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*Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Volume 4, No 1 (Spring 1975).

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University

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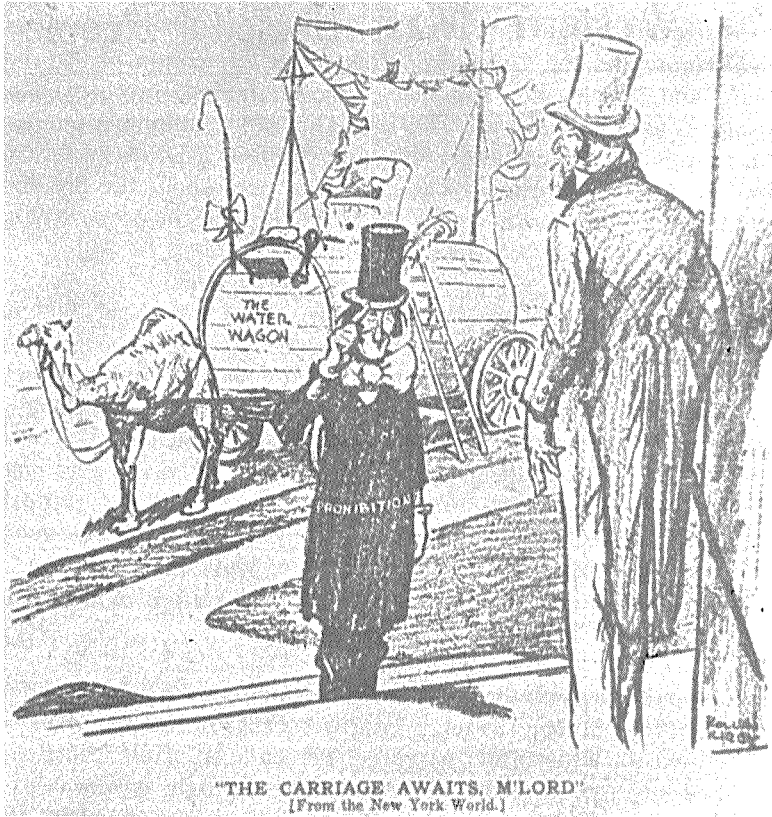
# Prohibition and its effect on Western Massachusetts, 1919-1920

Debra P. Sansoucy

The era of Prohibition was a controversial time in United States history involving distinct differences between individuals, interest groups, and more prominently, "wet" and "dry" states. The various temperance movements, including the popular Anti-Saloon movement, and those activities promoted by the "wets" on a nation-wide scale are relatively well-known through the abundance of literature available on the subject. Local occurrences and the attitudes of small cities such as Chicopee, however, are virtually unknown. It is of value, therefore, to investigate both the correlations and discrepancies between national and local reactions particularly during the years 1919 and 1920, as they represent a transitional period between "war time" prohibition and national prohibition.

War prohibition was in "effect" from 1917 through 1919, when World War I ended with the Treaty of Versailles. It was to remain until the demobilization of the armed forces was completed. By January 16, 1919, however thirty-five of the forty-eight states had voted to ratify the Amendment instituting national prohibition. California was among these states, despite the attempts of attorneys for the grape growers to obtain a restraining order preventing the governor from certifying to vote.<sup>1</sup> The Massachusetts legislature voted in favor of the proposal as early as April 2, 1918. The Senate supported ratification by a vote of 27 to 12, while the House agreed by a vote of 145 to 91. By this action, Massachusetts was the eleventh state to support prohibition.<sup>2</sup> The intended Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution held the following provisions:

- Section 1 - One year after the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors...is hereby prohibited.
- Section 2 - The Congress and the several states shall have concurrent powers to enforce the article by appropriate legislation.
- Section 3 - This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution...<sup>3</sup>



