor” and well-worn stone steps. As a young mother, Wise realized her commitment to children’s issues by contributing to Iowa’s child welfare code, but Prohibition work remained her lifelong passion since that very first incident as she gazed at the local saloon with childhood disgust.

Wise began her first office as director of Christian citizenship within Iowa’s WCTU and eventually held almost every office, including State President for twenty years from 1913 to 1933. She

professed to liking flowers and children, she often dressed in lavender and lace, and she commanded respect from dries and wets alike with her diligent, determined, but always cordial leadership. Though not a farm woman herself, Wise recognized the rural argument as stated in one of her annual WCTU addresses. "The farmers, those men and women who are the backbone of our nation, financially and morally," Wise began, "have not been overlooked by the enemies of prohibition. Those billionaires who suffer no economic distresses tell the farmer that prohibition is the cause of distress and its repeal would heal his woes. But farmers are not the unthinking group the wets assume they are." Wise not only held to her opinion but gave numbers as well to reinforce her argument: in 1917 only one percent of the corn yield was used in the production of alcoholic liquor. And as she surmised, "the wets talk of the 1% and say nothing about the 99%. When money is not spent for drink it is used for better food."²⁹

Ida B. Wise strived to be an active and earnest leader. The membership of the Dry Union elected Wise State President for the eighteenth time in October 1930. She added to her causes that year by trying to stop cigarette billboard posters with a letter writing campaign to the tobacco companies which, she declared, "may turn the trick." She constantly traveled, often to Washington D.C. to lobby, stating once, "away I must go to the capital to call upon our senators to express my hope that Iowa will support the program of the chief executive for prohibition enforcement."³⁰

The National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, established in May 1929 and commonly known as the Wickersham Commission, issued its report in January 1931. President Hoover favorably commented on the committee's findings: "the Commission by a large majority does NOT favor the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment as a method of cure for the inherent abuse of the liquor traffic." The report : 1) opposed repeal of Eighteenth Amendment, 2) opposed restoration of legalized saloons, 3) opposed federal or state governments operating liquor businesses; and 4) opposed any modification of the National Prohibition Act to permit manufacture

and sale of wine and beer. How much influence this study would carry remained to be seen, but the new slogan that very month from the Anti-Saloon League proclaimed its potential, “not ‘Iowa Safe’ but America Safe.”³¹

The culmination of her dry activity was at the Republican National Convention in the summer of 1932. There she experienced extreme disappointment when the Party failed to support Prohibition in its platform. Still suffering from a broken wrist and head wound, injuries from a taxicab accident shortly before the convention, Wise seemed genuinely shocked at many Republicans’ inaction during the Prohibition strategy meeting. She commented simply, “oh, it was disgraceful, that meeting!”³²

Her disappointment only escalated when balcony crowds actually booed the son of former President Garfield and when roaming young men displayed enough nerve to carry mugs of beer into the convention hall. Officials apparently did nothing about the rudeness or illegal activity. President Hoover had attempted a middle course at the convention—proposing states could decide on liquor sales while retaining federal powers to protect those dry states. Wets appeared unconvinced, according to historian David E. Kyvig, and many dries became even angrier and more frustrated with strong feelings of betrayal.³³

To a reporter, Wise spoke of her disillusionment with a voice breaking from “fatigue and honest sorrow”: “I am heartbroken tonight over it all. I love my country. I have always had a real obsession for my country. That’s why I have worked so hard for prohibition in order to make it a better country. The Republican party has taken a backward step. The party has not done its duty in enforcement of law. That is why we are in this place today.” The *Des Moines Register*, in an interesting too-early draft of her obituary, commented, “and though Mrs. Smith has not the optimistic outlook that inspired her in 1930, she has still the courage, the steadfastness and the strength necessary to take up the fight anew for prohibition—to retain it for her country.”³⁴

Despite her Republican Convention disappointments, Wise would recover much of her former spirit and energy by the WCTU annual meeting in October 1932. "It is in such times that moral disaster so often occurs," Wise addressed her fellow White Ribboners. "Let Iowa, let all our nation think clearly now of the grave dangers we face and vote, not impetuously, but prayerfully and soberly. Pray earnestly for guidance. Do not refrain from voting. Evaluate all the information you can secure and perform a citizen's duty on election day; a stay-at-home vote is one-half a vote for the thing you do not want."³⁵ However, Franklin D. Roosevelt would win Iowa's traditionally Republican stronghold, and although his leadership welcomed change and new ideas, his party affiliation sought, successfully, the end of Prohibition.

