



# PROHIBITION

## DRY TIMES IN SANTA ANA

by Dylan M. Almendral

Before we take a journey into the “blind pigs” of Santa Ana past, there needs to be a shot of history lesson.

The story of prohibition in Santa Ana begins long before the Volstead Act of 1919. Various elevating elixirs have been part of the culture of Santa Ana and greater Orange County since the era of Spanish colonization and the Rancho period. What is now Orange County used to be the wine region of California long before Napa and Sonoma. Wine and beer are cultural staples for our Germanic cousin colony to the north, Anaheim. Before there were oranges and walnuts, the cash crop was grapes and barley. Beverages of a spirituous nature, save for small family-run operations that produced brandy from wine grapes, were not part of the OC consumer culture. That would change in 2016 with Orange County’s first legal distillery of spirit, Blinking Owl Distillery in our very own Santa Ana. There’s more, but those stories are for another day over a dram, save for the fact that Orange County voted to “go-dry” in 1900, 19 years prior to national prohibition, but more on that later.

OK, lesson’s over, maybe. In Santa Ana there existed a group of women known as the WCTU, or the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, their sole purpose was to rid the world of “the devil’s drink” while also putting forth Christian values in the community in the form of education

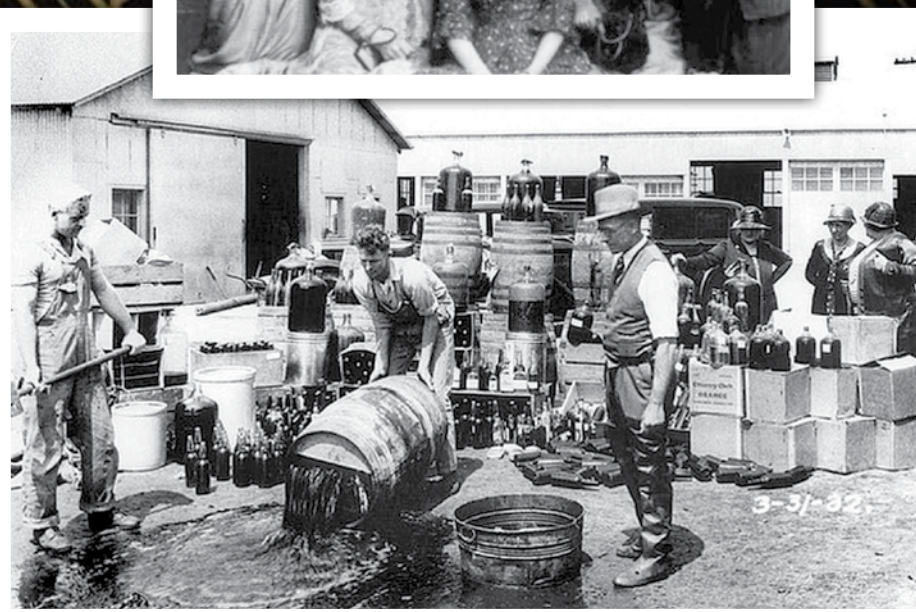
Photos top to bottom: Santa Ana Register headline: 25,000 Officers To War On Bootleggers — Arrests In All Parts Of Nation Expected; Women’s Temperance League members seated outside the First Methodist Church on 6th and Bush in Santa Ana; WCTU members pose in front of sign; Authorities empty barrels of illegal booze from a warehouse in Santa Ana in 1932.

and charitable causes. It is because of these ladies that the Santa Ana Public Library exists. So, I have them to thank for my job of 3 years in that institution. While I’m grateful to these women for the job, I’m sure they wouldn’t be happy to know where some of my money goes on certain days of the week.

Local members of the WCTU were usually the wives of the business-elite of Santa Ana, religious leader or widows as for some strange reason Santa Ana had many wealthy widows purchasing properties here in the early 20th century. They would hold demonstrations in the street, lecture anywhere they could be heard and campaigned from court rooms to bedrooms in order to see the city and county positively cleansed of all forms of intoxicating liquors.

Now, these ladies had a legitimate gripe. Anyone walking Santa Ana in the late 1800s, especially in downtown, were greeted with a familiar scene; a man, presumed properly pie-eyed, relieving himself in the alleys adjoining the public streets. This would result in a \$10 fine, along with a night in Brunner’s basement on charges of public drunkenness, and indecent exposure. Prior to prohibition, there were many saloons along the north side of Fourth Street between Broadway and Sycamore, as well on Sycamore between Fourth and Fifth Streets. Children who attended Central School where the YMCA building now stands were cautioned to avoid the area by going east to Main Street or west

Photos top to bottom: Santa Ana Register headline: Eighteenth Amendment Repealed; celebrating the end of prohibition and the legalization of alcohol.







