"Betwixt brewings": a history of college students and alcohol

Michael Stephen Hevel

University of Iowa

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“BETWIXT BREWINGS”:
A HISTORY OF COLLEGE STUDENTS AND ALCOHOL, 1820-1933

by
Michael Stephen Hevel

An Abstract
Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

July 2011

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Christine A. Ogren
ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers a history of white college students’ relationship with alcohol between 1820 and 1933. These years frame a long crisis regarding alcohol in the United States. A dramatic rise in alcohol consumption began around 1800, the negative consequences of which led growing numbers of Americans, for the first time, to associate social evils with alcohol use. These initial realizations gave rise to the temperance reform movement that ebbed and flowed over the next hundred years, reaching the pinnacle of its success in 1920, when national Prohibition became law. During this long century, college students’ alcohol use often served as microcosm of developments within society.

Making contributions to the historiography of higher education, historiography of alcohol, and modern research on college student drinking, this study relies primarily on three types of sources that provide different perspectives on both students’ behaviors and concerns about drinking on campus. Based on a large collection of student diaries, chapters one and two consider college students’ alcohol use in the forty years preceding the U.S. Civil War. Chapter one considers the behavioral patterns and significance of college men’s drinking; chapter two focuses primarily on the influence of the temperance reform movement on college students. Chapter three considers depictions of student drinking in twenty-two “college novels”—works of fiction set predominantly on campuses with students as their protagonists—published between 1869 and 1933. Finally, chapter four draws on the surviving administrative records at four institutions to consider the effects on campus discipline of national Prohibition.

Across the nation’s long century of conflict over alcohol, four themes emerge regarding college student drinking. First, drinking behaviors and attitudes toward alcohol on campus have long reflected those in the larger society. College students’ alcohol use has generally mirrored that of adults in the segments of society from which they hailed or those
whose ranks they wished to join upon graduation. The second theme is that the negative consequences of college student drinking have been ever-present and widespread. College students’ alcohol use has resulted in personal negative health effects, interfered with their academic success, and coincided with vandalism and violence. Closely related to the negative consequences student drinkers inflicted upon themselves and their communities, college students’ alcohol use has long presented problems to college authorities. These academic leaders primarily addressed alcohol-related misbehavior through the campus discipline process. Although college authorities enjoyed seemingly absolute discretion in terms of campus discipline, they seldom punished student drinkers harshly. Finally, drinking on campus has long been a mark of privilege. During all the years of this study, the heaviest and most regular alcohol use occurred at the institutions that enrolled the most privileged students, primarily eastern men’s colleges. Within both elite and less prestigious institutions, wealthy white men consumed more alcohol than their less economically advantaged peers. By studying college students’ alcohol use in relation to societal developments over a long century, the chapters that follow offer a largely untold story of student life and provide important perspective on our contemporary concerns.

Abstract Approved:  __________________________________________

Thesis Supervisor

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Title and Department

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Date
“BETWIXT BREWINGS”:
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Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Christine A. Ogren
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph. D. thesis of

Michael Stephen Hevel

has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy
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                    Katrina M. Sanders
To Lane and my mom, who both enjoy a cold beer,
and to my dad, who would love to join them.
And for their wanting beer, betwixt brewings, a week or a half together, I am sorry that it was so at any time, and should tremble to have it so, were it in my hands to do again.

Mistress Eaton’s testimony before the Massachusetts Bay Colony General Court
September 1639
Quoted in Samuel Eliot Morrison’s The Founding of Harvard College
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During her service as First Lady of the United States in the 1990s, Hillary Clinton received criticism from some conservatives when she argued that “it takes a village”—rather than just two parents—to raise a child. How embarrassing for me, then, that the support necessary to write this dissertation seems to have required the resources of a medium-sized city. In the twenty-six years of my life that passed before I arrived at the University of Iowa, I gained friends, colleagues, and mentors who helped prepare me for and sustain me through my doctoral education and the dissertation process. Since a fateful day in March 1993, Theresa (Drumm) Biggs has been a great best friend. Our lives took different, but always connected, paths after high school. I am grateful for her continued friendship and, now, her haircuts. At the University of Kansas, Danny Kaiser, Robert Page, Kenneth Stoner, Diana Robertson, and especially Randy Timm exposed me to the possibility of a career in higher education. Faculty members at Bowling Green State University, especially Maureen Wilson, Mike Coomes, Carney Strange, and Ellen Broido mentored and, to a large extent, put up with a particularly young and overly confident master’s student. I also met three comrades at BGSU, Chad Argotsinger, Nicole Craven, and Kurt Foriska, who made my two years in Ohio incredibly fun and continue to bring me good cheer in the years after our graduation. Chad also played host, chauffer, and tour guide during my dissertation research visits to the American Antiquarian Society and Smith College.

As my time in Ohio came to a close, I accepted a job at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon that took me far away from my midwestern homeland. Vonnie Martin welcomed me to Oregon and, in many ways, served as a surrogate mother during my three years there. Hans Bernard, Ryan Hamacheck, Bernie Liang, and Michael Ross made my professional transition to Willamette smooth while also becoming close friends. Komo Bains, Daniel Borgen, Kody Leonard, Robert Smith, and Doug Windedahl ensured I had an active social life while I lived in Oregon, not to mention when I visit the Pacific
Northwest today. In the weeks between my defense and the final deposit of my dissertation, Bob Hawkinson, a long-serving professor of politics and dean of campus life emeritus at Willamette University, passed away unexpectedly. Bob first encouraged my scholarly interest in the history of higher education, and I know he would have loved the opportunity to read what follows.

The University of Iowa proved to be a wonderful place to become a scholar. Faculty members in the Department of Educational Policy and Leadership Studies provided me with flexibility to explore my interests and hone my research skills. Karen Bixby and Janice Latta, two top-notch administrative support staff, gave me much needed guidance, often at the last minute. Christopher Morphew arrived at Iowa after I had completed my coursework, but he has nonetheless offered me particularly sage advice in the last two years. The faculty and students in the Department of History opened their courses to an interloper, much to my benefit. For the past three years, I have been fortunate to have office space within the College of Education’s Grants and Research Services Center and interact almost daily with Elizabeth Constantine, Valia Dentino, and Teresa Garringer. Liz and Val edited countless grant proposals I wrote and helped me find the right words for cover letters and dissertation chapters. I developed deep intellectual and personal relationships with many of my fellow graduate students over the last five years, but four deserve special mention. Just as had happened at BGSU, Georgianna Martin arrived at Iowa one year after I did. Just as had happened at BGSU, I have enjoyed sharing many of my graduate school experiences with her. Kathy Goodman was a new face when I arrived at Iowa, though she quickly became a good friend. Our regular dinners at the Olive Garden will always be an intellectual and social, if not culinary, highlight of my time in Iowa City. DeeAnn Grove and Karissa Haugeberg improved much of the writing that follows by being asked to read far too many drafts of this dissertation. Karissa was a pleasant partner, if not mentor, as we finished our dissertations together. DeeAnn found herself in the unenviable position of sharing an office with me the past three years, dealing with my organizational
scheme that primarily consisted of piling papers, books, and Diet Pepsi cans on every useable surface. That I hope my days of office sharing are over is due in part because I can’t imagine finding a better companion.

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My higher education and this dissertation would have been impossible without the support of my family. I was blessed to know and be loved by five grandparents: Beatrice Eckles; William and Wanda Hevel; and Melville and Ruth Hopper. Only my Grandma Hevel survives, and I’m grateful for the times we have shared during my five years in Iowa. For almost a quarter century, my Grandma and Grandpa Hopper provided both materially and emotionally for my happiness. I continue to miss them terribly. My aunt, Laura Kaiser, helped cover some of my undergraduate college expenses and paved the way in terms of graduate education in our family when she graduated with her master’s degree on the same day I graduated with my bachelor’s degree in 2001.

Mike and Julie Schmidt have been amazing in-laws for almost six years. They let their youngest son move to Iowa with me and have funded a large portion of the adventure. A couple times each year their home has served as a welcome respite from scholarly deadlines for me. My regular visits to Portland have been brightened by the company and hospitality of additional in-laws, Grandma Monson and Grandpa Schmidt, two spectacular individuals who came into my life only a year after I lost two of my grandparents.

Few people have had to put up with me as long and as regularly as my siblings, Joshua, Emily, Erin, and Matthew. The writing of this dissertation was pleasantly
interrupted by vacations, funded by our parents, to Colorado and New Jersey, holidays, and impromptu visits with them. I hope, though I do not promise, to be less grumpy on similar endeavors in the future now that the weight of this project has been lifted.

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Lane Schmidt, who braved the unknown and moved away from his home in Portland to join me in Iowa in 2006, has lived the day-to-day progresses and setbacks that comprised this dissertation more than anyone else. For the past five years, he has allowed me to live in an immaculately clean house, made sure that I had clean clothes to wear, limited my fashion mistakes, made me many meals, and, along the way, earned his own college degree. When I had my doubts about my decisions or abilities, he expressed his unwavering confidence. Lane also regularly reminded me that there was a life to live, a life to share, outside the walls of the library and beyond my computer screen. It is with great pleasure, and with love, that I am finally able to dedicate this dissertation to him and my parents.
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INTRODUCTION

Higher education in colonial North America began with a crisis that involved college students and alcohol. In the summer of 1639, Nathaniel Eaton, Harvard’s first leader, hired an assistant named Nathaniel Briscoe. Any happiness in their relationship was short lived as a disagreement between the two occurred on Briscoe’s first Sunday on the job. Eaton fired Briscoe and expelled him from the college’s only building—Eaton’s house. Briscoe was soon back in the house, however, partially because Puritans could not travel on the Sabbath and partially because Eaton yanked him inside after Briscoe “talked back.” A short skirmish ensued in the entryway, before Briscoe separated himself from his former boss and retired to his bedroom. As Briscoe slept, Eaton received the local constable’s advice to attempt to “reform” the assistant before involving a magistrate. Eaton called on one of his two slaves to retrieve his cudgel, a club made from a yard-long board of walnut tree “big enough to have killed a horse.” With the club in hand, Eaton and his two slaves climbed the stairs and entered Briscoe’s room. For the next two hours, the slaves held Briscoe while Eaton hit him “about the head and shoulders” with the cudgel. At one point Briscoe, believing himself about to be murdered, fell to his knees in prayers. Eaton then beat Briscoe for taking the Lord’s name in vain. Finally, several townsmen heard Briscoe’s cries and came into the home. Eaton claimed that he had beat Briscoe for pulling a knife on him (which had only occurred as an act of self defense) and for swearing.

The audacious Eaton then filed a legal complaint against Briscoe. But the trial turned on Eaton when the magistrates asked to hear Briscoe’s version of events. Irate, Eaton left the trial. But when several students who, in addition to reporting similar violent punishments, joined Briscoe’s testimony and complained about the conditions of college, the magistrates forced Eaton to return to court to answer their charges. Eaton defiantly described “his rule” of discipline: “correcting” until “he had subdued the party to his will.” Questioned about the students’ lamentations on the food, drink, and cleanliness at college,
Eaton directed such criticisms to his wife. This proved a strategic mistake as “Mistress Eaton,” whose first name appears to be lost to history, offered testimony that damned both herself and her husband.

Colonial leaders accustomed to corporal punishment from their parents and educators in England could overlook Eaton’s violence towards both his assistant and his students, but they could not ignore the living conditions that students suffered at Harvard under his care. Mistress Eaton, probably much younger than her twenty-eight year old husband, admitted to violating almost every conceivable gastronomic expectation of her era (and most of our own). Maintaining that she was unaware that students were served “mackerel ... with their guts in them, and goat’s dung in their hasty pudding,” Mistress Eaton nonetheless apologized if such food had appeared on the college’s table. She often did not provide butter or cheese, and the students fared even worse when her husband was absent from the dinner table. Despite these unpleasant scenarios, colonists were most concerned about the students’ beef, bread, and beer, the three mainstays of the colonists’ diet. Mistress Eaton admitted to never serving beef to the students and was “truly sorry” for making bread from sour meal. Perhaps worst of all was the lack of beer available to the students. They complained in court that a Black servant drank beer while they were denied it, and that they were denied both beer and bread between meals. In the last sentence of her testimony before the court, Mistresses Eaton apologized—vowing that it would never happen again—that students had waited up to a week “betwixt brewings” of beer.

She never received the chance to fulfill her promise. Her testimony sealed her husband’s fate. The magistrates fined Master Eaton, ordered him to pay damages to Briscoe, and fired him from his position at Harvard. Eaton, already in debt, fled to Virginia. In an attempt to join her husband, Mistress Eaton and most of their children drowned after a shipwreck in the Atlantic Ocean. After several subsequent careers, some
successful and others not, and two subsequent wives, Nathaniel Eaton died in a debtor’s prison in England nearly three decades after his alcohol-related dismissal from Harvard.¹

Nearly four centuries later, higher education in the United States continues to experience crises involving college students and alcohol, though most Americans would identify too much consumption rather than too little as the primary cause of the problem. At least since the early 1990s, public health scholars and social scientists have decried high rates of “binge drinking”—measured by a man consuming five drinks in one sitting and women consuming four—among college students and the resulting negative consequences. Alcohol-related arrest rates increased on college campuses each year between 1991 and 2003. Researchers now estimate that over seventeen hundred college students die in alcohol-related accidents, nearly thirty thousand require emergency medical attention for alcohol poisoning, almost three million drive under the influence of alcohol, and millions more ride with a drunk driver each year. Scholars at the College Alcohol Study at the Harvard School of Public Health found college student binge drinkers demonstrate poorer academic performance, engage in high-risk sexual behaviors, and commit acts of vandalism and violence at significantly higher rates than their non-binge drinking peers.²

While the large national studies of student drinking have garnered national media attention, journalists are more apt to cover individual tragedies that involve college


students and alcohol. In a 60 Minutes segment that first aired on April 17, 2011, Katie Couric reported on two alcohol-related sexual assaults against women students allegedly perpetrated by members of the men’s basketball team at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. Occurring roughly a month apart, each incident involved the young men inviting a young woman who had been drinking alcohol—six shots of vodka in one instance—over to their on-campus apartment, and raping her in an upstairs bedroom. When one of the victims chose to pursue the matter through the campus discipline process rather than through criminal proceedings (the other pressed no charges with the police or campus authorities), she reported that the university judicial board focused more on her drinking that night and “not the actual assault,” administrative behavior that appalled advocates for victims of sexual assault.3

This segment aired just three weeks before the first anniversary of another alcohol-related tragedy on a college campus that garnered national attention. In the early morning hours of May 3, 2010, two University of Virginia students found their friend and fellow student Yeardley Love, a senior on the women’s lacrosse team, “facedown in her bed and unresponsive.” When the police arrived they “saw a pool of blood beneath her head, bruises on her face and her right eye swollen shut” and soon pronounced her dead. They did not need to look far for her attacker. Her ex-boyfriend, George Huguely, lived in a nearby apartment. Love had recently ended their relationship after Huguely, in an intoxicated state, assaulted her. On the night of her death, Love, and apparently Huguely too, drank at a popular bar near campus. At the police station he waived his Miranda rights and told police how he had kicked in her bedroom door and shaken Love as “her head repeatedly hit the wall.” As news of the tragedy broke, journalists soon discovered something unknown to UVA officials: Huguely had two alcohol-related arrests behind him at the time of Love’s death, one for underage possession in Florida and one for public

3 “The Case of Beckett Brennan,” 60 Minutes (CBS, April 17, 2011).
intoxication at nearby Washington and Lee University. Today, he remains in jail awaiting trial for murder.4

The University of Iowa (UI), the institution at which this dissertation took shape, is also no stranger to the problems presented by college student drinking. In October 2007, two UI football players allegedly sexually assaulted a female student athlete after she had spent the evening consuming mixed drinks in a campus residence hall and beer at a house party. When the case went to trial, the Daily Iowan reported that a “key issue” was “the level of intoxication of the alleged victim,” with the prosecution arguing that the victim could not give consent and the men arguing that she was not intoxicated. The botched handling of the incident led President Sally Mason to fire the university’s general counsel and vice president for student services. The Iowa City community has also struggled with the minimum age at which individuals should be able to enter the numerous drinking establishments in town. Voters, including a particularly high number of UI students, rejected a ballot measure in 2007 that would have increased the age of entry from nineteen to twenty-one, the minimum legal drinking age in the nation. Despite this vote, the Iowa City Council nonetheless raised the age to twenty-one in the summer of 2010, a move that voters supported by a narrow margin (fifty-two percent) that November. A month later, a 26-member UI task force unveiled the Alcohol Harm Reduction Plan that aimed to reduce the rate of students’ binge drinking fifteen percent in three years by attracting more low-risk drinkers, helping students who drink heavily reduce their alcohol use, and holding high-risk drinkers more accountable through the campus discipline process. Even if the plan proves successful, UI’s binge drinking rate would exceed the national average by ten percent.5


5 Hayley Bruce, “Satterfield Testifies Sex was Consensual in Everson Trial,” Daily Iowan (Iowa City, January 12, 2011); Heaton, Nora, Sam Lane, and Ariana Witt, “Iowa City Bars to
Comparing the first crisis at Harvard with our contemporary concerns suggests that college students’ alcohol use has a long and complex history, but historians have paid relatively little attention to college students and even less to their drinking behavior. Within histories of single institutions (“institutional histories”), historians tend to enliven their monographs with incidents of alcohol-related misbehavior. Most historians writing broader histories of higher education pay only marginally more attention to student drinking. At most, they may regard drinking as a minor discipline problem, note a rise in drinking during one time period without considering earlier patterns, or associate excessive drinking with students’ characteristics (e.g., younger students in comparison to “nontraditional” students) or a specific feature of the extracurriculum (e.g., fraternity members in comparison to independents). A handful of historians analyze alcohol use to support an overall argument—such as Paula Fass considering drinking “a symbol of liberation” along with smoking and increased sexual activity among college students in the


1920s, or Nicholas Syrett arguing that fraternity men used alcohol to demonstrate their manhood—but none consider student drinking as the central unit of analysis. Historians writing about alcohol use and temperance reform pay no better attention to college students. They usually consider college students statically, with no differences among students, resulting in a seemingly contradictory literature. For example, several historians consider college men to be particularly heavy drinkers during the same time period that other historians find them particularly drawn to the temperance movement.8 In sum, historians of higher education have presented a disjointed picture of college student drinking, while historians of alcohol and temperance consider college students a monolithic group.

My dissertation aims to provide a focused history of college students’ alcohol use, adding to the historiography of campus life and providing perspective to current policy debates by critically examining white college students’ relationship with alcohol between 1820 and 1933. The years that frame this study represent a long century of concerns about alcohol in the United States. Before the early nineteenth century, alcohol was a dietary staple for men, women, children, and even infants. Two chief factors contributed to this crisis. First, many Americans’ relationship with water changed at the turn of the nineteenth century. As public works replaced cheap but polluted or expensive but safe supplies and the long-standing cultural attitudes toward water were disproved (namely that belief that drinking cold water on hot days could kill a person), the necessity of alcohol as a dietary

A staple lessened.\textsuperscript{9} Second, a dramatic rise in alcohol consumption began around 1800, the negative consequences of which led some Americans, for the first time, to associate social evils with alcohol use. These initial realizations gave rise to a reform movement that ebbed and flowed over the next hundred years, reaching the pinnacle of its success in 1920, when national Prohibition became law. During this long century, college students’ alcohol use often served as a microcosm of developments within society.

Uncovering college students’ drinking behavior is no simple task. At least for the historian, “students are the most difficult members of the collegiate community to study,” writes David Allemendinger. Unlike faculty members and administrators who often enjoy long careers and leave significant paper trails, college students lead transitory lives and create documents seldom collected by archivists.\textsuperscript{10} Moreover, the records that students created on campus, their class assignments and their publications, seldom provide insight into such a mundane and unofficial activity as their drinking behavior. Much information must be gleaned from individual and often isolated incidents. This study relies primarily, though not exclusively, on three types of sources—diaries written by college students, novels about college students, and administrative discipline records—that provide different perspectives into the behavior and the concerns of student drinking.

Chapters one and two consider college students’ alcohol use in the forty years preceding the U.S. Civil War. These chapters rely primarily on over twenty-five diaries, today housed in four archives or available in published form, written by students. The primary aim of these chapters is to understand the drinking behavior and attitudes about alcohol from the students’ perspective. Chapter one considers the behavioral patterns and significance of college men’s drinking. Students who drank alcohol did so in ways similar

\textsuperscript{9} On Americans’ changing relationship with water in the early nineteenth century, see Rorabaugh, \textit{The Alcoholic Republic}, 95-98.

to men’s behavior in the larger society. More specifically, these students drank in ways that mirrored wealthy men’s drinking habits. In so doing, students prepared themselves for their future social obligations. Even though many students brought prior drinking experience with them to campus, they nonetheless used their college years to test their limits with alcohol and develop more reserved drinking habits.

In contrast to chapter one’s focus on students’ drinking behavior, chapter two focuses primarily on the influence of the temperance reform movement on college students. Many Americans expressed concerns about drinking on campus, imploring students to eschew alcohol and join the temperance cause. Some students responded positively to these calls and found the temperance movement facilitated their involvement in a larger political movement. The new, negative attitudes about alcohol created social unrest in the United States between those who held on to old views about alcohol and the reformers. This social unrest appeared on campus as many college students continued to drink while others flocked to the dry cause. To the extent that the social ills associated with alcohol motivated temperance agitators, alcohol use by campus drinkers provided fuel for their reforming zeal. Student drinkers created havoc on campus and off, though they often escaped detection and, when they did not, seldom received damning punishments.

Chapter three considers depictions of student drinking in twenty-two “college novels”—works of fiction set predominantly on campuses with students as their protagonists—published between 1869 and 1933. As the novels’ growth in popularity coincided with both larger enrollments in higher education and increased interest among the general public in college students, they provided the dominant portrayal of campus life in popular culture. The novels conveyed distinct messages about student drinking to their readers. Those published before 1920 indicated that socioeconomic status, gender, and the regional location of the institution were the primary determinants of whether students drank alcohol or abstained from it. After 1920, college novels increasingly conveyed that students from all backgrounds attending all types of institutions had begun to drink,
though the same factors that had earlier determined consumption or abstinence continued to influence the frequency with which students drank.

Finally, chapter four considers the effects on campus discipline of national Prohibition. Drawing on the surviving administrative records at four institutions, each representing a different institutional type, this chapter explores the era’s discipline process, the alcohol-related cases within this system, the behaviors of college student drinkers, and the punishments such students received. Despite differences in size and purpose, the institutions operated generally similar and increasingly complex discipline systems that involved faculty members, administrators, and student leaders. Alcohol-related cases comprised a significant portion of the discipline docket at all four institutions, even though a minority of drinking incidents probably came to the attention of college authorities. The time that college authorities spent on these cases produced administrative records that provide deep insights into student drinking behavior in the 1920s and early 1930s. In many instances, students continued to drink in long-standing ways, but they also adopted new behaviors, all of which represented more dangerous drinking practices than those of earlier eras. In light of riskier drinking practices that now flouted the Constitution, many students continued to receive relatively mild punishments for their alcohol use.

In these four chapters and across the nation’s long century of conflict over alcohol, four themes emerge regarding college student drinking. First, drinking behaviors and attitudes toward alcohol on campus have long reflected those in the larger society. In fact, college students’ alcohol use has generally mirrored that of adults in the segments of society from which they hailed or those whose ranks they wished to join upon graduation. In antebellum America, wealthy and aspiring college men drank in ways that closely resembled the alcohol use among wealthy men, while college men from more middling backgrounds were, like their parents, more prone to support temperance. In the fifty years following the U.S. Civil War, college novels also depicted student drinking that closely
resembled that among the larger populace, with wealthy college men drinking while middle-class men and women abstained. In the 1920s, college novels continued to reflect national trends, depicting college student drinking as more widespread than earlier books, as greater numbers of middle-class men and women joined wealthy Americans in finding enjoyment in the bottle.

As we will also see, drinking on campus has long been a mark of privilege. During all the years of this study, the heaviest and most regular alcohol use occurred at the institutions that enrolled the most privileged students, primarily eastern men’s colleges. Within both elite and less prestigious institutions, wealthy white men consumed more alcohol than their less economically advantaged peers. College men from more humble origins often abstained from alcohol entirely, and, when they did drink, did so less often and consumed smaller amounts. The first generations of college women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who faced a great deal of hostility toward their higher education, similarly avoided alcohol. The reasons for the privileged position of alcohol were many, including the high cost of drinking at college, gendered expectations that women not drink, and the negative ramifications of drinking having a disproportionate impact on vulnerable students.

The third theme is that the negative consequences of college student drinking have been ever-present and widespread. Across the years of this study, college students’ alcohol use has harmed their health, interfered with their academic obligations, and coincided with vandalism and violence. College student drinkers have never confined their destruction to the college yard, creating problems in their college towns, nearby cities, and surrounding rural areas. Most of these negative consequences were temporary and minor, from breaking windows to missing class to disturbing the peace, but a few proved permanent. A small number of students have drunk in such egregious ways over the years that death resulted—either their own, a drinking companion’s, or a bystander’s—or they developed habits of excessive alcohol use that contributed to a failed, and often brief, life after college.
Finally, and closely related to the negative consequences student drinkers inflicted upon themselves and their communities, college students’ alcohol use has long presented problems to college authorities. These academic leaders primarily addressed alcohol-related misbehavior through the campus discipline process. Over the course of this study the campus discipline process evolved from a college president or faculty members catching and punishing rule breakers to an increasingly bureaucratic part of the institution, but through both the simple and the sophisticated system, college authorities spent much energy on student drinkers. Though college authorities enjoyed seemingly absolute discretion in terms of campus discipline—the ability to dismiss any student for any reason—they seldom punished student drinkers harshly. Moreover, college authorities seem to never to have caught and disciplined a majority of student drinkers.

And yet there is an important caveat to these themes and this study. Focusing primarily on college student drinking, as this dissertation does, can convey a campus life more soaked with alcohol than is accurate. There is no evidence that even the most regular drinkers drank to excess most days on campus. For most students, drinking, especially to excess, was an intermittent activity. Though many students experienced some unfortunate consequences related to drinking—getting sick, oversleeping, and poor academic performance as the result of their own indulgence or being disturbed by the late-night noises and vandalism from the indulgences of others—only in the rarest of incidents did alcohol use delay or prevent students from attaining their degrees.

Today, colleges and universities devote millions of dollars to preventing underage alcohol consumptions through educational campaigns, alternative programming, and greater numbers of police officers. Similarly, government agencies and foundations devote millions of dollars to research college student drinking using quantitative methods. Yet neither the institutions’ efforts nor the current body of research has reduced college student drinking significantly. Ellen Conliffe Lagemann, former president of the Spencer Foundation and former dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education cautions that
science alone solves few educational problems: “Science is the best way to illuminate laws, patterns, and regularities. It is not the best way to investigate human dilemmas, aberrant phenomena, or erratic occurrences. For those ... the humanities are more powerful.”

History is well suited to reveal the human dilemmas and erratic occurrences that contribute to college students’ decisions to drink alcohol. Linda Eisenmann claims the value in exploring modern higher education issues through the discipline of history “is that practitioners and policymakers gain a fuller, more wide-angled view.”11 By studying college students’ alcohol use in relation to societal developments over a long century, the chapters that follow offer a largely untold story of student life and provide important perspective on our contemporary concerns.

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CHAPTER 1

ACADEMICS, ALCOHOL, AND ADULTHOOD:
STUDENT DRINKING IN ANTEBELLUM COLLEGES,
1820-1860

By the time he began keeping a detailed diary as a sixteen-year-old junior at Harvard College in 1823, Charles Francis Adams (see figure 1.1), the grandson of John Adams and the youngest son of John Quincy Adams, already had a long history with alcohol. During his father’s service as U.S. ambassador to Russia, a not quite three-year-old Charles Francis opened a ball in St. Petersburg by “leading out” the daughter of a French diplomat. The hosts rewarded the children’s successful performance with “‘oceans of Champaign for the little people.’ ” For much of his youth, Charles Francis lived abroad within a household in which his diplomat father spent nearly a quarter of his government income restocking an ever-depleting wine cellar. Thus, by the time he arrived on campus, Charles Francis was prepared to continue a family tradition at Harvard of drinking regularly, and sometimes quite heavily, that stretched back to his grandfather. John Adams had begun a habit at college of drinking hard cider before he ate breakfast, a practice that he continued for the rest of his long life.

So Charles Francis followed in familial footsteps by drinking regularly with his friends on campus and during college breaks at his grandfather’s estate in Quincy, Massachusetts. He also realized the larger political and economic significance of alcohol. During his extended winter vacation, Charles Francis drank with leading politicians at the parties his parents hosted in Washington, D.C., while his father served as Secretary of State. Charles Francis was also at a dinner, a meal that certainly included wine, when an enterprising man visited his grandfather in Quincy in an effort to gain his support to establish a new distillery. Perhaps Charles Francis also knew that his maternal grandfather,
a Maryland-born, London-based merchant, nearly went bankrupt when one of his ships importing French brandy capsized in 1796.1

Figure 1.1: Charles Francis Adams, 1827. This portrait of Charles Francis Adams, the son and grandson of U.S. Presidents, was painted two years after his graduation from Harvard in 1825. Charles Francis Adams’s detailed diary reveals the prominence of his alcohol use at Harvard and beyond the campus. Indeed, the men in the Adams family had a long, and often troubling, history of drinking alcohol at Harvard. Source: Portrait of Charles Francis Adams by Charles Bird King, 1827. Adams National Historical Park.

As Charles Francis Adams’ experiences suggest, alcohol consumption held a prominent place in many Americans’ lives throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Inheriting a colonial tradition that had emigrated from Europe along with the white settlers, most Americans considered alcohol a dietary staple. Like John Adams, many began their day with a glass of “morning bitters” or other strong drink and ended their day with a potent nightcap. Often ministers were known for their fondness for alcohol and teachers were known to send their pupils off to get liquor so that they could continue their lessons with the aid of alcohol. Alcohol may have been most important to working-class Americans, including farmhands, seamen, and semi-skilled laborers, who scheduled regular drinking breaks for respite from their difficult labor. Sales of alcohol usually accounted for most of the profits at country stores. Americans also used alcohol to mark special occasions. Americans drank at auctions, weddings, and funerals; Americans drank during harvests and house-raisings. Political candidates garnered votes by “treating” voting men to drinks and voters could spend most of an election day intoxicated from free alcohol. Holidays, including Christmas and the Fourth of July, proved to be popular opportunities to drink to excess.\(^2\)

This drinking occurred in a rapidly developing and greatly expanding nation. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the number of Americans increased six-fold to exceed thirty million by the eve of the Civil War. Building upon Thomas Jefferson’s fifteen-million-dollar Louisiana Purchase in 1803, American political leaders managed to annex Texas, acquire the Oregon Territory, and receive the Mexican Cession through military

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means to establish the continental borders of the modern-day United States. Americans simultaneously migrated to cities and headed into unsettled (though long inhabited) western lands.

“Revolutions” in communications and transportation coincided with and aided this geographical expansion and population explosion. Samuel Morris’s introduction of the telegraph in 1844 forever altered the speed at which news could travel, though advances in printing increased the numbers of newspapers, magazines, and novels that also disseminated vast amounts of information, opinions, and rumors. Even with the new canals, railroads, and turnpikes built across their enlarging nation, travelers could never compete with speed of the telegraph, but such improvements in infrastructure permitted Americans and their goods to cover more ground in less time at lower costs than ever before. These revolutions succeeded the more significant American Revolution. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the United States, with universal white male suffrage, was a leading exemplar of democracy, though military aggression against and physical displacement of the Mexican people and American Indians coupled with the spread of Black chattel slavery and the perpetuation of limited rights for women of any race forever tarnished the reputation of early American democracy. Yet the small, vocal numbers of abolitionists and feminists helped realize America’s democratic promise by beginning movements that would eventually provide, against seemingly insurmountable and enduring obstacles, increased political rights for racial minorities and women.3

Growing numbers of colleges accompanied this population surge and westward expansion. Reflecting American democracy in general, however, colleges remained overwhelmingly reserved for young white men. Colleges sprouted in such large numbers

3 Although his book does not consider the tumultuous dozen years that directly preceded the U.S. Civil War, the strongest argument for the importance of the communication and transportation revolutions and the best narrative account of the political, economic, and social history of the antebellum United States is Daniel Walker Howe, What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848 (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).
that both contemporaries and later historians asked whether the supply of institutions exceeded demand. The difference in size and scope of American higher education between 1820 and 1860 was startling: twenty-three colleges grew to more than two hundred and the number of students increased from under five thousand to almost seventeen thousand. Growth in the numbers of college students outpaced the rising population, as the proportion of young men who attended college increased by fifty percent. Many of these new students came from poorer backgrounds than those who had traditionally populated American colleges. As New England farmland became scarce, young men faced the decision to move west or to prepare for a profession at college. Poorer students often lived in the community instead of at the college, left college intermittently to earn money by teaching school, and were more evangelical in their religious beliefs than wealthier students.4

As the size of their nation and the number of their colleges grew, so too did Americans’ thirst for alcohol. While Americans had long considered alcohol a dietary staple, their consumption of alcohol increased dramatically during the decades that surrounded Charles Francis Adams’ attendance at Harvard. The annual absolute consumption of alcohol (a measure that adjusts for the potency of various beverages) among individuals over fourteen years old peaked at upwards of seven gallons by 1820, the highest point ever in American history. Americans also demonstrated a preference for strong alcohol, with hard liquor accounting for over sixty percent of the alcohol consumed. This elevated alcoholic consumption had both economic and psychological roots. At the end of the eighteenth century, Americans’ alcohol use actually decreased as their favorite

beverage—rum, manufactured by distilling imported molasses from the British West Indies—became the target of both patriotic sentiments among the populace during the Revolution and taxation from the federal government afterwards. What eventually quenched Americans’ thirst was native-produced whiskey. As settlers moved west, distilled grain was cheaper to transport to eastern markets than unprocessed corn, helping whiskey to replace rum as the nation’s most popular drink. The large amounts of distilled grain that flooded the market drove liquor prices lower and consumption rates higher. But more than just low prices encouraged Americans to drink. The anxieties of the emerging industrial economy led many workers, primarily middling artisans and lower class unskilled laborers who were quickly losing control over their labor, to seek relief, even if only temporarily, from intoxication.5

Even as consumption increased, fewer segments of American society drank alcohol, primarily mediated by gender, socioeconomic class, and race. Drinking shifted from a universal activity of men, women, and children, to a behavior more associated with men. Among men, drinking concentrated in the working class, especially the increasing numbers of Irish and Scottish immigrants who brought their preference for whiskey across the Atlantic, and the wealthy, though contemporaries’ concerns and later historians’ attention focused primarily on the alcohol use among the laboring poor. Many middling men abstained from drinking, in part to shape their fragile class identity. Historical estimates of the concentration of alcohol use vary—from half of all men drinking half of all the alcohol (or twenty-five percent of society consuming fifty percent of its alcohol) to one-eighth of all men drinking two-thirds of society’s distilled spirits. The enslaved Blacks in the South demonstrated notable sobriety despite having easy access to cheap liquor. This meant that

not only was the nation dividing into drinkers and abstainers, but that most of those who drank consumed far more than seven gallons of absolute alcohol each year.6

Despite the fact that the growing numbers of college students coincided with a growth in alcohol consumption, historians have paid only passing attention to antebellum college men’s drinking. A few historians suggest college students were among the groups of particularly heavy drinkers in the United States, but devote little attention to drinking on campus. Historians writing about single institutions are more prone to recount infamous alcohol-related misbehaviors, such as a Princeton student’s attempt to shoot the college president while returning to campus from visiting a tavern, or the University of Michigan students’ regular fights with immigrants in taverns in the 1850s, than to detail the prevalence of alcohol on campus or the significance students attributed to its use.

Historians considering broader topics of higher education occasionally note drunkenness as one of the many “dangers of college life” or that fraternity men drank more than their independent peers. In sum, many college students drank alcohol, but the patterns and the significance of their drinking remain unclear.7

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Yet for most antebellum college men, the overwhelming majority of whom were white Protestants, drinking alcohol constituted a regular and meaningful aspect of their higher education. In the time and in the spaces that they controlled—mostly in the evenings and in their rooms—students regularly used alcohol to establish social networks and develop friendships. Though subtle variations existed between campuses, students’ drinking behavior was remarkably similar throughout the nation. Students used their college years and designed their campus life, both formally and informally, to drink alcohol in ways that marked themselves as men. More specifically, students mainly consumed alcohol in ways that resembled the drinking behavior of wealthy men. The college years served as time to master such upper-crust drinking behavior.

**Mimicking Men**

College students, whose ages generally ranged from the early teens to the twenties, led regulated and regimented lives more appropriate for boys than for young men. A bell, which many students came to resent, rang to awaken pupils for morning prayers, which occurred as early as 5:00 a.m., and continued to announce transitions throughout the day. Students usually ate with each other at the college or in nearby boarding houses, attended courses with their entire class, reconvened for evening prayers around 6:00 p.m., and needed to be in their rooms with their lights out by 10:00 p.m. Campus rules, approved by boards of trustees and enforced by presidents and faculty, governed seemingly every possible behavior and provided students few freedoms. “Scarcely a facet of life was left untouched by regulation,” writes a historian about the rules that college students faced in Pennsylvania, while another historian notes that University of Georgia students’ “every action was guided by” campus regulations: “He ate by them, he studies by them, he recited to their independent peers in the antebellum years, see Allmendinger, *Paupers and Scholars*, 98-99, 106-107; Syrett, *The Company He Keeps*, 32, 57-59, 61, 67, 70.
by them—they were with him always. He kept them close at hand, hardly knowing until he should consult them what he could do next.”

The most important goal of these rules was to create an environment conducive for learning on campus. Although some educational leaders proposed a variety of curricular reforms aimed at teaching more practical and modern subjects, the classical curriculum, with its emphasis on Latin and Greek as most famously supported by the Yale Report of 1828, continued to consist of most of the learning at most of the colleges. New students were primarily instructed by tutors, aspiring clergy or faculty members (usually one and the same) who were recent alumni and not much older than their pupils. Most of students’ academic work consisted of memorizing and reciting large passages of Greek or Latin in front of their class to their tutors. As students matriculated from freshmen and sophomores to juniors and seniors, they increasingly took courses from the permanent faculty, including a capstone moral philosophy course taught by the college president in their senior year. Few students were intellectually stimulated by this curriculum, especially the recitations that dominated their first years at college. In a passage that has been oft quoted by subsequent scholars, historian James McLachlan provides a searing indictment: “By no educational criteria derived from any time, place, or philosophy, can the early 19th century American college curriculum as actually taught be made to look attractive.… [S]tudents disliked the curriculum and pursued their studies only grudgingly.”

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Dissatisfied with—or at least unmotivated by—their studies and frustrated by intrusive rules, students found most of their enjoyment at college with each other. In the few free hours allotted each day, students prepared for their recitations, exercised, wrote letters home, and socialized together. Beyond these informal activities, most students participated in an increasingly organized and powerful feature of American higher education: the extracurriculum. Colleges usually hosted two rival literary societies that competed for members and for campus prominence, the first college fraternities took root in the 1820s, students began producing campus publications, and, after decades of increased physical activity on campus, students inaugurated intercollegiate athletics when a Harvard team competed against Yale team in a boat race in 1852. Students designed much of the extracurriculum to demonstrate their manhood, in sharp contrast to the college rules that announced their status as boys. Literary societies allowed students to demonstrate oratorical skills like political leaders; college fraternities provided the secrecy men enjoyed in the fraternal orders; and athletic contests allowed students to demonstrate their physical prowess. In between and alongside these formal activities, students created and participated in an informal extracurriculum that allowed them to engage in the social behaviors of adults. In particular, many students drank alcohol in ways that mimicked the behavior of American men.10

A lively extracurriculum was most pronounced at Harvard. Harvard entered this era—a time before clear distinctions between “public” and “private” institutions—on solid financial footing, receiving around $10,000 annually from the state of Massachusetts. Two presidents who served with distinction, John Kirkland (1810-1828) and Josiah Quincy

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10 On antebellum campus life, see John R. Thelin, A History of American Higher Education (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 63-67; Syrett, The Company He Keeps, chapters two and three; Rudolph, The American College and University, chapter seven; Coulter, College Life in the Old South, chapters five and six; Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present (New York: Knopf, 1987), chapter two.
(1829-1845), were followed by the relatively short tenures and limited success of three “minor prophets.” Harvard remained at the top—in terms of size, faculty distinction, and resources—of America’s growing system of higher education. Harvard’s student population was increasingly diverse and active. Antebellum Harvard graduated some of its most distinguished alumni. George Bancroft, Charles Eliot, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry Thoreau, not to mention Charles Francis Adams and thirty years later his son, Henry, represent only a small portion of the successful alumni who graduated from Harvard in the antebellum years. Though the main feeder to the college remained middle and upper class New England families, nearly thirty percent of the student population came from the South by the 1820s, a proportion that would dip but recover in the 1850s. The institution devoted resources to help poorer students attend, employing students and cancelling tuition charges, and admitted its first Catholic and Jewish students. Collegians created and joined student organizations with abandon and, with the energy that remained after visits to the gymnasium, began playing early forms of baseball and football. As Harvard’s most exhaustive historian notes, “The curricular requirements were not exacting, so that boys like Emerson and Thoreau had ample time to browse and dream, whilst the livelier spirits found abundant occasion to play and frolic.”

With ample free time and abundant energy, many Harvard students spent much of their time drinking alcohol in ways similar to older adults. Living in one of the campus buildings or nearby boarding houses, students divided their drinking between their own rooms and taverns. A fortunate sophomore assigned to a hall generally reserved for upperclassmen described the “beloved 16 Hollis” he shared with his “chum” (the term by which most students designated their roommate). Located on the fourth floor, a “German student-lamp” and two candlesticks illuminated the twenty-one by sixteen feet space “in

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which we study, sleep, and receive company.” While the college provided the room, students shouldered the responsibility for furnishing it. These two students filled their space with two beds, a dresser, a mirror, a couch, a large study table, two bookcases and five armchairs. A screen separated the beds from the living area. The walls, which reached seven feet high and upon which an engraving of Daniel Webster hung, were split in half by wainscoting on the bottom and wallpaper on the top. Carpets covered the floor and red Turkish curtains adorned the windows. Additional amenities included four closets, a washroom, and a coal closet that enabled students to heat their rooms during cold months.12

In large and well-furnished rooms such as this and following prevailing social customs among adults, Harvard students usually offered their visitors, mostly fellow students, alcoholic beverages. Charles Francis Adams drank various forms of wine and blackstrap (a rum sweetened with molasses) with his friends in their rooms at least five times between March 5 and April 5, 1824. A year later, Adams ended each of the first three days of April drinking either punch (usually a combination of fruit juice and alcohol) or champagne in students’ rooms. This trend continued throughout the antebellum period, as evidenced in part by Benjamin Crowninshield regularly drinking in either his or his friends’ rooms in the late 1850s. He and a friend practiced their piano and violin together until another friend brought in some wine to drink in July 1857. On a different occasion, Crowninshield provided two quarts of champagne to four friends who visited his room. Until graduating in 1858, Crowninshield continued to provide his visitors with alcohol and to receive similar refreshments upon visiting his friends. The preponderance of

12 F.O. French, Exeter and Harvard Eighty Years Ago: Journals and Letters of F.O. French, ’57, ed. Amos Tuck French (Chester, NH: Privately Published, 1932), 74.
college men drinking in their rooms reflected the larger societal trend of consuming the majority of alcohol in a domestic space.\textsuperscript{13}

When they were not entertaining each other in their rooms, Harvard men could often be found drinking in nearby taverns or restaurants. As in colonial times, the tavern remained a primary center of recreation, especially for men. Claiming space in this male milieu, college men shared this enthusiasm for places that provided good conversation, food, and amusements such as billiards and bowling, not to mention alcohol. In the 1820s and 1830s, Harvard students were most apt to patronize Willard’s Tavern near campus or to venture into the country to the tavern at Fresh Pond. Harvard students “highly respected” the proprietor and namesake of Willard’s Tavern because he treated them as men; one student lamented his death in 1831, remarking that Willard “was the only man who ever turned his back, when he helped himself from the decanter, while others [tavern owners] would look on to see that he did not take too much.”\textsuperscript{14}

As transportation to nearby Boston improved, students shifted their patronage to taverns and restaurants in the city. Institutions such as Chelsey’s, Parker’s Restaurant, Revere House, and Ripley’s became common destinations—even on weeknights—for

\textsuperscript{13} “Most liquor was drunk in the home, where whiskey and rum provided mealtime drinks, customary refresheners, and hospitable treats for guests,” Rorabaugh, \textit{The Alcoholic Republic}, 16.


