

No single aspect of Wisconsin's history, regulatory system or ethnic composition is responsible for our alcohol environment. Many statements about Wisconsin carry the implicit assumption that our destructive alcohol environment (sometimes called the alcohol culture) has always constant and like Wisconsin's geographic features - unchanging and unchangeable. This timeline offers an alternative picture of Wisconsin's past.

Today's alcohol environment is very different from early Wisconsin, where an active temperance movement existed before commercial brewing. Few people realize that many Wisconsin communities voted themselves "dry" before Prohibition. While some of those early policies are impractical and even quaint by modern standards, they indicate our current alcohol environment evolved over time. The policies and practices that unintentionally result in alcohol misuse are not historical treasures but simply ideas that may have outlived their usefulness and their unintended consequences.

This timeline includes some historical events unrelated to Wisconsin to place state history within the larger context of American history. This document does not include significant events relating to alcohol production in Wisconsin. Beer production, as well as malt and yeast making, were important aspects of Wisconsin's, especially Milwaukee's, history. But manufacturing, shipbuilding and the timber industry have all contributed to Wisconsin's history. Adding only the brewing industry to this time-line would distort brewing's importance to Wisconsin and diminishes the many contributions made by other industries.

Alcohol Policy in Wisconsin History

1776: Benjamin Rush, a physician and signer of the Declaration of Independence, is considered America's first temperance leader. He later wrote a text on alcohol that became the basis for Temperance/Prohibitionist Movement.ⁱ

1832: The first Wisconsin temperance society was formed in Green Bay.ⁱⁱ

1833: Andrew Jackson becomes President of the United States.

1838: Solomon Ashley Dwinnell (1812-1879) a Congregationalist minister comes to Wisconsin living in Walworth and Sauk counties. His sermons were known for their "radical" pronouncements favoring temperance and condemning slavery, profanity, and Sabbath-breaking.ⁱⁱⁱ

1839: Samuel & Jeremiah Phoenix persuade the territorial legislature to create a new dry county named Walworth after a prominent eastern temperance leader. As the population grew in the 1850s, enforcement became impossible and the experiment was abandoned.^{iv}

1840: President William Henry Harrison dies in office and is succeeded by Vice President John Tyler.

1840: Temperance society membership grew primarily from individuals migrating to Wisconsin communities including Milwaukee, Kenosha, Racine, Waukesha, and Rock counties from New England.^v

1840: The Owens Brewery in Milwaukee is founded. It is generally considered the first commercial brewery in Wisconsin; although it is possible others existed earlier.^{vi}

1840: The Washingtonian Movement based on personal abstinence and the “reclamation of drunkards” established temperance as a preventive step.^{vii} Some modern comparisons are made to AA.^{viii}

1845: Sons of Temperance chapters in Wisconsin are organized. Members of the Milwaukee Chapter produced the first reform newspaper in the state, the Wisconsin Temperance Journal.^{ix}

1846: The people of Wisconsin vote in favor of statehood. Congress passed the enabling act, and the first Constitutional Convention opened in Madison, October 15.

1846. Wisconsin was admitted to the Union in May 1848.

1847: Local option allows each voting district to vote annually in municipal elections whether or not to issue liquor licenses.^x

1848: The Grand (Milwaukee) Division of the Sons of Temperance is founded.^{xi}

1848: During the first legislative session of the new State Senate a bill was introduced by Simeon Mills to repeal the territorial licensing system and replace it with a system so “that all persons who shall sell ardent spirits shall be liable in suits at law for all damages which may give rise from such sales.” Passed the Senate 11-8, but died for lack of Assembly action.^{xii}

1849: The Mills proposal passes both houses and is signed by the Governor. Chapter 29, Revised Statutes of 1849 “An Act relating to the sale of spirituous liquors.” The law required a \$1,000 bond from each alcohol retailer for anticipated damages resulting from his sale of liquor. Town boards could recover paupers’ damages from the posted fund.^{xiii}

1849: On July 7th, Sons of Temperance toasted the state legislature for this action.^{xiv}

1850: California is admitted to the United States.

