“THE GREATEST BLESSING SINCE CHRIST,” the Deseret News called Prohibition on the evening before Utah went dry. “A splendid measure,” Gov. Simon Bamberger said of the Utah dry law that would take effect on August 1, 1917, and the Salt Lake Tribune assured its readers that “No Prohibition bill ever became law with a better chance of being enforced.” Instead, Prohibition introduced...
the speakeasy, the silver hip flask, and the padded suitcase. The era of the bootlegger was about to begin in Utah as it had in other dry states.¹

While the legislature was still debating the fine points of implementing statewide Prohibition, opportunists were busily hoarding liquor in anticipation of its advent. An enterprising Marysville druggist had accumulated 600 gallons, supposedly to be dispensed by physicians in Piute County, which was already dry under a local option law. In Salt Lake City, legally wet until August 1, the Tribune reported that residents were “keeping ear and eye open to the call of the ‘tangle foot’ vendor and many a quart, gallon and barrel has been snugly stowed away for future reference.”²

Until midnight of July 31 liquor dealers sold their inventories at any cost. People flocked to buy whatever liquor was available, ig-

²Salt Lake Tribune, July 1, 20, 1917.
noring provisions in the law for stringent fines, jail, or both for possession of it. Throughout the state, throngs celebrated the end of an era by toasting with liquor. The *Deseret News* called the revelry a night of debauchery. The *Kaysville Weekly Reflex* complained that if people were as careful in saving food for the war effort as they had been in the past few days “in conserving the supply of booze there would be a very large surplus this fall.” In Richfield “they celebrated the death of John Barleycorn with lots of wetting and washing down. . . .” The *Tooele Transcript* decried “a night of disorder that was much to be regretted by all the sober citizens of Utah.” The *Salt Lake Tribune* said, “Old Man Booze . . . died game . . . like the spirit of the west . . . with his boots on . . . [and with] wine, women and song.” At midnight in Park City

a wild scene was enacted on Main Street, and empty barrels and empty ice cream freezers and everything else that would roll down the paved street were set to motion . . . [with] drunken yells and loud hurrahs by the midnight revelers.³

By January 16, 1920, the Eighteenth Amendment imposing nationwide Prohibition had been ratified by the states; to enforce it Congress passed the Volstead Act. The evangelist Billy Sunday said:

the reign of tears is over. The slums will soon be a memory. We will turn our prisons into factories and our jails into storehouses and corncribs. . . . Hell will be forever for rent.⁴

The naive belief that Prohibition would solve the country’s social problems was unaffected by the weariness of the population over wartime shortages and sacrifices, the trauma of the worldwide influenza epidemic that killed more than a half-million Americans, and, most important, the cynicism accompanying the carnage of “the war to end all wars.” In the revolt against old virtues, forbidden liquor became the symbol of a new sybaritism. For many, also, Prohibition was an assault on Constitutional liberties.

While ministers, politicians, editors, and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union enjoyed a putative victory, speakeasies immediately proliferated in basements and walkups on shabby streets. A knock on a door was answered by the opening of a peephole


through which suspicious eyes looked out waiting for the password. "Joe sent me" and the words flivver, rumble seat, booze, flapper, jazz, and bootleg (an old word for liquor smuggled in a tall boot) became indelible accretions to the American vocabulary.

Joining Americans in these illegal liquor activities were recent immigrants from the Balkans, Mediterranean, and Asia who were free from the American-Puritan attitude toward alcohol. In moderation it was traditionally part of the ceremonial and communal festivities of their cultures. Especially among the Mediterranean people, drunkenness was censured. The immigrants derided Prohibition as peculiar; their wine and sake were staples that accompanied meals. A popular Greek phonograph record of the era asked in perplexity, "Why is America dry?"

The foreign-language newspapers subsidized by the LDS church — such as the German Beobachter and Danish Bikuben — could only mirror its stance in favor of Prohibition, but the Japanese Utah Nippo predicted the impossibility of monitoring the law and deplored the evils that followed, in particular blindness that afflicted people who had turned to drinking wood alcohol. The Greek-language To Fos ("The Light") said:

By a large majority doctors consider alcoholic beverages useful for therapy, most priests as well as [other] knowledgable people, want the abolition of this law that rather than saving a few drunkards from degeneracy and catastrophe, has sent a multitude to Hades by means of liquor sold for evil and unscrupulous gain.

To Fos asserted that morphine and cocaine addiction had increased tenfold since Prohibition. "Statistics show the Volstead Act is harmful not beneficial," it said. In ethnic communities bootleggers were not outcasts unless they combined liquor pursuits with prostitution.

In contrast, the predominately Mormon communities of Sanpete County gave Prohibition whole-hearted approval, but the law would be violated in Sanpete just as it was in areas with no tradition of abstention. Although possibly exaggerating, one former resident recalled that, "Bootleggers almost had to wear badges so they wouldn't sell to each other."

