

PROHIBITION AND HOMEBREW

The eighteenth amendment to the U.S. constitution, ratified in 1919, prohibited the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation into, or the exportation from the United States and all territories. Later that year, Congress passed the National Prohibition Act which provided enabling legislation to implement the Eighteenth amendment. It had many debilitating consequences.

Thousands of individuals lost their jobs as distilleries, breweries, bars, liquor stores, and related companies such as bottling and transportation closed their doors. Soon the illegal importation of liquor flourished and speakeasies--illegal drinking establishments—sprung up everywhere. Pre-prohibition Detroit had 2,334 establishments serving liquor. By 1925, at the height of prohibition, it was estimated that there were 15,000 speakeasies serving booze in Detroit. Corruption of police and politicians was widespread. Respect for the law diminished. Organized crime became a major force reaching into cities large and small.

Although I was young at the time, I remember my elders talking about prohibition, and how they might ease the pain. Before the law was enacted, both my grandfather and father took an occasional drink of bourbon and during the summer months enjoyed a bottle of beer every once and a while. So when the supply was suddenly shut off, they did what a lot of others did and decided to make their own beer--*homebrew* was the name given it then.

They acquired the necessary ingredients, as well as bottles, bottle caps and a capping device, and set up production in the upstairs bathroom. Once the mixture was ready, they filled and capped the bottles and stored them in a room over the kitchen.

This was well before the time of air conditioning and summer temperatures sometimes reached into the 90s. In a closed storage room they could get even higher, and that is what occurred. One hot Saturday afternoon a week or two after the homebrew was put into bottles, we heard a muffled explosion, followed by another explosion, and then what sounded like a gun battle in the upstairs storage room. We all rushed upstairs to see what was happening and found a mess. There wasn't a cap left on any of the bottles and there was homebrew all over the place. Thus ended the great

homebrew experiment--which pleased my mother since she had disapproved of it from the beginning.

— *George Loving*