Harvard students. One student noted, “The old adage, ‘All right and tight on a Saturday night’ is fully and beautifully exemplified at most colleges, especially, I think, at old Harvard. A visit to the Revere bar-room, or to Ripley’s, or to Chesley’s will explain my meaning.” But students did not abandon those places closest to campus, replacing Willard’s with Lyons’ and continuing to frequent the tavern at Fresh Pond. Whether in their rooms or in taverns, Harvard students overwhelmingly, though not exclusively, drank in the evening with their peers.

According to historian W. J. Rorabaugh, “Every social event demanded a drink.” In keeping with customs that began in the seventeenth century, Harvard students also marked their traditional events during the academic year that brought visitors to campus with alcohol. Exhibition days served as the most frequent of these events, occurring at the end of each of the three terms that comprised the academic year. Nineteen students provided individual speeches at an exhibition in May 1857. After the exercises, some students (presumably the performers) invited both the campus visitors and their peers back to their rooms where “spreads” of food and drink awaited. Following Exhibition Day in October 1855, Harvard junior Francis French visited two of his friends’ receptions, finding “ale, punch, and brandy ... freely flowing” at the first and “some capital ale” at the second. Not every exhibition proved well planned. Benjamin Crowninshield described the Exhibition Day performances in May 1858 as “damnably poor” in part because “[s]everal fellows forgot their parts.” Whether to celebrate or forget the performances, he nonetheless got “quite breezy” with nearly thirty other students that night.

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Marking the seniors’ leave from Cambridge between the end of classes in June or July and their commencement at the end of August, Class Day consisted of the senior valedictory addresses and the class poem. The soon-to-be graduates invited their families and friends to the performances and, by the 1830s, the class began “treating all comers to iced punch during the afternoon.” Nicholas Anderson wrote home that Class Day was “considered the pleasantest day in all the term at Cambridge. Everybody gets drunk and has a mighty fine time.” After guests had been treated en masse or, after 1838, in small gatherings in students’ rooms, many students reassembled for revelry. For the seniors, the most meaningful act of the day occurred when they assembled at the “Rebellion Tree” (or “Liberty Tree”), an elm on campus where students had famously gathered to organize a protest against an unpopular tutor in 1768. The faculty, with their good memories, usually forbade students from gathering in this treacherous spot, but relented on this day and tolerated the seniors who drank alcohol, sang, and held hands while dancing around the tree (see figure 1.2).17

Harvard’s commencement also enjoyed a strong association with alcohol. Commencement activities attracted students’ families, alumni, friends of the college, and the broader public. The formal exercises lasted from ten o’clock in the morning until four o’clock in the afternoon. Alcohol flowed, quite liberally, at the receptions, dinners, and dances that followed. After the commencement activities in August 1824, Charles Francis Adams and a fellow student “strolled” around Cambridge and “saw gambling, cheating, swearing and drunkenness exhibited in their most attractive veins.” A decade after Adams’s stroll, another Harvard junior found the Theological School’s commencement to be “dull business,” but enjoyed “some very good claret and porter” at the subsequent dinner. Two months later, this student hosted several visitors after the undergraduates’ commencement.

and “treated them in highly honorable manner after the performances, by procuring an abundance of cake, fruit, wine, lemonade &c [etc.]” in his room. But these formal receptions were not the only opportunities to drink that students created around commencement time. Departing seniors also treated their friends to one last party before they finished their college days. As his days as a junior were ending, Charles Francis Adams
received an “invitation to Fresh Pond” from a graduating senior. The students bowled “ninepins,” and then “took the largest boat,” “stocked it with provisions,” and “went off” on the lake, before they enjoyed a “boisterous return.”

Harvard students used the meetings of their flourishing groups to provide opportunities, if not excuses, to drink, enabling their participation in what one historian has labeled the “male drinking cult [that] pervaded all social and occupational groups.” Students did not limit themselves to involvement in a single organization. Benjamin Crowninshield joined the Hasty Pudding Club, the Institute of 1770, the music group Pierian Sodality, and the Porcellian Society during his college years. In general, students established organizations for a scholarly purpose, met regularly, and drank afterwards. When, as a freshman, Nicholas Anderson hosted a meeting of the Anoyma Club in 1855, he noted that several older members mentioned that they expected “‘a little of sunthin’” afterwards. Anderson went with “hot haste” to a nearby restaurant to obtain ale and cigars. In January 1858, Benjamin Crowninshield and other members of the Hasty Pudding Club heard an oration and poem by two members before adjourning to “Fontarive’s French house” where “an excellent French supper...degenerated with a few exceptions into a general and exceedingly jolly and fiendishly noisy drunk.” The students partied until “at last the omnibus [a stagecoach that ran between Boston and Cambridge] brought relief and the living and dead (drunk) were conveyed to the seat of learning” around three o’clock in the morning. Sometimes, however, students could not wait until after a meeting to begin drinking. One meeting of the Phi Psi Society was to consist of a poem, oration, and supper, but the poet cut his poem and the orator was already affected by alcohol before his speech.

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According to Crowninshield, “twenty semi-(some of them) intoxicated, and considerably drunk (many of them)” society members nonetheless considered the event a success.19

“Everything in Cambridge must end in a supper,” declared Francis French in 1857, describing the frequency with which members of student groups gathered in taverns or restaurants to celebrate events such as the end of an academic term or the election of new officers. Nicholas Anderson attended such a supper at the end of his freshman year. Following two courses of food, Anderson described, “Now the corks popped, and the champagne gurgled pleasantly into the wine glass, and thence into the throat.” Thirty years earlier, Charles Francis Adams had met with the proprietor of the tavern at Fresh Pond to arrange a supper for the Lyceum Club. In Adams’s not so humble opinion, the result “was much superior to the last one and looked really fit for any person to sit down to.” The election of new officers almost always warranted a supper. On a Friday evening in January 1857, Benjamin Crowninshield attended a meeting of the Hasty Pudding Club where he was elected treasurer and then went to the Institute of 1770 to hear an oration and poem. Afterwards Crowninshied and many of his contemporaries gathered into a sleigh to head to Parker’s, where “all ate and many drank more than was good for them.” Six months later, Crowninshield helped choose officers for the Porcellian Society and then traveled over thirty miles for the “officer’s supper.” Crowninshield’s crowd returned to campus at six o’clock in the morning, just in time for morning prayers. Selection to the more exclusive organizations also provided cause to celebrate, usually at the neophyte’s expense.20

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Even as they organized their extracurriculum and designed much of it to provide opportunities to drink, Harvard students did not require a formal organization or advance notice to plan drinking parties. Passing “several little boys playing marbles,” a college friend bet Nicholas Anderson a “treat” that he could beat Anderson in a game. Anderson recorded in his diary that he “immediately accepted the wager” but was “totally defeated.” Another companion joined the action, also losing to the skilled marble player and assuming the responsibility for half of the cost of the party. That night, a crowd of seven students who had witnessed the marble matches gathered in a room and “ate twelve dozen stewed oysters and drank six quarts of ale, besides much [brandy] punch.” Based on the “riotous singing” that accompanied this consumption, Anderson declared the treat “a decided hit.” 21 Thus, drinking like men featured prominently in both the organized and unorganized campus life at Harvard. But this prominence was not reserved only to the college in Cambridge.

Hundreds of miles to the south in Chapel Hill, college men at the University of North Carolina (UNC) did not enjoy as many campus societies or as close proximity to the pleasures of a city than their contemporaries at Harvard, but drinking similarly constituted an important part of many students’ college years. UNC, a fledgling institution in 1820, benefitted from increasing sectional hostility as fewer of the wealthiest southerners sent their sons to northern colleges. Rising cotton prices also permitted wealthy planters from other southern states to send their sons to Chapel Hill. Yet most faculty members were from the North, having been educated at Yale or Princeton. The middle-class ethic and religious piety that these academics worked to instill in their pupils often conflicted with the values of elite southern men who rejected close supervision and generally wished to satisfy their passions rather than subdue them. Although Chapel Hill was rather isolated and contained relatively few amusements, faculty members still struggled to keep students

from gambling at nearby racetracks, frequenting taverns, and visiting prostitutes in the surrounding area. David Swain had recently completed a two-year term as the state’s governor when he became UNC president in 1835. Only thirty-four years old upon becoming president, Swain used his political skills to smooth over sectional tensions between the faculty and the students and between the faculty and the board of trustees, while also securing an increase in the state’s financial support of the institution over the next thirty-three years. By 1840, when the population of Chapel Hill had reached 2,000, the campus consisted of four main buildings, the directionally-named Old East, Old West, and South Halls, and the campus chapel. At the beginning of the Civil War, nearly a third of the students arrived from other states, mostly from North Carolina’s neighbors but also from as far away as Iowa.22

UNC students drank in similar ways to their counterparts at Harvard, and thus, like many American men. UNC students typically drank with their friends in their rooms in the evening. Like Harvard students, UNC students enjoyed relatively large dormitory rooms, though they sometimes shared them with four other students. In October 1840, a student invited William Mullins, who would graduate in 1842, and ten other friends up to his room to eat a turkey supper. Mullins noted, “After it was finished, cigars and liquor were introduced, and we had a glorious time until ten.” A decade later, another student recounted that his friend “invited me over to his room to get some spirits. I went and took two or three pretty good drinks.” Less regularly than their Harvard peers headed into Boston, UNC students sometimes traveled to the nearby larger towns of Hillsboro, Pittsboro, and Raleigh to drink or get alcohol to take back to campus. Though hardly offering the distractions of a city like Boston, the larger towns surrounding Chapel Hill

might host a travelling entertainment that attracted student drinkers. Such was the case in September 1842 when upwards of thirty students traveled to Hillsboro to see a circus, but before the show started the students had drunk away their ticket money.23

Two literary societies, the Dialectic and Philanthropic, dominated the extracurriculum at UNC. These organizations, completely controlled by students, taught parliamentary procedure, developed speaking skills, and provided students with a well-stocked library far superior to the institution’s. Each organization’s purpose was scholarly, but membership provided natural drinking companions. Two members of the Philanthropic Society threw “a glorious summer treat” for “all the Phi’s on the Hill” in July 1841. Drinking punch made with French brandy, “[i]n a few minutes the whole party was thoroughly tight and such singing, shouting, sporting have rarely been exhibited,” recounted the participating William Mullins. That October, Mullins noted that members of the opposing “Di Club” partook in “a most tremendous row” that included alcohol.24

UNC students undertook fewer campus elections than their counterparts at Harvard, but they too celebrated theirs with alcohol. When William Mullins won a

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Philanthropic Society election in February 1841, he ended the evening by “having a long
talk on the subject of the defeated coalitions ... and taking two glasses of fine brandy.” The
elections most apt to provoke the spirits to flow were the annual selection of marshals and
ball managers for commencement. As the exhaustive historian of UNC, Kemp Battle,
notes, “Libations were offered to secure victory and then to celebrate it.” Students imitated
politicians in local, state, and national elections by using alcohol as the key to political
success in elections on campus. “[T]reating” potential voters with alcohol “was expected as
a matter of course” and the “candidate had to demonstrate his generosity and hospitality
without a hint of stinginess or parsimony,” writes Battle.25

Once elected, marshals and ball managers selected six assistants, three from each
literary society, to help with commencement activities, which culminated with a grand ball
the night of graduation. The ball began at nine o’clock in the evening, and featured music
performed by a band of Black musicians, an “elaborate supper,” and a great deal of
dancing, and lasted until three o’clock the next morning. Until the 1850s, the ball
managers served their guests wine. As a voyeuristic rising senior, William Mullins “went
round to the ball-room, saw them dance awhile, drank some wine and returned to my
room to pack up my trunk” in June 1841.26

UNC students also had a long tradition of celebrating George Washington’s
birthday with alcohol. Often students planned evening suppers in honor of the nation’s
first president. After a “splendid” dinner in February 1841, “the wine was brought
forward” so that the students could toast the “incorruptible patriot” and “sound

25 On UNC students witnessing drunkenness at political events, see Garrett, “Diary,” 243-
244, 541-542. On the drinking associated with campus elections, see William Sidney Mullins Diary,
12 Feb. 1841, SHC; Battle, History of the University of North Carolina, 1:569; George N. Thompson
Diary, 17 Jan. 1851, 18 Jan. 1851, SHC; Ruffin Thomson to his father, 16 Jan. 1860, quoted in
Tolbert, Two Hundred Years of Student Life, 53. On candidates treating potential voters with alcohol
as an important political activity, see Rorabaugh, The Alcoholic Republic, 20, 26, quotation on 152.

26 On the commencement ball, see Battle, History of the University of North Carolina, 1:570-
573; William Sidney Mullins Diary, 3 June 1841, SHC.
statesman.” A year later, the students convinced the faculty to cancel classes so that they could organize a procession and speech. Though the formal events passed successfully, most students spent more time engaged in drinking parties than participating in the program. James Dusenbery, a member of the class of 1842, noted that “the amount of liquor drank by the students was tremendous” and estimated that two-thirds of the students were intoxicated. He had been “gloriously tight before breakfast” and “kept the thing hot throughout the day.” Student drinking on this February holiday may have been cyclical, with one year’s binge leading to faculty reprimands and fewer freedoms which resulted in more reserved behavior the next year. Another student noted that the quiet campus “presented a very different scene from what it exhibited last year ... and not a drunken student was seen,” the year before Dusenberry was drunk by breakfast.27

Part of the larger male drinking culture included a fondness for practical jokes, a trait not lost on some clever UNC students in 1840. Upon the arrival of the freshmen in the fall, some enterprising upperclassmen convinced the new students that it was campus tradition for the freshmen to provide refreshments for the returning students. Each freshman contributed two dollars for the “Frosh Treat” before two members of the class headed into Hillsboro to obtain the liquor. Once back on campus, they gave the alcohol to the upperclassmen, apparently without ever getting a drink themselves. The upperclassmen who had pulled off this hoax on their newest peers headed into the woods to consume their winnings.28

27 As early as 1818, UNC students got so intoxicated at a dinner in honor of George Washington that one student was stabbed while trying to separate two of his fighting peers, Battle, History of the University of North Carolina, 1:263. On antebellum UNC student drinking on Washington’s birthday, see Tomlinson, “The Journal of Ruffin Wirt Tomlinson,” 247. James Lawrence Dusenbery Diary, 27 Feb. 1842, SHC; William Sidney Mullins Diary, 22 Feb. 1841, SHC.

Princeton College—situated between Cambridge and Chapel Hill and long
considered the southern most northern college or the northern most southern college—
struggled with a reputation as a relaxing refuge for the wealthy sons from both regions long
before F. Scott Fitzgerald described the institution as “the pleasantest country club in
America.” Technically named the College of New Jersey until 1896, but always better
known as Princeton, the institution was open to young men from seemingly all religious
backgrounds (including limited numbers of Jews and Catholics), but Presbyterian ministers
continued to hold a significant majority on the board of trustees and large donors to the
church comprised most of the board’s remaining members. Princeton leaders and alumni
began aggressive fundraising efforts, and, despite several national financial panics, the
interest on the college’s endowment could cover nearly a quarter of the annual expenses by
1837. The college attracted leading scholars to its faculty, many of whom conducted
original research despite heavy teaching expectations. By 1835, the faculty consisted of the
president, ten professors, and two tutors. After three years of reciting Greek and Latin,
with a mix of mathematics thrown in for good measure, seniors enjoyed listening to the
lectures and watching the experiments of the college’s accomplished science faculty. As at
UNC, two literary societies dominated campus life. From the rebellions that rocked the
campus at the turn of the nineteenth century, faculty and students had reached a truce by
the 1820s in which students ostensibly followed the college rules and faculty demands
while the faculty offered a curriculum that required limited study and provided enough
free time to satisfy students’ social energies. “The faculty at last,” writes historian Thomas
Jefferson Wertenbaker, “were learning that it was wise to ignore much, to smile at much,
and to depend upon a sense of humor rather than upon harsh repression.”

At midcentury, two Princeton seniors, James Buchanan Henry and Christian Henry
Scharff, wrote College As It Is or, The Collegian’s Manual in 1853. The eighteen chapters that

29 Wertenbaker, Princeton, chapter seven, quotation on 243.
comprise this manual (which was not published until 1996) provide intimate details of the student experience at Princeton, from entrance exams to commencement exercises. Along the way, the manual reveals the prevalence of drinking at the college. The authors defined two phrases that Princeton students used to describe the effects of their drinking. “To get tight” consisted of the “first degree of intoxication,” whereas “[o]ne who gets on a drunk, becomes too much intoxicated to take care of himself, and is usually put to bed by his friends.” Henry and Scharff gave an imaginary tour of students’ rooms to describe four “modes of passing the evening at College,” two of which explicitly included drinking. In the first, consuming alcohol served as the center of activity as a student “treated” his friends:

All the apparatus for making wiskey punch is displayed upon the table, and “mine host” is about to commence operations. After a little while the punch bowls are filled, and amid numerous jokes and merry laughter, the wiskey is quaffed and its qualities are praised. As the punch begins to work, the company grows noisier, and wilder;

Another mode to pass the evening was by consuming alcohol while playing cards: “Further on we have a Whist-party.... Four fellows who have taken a fancy to each other form a club, which meets two or three times a week for the purpose of enjoying a game of Whist. A bottle of wine is sometimes found on the middle of the table to refresh the mind and body.” Henry and Scharff briefly interrupt their description of the card players to describe what appears to be a fight between two students but ends up being “only a tight man, whom a friend is persuading to go to bed.” A third mode of passing the night, enjoying a “turkey supper,” might well have included alcohol as evidenced by William Mullins’s drinking at similar suppers at UNC and the authors’ description of the attendees as “jolly fellows,” a phrase that usually referred to intoxicated men. The only assured alcohol-free mode of passing the evening was to study alone, and the authors had little respect for the sober student. In between the rooms holding the “treat” and the “Whist-party,” Henry and Scharff find “a first-honor man, polling his eyes out for a grade.” In addition, Henry and
Scharff note that Princeton students used alcohol to help win their elections. This was particularly true of elections for commencement ball managers: “To be a Ball-Manager one must have popularity and the reputation of being a great splurger. Hence it is that a few weeks before the election comes off, all the Candidates for this honor ... treat their friends and acquaintances to drinks or stews with a liberality suited to the occasion.” The many ways in which Princeton students drank resembled the behavior of their peers at Harvard and UNC, not to mention those of many adult men.

Diaries written by two Princeton students, John Buhler (Class of 1846) and James Lee (Class of 1849), verify the drinking detailed in College As It Is. In November 1845, Buhler and four other students gathered in a friend’s room to eat a “Chicken Supper” as the “atmosphere ... smelt strong of whiskey Punch.” While mostly students entertained their peers in their own rooms, they occasionally took advantage of their friends’ absence from campus. “Assisted in getting up a spree in Price & Hustins room,” recorded Lee, “causing some degree of fun, to all of us but not much to the occupants I imagine, we shall see when they return home.” Princeton students not only secured campus elections with alcohol, they similarly celebrated their success. There were “[c]rowds of tight fellows” after an election for junior orators in February 1846. Princeton students also drank in nearby restaurants and taverns, probably more often than their peers at UNC and less often than Harvard students. John Buhler divided his tavern frequenting between three different establishments, Anthony’s, Horace’s, and Wagner’s, where he was apt to eat oysters and drink with his friends. So Princeton students were no strangers to drinking in ways quite similar to the counterparts at Harvard and UNC.

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30 James Buchanan Henry and Christian Henry Scharff, College As It Is or, The Collegian’s Manual in 1853, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Libraries, 1996), xvii, 32, 176-177, 207-208, 218. Henry and Scharff’s manual was not published until nearly a century and a half after it was written. It is unclear if the authors intended to publish it shortly after they graduated.

31 On drinking in rooms, see John Robert Buhler, “My Microscope,” 12 Nov. 1845, 6 Feb. 1846, 11 April 1846, Princeton University Manuscripts Division, Princeton University Libraries,
Princeton’s commencement activities, like many social events in American society, also included alcohol. Although wines were usually featured at the dinner that divided the commencement exercises or at the commencement ball that began that evening and lasted past midnight, the heaviest drinking occurred after the ball ended, the guests retired to bed, and the class gathered for one last supper around two o’clock in the morning. Indeed, worries about a cholera epidemic, which some Americans associated with alcohol use, prevented wine being served at the afternoon dinner in 1849, but many classmates braved the threat of an epidemic after the commencement ball to drink one last time together at the class supper. “Great Hilarity prevailed” alongside “much eating and more drinking,” he recorded. “We will not say how many of the young men arise from their beds [the] next without a headache, that is if they get out of bed at all,” Henry and Scharff commented on this early morning tradition.32

Those fortunate students who were attending Princeton in June 1847 celebrated the college’s centennial with dignitaries and drink. The academic procession that walked through the streets of Princeton into the town’s impressive Presbyterian Church for the formal ceremonies not only included the college’s distinguished faculty and successful alumni, but also the governor, two U.S. senators, and the chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. The next day, students and notables gathered underneath a large tent on campus for an elaborate dinner that concluded with a litany of toasts.33 These students not only imitated adult men, they actually drank with them.


33 Wertenbaker, Princeton, 230-231.
Drinking on campus certainly was not relegated to these three institutions, but students who drank at other colleges did so in ways that resembled their peers at Harvard, Princeton, and UNC, and thus men in the larger society. William Hammond consumed alcohol primarily in students’ rooms during his years at Amherst in the late 1840s.

Between March 10 and April 12, 1848, Hammond enjoyed at least four parties or suppers in his friends’ rooms as his college years came to a close. At the final supper, Hammond had a “great time” as he and his friends ate roast pork and turkey and drank water, liquor, and wine. At Trinity College in Connecticut, students might offer the guests attending their exhibitions wine or drink champagne with each other in their rooms at night.

Taverns, too, proved popular places for these students to drink. In South Carolina, college students headed into town to enjoy an oyster supper and drinks, while two New York University students stopped at a watering hole and paid two dollars for five glasses of “mulled wine” in January 1847.34

Three activities that accompanied men’s drinking also coincided with students’ drinking: card playing (or gambling), smoking, and singing. From Charles Francis Adams at Harvard in the 1820s to Abraham Warner at Trinity in the 1830s to William Mullins at UNC and William Hammond at Amherst in the 1840s, students everywhere participated in “wet” whist parties similar to the one described by Henry and Scharff at Princeton.

Many students also found that smoking complemented drinking. After ten UNC students consumed a turkey supper in October 1840, “cigars and liquor were introduced.” Three

months later at Harvard, seven students gathered in a college room. “The Punch was excellent,” noted a participant, and the students had “cigars to match.” Student drinkers might limit their singing to their own gatherings, with many of their large suppers ending with a rendition of “Auld Lang Syne,” or take their talents, which, along with their confidence, they had liquidly elevated, into town to serenade the residents.35

As historians have attributed the rise in men’s drinking in the early nineteenth century in part to the economic anxieties of the era, so too did college students’ drinking often result from the anxieties of college life. During a particularly rainy season in October 1849, UNC students could no longer stand being confined to the campus buildings. One night a group of students took a “sufficient quantity of liquor to render them to some degree insensible” and “began to brave the fury of the storm.” Those students who lived too far from home to visit during college vacations often dealt with this distance and the boredom of their friends’ absence by drinking. A UNC student noted, “This place is a great deal more dissipated in the vacation than in the session and … they were all … intoxicated in some degree.” Whether to celebrate their success or to forget their failure, students were prone to drink following examinations. At Harvard in January 1841, a student took an exam and then drank whiskey punch with some friends. He repeated both activities the next day. Preparing for and delivering public addresses at exhibitions and commencements proved nerve-wracking for many young men. An Amherst student later wrote that he was “troubled all day by that stage piece” in 1847. In search of inspiration, he

“drank some brandy in the evening, but it only made me sleepier.” In 1840, a Trinity student recalled his initial fear at delivering a speech at an exhibition: “The feelings of fear and embarrassment in my own mind were quickly dissipated by despair.” No wonder he and his friends sneaked “a few bottles of old Madeira” from the reception into their rooms that night. Alcohol proved effective in reducing, at least temporarily, the anxieties that college men suffered.

Drinking was a prominent feature of campus life and most students drank in ways similar to adult men in the larger society. Students who welcomed guests and entertained visitors in their rooms with alcohol mirrored the adults who did the same in their homes; students who celebrated elections and end of terms of office with suppers that included copious amounts of alcohol mimicked men whose political participation included significant alcohol consumption; and students who played pranks and cards also resembled men who enjoyed the same pastime. But in the ways they drank alcohol, college students did more than just reflect the behavior of men at large. Much of their drinking behavior emulated the alcohol use of a specific group of influential Americans: wealthy White men.

Entering Elite Circles

Most antebellum students came from either wealthy families, whose privileged lifestyle the student expected to enjoy after graduation, or came from more humble origins but aimed to use their college credentials to attain professional and financial success. Though historians have focused far more on the drinking behaviors of working class Americans—if they have drawn class distinctions at all—the limited evidence suggests that both what and how college men drank prepared them for social activities within elite

circles of society. College men usually drank alcohol of high quality. At UNC in 1841, for example, one student returned to campus on his birthday with “3 bottles of elegant Nash brandy.” Throughout the antebellum years, students’ two favorite forms of alcohol were wine, almost all of which would have been imported from Europe, and punch, which they often created by sweetening either liquor or wine with varying combinations of water, sugar, and fruit juice. Southern students demonstrated a fondness for fruit liqueurs (particularly peach) and mint juleps. College men drank cider throughout the early and mid nineteenth century, while beer grew in popularity, both in the country and on campus, in the 1850s. Students were particularly unhappy when they had to settle for low-quality alcohol. In 1824, Charles Francis Adams complained, “I have to convict myself of drinking so unphilosophical liquor as Gin to night.”

All this drinking was expensive. This was especially true because of the types of alcohol students preferred and because of the drinking that was involved in the various campus organizations. At midcentury, annual expenses for being a member of the Porcellian Club at Harvard occasionally exceeded three hundred dollars (the equivalent of

37 James Laurence Dusenbery Diary, 26 Sept. 1841, SHC; Adams, Diary, 1:419; Battle, History of the University of North Carolina, 1:585.

over $9,000 in 2009), much of which funded regular drinking bouts. Not surprisingly then, those students who drank the most were the wealthiest. This is best illustrated by the character descriptions of the UNC Class of 1841 written by William Mullins. Each student noted for his familial wealth had earned a reputation for his “dissipation” at college. A representative sketch found a student “rather dissipated, and being able from his extreme wealth to gratify his desires, he indulged very much in convivial pleasures.” Much more surprising to Mullins than these wealthy students’ high levels of alcohol consumption was a poor student who behaved similarly: “He was a beneficiary [scholarship student], and very poor, and knows that he must rely exclusively on his own efforts for success in any course that he may pursue. And yet he was very wild and dissipated, attended illy to all his duties, and read but little.” Thus, wealth did not serve as a complete divide between drinkers and abstainers. In 1855, Frank French and six other Harvard sophomores paid three additional dollars beyond their share of a class supper so that four students “whose pecuniary circumstances forbade their being present, should unite with us.”

College men’s fondness for and ability to acquire expensive alcohol placed them within the most elite male drinking circles in American society. Drinking wine served as a “central” activity at the dinner parties hosted by wealthy men for their friends, acquaintances, and business partners. Hosts provided guests with rare vintages. Developing a connoisseurship promoted a man’s civilized reputation. Some of the era’s leading political figures, including Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, and Andrew Jackson were known for their impressive wine cellars. In fact, UNC students’ celebration of George Washington with drink may have especially appropriate, for the man they revered spent nearly ten percent of his presidential salary on fine wines and liquor to entertain his guests. Men with fewer financial resources criticized wealthy men’s preference for wine as

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undemocratic—drinking a beverage beyond the means of most men—and argued that the importation of wine retarded rather than promoted the nation’s economic growth. The most these wealthy wine drinkers conceded to their critics was to encourage native grape production, agricultural experiments that largely failed in the antebellum years.39

The Harvard student group most associated with alcohol in the early antebellum years was the Washington Corps, one of many voluntary military companies that proliferated across the United States in the early nineteenth century. Flourishing when the national army remained small and the formerly well-organized state militias deteriorated, wealthy young and middle-aged men filled the ranks of the earliest “elite” companies, with members incurring all the expenses, from uniforms to musical instruments to firearms. A typical exhibition by a company began with a military parade, continued with a fake battle between two companies, and ended with a ball or stately dinner.40

Established during the lead up to the War of 1812, the Washington Corps survived for over twenty years. Membership peaked at 120 in the 1820s, representing nearly half of the student body. Every undergraduate could vote for the captain of the corps, making the position an important college honor. The resignation of the old officers and the election of the new occurred at Porter’s Tavern in Cambridge. The Washington Corps cadets wore a regal uniform. The officers began with the cadets’ uniform and added more military embellishments. The Corps drilled regularly, marched to martial music performed by its members, and held parades during exhibition days. Students’ interest in the Corps began


to wane in the early 1830s. President Quincy squelched the group altogether when, as part of a campus rebellion in 1834, Corps members threw their muskets out of a window in University Hall, damaging these arms which were on loan from the state arsenal. But President Quincy only hastened the end, as the Corps specifically and volunteer military companies generally had already lost some of their luster, becoming less popular among wealthy youth as young men from lower class groups, including Jewish and Irish immigrants, had formed their own military companies.41

While active, however, the Washington Corps comprised perhaps the wettest part of the Harvard extracurriculum. In June 1824, the newly elected Corps officers selected the junior Charles Francis Adams to be a commandant of the company. Adams initially refused the offer. He knew that they had already asked another student who had declined, thought himself too unpopular for the role, considered his body “not fit for it,” and worried about the trouble and expense. But soon Charles Francis succumbed to his friends’ pleas. The new officers’ first task was to organize a supper for their retiring counterparts. At the supper the rising and retiring officers enjoyed wine and offered numerous toasts, leading Adams to conclude, “The evening waxed extremely sociable, every thing went on right, and we closed the evening with Auld lang syne in perfection.... We broke up pretty late and I returned to my room not having for a long time spent an evening half so pleasant as this.”42

Drinking in the Washington Corps was certainly not limited to one or two suppers each year. The regular drills usually ended with officers treating their subordinates to drinks. Not providing subordinates alcohol threatened to damage the officers’ reputation.


42 Adams, Diary, 1:202, 204, 206.
Charles Francis Adams became particularly upset during the Corps’ sword exercises in July 1824. “The difficulty was,” he noted, “that our drinking provisions fell short very quick, which was a grievous thing to me.” Less than a week later, the officers gathered for business and “some strong punch.” Even when they “performed many manoeuvres but not very accurately,” the Washington Corps members enjoyed “customary refreshments.” Adams’ involvement in the Washington Corps increased his already regular consumption of alcohol. A quarter of the way through his term as an officer, he lamented, “I am angry and ashamed of myself for my course this past three months but I can hardly perceived how I could have done differently. My time was so taken up by my military service.” As his senior year officially started at the end of September, Adams looked back on his final months as a junior and hoped to be “little inclined to pursue the dissipated course of last year.”

The Washington Corps interacted with other voluntary military units and these occasions typically included drinking. Charles Francis Adams and his fellow officers skipped a lecture upon receiving an invitation to see the Boston Rangers parade in July 1824. After watching the parade and a rifle drill that he hoped to teach his cadets, Adams took “a glass or two at camp” for his “need of refreshment from the sun” before returning to campus. In August 1831, these martial students participated in another parade that the Boston Rangers hosted for a military group from Salem. Students drank wine in the encampment with similar military-minded men. Thus, for roughly twenty years, the students of the Washington Corps filled a small peg in the national board of voluntary military companies in which one historian has noted that there was “no end of drinking and with orders to ‘fall back’ literally obeyed by tipsy privates.”

43 Ibid., 1:244, 253, 259, 264-265, 275, 277, 309, 339.

Occasionally, students created organizations for the sole purpose of fostering camaraderie and facilitating drinking. “Arose considerably fatigued by the exertions last evening and the late hour at which I retired,” Charles Francis Adams wrote following a gathering of the Lyceum Club at the close of the fall term in 1823. Adams admitted that the group’s “purpose is entirely festive” in describing an early gathering: “[I]mmediately upon organizing we went into Committee of the Whole … and sat down to [the card game] Whist, at two Tables…. After the first rubber had been played, the Champagne Wine which was the provision, was produced and one bottle placed before each man.” The next August, the Lyceum gathered and “played cards and drank till eleven o’clock.” When Adams “felt like [an] amusement” after a lecture, the group met in his room and enjoyed whiskey punch in October 1824. In American society, it was not uncommon for wealthy men to gather for the primary purpose of drinking alcohol.45

As the alcohol offered to family members and guests at the receptions that followed exhibitions and commencements suggests, college men learned and mastered, at least in part, hosting skills and socially desirable drinking habits in the presence of wealthy adults. Family members flocked to many ceremonies and often footed the bill for the food and drink served. These events not only provided students opportunities to drink with their parents, but to do the same with their faculty. On such occasions, one student explained, “Professors descended from their dignity and drank to the health of the graduating class.” Faculty occasionally provided students drinks. At South Carolina College, a faculty member arranged a reception for the students to meet Daniel Webster on his visit to the South, providing thirsty students and the dignitary with the option of wine or lemonade.46

45 Adams, Diary, 1:9, 136, 289, 408; Rorabaugh, The Alcoholic Republic, 32.
Wealthy parents often approved of their students’ drinking. When Nicholas Anderson described the champagne that “gurgled” into glasses and then into throats, he did so in a letter to his mother. Parents also provided alcohol for their students. Frank French explained to his mother the “entertainment” graduating seniors provided on Class Day: “[I]t is customary to give your friends something nice to eat and drink about the middle of the day, since the exercises begin about ten in the morning and last till ten at night.... If we do anything of the kind, I expect it would cost from thirty to forty dollars. It seems rather extravagant, but it is the custom of the place, and from my position I shall be apt to have all my friends out here.” But seniors were not alone in requesting alcohol from home. At the end of his freshman year Nicholas Anderson wrote his mother, “The box of wine which I requested you to send me arrived in due time this morning. I am very much obliged to you indeed for answering my wish in so prompt a manner, but what touched my heart was your forethought in prepaying the freight.”

One of the most attractive aspects of these receptions was the opportunity to entertain and drink with young women from prominent families. It was common for elite women to drink with men at dinners and parties, and it was no different on campus. A Harvard junior felt “highly honored” to treat three young men and five young women to a commencement spread that included wine in his room in 1831. Class Day, as a later Harvard student elaborated, provided similar opportunities:

Class Day is always looked forward to by the belles and beaux of Boston as a day on which they can coquette and flirt, eat and drink, walk and talk, dance and be observed to their heart’s content. Then the college rooms are filled with elegantly dressed women.... There are many and splendid collations, where champagne and hock, claret and brandy-punch flow in streams.”

Women also created opportunities to socialize and drink with college men. Most such interactions occurred at parties hosted by socially prominent middle-aged women. These

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hosts often served wines at their parties that facilitated conversation, dancing, and courtship between young men and women. In February 1833, a Harvard student attended a party in Cambridge where he danced and mingled with several young women. “The cake and wine were very convenient & I did well,” he concluded. Fifteen years later, a Princeton student, at home in Richmond during a vacation, enjoyed an even better time in a similar situation: “The most pleasant party that I ever attended - Plenty of room - plenty of pretty ladies - plenty of wine - plenty of dancing - plenty of supper.”

As was customary at social events, wealthy men, including college students, drank more reservedly around women. Indeed, women had a moderating influence on college men’s drinking. During commencement activities at Princeton, college men drank moderately at the commencement ball because women were present. But when the women retired for the evening, the graduates gathered for an early morning supper and spent “the remainder of the night in a disgraceful manner.” The two most important women in Francis French’s life worried about his drinking while he attended Harvard. In a “pleasant two hour chat” with the young woman he would eventually marry, she confessed to worrying that his “future would be obscured by the dark clouds of dissipation.” French’s mother also worried that his involvement in so many campus clubs increased his drinking, especially after he joined the Hasty Pudding Club (which French considered “the acme of collegian societies”). He attempted to temper her fears: “You speak with doubt about the liquids consumed in the Hasty Pudding Club. The fare is hasty pudding, mush and fry, and hominy, with milk or molasses, and milk for the beverage. Nothing else, edible or drinkable, is ever seen there.” Other college men swore off drinking to maintain the

affection of a young woman. But the ability to affect collegians’ drinking only extended to those women within their social circle whose graces they wanted to enjoy, typically their mothers and potential wives. UNC students justified their drunken behavior in a nearby town by adopting the motto, “Nevermind! I do not expect to marry in this burg.”

College men conspicuously labeled the effects of alcohol, unwilling to consider their personal behavior negatively and demonstrating an attitude of social superiority likely common among wealthy men. Even in the privacy of their own diary, students rarely recorded that they had been “drunk.” Students described the effects of their drinking with words that conveyed jovial manners. They might get “somewhat boozy” or be in “a salubrious condition,” but their favorite word to describe their drinking condition was “tight.” In October 1841, several UNC students “got tolerable tight” from drinking brandy punch at night. If students needed to distinguish the different effects alcohol had among their drinking companions, they usually presented themselves as the least affected by alcohol. At Harvard in May 1841, David Sears, Jr. recounted a walk that he and several other members of the Porcellian Club took after a heavy drinking bout. They made little progress because each member became “quite uproarious,” “quite sick,” “quite merry,” or “full of hiccups,” except Sears and one other member who remained “sober.” After a supper at Amherst in 1848, a student demonstrated an impressive vocabulary by describing his drinking friends as “‘hilarious,’ “‘corned,’ ”‘over the bay,’ ” and “slightly influenced,” but for himself claimed, “The more I drank, the more I felt the need of keeping sober.” And while a UNC student wrote in his diary while “half tight” after drinking episode in February 1851, the next day he found one of his drinking partners from the previous night “almost beastily drunk.”

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On campus, students tended to reserve the label “drunk” for two different situations. First, a student drinker might describe an irritating drinking companion as “drunk.” At Princeton, John Buhler complained that a group of “drunken” students had ruined his efforts at serenading; he left with a friend for a local tavern, but they “hadn't been there long before” the drunken students, whom Buhler labeled “our deserted Intoxicati,” found them. Further, abstaining students tended to label a group of student drinkers “drunk.” William Mullins, no stranger to alcohol, decried that members of his rival literary society were “all drunk … and kept up a most tremendous row” as he tried to fall asleep in 1841.50

Even if all signs pointed to drunkenness, students rarely described themselves as “drunk.” The morning after a Lyceum party, Charles Francis Adams skipped prayers, missed his recitations, threw up his lunch, fell asleep during a lecture, and battled dizziness all day. Indeed, Adams admitted, “My feelings today were not of a sort to feel proud of. My mouth felt very much parched and I felt myself considerably under the influence of fever…. In fact I never was so affected by an affair of this kind in my life.” Yet he claimed, “I was not intoxicated for I went to bed perfectly conscious of my actions and with a perfect command over myself. But I had drunk nearly a bottle and a half of this Champagne Wine and felt quite loaded in consequence.”51 To be sure, there were differing degrees of


51 Adams, Diary, 1:136-138.
sobriety on campus, depending on the student and the situation, but could nearly all of these diarists have been so sober so often if they drank so regularly?

College men were particularly quick to label those they perceived as their social inferiors as “drunk.” Benjamin Crowninshield wrote in his journal that he found his Harvard friends in a “salubrious condition” when he arrived at a tavern in Boston in 1857, but it was with “a drunken Irish couple” the students “had a row with” on the midnight omnibus back to Cambridge. Charles Francis Adams watched a parade of the Boston Light Infantry in August 1824, declaring, “They are not remarkable for any thing except terrible dissipation.” At UNC, when a local resident accused two college men of sleeping with two women who operated a popular boarding house, one of whom was his wife, it was his reputation that became ruined. The accuser and his wife engaged in both verbal and physical assaults (he calling her a whore and she hitting him with a chair) and he twice drew a pistol at the college men, before the faculty intervened. Most students believed that their peers had long ago “seduced” the women, but the faculty resolved the matter in a way that the women “retain[ed] their good character” and the students “retain[ed] all their former privileges,” according to one student, while the husband was “given the character of a drunken fool, who in his intoxication vilely slandered most virtuous and honourable men and women.” College men’s criticisms of the effects of drinking resembled that of most wealthy Americans in that it was reserved primarily for members of the lower classes.52

College men, part of the privileged class, benefitted from the double-standards of penalties for alcohol-related misbehavior within American society. In 1846, a Princeton student drew a direct comparison between the activities of college men and that of local African American men, noting that the latter went on a “SPREE ... determined to ape a

favorite feat of Sophomoric Genius” and vandalized some signs and fences in town. But the student knew well that white college sophomores and African American townspeople would receive far different punishments for similar behavior. At most (and highly unlikely as the next chapter demonstrates), students might be dismissed from college, whereas, for the African Americans, “the Future opens to their contemplation the Iron Bars & Gates of the State Penitentiary - yawning for their year's incarceration.”

Although students primarily drank with members from their own social class and ridiculed drinking among the lower classes, they, like all wealthy drinkers, relied upon people from the working class to provide and serve alcohol. Women who operated boarding houses often kept their young customers happy by serving alcohol. But students’ search for alcohol often sent them lower on the social ladder than these often respectable, though working-class, women. After a UNC student hosted nine of his friends for a turkey and possum supper in November 1840, the students headed to a local man’s house “to get some ‘peach liquer’ but the old scamp would not rise.” The students banged the door for “some time” and engaged in “a stout quarrel with his wife,” before giving up and going to bed. At Harvard, one student entertaining his friends “didn't give them any champagne or cognac as my servant was knocked down and robbed of his keys, among which was that of my wine cellar.” In North Carolina and probably across the South, students often bought their liquor from local African Americans, many of who were likely slaves. At Princeton, students sometimes relied on free African Americans for alcohol, receiving two or three gallon jugs of “strong ale” from local Black boys.

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53 Buhler, “My Microscope,” 16 March 1846, PUMD.

54 William Sidney Mullins Diary, 14 Nov. 1840, SHC; Mullins also quoted in Tolbert, Two Hundred Years of Student Life, 42; Tomlinson, “The Journal of Ruffin Wirt Tomlinson,” 107, 110; French, Exeter and Harvard, 80; Battle, History of the University of North Carolina, 1:585; Wertenbaker, Princeton, 241-242.
From what they drank, to with whom they drank, to what they thought of other drinkers, college students’ drinking behaviors marked them as belonging to a special class of imbibing Americans. By the time they left college, many students had plenty of drinking experience in the social situations in which they would find themselves as they began their careers and entered society as adults. But students did not usually arrive to campus with these behaviors established. For most students, attending college served as a special time to learn to drink alcohol in socially acceptable ways. Yet since this learning process almost always involved drinking to excess to discover personal limits, it did not always have happy endings.

Learning to Drink and Testing Limits

Many students considered their college years as a time to master appropriate drinking habits and associated the refinement in their behavior as a rite of passage from youth to manhood. As students first arrived at college and experienced more freedoms, many drank a great deal, learning their limits with alcohol. Such excess was followed by reserved drinking among many older students. At the same time that many students strived toward moderation, they also conceptualized their college years as a time to enjoy the pleasures of adulthood, including those provided by alcohol, before suffering its responsibilities.

Students often reflected on their first year at college as one marked by heavy alcohol use. As a junior, Charles Francis Adams entertained an old friend in his room where they “talked over the old affairs of our Freshman year.” Disturbing memories flooded Adams’s mind: “I recollected my dissipation ... and had more to reproach myself of than usually agrees with me to recollect.... I recollect billiards, drinking parties and riding as the principle concerns of that year.” William Mullins remembered similar behavior but
expressed greater guilt: “What excuse can I offer myself, my parents, my God, for the dissipation and shameful wickedness of the first ... session?”

Some college students explicitly considered excessive drinking as childish behavior, and it was especially common for new students to test their personal limits regarding alcohol. Charles Francis Adams thought youthful drunkenness disgraced the institution: “I think that this institution is not a University yet. Children are admitted here and ... are ruined by the love of dissipation which they acquire and dazzled by the glare which accompanies it.” A UNC student complained that the “highest ambition” of his peers included “turning off a dose of liquor.” His solution was that the “mere boys ... ought not to have come here until they were two or three years older.” Often with the benefit of personal hindsight, college students perceived that their younger and newer peers had not yet mastered manly drinking.

Perhaps as they lost many of their same-age drinking companions who adopted moderation, a minority of heavy drinking upperclassmen often facilitated and encouraged new students’ excessive alcohol consumption. In 1834, a UNC student recounted the downfall of his roommate after he associated with the wrong crowd:

For the first two months he made no noise and studied hard and behaved himself well and properly and I liked him very much, ... but after a while he got a fiddle and of course got among the fiddlers in college idle and worthless fellows, ... so we parted and ... very seldom see each other, after he left me he begun to drink considerably, and to have wines and brandy continually.