On January 17, 1919, the amendment was adopted when Nebraska voted in favor of ratification. Subsequent disputes arose, however, as to its effective date. Many believed that prohibition would result in little dislocation. Norman Sterne of New York, president of the Transoceanic Commercial Corporation, stated that the exportation of liquors would be simple, and once the stockpiles were eliminated, the breweries and distilleries could easily change to non-alcoholic production with little unemployment or expense.<sup>4</sup> Prohibition generally was viewed as a viable social reform with a great many benefits. Many southerners saw the movement as a means of solving the "Negro problem" by keeping liquor out of the hands of blacks. Industrial leaders favored prohibition on the grounds that it would improve efficiency if workers no longer were intoxicated; in addition, there would be fewer industrial accidents and reduced payments for Workman's Compensation. Perhaps the most widely accepted benefit would be an improvement of the "moral fiber of youth." Without the adverse effect of saloons and alcohol, young people would be less prone to immorality and social impurity.<sup>5</sup>

Advertisements began appearing in the local newspapers such as the *Springfield Union* and the *Springfield Republican* for motion picture houses and billiard and pool rooms, and ideas were offered for the conversion of existing saloons to beneficial establishments. One rather unique advertisement was for a hospital in Boston, under the supervision of a Dr. Schaefer, which specialized in treating the "liquor habit."<sup>6</sup> While news about the prohibition movement filled many columns, stories about the war and the proposed League of Nations dominated the headlines.

With men returning from overseas duty, there was need for public gathering places. Numerous letter in the "Peoples Forum," a section of the *Union* for the views of the citizenry, demonstrated a fear that unless something replaced the saloon, there would be severe problems. That was especially the case since factory hours were shorter and returning servicemen would have more leisure time and no place to spend it. In February of 1919, plans were made at the Springfield Y.M.C.A. to retain some saloons licensed to sell only soft drinks.<sup>7</sup> Chicopee suggested the development of community centers out of classrooms in the Alvord and Robinson-Valentine Schools.<sup>8</sup> The Massachusetts "blue laws" forbade the playing of outdoor sports on Sundays, therefore indoor facilities were vital.

While preparations were being made for prohibition, no date for enforcing the Eighteenth Amendment was set, primarily because of the long debate over what constituted an intoxicating beverage. Percentages of allowable alcohol were proposed but none agreed upon. Meanwhile, as early as March of 1919 many cities were instituting liquor taxes to reduce consumption. In the Springfield area, wholesale and retail liquor dealers were directed to take inventory of their stock. As a result of the tax, the price of liquor increased to a total of eighty cents per quart and twelve dollars per case.<sup>9</sup> Tax evasion took many varied forms, however.

Some people applied for supplies of alcohol under the pretense of using them for medicinal purposes when they had not used more than "an ounce in a year" for those purposes in the past.<sup>10</sup> Others converted their cellars or nearby secluded areas into processing plants for corn whiskey and "moonshine." The state of Massachusetts did not totally support war time prohibition nor did it seriously try to enforce the new amendment to the Constitution. On March 10, 1919, Senator John J. Kearney of Boston acted as spokesman at a rally in favor of a return to "wet" status. Using the topic of unemployment and supported by a parade of 88 servicemen, he declared:

There are approximately 600,000 men out of work in the nation today. If we add to this number men and women who are being turned out of war industries almost every week, returning soldiers and the 600,000 men

who will be thrown out of employment when this war-time prohibition act becomes effective, you can readily appreciate the danger that is impending.<sup>11</sup>

Also attending the meeting was Charles E. Sands, a Springfield business agent for the Cooks and Waiters Union, who solidified their position by noting the different purposes of war time prohibition and national prohibition. He stated that the war act was necessary to conserve foods and grains for the war effort. In the past, these increases in liquor consumption were "un-American and un-democratic."<sup>12</sup> Area opinion opposing and favoring prohibition were best expressed in the "letters to the editor" column in local newspapers. One Springfield citizen asserted that those who opposed prohibition were the same people who opposed the League of Nations. He colorfully described them as "...wine makers and booze fighters...cabaret workers...night prowlers...possessed with seven devils."<sup>13</sup>