1850: “Great trial of liquor sellers terminated today, having been in continuance more than two days. Suit brought by a wife to recover damages of a liquor seller on his bond of indemnity, for selling and rendering incapable her any support. Verdict for the plaintiff of \$100, being the largest sum within the jurisdiction of the justices’ court. This is the first case under the new law of this kind which has been tried in the state.”^{xv}

1851: Wisconsin’s German population opposed the Mills law, arguing that it undermined individual responsibility and the penalty on tavern owners was too severe. In 1851, the legislature replaced it with a lesser penalty and a \$100 license fee.^{xvi}

1851: Maine adopted the first statewide prohibition law.^{xvii}

1853: The first attempt at enacting prohibition in Wisconsin occurred. The question of whether the legislature should enact a law prohibiting the sale of liquor in the state placed on the ballot. It passed by a vote of 27,579 to 24,109.^{xviii}

1854: A group of women in Baraboo angered by the story of a “drunkard” who threatened to murder his wife destroy all the grog shops, all were unlicensed. Six prominent women were arrested and jailed.^{xix}

1860's: To fund the Civil War, federal tax per gallon of alcohol rose to \$2.00 per gallon.^{xx}

1855: Good Templars Lodge (temperance organization) established in Sheboygan.^{xxi}

1855: Wisconsin bans the sale of intoxicating liquors as a beverage, but does not ban their manufacture. The bill passed the Assembly 43 to 25 and the Senate 14 to 8. Governor Barstow vetoes it.^{xxii}

1863: First alcohol industry lobby group, U.S. Brewers Association formed and launched a campaign succeeding to reduce the beer tax from \$1.00 to \$0.60 ^{xxiii}

1864: First cheese factory in Wisconsin established in Ladoga, Fond du Lac County.^{xxiv}

1872: The legislature passed the Graham Law, named after Alexander Graham of Rock County who proposed the bill, making tavern owners responsible for selling liquor to known “drunks”. Milwaukee's city attorney challenged the law but the Wisconsin Supreme Court held that the legislature had the right to regulate alcohol sales.^{xxv}

1874: The Graham Law was replaced with a compromise bill encouraging tavern owners and temperance advocates to prevent drunkenness.^{xxvi}

1878: John Bascom attempts to close Madison saloons to undergraduates. He eventually resigns as University President over temperance/prohibition related issues.^{xxvii}

1880: Thomas Edison receives a patent for the principles that lead to the incandescent lamp.

1887: Wisconsin's first worker safety law adopted. Wisconsin Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) blames “industrial conditions” for children working factories.

1898: Wisconsin Branch of the Anti-Saloon League founded.^{xxviii}

1905: Sweden makes the Gothenburg System compulsory creating a state monopoly; stores had “do not sell” lists of prohibited customers.^{xxix}

1907: The local option proposal fails in Wisconsin Legislature; “residence districts” allowing small areas to vote the area dry are created.^{xxx}

1907: Legislature bans liquor licenses within one mile of the University of Wisconsin campus.^{xxxi}

1907: Wisconsin Legislature increases penalties on alcohol in dry areas.^{xxxii}

1908: Women compete in the modern Olympic Games for the first time.

1908: Methodist periodical reported 789 “dry” towns and villages in Wisconsin.^{xxxiii}

1909: Legislature banned youth under age 21 from entering saloons, increased penalties for sales to intoxicated patrons and banned sales to those under 18.^{xxxiv}

1918: Congress creates dry zones around military installations.^{xxxv}

1918: Bishop Mesmer banned prohibitionist sermons or speeches in Roman Catholic schools, churches or halls.^{xxxvi}

1918: Ratification of the 18th amendment began in 1918. In Wisconsin, a significant portion of the state had already enacted local ordinances to restrict the sale of alcohol. A handbill in the collection of the Wisconsin Historical society announces that 75% of the territory and 44% of the population had already voted itself dry.^{xxxvii}

1919: Wisconsin ratifies on January 17th (39th state to ratify, 36th needed for adoption). Prohibition takes effect one year later.