A later UNC student regretted his early drinking habits at college, which he attributed to rooming near some wild upperclassmen: “I unconsciously received a tinge from their character.... I was drunk almost every night and kept liquor habitually in my room.” He reflected how newcomers to college often adopted the behavior of their older associates:

55 Adams, Diary, 1:130; William Sidney Mullins Diary, 8 Aug. 1841, SHC.

56 Adams, Diary, 1:113; Tolbert, Two Hundred Years of Student Life, 68.
When a young man comes to College, unless his character is definitely formed, it is extremely apt to take a tinge from those of the “set” into which he falls. Thus it was with me. I was led by the position of room to associate with men who were the most dissipated and worthless in College, and ere I knew the course I was pursuing, I became a “disciple perfect” in all their ways.

Enjoying, or expecting, greater freedoms than at home and anxious to acclimate to the campus environment, new students often used the bottle to fit in and relieve their fears.57

As evidenced by the elevated drinking among new students, drinking behavior on campus was hardly constant and distinctions among the college classes were particularly salient as they matured. Describing the taverns frequented by his peers, a proud Harvard sophomore presented a biased observation:

At these places of fashionable resort one may see the dignified and stately Senior swaggering about in the most ludicrous manner and declaring emphatically that “A-sright!” Or he may see in a far off corner the friendless, dismal, lugubrious Freshman, mourning over his distressing lot and drinking fitfully a mug of flip. On the sofa lies the drunken Junior, sullen and reserved. But lo! In the middle of the hall who is that majestic and imposing student, he who walketh like a prince? Is he the noble Sophomore of whom I have heard so much? It is.

In fact, students perceived college as a place to develop mature drinking behaviors. Adams “praised” a fellow student “for having subdued his ... dissipated habits and become a studious sensible young man” during his college years. As a departing graduate, Nicholas Anderson explained, “There is a peculiarity about Seniorhood.... It may be called the chrysalis state of manhood. The boy is still a boy, but verging towards the age of discretion... [T]hose little college revels, lasting from dusk to dawn, and made so pleasant by the exhilaration of wine and song, are no longer frequent.” At the same time as they valued manliness and maturity regarding drink, many students believed their time at college was meant for enjoyment before the responsibilities of adulthood. The ever-
perceptive Charles Francis Adams noted, “My College life is my time of freedom and I wish to seize the time for future courses will possibly be melancholy enough.”

_The College Experience of Ichabod Academicus_ (1850) provides an illustration of the maturation of a college man and his changing behavior toward alcohol that accompanied the process (see figure 1.3). With almost forty sets of illustrations, the book, produced by an artist among the Yale student body, follows the young Academicus through his four years at college. The young man first experiences alcohol on campus when members of a literary society recruit him with a bottle early in his freshmen year. Academicus’s alcohol use increases early in his sophomore year when, after mastering card-playing and smoking, he is “led farther into temptation” by frequenting a tavern. Not long thereafter, he “gets jolly for the first time.” Later that year, Academicus receives money from his parents and uses some of these sums “to regale his friends” with food and drink. By his junior year, Academicus’s attention is focused on courting young women and he “attends a party” at which the pitchers on the table likely contain alcohol. As a senior, he “celebrates an honor” by quietly drinking with a friend and attends local taverns to master amusements such as billiards rather than to drink excessively. Yet Academicus has not lost his ability to combine alcohol and fun. In the time leading up to his commencement speech, the apex of his college honors, he provides his friends with one final “frolic.”

But _The College Experience of Ichabod Academicus_ also illustrates many negative consequences associated with antebellum students’ drinking (see figure 1.4). Following Academicus’s initial experience with being jolly, he breaks the windows of a freshman’s room, “drags a horse into the recitation room,” “continues the destruction in his room,” and “sleeps amid the ruins.” The scene where Academicus uses his parents’ money to treat his friends ends with a tutor discovering the students. In response, the students flee, suggesting that college men’s tendency to drink in their rooms seldom meshed with

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campus rules. The disciplinary action taken by the faculty for the treat leads Academicus to conduct a spree of mischief, resulting in his suspension. And even after he assumes “senior dignity” and drinks moderately, Academicus backslides, selling some clothes to fund a “frolic” (presumably with his friends) that results in his incarceration.59

As the experiences of Academicus and many real antebellum college students attest, students considered their college years as a time to master appropriate habits with alcohol. Yet the negative consequences of drinking depicted in Ichabod Academicus were real. Charles Francis Adams knew the dangerous side of alcohol all too well. At college, his regular drinking led him to neglect his studies, a situation on which he often reflected in shame. His alcohol-related problems at Harvard, however, were far less debilitating than those of his older brothers. George Washington Adams and John Adams II developed a fondness for alcohol at Harvard that contributed to their short and unsuccessful lives. George, the oldest of John Quincy and Louisa Adams’s sons, graduated with the highest honors of the three brothers, though he “had begun to drink,” a habit that he continued during an unsatisfactory legal career in Boston that ended at age twenty-nine when he apparently jumped overboard and drowned while on a ship taking him to his parents after he had fathered a child with a servant. John fared worse at Harvard and only slightly better afterwards than his older brother. The faculty had already disciplined him for hosting noisy drinking parties, when they expelled him as one of the “high fellows” in an “uncommonly rowdy” class for participating in the Great Rebellion of 1823. After spending some time as an aide to his father, John continued to drink heavily and failed miserably at managing a mill purchased by his father. The physical tolls of his financial missteps, the stress of

Figure 1.3: Evolution of Student Drinking Behaviors Depicted in *Ichabod Academicus*. These excerpted scenes from a book produced by a Yale cartoonist in 1850 reveal antebellum college men’s evolving relationship with alcohol. This young man arrives on campus with seemingly little experience with alcohol. Not until he is a sophomore and has taken up playing cards and smoking does he begin to frequent a tavern. Later, the maturing student uses money sent from his parents to entertain his friends with drinks. Finally, as a senior, the young man courts women at local parties, where the bottles on the table suggest the presences of drinking. Source: William Thompson Peters, Hugh Florien Peters, and Garrick Mallery, *The College Experience of Ichabod Academicus* (n.p., 1850).
Figure 1.4: Consequences of Student Drinking Depicted in Ichabod Academicus. While some scenes depicted students’ maturing relationship with alcohol over their college years, others reveal that this journey could be fraught with hazards. After Academicus experiences intoxication for the first time, he vandalizes college property; after he treats his friends to alcohol in his room, a tutor discovers the party and the student race away from the scene; after he “furnishes a frolic” as a senior, the resulting revelry lands him in jail. Source: Ibid.
reporting them to his father, and his drinking led to his early death in 1834, barely a
decade after he should have graduated.60

Charles Francis’s brothers were not the first members of the Adams family to
develop drinking habits far more dangerous than John Adams’ ritual of a morning glass of
cider. Both of Charles Francis’ uncles set bad examples for future generations of the
Adams men during their years at Harvard in the 1780s. As an undergraduate, John and
Abigail Adams’ second son, Charles, “exhibited the unmistakable signs of a drinking
problem” and got in trouble “for running naked while drunk through Harvard Yard.”
Charles could not shake these bad habits and died a drunkard in 1800, after a wholly
unfilled life.61

Charles’ younger brother, Thomas Boylston, had also developed a troubled
relationship with alcohol at Harvard that followed him throughout his life. In fact, the
most severe consequences from alcohol use that Charles Francis experienced while a
college student, at least from his perspective, came in the form of his uncle Thomas’s
drunken tirades. With his parents in Washington, his grandmother dead, and his
grandfather dying, Charles Francis was generally at the mercy of his uncle, who, much to
his dismay, John Quincy had charged with overseeing his college allowance. Tensions
between the older and younger Adamses peaked in late May and early June 1824. Charles

60 On George Washington Adams and John Adams II’s alcohol-related difficulties at
Harvard that followed them for the remainder of their relatively short lives, see Paul C. Nagel,
Descent from Glory: Four Generations of the John Adams Family (New York: Oxford University Press,
270, 312-322, 341-343. On the Great Rebellion of 1823, see Morison, Three Centuries at Harvard,
230-231.

61 On Charles Adams’s drinking and disciplinary problems at Harvard, subsequent
alcohol abuse and business failures, and early death, see McCullough, John Adams, 411, 513-514,
529-530, 548; Woody Holton, Abigail Adams (New York: Free Press, 2009), 251, 261, 313-315, 327,
329-331; John E. Ferling, John Adams: A Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 386-387,
395, 402-406, quotation on 322; Nagel, Descent from Glory, 31, 44-45, 51-52, 77-80; Joseph J. Ellis,
Francis’ first duty in what appears to have been more than a weeklong bender was the “task of sitting up with my Uncle when he was in one of his usual situations.” The next day Charles Francis pitied his cousins who had “to see the disgrace of their father.” When trying to update his diary the following evening, Charles Francis was distracted by his uncle, who “was in a ‘talking humour’ being under the influence of this fire which he perpetually takes.” But this distraction paled in comparison to the “severe trial” his uncle put him through at the next supper:

   My Uncle sitting next to me took occasion to be affronted at me for what I do not know, but he tried to provoke me into a quarrel with him. Many bitter things he said which stirred my blood but conscious of the extreme folly of making a difficulty with him I remained silent. This being perceived, he sprang up and went off declaring that there was no congeniality among us.

A couple days later, Thomas Boylston “had decided to go off” and leave the Quincy estate. Charles Francis tried to talk him out of it “but only received insults as he was raving.” Thomas Boylston, whose career never exceeded low-level political offices or minor legal positions, continued on with little professional success and much drinking for another decade, before dying just shy of his sixtieth birthday. So it was the rare member of the Adams family—John Adams in the first generation, John Quincy in the second, and Charles Francis in the third—who was able to leave college without the seeds of an alcohol problem planted in their person.62

That such alcohol-related tragedies could befall a prominent family suggest that they were quite common in the United States during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Indeed, as America’s growing population consumed ever more quantities of the most potent varieties of alcohol, the negative ramifications multiplied

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across society. This elevated drinking and the accompanying consequences helped give rise to a new social reform movement, barely begun when Charles Francis Adams attended college but a powerful political force by his son Henry’s years at Harvard in 1850s. Temperance reformers aimed to persuade or coerce their fellow Americans into new drinking habits, ranging from the moderate use of the least potent alcoholic beverages to total abstinence. Many temperance reformers set their sights on college campuses to prevent temperate students from potent temptations, to convert student drinkers to their cause, and to alleviate the dangers perpetuated by drinking collegians.
CHAPTER 2
THE TROUBLES OF TEMPERANCE AND
THE DANGERS OF DRINKING

“I am determined that nothing shall interrupt my studies,” Ruffin Tomlinson, a senior at the University of North Carolina, recorded in his diary as he returned to campus following Christmas vacation in January 1842. Tomlinson resolved to buckle down in his remaining months at college as he reflected on an unproductive previous term during which he drank alcohol and “got tolerable tight” with several classmates. While he got “every thing fixed” to begin the new semester, Tomlinson’s first accomplishment was reading “with a great deal of delight” the most popular of the growing number of advice manuals written for college students, John Todd’s four-hundred-page *The Student’s Manual*, first published in 1835. Todd provided prospective and current students advice about college life. In between chapters devoted to study habits, conversation skills, politeness, and religion, Ruffin Tomlinson read Todd’s advice about alcohol.1

Todd’s advice about alcohol was as simple as the ramifications he attributed to drinking were severe. “Let it alone: never suffer a bottle, a decanter, a wine-glass, to come into your room, or to touch your lips,” he wrote. “[I]f you could take the catalogue of our colleges,” Todd told students, “and hear the history of those who ... are marked as having gone to the grave [early], you would be astonished at the number who were destroyed by this fatal indulgence.” Todd’s harsh advice was succinct—one paragraph that filled almost two pages—because he had difficulty imagining that his readers’ needed more: “I cannot

believe that any one, who has self-respect enough to read a book designed for his improvement, will need a single caution on this point.”

At least in terms of drinking, Todd’s advice seemed to take with Tomlinson. He and a fellow student formed a campus organization to advocate against alcohol the next month. At the group’s first meeting, Tomlinson “was called to the Chair and explained the object of the meeting in a short speech.” His co-founder read the society’s constitution and twenty-five students immediately signed up. The ambitious co-founders “expect[ed] nearly all [the] college” to join their cause and believed that they had “brought ourselves much note among the Faculty and students” for their organizing efforts. Tomlinson later wrote an article about the young organization for one of the largest newspapers in the state. And while many of his peers became drunk celebrating George Washington’s birthday later that month, Tomlinson retired to his room to read and write in his journal.

John Todd’s advice and Ruffin Tomlinson’s organization were only small fragments of the temperance movement, a burgeoning antebellum reform effort that targeted Americans’ alcohol use. Responding to the rise in drinking at the turn of the nineteenth century, temperance reformers originally advocated the moderate use of beer and wine instead of hard liquor, but by the 1830s many called for complete abstinence from all intoxicating beverages. The temperance movement developed in part because growing numbers of Americans, for the first time, began associating major social ills, including violence, poverty, crime, and insanity, to the excesses of the bottle. Reformers coordinated their efforts through a variety of prominent organizations, beginning with the Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance (MSSI) in 1813 and including the American Temperance Society (1826), the Washingtonians (1840), and the Sons of Temperance (mid-1840s), of which all but the first had hundreds of local chapters that

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supported an overarching national organization. These organizations proved immensely popular, with membership in the ATS reaching more than one million by 1833. Men led all these organizations, though the temperance movement served as one of the few antebellum reform and political movements that encouraged the involvement of women and young people.

In a cyclical pattern, reformers relied on moral suasion to reduce alcohol use until they wished for greater gains, then turned to legal coercion, only to have the resulting unpopular and often unenforced laws overturned, which required them to return to persuasive tactics. Temperance reformers relied on personal influence, religious sermons, traveling lecturers, and an unprecedented mass media campaign of novels, plays, pamphlets, magazines and newspapers to urge Americans to change their long reliance on the bottle. When not everyone listened, they turned to the law. Temperance reformers used innovative legal approaches to try to reduce or eliminate alcohol use. Starting in Massachusetts, reformers began to acquire “the local option” from state legislatures—allowing local officials to determine how many liquor licenses, if any at all, to supply to local taverns, inns, and grocers—which resulted in the nation’s first “dry” communities in the early 1830s. Toward the end of the decade, Massachusetts passed the more aggressive Fifteen Gallon Law, outlawing the sale of alcohol in quantities less than its namesake throughout the state in an effort to stop drinking in taverns and in homes. The antebellum temperance movement culminated with the more expansive Maine Laws, the first effective statewide bans on alcohol named after the first state to adopt such a measure in 1851. Eleven additional states had passed similar measures by 1855.4

Just as the ease of transporting distilled alcohol rather than unprocessed grains and the era’s economic anxieties caused some Americans to turn increasingly to the bottle, the rise of the temperance movement also had its roots in the era’s burgeoning capitalist system. The MSSI formed because some wealthy citizens became frustrated with higher taxes, which were necessary to support the increased numbers of people in poor houses following the economic and social upheaval from the War of 1812. As the temperance movement expanded to vilify all forms of alcohol, including wine, the wealthy’s drink-of-choice, the rising middling class took the reigns of the movement. Significant support for temperance came from farmers who realized that they lost productivity by providing workers regular drinking breaks, manufacturers who needed sober employees in their increasingly mechanized factories, skilled laborers who often had several employees and apprentices and might aspire to become a factory owner, and physicians who, for the first time, began explicitly attributing psychological and physical ailments to alcohol use, most notably the new alcohol-related insanity diagnoses of “delirium tremens” and “mania a potu.” Historian Ian Tyrell argues that these disparate groups shared a cultural identity as “improvers.” Blaming the era’s social ills on alcohol also allowed industrialists and other business leaders to overlook aspects of the emerging capitalist economy—low wages, dangerous working conditions, the loss of worker autonomy, and routinized and monotonous factory labor—that shared responsibility for the social unrest but that changing would have cut into their profit margins and threatened their rising fortunes.5


With rising concerns about both personal health and the nation’s future, drinking among college students proved troubling to growing numbers of Americans. Temperance supporters targeted college students to reduce their alcohol use and recruit them to the dry cause. Some students responded positively to these efforts and became reformers on campus and in the community. Because these new attitudes about alcohol sharply conflicted with those shared by student drinkers, the temperance movement divided the campus community. Temperance aimed to eliminate or reduce many social ills by eliminating their source: alcohol. College faculty members were particularly familiar with the damages that drink caused communities, as student drinkers wreaked havoc on campus and off. Yet when it came to disciplining this behavior, faculty members generally failed in reducing student drinking. Indeed, much of the temperance developments on campus—including students’ activities, the divisions created by the reform, and failed efforts to eliminate alcohol use—reflected the reform movement in the larger society.

Temperance Targets and Agitators

Students proved to be particularly popular targets for temperance agitators. As they began to associate alcohol with a variety of social ills, some Americans connected collegians’ drinking to the dangers of college life, most notably the riots that irregularly flared up on campus. Temperance reformers, rightfully so in some instances, believed that many drunkards had first learned their bad habits at college. That increasing numbers of young men attended college, especially those from middling families who formed the core group of temperance support, and that as alumni they would become influential citizens as politicians, businessmen, and clergy, helped reformers conclude that nipping the bud of men’s drinking in college would exponentially create a drier society. Students encountered forceful calls to be temperate in the publications that they read, in the churches and public lectures that they attended, from the faculty who taught them, and from the parents who loved them. Such efforts recruited many students to the dry cause. Students’ activities on
behalf of temperance mirrored those off campus and, in many instances, allowed students to join the reform community in the larger society.6

Over the course of the antebellum years, authors of advice manuals increasingly instructed students to avoid alcohol, provided the reasons why, and detailed the consequences if they did not. Indeed, across five popular advice manuals for college students published between 1823 and 1843—Noah Webster’s *Letters to a Young Gentleman Commencing his Education* (1823), Asa Dodge Smith’s *Letters to a Young Student in the First Stage of a Liberal Education* (1832), John Todd’s *The Student’s Manual* (1834), William Cogswell’s *Letters to Young Men Preparing for the Christian Ministry* (1837), and Samuel Miller’s *Letter from a Father to his Sons in College* (1843)—each author implored students to be temperate, although the advice increased in quantity and intensity as the temperance movement evolved. In the earliest manual, advice about alcohol consisted of just one sentence, whereas the last manual contained an entire chapter on temperance. As their coverage of alcohol increased, the authors’ definitions of temperance expanded. Webster’s early manual urged students to avoid “intemperance,” or drunkenness. Later manuals focused on students refraining from the most potent form of alcohol, “ardent” or “distilled” spirits (or “hard liquor” in modern parlance), but remained silent regarding wine and beer. Eventually, however, authors insisted on complete abstinence from alcohol. Samuel Miller provided an admonition remarkably similar to John Todd’s: “Let nothing tempt you to touch or taste the fatal cup. There is death in it. Your only safety is in total abstinence.”7

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Authors presented their arguments about alcohol in terms of morality and health, expanding upon one author’s assertion that “alcoholic liquors ... are poison to the body and poison to the soul.” Most claims about morality centered on intemperance as incongruent with Christianity. Webster wrote that intemperance violated the sixth of the Ten Commandments, arguing that the damage caused by excessive drinking was self-murder. William Cogswell claimed that the use of ardent spirits was “wholly at war with the Bible,” and that the apostle Paul considered temperance “a cardinal virtue.” Miller joined these authors in asserting that drunkenness was “forbidden in the word of God;... contrary to the spirit and will of Christ; and wholly inconsistent with the Christian character.” But Miller also sought to expand his audience and discourage drinking among religious skeptics and atheists on moral grounds. “Is it wrong to tell men that there are crimes against the community ... injurious to all the interests of the individual and society,” he asked.\(^8\)

The authors also detailed for students the detrimental health ramifications of drinking. Webster claimed that students must refrain from drunkenness because they were “to avoid every thing that may indirectly or consequently impair your own health, or injure that of others.” Another author argued that Americans’ reliance on alcohol for its “stimulating effects”—that is, drinking alcohol to increase their work productivity—was a rationalization that “justifies suicide.” Todd argued that students were particularly susceptible to alcohol’s negative health consequences: “I must be permitted to say that the danger, to the student, is very great, and that, owing to the peculiar excitability of his nerves, and the relaxed state of his system, he probably receives treble the injury, by stimulants than any other man does.” Miller took a similar stance, asserting “that the indulgence in stimulating drinks is peculiarly injurious to the youthful frame.... [W]hen a

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\(^8\) Webster, *Letters to a Young Gentleman*, 8-9; Cogswell, *Letters to Young Men*, 100, 146; Miller, *Letters from a Father*, 69-70.
most authors instructed students to only drink water. This was a marked change from earlier behavioral patterns in which Americans seldom drank water because cultural norms that rejected water as a beverage, mistaken beliefs in water’s negative health ramifications, and valid concerns about polluted water supplies. Authors of advice manuals pointed to new medical understandings and their own experience to encourage students’ consumption of water. “Drink nothing but water, and you will be better for it as long as you live,” wrote Miller. Arguing that “[a]lmost all other liquids used as a beverage are injurious,” another author challenged students to test his personal habits: “Cold water, I am fully convinced, is the very best kind of liquid to be taken with food, or at any other time. If a faithful experiment, of six months’ duration, does not convince you that it is better than tea, or coffee, or any other kind of drink, your experience will be far different from what mine has been.”

These authors were so familiar with campus life that they were able to discourage behaviors that often coincided with drinking at colleges. Most authors implored students to eschew tobacco, in part, they argued, because it led to drinking. John Todd hoped to stop those who had started using tobacco from developing a habit: “If you ever learned to chew or smoke that Indian weed, called tobacco, I beg that you will at once drop all, cleanse your mouth, and never again defile yourself with it.” He connected tobacco use to a variety of negative consequences, including “demanding stimulating drinks,” and concluded that the “custom certainly seems most at home in a filthy ale-house or bar-

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10 Miller, *Letters from a Father*, 151-152; Asa Dodge Smith, *Letters to a Young Student in the First Stage of a Liberal Education* (Boston: Perkins & Marvin, 1832), 43; Cogswell, *Letters to Young Men*, 146.
room.” Samuel Miller adopted a similar stance. “There can be no doubt that both chewing and smoking tobacco, especially the former, have been the means of making thousands of drunkards,” he wrote.11

Authors also advised students to refrain from spending too much time visiting their peers and to not spend much money furnishing their rooms for fear of attracting visitors. “Your business is chiefly at your own room,” wrote one author, “Students who spend a large portion of their time in gadding about from room to room, cannot make much progress in study.” Another author claimed that students without much furniture did “not possess conveniences for the accommodation of idle scholars, who so often interrupt by their visits the more industrious and studious.” Samuel Miller directly tied his advice about visiting students’ rooms to the dangers of drinking. “If you know of any room in which stimulating drink of any kind is kept, avoid it…. If you enter it, none can tell what may be the consequence,” he implored. Miller even gave those students who enjoyed visiting in general cause for concern: “any student of college who finds the stimulus of company necessary for his comfort, ought to consider himself on the verge of a fatal snare…. The vital principle of intemperance has taken up its abode in his person, and, without a miracle, will probably make him its victim.”12 In sum, authors instructed students to avoid the social aspects of college life at which the libations often flowed.

Authors targeted students’ behavior generally and their alcohol use specifically for four related reasons. First, authors believed in the importance of developing good habits as soon as possible. Noah Webster admitted that “no small portion of my life” had been “spent in correcting the errors of my early education.” John Todd acknowledged that everyone formed habits, but he wished that his student readers “form those habits which

11 Todd, The Student’s Manual, 76-77; Miller, Letters from a Father, 156-161; Smith, Letters to a Young Student, 49-50; Cogswell, Letters to Young Men, 99-100.

12 Smith, Letters to a Young Student, 153; Cogswell, Letters to Young Men, 107; Miller, Letters from a Father, 155.
are correct." Todd also asserted that the reputation developed as a college student would follow the young man for the remainder of his life:

Ask any educated man about the character of his fellow, and you will notice, that he at once goes back to his College-life, and dates and judges from that period. Thus, every anecdote, every ludicrous circumstance, whether it was a mistake in reciting, or in judgment, or in moral conduct, will be repeated over the land, and his frailties will be known as widely as his class is scattered.

Authors even suggested that those youth who read their books before attending college ought to immediately adopt their advice: "If you feel, as many seem to do, that it matters little what course you pursue, or what habits you form at the academy,... I shall have little expectation of your accomplishing much in your subsequent course of study, or in professional life."13

Second, the authors knew that students would encounter many "dangers of college life," including the opportunity to drink. Asa Dodge Smith provided a dramatic general caution:

You look, yourself, I doubt not, with some degree of anxiety on the course before you. And yet I know you cannot fully realize the perils which will beset your path. Be assured, they are many,—they are fearful. I say not this to discourage you, but merely to excite you to that vigilance and effort, which, alone, with the blessing of God, will save you from ruin. Would that I could utter in the hearing of every student in the land, at every step in his course, what I now say to you: —YOU ARE IN DANGER;—LOOK WELL TO YOUR FOOTSTEPS, OR YOU FALL.

John Todd explicitly noted one danger was alcohol, suggesting the occasional boredom associated with college life might tempt students to imbibe: "There is a depression, and sinking of the animal spirits, at times, which makes the desire for artificial stimulants almost irrepressible." Another author argued that the combination of youthful energies and freedoms on campus combined to make students susceptible to drinking. "Young men are apt to imagine that they are in no danger from this vice," he wrote, but "the young are

13 Webster, Letters to a Young Gentleman, 5; Todd, The Student's Manual, 14-15, 48; Smith, Letters to a Young Student, 22.
peculiarly apt to be ensnared and ruined by stimulating drinks. They are proverbially fond of company and of excitement ... and a proneness to reject the counsels of age and wisdom, no wonder they are often borne away by the intoxicating draught.”

Third, authors found it vital to discourage alcohol-use because they believed that even limited drinking would lead to ruin and that those who drank were beyond reform. “Temperate drinking is the down-hill road to intemperance,” wrote one author. Samuel Miller recounted a story of a father who brought his wayward son to a friend known for his ability to correct misbehaving youths. The father listed each of his son’s faults—laziness, profanity, dishonesty—but the friend remained confident in his ability to reform the young man. That is until the father noted the final problem, his son’s “fondness for strong drink.” The friend responded immediately, “Ah is it indeed so!... then there is no hope for him!... I can do him no good. He will never be cured of that vice.” Miller concluded that “of all sinners ... the lover of intoxicating drinks is most hopeless.” According to John Todd, the dastardly ramifications of drinking were immediate: “when the experiment has been once made, and the appetite once indulged, you are, probably, too completely in the hands of your enemy to be saved.”

The final reason the authors targeted students’ drinking behavior was, as John Todd’s admonition suggested, that alcohol, they claimed, had ruined many promising careers. Todd continued, “The student who, even occasionally, uses strong drinks, may be marked as one who will soon cease to be in your way as a rival, and whose career will probably be marked hereafter, only with shame and degradation.” Samuel Miller presented a similar first-hand knowledge of the role of alcohol in diminishing promising careers:

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14 Smith, Letters to a Young Student, 18; Todd, The Student’s Manual, 284; Miller, Letters from a Father, 147-148.

15 Cogswell, Letters to Young Men, 147; Miller, Letters from a Father, 145-147; Todd, The Student’s Manual, 283.
O, if you had known as I have, the mischiefs generated in colleges by strong drink; how many amiable and promising young men have been led on from occasional indulgence to abandoned sottishness ... leading to their ... final ruin, you would not wonder that I speak to you on this subject with so much earnestness.

Such claims must have been a particularly potent argument among anxious poorer students who expected their college attendance to result in future professional success.\(^\text{16}\)

No author came close to articulating as many negative ramifications of drinking as did Samuel Miller. On the son whose drinking could not be reformed, Miller reported that the “result was as predicted” as the young man “not long afterwards died a miserable drunkard.” Beyond this alcohol-related death, Miller produced a long list of the adverse effects of alcohol on the body. Alcohol “derange[d]” the nervous system, “injure[d] the tone of the stomach,” “radically” affected the liver, and provided “the foundation of many loathsome and fatal chronic diseases.” Individuals who began drinking suffered “a craving thirst” that could not “be satisfied without an increase of the same potion that created it.” He concluded his lengthy list by telling students, “If you are not aware of all these indubitable facts, it is high time that you should recognize and be convinced of them, and begin that system of entire abstinence from all stimulating drink which can alone ensure your safety.”\(^\text{17}\) While Miller’s writing was the most caustic, all authors asked that students generally avoid alcohol, couched their arguments in religious and moral terms, discouraged activities on campus associated with alcohol use, and provided powerful reasons to abstain.

The contents of these advice manuals were widely read among antebellum students, but the alcohol-related advice imparted by influential adults closer to home may have been more significant. Traveling temperance lecturers brought their messages about alcohol to the campus chapel and the college town. Students joined the town residents and nearby citizens to listen to the arguments on behalf of temperance. A former sailor set anchor in

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\(^{17}\) Miller, *Letters from a Father*, 147-149.
Princeton in 1850 to deliver a lecture against the two most common occurrences aboard ships, corporal punishment and the liquor rationed daily to seamen. That same year, a lecturer arrived in Chapel Hill. College students and local residents listened to his “argument,” summarized in a student’s diary, “that the use of spirituous Liquors has a tendency to debilitate the body, affects the brain by carrying its poisonous qualities through the brain in the blood – [and] creates in children born of drunken parents a predisposition to drink.”

Even the era’s most prominent temperance lecturer, John Gough, often travelled to college towns to deliver his message. Gough had been a bookbinder in Worcester who had developed a dependence on alcohol before his conversion to the temperance cause. From simple beginnings, Gough launched a speaking career that brought him international fame and earned him a sizable fortune. Students were particularly impressed by his persuasive talents. Princeton students “enjoyed quite a treat in the line of temperance” when Gough lectured in January 1851. “May success crown his laudable enterprise!” proclaimed a student in attendance. Four years earlier, Amherst students joined “people ... from the surrounding parishes” when Gough “completely filled” a large church in the village. A student recorded that Gough’s “voice is more remarkable for flexibility than power, and his gestures are violent, unusual, and sometimes most extravagant.”

Probably less exciting for students than traveling lecturers but occurring more often, local ministers regularly advocated temperance to college men and the other congregants. In 1835, Jason Niles, a student at the University of Vermont, heard a minister

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deliver a sermon in which the “evils of intemperance were depicted in very much the same terms as usual.” Ministers-in-training and the faculty at the Princeton Theological Seminary regularly directed their attention to the students at the nearby (though unaffiliated) college. The dual purposes of one sermon “were to point out some of the temptations to which young men were liable and then offer some dissuasives to them from the yielding to such seductions,” wrote a sympathetic Princeton student to his parents. Intemperance made the pastor’s short list, along with gambling, novel reading, and greed. One not so subtle “dissuasive” that the pastor provided was that the “ways of the sinner lead to hell, and to that lake of perdition from which no one ever returns.”

Mostly trained as Protestant clergy, antebellum faculty members formed a core group of early temperance supporters both on campus and off. They advocated temperance to undergraduates with two goals in mind: creating safer campuses and securing students’ salvation. As the problems of the Adams family suggest and the latter part of this chapter details, drinking on campus often created turmoil for academic leaders. As a preventative measure, they encouraged college men to adopt temperance principles and to join the dry cause. Such calls started at the top. Presidents used their frequent addresses to the student body, usually during the required daily chapel exercises, to discourage drinking. Faculty members also supported temperance activities off campus and provided examples for students to emulate. Some students took notice. One Amherst collegian noted that the faculty attended John Gough’s lecture “en masse” in 1847. At the beginning of Gough’s lecture, the faculty “convulsed with laughter at his well-acted personifications” before becoming “visibly affected as he told a sad story that had come from his own experience.”

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Indeed, scholars who were trained in the northeast before taking faculty appointments far from the epicenter of temperance activity may have served as the students’ and the community’s first lecturers on the subject. This appears to have been the case when, at the request of an early student temperance society at UNC in 1831, Elisha Mitchell, a Presbyterian-trained clergy member from Yale who served as a professor of mathematics and natural philosophy, delivered the first temperance lecture in the Chapel Hill area. His address “vividly portrayed the downward career of the drunkard.” Mitchell, nicknamed “Old Mike” by the students, detailed how the intemperate man loses his friends and his fortune, ruins his relations with his family, and often beats his wife and children. Perhaps suggesting that the students were fortunate to have the parents that fate had provided them, the educated man also noted that the “moral and religious education of the children of the drunkard” were “miserably neglected.”

The most difficult source of temperance advocacy to document today was perhaps the most important to students at the time: their parents. With so many students from middling backgrounds being the first person in their families ever sent to college, their parents surely worried that their sons would succumb to an environment long known for its wet ways. One mother wrote her traveling husband that she had asked their older son who was preparing for Princeton “if he thought his brother and himself could now withstand the temptations which surround youths at college.” Nearly two months later, as their sons prepared to leave home, the parents wrote “a few parting counsels” that they hoped would “receive not only consideration but be adopted ... as rules.” Of the fifteen rules, three concerned drinking. The first rule about drinking (and the fifth overall) stated, in a lengthy manner, that there should be none: “As you have always been advocates of temperance and have discarded as unnecessary, expensive, and positively injurious and

therefore immoral the use of ardent spirits and of tobacco in all their forms, so we trust that you will never under any circumstances or influences depart from these good opinions and habits.” The other alcohol-related rules instructed the young men to avoid the company of their intemperate peers and to not patronize taverns or other places “of dissipated or low amusement.”

College men proved to be popular and important targets for temperance reformers, as a variety of influential adults tried to moderate or eliminate student drinking. But students were not only passive recipients of temperance education; many became temperance agitators whose actions and activities mirrored those in the broader reform effort. Students’ most prominent and common action was to form campus temperance societies, similar to those organizations controlled by middle-class men and prominent clergy throughout the country. Early societies sprang up in New England in the late 1820s, coinciding with the uptick in the movement created by the establishment of the American Temperance Society in Boston in 1826. Both Yale and Williams students established societies in 1826. The next year, Dartmouth’s new society attracted over one hundred members, and Bowdoin’s society began in 1829. As a student temperance society at UNC requested Old Mike’s lecture two years later, these organizations spread quickly and far, though Ruffin Tomlinson’s need to establish a society on the same institution a decade later reveals that not every society was long-lasting. The primary purposes of these societies was to encourage students to sign a temperance “pledge,” to disseminate information on developments within the movement, to foster students’ involvement in the larger movement, and to provide peer support in environments where drinking collegians often remained the norm.

23 Myers, A Georgian at Princeton, 24, 55-56.

In an era known for the hostility between faculty members and students, temperance agitation proved an effective means of cooperation. From Francis Wayland at Brown to Timothy Dwight at Yale to Mark Hopkins at Williams, college leaders who were committed to temperance encouraged the formation of campus temperance societies and supported their subsequent activities. For students, campus temperance societies facilitated their participation in a national reform movement and, especially for students from families who had never sent a son to college, served as a “symbol of their acceptance of college community values.” For faculty, these societies recruited rising adults to an important cause while simultaneously improving student behavior on campus. At campuses with less direct faculty support of campus societies, students’ temperance agitation ebbed and flowed in conjunction with the common but irregular campus revivals associated with the Second Great Awakening. The membership rolls of campus temperance societies swelled during a revival and remained full for a year or two before tapering off and remaining low until the next wave of evangelical religion to sweep the campus.25

Not only did students establish and support campus temperance societies, they, like faculty members, became involved in the cause beyond the college yard. As Ruffin Tomlinson’s efforts suggest, students regularly supplied articles to those publications devoted to temperance or sympathetic to its aims. Students also delivered lectures in the community. Jason Niles in Vermont offered a temperance speech off campus in 1835, after which he recorded that a prominent citizen “paid me a few (undeserving) compliments & hoped I would be so good as to come down and deliver an address the next winter.” Students’ publications and lectures sometimes overlapped. In 1850, a Princeton student wrote home to ask his family to “obtain four or five copies of The Temperance Advocate when my speech in published.” And many students joined community temperance

societies in addition to or in lieu of campus organizations. Thomas Garrett, a UNC student, attended a “very pleasant meeting” of the Sons of Temperance in Chapel Hill in 1850 for which he “had prepared a few remarks.” The meeting “continued very long” and when Garret was finally “called upon,” he wrote, “I beged [sic] to be excused, but the cries of go on! go on! sounded so pleasantly in the ear of an youthful orator like myself that I could not resist. I spoke several minutes and from the earnestness which I manifested more than from anything which I said I gained some applause.”

Probably more so than any other antebellum reform or political movement, temperance agitation provided motivated students entre into the adult sphere of influence.

College men stayed up-to-date with the pressing concerns that captured the attention of the national temperance movement. At “a large temperance meeting” at the now defunct Farmers’ College in Ohio in 1849, students voted to support laws that imprisoned liquor dealers and banned hard alcohol two years before the first effective statewide ban was passed in far-off Maine. Though many faculty and students joined the cause, few belonged to its most radical wing. When the most radical temperance agitators attempted to reinterpret Biblical passages to rid the communion table of wine, several college-based theologians worked to thwart such efforts. Students too were skeptical of such efforts.

The cause of temperance seems to have spread to every campus, even flourishing at Harvard in the 1830s, the same decade that Massachusetts led the nation in efforts to limit alcohol use through legal channels. Students heard temperance lectures at their required

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daily chapel, the two Sunday sermons they had to attend, or local Cambridge churches they frequented. In February 1833, several faculty members and students gathered to determine “the best plans for forming a Temperance Society.” In less than a month, a committee had drafted a constitution. A relatively young faculty member, John Palfrey, chaired the committee and presented it to the larger group. Speaking for an hour and a half, Palfrey commented with “much fluency & elegance,” according to one student in attendance, on “the cause of temperance” and the contents of the constitution. Nearly one hundred students signed the constitution over the course of the next two days. Five years later, the Harvard Temperance Society invited one of the college’s more prominent alumni, the noted Boston physician Walter Channing, to prepare an address for the students. Channing, who had entered Harvard in 1804, advocated on behalf of the most pressing temperance issue before the Massachusetts legislature: the Fifteen Gallon Law. Even at colleges long known for their wet ways, students listened to calls on behalf of temperance and found ways to become involved in the movement.

Temperate students brought their sharpening intellectual skills to the aid of the reform movement. Some expressed criticism of the unfounded efforts of some reformers. Though sympathetic to the temperance cause, a recent alumnus of Connecticut’s Trinity College disagreed with a lecturer who advocated a revised translation of a Bible verse that effectively eliminated alcohol use in the scene: “anyone capable of reading the Hebrew alphabet can see … that Noah is said to have drunk and to have been drunken.” In a time when Americans highly valued oratory, however, most collegians’ criticisms focused on delivery. A UNC student noted that a visiting lecturer “embellished his whole argument with remarkable anecdotes, which were told in exquisite style of mimckry [sic]- The feelings

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of the audience were kept in continual change – until he had complete command of them.” John Gough’s performance also drew praise from students. “Never before have I listened to any speaker who so successfully commanded the attention of this auditors…. His peculiar power evidently consists in moving the passions. At one time the entire audience would be convulsed with laughter, and the very next moment the … unrestrained tear must flow,” recorded a Princeton student. But students were not always impressed. For example, Jason Niles criticized a preacher’s sermon: “The evils of temperance were depicted in very much the same terms as usual. The address I do not consider remarkable either for the originality of its treatment (if I may say so) or the force of its delivery.” In passing judgments on their fellow reformers, students considered ways to strengthen and expand the reach of the movement.

Beyond their conscious consumption of the movement’s rhetoric, temperate collegians’ inquisitive nature encouraged them to explore the consequences of alcohol on their own. In 1833, on his return to Providence from Massachusetts, one Brown student “fell in with an intemperate man” who was about sixty years old. The older man lived in one of the increasing number of towns that no longer allowed liquor to be sold (the “local option” in temperance language) and was travelling to a nearby village “to have his bottle filled.” The student engaged him in a conversation “about his habits – their rise, progress, and his intentions concerning them for the future.” He revealed that his drinking started when “he began to chew tobacco” as a seventeen-year-old. The thirst caused by the tobacco led him to “take a spoonful of rum.” From this meager amount, the man’s consumption increased “to that point where he could consume one or two quarts [of liquor] a day when engaged in labor.” The student “asked him if he could by degrees rid himself of this course,” to which the man responded “that he was endeavoring to do so, and drank only a

glass or two a day.” The intemperate elder “would give any thing could he begin life again; and ... would permit no spirits to enter his mouth.” The man bid the student farewell as he entered “a little low grog shop,” causing the reflective scholar to ask himself, “‘Who hath made us to differ?’”

Similar to older temperance reformers who decried the many adverse societal effects of drinking, temperate students were also attuned to alcohol-related tragedies. In Vermont, Jason Niles walked three miles away from campus to visit the “high bridge,” which connected two rocky ledges over a gushing river seventy feet below. Niles gripped a tree and leaned over the edge to examine the river, finding “one of the most frightful places” as the “boiling, foaming” water rushed below. This experience led Niles to remember in his diary the fate of one of the bridge builders who, “having drank fully of liquor,” returned to work and “fell into the foaming abyss below!” Levi Newton recorded in his diary that an intoxicated man had fallen out of the stagecoach between Boston and Cambridge, but “was found to be little injured.” Three months later, Newton noted a less fortunate woman who, drunk, had been burned alive when her clothes caught on fire. Another student in Georgia noted that a fifteen-year-old bartender had shot and killed a drunk customer.

In one significant way, then, students’ temperance agitation shared a common denominator with student drinking. In establishing organizations, speaking and writing for the dry cause, consciously considering the movement’s rhetoric, and seeing the evils of alcohol everywhere, temperate students closely mirrored the actions and attitudes of the adults they admired. If student drinkers looked to the established wealth and merchant

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30 Jacob Richardson Scott, To Thee this Temple: The Life, Diary and Friends of Jacob Richardson Scott (1815-1861), ed. Elizabeth Hayward and Roscoe Ellis Scott (Chester, PA: The American Baptist Historical Society, 1955), 119-120.

31 Jason Niles Diary, 19 April 1835, SHC; Levi Lincoln Newton Diary, 2 Dec. 1837, 7 March 1838, Newton MSS, AAS; George Gilman Smith Diary, 14 Nov. 1853, George Gilman Smith Books, #971-z, SHC.
classes for behavioral guidance, temperate students identified with the upwardly mobile men and the church establishment who formed the upper echelon of the temperance movement. Indeed, as a “conversion” to Christianity marked “the advent of adulthood” for many pious young men and most of their conversions included signing a temperance pledge, participation in the temperance movement served as a path to adulthood for some college students, just as mastering drinking did for other collegians.32 Not only did college men’s temperance agitation closely resemble that of adults, temperance served as a particularly effective path to promote students’ involvement in their local community and in the broader society. Also reflecting larger societal trends, the two sharply different viewpoints about alcohol held by college students contributed to an increasingly fractured community on campus.