Towards the end of March, 1919, the question of what was and was not intoxicating received a great deal of attention. Since no standard was issued by the federal government, states took it upon themselves to determine the "legal" alcoholic content. Elihu Root and William D. Guthru, counsels for the New York and New Jersey breweries, specified 2.75% alcohol, or "near-beer," to be the maximum level of non-intoxicating liquors. In contrast, the Internal Revenue Department advocated ½ of 1% alcohol to be an acceptable level. In Massachusetts, while Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and the author and educator, A. Lawrence Lowell debated the persistent question of the League of Nations, a state brewers association recommended resolutions in favor of the 2.75% standard. Springfield responded by not re-opening the Highland and Hampshire breweries for the manufacturing of light beer and ale until the status of non-intoxicating beverages was firmly set. This continuous battle of the breweries, however, quickly prompted the Massachusetts legislature to pass a state law regulating a limit of 1½% alcohol in time of peace or war. This attitude was reflected in an article in the *Springfield Union* which was headlined, "2 3/4 Beer a Soda-Fountain Drink." It went on to state:

If 2¾ per cent beer is nonintoxicating, as is maintained by Elihu Root and other prominent legal lights, then it will require no liquor license to it...It may then be sold at soda fountains as a 'chaser' for sundaes and banana splits.<sup>14</sup>

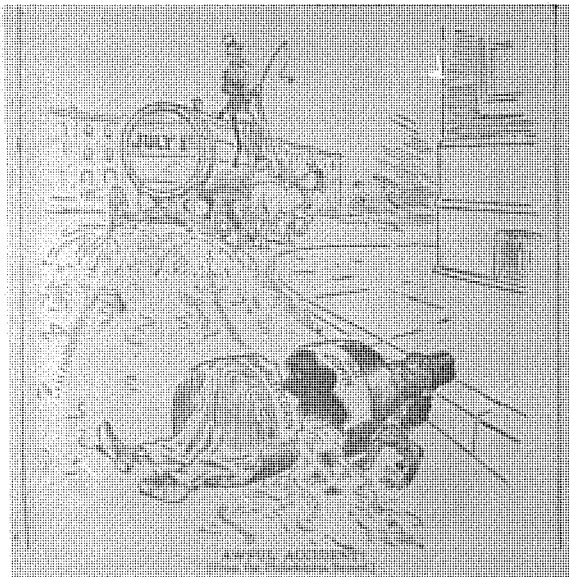
With the new restriction on alcohol came another stream of public opinion. One letter from a Chicopee resident warned that other substances, such as some brands of hair tonic, contain as much as 55% alcohol and should likewise be discouraged. A Springfield serviceman, Private M. F. Davis expressed his views in verse:

And while we fought for you in  
France  
You made the Old States dry;  
You never gave us half a chance  
Our vote on it to try.

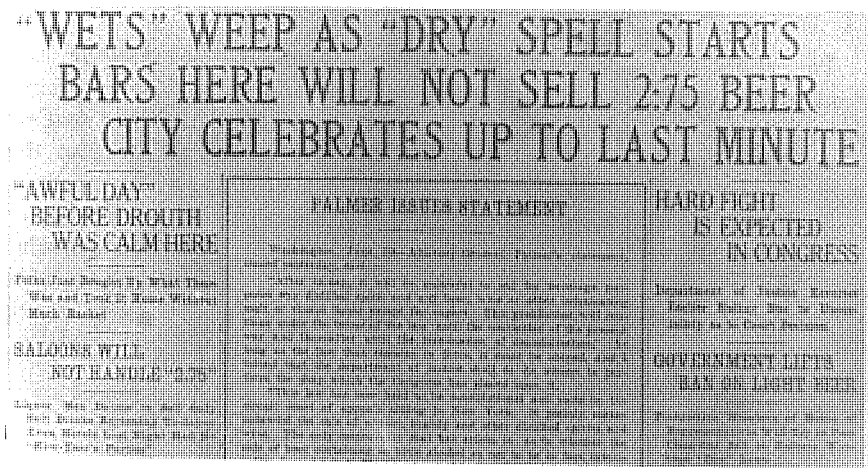
This is the voice of all the boys  
who were fighting tooth and eye;  
Do us all a favor, lads,  
Don't let the States go dry.<sup>15</sup>

Prohibition, however, was supported by other individuals who insisted that it was valuable in stopping temptation and crime.