*This innocent looking built-in cabinet and bookcase, built in the back room of the historic 1930 Walker House on Riverside Drive in Floral Park, is actually a Prohibition Bar. The back panel of the bookcase (upper left) reveals hidden storage for illegal booze (upper right) and the cabinet slides open to house an entire bar (lower right). Hillis House, built on Heliotrope in 1930, also features a false wall in the back of the maids closet that conceals hidden storage capable of housing an ample supply of bootleg hooch. (photos by Emily J. Davis Photography)*



Fourth Street. Further, in the Santa Ana Register in 1926, Lecil Slaback, a student at Julia Lathrop Junior High School, won a state-wide essay contest sponsored by our dear matronly friends of the WCTU. He writes “Saloons were the cause of much sickness as they were so dirty and unhealthy, usually crowded with dirty, slobbering men, who spat around on the floor and seats wholly disregarding any tendency to cleanliness or decency.” Really paints a picture, right?

These ladies were successful in their trilling, and in the general election of 1900, Orange County voted to go dry. There were some dissenters though, of course, including Anaheim and the 4th precinct in Santa Ana, among others. Guess where the 4th precinct was? If you guessed Floral Park, that would be incorrect because Floral Park isn’t that old. The 4th precinct is actually downtown and 4th Street! Downtown Santa Ana has historically always been the center of “good times for food and

drink” in Orange County.

So, Santa Ana goes dry in 1900. What happens? Almost nothing. Fines were raised on those caught in the act of producing, transporting, distributing and imbibing of the sauce and drinking establishments went partially underground. During this time, wine was omnipresent. The local Japanese immigrant population was making sake, Mexicans were fermenting tepache, a type of fruit-based beer. Other beverages from the local flora and white dog moonshine were being made in small operations throughout the county, particularly in Trabuco. Most law enforcement officers turned a blind eye. Not much changed that is, until that horrid 1st day of January 1919 when Prohibition went national.

This is where the fun begins. Within a week, alcohol was flowing in to the California coast from Canada and to the Caribbean via Mexico. Home-grown operations were quickly established in barns and basements. The quality and quantity of booze one could buy was

stratified based on status, just like it is today. You had your budget bourbons and your private selections. As far as race, folks bought from within their own ethnic groups, as it was believed to be a more trust-worthy product. Some sellers did the same, but most didn’t care about race, the ends (money) justified the means (crossing the railroad tracks).

It is estimated that 75% or more of the alcohol illegally imported into this country came through the west coast with its largely unguarded shoreline this is due to the fact that the Eastern seaboard was much more developed and therefore controlled. Far more of the California coast was unsupervised and that is a fact to this day. There was also alcohol being brought over the Great Lakes from Canada. The Los Angeles Times in 1926 estimated that \$10 million in Scotch whiskey was imported through Southern California annually.

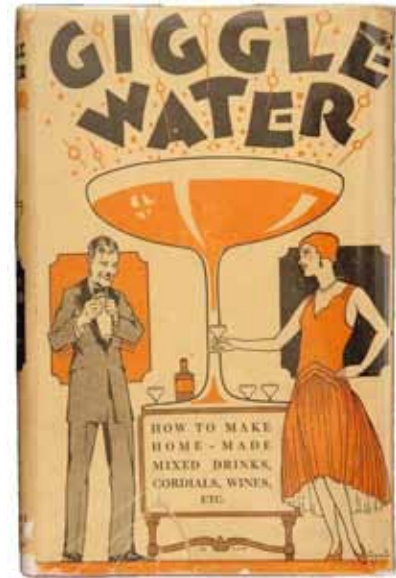
Now the popularized Hollywood version of secret drinking establishments operating in commercial cores of cities

was not the case here in Santa Ana. Purchasing alcohol and taking it with you was far more common overall then a clandestine drinking establishment, aka speakeasy. More often than not, these places were run out of private homes or out in the country, such as the largely undeveloped town of El Toro or out in one of the cabins in Trabuco canyon, away from the eyes of Johnny Law.

In the particular case of Floral Park, there is an example of a prohibition bar set up in a private residence with a large amount of hidden storage and security measures in place in order to warn people to “hide the hooch”. The Walker House, built on Riverside Drive in 1931, is one such example, with a wet bar hidden in a wall and an adjoining hidden storage area behind a bookcase that served as the central stash for illegal booze. The mechanisms used in this secret bar lend themselves to being original to the home. The owners of the home were doing unusually well during prohibition, owning a small chain of pharmacies in Santa Ana and Newport. They also owned a very large mixed-use property with an unheard of 99-year lease on the Balboa Peninsula, the first of its kind in the county. This business was an entire city block, with shops on the first floor and 18 hotel rooms on the second floor. The pharmacy business was booming, especially with its proximity to the harbor...which was a known entry point for liquor shipments. But who am I to tell? I am just a historian.

Altogether, this is an amazing find and keenly illustrates the Prohibition era in Santa Ana.