The Troubles of Temperance

The temperance movement cut deep divisions within American society. If progressive farmers, physicians, manufacturers, and skilled laborers usually supported temperance, then tavern keepers, distillers, and merchants opposed the movement. Similarly, judges and lawyers were seldom convinced of the benefits of abstinence and legal coercion, believing that alcohol should remain legal but regulated. At their core, prohibition efforts were class-based, with the emerging middle-class supporting, the working-class resisting, and the wealthy ignoring the initiatives. Especially before the call for total abstinence became widespread in the 1830s, many Americans criticized temperance advocates for targeting the drink of the poor (liquor) and overlooking the drink of the wealthy (wine). The Fifteen Gallon Law also disproportionately affected the working class because the wealthy could afford to buy large quantities of alcohol, and it became unpopular when it threatened to bankrupt many taverns, institutions whose

popularity endured despite the rise of temperance. Even immigrants, whose drinking was often the target of reformers, divided over temperance. The Irish, who usually arrived as single men or husbands whose families remained behind, were often wrecked by social problems from the drunkenness that resulted from their preference for whiskey, leading some to support temperance efforts. On the contrary, Germans usually arrived in family units and their preference for lager beer resulted in fewer community problems. They saw temperance as social control spawned by nativist fears.33

Temperance support also cut along religious lines and political parties. Denominations with conservative tendencies, such as Episcopalians and Lutherans, provided little support, while the members of the growing evangelical churches, most notably Baptists and Methodists, filled the rolls of temperance societies. The ATS, primarily led by evangelical men, offered harsh criticisms of Christians who drank alcohol and churches that allowed individuals who profited from the liquor trade to take communion or become members. Whig politicians and voters were more prone to support temperance and legal suasion, while Democrats resisted such efforts and worked to overturn subsequent laws.34

Divisions existed within the temperance movement too. There was tension between those reformers who supported total abstinence and those who avoided liquor but moderately drank beer and wine. Reformers also divided over the use of fermented wine—and the Biblical justification for it—in communion. Middle- and upper-class temperance regulars initially welcomed the rise of the Washingtonians, a group started by six working-class drunkards who adopted abstinence and rallied large numbers of the lower classes to the movement. The economically better-off temperance regulars expected to control this

33 Tyrrell, Sobering Up, chapters four, ten, eleven; Kass, Midwifery and Medicine in Boston, 189-190.

34 Tyrrell, Sobering Up, chapter three, 237-238, 266; Hampel, Temperance and Prohibition in Massachusetts, chapter six.
new group, but the Washingtonians resisted both this control and prohibition laws. When wealthier men gained control of local Washingtonian chapters, membership precipitously dropped. Moreover, some Washingtonians, when tempted by the traditional “treating”—campaigning for votes by offering men free alcohol—that coincided with the Congressional and Presidential elections in 1842 and 1844, backslid toward the bottle. Also in the political realm, many Whigs, initially sympathetic, became antagonist toward the dry cause when they perceived that such support had contributed to their electoral defeats.35

A particularly sharp division centered on the role of women in the temperance movement. Antebellum Americans inherited from the previous century an ideology that insisted female intemperance was rare but nonetheless considered women’s drunkenness far worse than the male variety. Women nonetheless drank up to a quarter of all the alcohol and were responsible for up to half of the alcohol-related arrests and deaths in the first half of the nineteenth century. Temperance reformers especially vilified women’s drinking, associating it with the evils of prostitution, the moral downfall of virtuous men, and sexual deviancy. Physicians aided reformers efforts by insisting that women’s biological makeup made them more prone to spontaneous combustion than male drinkers. Even as many male reformers welcomed women’s support of temperance, the two primary roles allotted women in the movement’s rhetoric were passive. First, temperance reformers depicted women as the primary victims of men’s intemperance. Second, women served as moral exemplars for whom drinking men could look for model behavior. Indeed, male temperance leaders did little to empower women. Reformers instructed wives not only to maintain an inviting home to distract their husbands from the tavern, but also that her sobering influence was to be inferred by rather than forced upon her spouse. Nor were women encouraged to separate from or divorce intemperate men. Despite these passive

35 Tyrrell, Sobering Up, 145-150, 195-207; Hampel, Temperance and Prohibition in Massachusetts, chapter six.
roles, when temperance efforts stagnated, some reformers blamed women who, they claimed, spent more time worrying about fashion than furthering the dry cause. When they were not complaining about women’s lack of commitment, male reformers worried that women were using temperance as cover to gain political rights. These men hoped that the prohibition laws, by moving the debate about drinking from the domestic sphere to the political, would encourage women to no longer concern themselves with temperance agitation.36

The wedge that the temperance movement drove into society also fractured the campus community. Temperate students largely avoided their drinking peers; student drinkers ridiculed temperance supporters on campus. The background characteristics that usually distinguished temperate students from student drinkers largely reflected the divisions among the larger populace, though such differences on campus were as messy as those in society. And while the temperance movement did damage collegiality among students, the two groups rallied together on rare occasions.

Some students took the advice of temperance advocates, such as the authors of advice manuals, and separated themselves from their drinking peers. Dry students sometimes lived in specific boarding houses “on principle of temperance.” Even off campus, temperate students supported the increasing numbers of inns operating under temperance principles, institutions that their drinking peers avoided. An Amherst student who needed accommodations while traveling from home to campus complained, “Why is it that temperance houses … are always worse kept than the dominions of Alcohol? I have always noticed it for a fact.” As the temperance movement gained steam, many individuals who had formerly earned a living by selling alcohol opened coffee shops and temperance inns and restaurants for the growing numbers of Americans, including temperate students,

who wanted to avoid drinkers or the temptations of alcohol at the tavern. In fact, temperate students also helped their sympathetic family members avoid the dominions of alcohol in their college towns. When a temperate Princetonian’s mother and sister planned to stay at a local hotel during that wettest time of the academic year, commencement, he arranged for them to stay with a professor and his wife. He warned the soon-to-be travelers “that the hotel at that season is so much ... frequented by drinking characters, that it would ... be very unpleasant.”

Temperate students at the wettest campuses probably had the most difficult time fitting in and finding friends. Upon his arrival at UNC in 1843, William Bagley found “the young men here are very wicked” and differentiated between none of his peers: “There are I suppose from 160 to 170 students, they are very wild and dissipated.” Less than three months later, he remained “continually annoyed with ... the conversations of those who indulge in lewdness, dissipation & gambling.” Not surprisingly, Bagley did not participate in the celebrations of most UNC students’ favorite holiday. He wrote home how it was “customary for the students to partake pretty freely of the intoxicating cup” on George Washington’s birthday: “I observed that they were getting unusually rowdy & boisterous. I however retired about ten.”

A more hidden form of campus division, probably unknown to student drinkers, was that temperate students sometimes used their wet peers’ behavior to smooth over discord with their own disappointed parents. When another temperate student at UNC learned that he had disappointed his father, probably due to his grades, in 1847, he pleaded that he had been studious and was “strict in his morals.” He expressed his

37 Jason Niles Diary, 9 May 1834, SHC; Hammond, Remembrance of Amherst, 77-79; Tyrrell, Sobering Up, 200; Myers, A Georgian at Princeton, 191.

frustration that “there are many others who are idle, prodigal, and dissipated and yet seem to give perfect satisfaction.” Whatever his offending actions, the student offered “a partial extenuation, that a sojourn of two years and half in a place like this, is enough to ruin a saint[,] much more a mortal.”

But temperate students did not always avoid, ignore, or complain about drinkers; some confronted the offenders. At Miami University in Ohio where more than a majority of the students may have been temperance supporters, they “signed a resolution agreeing to put out of college any one who would patronize the liquor shops.” So serious was one of the signatories that the next day he “fired [his pistol] at a liquor seller but missed him by a few inches,” sending a clear message to imbibing students of the seriousness of the resolution. Though such an episode of violence was probably extremely rare, it nonetheless demonstrated the seriousness that temperate students had for their cause and the displeasure they exhibited towards drinkers, on campus and off.

If temperate students choose to distance themselves from their wet counterparts, then student drinkers gave them plenty of reasons to stay away. Several wet Amherst students had an ulterior motive in attending an “exhibition on the evils of drunkenness” put on by a fellow student in 1847. One attendee admitted that he and his friends “[w]ent on purpose for fun; and succeeded most emphatically.” To add insult to injury, this student borrowed from the drinker’s lexicon to describe the experience. “We had a regular spree, making fun and comments, laughing and carrying on: ‘such a jolly row!’ ” When the leaders of Princeton’s temperance society asked to use a student’s room for a meeting a year later, an antagonistic neighbor determined to get his wettest companions—the commencement ball managers—“to meet in my room as opposition & then open the doors

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between.” As a group of temperate students were observed at the campus well at UNC, one student asked another what had precipitated such a gathering. His wet friend explained that as the president chased a trouble-making student, the young Achilles tossed his whiskey bottle down the well. “The temperance boys have been drinking the water ever since, hoping to get a taste of the spirits,” he claimed. Many students not only shared a fondness for drink but also an enjoyment in ridiculing those who did not.41

Dry students also encountered individuals antagonistic toward temperance beyond their drinking peers. A sober Princetonian, energized by a recent lecture by John Gough, spoke with a former college president visiting campus during which “the conversation very naturally turned upon temperance.” Claiming to use the older man’s own words, the student described the interaction in a letter home: “‘He despised everything that looked like temperance.... The greatest piece of tyranny and oppression the world had ever witnessed, and unworthy [in] this enlightened republican age.... Injurious to the state, religion, and the church.’” According to the student’s report, the president, perhaps remembering Gough’s working-class beginnings, believed that “‘he was a scoundrel; had no faith at all in him; would not trust him out of his sight.’” The student remained respectful in person if slightly snide in his recount, listening to the “anathemas which fell from his lips (which by the way, judging from his age, I deemed should have been trained to utter wiser and more sensible sayings).” The young man claimed that when he presented arguments on behalf of temperance, the president “accused me of ignorance—as being not aware of the nature of the association to which I had joined myself.” Eventually, the student confessed, “Considering his age I thought it best to say little ... and therefore let

him alone." Though neither man budged in his stance, such incidents reminded temperate students that even influential and learned people were hostile to their cause.42

For some students, having grown up in communities particularly divided over temperance, the social divisions about alcohol were nothing new. Levi Newton arrived at Harvard from Worcester, Massachusetts in 1835. Just as Newton enrolled in college, the town underwent a fierce political battle over granting liquor licenses to taverns and dram shops. Newton apparently hailed from a family of prohibitionists; he arrived and remained a temperance supporter at Harvard. More emotionally unsettled were those students who came from homes that divided over alcohol. William Mullins, no stranger to either alcohol or emotional unrest during his college years at UNC, had a particularly conflicted home life, which his biographer attributes, at least in part, to his interactions with his abstaining Methodist mother and his liquor-selling grocer father.43

Contrasting temperate students with student drinkers illustrates some differences in general characteristics between the two groups. Temperate students tended to be older than their drinking peers and more likely under the evangelical fervor of such denominations as Methodists and Baptists, like the Amherst student who tossed his brandy bottle into a roaring fireplace upon succumbing to revivalist fervor in 1855. Temperate students were strongest and most active at the evangelical colleges in the North, and drew less support at liberal Harvard and the southern state institutions. Students who arrived on campus with familial wealth were more prone to drink than those from the middling classes who aimed to use their college education for social advancement. Determining the exact proportion of student drinkers to temperate students is not possible for the historian,

42 Myers, A Georgian at Princeton, 105.

but one advice manual author estimated that one-quarter of all college students met his
definition of pious, a seemingly appropriate stand-in for the prevalence of temperance
supporters among antebellum collegians.44

Perhaps more important than drawing broad but imperfect generalizations,
studying students’ drinking and their involvement in temperance reform demonstrates the
fluid and complicated nature of both alcohol use and temperance reform in antebellum
America. Not every student who drank in a reserved fashion was an ardent temperance
supporter. Nicholas Anderson, who came to Harvard from Cincinnati in 1854, appears to
have drunk wine and beer but no liquor, especially in his first year. Upon arriving in
Cambridge, Anderson recorded, “[H]ow happy will I be, how happy will my parents be
when I return home in January and announce that I have neither drank a drop of
spirituos liquor, nor smoked a cigar, nor played a card.” Anderson’s success in avoiding
liquor does not mean he avoided opportunities to drink. Upon losing the bet over the
game of marbles, Anderson served his friends both ale and punch. Anderson consumed
only the lighter of the two beverages, writing “I, of course, drank but a little ale.” Despite
his moderate drinking approach, he never noted his involvement in the temperance
movement or attendance at a temperance sermon. Indeed, the midwestern Anderson
believed that “the inhabitants of New England” had too strong of attachment to their
Puritan past: “Loyalty and attachment to ancestry is undoubtedly a valuable trait in any
people. It implies faithfulness, honor, and patriotism when moderately developed, but
when too strongly cast, it implies idolatry, fanaticism, and all sorts of ultraism. It is this
trait which makes them so radical on the question of slavery, temperance, and the like.”
Nor did every temperate student completely abstain from alcohol. Jason Niles, the
temperance-lecturing Vermont student, stopped at a tavern for beer and apple pie as he

Spinney (Guilford, CT: The Shore Line Times Publishing Co., 1940), 15-16; Cogswell, Letters to
Young Men, 195.
traveled into Canada in 1835. Moreover, temperate students found themselves at least as often as their wet peers at the communion table, which usually included fermented wine throughout the antebellum years. And not every temperance pledge was taken as a life-long commitment to the dry cause. Some regular drinkers adopted temporary temperance behavior to suit a specific aim. Shortly after being “high in the wind” on George Washington’s birthday, a UNC senior “wrote a Temperance pledge for myself—signed it & nailed it up against the wall” in 1842. His pledge was temporary, “to drink not liquor before Senior [grade] reports are out.” Over a decade later, another student arrived at Georgetown University under a longer but still temporary obligation. He “took an oath, for Mollie’s sake, to abstain from tobacco and all deleterious drinks, during the year.”

Dry students also experienced the divisions within the temperance movement, most notably over signing temperance pledges. When a student in Pennsylvania “attended a grand temperance meeting” in January 1858, he and a fellow student were among the “great many” who signed a pledge. Though his position on temperance remained unchanged, the student soon admitted, “I did then what I have since been sorry for as I think that it would have been much better to have taken the same stand without being bound by a pledge.” The next month, the student received a letter from his old roommate that reinforced the regret: “He censored me for signing my name to any pledge to abstain from any intoxicating liquors. He (and so do I) believe in the exercise of the will.” A student attending Harvard more than twenty years earlier had a similar positive reaction to the cause but disdain for the pledge. He wrote in his journal that he “felt convinced by Mr.

Palfrey’s arguments that it was proper to join & he intended to do so,” but he “refused to sign when the paper was presented to him.”

Even when students were sympathetic to the dry cause, they at times had more important loyalties. At UNC in 1850, a colonel in the Georgia militia delivered a temperance lecture that focused on “the evil examples of great men,” chastising Daniel Webster in particular for his excessive drinking. The student who introduced the speaker was to sit on the stage during the speech, but, being a fan of Webster and his recent success with the Compromise of 1850 (which kept the nation united for another decade), he rose from his seat and marched “out of the hall with an indescribable expression of disgust.”

Perhaps trying to keep a semblance of order and in an effort gain a few converts, a faculty member corrected the colonel and noted that “the distinguished Defender of the Constitution had given up the habit of drinking alcoholic stimulants.” The colonel countered that he had recently been in Webster’s company and seen him drink. Regardless of which man was correct about Webster’s drinking, the colonel had offended the sensibilities of the young North Carolinians and won no converts that evening.

Though the rise of the temperance movement fractured the campus community, it did not shatter it. To some extent, student revelers realized that their dry peers provided cover and legitimacy to the extracurricular activities that facilitated their drinking. The moderate drinking Nicholas Anderson worried about his reputation after joining a particularly dissipated Harvard club:

Of late I have seen, much to my regret, that I made a mistake in joining the Oneida Boat Club. The hardest fellows in the class belong to it, and about twice a week they row to Boston and go on a “spree.” Now I have no fear that I would be persuaded to join in their carousals, but I do not like to be considered one of them. They

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47 Battle, History of the University of North Carolina, 1:581.
are all companionable, clever fellows, but they will get drunk, & sometime or other will get into trouble.... I thought that my character was at stake, and I resolved to resign.... I am afraid that some of them will feel hurt, but I cannot help it: I do not wish to get into the company of those who are, and wish to be called, “fast.”

But the members of the club worked to pacify Anderson and keep his name on the membership roll. Anderson reported, “I had my determination known to several of the members, and after many words they persuaded me to reconsider.... They talked to me as if I were the redeeming character of the club.” Student drinkers knew the faculty would squash organizations without at least some “redeeming characters.”

And although temperate students were concerned about alcohol in general, they may have been harsher critics of the drinking among the lower classes outside of the college than that of their classmates. In July 1849, a temperate UNC student attended a political debate eight miles from campus. While he had pleasant time and enjoyed most of the company, he wrote:

What most offended my senses, were the drunkards, who having procured some stinking whiskey, that a hog would not drink were sporting with it in a brave manner, swallowing glasses full at a time making beast and hogs of themselves.... be it said for the good of the temperance cause, that those men wore the most squalled garments, were filthier, and had the worst countenances than any other part of the company.

Two months later, the same student recounted in a gentler if still critical manner the behavior of some students who traveled to nearby Hillsboro to attend a circus:

Arrived they engage in drinking and carousing, each endeavoring to outstrip the other in the velocity of his inebriation, the height of liquor in his glass &c. Unfortunately pretty soon several found themself [sic] in that state of insensibility that they could not exercise [sic] any of their sense, and poor fellows! pitiful creatures!

The collegians who became “inebriated” and “insensible” “poor fellows” received a far kinder description from their abstaining peer than working class “drunkards” who made “beasts and hogs of themselves.”

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In fact, when times called for it, collegians who had divergent views about alcohol could put their differences aside. Drinking students sometimes changed their long-standing customs at campus events to include their temperate counterparts. Noting in 1839 that because the Class Day supper at Harvard was “the last occasion on which the class is together[,] it is desirable that all should attend,” Levi Newton recorded that the conflict between the wine and anti-wine men was resolved when “a compromise was made to suit all” in 1839 (though the details of the comprise are lost to history). Some temperate students also aided those student drinkers in the most need. In September 1851, a dry Princetonian spent “some time attending a sick young” student whose “indisposition was caused solely by excess.” Over the course of a week, the now incapacitated student had “taken about four hundred drinks, or about fifty quarts” which led him to suffer from “mania a potu.” “The first night I sat up with him,” the temperate student wrote home, “he would spring from the bed, roll and toss, call upon us for ‘only one more drink,’ adjuring by all the powers of heaven and hell.” While the incident served as “one of the most awful sights” in the temperate student’s young life, he nevertheless remained at the bedside.50

Even if temperate students came to the aid of the most notorious drinkers on campus, faculty members had to address their behavior. Reflecting larger societal trends, many students drank alcohol while increasing numbers supported temperance. The conflict between these two camps and the contradictions within them—on campus and off—presented a particular challenge to college authorities responsible for instilling values and promoting proper behavior in society’s future leaders. If the discipline system they relied upon is any indication, college authorities failed to determine if students were adults deserving of respect or children needing direction. The many failings of their approach to

50 Levi Lincoln Newton Diary, 11 June 1839, Newton MSS, AAS; Myers, A Georgian at Princeton, 227-228.
Discipline were only overshadowed by the real dangers posed by student drinking and other misbehaviors.

**Drinking, Discipline, and the Dangers of College Life**

“Is college justice human justice?” asked the relatively well-behaved Nicholas Anderson in 1857. If it was, Anderson had cause for concern. Anderson’s journals and letters are full of descriptions of college authorities regulating students and campus life, very little of which he deemed reasonable. Historians have been similarly critical of the antebellum campus discipline system. While faculty wanted to have complete parietal authority over students, a changing student population made this increasingly untenable. Younger wealthy students were “unaccustomed to being told what to do,” while poorer students were usually older and had often lived independently while saving money to attend college. The differences between how faculty wanted to exercise their authority and how students expected to be treated often soured relationships between the two. Yet student drinkers presented many valid reasons to the college authorities to curb alcohol use. The negative consequences of student drinking represented a microcosm of the concerns that fueled the temperance movement. Student drinkers disrupted the social harmony on campus, jeopardized their physical health and their academic success, and caused disturbances and acts of violence. Though these drinking-related damages and the rising temperance movement provided plenty of justification for aggressive enforcement of rules regarding alcohol use and harsh penalties for those who broke them, faculty members caught proportionately few drinkers, and often provided only mild punishments for those they did.51

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The ramifications of student drinking were many, spread on campus and off, and were often quite severe. Although students used alcohol to facilitate social interactions with each other, they learned that alcohol could reduce or contribute to social anxieties. When students were not included in their peers’ drinking parties, they sometimes felt neglected and became upset. After a Lyceum gathering in December 1823, Charles Francis Adams shook hands with a fellow student, “but not so cordially as formerly.” Adams believed that the chill was caused by the other student having been “left out in the invitation” of the recent party. The night after another Lyceum “debauch” five months later, Adams and another member gathered “with a number of Seniors who, it seems have smelt a rat and gave us strong intimation that they knew what we had been doing.” But even drinking together did not guarantee jovial spirits between participants. “We had all of us been in terrible spirits during the day,” Charles Francis began a recount of a Lyceum party in May 1824, “Our different tempers were considerably developed in the course of the night.” The members divided into two tables to play cards. The table that finished first opened their bottles of champagne and “soon became noisy and boisterous,” which “excited a spirit of discontent between the tables.” This discontent was heightened when the sober table voted to make the others pay for some wine glasses that they had broken. “This vote irritated” one of the noisy participants “to a high degree which increased by the liquor he had taken,” and “he flew into a violent passion.”

Since students usually did not start until after evening prayers, their drinking often lasted late into the night, far past the time the rules dictated that they should be asleep. The would-be circus attendees from UNC did not return to campus until “past midnight.” At Princeton, students who ate oysters and drank “refreshments” at nearby restaurants did not return to their rooms until around the same time. After a meeting of Harvard’s

Gridiron Club in 1855, members “drank claret cobbler until Midnight.” Students stayed out even later when they attended suppers planned for campus societies, especially at Harvard. After a fraternity initiation in May 1855, the brothers did not even begin to enjoy the “excellent collation ... with lots of champagne and claret” until eleven. The next month, Nicholas Anderson was one in “a merry jovial set of students” who left Cambridge at eight o’clock in the evening for a supper and did not return until five o’clock the next morning. In January 1857, Harvard’s Benjamin Crowninshield attended a Hasty Pudding supper in Boston until “2 o’clk” in the morning. Six months later, he returned to Cambridge “[a]t six o’clock [in the morning] just as the bell rang for prayers.” Even the generally better-behaved Amherst students might not arrive home until after two o’clock from a supper.53

Despite student drinkers’ hesitancy to consider themselves drunk, they often reached levels of intoxication that ranged from mild to severe. “Crowds of tight fellows” followed the election of the junior orators at Princeton in February 1848. The day after Princeton’s exam week ended that June, another student recorded, “Every body doing nothing. Exception[:] A few drunken fellows.” The supper following a Hasty Pudding meeting a decade later that descended into an “exceedingly & fiendishly noisy drunk” represented the results of many such late-night dinners planned by students. But students did not require campus elections or special suppers to drink to excess, as many reported heavy drinking during their regular and often unplanned visits to taverns, restaurants, and

even each others’ rooms. A handful of UNC students became “perfectly drunk” off some “fine peach-brandy” in a college room in 1841.54

Intoxicated students occasionally found themselves in situations that risked their physical safety. The UNC students who were not sober enough to attend the circus had drank so much alcohol that to ensure they made it back for morning prayers their (designated?) drivers and their less drunk friends threw “their senseless bodies into the carriages.” Three years earlier in Chapel Hill, the weather combined with a vacation created a troubled situation. A student lying next to the campus well during a rainstorm was “so drunk that he could not get up,” and his friends “were so tight” that they “could hardly” get him back to his room. In February 1846, a Princeton student, Hoyt, offended a young clerk, Packer, at a local dance. After “[g]etting pretty sociable,” Hoyt said, “ ‘Packer, take a drink.’ ” Packer drank and “in a familiar ... sort of way” asked, “ ‘well—Hoyt will you take a drink’”? The student responded, “MR. HOYT if you please.” Confused, Packer said, “ ‘...I don’t see why I should not call you Hoyt, as well as you can call me Packer.’ ” Hoyt bluntly responded, “ ‘Ah ... I am a Student of the College while you are nobody but Vanderventer’s clerk.’ ” Packer subsequently “thrashed Hoyt” and the fellow student who tried to come to his aid. The next month another “tight” Princetonian irritated some

townsmen eating at the local hotel, one of whom “caught him by the waist & pitched him forthwith out of the window.” A decade later in Pennsylvania at Franklin and Marshall College, two “somewhat boozy” students chopped down a “canopy of evergreens” in the city square. The students considered it a “first-rate Joke,” though many townspeople held a different opinion.55

When student drinkers’ physical safety was not at risk, sometimes their physical health was. Some students reached such high levels of intoxication that they lost the contents of their stomachs. After the usual “sociable” that followed a Porcellian Club meeting in 1841, several of the members, “already quite high,” ventured out for a walk on which one of the party became “quite sick.” In January 1848 at a friend’s room, an Amherst student met a new student who was “‘drunk as a fiddler’ ” and soon “vomiting profusely from the liquor he had drunk, and then trying with half tipsy gravity to persuade me it was voluntary!” Nine years later in Cambridge, Benjamin Crowninshield let a “drunk” friend who vomited on his floor sleep in his room, two weeks before he “imbibed” at two drinking establishments in Boston, becoming “sick” on “potable” at the latter. The positive side to this negative consequence was that it might curb a student’s appetite. One UNC student was invited to a friend’s room to enjoy some eggnog in January 1851. He went but drank “very little,” explaining in his diary that he had a “particular aversion to the stuff—I once liked it but, was so unfortunate, or rather fortunate as to ‘drink a little too deep at the Spiritual fount’, and it not only turned my head topsy turvy, but also my stomach. Since that, I cannot bear eggnogg!”56


56 David Sears, Jr. Diary, 3 May 1841, MHS. Hammond, Remembrance of Amherst, 215-216; Crowninshield, A Private Journal, 19-20, 24; George N. Thompson Diary, 18 Jan. 1851, SHC. See also Tolbert, Two Hundred Years of Student Life, 66.
After bouts of late-night and early-morning drinking, many students suffered the unpleasant consequences that subsequent generations of Americans would collectively label “hangovers.” “I have felt worse during the day than ever before in College,” complained William Mullins the day after becoming “completely drunk” in 1841, “Headache and bad feelings have tormented me throughout the day.” In the same decade, a Princeton student reported that the “sleighbing parties that were out—show it in their looks today. Oh what miserable-headachy-jaded … looking fellows they are.” During Benjamin Crowninshield’s college years in the mid-1850s, he “felt accordingly,” “got knocked up by my exertions of yesterday evening,” “[f]elt headachy and did not feel like going about,” and “[f]elt pretty seedy” upon waking in the morning after his engagements with the bottle. More than thirty years earlier, Charles Francis Adams reported similar consequences. “The Wine which I had drunk last night had great effect upon me today, causing me some languor,” he wrote in May 1824, a month before recording, “I did absolutely nothing this morning from a sort of listlessness always following a blow.”

Not surprisingly, the late-night drinking parties, incidents of vomiting, and morning-after effects of alcohol interfered with many students’ academic obligations. When the last part of Charles Francis Adams’ daily diary entry noted drinking with his friends, the next day’s entry usually began, “Missed Prayers.” Not only did student drinkers miss prayers, they also missed class. In 1858, Benjamin Crowninshield “[c]ut prayers and recitation” after attending a Hasty Pudding supper in Boston that lasted into the early morning hours. The temptations of alcohol prevented some students from preparing for class or exams. After a Princeton student took a trigonometry test in 1848, he participated in a “[s]pree at night in a cherry tree.” Yet the next morning he had a rhetoric examination, on which he only “[d]id as well as could be expected.” Students’ oratorical commitments

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also suffered from drinking. A member of Harvard’s Porcellian Club in 1841 “badly delivered” a speech despite being “an excellent orator” because of his participation in a club dinner the previous night. Several years later, a Princeton student started to give his oration “but owing to his being inebriated during the whole of the preceding part of the day, he was obliged to excuse himself.” Back at Harvard in 1857, another student delivered “but a small portion of oration” due to “being tight.”

Sober students often suffered the negative ramifications of alcohol use on campus. In June 1831, Jacob Motte, a Harvard student from South Carolina, left a lamp burning as he went to bed to help his roommate, a newly elected officer to the Washington Corps who was enjoying the transitional supper, find his bed after the party. Around three o’clock in the morning, several students “burst” into Motte’s room carrying his drunk roommate. After the old officers had put Motte’s roommate to bed, they proceeded to the college yard and used an old fire engine to make “all the noises in the world.” Motte lamented, “[T]here they were until prayers, making a most tremendous racket, much to the disturbance of myself and other sober minded and sleepy-headed persons, who would rather spend a little time between going to bed and getting up to prayers in respectable sleep.”

Indeed, the most common negative consequences from all this drinking were the loud, varied, and constant noises that campus imbibers created. At UNC in August 1841, some upperclassmen, after taking dancing lessons in town, called for a freshman to come

58 On students missing morning prayers after drinking, see Adams, Diary, 1:137, 188, 197, 207, 228, 296, 439, 457, 459; Crowninshield, A Private Journal, 57, 100; Thomas Cushing, Jr. Diary 19 Feb. 1833, MHS; David Sears, Jr. Diary, 3 May 1841, MHS. On students missing class after drinking, see Adams, Diary, 1:137, 206; Crowninshield, A Private Journal, 98, 100; Motte, Charleston Goes to Harvard, 31-32. On the test-taking Princeton drinker, see James Kendall Lee Diary, 23 June 1848, PUMD. On student drinkers struggling with orations, see David Sears, Jr. Diary, 14 July 1841, MHS; James Kendall Lee Diary, 27 June 1848, PUMD; Crowninshield, A Private Journal, 19-20.

59 Motte, Charleston Goes to Harvard, 6, 44-45.
play his fiddle in their third-story room where they continued to practice their moves. Following the dancing, the students enjoyed a bottle of wine and “pledged each other in flowing glasses.” These students were, most likely, dancing and drinking above rooms in which other students were trying to study or sleep. Earlier that year at the same institution, another student drinker admitted that he and his drunken friends “kept College in an uproar until after twelve [midnight].” During the same Porcellian excursion in which one member became sick, another was “too no[isy]” for the group to return to campus. Also at Harvard, Nicholas Anderson wrote home about his first Class Day, noting that after “the ladies having departed, noise and confusion were above par. Shouts and yells, which would have put to shame the bravest brave of the Kickapoo, were heard issuing from college rooms.” Temperate students were particularly frustrated by the alcohol-related noises. One UNC student complained to his father about the “very wild and dissipated” students: “I now feel quite unwell from loss of sleep owing to their shouting and frolicking last night.” Another complained that the UNC circus revelers who were “not content with losing their own allotted [sic] hours of sleep...,, began to disturb their fellow students by ringing the bell.”

Less common but more disturbing were the harassment, destruction, and violence attributable to student drinking. After the UNC students who consumed the Frosh Treat headed back into campus in 1840, they broke out windows of the college buildings, threw stones at people, vandalized classrooms, rang the college bell, and rode the faculty members’ horses throughout Chapel Hill. “Out of revenge,” the rude Princeton student who had been “thrashed” at the local dance “broke in ... [the] window and destroyed property worth $40” belonging to his assailant’s employer. At Amherst around the same time, a drunken student amused himself with “vain attempts to horsewhip” a freshman.

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60 James Laurence Dusenbery Diary, 29 Aug. 1841, SHC; William Sidney Mullins Diary, 1 Oct. 1841, SHC; David Sears, Jr. Diary, 3 May 1841, MHS; Anderson, Letters and Journals, 88-89; Tolbert, Two Hundred Years of Student Life, 47; Garrett, “Diary,” 390-391.
and later “struck” a friend who tried to help him up the stairs. A decade later, a Harvard student who returned from a late-night supper in Boston admitted to his diary, “I filled my pockets with apples before I left the table and on the way out [back to Cambridge] broke 2 gas lamps and some windows.”

Student drinkers had the potential to inflict personal as well as property damage. A group of “rowdy” UNC students created such a commotion at a tavern in Hillsboro in 1845, that the proprietor arrived to “stop the noise” and “ordered them off.” As one of the students approached him in a menacing manner, the owner “picked up a chair” for protection and to get the students to leave. Another student “drew a pistol and shot [the tavern keeper] in the arm.” At Harvard a decade later, James May, a student from Virginia, interrupted his two friends’ supper in search of pistol “as he wanted to shoot a man who had insulted him.” One of the friends, “seeing that May was drunk and really intent on committing harm, took him to his room where he soon quieted him,” avoiding a tragedy similar to that at UNC.

Though such violence was more intermittent than regular, it appeared in ways that thoroughly disrupted the academic community. In the fall of 1840, the University of North Carolina was home to a drinking club far more nefarious than the Charles Francis Adams’s Lyceum Club. Hilliard Fort, whom the faculty had already admonished twice, once for throwing an apple at a gathering of the board of trustees and once for his involvement in a late night ruckus that included ringing the campus bell and painting a faculty member’s horse, organized a small group he aptly named the “Dissipated Club.” Some of the students Fort recruited had long been “very dissipated,” but he also recruited younger members by “skillfully presenting the charms of dissipation.” The group started by stealing

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62 Tolbert, Two Hundred Years of Student Life, 70, 107; Anderson, Letters and Journals, 27.
a few horses. Before long the club members had painted themselves in blackface and “went
down to a negro house [and] seized ... a common negro prostitute, tore off her clothes, and
painted her naked body!!!” Several nights later the club members “poured a quart of oil” in
the pulpit of the campus chapel and dumped a similar quantity on the president’s porch.
These devious students ended their night by painting one last thing: the gate to college
president’s house. Several of the club’s freshmen members managed to destroy all but one
of the campus’s blackboards, leaving students to suffer lectures without visual aids and for
them to lose all of their deposits that college authorities would have returned if the
institution experienced no damage. Lacking any semblance of empathy, these students
again vandalized the president’s property three days after one of his children had died. Even
after the faculty dismissed several of the youngest club members from the university, Fort
and another member, both drunk, were caught riding horses and attempting to relocate
the University’s mules during an evening rainstorm. Finally, the faculty dismissed the
ringleaders and the Dissipation Club’s reign of terror ended. Yet even in dismissal, Fort
managed to encourage the dissipation of his peers, entertaining several friends in his room
with eggnog and peach liqueur.63

Like some of the Dissipation Club’s destruction indicates, college presidents and
faculty members were often the targets of student drinkers’ most dangerous behaviors.
Institutional histories are full of intoxicated students’ violence toward college authorities
during this era. Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker describes a Princeton student who was
returning to campus after visiting a tavern saw the outline of the college president in the
window of his illuminated study. The student drew a pistol, fired, and barely missed the
academic leader. When the college president and a faculty member investigated the
disturbance created by “six drunken seniors” at the University of Georgia in 1840, a

63 Battle, History of the University of North Carolina, 1:464-467; Ishkanian, “Religion and
Honor,” 140-172. Mullins Diary, 20 Oct. 1840, 19 Nov. 1840, SHC.
historian recounts that the upperclassmen “laid down a barrage of sticks and stones which painfully wounded the President and badly bruised the Professor.” Back at UNC a decade later, a handful of students “drinking and shouting boisterously” “became incensed with two of the professors” who dared interrupt their soiree, writes Kemp Battle. They threw stones at the faculty “so violently” that the faculty members barricaded themselves inside a student’s room. When a faculty member used a chair to hit one of the students climbing up to the window carrying “a huge stone,” “[t]here ensued a fierce cry to burst open the door and kill the assailant.” Only by the intervention of a “firm and orderly” student were the faculty members able to escape to safety. At Harvard on New Year’s Eve in 1857, “many lawless deeds were perpetrated” as students threw bottles at tutors, locked professors in their rooms, fired guns, and made “many violent noises ... to disturb the peace.”

With so much alcohol-related havoc created on their campuses and so much alcohol-fueled violence directed at their persons, college presidents and faculty members had good reasons to develop a discipline system that discouraged drinking and penalized perpetrators. Rules about alcohol varied from campus to campus, but they generally forbade students from keeping “intoxicating liquors” in their rooms (though whether this included wines and beers is unclear and probably also varied between campuses), having parties, and becoming intoxicated. In his overarching effort to warn of the dangers of alcohol, Samuel Miller informed his young readers that college rules prohibited “all intemperate drinking” and keeping “ardent spirits, or fermented liquors of any kind” in their rooms. New York University rules stated that a student caught frequenting taverns would “not be allowed to remain a member of the University.” The “college laws” at Oglethorpe in Georgia forbade students from having or using “intoxicating liquor.”

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addition, the rules targeted many of the activities that coincided with or resulted from
student drinking, including: fighting, gambling, playing cards, attending “any places of
fashionable amusement,” and “from hallooing, singing, loud talking, playing on a musical
instrument, or [making] other noise.” Describing the twenty-four items on their list of
regulations “few and general,” Oglethorpe authorities asserted that “much is left to the
discretion of the Faculty” in the event of any “cases [that] may occur that are not expressly
forbidden by law.” Whether the official rules prohibited them or not, many faculty
members worked to stop the suppers that student societies planned, surely because of the
ensuing late hours, potential vandalism, and missed prayers and classes.65

Students caught violating campus rules about alcohol suffered penalties that ranged
from mild admonishments to expulsion. For the most part, students received punishments
for being intoxicated, especially in public, rather than from drinking in general. A UNC
student who in 1823 had seven charges against him, the second of which was intoxication,
received only a four-month suspension. Later that decade, four students were caught
drinking and playing cards in a college room, but they only got in trouble for their game of
chance. Penalties for drinking seem to have increased over the antebellum period. In the
1810s at UNC, the first offense for intoxication was a private admonishment by the
faculty, to be followed by public admonition for repeat offenders; but by the 1850-1851
academic year, all the students brought before the faculty for “drunkenness” were either
suspended or expelled. That year, one student was “sorry to tell” his father that a classmate,
whom his father apparently knew, had been “suspended for three weeks for being found
intoxicated.”66

65 Miller, Letters from a Father, 147-149; John E. Parsons, “A Student at NYU in 1847:
Allen P. Tankersley, College Life at Old Oglethorpe (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1951), 150-
152; Adams, Diary, 1:214-215, 271-273; Anderson, Letters and Journals, 50-51, 132; French, Exeter
and Harvard, 93-94.

66 Ishkanian, “Religion and Honor,” 121; Battle, History of the University of North Carolina,
1:191, 275, 277-278, 452, 561; Tolbert, Two Hundred Years of Student Life, 71.
College authorities sometimes demonstrated leniency when they were convinced that a student drinker took responsibility for his actions. Nicholas Anderson recounted a conversation between his friend James May and Harvard’s president:

Pres’t – “You were on the cars [running between Cambridge and Boston] Fast Day night?”
May – “Yes, sir.”
Pres’t – “You were drunk?”
May – “Yes, sir.”
Pres’t – “Very drunk?”
May – “Yes, sir.”

In an effort to deflect a suspension or expulsion, May claimed he had just “signed a pledge for the rest of the term.” Whether a temperance pledge or some other commitment to good behavior, the President wanted to know to whom May had made the pledge and May told him it was Anderson. The President summoned Anderson. After “a long conversation,” Anderson was pleased to report “that the President promised me that he would pass over this misdeed because Jim so manfully owned up to everything.” Other students recognized that admitting to drunkenness might allow them to circumvent harsher penalties. At UNC, participants in the Frosh Treat, after some cajoling, willingly admitted to intoxication but claimed to have had no part in the subsequent vandalism. Such admissions placated the faculty members while alleviating the students of any responsibility for restitution.67

Faculty members often came down hard on the organizers of parties and suppers. In August 1824, the members of Harvard’s Knights of the Square Table considered their prospects for future suppers “rather dark” after another group of students was caught in a “‘Festive Entertainment.’” The faculty admonished six students, placed one on “special probation,” and rusticated—a form of suspension that banished the student from campus but put him under the tutelage of a rural pastor to continue his studies—three. “This course of the Government’s has frightened every body as by this it appears no body is safe from

their vengeance,” complained a knight. Fifteen years later in Cambridge, two students who “were found in a festive entertainment scrape” were “sent off for a year.”

In an effort to not rely only on after-the-fact punishments, faculty members took proactive measures to prevent student drinking. At UNC, faculty members tried to eliminate drunkenness on George Washington’s birthday in 1842. They visited various boarding houses to speak with the proprietors to “urge ... moderation in regard to the kind and amount of intoxicating liquors” to be served at the holiday’s suppers. Going a step further, the faculty members attended the various dinners. A jovial student realized that the faculty members “dined with us for the purpose, of preserving order & preventing us from drinking too much wine.” In spite of their work, one faculty member was walking across campus when some students, who turned out to be two freshmen, cursed at him from a window. Upon investigating, he found a “room full of drunken students” with sugar strewed about the brandy-soaked floor (the combination of which was used for making peach brandy).

The faculty reserved the harshest punishments for the most egregious offenders. At UNC in 1824, the trustees expelled two students who “committed violence upon” two professors and the president. Following the revelry surrounding George Washington’s birthday in 1842, UNC faculty members suspended a student who hosted “a drinking party in his room” and “unanimously dismissed” the two freshmen who were intoxicated that night, “used highly indecorous language” against the professor, and had already become “characterized by bad conduct and bad scholarship” during their short time in Chapel Hill. Three years later during that same troubled holiday, a total of seven students were suspended or dismissed, in part because of violence toward the faculty. To the north,

\[68\] Adams, Diary, 1:271-273; David Sears, Jr. Diary, 5 Nov. 1839, MHS.

Charles Francis Adams noted the expulsion of a student who had “obtained dissipated tastes” and “had been guilty of many vicious deeds.” Three decades later, Harvard faculty expelled a sophomore for “habitual intoxication” after he had “a slight attack of ‘delirium tremens.’” That same year, the faculty suspended three freshmen after learning that the trio had gotten a classmate “outrageously intoxicated” and “stripped their unfortunate companion, placed him in a tub of water, upset his furniture and left.” Almost universally, long-term suspensions or expulsions coincided with additional troubling behavior.70

In part because college authorities’ own efforts were unsuccessful, those outside the college walls tried to reduce student drinking. At least one state legislature intervened to help college authorities limit students’ alcohol use. North Carolina politicians established prohibition boundaries around Chapel Hill as early as the 1820s. In 1855, the legislature enhanced the original laws in ways reminiscent of the Fifteen Gallon Law, forbidding the sale of alcohol under a quart (typically the largest amount individuals bought) at retail establishments and outlawing the sale of alcohol by drink at “all houses” (restaurants, taverns, or boarding houses). The laws also extended beyond the short radius around Chapel Hill to forbid selling alcohol to “any student or other person” who intended to drink it within two miles of the college. Moreover, they placed a moratorium on many of the activities antebellum Americans associated with drinking within five miles of Chapel Hill, such as billiard halls and gambling, and any person wanting to present any amusement, including theatre performances, concerts, dances, and equestrian performances, needed to secure written permission from the president or the faculty a week in advance. These laws apparently ended students being served alcohol at boarding houses and any wines at the commencement ball.71

70 Ibid., 247-248; Tolbert, Two Hundred Years of Student Life, 61, 70; Adams, Diary, 1:141; Anderson, Letters and Journals, 38, 99-100.

71 Battle, History of the University of North Carolina, 1:645-646.
Formally and informally, parents were also involved in the college discipline process. One parent wrote his son at UNC that “you will do well to conform to all their rules ... and seem to do it cheerfully whether it be so or not.” When students violated college rules regarding drinking, the faculty usually notified their parents. Amherst faculty wrote to the parents of the most egregious drinkers to ask, though in reality to instruct, that they remove their son from college. In Connecticut, a Trinity College student who was part of a noisy group that usurped and drank several bottles of wine leftover after an exhibition in 1840, complained that a professor had discovered the gathering and “had the impertinence to dismiss us to our room and report the case to our parents.” That same year UNC students also became incensed when the faculty members contacted their parents. Following the early rash of intoxication and ensuing destruction, faculty members called on suspected students to sign an apology that admitted their misbehavior and pledged to reform. As most students perceived this situation as preferable to either dismissal or paying restitution, they willingly signed the pledges. With these pledges in hand, the faculty wrote to their parents, informing them of the recent wrong doing and asking for their support in reforming the students.72

Though they attended college in an era that preceded the widespread use of professionalized police, some antebellum student drinkers nonetheless encountered officers of the law. In May 1855, Nicholas Anderson described a group of Harvard students who “went to Boston” and “got on a spree.” As their revelry ensued and the students made “a great deal of noise, some watchmen came up and prepared to take them to the watchhouse.” A student at Franklin and Marshall College “was up before the Mayor, charged

with disorderly conduct, while in a state of Enebriation” in 1857. Back at Harvard a year later, Hasty Pudding members enjoyed “an excellent French supper” at a restaurant in Boston until a “next door neighbor complained about the noise. Soon the students “had the pleasure of a call from 3 watchmen.”

Even with broad discretion, near complete authority, and help from external sources, college authorities were not very successful in designing and implementing a discipline system that reduced student drinking and its related ills. But this was not necessarily their fault. Student drinkers were hard to catch, ingenious in obtaining alcohol, and aided in their efforts. To avoid a faculty member “pursing him” in October 1846, a “tight” Princeton student jumped out of a third-story window, a leap that “but for his ‘glorious compression’, would have ... killed [him] to a certainty,” recounted one of his peers. The student “escaped detection ... at the expense of a bruised back, & a bunged eye.” Another Princeton drinker, who could by no definition be considered temperate, appears to have joined the campus temperance society so that the faculty would ignore his room on their nightly rounds and he might use it as a tavern. When UNC students needed ice to make brandy punch, they acquired it by “feigning sickness” to a professor. Forbidden from attending the alcohol-soaked horseraces near Chapel Hill, students went in disguises. At other times, liquor sellers helped students circumvent prohibition measures. With the sale of alcohol forbidden in a two-mile radius of Chapel Hill, one restaurateur began charging particularly high prices for meals. Students willingly paid because these meals included “free” alcohol. Another entrepreneur opened a grog shop “just a little over two miles” from campus.

