

*Frank Jones, largest brewer of ale
 James Brewer went public
 March 16, 1889
 Raymond A. Brighton, Jones
 Hamilton, Not Randall,
 1976
 F.F. Misc. : Prohibition 58*

Bootlegging on the Seacoast
 by Bruce E. Ingmire

One of the most curious but understandable situations is the reluctance with which locals across the US maintain the secrecy of those persons responsible for running booze during the Prohibition era of the 1920's. Bootlegging got its name from a tradition that booze was secreted in boots and disguised under pant legs. The hip flask was a creation popularized by the roaring twenties flappers and their beaus.

For years before Prohibition took effect, towns had a local option as to whether alcohol was to be sold. The entire state of Maine was dry from 1850. Thus sailors were unable to imbibe near the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and they made Portsmouth the base for their liberty. Portsmouth had made much of its fortune in the end of the nineteenth century from brewing beer. It does not seem that the end of the Jones Brewery and Eldredge Brewery as employment or prestige for the town caused any local opposition to the social experiment that the eighteenth Amendment proposed.

Prohibition was the next logical step in the wisdom that believed that riding the nation of alcohol would bring the nation to a "very high moral plane and reduce evils that afflict society."¹ It did not take long for Americans to realize that Prohibition was a disastrous mistake.

Those persons who did run the booze served a purpose in keeping the average man supplied with a basic commodity. The amount

¹. F. W. Hartford, editor, Portsmouth Herald, January 20, 1919, Editorial.

*January 1880 > Democrats to run Jones who manufacture
 state item forbidden for sale in that state
 Courtesy of the Portsmouth Athenaeum
 Portsmouth, N.H.*

of smuggling was incredible. It unfortunately solidified a base for crime syndicates in this country that have lasted all century. It also is incredible that even in a small place like Portsmouth rumors that a bank president, police officers and other highly placed persons allowed the stuff into the city, the population still protects them and will not reveal their names. It is probable that had Prohibition not been passed that the crime syndicate might not have made such an inroad in this country but that is unproven and hindsight.

Coastal fishermen and others who masqueraded as coastal fishermen were logical rumrunners as the transport of the contraband came to be called. It came to be a game when the fishermen hung out at port all day and then left at night to make their purchases by night. The purveyors' boats were provisioned in Europe and Canada and then supercargos sold the alcohol for cash to Americans along a path in the ocean called Rum Alley which was three miles then twelve miles out. Americans risked arrest by the Coast Guard but profited handily when they brought the stuff on shore.

As early as the 1600's colonists smuggled under the eyes of colonial officials. Even Benning Wentworth himself smuggled alcoholic beverages into New Hampshire.² Wentworth's long term as Royal Governor has been attributed to his ability to look the other way as NH merchants smuggled. The merchants knew that every so often a ship's contraband had to be sacrificed so it appeared that the Royal Governor was performing his duties. As towns and states

². Sibley's Harvard Graduates.

were declared dry, runners developed techniques to thwart law enforcement. The rum runners in the Maine and New Hampshire coastline had had years of practice.

It appears that Portsmouth was dry before Prohibition went into effect. One source says that the first arrest was May 16, 1918 of Samuel Grossman of Penhallow Street. That is before nationwide Prohibition.³ Another case that was in the newspapers for months concerned a January 22, 1919 incident in which a truck owned by Rufus Wood's furniture concern was abandoned in Haymarket Square while the police were following the driver. The driver Carl Beetle was apprehended.⁴ Much of the problem was over who had jurisdiction in the case and county and state officials wrangled for weeks over the case, all of course at the taxpayers expense and to the dismay of the serious minded.

[Need to check books on Prohibition.]

One Thousand facts of Alcohol, Portsmouth Public Library.

There are few published facts about bootlegging during Prohibition. On the New Hampshire seacoast certain "road houses" catered to the booze runners not speakeasies which were named from the habit of speaking easy and asking for "Joe" to gain admittance. Locals knew that alcohol was available in these road houses. Two alleged such houses were the Odiorne Farm in Rye and Amazeen's Piscataqua Cafe in Newcastle. Much of the alcohol was brought in

³. Brighton, Fish, :

⁴. Brighton, Fish, II: 361-362.

by fishermen from Canada. The theory is that the liquor was exchanged from Canadian ships into the fishing boats and then the fishermen brought it into port. Often under the guise of placing freshly caught fish into trucks for shipment to the railroads, the booze was transported to warehouses.