The case for this home to have been the site of many “wet parties” is furthered by the fact that on top of its hidden features, there was also a “look out” and alarm system for the servant of the home to alert the party-goers or other staff of a visit from the cops. A bust would result in the alcohol being confiscated, held in the basement of the county courthouse and then dumped into the sewer in front of the



*“Giggle Water” was one of many slang terms for liquor during Prohibition and served as the title for Charles S. Warnock’s 1928 book on home-made cocktails and other alcoholic drinks.*

court house once a month.

Enforcing prohibition wasn’t that easy and there were risks, especially to officers involved in raiding bootlegging operations and speakeasies. In 1923, Santa Ana Mayor Tubbs declared that the city should give every cooperation to county and other officers in raiding “Blind Pigs,” and that precautions should be taken not to leave the city unprotected or liable if a city officer were hurt. Therefore, only off-duty city police should be used.

Their efforts showed success. A headline in the Santa Ana Register in November 1924 read: “County-wide Raids Result in 60 Arrests!” C.S. Kelley, Santa Ana druggist, surrendered to federal authorities on \$2,000 bail on charges of violating the national prohibition act. Also arrested were local pharmacists C.E. Gard, E. Dietrich and R. Hupp. (These druggists had a real thing going!) A surprise liquor raid conducted by scores of federal, county and city police officers led by secret service operatives of the Anti-Saloon League swept Orange County and filled the jails. One of the largest finds was the home of Santa Ana waitress Carrie Buckley, where they found a cellar with 17 gallons of wine. When officers raided her home, she admitted she had a little wine “for my own consumption.” The youngest

case recorded was that of a 12-year old Santa Ana girl who was arrested along with her father and spent the night in jail. Officers claimed her father made whiskey and forced his daughter to sell it.

Today these raids would be comparable to having the SWAT Team visit your house, doors and windows kicked in, guns out.

It is interesting to note that during Prohibition, many doctors could prescribe their patients with medicinal alcohol for certain “cases of nerves”. Catholics for instance were allowed to produce wine for the sacrament under the Volstead Act, enough wine for their household, and if a little extra was made and sold to the neighbor down the street – nobody had to know.

Alcohol could still be had because it was utilized for industrial purposes, such as in mechanical jobs. Industrial methanol is incredibly poisonous, but many bootleggers used it to fortify their booze, leading to an increase in alcohol poisoning. Cocktails, spirits mixed with other ingredients such as fruit juice, lemonade, or cream dramatically disguised the taste and increased the popularity of bathtub gin.

By the 1930s, it was clear that Prohibition had become a public policy failure. The 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution had done little to curb the sale, production and consumption of intoxicating liquors. And while organized crime flourished, tax revenues withered. With the United States stuck in the throes of the Great Depression, money trumped morals, and in 1933, Congress easily passed a proposed 21st Amendment that would repeal the 18th Amendment. Prohibition was over and Santa Ana went back to well...the way it was. Except with paved streets and fewer horses.

As we observe the anniversary of the end of Prohibition let’s remember the wise words of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as he signed the repeal of the 18th amendment on December 5, 1933: “What America needs now is a drink.”





*The Duchess on Cambridge has a whole room full of cocktail accoutrement, including flasks, glasses and books including “Gone with the Gin” and “The Gentleman’s Guide to Cocktails.”*

Saturday, December 5 marks the 87th anniversary of the end of Prohibition, the great experiment. I can’t think of a better way to celebrate than with a cocktail. And since it’s the holidays, let’s also make it festive with these great seasonal recipes!



**HOLIDAY OWL NEST**

*by The Blinking Owl*

- 1 ½ oz. Blinking Owl Aquavit
- ¾ oz. lemon
- ¾ oz. rosemary infused simple syrup
- ½ oz. port or Lillet Rouge
- Rosemary sprig

Add the aquavit, lemon and rosemary simple syrup to a shaker and fill half way with ice. Shake approximately 15 seconds (until the shaker becomes frosty). Pour the ingredients through a strainer into a glass and add ice. “Float” the Port or Lillet Rouge by pouring it over the back of your mixing spoon over the top of the cocktail. Garnish with a Rosemary sprig.

**WHITE CHOCOLATE PEPPERMINT MARTINI**

- 1.5 ounces white chocolate liqueur
- 1.5 ounces vanilla vodka
- 1 ounce creme de cacao - (clear/white)
- 1 ounce half and half
- 1/2 ounce peppermint schnapps
- White chocolate syrup and crushed peppermints to garnish



Begin by preparing your martini glass. Rim the edge of the glass with white chocolate syrup; then dip it into crushed peppermint candies or crushed candy canes. Set glass aside. Add the white chocolate liqueur, vanilla vodka, creme de cacao, half and half, and peppermint schnapps to a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake and then strain into your prepared martini glass.



**THYME CHERRY OLD FASHIONED**

*by Benchmark Restaurant*

- 2 dashes of thyme bitters
- .5 oz. black cherry syrup
- 2 oz. Woodford rye whiskey
- Orange peel
- Luxardo cherries for garnish

Stir with large ice cubes (15-20 seconds). Express orange peel over drink. Garnish with cherry and orange peel.