73 Anderson, Letters and Journals, 46; Douglas, Douglas Diary, 101; Crowninshield, A Private Journal, 100.

74 Buhler, “My Microscope,” 31 Oct. 1845, 14 Nov. 1845, PUMD; William S. Mullins Diary, 15 July 1841, SHC; Tolbert, Two Hundred Years of Student Life, 67-66; Battle, History of the University of North Carolina, 1:277.
When the Harvard faculty began to crack down on suppers, the students began an ingenious tradition of appointing a small number of students to plan the festivities and keep the details secret until the last minute. In explaining the custom to his mother, one student admitted, “I myself do not know what place the committee have determined on, as it is kept a most profound secret lest if should get to the ears of the faculty.” A sophomore offered a similar description to his father about planning of his class supper: “For several reasons the Faculty have tried to break up these suppers and discontinue the custom. Consequently a committee was appointed secretly, who made all the arrangements, and nothing was said till the very day of the supper, when word was passed round, and all met quietly.” Enjoying their supper throughout the night, the students likely awoke many hotel guests and town residents with their rendition of “Auld Lang Syne” on the town green as “they cheered and dispersed around sunrise.” Yet their disturbance went unheard by the far off faculty.75

Students also had a low opinion of and a lack of faith in the discipline process. Princeton students noted a discrepancy in college rules about alcohol. Students openly frequented taverns with no repercussions despite it being a violation of college rules, but faculty regularly suspended or expelled students for intoxication, an offense not listed in the campus regulations. Nicholas Anderson, given his relatively well-behaved demeanor, was particularly critical of Harvard’s discipline system. “It is hard for me to bear my own misfortunes, but when I suffer for the misdeeds of others, it seems particularly distressing,” he complained when was accused, unjustly, of throwing an orange at a college janitor. At least according to Anderson, college authorities had little patience for protests of innocence: “They have a very simple way of satisfying their consciences, if they are possessed of such a thing, by saying, ‘Well, if not guilty in this case you were guilty of some

75 Anderson, Letters and Journals, 50; French, Exeter and Harvard, 93-94. See also Adams, Diary, 1:271.
previous misdemeanor and escaped detection.’ ” He also complained about the faculty’s methods of discovery, “One might think it rather a small thing for the distinguished faculty of Harvard College to skulk behind trees and in the dark shadows of buildings to start out upon the unwary student and arrest him.” Other students believed the likelihood of getting caught by faculty was slim. Charles Francis Adams was one particularly indolent student. Even after the crackdown on students’ behavior following the Great Rebellion of 1823 that resulted in his brother John’s expulsion, Adams seldom worried about the potential ramifications of his behavior. During one Lyceum supper, Adams noted that one of the participants “was too prudent as he was fearful of discovery, which I thought not risked in the least.” Later that year as he continued to partake in many suppers, Adams reflected, “For my own part I do not think the Government will take any notice of little infringements.” Students could be particularly incensed by what they perceived as hypocrisy among the college authorities. In January 1851 at UNC, students and faculty awoke to a new mural painted on a campus building. Some artistic students drew disturbing representations of their faculty members. One student reported that Elisha Mitchell, that long-serving faculty member who delivered Chapel Hill’s earliest temperance lecture, was represented by “a bowl (of hot) punch! Glass & Jug” because “it was said, when he caught whiskey in a student’s room always took it, to the Elaberatory and made punch to drink himself.”76 Students at UNC, and perhaps elsewhere, appeared to reject rules that treated themselves as children instead of permitting their alcohol consumption as adults.

The parietal nature of the discipline process probably destined for failure efforts to eliminate or reduce student drinking. Since, as we saw in the previous chapter, many students perceived the college years as time to master and demonstrate the alcohol use

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among adults and expected the freedoms of adulthood, they were particularly riled by efforts to control or limit their drinking behavior. In addition, getting into trouble often earned students respect rather than contempt from their peers. When George Dexter, who probably was only a witness to a riot in the Harvard Yard in 1855, nonetheless was punished as a participant, his friend recorded: “Dexter, instead of feeling a regret at this disgrace... is a proud, manly, and don’t-care-a-bit individual as you can see anywhere. He is deluded with the idea that he is now looked upon as a man, not a boy, a childish boy as he has heretofore been considered; he thinks he now may be spoken of as a lion.” Including parents in the discipline process also appears to have exacerbated students’ perceptions of being treated as children. One UNC student believed that the destruction of the Dissipated Club was directly related to the letters sent home following the Frosh Treat: “When the excitement ... died away, it was partially aroused again by the Circular of the Faculty [to the parents], and I then thought (and I believe predicted) that another row would be the consequence.” To a large extent, faculty members’ attempts to outlaw aspects of drinking alcohol appear to have resulted in students seeking the “pleasure that comes from doing forbidden things.”

Even if student drinking and its effects were not punished most severely, the consequences were both real and often permanent. College proved to be a place where students could develop a damaging relationship with alcohol. In 1824, Charles Francis Adams detailed in his diary the downfall of a fellow Harvard student who began as a “boy ... of pretty good parts, excellent nature and very studious.” Yet upon arriving at college, the young man quickly learned horrible habits by rooming with a wild student who “in fifteen months by a terrible course of dissipation ruined himself for this world.” The once promising youth “was not possessed of sufficient energy to withdraw” from the company

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and behavior of his drunken roommate. Upon learning of his peer’s expulsion in 1824, Charles Francis Adams found the fall from grace “the most notable example ... of blasted hopes and merits destroyed by a concurrence of ill fated circumstances.” A year before the pledge to the college president, Nicholas Anderson worried that his Virginian friend was “killing himself by drink.” And the Princeton student who suffered from “mania a potu” and the Harvard student expelled following a bout of “delirium tremens” demonstrated the most severe alcohol-related health problems of their day. So severe were the potential ramifications of student drinking that when faculty allowed punished drinkers to return to campus, even their wet peers might wish their readmitted classmates had reformed. “I hope he will remain now and leave off his drinking,” commented a UNC student when an often-intemperate peer returned from suspension.78

Student drinking presented an enormous problem for antebellum college authorities. Drinking remained an important activity for many men, but growing numbers of Americans argued such archaic practices should be abolished. In a similar vein, many students considered drinking an important aspect of their college years, while others found it reprehensible. Those who did drink, though, brought little glory to their cause. They caused a variety of problems both on campus and off. Faculty members confronted these negative consequences and social divisions through their discipline efforts on campus. They split the difference, punishing a handful of student drinkers harshly while letting many more escape with mild rebukes. Yet most student drinkers, the majority of the time, eluded college authorities.

The Lasting Legacy of Temperance

The antebellum temperance movement was marred by major disappointments and marked by significant accomplishments. The temperance movement’s two greatest political

78 Adams, Diary, 1:141; Anderson, Letters and Journals, 27, 38; Myers, A Georgian at Princeton, 227-228; George N. Thompson Diary, 16 Feb. 1851, SHC.
victories proved more popular before their passage than after. Massachusetts’s Fifteen Gallon Law, enacted in 1838, caused such anger among working-class voters that the Whigs were swept out of office and the anti-prohibitionist Democrats repealed the law in 1840. Statewide prohibition laws were similarly short-lived. The compliance that reformers expected failed to occur, and as they tried to eliminate legal loopholes public opposition only increased. While eleven additional states had adopted prohibition by 1855, just four years after Maine’s initial effort, the northeastern state again led a national trend by repealing prohibition, following a violent riot in Portland, the next year. During the brief time these laws existed, judges struck down many enforcement measures and unprofessional, politically-appointed police forces often refused to enforce those that remained. But surely the greatest failure of temperance, at least for the most ardent reformers, was that many Americans continued to drink alcohol. Indeed, with the massive influx of German and Irish immigrants in the 1850s, the final decade of the antebellum temperance movement saw a one-gallon rise in the per-capita consumptions of alcohol.79

Despite these setbacks, temperance reformers enjoyed much success. Before the uptick in the 1850s, temperance reformers had significantly lowered the amount of alcohol Americans consumed. Between 1810 and 1840, the annual per-capita consumption fell from five and one-half to four gallons, with the proportion of hard liquor within the measure decreasing even more, from more than eighty to less than sixty percent. In addition, prohibition survived, if in a weakened condition, because reformers could still rely on their first political victory—the local option—to keep their towns and counties dry even after the repeal of the Maine Laws. More significantly, temperance advocates temporarily shifted their attention to improving city government, professionalizing police

79 On the repeal of the Fifteen Gallon Law, see Hampel, Temperance and Prohibition in Massachusetts, chapter six; Tyrrell, Sobering Up, 237-239. On the repeal of the Maine Laws, see Tyrrell, Sobering Up, 305-309. On the rise in drinking that corresponded with increased immigration, see Ibid., 302.
forces, and restricting immigrants’ political rights. As these were the primary reasons that prohibition failed, reformers believed that such changes would ensure that future legal restrictions on alcohol would be more successful.80

But neither failure nor success was the most enduring legacy of the antebellum temperance movement. Instead, the most lasting consequence was the division in society over alcohol use. No longer did all Americans—young and old, men and women, native born and immigrant—consume alcohol as a dietary staple. Many Americans continued to drink and many others eschewed both alcohol and those who consumed it. Demographic characteristics, in particular gender and wealth, would serve as the primary indicators as to whether individuals imbibed or abstained in the decades following the U.S. Civil War. Middle-class men and most women turned away from alcohol and often vilified drinking. Both working class and wealthy men continued find pleasure and respite in the bottle.

Such demographic characteristics also increasingly affected American higher education. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth, large numbers of middle-class White men headed to campus as a college degree became increasingly important for professional success. The doors to many colleges and universities opened to White women for the first time. As more young people attended college than ever before, American popular culture became especially interested in campus life. Novels set on campus with students as protagonists entered the American literary scene with rising frequency in the late nineteenth century until peaking in popularity in the 1920s. These “college novels” conveyed similar if sometimes contradictory messages about alcohol use on campus to the general public and future students.

80 Ibid., 4, 307, 318.
In 1901, Charles Macomb Flandrau published *The Diary of a Freshman*, a novel that follows Tommy Wood’s first year at Harvard in the 1890s. Wood, a midwestern transplant, lacks both self-awareness and knowledge about the intricacies of campus life. He overcomes early struggles—nearly being arrested, failing his first exams, getting into debt—to be selected by sophomores to an exclusive society at the end of his first year. Compared to most antebellum Harvard students, Wood’s first year is nearly devoid of alcohol. He recounts drinking only twice. The first instance follows a staff meeting of a student publication that he has joined, when the members gather to enjoy crackers, cheese, and beer. Later, during a private study session in which students have paid several dollars to prepare for an upcoming exam, Wood and other students drink ginger ale and beer. Perhaps more notable than the novel’s lack of drinking in relation to earlier real-life Harvard students is that Flandrau nursed a life-long problem with alcohol, a problem that started during his college years at Harvard.1

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1 The starkest difference between Flandrau’s first book, *Harvard Episodes*, and his second, *The Diary of a Freshman*, is that student drinking occupies a relatively prominent place in the former but is nearly absent in the latter. This is best explained by the different publication trajectory of the two books. As he finished college, Flandrau wrote several short stories that he originally published as a compilation in *Harvard Episodes*. Depictions of students’ misbehavior, including their alcohol use, probably created interest in the book and helped sales. Once established in the literary world, Flandrau began writing short stories for prominent national magazines. *The Diary of a Freshman* is a compilation of twelve short stories originally published in *The Saturday Evening Post*. As the circulation of the *Post* approached one million, its powerful editor, George Lorimer, prohibited alcohol and tobacco advertising and had little patience for content that might shock his magazine’s core readers, middle-class midwesterners. Lorimer removed at least two references to alcohol at Harvard in the stories that would later become *The Diary of a Freshman*; Charles Macomb Flandrau, *The Diary of a Freshman* (New York: A. Wessels Co., 1901), 140, 292; Larry Haeg, *In Gatsby’s Shadow: The Story of Charles Macomb Flandrau* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004), 51, 53, 57-60, 77-79, 82-86, 90-91.
If Flandrau underrepresented the amount of drinking on campus, a better-remembered author did the opposite. F. Scott Fitzgerald burst onto the literary scene in 1920 with *This Side of Paradise*. At the center of his first novel is Amory Blaine, a spoiled, sheltered young man who spends much of the book enrolled at Princeton. He aims to be a success at college: going out for football, participating in a drama troupe, and writing for the campus newspaper. At the end of his sophomore year, upperclassmen select Blaine to one of the prestigious “eating clubs” on campus. In between his collegiate successes and setbacks—and even before and after his time at Princeton—Blaine is often drunk. Blaine has long been considered to be the author’s alter ego, yet Fitzgerald’s college friends did not consider him a heavy drinker. According to one biographer, “When he got tight, his friends suspected him of pretending to be drunker than he really was—that it was a way of getting attention.” Fitzgerald later admitted “that *This Side of Paradise* does over accentuate the gayiety + country club atmosphere of Princeton. For the sake of the readers that part was overstressed.... To that extent the book is inaccurate.” But even if Fitzgerald exaggerated his drinking at Princeton, his, like Flaundrau’s, long struggle with alcohol took root at college.²

Novels with college students, faculty, or administrators as central characters have held a place within American literature ever since Nathaniel Hawthorne anonymously published his first novel in 1828. Set at the fictitious Hartley College, which closely resembled Hawthorne’s alma mater, Bowdoin, *Fanshawe* recounts several students’ romantic pursuit of a young woman who has come to live with the college president, a close friend of her recently deceased father. A handful of such “college novels” followed, but the genre did not grow in popularity until after the success in both the United Kingdom and the United States of the English novel *Tom Brown at Oxford* in 1861. College

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novels about students achieved their greatest popularity in the 1920s, in large part because of the success of This Side of Paradise and Americans’ increasing interest in youth culture.3 Flandrau and Fitzgerald’s novels illustrate the challenges of tracking students’ actual alcohol use with fiction, yet historians have long used college novels as sources. Left with few surviving materials created by students, particularly in relation to administrators and faculty members, historians have often relied on novels to reflect real-life experiences on campus. In Campus Life, for example, Helen Horowitz cites Owen Wister’s (1903) Philosophy 4 to demonstrate privileged white college men’s hostile attitudes toward minority students on campus at the turn of the twentieth century. Historians tend to rely on novels written by recent alumni, implying that such works provide the most accurate insight into campus life and finding a handful of such books particularly useful (e.g., This Side of Paradise, An American Girl and Her Four Years’ at a Boys’ College, Stover at Yale).4 Historians

3 Nathaniel Hawthorne, Fanshawe, and Other Pieces (J.R. Osgood and Company, 1876). The best resource for identifying college novels is John E. Kramer, The American College Novel: An Annotated Bibliography, 2nd ed. (The Scarecrow Press: Lanham, MD, 2004), which is an update to his earlier bibliography, The American College Novel: An Annotated Bibliography (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981). Excluding short story compilations, juvenile novels, mysteries, science fiction, novels centering on intercollegiate athletics, and eroticism, Kramer identifies 648 American college novels in his most recent bibliography, which he further classifies almost evenly between student-centered (319) and staff-centered (329) novels. Until the 1930s, college novels focused predominately on students and their campus life. They later became more evenly divided between books that detailed the youthful exploits of students and those that centered on the mature misadventures of faculty and administrators. See also John O. Lyons, The College Novel in America (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), 181-183. For a handful of recent college novels by prominent American authors, see Saul Bellow, Ravelstein (New York: Viking, 2000); Joyce Carol Oates, I’ll Take You There (New York: Ecco, 2002); Philip Roth, Indignation (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2008); and Jane Smiley, Moo (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

4 Over twenty years ago, John Thelin and Barbara Townsend called for a “serious and systemic analysis of the study of college fiction as part of the study of higher education.” Refuting many critiques of college fiction—that the novels are difficult to categorize, focus on few campuses, do not provide facts, and represent only limited experiences—the two scholars argued that fiction could serve as “an alternative or supplement to overreliance on questionnaire data” in the study of higher education. Thelin and Townsend offered several approaches to studying fiction for insights into higher education, borrowing primarily from literary studies, John R. Thelin and Barbara K. Townsend, “Fiction to Fact: College Novels and the Study of Higher Education,” in Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research, vol. 4 (New York: Agathon Press, 1988), 184.

Both before and after Thelin and Townsend’s urging, the higher education scholars most apt to inform their research with college fiction have overwhelmingly been historians studying
have seldom considered college novels as novels, works of literature read by the public. But even if *Diary of a Freshman* and *This Side of Paradise* presented inaccurate depictions of drinking on campus, both nonetheless shaped their readers’ perceptions of campus life.


Although historians studying college students have long relied on novels, they have provided little insight into their conceptualization of fiction as a source. To the extent that they have used college novels written by recent alumni and used novels as one of several sources to support an overarching argument, historians appear to implicitly use the literary tradition of “biographical analysis” and “triangulation … with other sources” to determine the accuracy of the campus life presented in a novel, Thelin and Townsend, “Fiction to Fact,” 187-188.

For a rare example of a non-historian using fiction to study contemporary higher education, see William G. Tierney, “Academic Freedom and Tenure: Between Fiction and Reality,” *The Journal of Higher Education* 75, no. 2 (2004): 161-177. Tierney uses college novels to study depictions of academic freedom and tenure, finding a disturbing trend of “the displacement of academic freedom for tenure” as the primary concern of fictional faculty members, “Academic Freedom and Tenure,” 175.
and Gown and Percy Mark’s *The Plastic Age*, became almost required reading among the youth in the 1920s. Finally, as college novels gained in popularity, real-life college authorities became concerned about how fiction affected their institution’s reputation.

With the publication of Flandrau’s *Harvard Episodes*, college leaders were less concerned with depictions of drinking and intoxication (“common knowledge for decades”) than with the claims that the institution “condoned and perpetuated a climate of intellectual dishonesty.” After the stir caused by *This Side of Paradise*, the president of Princeton wrote Fitzgerald, “[Y]our characterization of Princeton has grieved me. I cannot bear to think that our young men are merely living for four years in a country club and spending their lives wholly in a spirit of calculation and snobbishness.”

As the most prominent depictions of higher education within popular culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, college novels shaped public perceptions

5 Thelin and Townsend, “Fiction to Fact,” 189.

While historians of higher education have mostly used college novels in an effort to reconstruct students’ experiences, a few have noted that these books have also shaped the public’s perception of campus life. Paula Fass points to Fitzgerald’s first book not for what happened in the 1920s, but the public discomfort that it created: “This Side of Paradise struck a responsive cord in the twenties precisely because it strives to be naughty, sophisticated, and shocking. By portraying the young as he did and by posing as their spokesman, Fitzgerald was brilliantly telling his audience what it was eager to know but unable to condone,” *The Damned and the Beautiful*, 26. Historians do not necessarily neatly divide their use of fiction between shaping public perceptions of higher education and reconstructing reality on campus. Horowitz begins a chapter noting that high school students read *Stover at Yale* in preparation for college, but immediately shifts to summarize the novel to demonstrate “an emerging debate about the relation of college life to education in the twentieth century,” *Campus Life*, 98-100.

about students’ behavior. Continuities or changes across novels, particularly those known to have been widely read, convey what many Americans believed occurred on campus and what future college students expected to find there. This chapter explores depictions of college student drinking in twenty-two college novels published between 1869 and 1933 (see table 4.1): eight novels about college men attending single-sex, today considered Ivy League institutions; seven novels primarily about men attending less prestigious institutions outside of the Northeast, generally coeducational universities; and seven novels about college women, four of which are set at women’s colleges and three at coeducational institutions. In the novels published before 1920, student drinking vacillated between being very prominent to completely absent, primarily mediated by the protagonists’ gender and socioeconomic status. Despite the enactment of national Prohibition in 1920, college novels published during the nation’s thirteen dry years presented an increasingly consistent message about alcohol use on campus: many students on increasing numbers of campuses ignored the new Constitutional amendment and drank alcohol. Later college novels conveyed several changes in students’ alcohol use, though these differences were coupled with drinking behaviors that endured over time. Several of the most popular novels conveyed to readers that the college years, as they had for many antebellum students, served as time during which students mastered moderate drinking behaviors.

The Importance of Place, Class, and Gender

The publication of Diary of a Freshman marked the chronological midpoint of college fiction’s rise to the peak of its popularity in America. By 1880, at least eleven novels focusing on college students had been published; fifty years later, that number had reached nearly one hundred. The proliferation of college novels mirrored the increasing importance of higher education in America. New institutions, such as Johns Hopkins and Clark University, joined older institutions, including Harvard and Yale, and burgeoning state universities, such as Michigan and Wisconsin, to lay the foundations of what would
Table 3.1: Depictions of Student Drinking in College Novels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Depictions of student drinking</th>
<th>Institutional type</th>
<th>Protagonists</th>
<th>Author attended college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td><em>Fair Harvard</em></td>
<td>Prominent</td>
<td>Single-sex</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td><em>An American Girl...</em></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Coeducational</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td><em>His Majesty, Myself</em></td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Single-sex</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td><em>Two College Girls</em></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Single-sex</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td><em>John Auburntop, Novelist</em></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Coeducational</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td><em>The Adventures of a Freshman</em></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Single-sex</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td><em>For the Blue and Gold</em></td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Coeducational</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td><em>The Diary of a Freshman</em></td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Single-sex</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td><em>Philosophy 4</em></td>
<td>Prominent</td>
<td>Single-sex</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td><em>Stover at Yale</em></td>
<td>Prominent</td>
<td>Single-sex</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td><em>The Bloom of Youth</em></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Single-sex</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td><em>Lydia of the Pines</em></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Coeducational</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td><em>Bertram Cope's Year</em></td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Coeducational</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td><em>Ramsey Milholland</em></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Coeducational</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td><em>This Side of Paradise</em></td>
<td>Prominent</td>
<td>Single-sex</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td><em>Janet March</em></td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Coeducational</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td><em>Town and Gown</em></td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Coeducational</td>
<td>Men and Women</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td><em>The Plastic Age</em></td>
<td>Prominent</td>
<td>Single-sex</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td><em>Wild</em></td>
<td>Prominent</td>
<td>Single-sex</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td><em>Boojum</em></td>
<td>Prominent</td>
<td>Single-sex</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td><em>The Parable of the Virgins</em></td>
<td>Prominent</td>
<td>Single-sex</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td><em>Cotton Cavalier</em></td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Coeducational</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
become the American research university. Wealthy white men, and increasingly middle-class men, took advantage of a broadening curriculum, and groups historically excluded from higher education found greater opportunities to earn degrees. Women gained access to both single-sex and coeducational colleges and universities. Following the Civil War, African Americans rushed to attend both predominantly white and all-black institutions in the South and the North. Normal schools, which subsequently developed into teachers colleges, educated large numbers of working-class and ethnic minority students, who were often one and the same, by the 1870s. Another type of institution, the junior college, developed in the early twentieth century and also attracted large numbers of students from groups traditionally excluded from higher education.6

While American higher education served larger and more diverse segments of society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it continued to serve wealthy and upper middle-class white men and, to a lesser extent, well-off white women, best. White men enjoyed the greatest number of opportunities during their college years and a greater number of career options (with higher incomes) after college. White women attending coeducational institutions had limited access to most aspects of campus life,

African American men and women attending predominantly white institutions may have been admitted to the classroom but were excluded from the extracurriculum, and Jewish students faced increasingly discriminatory admissions practices at the most prestigious institutions. Whatever the quality of their higher education, women found far fewer career options than men after graduation, African Americans continued to face racism that limited their economic mobility, poorer students who attended normal schools found their career options primarily limited to teaching, and those who started at junior colleges seldom finished the more lucrative four-year degree.

Despite these limitations, American higher education earned a reputation for its democratic nature and college students increasingly became the center of popular culture. By the 1920s, those fortunate white college men and women became national trendsetters in terms of fashion and behavior and the main characters in some of the most successful novels and movies. Authors of college novels demonstrated a mixed appreciation for the diversity of American higher education. They often included students from poor backgrounds in their books, but they ignored the types of institutions—Black colleges,

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normal schools, and junior colleges—where a majority of these students enrolled. Women often served as protagonists in college novels, but students of both genders in college novels were exclusively white during these years.

These disparities, both real and imagined, existed within a society that continued to experience a crisis over alcohol. The per capita consumption of absolute alcohol (a measurement that adjusts for the quantities of alcohol found in beer, wine, and liquor) hovered between one and one and a half gallons per year in the last half of the nineteenth century, rising to almost two gallons by 1913. This increased per capita consumption was lower than in the first half of the nineteenth century, but the United States increasingly divided into a country of drinkers and abstainers, which, as moderate drinkers disappeared, concentrated greater amounts of consumption in smaller numbers of people. The cultural norms of the massive numbers of immigrants from Germany, Ireland, and Italy created a perception, though not a reality, that drinking was isolated in communities about which native-born white Protestant Americans were already skeptical.

This increased drinking coincided with continued efforts to stop alcohol use in America. Involved from the start, women became the leaders of the temperance movement through the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in the twenty-five years following the Civil War. By the end of the nineteenth century, the male-dominated Anti-Saloon League eclipsed the efforts of the WCTU. The Anti-Saloon League, a savvy organization renowned for the effectiveness of its paid staff members, waged pragmatic political battles. The League’s ability to deliver decisive numbers of votes to candidates who committed to support the “dry” cause increased support of Prohibition by both the Democratic and Republican politicians. The dominos of the League’s small victories fell into national Prohibition—established by the Eighteenth Amendment and enforced by the Volstead Act—in 1920, earlier than most of the organization’s leaders had considered possible.
There continued to be valid reasons to reduce drinking. As the industrializing economy depended less on semi-skilled, self-employed laborers and more on assembly-line labor in factories, the American tradition of drinking at work posed a danger to both person and profit. Even farmers risked their lives if their midday swallow increased their likelihood of becoming entangled in the new machines that made their farms more efficient. And many working-class men spent much of their limited income at taverns, returning home with little money and an elevated tendency to assault their wives and children.  

In the fifty years preceding national Prohibition, the fluctuating prominence of student drinking in college novels reflected the differing behaviors and attitudes within specific segments of society. In novels about wealthy white men attending elite institutions, student drinking tended to be prominent. During this time, wealthy men continued to enjoy alcohol, often using the guise of connoisseurship to justify high levels of consumption. Men attending less prestigious institutions, typically coeducational state universities, hailed from middle class backgrounds and tended to live in the Midwest. Middle-class midwestern men accounted for some of the nation’s strongest temperance supporters, and the fictional young men from these households drank little alcohol. Though both the wealthiest and poorest women continued to drink in the United States, middle- and upper-middle class women were both ardent campaigners against alcohol and the most likely women to attend college. Beyond filial bonds that discouraged drinking, early college women faced such hostility to their higher education that the likelihood of them drinking and thus providing additional concerns about their college attendance was low.

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William Tucker Washburn’s *Fair Harvard* (1869) is representative of many early college novels with its focus on students’ out-of-class experiences at Harvard. The novel chronicles the evolution of a romance between Wentworth Saulsbury and Nell Campbell while simultaneously following Saulsbury through his four college years in the 1850s. Much of the novel details Saulsbury’s tendency toward excess and the subsequent consequences. He lives luxuriously by going into debt with local merchants as a freshman, only to learn by the end of the year that his family’s fortune has disappeared, forcing him to negotiate with his creditors and live in relative squalor during his sophomore year. After Saulsbury nearly gets caught in several college pranks, his roommate implores him to change and use his popularity for good causes. When the roommate dies after an ice skating incident, guilt ensures Saulsbury’s compliance.

Student drinking is prominent from the beginning of *Fair Harvard*. The novel opens with a series of brutal football games between the freshman and sophomore classes. Members of both classes nurse their bruises after the contests by drinking wine at a nearby tavern. Harvard students continue to drink ale and wine throughout the novel. Alcohol use peaks when a student hosts an elaborate “Roman meal” for his friends. The attendees tell imaginative stories, disdain the drinking of water, and associate drinking with the ancient Greeks and Romans whose writing dominates their formal curriculum, all the while consuming copious amounts of wine. Perhaps the clearest message of *Fair Harvard* is that drinking alcohol, especially wine, was an ever-present and important aspect of Harvard student life.9

Published a decade after *Fair Harvard* but set before the Civil War, the anonymously written (but later attributed to W.M. Baker) *His Majesty, Myself* (1880) traces two cousins, Theo Thirlmore and Steven Trent, and their evolving romantic relationships.

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with twin sisters. With both of their fathers dead, an uncle sends Thirlmore and Trent to college at Old Orange (or Princeton). Their uncle has amassed a large fortune since immigrating to New York City as a boy, but it was a fortune he hid from everyone, including his nephews. He provides them with a meager allowance while at college. The two young men begin college as polar opposites—Thirlmore exhibits northern ruggedness that developed as a farm boy while Trent exudes southern gentleness that was honed as a son of plantation owner—and their distinctions only become more pronounced over time.

Compared to *Fair Harvard*, student drinking is present but less prominent in *His Majesty, Myself*. The studious Trent eschews drinking, but other students trudge down a less sober path. Joined by his cousin and a handful of classmates, Trent creates a secret organization. The members typically gather to discuss current affairs and to contribute to a journal. When they celebrate their organization with a midnight supper at a distant tavern one winter evening, all but Trent become drunk. On their way back to campus at dawn, the students run their sleigh off a bridge onto a frozen creek. Disgusted, Trent dissolves the organization following this drunken revelry. After graduating from college, Thirlmore returns to Old Orange to prepare for the ministry at the seminary. The faculty expels one of Thirlmore’s most talented classmates, who was well-known for his temperance sermons, when he returns to campus drunk. In sum, the less wealthy Old Orange students drink with less regularity and with more reserve than their fictional Harvard peers.

While *Fair Harvard* represents one extreme and *His Majesty, Myself* provides the midpoint on the spectrum of student drinking, Anson Hancock’s *John Aubumtop, Novelist* (1891) presents complete abstainers. Set at the University of Nebraska in the 1870s, the novel focuses on the rise and fall of the romantic relationship between two college students.

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10 Scholars have typically attributed fictional institutions (e.g., Hawthorne’s Hartley College, Baker’s Old Orange) as a direct stand-in for the college or university they author attended or with which they were closely associated. Kramer’s *The American College Novel* serves as the best reference for such information. W.M. Baker, *His Majesty, Myself* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1880), 83-89, 149-151.
students, John Auburntop and Minerva Jackson. Probably due to the author’s anxieties about the reputation of higher education outside of New England, a primary concern of the novel is to demonstrate the learning that occurs on campus. The novel details lectures offered to eager pupils and field trips planned by faculty members, not to mention orations delivered and publications composed by students. In a scene that conveys the ideas circulating among the students, Auburntop and Jackson attend a temperance lecture. Throughout the novel, Auburntop only associates alcohol use with those outside of the college. His disdain for Jackson’s father, a poor farmer whom Auburntop already held in low regard, increases when the older man recounts a visit to the Texas-Mexico border where he spent an entire day drinking whiskey. On another occasion, Auburntop interacts with the German immigrants living in nearby rural communities who regularly enjoy “beer dances.” Suggesting starkly different behaviors regarding alcohol between wealthy northeasterners and middle-class midwesterners, John Auburntop’s college years are as alcohol-free as Wentworth Saulsbury’s are alcohol-filled.11

Joy Lichtenstein’s For the Blue and Gold (1901) joins His Majesty, Myself in portraying drinking that varies among students within an institution. The novel chronicles James Rawson’s successes during his freshman year at the University of California in the 1890s. Rawson, a twenty-three year old son of a poor orange farmer, secures work with a local landlady, becomes a football star, serves as class president, leads the freshmen in several clashes with sophomores, and wins a scholarship. At the end of the novel, Rawson realizes he has fallen in love with the university’s most intelligent student, a young woman who will soon graduate and return to Rawson’s hometown to teach. The poor Rawson abstains from drinking but attends an institution many of the wealthier men do not. When some well-heeled students invite the mature Rawson to their boarding club for dinner, his presence improves the conversation and the table manners. One regular boarder notes, “Say, fellows,

11 Hancock, John Auburntop, 82-83, 103, 163.
haven’t we behaved ourselves tonight and talked big talk? I guess it’s the influence of Jim. No joshing to speak of and nobody’s proposed to ... beer up.” After winning a class election, Rawson is invited to a prominent fraternity house where the members cool a keg of beer in a cellar and enjoy it as the night progresses. Unlike Trent in His Majesty, Myself, the abstaining Rawson never disdains his drinking peers and defends the fraternity men against some decided anti-fraternity students, sending a message that “drys” and “wets” could exist in harmony on campus.12

Returning to the east coast, Jesse Lynch Williams’ The Adventures of a Freshman (1899) is a rarity among college novels set at an Ivy League institution because it includes no alcohol use. Set at Princeton in the 1890s, the book follows Will Young, the son of a successful midwestern farmer, during his first year at Princeton. Young, a year older than his fellow classmates after working at a bank to fund his college education, finds success in football and the classroom. Putting himself through college because of his father’s scorn for higher education, Young is far poorer than his friends. He manages by coordinating an eating club for free board and concocting a scheme to sell candy on campus that proves wildly successful. This success soon goes to his head and Young wants to enjoy the pleasures of college life, but these distractions are smoking and gambling rather than drinking. Soon Young has gambled away both his money and a large portion of the class funds of which he was treasurer. Young returns home in shame until his father, deciding to support his son’s higher education, gives him a two hundred dollar check that wipes away his debts and allows him to return to campus as a sophomore. Foreshadowing the lack of alcohol in The Diary of a Freshman, the novel contains no explicit alcohol use. However, the author alludes to drinking in several scenes. The class song that the students sing includes the refrain, “Here’s to Ninety-blank—Drink her down—drink her down.” Even more subtly, the author several times describes the older and midwestern Young as sober in relation to

12 Lichtenstein, For the Blue and Gold, 63-64, 142, 145-146.
his peers and as having a “sobering influence” upon them. Indeed, the novel’s chief moral lesson is that Young wastes an opportunity to improve his fellow students. Once Young’s candy scheme makes him a success on campus, he uses his earnings to join the gambling crowd instead of reforming it.\(^{13}\)

Student drinking in the Northeast returns to prominence in Owen Wister’s *Philosophy 4* (1903), which provides another important insight into student drinking. If *For the Blue and the Gold* suggests that students from poor backgrounds did not drink, *Philosophy 4* serves as a reminder that these students were often ethnic minorities. The novel focuses on three Harvard students’ preparation for a final exam. Oscar Maironi, a studious Jewish student, tutors two Anglo-Saxons from more privileged backgrounds, Bertie Rogers and Billy Schuyler. In another mark of privilege, Wister’s presentations of Marioni are rife with anti-Semitism, ridiculing his studious and determined nature while promoting Rogers and Schuyler’s lackadaisical attitude. Confident about their guaranteed future success, the two Protestants can afford both to pay Maironi for the tutoring session and not take the tutoring seriously. Rogers and Schuyler skip their study session with Marioni the day before the exam, instead deciding to find the Bird-in-Hand Tavern, a hidden establishment in the countryside outside of Cambridge infamous among Harvard students (see figure 3.1). They succeed both in finding the tavern and getting drunk, returning to Cambridge just in time for the exam. Demonstrating the author’s prejudices more than any possible reality, Rogers and Schuyler discuss philosophy during their drunken adventure and apply their experience to the test, outperforming Maironi.\(^{14}\)

Alcohol use is similarly prominent in the popular *Stover at Yale* (1911). The novel traces the wealthy Dink Stover from his arrival as a freshman until the end of his junior


year when Skull and Bones, Yale’s most exclusive society, “taps” him for membership. Along his rocky path toward success, Stover also courts Jean Storey, the daughter of a prominent judge and Yale alumnus. Upon first arriving in New Haven, Stover takes the advice to be conservative in his actions (including his drinking), activities, and in his choice of friends, to ensure his selection into an exclusive sophomore society. Stover quickly realizes that drinking is a regular pastime for Yale students, especially among the wealthy and popular students who comprise the campus elite. Student drinkers frequent taverns and restaurants near campus (see figure 3.2). After a remarkably successful freshman year—on the football field and off—Stover begins to expand his circle of friends as he returns to campus as a sophomore. When some of his fellow society members discourage this egalitarian behavior, he quits the society, losing many friends and much popularity. By hanging around a group of intellectual students who are poorer than most of his fellow society members and subsequently drink less, Stover develops a heightened sense of democracy. Learning that he is still in the running to be selected to a senior society, he is compelled to confront the members about his concerns over their undemocratic practices. Nonetheless, they “tap” Stover to become a Bonesman.15

With similarities to John Auburntop, Novelist, Henry Blake Fuller’s Bertram Cope’s Year (1919) reveals that students’ backgrounds and the location of the institution continued to affect college men’s drinking behavior in the run up to the “Roaring Twenties.” The book focuses on Bertram Cope, a twenty-four year old student who returns to his alma mater, an institution in a small town outside a large city in the Midwest resembling Northwestern and its proximity to Chicago, and his attempt to earn a graduate degree and secure an academic appointment at an eastern college. Cope initially refuses drink. A faculty member who mentors Cope recounts to a friend the young scholar’s refusal of a drink at dinner: “I innocently suggested cocktails; but, no. He declined—in a

Figure 3.1: Two Harvard Students Search for a Tavern in *Philosophy 4*. Two Harvard students skip a study session in order to search for a famous, and famously hard to find, tavern in *Philosophy 4*. The two search in vain until they almost literally run into the tavern’s proprietor on the road. He provides directions, and his wife serves the students large amounts of both food and drink. Illustration for Owen Wister, *Philosophy 4* (1903), facing p. 64.
Figure 3.2: An Intoxicated Imposter in *Stover at Yale*. A large crowd of Yale students gathers to sing, play billiards, and drink on a Saturday evening following a football victory. They are addressed by a drunk student who pretends he is a faculty member and provides his peers with a mock admonishment for their behavior. Illustration by Frederick R. Gruger for Owen Johnson, *Stover at Yale* (New York, 1912), facing p. 90.

deft but straightforward way. Country principles. Small-town morals.” At a dinner party attended by many wealthy residents, Cope succumbs to their traditions and drinks wine with his dinner. Before the meal is over, he faints at the table. The only other time Cope drinks is after a boating accident, when he and his sailing companion drink a glass of liquor to warm their bodies.16

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16 Henry Blake Fuller, *Bertram Cope’s Year* (Chicago: Ralph Fletcher Seymour, 1919), 120-125, 162.
Early novels about college men contributed to the perception that midwestern, older, and poorer students were far less likely to drink than their eastern, younger, and wealthier peers, but such distinctions were not absolute. Settled midwestern communities became known for their support of temperance, but the process of settling included an initial influx of men who, without the moderating influences of women or family responsibilities, constituted communities notorious for their drunkenness. In *Fair Harvard*, one student from Illinois recognizes similarities between the violent game of football and the violence he witnessed growing up in various “Western barrooms.” Poorer students working their way through college had less disposable income and were likely to appreciate money more than those who enjoyed large allowances provided by their parents, but they could be quite interested in drinking free alcohol. One such student eagerly responded to Dink Stover’s offer to buy him a drink if he kept Stover company at dinner: “‘Did I hear the word “buy”?... Lead me to it.’” Elsewhere in the novel, Stover’s older friend Tom Regan explains why he did not interfere in Stover’s drinking benders:

“Well I’ve seen men go through it before. You never were very bad.”

“What?” said Stover, who felt rather annoyed at his tame estimate.

“It’s not a bad thing when you’ve licked the devil four ways to election,” said Regan. “You know what you can do, and that’s something.”

“Ever been through it?” said Stover, still a little piqued.

“Ye-es.”

“Really, Tom?” said Dink amazed.

“Ran about six months,” said Regan, crossing his legs and dreaming. “I wasn’t nice and polite like you—used to clean up the place—rather ugly time, but I pulled out.”¹⁷

Regan’s explanation conveyed the message that older students either avoided alcohol or drank moderately because they had already experienced youthful exploits with the bottle.

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¹⁷ Johnson, *Stover at Yale*, 308.
Indeed, novels presented consistent themes about the influences on college men’s alcohol use, but not absolute truths.

If novels about college men demonstrate that socioeconomic class and the geographic location of their institution affected their alcohol use, then early novels of college women reveal that their gender trumped these characteristics in determining that their college years were devoid of drinking. The earliest novels detail the precariousness of women’s access to higher education. In Olive San Louis Anderson’s *An American Girl and Her Four Years at a Boys’ College* (1878), Will Elliot is one of a handful of women who enters the University of Ortonville (a pseudonym for the University of Michigan) during the first year of coeducation in the 1870s. Elliot is surprised by the hostility she encounters: men students complaining about the arrival of women, landlords unwilling to rent rooms to women students, and the male faculty’s suspicions about the young women’s intellectual abilities. These challenges subside after the first year, but then two college women’s deaths—one from suicide, one from typhoid fever—are blamed on the overexertion caused by the rigor of higher education, although the college women point out that academic rigor is not considered the cause of men students suffering similar fates. Moreover, college women received the blame for actions of their male counterparts. Elliot’s Greek tutor, a studious college man who, at the start of the novel is shy and awkward around women, eventually makes himself too comfortable. After he surprises her with a kiss, Elliot tartly responds, “‘I employed you to teach me Greek, and not make love to me. Everybody says that we come here just to flirt with the boys; and, when we are going along quietly trying to mind our own affairs, you make fools of yourselves, for which we get the blame.’”

Students at women’s college were no less immune to accusations that they were poorly served by higher education. Helen Dawes Brown’s *Two College Girls* (1886) traces the activities of two very different roommates at an unnamed women’s college that closely

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resembles Vassar. Edna Howe is the intellectual and reserved daughter of a poorer New England family. Rosamond Mills is the energetic daughter of a wealthy Chicago lumber merchant. After getting off to a rocky start, they become the best of friends, each improving the other. Mills describes her Harvard-educated brother’s hostility to her higher education: “Everything bad in me, things that were born in me, he blames this poor college for. ‘So they teach you to whistle there do they?’ he’ll say, in that cynical way he cultivates. ‘No, sir,’ I said, and I was pretty much provoked, ‘you taught me yourself; you know you did.’ ”19

Young women’s struggles for higher education depicted in An American Girl... and Two College Girls suggests few—if any—students risked their attendance, and the attendance of other college women, for a drink. Two College Girls contains no references, or even inferences, to alcohol. An American Girl suggests gendered distinctions of drinking and acceptable use of alcohol by women. Women’s entrance into the University of Ortonville coincided with the state convention that debated granting women the right to vote. Though many college women support the suffrage movement, including Elliot, critics claim that women who vote would venture further into men’s territory to “hold office, drink cocktails, and ride astride.” The author also hints that alcohol use may occur among college men. After the first year of coeducation has passed, “four gay young [male] sophomores” discuss college women and play cards. Toward the end of the scene one of the sophomores says, “‘but let’s have something to drink’,” pours a glass of cider, and toasts the college women: “‘Here’s to the pioneer girls of the University of Ortonville.’” The closest any college woman gets to alcohol occurs when an old woman rubs Will Elliot with brandy after she has been knocked unconscious from standing near a tree that is subsequently struck by lightning.20

19 Helen Dawes Brown, Two College Girls (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1886), 131-132.

20 Anderson, An American Girl, 64, 81-86, 91, 208.
Later novels depict a more complicated role of alcohol in the lives of college women. Although the female students continue to avoid drinking, alcohol is present in their lives. In Dorothy Foster Gilman’s *The Bloom of Youth* (1917), Leslie Wyman, a student at Radcliffe who lives with her parents, is torn between two worlds: one aggressively presented by a young Harvard suitor who is the college’s most prominent socialist, and another more subtly advocated by her capitalist father and a recent Harvard alumnus who also romantically pursues her. Several scenes suggest the presence of alcohol within both worlds. When she attends a speech the young socialist gives to unemployed laborers, Wyman observes the “dissipated faces” of many in attendance. During the speech, Wyman’s other suitor, who agreed to accompany her to the event, confronts the socialist over spreading lies. A “half drunk” Italian plumber strikes her companion on the head, rendering him unconscious. The author presents the drinking within Boston’s wealthy society more kindly and without negative ramifications. Champagne is the drink of choice at the balls thrown primarily to help young people find spouses, wine is served at dinner parties, and work-weary businessmen rush home to enjoy cocktails. When young members of high society gather, though not college women, the “small talk flowed, likewise, champagne” as the “[m]erriment rose higher and higher.”

Honoré Willsie’s *Lydia of the Pines*, published the same year as *The Bloom of Youth*, also indicates the presence of alcohol in the lives of—but not the mouths of—college women. The novel traces Lydia Dudley’s complicated role in the removal of American Indians from a reservation outside of Lake City (an apparent pseudonym for Madison, Wisconsin), home of the state university. Dudley is close friends with both a member of the tribe and the U.S. Congressman who promotes a law to sell the reservation lands to whites. She learns that those who oppose removal, both Indians and whites, believe that

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their political adversaries provide Indians with cheap whiskey to make them dependent on whites and to weaken their resolve for holding on to the land. Although Dudley sides with the American Indians against this law, she eventually inherits over three hundred acres of the former reservation upon the legislator’s assassination. Dudley also attends a political victory party populated mostly by drunken men. At the university, college leaders are disturbed to find themselves on the same side politically with the “saloon element” in opposing the law. Later, another one of Dudley’s friends, the son of a successful German brewer, finds it difficult to develop relationships with college students because of his father’s occupation. Reminiscent of John Auburntop..., *Lydia of the Pines* presents a strong distinction between the alcohol-free university and an alcohol-filled society in the Midwest. More specifically, the author places the use of alcohol within the working class communities and ethnic minorities, whereas the middle-class whites who attend college exhibit disdain toward drinking and the alcohol industry.22

That college women did not drink alcohol, and probably did not have the freedom to do so even if they had the desire, are the most important lessons regarding gender and alcohol in early college novels, but the books also convey gendered dimensions of college men’s drinking. Perhaps most importantly, college men overwhelmingly drank in single-sex settings. From the Roman meal in *Fair Harvard* to the fraternity house in *For the Blue and the Gold* to the taverns in *Philosophy 4* and *Stover at Yale*, college men drank apart from women, especially women similarly situated in terms of socioeconomic class and age as the male students. Authors separate depictions of drinking from scenes focusing on relationships between college men and the women they pursue, such as Wentworth Saulsbury’s courting of Nell Campbell and Dink Stover’s many calls to Jean Story’s home. Despite this separation, college men often lived in a world where their alcohol use could

affect their relationships with women. In *Fair Harvard*, young women interested in marrying Harvard graduates had little patience for drunk college men. Upon learning that one student had been publically drunk at the theatre, a young woman informs his friend: “I don’t see how any woman could ever marry him. Perhaps, after years of repentance.”