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5 Mentioned in "Tales of Skill and Loss in Greek-American Recorded Humor," paper by Steve Frangos, Department of Anthropology, Indiana University.
6 Utah Nippo (Salt Lake City), February 8, 1919, January 10, 1923; To Fos (Salt Lake City), July 5, 1923. The author is indebted to Rev. K. Okuno, Nicherin Buddhist Temple, for researching back issues of Utah Nippo.
Yet in Utah, immigrants and the American-born never embroiled themselves in bootlegging to the extent of those in large cities beyond the state where young thugs were taking their first steps toward becoming leading gangsters. Utah was only slightly touched with gangsterism, but residents, including mothers and children, became lawbreakers; bootlegging flourished; and shootings were regular events. Drinkers had not resigned themselves to becoming abstinent, even if it meant drinking flavoring extracts that contained a high percentage of alcohol (as much as 85 percent for lemon) and which, in spontaneous accommodation to their need, were being bottled in pints, quarts, and gallons.

Former governor J. Bracken Lee recalled Prohibition's debut: "Whiskey immediately began coming in from Rock Springs, Wyoming." Rolla West, a mayor of Price, Utah, during the Prohibition era, wrote:

One of the biggest and most astute politicians of the early 1920's discovered that White Mule, Panther wettings, moonshine, embalming fluid, Bootleg or even Bourbon whiskey, by throwing in a little burnt sugar and tobacco juice [for flavor and color], was available in Private distilleries in Wyoming.\(^8\)

The making and selling of liquor had suddenly passed from commercial distilleries to the underground. Immigrants who had used the grape residue from wine-making for their households' liqueurs, Americans who had sporadically made a small amount of whiskey for their own consumption, and an eager number of novices learning the easy rudiments of production set up stills in towns, cities, and isolated areas of the state. The Utah State Legislature was as busily engaged for the next sixteen years in formulating a complex system of rules to govern patent medicines and flavoring extracts (a favorite of young people and housewives), denatured (wood) alcohol, cider, vinegar, mincemeat, and communion wine ("to follow the commands of the Divine Master") as well as fines, imprisonment, and confiscation of liquor apparatus and other property involved in the preparation and selling of liquor, including automobiles used for transportation.\(^9\)

Although the phenomenal new liquor business was surreptitious, bootleggers became instantly known. Usually they carried on a

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\(^8\) Interview with J. Bracken Lee, June 16, 1983; Rolla West MS., p. 23, American West Center, University of Utah.

legitimate business as camouflage. Others worked part-time at it, especially after the stock market crash of 1929 and the economic depression that followed. Bootleggers came from the professions, from business, and from labor: unsuccessful doctors and attorneys, successful druggists, sheepmen (who left their wives to run stills while they were in sheep camps for lambing and shearing), railroad workers, miners, and shop owners, particularly those of shoeshine stands.

Many American-born druggists were actively engaged in bootlegging, a natural development since medicinal liquor had always been dispensed by them. In their back rooms, as well as in poolhalls, candy stores, and hotels where “traveling men,” the old-time drummers, congregated, liquor was readily available.

Shoeshine shop owners became middlemen through another long-established American custom. Until World War II, doctors, attorneys, and businessmen were in the habit of having their shoes shined during their work day in the business district. According to one shop owner, while the polish was being applied his customers “asked us all the time where to get some whiskey.”

10 A Greek bootlegger of the era who asked, as did many respondents, not to be indentified.
nation, Greek immigrants had almost exclusively taken over shoeshine parlors, once the province of blacks and the Irish, and often owned chains of them. As boys of nine and older they had been brought to the United States by somatoempori ("flesh merchants") and indentured in return for their highly inflated ship's passage. In Salt Lake City and elsewhere in Utah they served as conduits between their countrymen's bubbling stills and respected, insatiable citizens. As the shoeshine parlors became increasingly popular fronts the once modestly dressed, obsequious shoeshiners began wearing monogrammed silk shirts and being chauffeured in Cadillacs. Several extended their activities into Canada. As the best man at a wedding in the middle twenties, one of them brought cases of Canadian whiskey as a gift for the large reception, because marriage celebrations in Greek immigrant days were communal.

If illegal whiskey flavored the wedding festivities of immigrants, it also spiced the dancing parties of the American-born. Reports in the Provo Herald complained of "immoral dancing" and intoxication in Utah County resorts throughout the early 1920s. L. R. Hebertson, who managed the Geneva resort, "admitted that drinking had been rampant at the resort the entire season. 'There hasn't been a dance at Geneva this summer,' he said, 'when Salt Lake bootleggers didn't come down, loaded with liquor, which was sold to the dancers and others.' " In Vivian Park, another resort in the Provo area, manager J. F. Carter told the Herald that "there had been 'drunkenness and improper dancing at the resort all summer.' "

Middlemen did well; bootleggers who sold their liquor directly did even better. In cellars, basements, and empty buildings they set up stills with exhaust pipes leading to chimneys to disperse the potentially betraying fumes. Beyond, on farms and in half-hidden gulleys and washes where scrub oak and tall sagebrush screened chimneys on shacks, lucrative distillation progressed. Small canyons and mountain draws were ideal: Burch Creek in Weber County, the Mount Olympus area of Salt Lake County, Barney's Canyon north of West Jordan, the junction of Red Creek and the Strawberry River, Johnson's Pass in Tooele County, Twelve Mile Canyon in Sanpete

12 The author's husband remembers this scene at the wedding of his uncle in the mid-1920s.
County, the mouth of Provo Canyon, Crandall Canyon north of Castle Gate in Carbon County, and Nine Mile Canyon between Price and Duchesne.

To allay suspicion, bootleggers in Nine Mile Canyon kept a few old ewes grazing outside the shacks because authentic sheepmen left old and injured animals behind when they trailed their flocks into high country for summer grazing.