One story about warehousing concerns the estate of John Templeman Coolidge who owned the former Cushing-Wentworth property on Little harbor Road. A caretaker contacted Coolidge during one winter to tell him it appeared rumrunners had commandeered his barn for intermediate transfer of alcohol. Coolidge told the factor to "Lay low or they might burn the place down."

The Amazeens were longtime New Castle residents. Like all seacoast fishermen, they found other means to augment a sometimes meager and variable income. In the twenties it is alleged they smuggled liquor. The Amazeens were owners of the Piscataqua Cafe, a twenties dance club and another Amazene, Mary Amazeen Baker was one of the Madams of Water Street. The road houses were infamous for serving alcohol during Prohibition.

Mary F. Amazeen had married Allen Baker. She had an ice cream shop off Water Street where she served many a local child during the day. Later each night, she and her female associates entertained sailors with more than ice cream. Mary Baker with diamonds in her teeth ran a house of "suspended integrity." It follows she would need a supply of forbidden libations. It appears she could count on her family for this commodity and they could count on her patronage.

But like all forbidden fruit, when liquor became illegal it

became more interesting to a variety of people. In many cases persons raised in homes where a daily amount of liquor was not an accepted habit, came during prohibition to try bathtub gin. Cocktails became a thing to consume. In the homes of recent immigrants, homemade wine became a staple not because of criminal intent but because culturally they were accustomed to a glass of wine with a meal. The reason Italians were drawn to bootlegging was due to their cultural habits than their desire for violence and action.

Another name associated with booze running was Ham. Ham's was located in the back of the Peirce building at the corner of High and Ladd Street and was the best known of local restaurants. It seems some members of the Ham family were involved in running alcohol. It is believed they came up Sagamore Creek with some of their take. Ham was in cahoots with an Italian immigrant named Priori. Priori invested in a stone crusher at Peverly Hill. He rented land from old John Hett and built a small house. Soon another Italian immigrant named Marconi who took up residence Priori built next door to his place. Priori became implicated in the booze operation, involved in a hit and run accident that killed a man named Parmenteer and eventually skipped the country. John Hett came back into possession of the land.

Joseph Fate an Italian immigrant and a barber has also been said to have participated in bootlegging in the era. Another person said to have participated at the Sagamore Creek area was Harry Brown, a Shapiro or Tapper relation. Sagamore Creek was the location Ladd's Potato Chip House and a location in Rye where beer

was consumed. Rye chose a local option and so Ladd's was moved by the Scammon family to the location of the Seacoast Mental Health Center.

Another potential "rumrunner" was Frank Dearborn. Dearborn's place was located on the left of Ocean Boulevard, past the Odiorne Place where there remains a stand of trees and a turn-off that is used more recently for parking lovers. Dearborn was a bachelor who lived at the site year round. He was paid by the summer residents to watch over their seasonal homes. One wonders about the coincidence of the former dearborn resident and the fact that the fort that occupied the site during WW II was called Fort Dearborn.

At one time the Dixie Three ran aground with booze in cans on board. Another name that needs investigation, Noel French, a Canadian who owned the Old Carey estate, what is Creek Farm today.

Of course there were supposed to be stills around. Home made alcohol was likely to have many poisons produced in the making which professional distillers know how to remove these natural poisons. The homemade variety was not always cleared of these substances and instances of poisoning and blindness resulted.

Portsmouth still had its share of cat houses. One was run by Cappy Stewart, another by Charles Marotta, and by ? Linsky. There was a Bald Eagle Club that was often in the news for selling liquor.

Mareuilendole with Gerald Lewis
as super cargo left booze at Hampton Ry
Beach, N H at 4 in July, 1929
Prohibition
Everett Sr Allen
The Black Ship
rum runners
who spent a lot of time
to spend around
Prohibition
Telle story of ships who
courtesy of the Portsmouth Athenaeum, Portsmouth, N.H.

Portsmouth Little Brown and Company 1965