College novels presented a complex portrait of student drinking between 1870 and 1920. Mediated primarily by gender and socio-economic status, fictional college students’ alcohol use varied widely between and within institutions. Wealthier college men attending northeastern institutions drank the most, while middle-class midwestern men eschewed alcohol. Either from lack of interest or lack of freedom, college women did not drink, regardless of their class backgrounds. If early college novels conveyed complexity, most subsequent novels presented a simpler picture regarding student drinking. Yet the more consistent depictions of student drinking contradicted national policies toward alcohol use, and beneath the surface of higher rates of alcohol use on campus, the novels conveyed that the same characteristics continued to influence drinking.

**Diminishing Distinctions**

In 1920, the same year that F. Scott Fitzgerald added the often drunk Amory Blaine to the American literary canon, a then more established author offered a novel with no depictions of alcohol. Booth Tarkington’s *Ramsey Millholland* traces the long history of tension between Ramsey Millholland and Dora Yokum. Yokum succeeds in academics from elementary school through college; Millholland struggles, often making a fool of himself in public, but shows remarkable thoughtfulness in private. At college, Yokum becomes an outspoken pacifist in the lead up to World War I. She misinterprets Millholland’s silence as acquiescence to her views. But when he is the first student at the state university to enlist, Yokum writes to him, admitting that there are worse things than

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war and supporting his decision. Although Millholland is the son of a wealthy family and joins a fraternity, the novel depicts no alcohol use.24

National Prohibition entered Americans’ political reality the same year that Ramsey Millholland and This Side of Paradise entered their literary imaginations. The Eighteenth Amendment outlawed the “manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating beverages.” Many political leaders believed that compliance with Prohibition would be immediate and violations would be rare. Neither turned out to be true. To be sure, Prohibition significantly reduced the consumption of alcohol and increased the cost of the alcohol. But as drinking continued to occur, and often in quite public ways, the law developed a reputation as one that was unenforceable. Once codified into the Constitution, national Prohibition appeared to be nearly impossible to repeal. However, with the onset of the Great Depression the policing of alcohol consumption appeared to be a waste of government resources while the need for jobs and tax revenue guaranteed by the alcohol industry resulted in a rapid end to national Prohibition. But for thirteen years, as the youth culture on campus garnered nationwide attention, Prohibition was law of the land.25

While Ramsey Millholland and This Side of Paradise provided two divergent depictions of drinking on campus, and the enactment of national Prohibition provided increased incentives to abstain, subsequent authors nonetheless followed Fitzgerald’s lead. Far more than earlier works, novels published during Prohibition conveyed that drinking occurred at nearly every college. College students’ gender, wealth, and the institution they attended continued to affect their drinking, but more as matter of degree of alcohol use rather than in terms of total abstinence versus heavy drinking.

24 Tarkington, Ramsey Millholland.

25 Lender and Martin, Drinking in America, chapter four; Eric Burns, The Spirits Of America: A Social History of Alcohol (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), chapters eight, nine, and ten; Blocker, Jr., American Temperance Movements, chapter four; Kyvig, Repealing National Prohibition, chapters two and three.
Probably the most popular Prohibition-era college novel, at least in its day, was Percy Marks’ bestselling *The Plastic Age* (1924). The book traces Hugh Carver’s four years at the elite all-male Sanford College (probably a pseudonym for Brown University). Carver begins college by dedicating himself to become a track athlete and soon joins a fraternity. Carver joins one of the most elite fraternities on campus as a freshman, but, in scenes reminiscent of *Stover at Yale*, becomes frustrated when his “brothers” discourage his friendships with Catholic and Jewish students. Carver eventually becomes disillusioned with college life and becomes more studious, developing a close relationship with a young professor. Much of the novel also focuses on Carver’s relationship with Cynthia Day, a young woman from a wealthy Long Island family.

Student drinking factors prominently in *The Plastic Age*. Carver initially declines opportunities to drink, but once living in the fraternity house as a junior, he develops a daily habit. In one of the biggest shifts in the depiction of alcohol use in college novels, Sanford men also drink with young women. This drinking by women generally and women drinking with men specifically, shocked readers and even fictional college men. As a sophomore, Carver is appalled by the drunken women attending a dance at his fraternity house, but by the next year he and Day become drunk during the prom. After experiencing remorse and guilt for this behavior, Carver vows to reform and attempts to vindicate himself on the track where, after a year of heavy smoking and drinking, he has lost much of his endurance and speed. After a month of diligent preparation for the meet against Sanford’s archrival Raleigh College, Carver comes in second in both of his races. Carver continues to be disappointed in himself and disturbed by his behavior at the prom until his classmates elect him to the senior council, through no campaigning on his part.26

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continued to be prominent among students at all-male eastern colleges, but these men had new drinking companions: young women.

Lynn and Lois Montross’s *Town and Gown* (1923) contains less alcohol use than *This Side of Paradise* and *The Plastic Age*, but nonetheless suggests that some midwestern students had started drinking alcohol by the 1920s. Set at the coeducational University of Illinois, the novel details the experiences of a hodgepodge of students, faculty members, and administrators. Within the diverse segments that comprise the student body, fraternity and sorority members sit atop the social hierarchy. These students, generally hailing from wealthy areas of Chicago, own cars, drive around town, and hold dances that violate the regulations set by the overbearing dean of women. Fraternity men are the students most apt to drink. One member who had fallen out of grace with his fraternity at the end of the school year returns to campus the following fall with a “private stock” of alcohol that “healed all the breaches between him and his brotherhood.” But drinking is no longer the sole prerogative of men on campus. Although the women drinkers in *The Plastic Age* hail from the male students’ social milieu, they are not college students. In contrast, *Town and Gown* suggests that some—though certainly a small proportion—of college women had achieved either enough freedom or enough bravery to drink alcohol. The most popular and beautiful sorority woman on campus, Dot Ambrose, is so notorious that the college publications even publish information “about her booze parties.” Drinking is concentrated within fraternities and among a handful of sorority women, but because they occupy the most vaunted place in the campus hierarchy, *Town and Gown* sent a new message that social success at a big university in the Midwest involved alcohol.27

Additional prohibition-era novels focusing on college women confirmed for readers that Dot Ambrose’s drinking was no isolated incident. The title character in Floyd Dell’s

Janet March (1923) starts drinking before she attends the coeducational state university in the Midwest. The novel follows March from her childhood through her truncated college career, when she leaves the university a year before graduating to establish a career and find romance in New York City. She starts drinking sips of liquor with her friends during high school. Although the young women begin to drink, they do so in a reserved manner. March limits herself to one cocktail or one glass of wine per social event (except the one time she became “almost drunk, on two cocktails”) and refuses to associate with men who drink to excess. Although Janet March conveyed that midwestern college students, both men and women, had begun to drink alcohol, it also suggested that their college authorities remained hostile to such behavior. For most of her time at college, March is interested in Paul Richards, a professor’s son with literary aspirations who hangs around a “beer-drinking, sloppy-dressing, girl-scorning crowd.” He publishes a poem about drinking in the campus literary magazine that upsets the college president who considers expelling the budding literati. The author uses Janet March to explore themes of youth. He demonstrates that during this time parents were more interested in befriending their children rather than disciplining them, as Americans of all ages were keenly interested in youth culture, and adults attempted to mimic the youths’ behavior. This was true with drinking too. When March confides to her parents that she has begun to drink, her parents respond by purchasing “sweet wine” to enjoy with their daughter on “special occasions.” The author adds that her parents “were trying to keep up with the times—or at least not lag too conspicuously behind.”

Shifting locations from a coeducational university in a college town to an urban women’s institution, Carol Denny Hill’s Wild (1927) traces Helen Atchinson’s wet sophomore year at Barnard College in New York City. Atchinson, a wealthy youth from

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Ohio who has transferred from the Glenway College for Girls in Virginia, perceives that she has two choices: participate in the unfeminine “rah rah” campus life of clubs and athletics or embrace her femininity as the dating companion of New York’s high society bachelors. She aggressively pursues the latter. Atchinson and her friends regularly drink alcohol with men and study just enough to pass their classes. She spends much more time rejecting men’s marriage proposals and wondering why anyone would want to get married than studying, only to marry Carl Sherwood, a young man who has frustrated her with his insistence that she stop smoking and drinking to behave like a “traditional” woman, at the end of the novel. Indeed, a scene between Atchinson and her future husband hints at continued differences in drinking behavior between the genders. Though Sherwood claims to have stopped pursuing Atchinson in favor of a more traditional high school girl, he arrives unexpectedly and intoxicated at her dormitory. When Atchinson finds him, she exclaims, “‘Carl, you’re lit!... You’re disgusting this way.... I certainly thought with all your great idea about idolizing women, you’d have brains enough not to get drunk and come up to a girls’ school.’” Even as college women began to drink, and to do so with men, they tolerated only moderate consumption, but for young men, anxieties about women might lead them to drink to excess.29

Set at a more rural women’s college, women students drink in similar ways to Atchinson and her Barnard friends in Mary Lapsley’s The Parables of the Virgin (1931). The novel follows one year at Walton College, probably a pseudonym for Vassar. Academic dishonesty, faculty troubles, political activism, tensions among roommates, decisions about sex, romances between the college women themselves and between the students and young men all fill the book. Although the novel consists of an ensemble cast, the most important character is Crosby O’Connor, a student famous (and infamous) for her published poetry.

Walton women drink both on campus and off. When they drink on campus, they have small parties where they serve a variety of alcohol within their dorm rooms. When they drink off campus, they tend to drink with men on dates. But not all Walton students drink. A student from Oregon expresses her shock at the drinking during the prom, but her frustrated roommate clarifies Eastern college life:

You’re always throwing in our faces what you do in Oregon.... Now I’ll tell you how we look at things here, and if you don’t like it, you can keep your mouth shut.... [I]f you’re a man ... you can do anything you please except be a teetotaler.... If you’re a girl, you can do the same as the men with the liquor.

Like the college president in *Janet March*, this scene portrays persisting regional variations in attitudes toward drinking, but also suggests that some college women, particularly those from the wealthiest backgrounds, began to expect parity with men regarding alcohol. Indeed, from a coeducational state university to an urban women’s college to a more traditional all-female institution, *Janet March*, *Wild*, and *The Parable of the Virgins* combine to convey that some college women drank alcohol regardless of the type or location of the institution they attended.30

By the 1920s, authors expanded their geographic coverage of higher education to begin offering novels set at colleges in the South. Charles Wertenbacker’s *Boojum* (1928) and Thomas Goodrich’s *Cotton Cavalier* (1933) both portray student drinking during Prohibition, but the quantity and frequency differs drastically between the two books, mediated primarily by socio-economic class. *Boojum* traces the misadventures of the conceited Stuart Breckenridge. Under the tutelage of his older brother Peter, Stuart Breckenridge enrolls in Southern University, an elite all-male institution attracting mostly wealthy young men and resembling the University of Virginia. Peter, a popular fraternity member known for his ability to hold his liquor, becomes a more serious student after

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accepting responsibility for his nefarious brother. Although Stuart and Peter come from a wealthy family, their father cannot make money as fast as Stuart spends it. At college, Stuart does not study or attend classes but rather drinks a great deal and writes many bad checks. Stuart surrounds himself with others who share his fondness for seemingly constant intoxication and reliance on familial wealth to bankroll their excesses. By the end of his freshman year, Stuart realizes he will fail all his classes and will be dismissed. This reality comes to fruition early when Stuart is suspended for having an accident while driving intoxicated in which a fellow student is thrown from the car headfirst into a tree and is killed. The dismissal leads Stuart on a variety of ill-considered travels, mostly at the expense of his brother, his friends, and his father.31

In contrast to Boojum!, the later southern novel suggests that socioeconomic class had a larger influence on students’ alcohol use than the region in which they attended college. Cotton Cavalier is set at a more humble southern institution, the small, religious, and coeducational Blakeley College, and depicts far less drinking than at its regional predecessor. The novel follows Peter Kimbrough from the start of his sophomore year until he graduates, often focusing on his relationship with a woman student, Lynn Blount. Unlike the wealthy and lazy students at Southern University, Kimbrough, like most of his male peers, works long hours in the cotton fields over the summer to pay for his college education. Kimbrough compares Blakely unfavorably to eastern colleges and big state universities. Frustrated that the teaching of evolution is forbidden and that the women students enjoy few freedoms, Kimbrough prepares an exposé that will illuminate the hypocrisy at Blakeley. With less disposable income and with their actions more closely monitored by college authorities than their peers’ in Boojum, Blakeley students’ drinking is very intermittent. Students tend to drink at one or two parties per year, such as when a

local student’s parents leave town, or to celebrate a suspended student’s readmittance. Even though drinking is comparatively sparse, authorities are vigilant about eliminating any drinking. A law enforcement officer insists that students’ luggage be searched for alcohol at the train depot upon their arrival to town, and the college president, a former pastor, wants to hire a dean of men in part because he believes some college men “have become addicted to ... alcohol.” Tension within the novel crests when Kimbrough and several classmates murder and hide the body of a Black employee of the college after a woman student claims that he raped her. After Kimbrough learns that this claim was only to protect a student who has impregnated her, he turns to the bottle to deal with his guilt:

He stayed just drunk enough to be agreeably muddled in his thinking.... Liquor as a sedative, however, had its disadvantages. He had to increase the doses little by little, had to be satisfied with a numbing effect—like cocained gums after a tooth-pulling—instead of the former glow. He acquired the habit of washing away the bad taste of the night before with a morning pick-me-up. Headaches and jangling nerves resulted.

Kimbrough never feels enough guilt to confess, and with the help of several friends he manages to both avoid prosecution and give up drinking.\textsuperscript{32} That Blakeley men are so envious of the campus life at the “big universities” suggests that while these poorer students drank less, they wished that could enjoy all the amenities of a true college experience, including regular access to alcohol.

After 1920, novels conveyed that student drinking had spread beyond its traditional stronghold—eastern men’s colleges—to campuses throughout the country. Fictional women students started to drink, and did so in both single-sex and mixed settings. Despite all this drinking, a scene in The Plastic Age may have tempered any tendency for readers to conclude that all students illegally drank alcohol. After a prom that earns the reputation for being alcohol-soaked, the president of Hugh Carver’s fraternity, a well-behaved reformer, challenges his fraternity brothers’ perception of the event:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
“You talk as if everybody at the Prom was lit. Well, I was n’t lit, and as a matter of fact most of them were n’t lit.... What I’m getting to is this: there are over a thousand fellows in college, and out of that thousand not more than fifty were really soused at the Prom, and not more than a hundred and seventy-five were even a little teed. To go around saying that Sanford men are a lot of muckers just because a small fraction of them acted like gutterpups is sheer bunk.”\(^{33}\)

The leader’s correction offers both his fraternity brothers and readers a more accurate account of the prevalence of drinking on campus. Indeed, authors presented a consistent message that drinking occurred on every campus, but those Americans reading closely should have recognized enduring patterns of consumption. Alcohol use continued to vary within the institution and between institutions, with gender, socioeconomic class, and geography continuing to influence behavior. Though depictions of drinking had become far more common, the similarities and differences regarding alcohol in earlier college novels and their subsequent counterparts provide further examples of the intricacies of this increasingly common phenomenon.

**Changes and Continuities**

The onset of Prohibition proved to be a turning point in depictions of student drinking in college novels. Beyond the wider spread and increased prevalence of student drinking after 1920, these novels also depicted that, for student drinkers, the location of their drinking, the types of alcohol they drank, and with whom they drank had changed. Yet these significant shifts occurred alongside a greater number of enduring similarities regarding student drinking in college novels. Many of these similarities not only bridged the two eras of novels, but also harkened back to the antebellum years.

Following the enactment of Prohibition, fictional students shifted the location of their drinking from taverns near campus to their rooms and other less public spaces (see figure 3.3). In *Fair Harvard*, students have a particular fondness for Lyons’ wine-shop, and Dink Stover does most of his drinking at a similar tavern near the Yale campus. But the

first drinking in *The Plastic Age* occurs when roommates Hugh Carver and Carl Peters descend into a bootlegger’s cellar. As a junior, Carver’s drinking is confined to his room in the fraternity house. In *The Parables of the Virgins*, a Harvard alumnus takes a Walton student on a date. She obtains permission to enjoy a dinner and a movie, but instead the two drive far away from campus to a “roadhouse ... frequented ... by the section of town which didn’t look too closely to its neighbor’s business.” The two drink and dance until she has to return to campus at midnight. Otherwise, Walton women drink at small parties in their dormitory rooms to prevent attracting the attention of college authorities or their better behaving peers.34

Faced with a need to conceal their now illegal alcohol use, fictional college students during Prohibition switched to drinking more potent and easily concealed hard liquor instead of beer and wine. The students in *Fair Harvard* prefer wine to both water and beer. The only alcohol Tommy Woods drinks in *The Diary of a Freshman* is beer, and similarly Dink Stover’s drink of choice is ale. Even when the usually abstaining Bertram Cope drinks, he swallows wine. But by the 1920s, protagonists primarily drink hard liquor. Hugh Carver’s first drink in *The Plastic Age* is bootleg liquor, and he favors scotch and gin throughout his remaining years at Sanford College. The first drinks Helen Atchinson takes at Barnard were “ginger-ale hyballs that tasted like stove polish mixed with five-cent bottles of pop.” The southern men at Blakely College drink “corn likker.” The college women at Walton College have similar taste in alcohol. Crosby O’Conner makes hot toddies over Christmas vacation in New York City. Once back on campus, O’Conner hosts a party in her room, serving her peers red wine and liquor.35 If the aim of Prohibition was to stop

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Figure 3.3: The Effects of Strong Drink in *Stover at Yale*. In *Stover at Yale*, a student complains about the hangover induced by a particularly strong drink, but nonetheless returns to a tavern the next night. Although student drinking had spread to most campuses in Prohibition-era college fiction, it occurred in less public and more clandestine places than the prominent taverns near campus frequented by students in earlier novels. Illustration by Frederick R. Gruger for Owen Johnson, *Stover at Yale* (New York, 1912), facing p. 292.
alcohol use, college novels suggested that the results affected where and what students drank instead.

As the drunken interactions of Hugh Carver and Cynthia Day indicate, that college students began to drink with members of the opposite sex was another significant change in depictions of alcohol use by the 1920s. While *Fair Harvard* and *Stover at Yale* separate college students’ drinking from their romantic relationships, *The Plastic Age, Janet March, Wild* and *The Parable of the Virgins* employ a reverse approach. In New York City, Helen Atchinson and her Barnard friends regularly drink with their male dates. In both *The Plastic Age* and *The Parables of the Virgin* the prom provides students attending single-sex institutions an opportunity to drink with the opposite sex.36

Related to this drinking in mixed company and often coinciding with alcohol use, another stark distinction between the two generations of college novels is that students are more sexually active in the later novels. This activity ranges from “petting”—a term later generations would change to “making out”—to intercourse. The college woman who misleads Walton authorities and heads to a roadhouse to dance and drink ends the evening by kissing her date and letting him cup her breasts. Later in *The Parables of the Virgins*, a scorned Crosby O’Conner drinks alone in her lover’s New York City apartment as she awaits his return. Janet March drinks wine with and loses her virginity to a much older artist during her summer vacation to Chicago. In *The Plastic Age*, Carl Peters has sex with a prostitute after a visit to a bootlegger’s den; Hugh Carver almost follows suit with Cynthia Day on the night of the prom.37 In total, later novels suggested that college men had shifted their drinking from public spaces to secluded places and replaced wine and beer with hard liquor; college women had joined college men, both in drinking generally

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and in selecting private and potent approaches to alcohol. But perhaps more disturbing
than the spread of alcohol use for readers was the increased sexual activity that
accompanied it.

The differences between Prohibition-era and earlier novels in terms of student
drinking coincide with important consistencies regarding alcohol use on campus over time.
Scattered scenes across the novels remind modern readers that Americans used alcohol for
medicinal purposes throughout much of American history. The old woman rubs an
unconscious Will Elliot with brandy in An American Girl..., and when Bertram Cope and a
young woman capsize in a sailboat they receive both dry clothes and a drink “not generally
approved of” in their midwestern college town to warm their bodies when they reach a life-
saving station. In The Parable of the Virgins, one college woman comforts another who is in
shock after her roommate’s suicide with whiskey. But this novel also hints at the end of the
era of Americans medicating with liquor. As the college president prepares to leave the
dormitory room where the woman has been subdued with alcohol, he notices the bottle of
whiskey on the desk. The student states that it for “medicinal purposes”; the president
responds, “A false idea.... I must ask you to destroy that bottle.”38

Both before and after Prohibition, novels conveyed that participation in
intercollegiate athletics reduced fictional students’ alcohol use. Two rowers in Fair Harvard
give up drinking their preferred wine for beer as they train for a race. At dinner on Dink
Stover’s first night at Yale, a fellow football teammate says, “‘Guess we’d better cut out the
drinks. We’ll stand the gaff better to-morrow.’” Imagining future stardom on the track
team, Hugh Carver initially refuses to drink when he arrives at Sanford. A star halfback in

38 Anderson, An American Girl, 208; Fuller, Bertram Cope’s Year, 162; Lapsley, The Parable of
the Virgins, 285-286, 293. See also Washburn, Fair Harvard, 42, 162.
Town and Gown complains that he and his teammates are forbidden “all the good things in life ... women, beer, [and] beefsteak.”

Depicting the campuses as no bastions of temperance, authors of novels set at elite men’s colleges nonetheless conveyed that drunkenness was not a campus value either before or after Prohibition. In fact, novels depicted upperclassmen using access to the college’s most prestigious student organizations to regulate new students’ drinking behavior, privileging reserved alcohol use over blatant drunkenness across the decades. The popular and aristocratic sophomore Hugh Le Baron advises freshman Dink Stover on how to ensure his selection into one of Yale’s elite sophomore societies. Le Baron suggests a reserved approach: make friends slowly, acknowledge students by their last names, and do not become known for gambling. Le Baron further tells Stover, “Keep out of the crowd that is out booze-fighting—or, when you’re with them, keep your head.... I’m not preaching a moral lesson; only, what you do, do quietly.” Amory Blaine realizes that he should employ similar moderation with alcohol in his effort to be selected to one of Princeton’s eating clubs: “Anything which brought an underclassman into too glaring a light was labelled [sic] with the damning brand of ‘running it out.’ ... [T]alking of clubs was running it out; standing for anything very strongly, as, for instance, drinking parties or teetotalling, was running it out; in short, being personally conspicuous was not tolerated.”

As a further sign of the importance of moderate drinking perpetuated at eastern men’s colleges over time, several novels contain scenes of college students confronting their peers regarding their drinking excesses. As Dink Stover’s drinking spirals out of control during his junior year, both friend and foe attempt to intervene. In a slurred conversation,


McNab, Stover’s classmate and regular drinking companion, tells him to stop drinking. Noting that Stover has a chance to be a good influence, McNab contrasts their reasons for drinking: “‘When I take ‘n occasional glass, I drink to be happy, make others happy.... When Stover drinks he goes at it in a bad way, no love [of] humanity, joy of youth.’” This conversation has no impact on Stover, despite his admission that he is unhappy and drinks “to forget.” What finally compels a drunk Stover to change is a late-night confrontation with his former friend and current archrival Le Baron, who says, “You’re going to the devil.... You ought to be the biggest thing in your class, and you’re headed for the biggest failure.... Dink, man alive, you’re too good to go to the devil. Brace up – be a man.” In *The Plastic Age*, Hugh Carver’s fraternity elects the president who will correct the perception of the prevalence of alcohol at the prom. His primary aim is to reform the drinking behavior of his chapter. The fraternity members agree to stop hosting drunken dances, but reject his plan to forbid bringing alcohol into the chapter house.41

Harkening back to the problems presented by excessive student drinking in the antebellum years, novels from both later eras depict a wide range of personal consequences of students’ alcohol use, from hang-overs to deaths. In *This Side of Paradise*, Dick Humbird suffers the same fate as the intoxicated Stuart Breckenridge’s car passenger in *Boojum!* Humbird and other Princeton students take two cars into New York City to enjoy the nightlife. As they head back to campus at midnight, a drunk Humbird insists on driving. He takes a corner too fast, flipping the car, injuring two friends, and killing himself. If Dick Humbird’s death is one of the most tragic alcohol-related consequences within these novels, Hugh Carver demonstrates the most remorse over his drinking. Following the prom, Carver is mortified by his drunken actions:

> For several days Hugh was tortured by doubt and indecision: ... he tried to persuade himself that his conduct was no more reprehensible than that of his comrades, but shame invariably

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overwhelmed his arguments.... Most of all, he wanted comfort, advice, but he knew no one to whom he was willing to give his confidence. Somehow, he couldn’t admit his drunkenness to any one whose advice he valued.

Carver resolves to stop drinking and regain his prominence on the track team. Authors conveyed a clear message that some students suffered from their dance with the bottle.

Appearing far less often than personal consequences but still spanning both before and during Prohibition, several books detail the disciplinary actions taken by college authorities against student drinkers. The host of the drunken “Roman meal” in Fair Harvard is “rusticated,” which consisted of being banished from campus but expected to follow the course of study under the tutelage of a pastor in a rural community, for six months. Within later novels, authors’ depictions of increased alcohol use coincided with increased efforts of college authorities to punish, and thus discourage, such behavior. As the dean of women makes her seemingly fruitless nightly rounds through the campus to catch rule-breaking students in Town and Gown, she finds some solace that “[t]hree ‘Ups’ [fraternity members] had been expelled the year before for drunkenness.” Even the often drunk men at Southern University recognize an increasing crackdown on drinking, leading one of them to complain, “‘They kick you out for getting tight now.’” At Southern, college authorities expel any intoxicated students who attend the campus dances. Not all college women who drink escape repercussions either. The Parables of the Virgins opens with the college president rejecting the application for readmission offered by a young woman expelled for drinking, and several faculty members who attempt to expel Crosby O’Connor for drunkenness are only thwarted by a false alibi provided by another student. Depictions of alcohol-related disciplinary consequences were far fewer than the depictions of student drinking within college novels. Thus, novels sent a clear message that most student

42 Fuller, Bertram Cope’s Year, 120-123, 143; Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise, 83-85; Marks, The Plastic Age, 269.

43 Washburn, Fair Harvard, 213; Montross and Montross, Town and Gown, 194; Wertenbaker, Boojum, 38, 52, 57, 65-70; Lapsley, The Parable of the Virgins, 6, 276-283, 307-311, 319-326.
drinkers eluded college authorities and escaped punishment, just as most real-life student rule-breakers had before the Civil War.

Another aspect of college students’ alcohol use that spanned from the antebellum to the Prohibition years was the privileged nature of drinking on campus. That some college women felt the freedom to drink, that college students drank with members of the opposite sex, and that increasing numbers of college students had sex does not mean that gender equality regarding alcohol had arrived on campus by the 1920s. *Wild* conveyed that college women who drank did so in spite of enduring hostility toward such behavior. The man Helen Atchinson eventually marries repeatedly implores her to “be more lady-like,” which was a guise to get her to stop drinking and give up smoking. Other novels suggested that the potential consequences for women’s drinking exceeded those for men. In *Cotton Cavalier*, Peter Kimbrough wishes that Lynn Blount could drink at a house party, but realizes “there were too many tattletales.” Men’s drunkenness evades the interests of these tattletales.44 Moreover, even as college women increasingly drank, only in *The Parables of the Virgins* do college women actually become drunk. As the latest novel under consideration, this suggests that drinking to excess was the last freedom of alcohol use college women enjoyed.

Double standards also remained in the campus discipline process. In *The Plastic Age*, college authorities expel men who were caught having or having had sex (usually through contracting a sexually transmitted disease and being reported by the college physician) but not for drinking. In *The Parables of the Virgins*, college women receive a similar fate for either being sexually active (typically by becoming noticeably pregnant) or for drinking.45 In terms of student drinking, college novels conveyed that women had

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achieved greater parity with men, but the playing field remained uneven. College men’s drinking continued to enjoy greater social acceptability and less disciplinary punishment.

Considered collectively, novels from both eras suggest that college students’ paths toward drinking have long been complicated. As Janet March’s high school drinking suggests, students brought different levels of experience with alcohol when they arrived on campus. Amory Blaine is another drinker who starts young when, at eleven years old, he gets tipsy on an apricot cordial his mother had left behind in a hotel room. A teenage Dink Stover had drunk a “sufficient quantity of sickening beer” while away at boarding school, seemingly in preparation for college. Other students arrived at college having never drunk alcohol. Hugh Carver waits for his first drink until he is a sophomore in college. Once on campus, students faced the decision of whether to drink or abstain. Dink Stover is embarrassed when an upperclassman offers to buy him a drink that he cannot enjoy while training for football. The upperclassman responds, “‘That’s all right – hand him a soft one [nonalcoholic drink],’” leading Stover to realize “that there was a perfect freedom in the choice of beverage at college.” Similarly, when sophomore Hugh Carver is disturbed by the drunkenness among his fraternity brothers and their dates at a dance, he also realizes that a good number of the members were not drinking and “were making gallant efforts to keep the sober girls away from the less sober girls and the inebriated brothers.”

Many novels, before and after Prohibition, present the college years as a time when students completed rites of passage on the journey from adolescence to adulthood. As many students prepared to leave home for college, they identified as men and women instead of boys and girls, but they found few confirmations of their adult status once on campus. Returning students, especially sophomores, worked to ensure that freshmen realized their place at the bottom of the campus hierarchy, usually through hazing (see

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figure 3.4). Faculty also often held freshmen in low regard and parents continued to treat their sons and daughters as children. In Two College Girls, one frustrated college woman tells her father, “I wish to be taken seriously, papa. I won’t have you thinking that I am just a girl.” But parents funding college educations had ample reason to be suspicious of their offspring’s maturity. The most popular refrain in Stover at Yale is the lyrics college men sing: “Oh, father and mother pay all the bills, And we have all the fun, That’s the way we do in college life. Hooray!” (see figure 3.5). By the time students left college, however, both outsiders and students recognized that the latter had reached the world of adulthood.47 That the college years served as a time when students finalized their path to adulthood holds particular salience to the use of alcohol depicted in college novels. Those students who were most apt not to drink, early college women and early midwestern college men, reflected the prevailing behavior in adult society into which these students would emerge. Not until it became more acceptable—though certainly not universally approved of—within their communities did these fictional students imbibe. For college men who drank, the college years served as the time to learn the limits of alcohol use and develop moderate drinking habits. Both Dink Stover and Hugh Carver arrive on campus with athletic ambitions that preclude their drinking alcohol. But midway through the novels, each becomes disillusioned with college life and drowns his sorrows with alcohol. Stover, proud that he can always make it back to his room from the tavern unassisted, nonetheless relies upon a certain freshman to help him to bed every night. Carver engages in the same drunken behavior with women as a junior that repulsed him as a sophomore. Both

47 On youths considering themselves adults before entering colleges, see Johnson, Stover at Yale, 5; Marks, The Plastic Age, 6; Dell, Janet March, 106. On new students encountering hostility from returning students, see Washburn, Fair Harvard, chapter one; Williams, The Adventures of a Freshman, chapters three, four, five; Lichtenstein, For the Blue and Gold, 62; Brown, Two College Girls, 161; Johnson, Stover at Yale, 229-230, 232, 302, 333-334; Tarkington, Ramsey Milholland, 119-120. On both students and others recognizing graduating seniors as adults, see Washburn, Fair Harvard, 305; Anderson, An American Girl, 254-269; Brown, Two College Girls, 235; Montross and Montross, Town and Gown, 254; Dell, Janet March, 220.
Students, men especially, often arrived on campus considering themselves adults. Once at college, a variety of individuals, including faculty, parents, and other students, actions communicated the lowly status of new students and rejected any notion that they deserved the respect of adulthood. At the turn of the twentieth century, hazing of freshmen by upperclassmen, particularly sophomores, was both prevalent and violent. Illustration in Jesse Lynch Williams Adventures of a Freshman (1899) facing p. 58.
eventually become embarrassed enough with their actions to change, establishing what will likely prove to be their drinking behavior throughout adulthood. The day after the encounter with Le Baron that solidifies Stover’s resolve to change, he meets his friends at their regular tavern. Stover orders one drink and a friend buys him another. When another friend offers to get the next round, Stover responds, “Not for me.... I guess two'll be my limit from now on.” Carver chooses a similar line. He tells his roommate to stop bringing
alcohol into their room. When Cynthia Day asks him if he would enjoy a repeat performance of the drunken prom, Carver responds,

“Of course not, especially at a dance. I’m not a child any longer, Cynthia. I have sense enough now not to forfeit my self-respect again.... I have n’t been drunk in the last year. A drunkard is a beastly sight, rotten. If I have learned anything in college, it is that a man has to respect himself, and I can’t respect any one any longer who deliberately reduces himself to a beast.”

Neither student chooses complete abstinence, but his drunken revelry ends before he leaves college. This fictional trajectory of alcohol use—a period of heavy alcohol use followed by more reserved consumption—closely resembled the drinking patterns of many antebellum students whose freshman year was particularly wet before they adopted more moderate tendencies as upperclassmen.

Of all the hedonism in Prohibition-era college novels that both titillated and shocked readers, student drinking was the most prevalent. But whatever concerns these novels circulated about youth culture, one author offered a tongue-in-cheek scene that aimed to calm such fears and suggest that such concerns were unnecessary. In *Boojum!*, Stuart Breckenridge finally stops being a financial drag on his family and friends when he publishes his own successful college novel. When his brother claims that the novel is “rotten,” Stuart agrees but counters that people want to read “a book about drinking and sex.” He further justifies his book:

‘Mine’s an honest effort in one respect.... I tried to prove that books of that sort are not worth reading, which is sort of a paradox, I guess. What I mean is that the stuff that’s written about in *This Side of Paradise* and ... *The Plastic Age* and my book and all the rest of them is trivia. But in those other books the chaps who wrote them took themselves seriously and tried to make a problem out of adolescence. That’s all poppycock. In my book I tried to show that it’s all a huge joke and not worth writing about. You have your fling and then you settle down. That’s all there is to it.’

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To some extent, the college years increasingly became viewed as a time when students tested their limits, often with alcohol, before, as the experiences of Dink Stover and Hugh Carver testify, the graduated and settled down for adulthood.\textsuperscript{49} Indeed, the vast majority of student drinkers depicted in college novels, despite their excesses, managed to survive their undergraduate years with relatively few, if any, alcohol-related scars.

As college novels rose in popularity, they presented a consistent message that many students drank on campus. To be sure, there were still colleges young men and women could attend at which drinking would be so discouraged that few would risk drinking. But as authors overlooked these institutions to offer risqué stories of college life, the public increasingly came to perceive that many young people drank alcohol at college. On the whole, college novels offer many insights into student drinking. While these insights allow for categorizations that draw distinctions between institutional types and over time, the most important lesson the novels offer is that college drinking was a complex behavior affected by a myriad of extenuating circumstances—a lesson with enduring value.

The popularity of novels about college students peaked during national Prohibition. Percy Mark’s \textit{The Plastic Age} became the second best-selling book in 1924. A year later the film adaptation became a blockbuster. Millions of Americans watched college roommates Hugh Carver and Carl Peters escape a police raid on a dance hall where they had been drinking alcohol.\textsuperscript{50} The success of both versions of \textit{The Plastic Age} marked the beginning of a long and gradual shift from the novel to the movie as the dominant representation of campus life in popular culture. This shift would be particularly important regarding student drinking, as it is difficult to imagine a more powerful force in the past

\textsuperscript{49} Wertenbaker, \textit{Boojum}, 273-274.

fifty years than National Lampoon’s Animal House in conveying the idea that, for many students, college is a place of drunken revelry.

The numerous and often egregious depictions of college men’s—and increasingly college women’s—alcohol use in novels and films after 1920 created problems for college leaders. As the nation experimented with a widespread ban on alcohol, the public, including future students, encountered images in popular culture that suggested that the college years were alcohol-filled. In fact, many real-life college students engaged in the alcohol-related behaviors depicted in college novels after 1920—students drinking in mixed company, students drinking hard liquor in hidden places, and a slew of negative consequences to the then illicit activity. College leaders responded to both the perception and the reality of student drinking by adapting their discipline system to deal with problems simultaneously old and new. Their efforts would satisfy few.
“Well mother, it seems as though I have been one big disappointment to you and Dad,” began a letter home in June 1924 by a young man who should have been graduating in less than a month from Iowa State College (today Iowa State University) in Ames. National Prohibition had been in effect for three and a half years as this young man wrote his letter, but this student had, along with two others, become intoxicated in their fraternity house. Two weeks later, as news of this indiscretion had reached the college authorities, the student found himself at a meeting of Iowa State’s Government Committee (ISGC), a group of three faculty members who were responsible for enforcing the rules of the institution. Students were expected to obey the spirit of the law and not drink alcohol. But not only had this young man become drunk, he was also part of a faction within his fraternity in which, at least the ISGC members believed, “drinking had been going on rather regularly.” The student admitted to drinking and becoming drunk on the night in question and “that he had been drinking at the fraternity house on a number of other occasions.” The student detailed the meeting to his parents: “They questioned me for three hours and then decided to suspend me—Oh! it’s all so miserable, it’s hard to tell you—for a period of one year from school.” The student explained that if he had positive references in a year he would be allowed return and complete his few remaining requirements and receive his degree. The student wrote that it would be too painful to return home right away and that a professor was helping him find work for the year,
concluding, “When I think of the sadness and disappointment this letter is going to cause you & Dad I can hardly bear to send it.”

This young man had been caught in the crosshairs of a social paradox: drinking alcohol had become increasingly important to young people at the same time as the only nation-wide ban on alcohol in United States history. Indeed, two predominant images that persevere of the 1920s are those of flappers dancing and drinking in the era’s underground speakeasies and Elliot Ness and other government agents’ aggressive pursuit of organized crime members who earned their fortunes from the illegal alcohol industry. National Prohibition—the ban on “manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating beverages” codified by the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, enforced by the subsequent Volstead Acts, and upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court—became the law of the land on January 16, 1920, two months before the publication of This Side of Paradise provided a particularly wet depiction of campus life.

The path to national Prohibition proved shorter than even its most ardent supporters had believed possible at the turn of the twentieth century. The male-dominated Anti-Saloon League (ASL) eclipsed the efforts of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union by the end of the nineteenth century. The ASL, a savvy organization renowned for the effectiveness of its paid staff members, waged pragmatic political battles. The League’s ability to deliver decisive numbers of votes to candidates who committed to support the dry cause increased support of Prohibition by both the Democratic and Republican politicians. They gained popular support for Prohibition by attacking the alcohol industry as opposed to personal consumption and not defining “intoxicating liquor.” Many Americans who supported the national ban believed that it would only affect access to hard liquor, sparing beer and wine for their tables. World War I—by centralizing power in Washington, D.C.,

1 210th Meeting of the Government Committee, 26 June 1924, Box 3, Student Conduct Committee Records (hereafter cited as “SCC Records”), University Archives, Iowa State University Library, Ames, IA (hereafter cited as “ISUA”).
emphasizing thrift among citizens, and fostering negative attitudes toward all things
German, including the previously popular lager beer—contributed to a political climate
amenable to a national ban. By 1917, the ASL had helped replace enough wet politicians
with dry ones in Congress to pass a prohibition amendment to be sent to the states for
ratification. In January 1919, Nebraska provided the final approval necessary to put the
ban in effect, which would begin in one year.  

But the path toward repeal proved even shorter than that for approval. National
Prohibition, deemed “a noble experiment,” existed for only thirteen years (1920-1933), and
the Eighteenth proved to be the only constitutional amendment ever annulled. Many
political leaders believed that compliance with Prohibition would be immediate and
violations would be rare. Neither turned out to be true. Enforcement of Prohibition
proved to be both ineffective and expensive. As drinking continued to occur, and often in
quite public ways, the law developed a reputation as one that was to be flouted rather than
obeyed and ignored rather than enforced. Opposition to the ASL was unorganized in the
1910s but mobilized quickly after 1920. Most importantly, many American capitalists, who
had long supported temperance to create a more efficient workforce, turned against the law
as their own liquor supplies dried up and the federal government imposed higher taxes to
offset the large loss of revenue previously supplied by the liquor industry and to pay for the
increasing costs of enforcement. By the onset of the Great Depression, the policing of
alcohol consumption appeared to be a waste of government resources while the need for
jobs and tax revenue guaranteed by the alcohol industry hastened the rapid end to the
nation-wide ban. In the end, national Prohibition, reminiscent of the antebellum

2 Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby Martin, Drinking in America: A History, 2nd ed.
Dry America, 1800-1933 (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998), chapter seven; Jack S. Blocker, Jr., American
Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989), chapter four; Eric Burns,
The Spirits of America: A Social History of Alcohol (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004),
chapter seven.
temperance movement, proved to be both a success and a failure. During its thirteen years, drinking rates plunged, especially among working class Americans who could not afford the era’s higher prices for alcohol, and negative alcohol-related health effects also decreased. But to the extent that national Prohibition was supposed to eliminate drinking and create a crime-free society, it failed miserably.3

A strange thing happened during the noble experiment that contributed to its fast demise. Many members of the middle class, long the strongest supporters of temperance reform, rediscovered the pleasure of the bottle. As the saloon culture, perpetuated by working class men, gave way to speakeasies for the middle and upper classes, “respectable” women joined men to participate “in the new culture of public drinking.” In fact, middle-class women, long advocates for temperance and prohibition, “fractured” over the dry cause in the 1920s, the first decade in which they were guaranteed the right to vote after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in August 1920. Noting “the legend … that drinking actually increased during prohibition,” historian Thomas Pegram provides an important correction, “In reality, it was middle-class exposure to drinking that grew during the dry years.”4

Historians have not fully explored the social paradox caused by the combination of increasing middle-class drinking and national Prohibition on higher education. Several historians acknowledge an increase in, or at least the prominence of, student drinking in the 1920s. Most notably, Paula Fass argues that drinking served as one of the “symbols of liberation” from adult supervision for white college men and women. While these historians sometimes note the illicit nature of students’ alcohol use—“Drinking for youth in

3 Pegram, Battling Demon Rum, chapter 8; Lender and Martin, Drinking in America, 136-147, 167-168; Blocker, Jr., American Temperance Movements, chapter four; David E. Kyvig, Repealing National Prohibition, 2nd ed. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2000).

4 Pegram, Battling Demon Rum, 168, 175-177; Daniel Okrent, Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition (New York: Scribner, 2010), 211, 214, 222-224; Lender and Martin, Drinking in America, 145-146; Burns, The Spirits Of America, 198-199.
the twenties was unlike sex, smoking, or dancing, because the young labored under a specific legal ordinance forbidding alcoholic indulgence of any kind,” writes Fass—they do not consider how its prevalence affected campus discipline. In fact, historians have generally ignored the campus discipline process in the early twentieth century, at most attributing responsibility for discipline to early student affairs administrators. According to Robert Schwartz, discipline was the “most visible” responsibility of the first deans of men, yet the only insight he offers into this process is the suggestion that deans of men used their intuition in lieu of adhering to a strict set of rules in disciplining students.5

Yet as college students constituted a key component of a youth movement that established drinking trends in the 1920s, college authorities both confronted and contributed to the social paradox through their campus discipline process. At institutions as diverse as Iowa State College, Princeton University, Smith College, and the University of Michigan, they confronted the social paradox by operating generally similar and increasingly complex discipline systems; establishing many aspects of the campus discipline system that endure today; addressing increasing numbers of alcohol-related cases; learning about students’ risky drinking behaviors; and garnering criticisms for being too lenient or too harsh in the penalties for student drinkers. They contributed to it by not addressing a


majority of the drinkers or the drinking incidents among collegians; expressing greater frustration with third parties who facilitated student drinking rather than the drinkers themselves; and often punishing student drinkers mildly. The ways in which students drank alcohol and the ways in which college authorities attempted to discipline their behavior reflected the shortcomings and eventual failure of national Prohibition.