Fermenting grapes for wine and barley and hops for beer required no special equipment, but setting up a still depended on a coppersmith’s craftsmanship to solder sheets of copper into round or box-shaped containers of sizes ranging from a few feet in circumference for individual needs to those of massive dimensions for wholesale business. The “feds,” federal liquor agents, sought out coppersmiths as diligently as bootleggers did and at times used ruses to entrap them.14 Fortunately, stills were made of copper. When a still that used lead coils rather than copper was discovered in San-

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14Salt Lake Tribune, March 8, 1929.

Raids in Provo uncovered numerous stills, and residents complained of free-flowing liquor at Utah County resorts during Prohibition era. Photograph is of Center Street looking west. USHS collections.
pete County, the information “presumably did more to discourage tippling . . . than any number of sermons.”

Making whiskey was simple once the still was ready; recipes for mash became common property. Bootleggers drove to farms and grain elevators to buy great amounts of rye, wheat, and corn “for fodder”; to stores for hundred-pound sacks of sugar “for putting up fruit”; and to wholesalers for pounds of yeast “to bake bread.” To distill 100 gallons of whiskey a day, a plant in an empty four-story warehouse on First South and Fourth West in Salt Lake City used a ton of sugar, sixty-five pounds of yeast, and a sack of rye every four days. The industry utilized great quantities of raisins, molasses, and a lesser amount of fresh fruit. Tobacco juice or iodine gave the required amber color and “bite” to the whiskey.

Sugar whiskey made without fusil oil that had to be filtered over charcoal was of the highest quality. Grapes were often added to the grain and sugar for taste. The mash was then left to ferment in a crock for seventy-two hours, strained through cloth, and distilled. The first distillation was whiskey. The bootlegger periodically lighted matches to the distillation: the higher the alcohol content, the bluer the flame. When the flame turned yellow, more water than alcohol was being distilled.

“Raw” whiskey, also called “white lightning,” was unaged and sold straight from the still. Much cheaper than aged whiskey that was handled by trusted bootleggers who supplied men in business and the professions, it satisfied transients, cowboys, sheepherders, and the poor.

Capturing bootleggers was a monumental problem. Following usual political practice, the state legislature had passed a Prohibition bill that entailed an enormous expenditure of time by a vast force of personnel but had not provided commensurate funds to pay officers. Governor Bamberger asked health officials and other state officers to take on Prohibition duties with their regular work, and he deputized others. Gov. Charles R. Mabey continued the policy of giving commissions to people who traveled about the state and were interested in uncovering liquor violations. Not enough honest

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16 Salt Lake Tribune, November 15, 1930.
18 Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Twenties (New York: Bantam Books, 1959), p. 224, states that appropriations in 1920 provided a force of only 1,520 federal agents.
agents were employed, however, to cope with stills sprouting up everywhere and the ceaseless demand of the public: "People went crazy over whiskey. Looking for it, getting it, hiding it."29

After the Utah bill became law, the liquor agents' first duty was to stop whiskey from coming into the state, especially from Wyoming, which was still legally wet. According to Rolla West:

Any unattached man who had enough money to make a down payment on a fast car and enough money to pay for his 'load' to the Wyoming supplier could get directions [from him] where he could sell his 'load' at a handsome profit. Full time or part time. Part time being preferred since a regular job was a good front.

When agents found the two-lane dirt roads that bootleggers used between Utah and Wyoming, some shipments were thwarted and local whiskey making increased. In Carbon County

"Kentucky" moonshine whiskey makers who had never been as far east as Grand Junction, Colo., arrived on the scene on very short notice. Back rooms and basements strategically situated became quietly active and hush-hush. . . . [You could get it] anywhere in town.21

To transport liquor, bootleggers used cars, stages, trains, horses, and, in one instance, an airplane. One man recalled:

I drove the old Bingham Stage Line starting in 1919. We'd regularly pick up two unmarked suitcases in Salt Lake — no name or tag on them — and deposit them outside Johnny Jimson's place in Bingham. This way no one could accuse us of knowing the suitcases were filled with Wyoming whiskey.22

An ingenious bootlegger in Wales, Sanpete County, loaded whiskey in the pack saddle of his trained horse and then turned the animal loose to make its way home over twenty miles of mountain road. The bootlegger returned home by car on the highway. Although the officers "knew he was bootlegging," when they stopped his car and searched it, they never found any liquor in it.23

Agents checked boxcars regularly. Because few officers were available to examine every freight train, they relied on rumors and informers. In Ogden agents discovered two boxcars filled with $100,000 of "fine liquor" and stood guard while curious onlookers came to the railyards and milled about.24

29 Statement of Emily Zeese, the author's mother.
22 Interview with Joseph Hasalone, August 18, 1983.
24 Salt Lake Tribune, December 29, 1923.
Railroaders themselves made deliveries. Engineers, conductors, and brakemen traveled throughout Utah and into surrounding states and were able to buy their own whiskey, but railroad officials and men working in roundhouses and depots in division points had stationary jobs and depended on others for liquor. Two gallons in pint bottles could be fitted into a padded suitcase. Railroaders had few qualms about carrying their heavy luggage into YMCAs, which had been built mainly to house them on their overnight runs.