In May of 1919, Senator Andrew Volstead of Minnesota introduced a measure for the enforcement of both war-time and national prohibition. While a minority on the House Judiciary Committee protested the provision, the Anti-Saloon League triumphed and the bill was passed. Thus the "Volstead Act" was adopted.<sup>16</sup> Congress convened during June of 1919 to finalize plans for the effective date of July 1 when the nation was to go "dry". In the few days preceding that date, area liquor stores, saloons, and cafes reported unprecedented sales of alcohol in various quantities as people prepared for the future. Soft drink companies did not let such an event go by without using it to their own advantage. The Connecticut Valley Bottling Company of Springfield developed the slogan: "Why Worry About The 'Thirsty' First of July—Here's a Better Drink That's Been a Favorite for 60 years—Dr. Swett's Original Root Beer."<sup>17</sup>



Reporters with the *Springfield Republican* interviewed several saloon owners on July 1, 1919 to obtain their policies during the official war-time prohibition. Many stated that they would sell only "near-beer" and soft drinks and not 2.75% beer until Congress declared it non-intoxicating. They did express the hope, however, that the law would soon be repealed. Springfield Police Captain C. A. Wade reported on the July 4th celebrations: "One 'drunk' was arrested," instead of the more typical "drunks' by the wagonload."<sup>18</sup> However, in Westfield, chemistry Professor Lewis B. Allyn discovered some "soft drinks" containing more than 5% alcohol. In addition, upon analysis, he uncovered a prune wine consisting of 52% alcohol, evidently produced for home consumption.<sup>19</sup> The *Republican* published another letter asking for the legalization of Sunday afternoon sports to counteract the vacuum left by prohibition. This was probably a reaction against the move taken to stop the baseball games in Holyoke and the playing of golf in Chicopee. At one point, in fact, the State Police were called in to enforce the "Blue laws."



On the national level, Internal Revenue Collector John F. Malley stated that liquor dealers, physicians and pharmacists should be given the right to govern the sale of wines and liquors for medicinal purposes as long as they did not dispense more than one quart at a time. The stipulations involved were that "All prescriptions shall indicate clearly the name and address of the patient, including street and apartment number, if any, and date when written, the condition or illness for which prescribed, and the name of pharmacist to whom the prescription is to be presented for filling."<sup>20</sup> In area cities, though, more alcohol was obtained through the purchase of liquor licenses. By mid-July, thirty-eight permits were issued in Chicopee, authorizing the sale of 2.75% beer, light wines and cider; but the licenses were subject to future federal regulations. Of these permits, eleven were bought by hotels, eight by clubs, and one by a Springfield brewing company. In Holyoke there were a number of arrests for

drunkenness during the first month of "war time" prohibition. Three men and two women were arrested on July 15. The men were subsequently released, while the women were fined \$6.00 each for intoxication and \$3.00 each for breach of the peace. Perhaps this resulted from the fact that "practically every saloon" was selling "the regular 'red eye' in addition to the temperance drinks and no attempt has been made to get any evidence to prosecute...." <sup>21</sup>

Saloons were not the only places guilty of selling illegal beverages. The newspapers reported a number of local raids. In Holyoke, forty gallons of whiskey, forty gallons of gin and eighty gallons of wine were seized at the Murray Hotel. The dealers involved were given fourteen days to claim the merchandise, which they could not do without incriminating themselves. One of Chicopee's attempts to promote prohibition within the city was founded on July 30, 1919, when the Chicopee Council of the Knights of Columbus bought a hall on Perkins Street for temperance meetings. Thus, "war-time" prohibition failed to produce a "bone dry" nation, through lack of enforcement, unspecified regulations and opposition of the "wets."

Too many ways to evade the law were available, perhaps the most prominent being the manufacturing of home-made drinks. Such items as cider, grapes, vinegar, and fruit juices could not be outlawed and neither the state nor national government could oversee home fermentation to insure that they remained below the intoxicating level. Often times the concoctions produced were lacking in quality, as exemplified by one resident's sarcastic recipe for a "Prohibition Cocktail: one half pint of ammonia, four ounces of peppermint, four ounces of horse liniment, two lumps of sugar, and four ounces of water." <sup>22</sup> As 1920 approached and "war-time" prohibition was to be replaced by the Eighteenth Amendment, the United States still did not have a plan to enforce the law.