Once heralded as "the Gibraltar of Prohibition," Iowa did not solidly stand when put to the repeal test of the Twenty-first Amendment. Sixty percent of the voters from the 1932 election cast ballots for a grand total of 646,068 votes with a tally of 389,701 votes for repeal and 256,367 against repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. What had seemed almost unthinkable in 1929 had easily passed the public vote in 1933. Liquor-by-the-drink legislation, however, would not pass in Iowa until 1963—over thirty years later. Newspaper editor Deemer Lee remembered the irony in his own northern Iowa county, Emmet, of that particular vote on repeal. "Although Emmet County residents always seem to have about the same kind of thirst as other people," he wrote, "they voted dry when the rest of the country opted to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment. Emmet dries polled a majority of 424 votes, even as the bootleggers continued to do business."³⁶ On the day of that repeal vote, a literal drought ended in Iowa when the clouds turned wet with the first rain in almost a month.

In her fall annual address of 1933, Wise expressed her disgust with the Democrats' victory—the only time Democrats had won the governorship had been during a previous Prohibition debate in the late 1800s. She informed her audience, "the Legislature of 1933 returned the saloon to Iowa by way of the Beer Law as 'the natural

fruit of party idolatry.’ One major party in 1894, the other major party in 1933.” She asked her fellow WCTU members to consider the numbers: only 25.3 percent of Iowa’s qualified voters had cast their ballots and only thirty percent of the entire nation even voted on the repeal issue. What about all those silenced voters? What had happened to the full voice of democracy regarding Prohibition?

And so Wise ended her last president’s speech in 1933 for the Iowa WCTU with two points, one about history and the other about continued courage. She rather self-consciously noted the moment: “this document is written and included in the records of the WCTU of Iowa to preserve history. Future generations will some day exclaim at the shortsightedness of this generation. The WCTU will wish to have its record clear.” In her concluding passage titled “Straight On,” Wise compared herself to the petrified soldier on guard in the ruins of Pompeii—this classic and stoic symbol of constancy and courage. This is what she and other Prohibitionists should strive to emulate. “So we fight!”

However the battle is ended,
 Tho the enemy seems to have won
 Tho his ranks be strong, if in the wrong,
 The battle is not yet done.
 For sure as the morning follows
 The darkest hour of night
 No question is ever settled
 Until it is settled right.³⁷

The textbook version of the Twenty-first Amendment has ignored the varied organizing, politicking, debating, and speechmaking as well as the energy, commitment, and passion expressed in that continued fight for the Prohibition movement, whether through organized groups such as the WCTU and the Anti-Saloon League or individual households. Iowa’s leaders energetically attempted to reassure their state’s supporters of the rightness of Prohibition during the early years of the 1930s. This poem described that continued

fight. And the fight for Prohibition even after 1933 would continue—perhaps not always in the open but rather in the hearts and minds of those so morally motivated. The battle had not ended—not for Brookhart, Brown, or Wise or their thousands of followers. Wise, especially in her new role as WCTU’s national president, continued to vehemently argue for Prohibition into the next decade. The repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment dramatically marked these Prohibition leaders’ “darkest hour” because their political and moral question had certainly not been “settled right.”