A long-retired Union Pacific brakeman recalled that as an eighteen-year-old he was introduced to the Milford mayor by a conductor. In return for a room above the mayor's drugstore, freedom to read any magazine on the rack, and all the malted milks he wanted, he was recruited to bring Delmuse Whiskey, at twenty dollars a gallon, from Caliente, Nevada.

It was a good deal. I had the experience. The year before I spent two months in Monterey, California, in an army program for young men to get a taste of army life. The sergeant was confined to the base. He was an alcoholic and he'd whipped all the Monterey police force. His nerves were a jangle and he had to rely on vanilla and lemon extract. Twice a week I went into Monterey for supplies and the sergeant gave me some
money and a note to take to this guy in a certain poolhall. I'd go to the toilet and the guy would follow me. I'd give him the note and money and he'd give me the booze.\textsuperscript{25}

Using the rails to transport liquor was easiest and least subject to detection, but automobiles were the common means of bootleg travel. When horses carried liquor through impassable draws and canyons, several trips had to be made to highways where cars awaited their arrival. In a dugout a half-mile off the Lincoln Highway in Tooele County, agents found a 200-gallon still, 40 gallons of whiskey, and 1,500 gallons of mash. The bootleggers brought the liquor on horseback to the highway with a cedar tree tied to the horse dragging behind to erase its tracks.\textsuperscript{26}

Bootleggers spent a large portion of their time eluding and trying to outwit agents. In Salt Lake City a wholesaler rode streetcars to empty houses throughout the city to tend his stills. To cover his trail he stopped off at various corners and transferred to later streetcars. For alleviating the sag at the back of automobiles that gave officials the clue liquor was being transported, bootleggers placed blocks under the rear springs. With loads of liquor in their cars, they drove slowly toward semaphore lights to prevent sloshing in the bottles that would arouse suspicion. Recalling this precaution, the owner of the Grand Central grocery chain, Maurice Warshaw, told a television audience about creeping toward an intersection light while looking apprehensively into the rearview mirror at a sheriff’s car following him.\textsuperscript{27}

Bootleggers quickly learned it was useless to hide bottles in toilet tanks or pour liquor down the sink, for agents became adept at removing the gooseneck pipe underneath and finding the incriminating residue. However, bootleggers were equally adept at devising new subterfuges to avoid detection.

An imaginative bootlegger in Sanpete County “kept his stocks in bed — with his wife ready to jump in and feign sickness should the law appear with a search warrant.” Another Sanpete merchant transported his booze “in a specially designed rumble seat.” In Summit County, when the newly elected Coalville sheriff set up road-blocks to stop Wyoming whiskey from coming in, Park City

\textsuperscript{25} The respondent asked not to be identified because “The U.P. was good to me.”

\textsuperscript{26} Salt Lake Tribune, December 29, 1923.

\textsuperscript{27} For Warshaw’s other bootlegging experiences in California see his autobiography, Life More Sweet than Bitter (Salt Lake City, 1975), pp. 157-59.
connoisseurs had to drink less desirable brew until the town mortician J. E. "Jimmy" Flynn drove a hearse to Kemmerer, Wyoming, with other town notables following, ostensibly to the site of a mine disaster. After filling the coffin with whiskey, the funeral cortege drove through the roadblock, reverently waved on, and into Park City.  

Heine Hernon, who since 1901 had owned a Park City saloon that was converted to a soda fountain the day after Prohibition went into effect ("There were seventeen saloons in Park City before that day and seventeen soda fountains the day after," residents said.), installed a partition, suspended by weights, under a second-story window of his saloon. When raided, he rolled barrels of Wyoming whiskey against the partition, which lifted from the pressure, and the kegs came to rest in the attic of the adjacent one-story building. The owners of the Metropol Hotel in Price constructed removable baseboards behind which whiskey bottles could be safely hidden. In the Granger-Hunter area of Salt Lake County, farmers successfully hid bottles and small kegs in designated sections of irrigation ditches for nighttime retrieval by middlemen.

Copper tubing leading to storage containers was conclusive proof of illegal activities. After a diligent hunt in a combination restaurant and soft-drink parlor near 100 West Second South in Salt Lake City, agents found a copper tube between the woodwork running from the first floor to the basement and back to a supply tank on the second floor.

No one, of course, could explain away the presence of working stills; bootleggers frantically tried to dismantle them when agents swept through neighborhoods on raids. During the 1922 Carbon County coal strike National Guard troops, while systematically searching mine company houses, saw a young South Slav girl running down the road, her long blond hair streaming; sensing she was holding contraband, they ran after her. The girl threw a coil of copper tubing into a clump of bushes, climbed a tree outside Menotti's grocery store, and remained there until a wagon passed below. She jumped into it, hid, and escaped to her house. She then had her hair cut like a boy's and dyed black, and until the National Guard left the county she dressed in overalls.