**FIGHT AGAINST 2.75 BEER IS BEGUN  
WHEELS OF JUSTICE START MOVING  
CONGRESS IS EXPECTED TO ACT SOON**

**"DRY" LEADERS  
WORK QUICKLY**  
A Meeting of the House Judiciary Committee Has Been Called for Monday

**FEDERAL DECISIONS  
ARE CONTRADICTIONARY**  
Attorney General Palmer Announces That Offenders Against Prohibition Law Can Expect Early and Vigorous Prosecution  
Washington, July 1.—Congress and the department of justice moved today to stop the sale of 2 1/2 per

**Δ "KICKLESS" BRONX**  
New York, July 1.—The first nonalcoholic Bronx cocktails passed over the bars here today. They, sold for 15 cents and contained nonalcoholic gin, two kinds of nonalcoholic vermouth and orange bitters mixed in the same proportions as the genuine Bronx, but minus the "kick."



The year 1920 began with disaster. The *Pringfield Union* reported on January 1, that there were sixty-two deaths in Western Massachusetts due to wood alcohol, "fake whiskey," poisoning which occurred during the holiday season. Two Hartford men, Max Sanders and Sam Darling were arraigned in Chicopee District Court and charged with manslaughter. They were captured after local police tracked down the truck from the Springfield-New York Dispatch Trucking Company allegedly used to make the deliveries. In Chicopee, two public places were the recipients of the "bad booze"—the American House in Chicopee Falls and the Polish National Club at the corner of Center and Cabot Streets. The cases of the two men were continued until a later date.<sup>23</sup> The local reaction was generally one of shock but there were people who regarded the wood alcohol deaths as a good sign to others to follow the prohibition regulations.

At midnight, January 16, 1920 the country officially became "dry" as the Eighteenth Amendment went into effect. All liquor advertisements and signs had to be removed, but two large breweries switched their products and continued their campaign. The *Union* began running ads for "Gansett," a new product of the Narragansett Brewing Company. Its slogan noted its non-alcoholic content. The Country Club Soda Company of Springfield likewise began bottling products of the Piels Brothers Company of New York under a new label, "Piels Light," tempting its consumers to "Taste the tang of real...hops."<sup>24</sup> Despite the outlawing of intoxicating liquors and the development of substitute beverages, violations of the National Prohibition Act were frequent. Most arrests were made for producing home-made "moonshine" and "mash" corn whiskey. Some violators were easier to catch than others, however. On September 27, 1920, in Holyoke, four stills exploded in an apartment block on High Street, destroying the windows and some of the flooring. The man involved was quickly arrested.<sup>25</sup> In Amherst, though, where the production of hard cider flourished, it was much more difficult to prosecute for the law allowed cider to be made and it was virtually impossible for agents to keep a continuous check on the amount of fermentation. The liquor that was sold easily returned a very high profit for the proprietor which was an incentive for many to run the risks of bootlegging. During a Springfield raid, two men confessed to having paid \$43.00 for one quart of moonshine whiskey.<sup>26</sup> Thus although the quantities produced were small, a very real operation worked to supply the hotels and saloons.

The difficulties involved in the apprehension of bootleggers was illustrated by the fact that only four arrests were made in twenty simultaneous raids in the Holyoke area. They were conducted by thirty-five men, the "flying squadron," under the direction of William J. McCarthy, a special Federal Prohibition agent of the Northeastern Department. Only seven cases of bonded liquor valued at over \$800 and labeled for medicinal purposes were seized at the Marble Hall