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NOTES

1. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, “Stanton W.C.T.U.,” 10 November 1929, 1. Stanton is a small Swedish Lutheran town of almost 500 residents.
2. Nodaway County Museum (Clarinda, Iowa), Page County Women, Temperance folder, *The Iowa Champion*.
3. K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 276.
4. Charles Merz, *The Dry Decade* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970, 29; Peter H. Odegard, *Pressure Politics: The Story of the Anti-Saloon League* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 78.
5. Sean Dennis Cashman, *Prohibition: The Lie of the Land* (New York: The Free Press, 1981), 19; Jack S. Blocker, Jr., *American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), 161. Also see Jack Blocker, *Retreat from Reform: The Prohibition Movement in the United States, 1890-1913* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976).
6. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Clipping File 2: Prohibition Folder 1: *Palimpsest*, Volume 14, 1933, and *Iowa’s White Elephant*.
7. Merz, *The Dry Decade*, 284 and 304.
8. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Clippings File 2. Prohibition Folder 4.
9. *Des Moines Tribune*, “Swell Head from Drinking Home Brew,” 24 May 1930, 1; *Des Moines Tribune*, “Bitter Bootleggers War Ready to Flare in City,” 26 December 1931, 1; Lee Deemer, *Esther’s Town* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1980), 180; *Des Moines Register*, “Woodcock Learns About Iowa’s Own

Spiked Beer,” 14 November 1931, 1; and *Des Moines Tribune*, “Alcohol Cooker Explodes; One Hurt,” 18 August 1930, 1.

10. *Des Moines Tribune*, “Dry Leaders Say Poll is Misleading—Literary Digest Ballots Untrue to Iowa, They Charge,” 14 March 1930, 1. Iowa’s wettest cities at this time remained Sioux City, Des Moines, and Waterloo.

11. *Des Moines Register*, “Dry Poll of Iowa by Literary Digest,” 14 March 1930, 1; *Des Moines Tribune*, “Iowa’s Vote in Prohibition Poll is Now 17,543 for Change and 12,960 for Enforcement,” 20 March 1930, 14; *Des Moines Register*, “Waterloo is Wet, Two Other Iowa Cities are Wetter,” 13 April 1930, 5; 1; and *Burlington Hawk-Eye Gazette*, “Wet and Dry,” 26 March 1930. More women than men answered the dry poll.

12. *Sioux City Tribune*, “Prohibition Is Healthy Child on 10th Birthday, Says Local Dry Czar,” 16 January 1930, 1; *Des Moines Register*, “Women Vote Dry; Men Vote Wet,” 21 February 1932, 1; *Ladies’ Home Journal*, “Beginning 1930,” January 1930, 22; *Ladies’ Home Journal*, “Where Prohibition is a Success,” February 1930, 8; and *Des Moines Tribune*, “League of Nation’s Child Welfare League Report,” 16 April 1930, 1.

13. *Burlington Hawk-Eye Gazette*, “Progress is Keynote for 1930,” 4 January 1930, 1; *Des Moines Tribune*, “Founder of Dry League Arrives Here for Speech,” 26 May 1930, 1; *Des Moines Register*, “Drys Boom Hoover for ’32,” 27 May 1930, 1; and *Des Moines Register*, “Billy Sunday Lashes Liquor Traffic as 8,500 Jam Colliseum,” 1 April 1932, 1.

14. Ronald Briley F., “Smith W. Brookhart and the Limitations of Senatorial Dissent,” *Annals of Iowa* Volume 48, Numbers 1 and 2 (Summer/Fall 1985): 56-79; and *Des Moines Register*, “Letters to the Editor,” 19 January 1930, 5. Many Iowans had selected the Republican straight ticket at the top of the ballot but had also selected the Democratic candidate opposing Brookhart. Under Iowa law, a straight ticket counted as all Republican votes, but the Supreme Court ruled in favor of a mixed ballot, hence voter intent. Therefore Brookhart did not have the needed votes for election to the Senate after the Court’s challenge.

15. *Time*, “Political Notes, Lucas, Norris, et al,” 5 January 1931, 12-14; and *Des Moines Register*, “Senator Brookhart’s Past,” 18 April 1930, 4.

16. *Daily Iowegian*, “Brookhart Says to ‘Fire’ Mellon,” 5 November 1929, 1.

17. George William McDaniels, *Smith Wildman Brookhart: Iowa’s Renegade Republican* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1995), 67 and 82.