29 Salt Lake Tribune, May 17, 1929.
30 Interview with Zelpha Vuksinick, April 2, 1980.
The potential profit to be made from illegal liquor was so tempting that individuals often took foolish risks. Frank Lyons built a 40-gallon still in his Provo home, less than two blocks from the courthouse; it was raided in 1921. A number of larger stills were discovered by agents in downtown Provo, the largest, destroyed by officials in 1928, "was capable of producing over 200 gallons of whiskey every 24 hours," with most of the product sold to Provoans in anticipation of the Christmas holiday season.31

The elements often helped federal agents. Counting on surprising the immigrant neighborhoods in Magna, agents began a raid after snowfall. Hearing the commotion and the cries, "They're coming!" a millworker emptied several barrels of wine into the gutter in front of his house. The agents followed the red rivulets to his doorstep and arrested him.32 To absorb fumes a bootlegger in Price dug a trench and buried two parallel pipes that led from his basement still to an underground septic tank. While agents prowled the neighborhood after snow had fallen, they noticed two lines where the snow had melted, dug, and uncovered the pipes.33

Still exploded frequently and neighborhood fires were a constant menace. Firemen repeatedly detected stored whiskey and stills while extinguishing flames. A disastrous 1932 fire in Highland Boy destroyed the school, houses, and businesses a third of a mile on either side of Carr Fork, leaving three hundred people homeless.34 Above the roar of the fire stills blew up, one after the other.

Agents were also aided by hunters and boys. During every pheasant, duck, and deer season, hunters came upon hidden stills and informed police. Playing football on Fourth South between Tenth and Eleventh East in Salt Lake City, boys discovered a ten-gallon keg of whiskey buried in a hillside to age. They carried the prize a distance and then called police. One of the largest distilleries in the West was found by boys playing near an old westside warehouse, supposedly used to store furs and hides. The boys saw two men enter the building and notified the police. Nine 500-gallon vats and twelve 55-gallon barrels filled with mash were found. Inadvertently, a small boy betrayed his bootlegging grandfather when several agents appeared at a farmhouse in American Fork and asked

31 Kunz, "Provo in the Jazz Age," p. 35.
32 The godfather of the author's husband.
33 Interview with Ted A. Poulos, October 26, 1980.
him if his grandfather made whiskey. The boy answered that he did and led them to the barn, then watched in horror as they demolished the still and barrels with axes.  

Liquor agents were almost always Protestants or Mormons and reflected the anti-immigrant prejudice of the era that culminated in the 1924-25 Ku Klux Klan campaigns. As immigrants from the Mediterranean and the Balkans began marrying American women, hostility against them grew. In retribution, liquor agents often tried to fake bootlegging charges. A young Greek in Magna who eloped with a Mormon woman to Farmington and returned to find crosses burning in front of his cafe and her parents' house was continually on the alert for approaching agents. By banging on the wall, the other side of which was a Greek coffeehouse, he gave the signal to his countrymen to rush over to prevent agents from planting a bottle of whiskey and then arresting him.

Ignorant of or indifferent to immigrant cultures, agents were often harsher than necessary. They trivialized the need of wine for communion, for the common cup from which a bride and groom must drink, and for toasting the health of a newly baptized infant. In Helper the sheriff entered a below-the-sidewalk restaurant to arrest the owner for a liquor violation. The proprietor was eating and lifted his palm in a staying motion. He had come from the island of Crete, from a pocket of land where a large population of Turks lived, and had acquired their Moslem tenet of not rising from the table until a meal was completed. Fuming, the sheriff waited, taking this religious custom as a sign of contempt.

The Price newspaper resented the attention focused on illegal liquor operations in Carbon County by federal Prohibition director Mathonihah Thomas. It accused him of not having "the nerve to tackle the booze problem in Salt Lake City" where "all a man has to do to get booze most anywhere . . . is pay the price. . . . The trouble is that if the Democratic office holder undertook to clean up Salt Lake he would run into too many of his friends. . . ." Accusations that law enforcement officials protected some liquor violators were common

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35 Salt Lake Tribune, March 30, 1932, February 24, 1923; story related to author by Myra Varanakis.
36 See Larry R. Gerlach, Blazing Crosses in Zion: The Ku Klux Klan in Utah (Logan: Utah State University, 1982).
37 Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Dallas, June 26, 1972.
38 Reminiscence of George Zeese, the author's father.
Bootlegging in Zion during Prohibition. The city marshal of Milford in 1928 was reported by federal official George A. Goates to be protecting his sister, “the chief offender” against Prohibition in his jurisdiction. State legislator Lorenzo Argyle complained to Governor Bamberger that law officers in Spanish Fork were turning a blind eye toward “Bootlegging, Drinking and Carousing.”

Caught with liquor in one’s possession was not the only hazard in Prohibition days. Lacking reputedly made liquor, drinkers consumed canned heat and wood alcohol that could cause blindness. Some learned how to neutralize the methane in this denatured alcohol bought at service stations. Lead salts from car radiators — used by unscrupulous still operators as cheapjack condensers instead of copper tubing — could poison drinkers. Another danger was posed by caves and other poorly ventilated hideouts that nearly asphyxiated bootleggers and agents alike. Proper storage presented problems that sometimes required sophisticated knowledge. J. Bracken Lee recalled:

Someone gave me a gallon of moonshine and I went to the druggist and asked him if he had any empty wooden casks. He gave me a small, empty formaldehyde barrel and told me to wash it out several times with boiling water. Later that day two friends came by and I offered them a drink. I saw them the next day downtown. Their mouths were blistered. I found out you can’t ever get formaldehyde out of wood.

Because the liquor business had become clandestine, standards of sanitation belonged to the past, and bootleggers could be as clean and as honest or as unclean and as dishonest as they wanted. Agents raiding a grocery store in Salt Lake City seized forty-four gallons of wine made in a dirty fifty-gallon barrel: “The mash was a conglomeration that respectable pigs would have scorned — being composed of decomposed grapes, apples and other refuse from the store.”