**Prohibition-Era Campus Discipline**

Spread fourteen hundred miles across the eastern half of the United States, Iowa State College, Princeton University, Smith College, and the University of Michigan—respectively a coeducational land grant institution, an all-men’s institution, a woman’s college, and a coeducational state university—represented distinct versions of the “collegiate ideal” that fascinated many Americans in the 1920s. Though the differences between the institutions were many, all experienced remarkable growth during Prohibition. Michigan, the largest of the four, enrolled nearly nine thousand students, one-third of whom were women. The university experienced an expansion of both its appropriations and its physical plant, with the state legislature increasing the annual support from $1.5 million in 1920 to $4.9 million by 1930 and funding the construction of five new buildings in 1921 alone. Money from both private philanthropy and industry funded a growing amount of faculty research. Students with adequate resources and from the “proper” background (primarily white Protestants) participated in an active campus life; thirty percent of college men joined one of sixty fraternities and twenty percent of college women joined one of twenty-two sororities. Michigan also enjoyed tremendous athletic success, winning eight conference titles in football and three in basketball, having two students win Olympic gold medals, and opening a new football stadium that held 85,000 fans. Three different presidents presided over this growth: Marion Burton (1919-1925); Clarence Little (1926-1929); and Alexander Ruthven (1929-1951).6

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6 Peckham, *The Making of the University of Michigan*, chapter eight.
President John Hibben served Princeton during all but the final year of Prohibition, having replaced Woodrow Wilson in 1912. Throughout the 1920s, Princeton’s student body hovered around two thousand undergraduates, all of them men. During Hibben’s presidency, Princeton’s endowment quadrupled, library collections doubled, and campus expanded by thirty new buildings. While much of Princeton grew during Prohibition, its students continued to hail from a narrow segment of society. Wealthy white Protestant men from the eastern seaboard filled the class rosters, upwards of eighty percent of whom had attended elite private schools. Princeton administrators increasingly restricted the number of Jewish students, which had never exceeded five percent of the student body, to below three percent—the percentage of Jews within the American population. (Princeton did not admit African American men until the 1950s.) Princeton offered an active campus life for those with deep pockets. Atop the social hierarchy sat the “eating clubs,” organizations that selected rising sophomores to membership and then provided students a place to eat, study, and drink covertly for their remaining two years in college.7

Smith College, located one hundred miles inland from Boston in Northampton, Massachusetts, was the largest women’s college in the country during Prohibition. Two thousand students, hailing from every state in the nation, enrolled each year. In 1925, Smith inaugurated its Junior Year Abroad by sending thirty students to study in France. Similar programs in Spain and Italy followed. President William A. Neilson—a Scottish-born, Harvard-educated literature scholar—outlasted Prohibition, arriving in 1917 and retiring in 1939. Neilson saw the number of campus buildings increase by half, the campus acreage double, the endowment triple, and the library holdings quadruple. Much of this success was the result of impressive donations made to the college. Smith began the decade on a strong note, receiving via bequest the property of a nearby private school and via gift

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four million dollars raised by alumnae. Half of the money went to support faculty through increased salaries and new equipment; the other half built three much needed dormitories. Continued generosity from donors provided for the construction of five additional residences. By the end of Prohibition, every Smith student could live on campus for the first time since 1884.8

Iowa State College celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in June 1920. By that time, President Raymond Pearson, who had assumed the position as a thirty-nine-year-old in 1912, had six years left in Ames before departing for the University of Maryland and being replaced by Raymond Hughes. Enrollment doubled to near five thousand men and women and the physical footprint of the campus increased dramatically with the addition of twenty new buildings on fifty percent more campus land during Pearson’s term. Iowa State students took the lead in raising one million dollars for the Memorial Union, which opened in 1928. Iowa State coupled traditional liberal arts offerings with the most applied curriculum of the four institutions, with programs in forestry, home economics, agriculture, and engineering dominating course lists. More graduate students enrolled at ISC than at any other land-grant institution in the United State by 1930. Indeed, Prohibition coincided with Iowa State’s transformation from a college into a “technical university” with increasing renown for the quality of its students, its instruction, and its research activities.9


Dramatic growth was not the only thing these institutions shared during Prohibition. Their discipline systems were also similar. By the early years of Prohibition, the four institutions had either completed or begun a transition from relatively simple to increasingly complex discipline systems that required an administrative staff to function, used a significant amount of faculty members’ time, and incorporated students into university governance. The evolutions in campus discipline coincided with more sophisticated law enforcement efforts to combat the newly illegal alcohol market. Although college authorities apparently never attributed these disciplinary developments to alcohol-related challenges, the new structures they created would often encounter cases of student drinkers during Prohibition.

Academic leaders at each institution were free from legal scrutiny in designing and operating campus discipline systems, as evidenced by different judicial opinions in 1924. Two assertive young women, one of whom had attended Michigan State Normal College (today Eastern Michigan University) and the other had been enrolled in the University of Maryland, filed lawsuits to challenge their dismissals and to seek reinstatement. The first decision, handed down by the Michigan Supreme Court in March, involved Alice Tanton challenging her expulsion for smoking, riding “inappropriately” in a car with a man, and complaining about the campus discipline process to the local press. The trial court had decided for the college. The higher court agreed with the lower court that had rejected the testimony “that male students and professors ... smoked” without rebuke and asserted that the dean of women and the president had demonstrated “no abuse of discretion, no arbitrary action.” On the contrary, the court concluded, the Dean of Women had “displayed a motherly interest” in Tanton and “should be commended for upholding some old fashioned ideals of young womanhood.”

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10 Tanton v. McKenney, 226 Mich. 245 (Supreme Court of Michigan 1924).
The Maryland Court of Appeals decided the other case in December, after the college appealed a trial court’s reinstatement of Vivian Simpson. During the previous academic year, a Washington, D.C. newspaper had received and published a report supposedly sent by women students at Maryland that claimed “that men officials of the University were making objectionable suggestions to girl students and otherwise exhibiting a wrong moral attitude toward them.” Some Maryland students responded to the report by drafting “a resolution of confidence in the administration” for which all but Simpson and one other student voted. The Dean of Women then interviewed all women students to see “if they knew anything of the charges.” When Simpson was questioned, “she turned and left without answering.” Later the president summoned Simpson to ask if she had sent the statements. When she refused to answer, he refused to allow her to enroll for the next term. The trial court agreed with Simpson that not answering a question was not grounds for expulsion, but the appellate court did not. That court decided that the college authorities had, with good reason, considered the sum of Simpson’s behavior over the course of two years and decided she was unfit for the institution: “[C]ollege officials are required to act upon their ultimate judgment of the student derived from experience, the longer the better, and the greater number of incidents the better.” The decisions reverberated across the country, as Iowa State Raymond Pearson sent a copy of the decision in the Simpson case to his discipline officers, instructing, “Hope you will familiarize yourself with this as it may have national importance.”

With broad discretion over policies and operations, each institution had a position responsible, in part, for coordinating the discipline process. Faculty-members-turned-administrators served in this role at both Michigan and Princeton. At Michigan, the responsibility for college men’s discipline was the dean of students and for college women

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11 Woods v. Simpson, 146 Md. 547, 550, 552 (Court of Appeals of Maryland 1924). President to G.B. MacDonald, J.E. Foster, J.S. Dodds, J.W. Stanton, 10 Jan. 1925, Box 1, SCC Records, ISUA.
the dean of women. While the discipline process for Michigan women was in place by 1920, the one for men evolved rapidly during the early years of Prohibition. In February 1921, the Board of Regents created the position of dean of students and appointed Joseph Bursley (see figure 4.1), a professor of engineering, to the post. Bursley was a Michigan alumnus who spent only seven years of his adult life away from the university, five following his graduation working in private industry before becoming an instructor in 1904 and two years during World War I when he worked for the federal government. At Princeton, the dean of the college was responsible for operating the discipline process. Howard McClenahan, a professor of physics, held this position until he resigned in 1925, and Christian Gauss, a long-serving professor of literature, filled this role from McClenahan’s resignation until 1946. At Smith, a newly created administrator took over the dean of the college’s responsibility for discipline in 1922. Laura Lord Scales, an alumna who had previously served as a dean of women in Pennsylvania, became Smith College’s warden—an apropos title for someone responsible for discipline, but President Neilson insisted that he borrowed the title from a similar administrative position that was responsible for women students in Great Britain’s universities. Only at Iowa State was the position held, at least from 1922 until 1928, by a full-time faculty member, professor of forestry G.B. MacDonald.12

While these individuals coordinated the system, a centralized committee comprised primarily of faculty members served as the chief disciplinary body at every institution but Smith. The University of Michigan Board of Regents established the University Committee on Discipline at Michigan (UMCD), which only heard cases against men, a year and a half after their creation of the dean of students position. The UMCD was comprised of two types of members appointed by different academic leaders:

Figure 4.1: Prohibition-Era Discipline Authorities. Clockwise from upper left: Dean of Students Joseph Bursley at the University of Michigan; Dean of the College Christian Gauss at Princeton University; Chairman of the Government Committee G.B. MacDonald at Iowa State College; and Warden Laura Scales at Smith College. Sources: Bentley Historical Society, Princeton University Libraries, Sophia Smith College and Smith College Archives, and Iowa State University Libraries.
the President appointed one faculty member each year to serve a three-year term (three positions in total); and the academic deans, in turn, appointed a faculty member from their college to be a representative each year. The members appointed by academic deans only attended UMCD meetings that considered cases against students enrolled in their respective colleges. Several faculty members comprised the majority of membership on both Princeton’s Committee on Discipline (PUCD) and Iowa State’s Government Committee (ISGC), of which G.B. MacDonald was chairman.13

Student leaders also became more involved in the discipline process at all four institutions during Prohibition. Women students at Michigan and Smith enjoyed the most significant authority. Smith did not have a faculty committee for students’ out-of-class infractions because the Judicial Board of the Student Council, advised by the warden, fulfilled this role. At Michigan, the Judiciary Council of Women’s League, the student government for women, in coordination with the dean of women, heard cases and determined punishments for Michigan women. While this high-level of responsibility was in place for Michigan women by 1920, male students enjoyed no such status at the start of the decade. At their May 1924 meeting, the Regents finally approved a discipline role for college men. The Advisory Committee of the Student Council, headed by the Student Council President and comprised of four additional members, would conduct a preliminary hearing and send a confidential report that included “findings of fact and recommendations as to punishment” through the dean of students to the UMCD. The faculty members retained the authority to “accept, reject, or modify the recommendations.” Both faculty members and students comprised the PUCD. The numbers of members

13 The sources on the University Committee on Discipline at the University Michigan during Prohibition are primarily housed in Committee on Student Discipline Records, Boxes 1 and 5 (hereafter cited as “CSD Records”), University of Michigan Archives, Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI (hereafter cited as “UMA”). The minutes and actions of Princeton University’s Committee of Discipline during this time period are found in Dean of Undergraduate Students Records, Subseries 6 (Discipline), Box 1 (hereafter cited as “DUS Records”), Princeton University Archives, Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton, NJ (hereafter cited as “PUA”).
varied among the years and between the meetings within a year, but the committee membership never exceeded ten and the students never outnumbered the faculty. Princeton students did not make recommendations, but rather voted alongside the faculty on the fate of their peers. In addition to Gauss becoming the dean of the college in 1925, the other significant change to Princeton’s discipline process in the 1920s was the replacement of the Senior Council with the Undergraduate Council in supplying the student leaders who served on the PUCD. The role of student leaders in the discipline process at Iowa State is less clear, but they irregularly attended the ISGC meetings, though, like Michigan men, not until the mid 1920s. It was more common for fraternity or sorority presidents to meet with the ISGC when some of their members were under investigation. As these institutions grew in size and fewer college authorities had direct relationships with individual students, involving student leaders in campus discipline helped institutional authorities to shift some responsibilities to the students and contributed to an image of a self-governed community.14

There is also evidence that college administrators gained increased control over the discipline system during Prohibition. Although UMCD members, the official discipline policy, and even Bursley himself stated that the dean of students had no disciplinary

14 The records of the women students’ judicial bodies at both Smith and Michigan do not survive. Serve as a useful but imperfect substitute. The best insights into the discipline process at Smith come from the letters written by the Warden, usually to parents, about students who had discipline action taken against them. Theses letters comprise a small portion of the Dean of the College Records (hereafter cited as “DC Records”) in the Smith College Archives, Northampton, MA (hereafter cited as “SCA”).

University of Michigan Board of Regents, Proceedings (1920-1923), 504. May Meeting 1924, University of Michigan Board of Regents (1923-1926), 306-307. For examples of the actions of the Advisory Committee of the Student Council, see G.W. Ross, Jr. to J.A. Bursley, 18 Feb. 1926; C.C. Smith to University Discipline Committee (UCD), 13 Jan. 1928, 21 May 1928; Fletcher Hall Bootlegging Case, Report of Advisory Committee, December 1929; on the incident between the freshman and the sophomore, see P.J. Kern to J.A. Bursley, 19 Nov. 1928, CSD Records, UMA. On the incident between the freshman and the sophomore, see P.J. Kern to J.A. Bursley, 19 Nov. 1928, CSD Records, UMA; 380th Government Committee Meeting, 23 Nov. 1927, Box 11, SCC Records, ISUA.
powers at Michigan, Bursley exercised broad discretion regarding student discipline. During his first years as dean, Bursley sometimes encouraged college men under investigation to withdraw from the University. A student who withdrew upon his advice could be readmitted at his discretion. Bursley later adopted a more complicated “informal” approach in handling cases. If he became aware of a student’s misbehavior that had not become public knowledge, perceived the infraction as not egregious, and found the student amenable to reform, Bursley had the student write a statement that described the situation and his actions. This confession was sealed inside an envelope and placed inside a safe. The student’s name, his graduating year, and his college were typed on the envelope along with a note that the envelope was to be delivered to the student “unopened on the day he graduates from the university, provided he is not reported for discipline prior to that time.” Any record of the student’s infractions would thus disappear from the university’s records. Bursley would open the letter if the student was involved in another disciplinary infraction or if a student failed to make adequate academic progress, and the formerly sealed infractions would be added to the more recent allegations. These informal methods gave Bursley more control over the discipline process than granted by the formal policy.15

Princeton’s Dean Gauss also secured greater control over the discipline process soon after his appointment to the post in 1925. Technically, the dean of the college’s discipline role was limited to convening the PUCD and voting to break ties (and, since the committee’s votes were overwhelmingly unanimous, this power was rarely exercised). Yet Gauss reprimanded four students for several different infractions without bringing them before the committee at the beginning of his second semester as dean in 1926. From this start, Gauss gained greater authority in deciding college men’s fates. The PUCD began

15 On advising students to withdraw, see J.A. Bursley to G.W. Patterson, 17 Dec. 1923; J.A. Bursley to John R. Effinger, 2 March 1927. On confessions in sealed envelopes, see Statement of Elbert King, November 1931; Statement of Albert Gregory, 13 Feb. 1933; Statement of Owen Crumpacker, 7 April 1933, CSD Records, UMA.
approving punishments Gauss had already given a student, and such punishments ranged from reprimands to requiring the student to withdraw (apparently only the committee could “dismiss” a student). The PUCD started to refer cases to Gauss “with power” to decide the student’s fate. Often, Gauss brought his punishment back to the committee for approval, but the committee never altered his punishments. While faculty committees continued to hear the vast majority of discipline cases at both Michigan and Princeton in 1920s, these developments suggest the gradual reduction of faculty members’ role as disciplinarians began during Prohibition.\footnote{16 On Dean Gauss exerting or gaining control over discipline proceedings, see PUCD Minutes, 11 June 1926, 22 Oct. 1928, 5 Feb. 1930, 14 Oct. 1930, 29 Sept. 1930, 15 March 1934, DUS Records, PUA.}

As the discipline system at these four institutions evolved in the early years of Prohibition, so too did law enforcement agencies designed to eliminate alcohol. Shortly after the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment, Congress created the Prohibition Unit within the Treasury Department to ensure compliance. Congress allocated $6.35 million to fund these efforts and employ around 1,500 federal agents in the first year of Prohibition. As it became clear that more resources would be needed to combat alcohol, the Treasury Department’s request grew four-fold to reach $28 million three years later. Cheap politicians rejected that number, funding enforcement efforts upwards of $10 million and employing around 3,000 federal agents for most of Prohibition.\footnote{17 Lender and Martin, Drinking in America, 149-150, 154; Pegram, Battling Demon Rum, 159.}

While the four institutions’ discipline systems were marked primarily by similarities, each had aspects unique to its own campus. As is suggested by the bifurcation of cases by gender and perhaps necessitated by its size, Michigan operated the most decentralized disciplinary system. The only discipline cases over which the UMCD had complete jurisdiction were those “involving [male] students from more than one school or
college of the University.” In cases that involved students enrolled in the same college, a committee of that college’s faculty had original jurisdiction, though they could adopt “as a general policy that all cases of discipline ... be referred ... to the University Committee on Discipline.” So not only was there the UMCD, there were also a Committee on Discipline in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, a Committee on Discipline in the College of Engineering, and similar committees in the university’s other colleges and schools. For those discipline issues that were handled within the colleges, the university’s disciplinary policy instructed the faculty to bring them “to the attention of the Dean of Students ... before action is taken.” 18

The discipline authority of the president also varied among institutions. Generally, the presidents had minor, if any, roles in the formal discipline process. At Michigan, the actions of the UMCD were final, but the discipline policy approved by the Board of Regents encouraged consultation with the president prior to expelling a student. The presidents at Iowa State and Princeton apparently had no authority regarding the disciplinary process. Only at Smith did the president have a prominent role in discipline, perhaps not surprising since Smith students had a particularly high level of disciplinary authority with limited faculty oversight. President Neilson had a final say over any suspension or expulsion handed down by the Judicial Board. 19

Divisions in handling academic and behavioral problems within the discipline process varied between institutions. Smith College had the sharpest distinctions. The students of the Judicial Board heard cases of behavioral misconduct, whereas faculty and administrators serving on the Administrative Board determined the fates of students in academic trouble. On the other end of the spectrum, Princeton’s faculty committee heard

18 University of Michigan Board of Regents, Proceedings (1920-1923), 504-506. For examples of the records of college-level committees, see College of Engineering Records, Box 86, UMA; College of Literature, Science, and the Arts Records, Box 13, UMA.

every discipline case. At Michigan, the UMCD heard both types of cases, although the college-level committees appear to have been more likely to hear academic problems. At Iowa State, the Government Committee heard all academic and behavioral violations, although the Scholarship Committee determined if students had failed to make adequate academic progress. This meant that the Government Committee determined the penalty for a student who cheated on an exam but the Scholarship Committee determined what should be done about the student who did not pass any classes in a given term.20

A student entered the discipline process when the college authority responsible for coordinating the discipline process received a complaint regarding that individual. No affiliation appears to have been necessary to register a complaint against a student at any institution. Landlords, business owners, railroad employees, administrators and student governments from other institutions, and chaperones, not to mention faculty and administrators from their own institutions, filed complaints against students. After a complaint was filed, an investigation ensued. At Princeton, the university’s “proctors,” the campus security force, most often brought incidents to the dean’s attention after acquiring most of the information. Famous for ribbing their superiors in song, Princeton students created the “Procter’s Song” in the 1930s:

There are three men in Princeton town,
They look us up, they look us down;
Like the plague, they’re all around,
...Heigh-ho, the proctors, the Pinkertons of Princeton.

Michigan officials enjoyed no campus security force, and placed the responsibility for conducting investigations on the student leaders of the Advisory Committee. At Iowa State, the ISGC chairman conducted most investigations.21

20 331st Government Committee Meeting, 3 Jan. 1927, Box 9, SCC Records, ISUA.
21 Leitch, A Princeton Companion, 391-393; [J.B. Waite] to M.L. Burton, 24 May 1923, CSD Records, Box 5, UMA.
Students enjoyed no privacy rights in terms of campus discipline at any institution. Michigan students learned of their peers’ infractions and punishments by reading the campus newspaper. The UMCD regularly inserted its actions into the “Daily Official Bulletin” which was published in the Michigan Daily. A typical notice included the student’s name, his anticipated year of graduation, the college or school in which he was enrolled, the infraction, and the punishment. If the Advisory Committee had investigated the incident and the UCD followed its suggested sanctions, the bulletin also included this information. Occasionally, the UMCD used this forum to communicate important matters to and attempt to correct the behavior of the larger student body. Princeton officials reserved a similarly prominent place to notify the community of their findings: the bulletin board in Nassau Hall, the oldest and most prominent building on campus. While there is no evidence of public notices for infractions at Iowa State or Smith, no students could keep their misbehavior from their parents. The coordinator of discipline at each institution sent letters home after the proceedings had ended and the punishment had been decided.22

The University of Michigan provides an excellent example of how these complex systems of discipline worked. After receiving a complaint against a Michigan man, Bursley usually asked the Advisory Committee of the Student Council to investigate. The student leaders then questioned the college man to ascertain the validity of the charges. They also relied on witnesses to provide information, either in person or in writing. The committee then passed judgment on the student and sent that decision as well as a recommendation for punishment to Bursley. Once the student leaders had made sufficient progress, Bursley notified the UMCD members to convene. Bursley joined the three Senate members and the faculty representative from the charged student’s college. Students from the Advisory

Committee also regularly attended UMCD meetings. The student under investigation generally testified during a meeting, but did not remain for the deliberations. The UMCD might also hear from witnesses. The UMCD members then voted on whether or not the charged student was guilty of the offense and, if so, decided on his punishment. If the Advisory Committee had made a recommendation to the UMCD, the committee members usually followed that advice. In several incidents the faculty members increased the sanctions that the students levied, but they never reduced them. The UMCD communicated its decisions to the student’s academic dean, the dean of students (even when Bursley attended the meeting), and the dean of women. The academic dean could not overturn the UMCD’s findings or lessen its punishment, but he could increase the sanctions. The responsibility to notify the students rested upon the academic dean; the responsibility to notify parents rested upon Bursley.23

Institutional leaders had developed a complex system to handle allegations of college students’ misbehavior by the early years of Prohibition, and college students who drank alcohol often became personally familiar with this system. The surviving discipline records vary widely both across and within institutions. Princeton, a relatively small institution that operated a centralized discipline system, seemingly has the most complete records. Iowa State’s records also seem exhaustive, though they cease without explanation after the end of the 1927-1928 academic year. The records at Michigan, the largest of the four institutions and the one that operated the most decentralized system, have some

23 On requesting a meeting of the UMCD, see J.A. Bursley to W.A. Freyer, 19 Nov. 1925; J.A. Bursley to William A. Frayer, 19 Feb. 1926, CSD Records, UMA. For typical sessions of the UMCD, see UMCD Minutes, 17 Dec. 1926, 10 May 1927, 19 Dec. 1929, CSD Records, UMA. On increasing the Advisory Committee’s suggested punishments, see UMCD Minutes, 21 May 1928, 19 Dec. 1929, CSD Records, UMA. On communicating punishments to deans, see J.A. Bursley to M.E. Cooley, 5 April 1927; J.A. Bursley to John R. Effinger, 5 April 1927; C.H. Fessenden to H.C. Sadler, C.H. Fessenden to M.L. Ward, C.H. Fessenden to J.A. Bursley, 9 March 1929, CSD Records, UMA; Basil Edwards to Alice Lloyd, Basil Edwards to J.R. Effinger, 15 March 1930; C.T. Olmsted to J.R. Effinger, C.T. Olmsted to J.A. Bursley, C.T. Olmsted to Alice Lloyd, 1 June 1933, CSD Records, UMA.
significant holes regarding student discipline. All of the UCD and several of the college-level committees’ records survive, but records in other colleges appear to be less intact. More glaring, none of the Women’s Judiciary Committee records endure. Similarly, none of the Student Council’s Judicial Board records exist at Smith, so most insights into the discipline system come from the correspondence sent to and from the warden. Though the uneven nature of the discipline records makes for imperfect comparisons between the institutions, those that survive combine to provide approximations of the proportion of alcohol-related cases at each campus and reveal college authorities’ chief concerns regarding student drinking.

**Alcohol Cases in the Discipline System**

Just as alcohol-related incidents occupied a great deal of the legal community’s resources, so too did a similar situation develop on college campuses. At Iowa State, Princeton, Smith, and the University of Michigan, cases involving student drinkers proliferated in the discipline systems. College authorities, like many individuals responsible for enforcing Prohibition, spent a great deal of time and energy on alcohol-related discipline cases, but probably addressed only a small fraction of student drinkers and drinking incidents. Efforts to eliminate alcohol-use lead to coercive tactics on campus and in the community that students, and many other Americans, came to resent.

The percentage of alcohol-related cases within the discipline system varied widely between the institutions, but comprised a significant proportion of the discipline docket everywhere (see figure 4.2). Most of these cases involved only an alcohol-related offense—being intoxicated, holding a drinking party, or storing alcohol—but in a significant portion of cases alcohol use coincided with—or contributed to—other infractions, such as many for disorderly conduct. Princeton, where nearly sixty percent of all discipline incidents were alcohol-related, provides an extreme example of the extent to which drinking dominated some campus discipline systems. Less complete numbers survive at Michigan and do not
include any discipline cases considered at the college-level or those for college women, but alcohol-related cases comprised the plurality of problems heard by the UMCD. Deeper into the Midwest, Iowa State had a considerably lower though significant percentage of alcohol-related cases. Smith College had the smallest percentage of alcohol-related cases, but still one in five incidents involved drinking. Also, Smith women faced more stringent behavioral expectations than college men generally, such as having a 10:00 p.m. weeknight curfew and needing to “sign out” with college authorities to leave campus, so there were more rules for them to break. If Smith women only had to abide by the rules of Princeton men, their percentage of alcohol-related cases would be considerably higher.

**Figure 4.2:** Percentage of Alcohol-Related Cases in the Discipline System during Prohibition. University of Michigan percentage only includes cases of male students heard by the University Committee on Discipline; Iowa State’s percentage only involves cases heard between 1920 and 1928.
A variety of sources notified college authorities about students’ alcohol use. Police reported lawbreakers, landlords complained about tenants, chaperones became upset with their charges, and local residents wanted peace and quiet instead of revelry. Other students did the wrong thing in the wrong place at the wrong time. As the crowds left the stadium following the Iowa State-Drake football game in Des Moines in 1925, the ISGC records noted, an older spectator saw two “rather noisy” young men who “announced rather prominently that they were from Ames and glad of it.” When the two realized they were among fellow fans rather than foes, they “insisted on shaking hands.” At that point, the older fan recognized an “odor of strong liquor” on their breath. He stopped the two and asked for their names and addresses. One of them gave a different Ames address each of the three times he was asked. The other one said that he belonged to a certain fraternity at Iowa State until his address-forgetting friend convinced him “that he was not only not a member of that organization but was not even a student at the college.” The older man also saw that both men had “generous sized bottles on their person.” The older man took the intoxicated duo to a nearby gas station and questioned them further, realizing that they had provided false names. He left the two in the charge of the station attendant until they “sobered up somewhat,” but not before instructing them to come to his office in the Chemistry Building first thing Monday morning. Only then did G.B. MacDonald, ISGC chairman, head back to Ames.24

College authorities involved students’ parents in their efforts to address drinking on campus. At every campus, the discipline authorities notified parents of their student’s misbehavior and punishment. Even those Princeton students who received a reprimand or warning for drinking often had letters sent to their parents. At Michigan, the letter did not usually include the reason for the action, but noted that the student had been instructed to provide details of the incident. Bursley explained this approach to one parent: “It has

24 290th Government Committee Meeting, 8 Dec. 1925, Box 6, SCC Records, ISUA.
always been my practice ... to have the report made to the parents by the boy himself rather than have it come from this office, as it has seemed to me that it is much better for the boy to have to face the facts ... than it is to have someone else tell the story for him.”25 Parents served as a double-edged sword in the campus discipline process: their notification served as a punishment for students and provided additional supervision of students.

The growth in alcohol-related discipline cases at Princeton and Iowa State suggests that the legal atmosphere created by Prohibition converged with the middle class’s embrace of alcohol to increase the extent of drinking as a discipline problem (see figure 4.3). For institutions such as Princeton where student drinking had long been part of campus life, Prohibition made a wider range of behaviors a violation of campus rules. During Prohibition, the number of Princeton students found responsible for alcohol-related infractions ranged between forty and sixty each year. The PUCD disciplined a total of seventeen students for alcohol-related offenses in the two semesters that preceded Prohibition and twelve during the semester that followed. These numbers equate to around twenty percent of the average annual number of alcohol-related cases considered during Prohibition. That is, national Prohibition correlated with a five-fold increase in alcohol-related discipline cases at Princeton. All of the alcohol-related cases were for intoxication in 1919, so the spike during Prohibition resulted from drinking alcohol below the point of intoxication, storing alcohol, and being present but not consuming alcohol at drinking party becoming new violations of campus regulations. At institutions like Iowa State where drinking had not been a widespread campus pastime before Prohibition, students started to drink during a time when college authorities could not tolerate it. The

25 For examples of the PUCD notifying parents, see PUCD Minutes, 8 Dec. 1920, 25 Feb. 1920, 23 Jan. 1923, 5 March 1925, DUS Records, PUA. On UM officials communicating with parents, see J.A. Bursley to W.W. Speer, 1 Nov. 1923; J.A. Bursley to J.P. Rowe, 19 June 1926; C.C. Little to Mrs. W.J. Smith, 16 Sept. 1926; J.A. Bursley to F.S. Kellogg, 29 March 1933; E.B. Stason to L.G. Palmer 26 June 1933, CSD Records, UMA. On Bursley explaining his parental notification policy for informal infractions, see J.A. Bursley to Mrs. W.R. Gregory, 29 March 1933, CSD Records, UMA.
ISGC heard no alcohol-related cases in the first two years of Prohibition, but by mid-decade Iowa State suffered from numbers of drinking violations that approached and even surpassed Princeton’s (although it is important to note that Iowa State’s student population was double Princeton’s).

Figure 4.3: Number of Alcohol-Related Cases by Year at Princeton and Iowa State.

Even though alcohol-related incidents comprised an increasing number of discipline cases during Prohibition, most student drinkers eluded campus authorities just as most American drinkers avoided legal repercussions. The numbers of college students who drank alcohol appears to have increased over the course of the 1920s, with a majority of students at many campuses drinking by the end of the decade. In 1930, nearly thirty thousand college students at seventeen different institutions, including Michigan and Princeton, participated in a survey that revealed the extent of their alcohol use. Nearly four thousand Michigan students (sixty-seven percent of the institution’s participants) and
almost fifteen hundred Princeton men (seventy-nine percent of the institution’s participants, the highest of any participating institution) responded “yes” to the question, “Do you ever drink?” Put another way, twice as many Princeton students admitted to drinking in one year than appeared before the PUCD during the entire course of Prohibition.26 

Perhaps college authorities were grateful that many student rule-breakers escaped detection because the alcohol-related cases they heard occupied a great deal of time. Nowhere was this more true than at Iowa State. A woman who lived on a nearby farm provided a report to ISGC about several college men, their drinking, and their questionable behavior with several young women, including her daughter, on February 4, 1925. After a two-hour evening conference with the woman, the ISGC met the entire following workday, from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 to 5:00 p.m. The ISGC convened from 3:00 to 11:45 p.m. the next day. That Sunday the ISGC gathered three times to discuss the cases created by the report. Ten days after the initial meeting with the woman, the ISGC members met for another twelve hours and forty-five minutes to discuss the cases, not adjourning until 1:00 a.m. The ISGC met at least thirteen times for more than forty-four hours over the course of two weeks to resolve the cases. While this may have been an extreme example, it was not an isolated one. ISGC minutes are full of remarks such as “[a]fter several hours of questioning” and “he was questioned very closely for a number of hours,” suggesting that service on this committee required a great sacrifice of time for faculty members.27


27 231st Government Committee Meeting, 4 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 232nd Government Committee Meeting, 5 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 233rd Government Committee Meeting, 5 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 235th Government Committee Meeting, 6 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 236th Government Committee Meeting, 8 Feb.
In the quantity of cases and the time they involved, college authorities shared similar experiences with other individuals responsible for eliminating alcohol use. During two years of Prohibition, Philadelphia police made almost 230,000 alcohol-related arrests. In a survey of U.S. attorneys, these prosecutors reported spending more than forty percent of their time on alcohol-related cases. In places where enforcement was heaviest, their time involvement was highest. One U.S. attorney particularly devoted to the dry cause spent more than twice the national average, roughly ninety percent, of her time on eradicating alcohol.28

Of all types of discipline cases, those involving alcohol were probably most prone to demand the president’s attention. Since he approved or rejected every suspension or expulsion, President Neilson at Smith had the most regular involvement in such cases. In 1926, a Smith student who was studying abroad in France broke several rules in an evening that included drinking champagne and dancing with a young man on Montmartre. Her infractions coincided with a presidential visit to the program, so Warden Scales wrote her parents, “You ... will be very thankful to realize that in such a serious situation President Neilson is there.” At Michigan, Presidents Burton and Little both expressed concern to Bursley and the UMCD about reports of intoxication at Swing-Out, a farewell party for graduating seniors. At Iowa State, G.B. MacDonald wrote to President Pearson regarding the most egregious discipline cases, most of which involved alcohol use. Princeton’s president seems to have been the most immune to dealing with students’ drinking,

1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 238th Government Committee Meeting, 8 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 239th Government Committee Meeting, 9 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 240th Government Committee Meeting, 8 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 241st Government Committee Meeting, 11 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 243rd Government Committee Meeting, 14 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 245th Government Committee Meeting, 16 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 247th Government Committee Meeting, 17 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 248th Government Committee Meeting, 17 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 332nd Government Committee Meeting, 4 Jan. 1927, Box 9, SCC Records, ISUA; 344th Government Committee Meeting, 3 May 1927, Box 9, SCC Records, ISUA.

28 Okrent, Last Call, 253-255.
although Hibben did receive a letter regarding students frequenting an illicit drinking establishment that resulted in five students appearing before the PUCD in 1924.29

College authorities were interested in a certain set of information in nearly every alcohol-related case. They worked to determine who had been drinking, how much alcohol had been consumed, where the drinking occurred, and from whom the students acquired their alcohol. Because students usually got their alcohol from individuals off campus, discipline leaders often expressed extreme frustration with third-parties, blaming them and deflecting responsibility. Following an incident where a drunk college man broke into a sorority house, trashed the interior, and was later arrested, the UMCD passed a motion requesting that “President of the University ... make every effort to see that the person or persons who sold liquor to ... [the student] be apprehended and brought to trial and to use every means in his power to induce the State and other authorities to rid Ann Arbor and vicinity of bootleggers.”30 Legal authorities also shared this focus on providers as opposed to individual drinkers, but, because so few college students were providers, this outlook allowed college authorities to shift their frustration from those they ostensibly could control to those they could not.

For an era when alcoholic beverages and not their effects were the target of Constitutional and Congressional scrutiny, Michigan and Princeton officials spent a surprising amount of effort on determining if students had become “intoxicated.” The


30 PUCD Minutes, 29 March 1920, 1 Feb. 1921, 7 March 1921, 4 June 1923, 16 June 1923, DUS Records, PUA; UMCD 15 March 1933, CSD Records, UMA.
PUCD made most of their distinctions based on the testimony of students and proctors. After a proctor found several Princeton men drinking in a speakeasy in 1924, he appeared before the PUCD and “testified that all of the men had glasses of beer standing in front of them” but that “[n]o one of the party was at all intoxicated.” At other times, proctors were “unable to say precisely” whether a student was intoxicated. In 1925, three college men admitted to drinking wine in their dorm room “but stated that they were not drunk.” The proctor disagreed, asserting “that all three were obviously under the influence of liquor.” At Michigan, the UMCD dismissed a case against a student who admitted to drinking before a campus dance but denied intoxication. Instances of such leniency may have provided encouragement to the many men who appeared before the UMCD to admit consumption but deny intoxication, including one who vomited in the stands at a football game in October 1923, but appeared before the committee and “denied intoxication.” A decade later the UMCD considered the cases of two students and concluded that although each “had been drinking in the course of the evening, he had not reached a state of serious intoxication.”31

Some students, mostly men, resisted the discipline process or challenged their charges. Discipline authorities often became convinced that a student was being dishonest. When the ISGC conducted an investigation into alcohol use in a specific fraternity in May 1927, the chapter president eventually admitted that he had instructed the members to “not tell the committee a thing.” Many college men admitted to drinking but contested any reports that they had been intoxicated. College men usually offered up their personal actions, but not those of their accomplices who had escaped detection. At a PUCD meeting on April 4, 1921, a participant in a drinking party claimed “that he didn’t know the name of the place where they had obtained the liquor” and “refused to give the name

of the man who had sold them the liquor.” Five years later to the day, another student who “preferred not to disclose the identity of the place” to the PUCD where he and his friends had “obtained three quart bottles of red wine.” Most commonly, Princeton students refused to say from whom they acquired the alcohol, but tried to reassure, or convince, the PUCD that it was not a fellow student.32

Students at Iowa State appear to have been the most prone to provide details against their friends and providers, probably because of the particularly aggressive questioning of the ISGC. The record of a meeting between a fraternity member and MacDonald provides a representative example of an interrogation. The young man had arrived at Iowa State as a freshman and joined a fraternity in 1922, attended the University of Illinois the next year and lived in his fraternity’s chapter house in Champaign, and then returned to his original fraternity brothers in Ames as a junior. With his chapter under an intensive investigation for a slew of alcohol-related offenses, the student tried to provide minimal details to MacDonald. At every turn, however, the chairman pushed for, and usually received, additional information. MacDonald began the meeting by asking the student about his experiences with alcohol at Illinois. The student at first only offered “that he used some liquor at that place” with his fraternity brothers and that he had never acquired the alcohol. “On being pressed,” however, he revealed how often their drinking parties occurred (about once a month), how much alcohol they usually consumed (“about a quart of liquor”), when they took place (between 9:00 p.m. and midnight), where they took place (“all of the drinking was done in the automobiles”), and with whom (no women). MacDonald then turned his attention to the young man’s actions at Iowa State. “On being pressed on the matter of securing liquor in Ames,” MacDonald noted, the student “finally admitted” that he had obtained “a quart of gin” as he prepared to leave school in June

32 344th Government Committee Minutes, 3 May 1927, Box 9, SCC Records, ISUA; PUCD Minutes, 14 April 1921, 7 June 1923, 16 June 1923, 14 April 1926, DUS Records, PUA.
1923. The student was “not inclined at first to tell where” he had obtained the alcohol, but “he finally told.” Worn down, the student relayed how much he had paid for this alcohol, mentioned at least three other drinking incidents involving his Iowa State fraternity, and offered his perception of which “present or former [fraternity] members … were most responsible for the liquor situation.”

As this intensive questioning suggests, records of alcohol-related cases reveal disconcerting administrative practices in the discipline process. Not only did Iowa State students face intense questioning, the ISGC often worked to entrap students. After receiving a report, the ISGC sometimes met with a student who did not know the charges being investigated. In 1924, a woman running a boarding house asked a young man to find a new place to live because of his involvement with alcohol. Unaware that the reasons for his eviction had become known to the ISGC, he told the committee “that he had not been required to leave … but that his change in location was voluntary.” Several years later the ISGC asked a student “if he had ever offered liquor in his room to another person. While the student responded that he had not, MacDonald informed the other ISGC members that he possessed “a direct statement which could be sworn to” attesting otherwise. Nor did students have the right to know, much less challenge, their accusers. At Smith, Scales warned a chaperone who had provided details that led to the dismissal of two students, “I have not given your name and have refused to do so, but it is entirely possible for them to find out…. I hope most sincerely that you may be spared such an interview, and I have done what little I could to prevent it.” Intrusive and aggressive efforts to enforce the alcohol ban, like those exhibited by college discipline authorities, among law enforcement officers outside of the college walls contributed to many Americans becoming displeased with Prohibition.

33 241st Government Committee Meeting, 2 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA.

34 291st Government Committee Meeting, 9 Dec. 1925, Box 7, SCC Records, ISUA; 315th Government Committee Meeting, 9 Sept. 1926, Box 8, SCC Records, ISUA; 344th Government Committee Meeting.
Coming nowhere close to addressing most student drinkers or eliminating alcohol use among their students, college authorities nonetheless expended a great deal of effort on alcohol-related discipline cases during Prohibition. The amount of time they devoted to investigations of alcohol-related cases produced administrative records that provide deep insights into Prohibition-era student drinking behavior. What they learned gave cause for concern.

Some Things Old, Some Things New

Discipline records reveal that Prohibition-era college students drank in ways both similar to and different from earlier eras. Both the similarities and the changes shared an important characteristic: they mirrored the behaviors regarding drinking in the larger society. Nearly all the changes in Americans’ drinking behavior, both on campus and off, resulted in riskier and more dangerous behaviors during Prohibition. As it had for nearly three centuries, drinking on campus remained primarily the prerogative of college men. The vast majority of students who drank alcohol were men, and they usually drank in all-male groups in all-male spaces. At Princeton, where many students lived in campus dormitories, their rooms remained popular places to drink. Fraternity men at Iowa State and Michigan engaged in both planned and impromptu drinking parties in their chapter houses.35 While college men remained the stars of student drinking, they began to share

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35 See for example, 239th Government Committee Meeting, 9 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 272nd Government Committee Meeting, 6 June 1925, Box 6, SCC Records, ISUA; 273rd Government Committee Meeting, 7 June 1925, Box 6, ISUA; 275th Government Committee Meeting, 9 June 1925, Box 6, SCC Records, ISUA; 357th Government Committee Meeting, 2 June 1927, Box 10, SCC Records, ISUA; UMCD Minutes, 1 June 1929; 13 Oct. 1933, CSD Records, UMA; J.A. Bursley, Chairman, Committee on Student Affairs, to Mr. Stuart M. Smith, President, Phi Delta Theta Fraternity/Mr. Donald S. Bell, President, Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity/Mr. John Noyes, President, Kappa Sigma Fraternity/Mr. Charles B. Cumings, President, Delta Kappa Epsilon Fraternity/Mr. David C. Finley, President Theta Delta Chi Fraternity, 12 Feb. 1931, CSD Records, UMA; PUCD Minutes, 1 Feb. 1921, 7 March 1921, 23 April 1923, 23 Oct. 1923, 12
the stage, however slightly, with college women. The most significant difference in drinking between college men and college women is that the women almost exclusively drank with men. Most of these male drinking companions were also college students. It was very rare for college women to drink in same-sex settings or outnumber men at drinking parties. At Iowa State, each alcohol-related case of a college women coincided with imbibing men. Even at all-female Smith, it was much more common for students to drink with men from Amherst or Williams than among themselves. College men and women drinking served as a significant subset of Americans who, for the first time since the antebellum period, began to drink in mixed company, though men continued to outdrink women. In the fifty years preceding national Prohibition, drinking was sharply segregated by gender, with men drinking at saloons and with the far fewer women drinkers, especially among the middle and upper classes, drinking at home. According to one popular historian, the mixed-gender cocktail party “became an American institution” during Prohibition.\(^{36}\)

Many students continued to arrive on campus in the 1920s with an established relationship with alcohol. Some came with ingrained hostility towards Prohibition, some came with prior drinking experiences, and some came with both. When a Princeton student appeared before the PUCD for being under the influence of alcohol in 1923, he told the faculty “that he was in the habit of drinking at home, where champagne was served

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\(^{36}\) L.L. Scales to Dr. Fosdick, 19 Sept. 1927, Box “Special Cases A-F,” Folder A, DC Records, SCA; Memorandum from L.L. Scales to President, n.d., Folder Ba, SCA; L.L. Scales to F.L. Nardin, 24 Aug. 1923, Folder Ba, SCA; L.L. Scales to Mrs. H.F. Griscom, 25 May 1932, Folder Go-Gr, SCA; L.L. Scales to Mrs. T.N. Stilwell, 14 Nov. 1927, Box “Special Cases Pat-Z,” Folder Sti-Su, DC Records SCA. For the few examples of Smith students apparently drinking in all-female groups, see “Notes for Judicial Board,” n.d., Box “Special Cases G-Par,” Folder Go-Gr, DC Records, SCA; “Florence Stilwell,” 13 June 1929, Box “Special Cases Pat-Z,” Folder Sti-Su, DC Records, SCA.

On the rise of drinking in mixed company in American society, see Okrent, Last Call, 207, 211; Pegram, Battling Demon Rum, 168, 175-176; Burns, The Spirits Of America, 196.
at table once a week, and that he occasionally took a drink at the country club on coming in from a game of tennis.” An Iowa State man in trouble for arriving to campus with several bottles of alcohol in 1926 admitted that he “had been engaged in three liquor parties” that summer. The following year, ISGC members did not believe a student’s claim that the whiskey in his room had been prescribed by his physician father for “use when he was threatened with a cold,” but they were soon in possession of telegram that read, “My son Arthur’s statement is correct.” Even college women arrived on campus with previous encounters with alcohol. When Smith’s warden wrote to an interested party about a troubled student, she received a letter that explained the young woman had “a rather brilliant journalist” for a father, but he was “drunk and dissipated so much” that he could not keep a job. Then the student proceeded to date a man who had apparently been kicked out of two colleges “for drinking and gambling.” The principal of a private school in Massachusetts admitted to Scales that one of their students before arriving at Smith had participated in “at least one gin party.” Back at Iowa State, one woman admitted to the ISGC that she had drunk at a different college once “and another time at a wedding.”