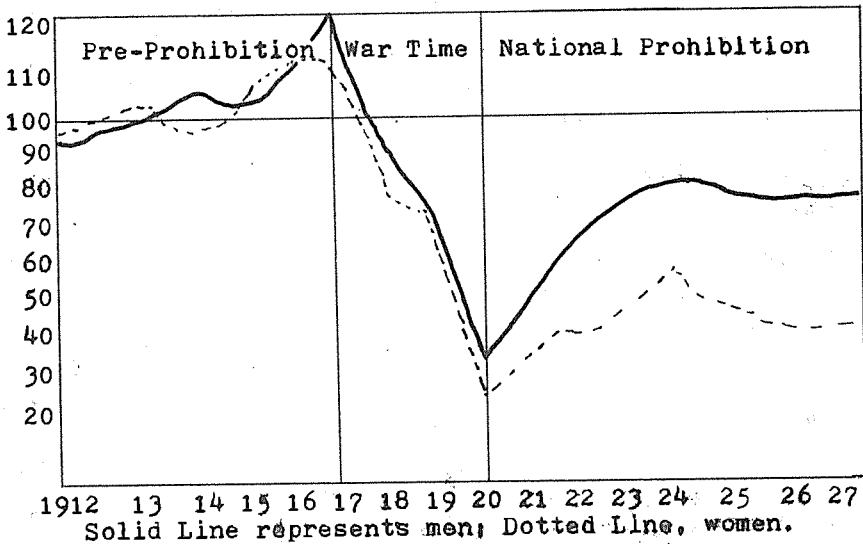
Hotel, located at 198 High Street, Holyoke. One quart of gin and one quart of "moonshine" were confiscated at a saloon run by Timothy Lynch at 46 North East Street and the "Moose" wine rooms at 275 Appleton Street produced only one quart of moonshine. One reason for the poor results of the raids was the use of an apparatus found in many of the saloons. When it was known that federal surveillance was a possibility, wires were strung along the entire length of the bar, and then attached to the bottles and kept near a sink half-filled with water. If the bartender was convinced that there would be a raid, he needed only to pull on the string and the whiskey would be spilled into the sink.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the problems of enforcing prohibition, a Boston newspaper reported that during the first ten months of national prohibition drunkenness in Massachusetts was reduced by about seventy-five per cent. A graph produced in 1929 describes the change:

*MASSACHUSETTS ACTUAL DRUNKENNESS ARRESTS  
MEN AND WOMEN*

28

Per Cents of Pre-Prohibition Level for Each Sex



In local cities, statistics showed a decrease in per-capita arrests, and except for Chicopee, a decrease in actual arrests:

City	Arrests per 1,000 Population		Actual Arrests	
	1915	1925	1915	1925
Chicopee	14.48	12.80	436	536
Holyoke	20.93	15.34	1,273	926
Northampton	15.93	12.05	345	291
Pittsfield	23.00	14.20	1,268	669
Springfield	20.20	13.30	2,083	1,891

In addition, in Boston arrests of all kinds were reduced by fifty per cent and deaths caused by alcohol were down eighty per cent.<sup>29</sup>

Regardless of how well prohibition seemed to work, people in the Springfield area were concerned with the problems it entailed. In November of 1920, the majority of editorials appearing in the *Union* expressed this attitude. A Brimfield resident regarded prohibition as one-sided in its unfair treatment of the poor in society. He declared that the rich were able to buy the high-priced liquor while the less fortunate could not. A Springfield man, E. N. Cook, wrote: "This prohibition is the biggest graft that has ever been put in operation, as everybody knows that prohibition prohibits nothing but good whiskey."<sup>30</sup>

On November 16, 1920, however, a break in the case of the sixty-two deaths in Western Massachusetts during late December of 1919, once again gave strength to the prohibition movement. John Romanelli, a Brooklyn undertaker was arrested and charged with stealing ten drums of wood alcohol, distributing it as whiskey and ultimately causing a great deal of blindness, disease and death. Romanelli denied knowing that the liquor was wood alcohol. He also denied receiving \$23,500 for the stolen merchandise, claiming that he received closer to \$2,000.<sup>31</sup> He did not stand alone in this case; further investigation produced evidence of involvement, in different capacities, of other men. Joseph Mulvihill of Bridgeport, a boxing promoter, informed the police that Springfield was one point in a "whiskey ring" from Connecticut, north to Springfield, Worcester, Boston, and into New York. He cited a New York hotel as the chief source of the wood alcohol. Mulvihill also accused Jacob Levy, owner of the Compo Inn in Westport, Connecticut as being his only agent in Massachusetts. His reason for admitting his part in the crime stemmed from the fact that Levy refused to pay \$250 for a delivery made to Westfield. He was not granted immunity and this tied up the proceedings when he refused to testify on the grounds of self-incrimination.<sup>32</sup>