Drinkers, therefore, deemed it important to know their bootleggers, and they searched until they found “decent liquor that wouldn’t make a person sick.” Two men most frequently mentioned as “men you could trust” and who “made good stuff” were John Diamanti of Helper and Jimmy McG— of Salt Lake City who made whiskey in his First Avenue house and sold most of it in the Moxum

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40 Salt Lake Tribune, June 11, 1930.
41 Lee interview.
42 Salt Lake Tribune, January 21, 1928.
Hotel; the guests were mainly permanent residents, stockmen, and traveling salesmen.

People needed bootleggers to supply them with liquor, and bootleggers needed attorneys to extricate them from the law. Prohibition brought a period of halcyon days to many lawyers who otherwise would have made a modest or substandard living. Word-of-mouth elevated several attorneys to enviable positions, among them Samuel A. King and R. Verne McCullough, well known also as a businessman. More so than American bootleggers, immigrants required effective attorneys because judges used their discretion in handing down sentences and were especially severe toward the foreign-born who had flouted the nation's laws. Meanwhile, local juries refused to convict their fellow citizens of liquor possession often enough that the Utah attorney general's office complained.43

Women, too, often faced trial for bootlegging. Among nine Carbon County bootleggers caught in a raid was a Helper woman of “old” American stock who owned a “brewery of magnificent proportions.” Her operation included a complete bottling plant. Women owners of boardinghouses were under continual scrutiny. The French owner of the Allies Hotel in Price was arrested twice in one week. In Bingham a woman was charged with making whiskey in the old Boston Con Hotel, and in Salt Lake City the mother of nine children pleaded guilty to possession of liquor. Another Salt Lake City mother kept a still going in the basement of her house while her husband was serving an eighteen-month term at McNeil Island for bootlegging.44

Many mothers turned to bootlegging during the depression years when federal aid was unavailable to help their indigent families. For others bootlegging was a wondrous opportunity to make money. Some women followed the cultural patterns of their native countries. To have on hand the obligatory liqueur for guests, Greek women in Magna (and elsewhere) made ouzo from chipoura, the crushed grape skins left after the juice was extricated for wine. To make mastiha, the licorice-tasting liqueur, they combined ouzo with anise.45 Italians used the crushed grape skins to make a second-grade, and therefore inferior, wine called grappa.

44 News Advocate, July 24, May 13, 1926; Bingham Bulletin, March 10, 1932; Salt Lake Tribune, February 17, 1933.
Bootlegging was commonly a family business. Children often left play and chores to deliver liquor.

I was fourteen years old and drove my dad’s fancy Hupmobile to N—’s goat ranch in Butterfield Canyon. I’d load up and drive back to Magna. I’ll never forget the time the feds raided our house and one of them pushed my mother out of the way. She bit his hand so hard, he had to go around with it bandaged up.

In Spring Glen, Carbon County

The appearance of an 8 year old boy on the Highway in the heat of the day garbed in a coat of manly proportions . . . aroused the curiosity of agents, who, upon investigation, discovered two pints of whisky in the pockets of the coat.46

Agents frequently overlooked the search and seizure conditions of the Prohibition law and were zealous in their pursuit of liquor violators. In Salt Lake City Sheriff Benjamin R. Harries wounded a fleeing confectioner who was fearful that invading officers were going to assault him. To Fos denounced the shooting of this “American citizen, of very short stature, quiet, a philanthropist, and well

46 Interviews with Theodore Heleotes, September 3, 10, 1983; News Advocate, July 29, 1926.
known in his business neighborhood.” In his fear of agents a seventy-eight-year-old man fell headfirst down an elevator shaft. A widow and her children, who had moved into an alley house behind the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Salt Lake City, were terrorized by agents when, failing to find liquor in a neighbor’s house, they burst into her kitchen looking for contraband.47

Unconcerned about formalities, agents were given a legal precedent when the Utah Supreme Court upheld the conviction for possession of liquor of a Uintah County man who had contested his arrest without a signed warrant. In a unanimous decision the court held that the Fourth and Fifth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution on unreasonable search and seizure did not apply to state governments and state courts. The court, however, ruled in favor of Bertha Jackson, who brought suit against the Salt Lake County sheriff’s office for “vigorously” searching her house (with a warrant) and causing her “severe nervous and emotional stress.”48

Legal maneuvers, speakeasies, rum-running, fashionable cocktail parties, gang wars, and hypocrisy fused into the milieu of the dry years. From its inception Prohibition enforcement was a delusion. Although the liquor traffic was intense in almost every part of the state, the Salt Lake Tribune carried the caption “Utah Bone Dry, According to the Official Records.” The reality was that during 1923-32 agents uncovered 448 distilleries and 702 stills in Utah along with thousands of pieces of distilling apparatus; over 47,000 gallons of spirits, malt liquor, wine, and cider; and 332,000 gallons of mash. Much more went undetected.49

While agents struggled to control the amount of alcohol made in-state by Utah residents, other law enforcement officials tried to stem the tide of liquor entering the United States from foreign countries. Representatives of the federal government and Canada attempted the impossible task of shutting off the supply of liquor and drugs over the border into the United States. Trucks from throughout the country met Canadian ships and left with their disguised loads. A Magna family regularly drove a truck with a half load of lumber to the Pacific Coast, set cases of whiskey and rum under the planks, and returned to Utah. Liquor brought by British