1919: June 10, Wisconsin ratifies 19th amendment for Women’s’ Suffrage.

1919: In June, Wisconsin adopts Mulberger Law legalizing 2.5% beer.^{xxxviii}

1919: Norway, Finland and Denmark adopt or expand limited prohibition.

In 1922, Swedes voted against prohibition in a referendum by 51% to 49%. Sweden later rationed alcohol through the Bratt system; eligible adults were given a booklet called a *motbok*, where each alcohol purchase was noted. Public drunkenness or other alcohol related problems could result in a reduction in the ration by local boards which often included Lutheran clergy. The system was repealed in 1955.^{xxxix}

1926: Wisconsin voters approved a referendum amending the Volsted Act to allow the manufacture and sale of beer with 2.75 percent alcohol. “In accordance with a resolution passed in both branches of the Wisconsin Legislature, last week, a referendum on 2.75% beer will be submitted to the people of the state in November, 1926.”^{xl}

1929: Voters repealed Wisconsin's prohibition enforcement law, the Severson Act.^{xli}

1933: J.D. Rockefeller, Jr. retains Raymond Fosdick and Albert Scott to study alcohol control systems elsewhere and make recommendations. The team examined systems in Canada, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Poland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. The final report notes that the goal of any proposed system should be promoting temperance and the development of self-control.^{xlii}

1933: Wisconsin Senator John J. Blaine proposed a constitutional amendment for the repeal of prohibition. The U.S. Senate modified Blaine's resolution to satisfy anti-prohibitionists and passed the measure without delay. .

1933: On April 25, Wisconsin became the second state to ratify the 21st amendment to the Constitution, repealing the 18th amendment.

1933: December 5, Prohibition ends when Utah became the 36th state to ratify 21st amendment.

1933: After prohibition, the number of alcohol manufacturers within the US had dropped from 1345 brewers in 1915 to 31 remaining in the first three months after repeal.^{xliii}

1935: Beaulieu Vineyards is the largest vintner remaining, a result of its production of sacramental wine.^{xliiv} Distilled spirits production and trade is largely controlled by three men, one of them, Sam Bronfman, coins the “Drink Moderately” phrase.^{xliv}

1935: When prohibition ends, just five companies controlled 14% of beer production; by 1958 31% of beer production and, by 2009 the 3 remaining companies control 80%.^{xlvi}

1975: Alcohol Control Policies in Public Health Perspective is the first publication to frame alcohol consumption by the entire population as a public health issue, arguing that societal level of alcohol consumption impacts alcohol related problems.

1981: Wisconsin’s alcohol-related statutes are consolidated resulting in the creation of Chapter 125.^{xlvii}

1982: President Reagan signed a bill linking federal highway funds to .10 BAC, administrative revocation, mandatory jail or community service for repeat offenders and, better enforcement.

1986: September 1, Wisconsin increases the minimum legal drinking age to 21.

1994: Alcohol Policy and the Public Good is published.

2003: Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity, first edition, is published.

2004: Reducing Underage Drinking: A Collective Responsibility, the first national strategy to reduce underage drinking is released by the National Academies of Science Institute of Medicine.

2005: First meeting of Interagency Coordinating Committee on the Prevention of Underage Drinking (ICCPUD) is held and an annual report to Congress summarizing all federal agency activities related to preventing underage alcohol use is initiated.

2007: *The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking* is released.

2009: Two Rivers Wisconsin becomes the first Wisconsin municipality to adopt a social host ordinance.

2010: The Wisconsin State Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse approves and releases *Changing Wisconsin’s Alcohol Environment to Promote Safe and Healthy Lives*, known as the ACE report.