Carmine Lizenziata, a New York wholesale grocer, was likewise brought to trial. He was charged with larceny, receiving stolen goods from Romanelli and manslaughter in connection with the death of Joseph Kania of Chicopee Falls. In addition, he was charged with violating the "war-time" prohibition act then in effect. Lizenziata also denied that he knew the liquor he was selling was poisonous. Frank Lucibello, a New Haven resident, was to be the state's primary witness until he mysteriously disappeared. He was to testify that Lizenziata had swallowed some of the alcohol when he was syphoning it from steel drums into wooden barrels and that he had to rush to a pharmacist for treatment. Lucibello had received two barrels of "whiskey" and ten cases of "fine French brandy" made from the stolen wood alcohol that Lizenziata bought from Romanelli.<sup>33</sup> The state's attorney explained to the jury at the trial that Lucibello would have provided the link between Lizenziata and the deaths at the American House. The American House, owned by Alexander Perry and his brother Charles Perry, operated by means of forged permits.<sup>34</sup>

In place of Frank Lucibello, James Lamberto, of New Haven, testified against Carmine Lizenziata. He stated that he was the truck driver who transferred the "liquor" from New York to Four Corners where it was shifted to another truck driven by Max Sanders and Sam Darling, both of Hartford. Sanders and Darling then delivered the stock to the American House. A final and important witness was Anthony Marchu, a friend of the deceased Joseph Kania. Marchu stated at the trial that he, Kania, and a few other Polish workers went to the American House to have a couple of drinks to celebrate the holiday season. All except Kania, who died shortly thereafter, were sick for several months. Felix Furtek corroborated his testimony by adding that he too tried the "whiskey" at the Polish National Home, and that he was subjected to choking fits. To counteract these statements, the Perry brothers and Louis Lussier, the bartender at the American House, stated under oath that they each sampled the alcohol and did not become ill.<sup>35</sup>

The trial ultimately ended in early December of 1920. John Romanelli was sentenced to not more than seven years in prison for his role in the theft of the wood alcohol.<sup>36</sup> Carmine Lizenziata received eighteen and one half years in Sing-Sing.<sup>37</sup> A certificate of reasonable doubt was granted, however, and he was placed in jail under \$50,000 bail until further evidence could be produced. On Christmas Eve three unidentified men posted the bail and he was allowed to return home.<sup>38</sup> Alexander and Charles Perry, as well as their bartender, Louis Lussier, were also convicted, and heavy damages were assessed. The final person arrested was Frank Pajik, bartender at the Polish National Home, who was charged with maintaining a "liquor nuisance" and keeping liquor with intent to sell.<sup>39</sup>

## **Wood Alcohol Seller Gets 18 1-2 Years in Sing Sing**

**Carmine Lizenziata Sentenced at Brooklyn on Specific  
Charge of Having Knowingly Sold Poison to Joseph  
Kania of Chicopee Falls, Causing His Death**

Special Dispatch to The Republican

New York, Dec. 2—Carmine Lizenziata, the wholesale fruit dealer, who sold the wood alcohol which Joseph Kania, a laborer, drank as

The trial seemed to have a settling effect on the Western Massachusetts towns and cities. In addition, on December 3, 1920, a Chicopee man reported symptoms of wood alcohol poisoning, further instilling the fear of another holiday epidemic.<sup>40</sup> Raids continued and the debates over 2.75% beer were still heard, yet the public sentiment so prominent in past editorials disappeared. Local citizenry seemed to avoid buying wholesale liquor or producing their own as evidenced in the dwindling number of arrests for intoxication.

With Christmas and the New Year approaching, prohibition agents issued special warnings to local hotels such as Hotel Bridgeway, Hotel Highland, and Hotel Kimball, of possible raids if anything stronger than ginger ale and sweet cider were served. Thus, the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts was ready to welcome a relatively "dry" 1921.<sup>41</sup>

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