47To Fos, September 6, 1923; Salt Lake Tribune, November 29, 1923, February 20, 1933; interview with Steve Sargetakis, October 26, 1981.
48Salt Lake Tribune, November 16, 1923; Nelson, “Problems of Prohibition Enforcement,” p. 46.
ships to the twelve-mile national waters was transported to lighter, faster craft to elude the United States Coast Guard, a small patrol that could not conduct adequate surveillance. Arrests were relatively few; the capture of a British rum schooner with the purported king of smugglers aboard made front-page news.59

While gang wars escalated in the East and Midwest — the 1929 Valentine’s Day Massacre of seven O’Bannions by Al Capone’s men a grisly, ingenious performance — violence also erupted periodically in Utah. In Eureka near the Mammoth Mine a bootlegger shot and killed a member of the pioneer McIntyre family. Halfway between West Jordan and Bingham Canyon in a barn where a still worked, a shooting left one of the bootleggers dead. Rival bootleggers shot at each other on a goat ranch near Lark, and in Lakepoint two still operators were killed over liquor and slot-machine competition. Seventeen miles south of Price, near Mounds in Emery County, an agent shot a bootlegger who was protecting his still with a shotgun and paralyzed him. He died soon after. Two Salt Lake City revenue officers were wounded in Silver City when they discovered that the town’s water line had been tapped and followed the pipe to an “effectively concealed” dugout. The three young bootleggers refused to come out of the dugout, thinking the officers were hijackers. In the midst of the confrontation, the boiler exploded and one of the bootleggers came out shooting.51

The illegality of liquor and the determination of drinkers to get it by any means led to unprecedented corruption. Raids into neighborhoods were often shams: bribed officials telephoned still operators to give them time to dispose of their liquor. An area of West Jordan was under the protection of the sheriff, and deputies were ordered not to enter it. In Summit County a deputy sheriff was indicted for allegedly furnishing a still to a bootlegger and conspiring with him to manufacture liquor. Sheriff Amasa M. Hammon was charged with taking one hundred dollars from “Fats” Davis, owner of an Ogden speakeasy. This occurred in the same week that beer was again being legally sold in Wyoming and long lines of au-

50 Salt Lake Tribune, November 26, 1923; To Fos, July 5, 1923.
51 Salt Lake Tribune, January 19, 1931; Price News Advocate, January 29, 1931; Salt Lake Tribune, January 11, 1931. Until mortuaries began sending obituaries to newspapers, families often neglected to insert death announcements. When relatives were involved in shootings, they were even more reluctant to inform newspapers of deaths. That, along with incomplete files for some newspapers, makes gathering details of shootings difficult. Accounts are often imprecise but vivid. Everett L. Cooley recalled a Boy Scout trek from West Jordan to Bingham and the awe of seeing the barn in which the shootings over the still took place.
tomobiles crossed over the border from Utah as regular Sunday excursions.  

A federal grand jury in 1928 indicted deputy sheriffs, federal officers, "and reputed higher ups in [Salt Lake City] bootleg circles." In Clear Creek, Carbon County, the constable was arrested for serving "white mule" in his boardinghouse; and in Helper the mayor and all the councilmen except one asked for bribes from hotels, poolhalls, and candy stores in return for insurance against arrest. The owners notified Henry Ruggeri, the county attorney, who stripped the officials of their positions. In Ogden the mayor, a commissioner, the chief of police, a police captain, a patrolman, the sheriff, and two deputy sheriffs were arraigned in court, indicted for collaboration with a bootlegger. The local Lions' Club passed a resolution in support of the officials.  

52 Salt Lake Tribune, July 30, 1928; Deseret News, May 25, 19, 1933.  
53 Salt Lake Tribune, April 24, 28, 1928; Sun, August 30, 1928; Zeese reminiscence; Salt Lake Tribune, January 25, 1923, April 6 and May 23, 1933; Ogden Standard-Examiner, April 5, 1933. Of the Helper officials, only Charles Bertolino was found innocent, and he became acting mayor.
Citizens had a collective contempt for elected officials and, especially, for agents. Besides their solicitation of bribes or accepting them when offered, agents were often guilty of drunkenness and disorderly conduct. In Carbon County an agent was charged with being “too drunk to call the ‘Black Maria’ ” after making an arrest.\(^{54}\) The Salt Lake City police chief suspended a policeman caught in a speakeasy raid and three others for intoxication.\(^{55}\) A Salt Lake City federal agent with “a high-handed manner” was arrested in Helper for criminal assault on a woman he had kept captive for a period of five hours:

[He] held her nose and tried to force liquor down her throat after which he attacked her. [In his car were] two revolvers, a rifle, several pint flasks filled with moonshine, and an empty small keg.\(^{56}\)

Agents carried on vendettas against bootleggers who tried to avoid paying bribes; some kept confiscated liquor and openly defied the law:

The fed telephoned my dad to give him time to hide his whiskey, then walked in with his men, gave a quick look around, and after his men went out, motioned my father to get him a stiff drink.\(^{57}\)