2010: World Health Organization releases the first global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol.

- ⁱ Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, (Scribner, 2010).
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- ⁱⁱⁱ Wisconsin Historical Society, *Terms Dwinell*, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term_id=1198&term_type_id=1&term_type_text=People>, accessed May 25, 2013.
- ^{iv} Wisconsin Historical Society, *Temperance Movement in Wisconsin*, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term_id=13070&term_type_id=3&term_type_text=things&letter=T>, accessed May 21, 2013.
- ^v Joseph Schafer, "Prohibition in Early Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. #8, #3, March 1925. <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term_id=13070&term_type_id=3&term_type_text=things&letter=T>, accessed May 21, 2013.
- ^{vi} Wisconsin Historical Society, *Turning Points, Brewing and Prohibition*, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-051/?action=more_essay>, accessed May 22, 2013.
- ^{vii} Milton Maxwell, "The Washingtonian Movement," *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, Vol. #2, pp. 410-452, 1950.
- ^{viii} Milton Maxwell, "The Washingtonian Movement", *Quarterly Journal on Studies on Alcohol*, Vol. #2, p. 410, 1950.
- ^{ix} Joseph Schafer, "Prohibition in Early Wisconsin," *Magazine of Wisconsin History*, Vol. #8, #3, March 1925.
- ^x Smith, Alice E., *The History of Wisconsin: Volume 1: From Exploration to Statehood*, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1985, p. 699.
- ^{xi} Joseph Schafer, "Prohibition in Early Wisconsin," *Magazine of Wisconsin History*, Vol. #8, #3, March 1925.
- ^{xii} Joseph Schafer, "Prohibition in Early Wisconsin," *Magazine of Wisconsin History*, Vol. #8, #3, March 1925.
- ^{xiii} Joseph Schafer, "Prohibition in Early Wisconsin," *Magazine of Wisconsin History*, Vol. #8, #3, March 1925.
- ^{xiv} Joseph Schafer, "Prohibition in Early Wisconsin," *Magazine of Wisconsin History*, Vol. #8, #3, March 1925.
- ^{xv} *Diary of Colonel M. Frank*, Kenosha County January 16, 1850.
- ^{xvi} Wisconsin Historical Society, *Turning Points, Brewing and Prohibition*, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/tp-051/?action=more_essay>, accessed April 30, 2013.
- ^{xvii} Kelly Brouhard, "When Maine Went Dry," *The Portland Press Herald*, October 2, 2011.
- ^{xviii} Joseph Schafer, "Prohibition in Early Wisconsin," *Magazine of Wisconsin History*, Vol. #8, #3, March 1925.
- ^{xix} "A Bottle Smashing Crusader of Wisconsin," *Milwaukee Journal*, 1927.
- ^{xx} Jurkiewicz, C., Painter, M. *Social and Economic Control of Alcohol: The 21st Amendment in the 21st Century.*, Taylor and Francis Group, 2008, page 4
- ^{xxi} Herman Deutsch, "Yankee-Teuton Rivalry in Wisconsin Politics," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*. Vol. #14, #3, March 1931, page 267.
- ^{xxii} Joseph Schafer, "Prohibition in Early Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. #8, #3, March 1925.
- ^{xxiii} Jurkiewicz, C., Painter, M. *Social and Economic Control of Alcohol: The 21st Amendment in the 21st Century.*, Taylor and Francis Group, 2008, page 4.
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- ^{xxix} John D. Buenker, "The History of Wisconsin," Vol. 4, The Progressive Era, 1893-1914, p. 505
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- ^{xxxiv} John D. Buenker, "The History of Wisconsin," Vol. 4, The Progressive Era, 1893-1914, p. 128.
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- ^{xliii} Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, (Scribner, 2010), p. 358.
- ^{xliv} Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, (Scribner, 2010), p. 359.
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