18. *Des Moines Register*, 8 February 1930, 1; and *Mason City Globe Gazette*, “House Hearing on Liquor to Be Limited,” 21 February 1930, 1.

19. *Des Moines Tribune*, “Senator Smith W. Brookhart Rode Full Tilt Against The Wet Hordes of Manhattan Weds. Night,” 20 March 1930, 1A; *Des Moines Register*, “New Yorkers Hiss Brookhart,” 20 March 1930, 1; and McDaniels, *Smith Wildman Brookhart*, 251.

20. McDaniels, *Smith Wildman Brookhart*, 250.

21. *Time*, "Brookhart v. The Century," 10 February 1930, 13-14; *Davenport Democrat*, "Their Favorite Songs," 18 March 1930, 6; and *Des Moines Tribune*, "Brookhart Proud of His Unique Reputation," 27 January 1930, 1.

22. *Winterset Madisionian*, "Roosevelt and Garner Win With Landslide—Protest Vote Extends to Every State in Union," 9 November 1932, 1.

23. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines. Clipping File 2, Prohibition Folder 2. A "blind tiger" is old slang for a speakeasy (where alcoholic drinks were sold illegally in the United States during Prohibition).

24. *Des Moines Register*, "Dissension over Power and Wet Issues is Gem for Third Party," 1 February 1931, 1.

25. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines. Clipping File 2, Prohibition Folder 2.

26. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Clipping File 2. Prohibition Folder 1, *Des Moines Register*, dated 1938.

27. Jeane Westin, *Making Do: How Women Survived the '30s* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1972), 242.

28. *Fort Dodge Messenger*, "President Assails Pessimists," 3 October 1930, 1; *Daily Iowegian*, "W.C.T.U. of Iowa Ends State Meeting," 5 October 1929, 1; *Des Moines Register*, "Washington, Its Personalities as seen by Iowa's W.C.T.U. Head," 12 January 1930, 2; *Des Moines Register*, "Iowa Women's Dry Forces Claim Victory over U.S.," 6 November 1930, 1; *Des Moines Tribune*, "W.C.T.U. Celebrates Dry Law's Fifteenth Birthday Here but to Rufus Smith, Ex-Barman, It's Time for Mourning," 16 January 1930, 1.

29. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa WCTU Annual Proceedings, 18, 19, and 20.

30. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines. Clipping File 2. Biographies—Ida B. Smith-Wise Folder. Ida B. Wise married a second time, adding her second husband's name Smith. Although the file is alphabetized under Smith, she sometimes utilized a hyphenated version of Wise-Smith.

31. Thomas M. Coffey, *The Long Thirst: Prohibition in America: 1920-1933* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975); and *Des Moines Tribune*, "Alice J. Boyer," 21 January 1931, 11. The Wickard Commission included Iowa's former senator, William S. Kenyon.

32. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines. Clipping File 2, Biographies--Ida B. Smith-Wise Folder, Obituary draft from the *Des Moines Register*.

33. David E. Kyvig, *Repealing National Prohibition* (Second Edition. Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2000), 165.

34. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines. Clipping File 2, Biographies--Ida B. Wise-Smith Folder, Obituary draft from the *Des Moines Register*.

35. State Historical Society of Iowa, 1932 WCTU Annual Proceedings, 21.

36. State Historical Society of Iowa, Clipping File 2, Prohibition Folder 1, *Des Moines Tribune*, 8 April 1958, no page number; *Plain Talk*, 22 June 1933; Lee,

Esther's Town, 181; and *Des Moines Register*, 21 June 1933, 1. The state legislature followed with a law that permitted the sale of beer (as non-intoxicating) under private licenses by the drink or package but deemed intoxicating drinks such as wine and spirits only to be sold in state stores, and the Webb-Kenyon Act still outlawed the importation of alcohol into the state.

37. State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Iowa, Sixtieth Annual Convention held at Marion, Iowa. October 3-6, 1933, Annual Report of the W.C.T.U. of Iowa, "State President's Annual Address 1933," 13, 16, and 19.