Bootleggers became bolder in their retaliation against liquor agents. A percentage of each fine was commonly paid to officers on convictions, a policy that was particularly offensive to bootleggers and a reason Helper dry agents became “unpopular with the foreign element.” Bootleggers in Bingham Canyon warned “Sheriff Corless . . . not to destroy booze . . . or [he] may come in contact with T.N.T.”\(^{58}\)

On Salt Lake City’s westside bootleggers fought with two undercover agents, leaving one with a battered face.\(^{58}\)

On November 15, 1927, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported: “War between police and bootleggers after nightfall, at the present time, has developed into more or less of a one-sided conflict, in which the rum dealers have the odds.” Two years later the newspaper reported federal agents had been threatened with bodily harm, and precautionary measures were taken. Rumors of a similar nature surfaced throughout the era:

\(^{54}\) *News Advocate*, April 15, 1927.
\(^{55}\) *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 12, 1931.
\(^{56}\) *News Advocate*, October 31, December 1, 1927.
\(^{57}\) Heleotes interviews.
\(^{58}\) *News Advocate*, April 27, 1922; *Bingham Press Bulletin*, August 9, 1918; *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 17, 1925.
Members of a bootleg ring are believed to be planning a swift revenge, according to officers. Reports intimate that a group of racketeers had been brought to Salt Lake from a distant city to assist with the work.\(^{59}\)

Agents especially feared going into Carbon County and at times refused to return there. Scoffing at Prohibition was an amusement: a Helper baseball team was called the Bootleggers. Carbon County had been described as "wide open" since early settlement days when cattle was rustled from southern Utah and northern Arizona through Nine Mile Canyon to Myton and Vernal for summer range and on to Union Pacific railheads in Wyoming.

This brought into the county a bunch of hard riding fast shooting men who generally had money... In addition these rustlers required liquor and entertainment and from somewhere these "wide open" items always seemed available.\(^{60}\)

Carbon County's wide-openness was accepted by almost everyone, but W. F. Olsen, mayor of Price, angrily replied to a derogatory Deseret News editorial on the subject with a letter to the editor: "Our two marshalls [sic] are good Latter-day Saints even in keeping strictly the word of wisdom."\(^{61}\)

Complaints about laxness in Carbon County did not abate. Letters to federal government officials, the United States attorney general, and Gov. George H. Dern resulted in a vast raid. Agents met in Scofield at 3:30 on an August afternoon in 1928 and spread out to Colton, Helper, Price, the surrounding coal camps, and Eureka in the Tintic Mining District. They succeeded in making numerous arrests.\(^{62}\)

When public protests reached a proportion that could not be ignored, raids followed and agents smiled in the foreground of a pile of stills for newspaper photographers. Editors and readers were scornful of these raids:

Frequent accounts appear of the destruction of confiscated liquor, in which a great ceremony is made of the event. It is quite the fad to delegate the actual destruction to some dry organization, under the direction of the proper officers of the law. A public place in the streets is selected, due publicity given in advance and then the "Roman holiday." The assembled crowd looks on with varied audible expressions.\(^{63}\)

\(^{59}\)Salt Lake Tribune, October 25, 1929, January 21, 1923.
\(^{60}\)West MS., p. 17.
\(^{61}\)Sun, April 28, 1928.
\(^{62}\)Sun, August 30, 1928.
\(^{63}\)Salt Lake Tribune, December 4, 1926.
The scorn was fueled constantly by contempt for the law that came from the very makers of laws. George Zeese, who accompanied Carl R. Marcusen of Price, state Republican chairman and a candidate for governor, to the August 16, 1928, state GOP convention in Ogden, said: “Whiskey was everywhere in the convention hall. What went on! It was almost impossible to believe. A big drinking party.”

On another occasion, when a well-known lobbyist dropped one of two quart bottles of pre-Prohibition Scotch whisky on the marble floor of the Utah State Capitol building, he explained, before hurrying off, that it was medicine for the sick wife of a legislator.

The “Era of the Big Lie,” a writer characterized the period:

The drys lied to make prohibition look good. . . . the wets lied to make it look bad; the government officials lied to make themselves look good and to frighten Congress into giving them more money to spend, and the politicians lied through force of habit.

The foisting of Prohibition on the nation was catastrophic. The failure of the Volstead Act and the misery of the depression brought a clamor for repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. Organizations sent resolutions to Governor Blood asking for a special session of the legislature to consider repeal. Yet Prohibitionists fought with valiant, impotent fervor to keep the amendment. At a mass meeting in the Salt Lake Tabernacle to rally against repeal, speakers pleaded for more money and men to enforce Prohibition. “Death is preferable to the iron collar of liquor,” a Methodist minister proclaimed.

Prohibition was repealed by the Twenty-first Amendment that required ratification by thirty-six states. Utah won over Maine’s bid to become the thirty-sixth state by Governor Blood’s quick action in convening the legislature to vote on it. Utah, however, remained a dry state until 3.2 beer became legal in January 1934, and liquor continued to be bootlegged until the present state monopoly was established in 1935. In the interim, Wyoming whiskey from Kemmerer selling for $1.25 was a drinker’s “good stuff.”

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64 Zeese reminiscence.
65 Salt Lake Tribune, February 25, 1931.
67 Salt Lake Tribune, May 4, 16, April 6, 1933.
68 Salt Lake Tribune, February 21, 1933.