Some students found that there remained establishments in their college towns amenable to drinking students. The Parrot Lunch Room, the Dixie Barbeque, and the 316 Club hosted Michigan student drinkers in the early 1930s. Proctors regularly caught Princeton students intoxicated at Sipley’s Restaurant and the Baltimore Dairy Lunch. Smith women were able to sneak drinks into several of the restaurants they frequented around Northampton. Businesses in Ames proved less hospitable to Iowa State’s drinkers, so they regularly headed into the nearby towns of Boone and Nevada to quench their

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thirst. These establishments were open to all prospective drinkers. Indeed, one of the most significant alcohol-related changes during Prohibition was the shift from the saloon, populated by working class men, to the speakeasy, populated by wealthier Americans of both genders, as a central place for drinking alcohol. In many places, there were more than-legal speakeasies, roadhouses, and restaurants that served alcohol during Prohibition than legal saloons before, with twice as many drinking establishments (over thirty thousand) operating in New York City by 1930 than had operated in the 1910s. The most significant difference between the saloon and the speakeasy was the welcomed presence of women, so when college students drank in mixed company they both reflected and furthered a national trend.38

As the proliferation of drinking establishments in New York suggests, nearby cities still served dual purposes for student drinkers during Prohibition, as places for students both to obtain and to drink alcohol. Cities were the last respite for many thirsty Americans before 1920, as smaller towns and rural counties used the local option to ban alcohol. Cities continued in this role throughout the nation-wide ban. Princeton students brought alcohol back from their trips to New York City, New Brunswick, Trenton, and Philadelphia. Princeton students also took trips to the same cities to drink. Iowa State’s close proximity to Des Moines, located about thirty miles to the south, ensured that


On the popularity of the speakeasy and the mixed company it attracted during Prohibition, see Burns, *The Spirits Of America*, 197-198; Okrent, *Last Call*, 207, 211-212; Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum*, 176.
students had regular access to alcohol. In September 1924, one Iowa State student told the ISGC “that he had made a number of trips to Des Moines with the purpose ... of securing liquor, which he stated was used (in practically all cases) in Des Moines.” Other Iowa State students went to the state capital with sole purpose of getting alcohol and bringing it back to campus. Michigan students’ favorite drinking destination during Prohibition was the much bigger and much wetter Detroit, a city that was not only a major point of importation of Canadian alcohol but also “supported a thriving urban moonshine operation.”

Long gone were the days when students entertained their guests with alcohol during class days and commencements, but some students marked another type of event that brought large numbers of visitors to campus with alcohol. By the 1920s, Americans were thoroughly obsessed with men’s intercollegiate athletics, especially football. Fans who flocked to stadiums on game days regularly encountered intoxicated students. A “large number of people” at a football game in 1920 saw a Princeton student “climbing around the parapet of the stadium, very dangerously,” in what one professor complained to the PUCD “was one of the most disgraceful exhibitions he had ever seen.” Two years later, a proctor monitoring another Princeton football game ordered two drunk students to their rooms, but he testified that “they returned to the stadium still intoxicated.” Michigan men sometimes gathered in the stadium’s restrooms to sneak sips of bootleg liquor. At Iowa State, the wettest annual event was the homecoming football game, as many recent alumni returned to campus with alcohol to share with their younger friends. College women

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39 On the importance of the city as a place to drinking during Prohibition, see Burns, *The Spirits Of America*, 197-198; Okrent, *Last Call*, 208.

appear to have been more discreet in their consumption, though some Smith women participated in drinking parties after football games at nearby men’s colleges.40

Many of the adverse side effects of student drinking during Prohibition resembled those of earlier eras. Students vomited, blacked out, passed out, and overslept. In 1923 at Princeton, a night guard reported “that a dead man was lying on the floor of the toilet room” in a dormitory. The student was not dead, but a proctor had to help him to his feet and back to his room. That year two other students had insisted to the PUCD that they were not noisy drunks. Rather, no one knew that they had been drinking until hearing “the noise they made” from vomiting. The ISGC learned that a student drinker was so surprised when he walked into a room in his fraternity house at the time “occupied by a man and his wife” that “he jumped out and fell” down the stairs. In February 1933, a Michigan freshman had a drink at the Parrot Lunch Room before he “went home and got ready for bed.” No sooner was he undressed than he decided to walk to his fraternity house. He put on his bathrobe, overcoat, and slippers and ran out the door, making little progress before crashing into the sidewalk. A month later, an editor of the Michigan student newspaper also drank some liquor at the Parrot Lunch Room before returning to the office. Several students later found him “in the stock room in an almost unconscious state.” Rare were the college women who reported severe effects from drinking, probably because they drank far smaller quantities than their male counterparts.41


41 PUCD Minutes, 6 May 1921, 7 Nov. 1923, 28 May 1923, DUS Records, PUA; “General Consideration,” Government Committee on Discipline, n.d., Box 8, ISUA; Albert Gregory statement, 13 Feb. 1933, UMA; UMCD Minutes, 21 March 1933, CSD Records, UMA; “Notes for Judicial Board,” n.d., Box “Special Cases G-Par,” Folder Go-Gr, DC Records, SCA;
The behaviors and consequences regarding student drinking that persisted over time coincided with significant changes. Most students now drank alcohol of high potency and low quality. College men replaced their wine with whiskey, their hard cider with gin, and their beer with “spiked” beer. In June 1923, a Princeton student “testified that he had not planned to get drunk but ... he had become intoxicated ‘spontaneously’ ” from drinking “about a pint and a half of ... gin.” Three years later, several Iowa State fraternity members went into the country and got a gallon of liquor. The liquor proved to be too strong for any of them to drink, so they hid it while they searched for something to dilute their moonshine. Some of their brothers, with apparently higher thresholds for strong drink, found the contraband and consumed it. A Michigan student “admitted that he had been drinking spiked beer at the Dixie Barbecue” to the UMCD in 1933. Smith women who drank generally consumed lighter or diluted beverages such as a “blackberry cordial” or wine, though they were no strangers to straight gin or whiskey.42

Students’ reliance on hard liquor was shared by most drinking Americans during Prohibition. In 1919, lager beer constituted the majority of alcohol drank in America. During Prohibition, the proportion of hard liquor drank more than doubled to reach seventy-five percent. Gin, or what was called gin, became the most popular form of alcohol during Prohibition. A variety of factors converged to make hard alcohol more attractive.

Most brewers and winemakers had to convert their operations to prevent fermented beverages from reaching the market, but the production of industrial alcohol, necessary for a wide range of commercial products—chemicals, insecticides, cleaning agents, and fuels—continued unabated. The illegal alcohol market employed many people, both qualified and unqualified, to transform these poisons into potable drinks. Moreover, the combination of the high price of Prohibition-era alcohol and the necessity to often conceal their drinking encouraged Americans to choose a drink that offered the fastest path to the desired result.43

Students also began to mix their alcohol use with driving automobiles. Students first brought their automobiles to campus in mass numbers in the 1920s, and every campus resisted their arrival. Smith women were only allowed to have cars in their final semester at college. Iowa State officials maintained a list of students’ license plates so that any vehicular misdeeds were easily attributed to the appropriate party. College authorities had a slew of reasons to dislike the combination of students and vehicles, but two of the most important had to be that vehicles enabled drinking and that student drinkers drove. Some students held drinking parties in their cars. Many college men drove sober to Des Moines, Trenton, or other nearby towns to drink alcohol, but did not wait until they were sober again to return to campus. Smith women, even when they had not been drinking, were often the passenger of a man who was under the influence. Of course, college students were only a subset of the population that contributed to this dangerous practice, as both the incidents of and arrests for drunk driving increased dramatically during Prohibition. This increase was partially due to the rising numbers of cars on the road, but also because the automobile served as a place where Americans could drink in private in addition to transporting them to out-of-the-way roadhouses.44

43 Burns, The Spirits Of America, 217-218, 221-222; Lender and Martin, Drinking in America, 146; Okrent, Last Call, 209-219, 214.

44 190th Government Committee Meeting, 19 Dec. 1923, Box 2, ISUA; 232nd Government Committee Meeting, 5 Feb. 1925, Box 4, ISUA; 255th Government Committee Meeting, 11 March 1925, Box 5, ISUA; 260th Government Committee Meeting, 11 April 1925,
Drinking in mixed company contributed to heightened levels of sexual activity among college students. The partners of most college men who engaged in intercourse appear to have been women of lower social standing not enrolled in college. For example, the ISGC learned that a young man at Iowa State was “accustomed to using liquor” while “keeping company with girls in Des Moines of questionable character” for “immoral” purposes. The farmwoman whose report resulted in a flurry of ISGC meetings concerned a handful of fraternity men drinking with young women and contracting and spreading sexually transmitted diseases. The PUCD tried to determine if any “immorality” had occurred when college men were caught drinking with women. In 1925, a Smith student who had been ejected from a Williams College dance for being intoxicated earlier in the evening was discovered in a dormitory room wearing “either a chemise or a night-dress.” The next night, a different Smith student was passed out “dead drunk” under a blanket on the couch in the same room with two young men who were “only partly dressed.” Most college students, and certainly most college women, did not have sexual intercourse, but for those who did, alcohol was a frequent accomplice.45

On the role of the automobile facilitating alcohol use during Prohibition, see Okrent, Last Call, 222, 283-284.

45 231st Government Committee Meeting, 4 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 332nd Government Committee Meeting, 4 Jan. 1927, Box 9, SCC Records, ISUA; 347th Government Committee Meeting, 5 May 1927, Box 10, SCC Records, ISUA; PUCD Minutes, 6 May 1925, 25 Sept. 1929, 13 Oct. 1930, 10 April 1933, DUS Records, PUA; F.V.D. Smith to L.L. Scales, 18 March 1925, Folder Ba, SCA.

On the sexual activity of young people during the 1920s, see Fass, The Damned and the Beautiful, chapter six.
Prohibition meant that for the first time, almost every college student who drank, like everyone else in America, had to participate in the illicit liquor market, an enormous economic force that, best estimates indicate, provided employment to more than a half million people, generated more than $1.5 billion (nearly $20 billion in 2010) in sales each year, and constituted nearly two percent of the gross national product. For most student drinkers, their participation meant buying alcohol from bootleggers or from businesses that still operated as dispensaries. According to PUCD minutes, Princeton students “obtained ... liquor from a bootlegger in Trenton” or “from a man who pretended to be a Yale man.” In 1926, a new Iowa State student arrived on campus with “one pint bottle and two half pint bottles of liquor” that he “secured ... above a grocery store” in his hometown. Later that academic year, the Government Committee received “a definite report” that a student had purchased liquor at a pharmacy in Des Moines, and not for the purposes of treating an illness. When nine graduating seniors at Michigan planned “a farewell outing” at a cottage on a lake to “play ball, swim and have supper and beer” in 1929, the UMCD soon learned that they “arranged with a bootlegger to secure and deliver the beer.” In the final year of Prohibition, another student “bought liquor from a bootlegger which he took to the Parrot Lunch Room.” Although men provided most of the alcohol college women drank, a small handful of Smith students were involved enough in the illicit market to be indebted to a bootlegger or to know whom to call when their male companions wanted a drink.46

46 On the scope of the illicit alcohol market during Prohibition, see Burns, The Spirits Of America, 203, 206; J. C Furnas, Great Times: An Informal Social History of the United States, 1914-1929 (New York: Putnam, 1974), 355; Miller, New World Coming, 296, 300.

PUCD Minutes, 23 April 1923, 28 Nov. 1923, 5 March 1925, DUS Records, PUA; 330th Government Committee Meeting, 21 Dec. 1926, Box 8, ISUA; 362nd Government Committee Meeting, 10 June. 1927, Box 10, ISUA UMCD Minutes, 1 June 1929, 21 March 1933, CSD Records, UMA; L.L. Scales to Mrs. W. Dunbar, 5 May 1931, Box “Special Cases A-F,” Folder Da-end, DC Records, SCA; “Notes for Judicial Board,” n.d., Box “Special Cases G-Par,” Folder Go-Gr, DC Records, SCA.
Other students assumed more active roles in the underground trade. Some
students stole alcohol. In November 1927, ISGC Chairman MacDonald learned that
“three and one-half gallons of grain alcohol ... disappeared” from a storeroom in the
Chemistry Building at Iowa State. In the course of searching the building, a janitor found a
“five gallon can, about two-thirds filled with alcohol” hidden in a closet in a restroom.
College authorities soon realized that all of the cans and bottles in the building that should
have contained alcohol were empty, representing about three additional missing gallons.
Then an employee saw a college man come up from the basement “carrying a metal
container of approximately five gallons capacity,” leave the building, toss the can into a
“touring car,” and jump “on the running board” as “the car hurriedly drove away.”

In another aspect of their involvement in the Prohibition-era alcohol economy,
some students tested their scientific training in attempts to produce alcohol. In January
1921, a Princeton student appeared before the PUCD “to exonerate” his friends and take
responsibility “for the presence of a fermentorium” in their room. The student admitted to
putting a large amount of cider and two boxes of raisins into the device in an effort, he
(probably dishonestly) claimed, “to make the drink, not alcoholic, but more according to
his taste.” Iowa State students similarly bought cider and added sugar, raisins, and yeast so
that it “changed somewhat from its original state.” When an Iowa State chemistry major
appeared before the ISGC after a still had been discovered in his closet, committee
members came to believe that he “had been engaged in re-distilling some of the denatured
alcohol” stolen from the Chemistry Building “for the purpose of ridding it of some
poisonous qualities.” These students were just a handful of participants in a new national
pastime. During Prohibition, Americans took to brewing beer, making wine, and distilling
grains in their homes at unprecedented levels. Creation and consumption in the home was

47 377th Government Committee Meeting, 5 Nov. 1927, Box 11, ISUA; 378th
Government Committee Meeting, 7 Nov. 1927, Box 11, ISUA; 379th Government Committee
Meeting, 8 Nov. 1927, Box 11, ISUA.
legal, and Americans only broke the law if the alcohol they made entered the marketplace. However, college authorities made no such distinctions. Students who tried to make alcohol, either for personal consumption or to provide for others, broke the college rules.  

A handful of students sold alcohol, a much more serious involvement in the illicit market than buying from a bootlegger or small-scale production. During the fall of 1921 and the spring of 1922, a Michigan student sold whiskey he acquired from a distributor, “disposing of an average of about twelve quart bottles per week.” A less successful Princeton student “had tried to sell to students ... [but] had sold four quarts only” the same academic year. In 1927, two Michigan students participated in the increasingly popular pastime among many Michiganders of bringing liquor across the border from Ontario into Detroit. A young man who was not currently enrolled nonetheless returned from his hometown to his fraternity house at Iowa State where he proceeded to load up a dresser with twenty “half pints of liquor” which he “offered for sale” in October 1924. That December an enrolled student sold another Iowa State student “a pint of liquor,” telling his purchaser “that he had eleven customers yet that evening to see.”  

At least one entrepreneurial Princeton student had the skills and connections to both make and sell alcohol, reaching a particularly high-level of involvement in the illicit

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48 PUCD Minutes, 12 Jan. 1921, DUS Records, PUA; 333rd Government Committee Meeting, 5 Jan. 1927, Box 9, ISUA; 291st Government Committee Meeting, 9 Dec. 1925, Box 7, ISUA; 295th Government Committee Meeting, 23 Dec. 1925, Box 7, ISUA. Students making alcohol was not reserved to these four campuses. In Maine, Bowdoin College students used the college’s laboratory equipment to brew beer, Okrent, Last Call, 214. On the extent of Americans making alcohol beverages in their home during Prohibition, see Burns, The Spirits Of America, 190-197.

49 UMCD to J.R. Effinger, 13 Oct. 1922, CSD Records, UMA; UMCD Minutes, 17 Dec. 1926, 18 Nov. 1927, CSD Records, UMA; PUCD Minutes, 22 Nov. 1921, DUS Records, PUA 223rd Government Committee Meeting, 5 Dec. 1924, Box 3, SCC Records, ISUA; 226th Government Committee Meeting, 15 Dec. 1924, Box 3, SCC Records, ISUA. See also G.B. MacDonald to C.A. Lowry, 21 Sept. 1922, Box 15, SCC Records, ISUA; 88th Government Committee Meeting, 9 May 1922, Box 15, SCC Records, ISUA.
alcohol industry. In January 1933, maintenance employees “discovered a collection of liquor” in the basement of one of the campus buildings. The proctors kept a close watch on the stash and less than a week later caught a student “leaving the collection ... with two pint bottles and a half-pint bottle,” all full of liquor, the PUCD learned. A search of his room revealed even more alcohol and an “apparatus for the manufacture of gin.” All told, the proctors found five one-gallon jugs partially filled with four different types of liquor (“alcohol,” “apple,” “gin,” and “rye”), four quart bottles filled with three different types of liquor (“apple,” “gin,” and “rye”), two empty gallon jugs, twenty-two empty bottles, and a funnel. The student admitted to selling the alcohol to his peers. He had put two and two together: he “found where he could get the liquor cheap” near his hometown and “knew students to whom he could sell it.” The student “saw a chance to make some easy money and took” it. He would go home on the weekend, get the alcohol, securely pack his suitcase, and return to campus “without anyone knowing.”  

The secrecy that surrounded alcohol use during Prohibition affected student drinkers. Sometimes they did not know what they were drinking. After a halftime drinking party in a stadium restroom, a Michigan student admitted, “To be frank I cannot tell just what brand of liquor it was, but it seemed like a rotten home made gin.” A Princeton student believed that he had taken two drinks of wine, but acknowledged that “he did not know the character of the wine and admitted that the liquor may have been cocktails.” One of the reasons students did not know what they were drinking is that they did not know who gave them the alcohol. Various Princeton students admitted receiving alcohol “from a man who pretended to be a Yale man,” a bootlegger who they “had never seen ... before,” and a “Navy man” whom they had just met—or had it “given ... by strangers.” At Iowa State, “some person unknown” sometimes knocked on the door of fraternity houses and asked whoever answered “if he could use some liquor.” A bellboy at a Des Moines

50 PUCD Minutes, 7 Feb. 1933, DUS Records, PUA
hotel asked another Iowa State student “if he would like to secure some liquor” and, when the student responded in the affirmative, gave him directions to drive into the country. There, someone in “a Ford coupe drove up” and “handed [him] a quart bottle of alcohol,” he later explained to the ISGC. A Smith woman went “out with a man whom she had never seen before.” He “offered her ‘white wine’ from a flask,” and the two stood “in the shadows at the back of” the campus laundry and drank.51

New side effects and consequences of drinking also emerged on campus during Prohibition. Students sometimes blamed their behaviors on the poor quality of alcohol. The Michigan student who passed out in the newspaper’s stockroom believed “the entire blame for his difficulty should be placed upon the extremely bad grade of liquor … and was quite sure he would not have become intoxicated if he had been drinking good liquor.” Sometimes college authorities bought these arguments. In 1920, the PUCD decided that a student who had gotten sick at a campus dance “was the victim of poisonous liquor” and “passed that the case be dismissed with a warning.” A year later, a proctor took one of two Princeton students who had become so intoxicated that they were literally “found lying in a gutter” to the campus infirmary, “fearing that the boy had been poisoned.”52

Although flouting the law had led to their misfortune, some students were justified in blaming the booze as they surely were, like many Americans, victims of the unregulated and dangerous alcohol market. During Prohibition it was the norm for drinkers to not know the origins of the alcohol they consumed, and they would have been appalled if they had known. “Gin” became the drink of choice because it was particularly easy for someone

51 Report of Conduct, 7 Nov. 1931, CSD Records, UMA; PUCD Minutes, 12 Jan. 1921, 23 April 1923, 23 Oct. 1923, DUS Records, PUA; 220th Government Committee Meeting, 2 Dec. 1924, Box 3, ISUA; 370th Government Committee Meeting, 29 Sept. 1927, Box 11, ISUA; L.L. Scales to Mrs. C.A. Mewborn, 21 May 1928, Box “Special Cases G-Par,” Folder M, DC Records, SCA;

52 UMCD Minutes 21 March 1933, CSD Records, UMA; PUCD Minutes, 8 March 1920, 25 Oct. 1921, DUS Records, PUA.
to add glycerin and juniper oil to industrial alcohol, perhaps dilute it with some water, and sell it. Americans drank—sometimes knowingly, often unaware—iodine, cologne, nitric acid, formaldehyde, gasoline, wood alcohol, and anti-freeze as part of beverages designed to produce a buzz. Prohibition-era alcohol tasted so bad that Americans invented the cocktail, making their drinks palatable by adding juice, soft drinks, and tonic water. Government regulations contributed to the problem, expecting manufacturers to denature industrial alcohol (make it poisonous to drink) and later to add an emetic to induce vomiting. Bootleggers hired individuals to make the poison potable, with mixed results. Many drinkers of a particularly potent form of alcohol, Jamaica gin, developed a permanent limp. Those who drank other types of alcohol became blind or suffered kidney damage. By the mid 1920s, more than six hundred people died from drinking bad alcohol in New York City each year, helping one historian to conclude, “Poisoned booze was the great, unsung tragedy of Prohibition.”

Not only was students’ health at risk, so was their liberty. Students’ participation in the illicit liquor market made them targets for law enforcement. Many student drinkers had run-ins with police. In January 1923, four Princeton students drove into New York City, bought some gin, and went into an establishment in Greenwich Village where they sat at a table “with an elderly man and girl.” They soon learned “that the elderly man was an officer in civilian’s clothes.” Another student claimed that a law enforcement officer told him “that the police of Trenton want to ‘get’ Princeton students.” Iowa State students drinking in the nearby small towns of Nevada or Boone occasionally came to the attention of the local sheriff and get arrested. A Michigan student complained to UMCD—the wrong audience, it would seem—about how the “police congregate outside of the Dixie [Barbeque] and the 316 [Club] a little before” closing time “and are ready for any students that leave.”

53 Burns, The Spirits Of America, 217-224; Lender and Martin, Drinking in America, 143; Okrent, Last Call, 209, 214-215, 221; Pegram, Battling Demon Rum, 172.
The police told students “to go home in a rather antagonistic fashion” and those who argued got in trouble. “And what student won’t argue after a few beers?” he asked.54

These encounters often led to arrests, nights in jail, trials, and fines. In March 1921, three Princeton students were arrested for intoxication in Trenton, spent the night in jail, and were fined and released the next morning. The exact same situation in the same town, albeit with different sets (though the same number) of students occurred in April 1921, April 1924, and February 1930. The Michigan student who was so efficient in “disposing” Canadian whiskey was in jail awaiting his trial by March 1922. At Iowa State, a student who “was engaged in making liquor” soon found himself “before the Civil authorities.” Because law enforcement agents could seize and disperse all material items involved in the illicit trade, they sold the car that an Iowa State student was driving when he was arrested for transporting liquor. The group of collegians that escaped the legal system was college women, probably as a result of drinking less often, consuming smaller amounts when they drank, and gender discrimination that actually worked in their favor. In May 1927, a detective found four young men and four Smith students dancing and drinking in a cottage. He told the men “to report to” the district attorney while he took the women back to campus.55

Sometimes students got in way over their heads. In May 1927, the local sheriff confiscated a letter sent from an inmate in the county jail intended for an Iowa State student and passed it on to the ISGC. The inmate had come to the conclusion that having a college man vouch for his reputation to a local judge might lessen his eight-month

54 PUCD Minutes, 23 Jan. 1923, 9 April 1924, DUS Records, PUA; 370th Government Committee Meeting, 29 Sept. 1927, Box 11, ISUA; UMCD Minutes, 7 Nov. 1933, CSD Records, UMA

55 PUCD Minutes, 7 March 1921, 14 April 1921, 9 April 1924, 5 Feb. 1930, DUS Records, PUA; J.A. Bursley to G.J. Cowing, 1 April 1922, CSD Records, UMA; 211th Government Committee Meeting, 10 July 1924, Box 3, ISUA; L.L. Scales to Dr. Fosdick, 19 Sept. 1927, Box “Special Cases A-F,” Folder Be-Bo, DC Records, SCA
sentence and heavy fine. He wanted to speak with the student first so that they could align their stories. He also conveyed that the student had little choice in the matter. “You know I can draw you into this case if I get up and swear to an affidavit that you received any money on any sale,” he warned, “[s]o you had better get yourself over here Friday.” Other Iowa State students made the newspaper for all the wrong reasons. Local law enforcement and college authorities soon identified six students, all members of the same fraternity, they believed responsible for stealing the alcohol from the Chemistry Building in 1927. Prosecutors dropped charges against three of the students, but the remaining three were soon on trial. The proceedings captured the attention not only of the local community but also the entire state, with the *Des Moines Register* running a headline, “Ames Passes Up Football for Liquor Trial.” 56 Many Americans faced legal repercussions for their drinking during Prohibition, but that college students, who had long represented the rising social leaders, often broke the law and encountered legal troubles surely caused particular concern among college authorities, their parents, and many in the larger society.

There was also no shortage of negative consequences from college students’ drinking and driving. Some students were arrested for driving while intoxicated. A Princeton student borrowed a car and took a friend to a roadhouse in 1926. The young man later testified to the PUCD that he “did not realize that he was drunk when he started to drive back.” Indeed, the student was so impaired that he also did not know that the “car was swaying side to side,” nor could he remember how he got arrested. Others had accidents after they had been drinking. A woman attending Iowa State who, along with a sorority sister and two fraternity men, had been drinking in Des Moines, drove off the road on the way back to Ames. Still other students got arrested for having wrecks while intoxicated. A Michigan student had a particularly adventuresome Sunday morning, having

56 361st Government Committee Meeting, 9 June 1927, Box 10, ISUA; “Ames Passes Up Football for Liquor Trial of Three Students: Crowd Cheers When Lee Fires on MacDonald,” *The Des Moines Register* (Des Moines, IA, November 11, 1927), Morning edition.
“obtained some intoxicating liquor” that he drank with friends. Around 11:00 a.m., he left the gathering, borrowed a car, and proceeded to be arrested after colliding into “two other machines, one on each side of the main street.” And at least one student got arrested for stealing a car while intoxicated and wrecking it. In March 1922, three Princeton students hitchhiked to Trenton where they became intoxicated at a speakeasy. One of the students, apparently wanting a faster and more guaranteed way back to campus, stole a taxi. Yet “[h]e did not understand the car and crashed into an automobile ahead of him.” He was then arrested (as was one of his companions who tried to get him out of jail). Even in their vehicular misfortune, student drinkers engaged in a national pattern of exponentially rising arrests for drinking and driving during Prohibition.57

Despite these many changes in drinking behavior on campus, alcohol consumption remained a pastime primarily reserved for the most privileged students. Princeton, which by far attracted the wealthiest student body, had the largest number of alcohol-related cases—over seven hundred—despite being far from the largest of the four institutions. Fraternity and sorority membership was often indicative of familial wealth and resources. Fraternity men dominated the discipline docket for alcohol-related cases at Iowa State and, to a lesser extent, at Michigan (Princeton did not have fraternities and Smith did not have sororities). At Iowa State, fraternity men, pledges, or former members were responsible for nearly ninety percent of alcohol-related cases; all but one woman charged with alcohol-related violations belonged to a sorority. And while college women drank more often than

57 PUCD Minutes, 4 May 1926, DUS Records, PUA; 239th Meeting of the Government Committee, 9 Feb. 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; J.A. Bursley to E.D. Whalen, 11 April 1927; PUCD Minutes, 14 March 1922, DUS Records, PUA. See also 190th Government Committee Meeting, 19 Dec. 1923, Box 2, ISUA; 272nd Government Committee Meeting, 6 June 1925, Box 6, ISUA; PUCD Minutes, 14 April 1921, 13 Oct. 1922, 4 June 1923, DUS Records, PUA; L.L. Scales to Mr. Rotan, 25 May 1932, Folder Q-R, SCA; UMCD Minutes, 17 Dec. 1926, 15 March 1933, CSD Records, UMA.

On the rise of drinking and driving in American society during Prohibition, see Okrent, Last Call, 222.
in earlier eras, they enjoyed nothing close to parity with college men when it came to
drinking on campus. There are fewer than thirty surviving records for alcohol-related cases
at Smith and around ten for Iowa State women.

If nothing else, the financial costs of drinking during Prohibition relegated the
behavior to the most affluent students. Prohibition-era alcohol was expensive. An Iowa
State student who was paying for his car with money earned from selling alcohol bought
alcohol for twenty dollars a gallon (approximately two hundred dollars in 2009) and sold it
for five dollars a pint (approximately sixty dollars in 2009), earning “practically one
hundred percent profit.” Indeed, around five dollars a pint is what most Iowa State
students paid for their alcohol. A Smith woman had worked up a “bill ... of nearly $50”
from a local bootlegger in 1923, or the equivalent of more than six hundred dollars in
2009. The penalties for getting caught drinking were also prohibitive for any student
without significant resources. The Michigan bootlegger in jail remained there because he
could not afford the one hundred dollar bail (over twelve hundred dollars in 2009).
Princeton students paid so many fines for drinking in the towns and cities that surrounded
their college that their contribution to municipal income cannot be overstated. Most of
these fines ranged from ten to twenty dollars, but could go much higher. In 1926 alone,
judges levied fines against individual students in amounts of $71.25, $100, and $300
(approximately $850, $1,200, and $3,600 in 2009). That same year, an Iowa State fraternity
fined its most egregious drinkers $25 (more than $300 in 2009). With so much money
needed to drink during Prohibition, it is not surprising that sometimes when college
authorities deliberated on an alcohol-related case they decided, like the ISGC in 1925, that
a student “had probably too much money available for his [or her] use in college.”

58 On the expensiveness nature of alcohol during Prohibition, see Burns, The Spirits of
America, 199; Lender and Martin, Drinking in America, 145.

304th Government Committee Meeting, 19 March 1926, Box 7, ISUA; “Notes for Judicial
Board,” n.d., Box “Special Cases G-Par,” Folder Go-Gr, DC Records, SCA; PUCD Minutes, 23
March 1926, 4 May 1926, 18 Oct. 1926, DUS Records, PUA; G.B. MacDonald to C.B. Smith, 25
Compared to antebellum college men who purchased fine wines and liqueurs at considerable expense, Prohibition-era students expended similarly large amounts of money on alcohol of much lower quality and unknown origins.

While the most advantaged collegians had long been the most prone to drink, they assumed an even more prominent societal role in terms of drinking in the 1920s. No longer were young people in general and college students in particular looking to adults for guidance regarding alcohol. Rather, they became the trend-setting drinkers. According to the insightful synthesis of historian Thomas Pegram, “An intersection of powerful social forces—an assertive youth movement, new patterns of sexual dynamics, and demands for leisure-time amusements spurred by an expanding consumer economy—broke down the saloon culture of male drinking and replaced it with a culture of youthful, recreational drinking which emphasized social contact between men and women.”

The last aspect of Prohibition-era student drinking also harkened back to earlier eras: the subtle but pervasive culture of violence that coincided with collegians’ alcohol use. In 1922, the ISGC heard that an intoxicated Iowa State student “attempted to fight some of the spectators at the Ames-Kansas basketball game” in 1922. At the Princeton-Georgetown football game the next year, a student from each school, both of whom had been drinking, got into a verbal and physical altercation, “creating a highly disreputable scene.” Five years later on the train back from Columbus following the football game against Ohio State, another Princeton drinker “took a friendly pass at a friend” who ducked, so that the first student’s “fist went through the window.” During the last year of Prohibition, a college man at Michigan became “extremely intoxicated” and broke into a sorority house where he proceeded to smash windows and damage furniture. Violence was

Sept. 1926, Box 8, SCC Records, ISUA; 258th Government Committee Meeting, 18 March 1925, Box 5, SCC Records, ISUA.

59 Fass, The Damned and the Beautiful, 310-324; Okrent, Last Call, 213, 222-223; Pegram, Battling Demon Rum, 175.
sometimes perpetrated against student drinkers. In January 1921, a Michigan student who, having drank whiskey with his friends and proceeded to sing loudly on the streets of Ann Arbor in the early morning hours, attempted to flee a police officer. The officer yelled for the student to stop and fired a warning shot into the air, before taking aim and shooting the student. The bullet entered his back—“passing completely through his liver”—and the student entered emergency surgery at the university’s hospital.60

College student drinking was pervasive and problematic during Prohibition. As college students helped set national drinking trends during Prohibition, they not only flouted the Constitution and often broke the law, students also adopted many dangerous drinking practices. Thus, college authorities had good reasons to eradicate drinking from campus. Although college authorities were armed with a wide arsenal of ways to punish student drinkers, they often only fired warning shots.

**Punishments and Perspective**

Discipline authorities had wide latitude to punish student drinkers who flouted the Constitution and broke the law. Yet they, like many responsible for enforcing Prohibition, often provided mild penalties for alcohol-related offenses. College authorities struggled with how to regulate an illegal but increasingly common activity, becoming more lenient towards drinking over the course of Prohibition and expecting greater adherence to the law among older students than underclassmen. But while college authorities were meting out (often light) punishments, they became the target of criticism, as did many American political and legal leaders, for either punishing student drinkers too lightly or too severely. By the end of the 1920s, many college authorities decided that Prohibition had to go.

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60 75th Government Committee Meeting, 2 March 1922, Box 15, SCC Records, ISUA; PUCD Minutes, 16 Oct. 1933, 20 Nov. 1928, DUS Records, PUA; UMCD Minutes, 15 March 1933, CSD Records, UMA; “Student, Shot by Policeman, Is in Hospital; May Die,” *Ann Arbor Times News* (Ann Arbor, MI, January 24, 1921); B.C. Colcord to Committee on Discipline, 25 Jan. 1921, Committee on Discipline to College of Engineering Faculty, 8 Feb. 1921, College of Engineering Records, UMA.
Sometimes college authorities required additional coursework or withheld the diploma for alcohol-related cases, but the vast majority of punishments fell into one of three categories: probation or a warning; suspension; or expulsion (see figure 4.4). The harshest penalty was the most rare. The PUCD, hearing the most alcohol-related cases of any disciplinary body among the four institutions, expelled only seventeen students for such infractions. Authorities at the other institutions dismissed a higher proportion of students, but only at Smith did expulsions exceed another form of penalty (suspensions). Nearly a quarter of charged students escaped with probation or a warning at Iowa State, Smith, and Princeton. Smith officials, who were most prone to expel college women for alcohol-related offenses, were also the most lenient. Four out of every ten students charged with an alcohol-related violation received probation (or, in Smith’s terminology, earned demerits that limited social privileges). By far the most common penalty for student drinkers at Iowa State, Michigan, and Princeton—or more accurately, the most common penalty for college men—was suspension. Between sixty and seventy percent of students charged in an alcohol-related discipline case received a suspension, which usually entailed leaving campus and the surrounding community for the duration of the punishment.61

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On students receiving probation or a warning for alcohol-related cases, see 221st Government Committee Meeting, 3 Dec. 1924, Box 3, SCC Records, ISUA; 224th Government Committee Meeting, 12 Dec. 1924, Box 3, SCC Records, ISUA; 240th Government Committee Meeting, 8 Feb 1925, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; PUCD Minutes, 4 Dec. 1922, 23 Jan. 1923, 5 March 1925, 13 March 1926, 11 April 1930, DUS Records, PUA; L.L. Scales to Mrs. C.A. Mewborn, 21 May 1928, Box “Special Cases G-Par,” Folder M, DC Records, SCA; L.L. Scales to N.P. Breed, 15 March 1926, Box “Special Cases A-F,” Folder Br-Bu, DC Records, SCA; L.L. Scales to Mrs. T.N. Stilwell, 14 Nov. 1927, Box “Special Cases Pat-Z,” Folder Sti-Su, DC Records, SCA;
Suspension as the most common punishment for student drinking may sound harsh to modern ears, but its length and effect varied widely among the institutions (see figure 4.5). Punishments for Iowa State and Smith students who were suspended for their alcohol-related offenses usually lasted between one term (a quarter at Iowa State and a
semester at Smith) and one year. Rarely did suspensions last longer than a year. Most of the
punished at Michigan and Princeton enjoyed far briefer separations from campus. Many
Michigan men were caught drinking in early June, right before the academic year ended.
The UMCD typically suspended these students for “the remainder of the term,” but
allowed them to take their final exams when they returned to campus in the fall. Princeton
drinkers spread their appearances before the PUCD more equitably across the academic
calendar. The PUCD suspended the vast majority of drinkers for less than two weeks. Of
course the real penalty was not the length of the suspension per se, but rather its effects on
academic progress. At most, the short-term suspensions at Michigan and Princeton lowered
students’ grades that term in an era when many students only exerted enough effort to earn
a “gentleman’s C” and their GPAs had minimal impact on future professional success. On
the other hand, the long-term suspensions usually delayed Iowa State and Smith students
from receiving their degrees on time.

The leniency toward alcohol-related cases in the college discipline system reflected
the actions within many American legal institutions responsible for enforcing Prohibition.
To clear their growing docket of alcohol-related cases, city courts developed systems that
provided small fines rather than prison sentences for individuals who plead guilty. Indeed,
many local law enforcement officers and courts decided to levy only fines against
Prohibition violators, adding to their coffers while minimizing their expenses. When
alcohol cases went to trial, juries often refused to convict their neighbors for drinking. In
New York, a state particularly hostile to Prohibition, fewer than thirty of more than seven
thousand alcohol-related arrests resulted in convictions. But most notorious were the
policemen on the payrolls of organized crime syndicates who turned a blind eye toward,
when they were not facilitating, illegal alcohol activities.62

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62 Lender and Martin, *Drinking in America*, 154; Okrent, *Last Call*, 255-256; Pegram,
*Battling Demon Rum*, 160-161; Miller, *New World Coming*, 297, 301.
At each campus, punishments that exceeded warnings or short-term suspensions resulted from several scenarios: students who were publicly intoxicated at local restaurants; students who drank or were intoxicated at campus events, especially dances and football games; students who had previously appeared before the committee; students who (discipline authorities believed) provided dishonest testimony; and students involved in the illicit alcohol market beyond buying alcohol. At Smith, most instances of suspension or expulsion for drinking involved a woman who had a prior discipline record, regardless of whether the earlier incident was alcohol-related. In 1925 at Princeton, the PUCD expelled two students who had brought 36 bottles of liquor into their dormitory and had, at the time of the discovery, sold eleven of them. While drinking was not always punished harshly, college authorities were not above using an alcohol-related incident to remove an unwelcome student. When a Michigan student was arrested and convicted for illegal
possession of intoxicating liquor in 1931, the UMCD members decided “that his presence at the University was extremely undesirable” and “denied permission to re-enter this University.”63

Subtle evidence suggests that college authorities connected adherence to campus rules and federal laws to the expectations of adulthood, having higher expectations of and reserving harsher punishments for older students. The ISGC placed an Iowa State sophomore on probation for trying to ferment apple cider, concluding “that this affair was pretty much of a ‘small boy trick’ and that it could be handled without serious action.” An Iowa State senior who admitted to several occasions of intoxication was less lucky. Because he had served as a class officer, a fraternity president, and in student government, the ISGC believed “that he is a senior student and should have somewhat more judgment than some of the younger students attending the college.” “In other words,” the ISGC concluded, his alcohol use was “a more serious offense ... than if it happened in the case of an under classman who does not have any prominent connections on campus.” Such higher expectations for upperclassmen were not limited to Iowa State. After six Princeton juniors arrived at Vassar and took six younger college women to a nearby establishment and drank beer with them into the early morning hours, the college president wrote Dean Gauss, “I believe the choice of the speakeasy and the hours spent there were entirely due to

63 See for example, 190th Government Committee Meeting, 19 Dec. 1923, Box 2, SCC Records, ISUA; G.B. MacDonald to S. Bullock, 19 Dec. 1924, Box 4, SCC Records, ISUA; 315th Government Committee Meeting, 9 Sept. 1926, Box 8, SCC Records, ISUA; PUCD Minutes, 8 March 1920, 1 Feb. 1921, 18 May 1921, 14 March 1922, 12 Nov. 1925, DUS Records, PUA; L.L. Scales to M. Glass, 2 Oct. 1923, Box “Special Cases G-Par,” Folder Go-Gr, DC Records, SCA; L.L. Scales to E. Lewis, 10 June 1926, Box “Special Cases G-Par,” Folder Lew-Luf, DC Records, SCA; L.L. Scales to Mrs. E.L. Patterson, 27 May 1929, Box “Special Cases Pat-Z,” Folder Pat-Py, DC Records, SCA; UMCD Minutes, 3 Oct. 1922, 21 May 1928, 1 June 1929, 15 March 1933, 21 March 1933, CSD Records, UMA. On using alcohol as a guise to remove an undesirable student, see UMCD Minutes, 6 March 1931 CSD Records, UMA.
the insistence of the Princeton men and that they as upperclassmen ought to have had a better sense of responsibility.”

Of all the influences that affected penalties for an alcohol-related incident, gender seems to have been particularly powerful. College women often earned harsher punishments for the same behavior as similarly situated college men. Smith authorities regularly punished students for being around male drinkers, even if they had not drunk themselves. If the ISGC concluded a college woman had consumed alcohol, she always received a suspension for one year. Not only did college women have less leeway in terms of drinking, but they perhaps felt their punishments more deeply. An Iowa State father worried about the effect of his daughter’s year-long suspension for drinking. He explained that she “has scarcely gone any place since coming home…. She can’t hardly stand to see people on the account so many people don’t ask facts ... but would rather get an inkling ... and play on their imagination.” This experience at Iowa State may reveal why Smith authorities usually steered clear of suspensions. If they considered a woman worthy of continuing on at Smith, they probably figured they had better save her the embarrassment of a suspension and allow her to remain at college under closer watch; they would place only those women from whom they desired a permanent separation in the position to be socially ostracized.

This lower tolerance for women’s drinking than men’s and gendered concerns for women’s reputations also worked against college men who drank in mixed company. In

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64 315th Government Committee Meeting, 24 Sept. 1926, Box 8, SCC Records, ISUA; 334th Government Committee Meeting, 6 Jan. 1927, Box 9, SCC Records, ISUA; PUCD Minutes, 5 May 1932, DUS Records, PUA.

65 L.L. Scales to Mrs. F.C. Curtis, 21 Oct. 1924, Box “Special Cases A-F,” Folder Ch-end, DC Records, SCA; L.L. Scales to J. Churchill, 24 April 1923, Box “Special Cases A-F,” Folder Ch-end, DC Records, SCA; L.L. Scales to Mrs. Dunbar, 5 May 1931, Box “Special Cases A-F,” Folder Da-end, DC Records, SCA; 251st Government Committee Meeting, 25 Feb. 1925, Box 5, SCC Records, ISUA; 272nd Government Committee Meeting, 6 June 1925, Box 6, SCC Records, ISUA; 357th Government Committee Meeting, 2 June 1927, Box 10, SCC Records, ISUA; O.M. Bundy to G.B. MacDonald, 5 May 1925, Box 5, SCC Records, ISUA.
1926, three Michigan men rented a house where they entertained both “University girls” and “Ypsilanti girls” (probably students at the nearby Michigan State Normal College). The men drank a great deal; the women spent much more time cleaning up after the men, but occasionally imbibed. When this case reached the UMCD, all three men were expelled. Similarly, the PUCD punished Princeton men for either drinking with disreputable women or corrupting reputable women. In March 1928, a Princeton student showed up to a campus dance with an intoxicated date. Sent away from the dance, he and his date returned to his room “to give her another drink.” When a proctor later discovered them, he initiated the discipline process that culminated in the young man’s dismissal. Two years later, a night clerk discovered two Princeton men “very much under the influence of liquor” with “two disreputable women” in a room in the Nassau Inn. He called a proctor and a policeman. The PUCD dismissed both students.66

If the UMCD and PUCD punished college men harshly for drinking with women, they treated students involved in the court system gently. In the time between students’ arrest and their trial—anywhere from a week to several months—college authorities rarely took discipline actions against them. In January 1928, police arrested four Princeton students for assaulting some local residents after they all had been drinking. The PUCD “postponed” any penalties until after the case progressed. Three years later at Michigan, the UMCD decided to not take action against a student arrested for bootlegging “until his case had been disposed of in court.”67


67 PUCD Minutes, 10 Jan. 1928, DUS Records, PUA; UMCD Minutes, 6 March 1931, CSD Records, UMA.
Other than drinking with women, college men’s alcohol-related offenses had to be particularly egregious to result in expulsion even during Prohibition. By December 1923, the ISGC had already heard three cases over the course of two years, one of which involved being drunk during homecoming, against a student who again appeared on a charge of intoxication. They decided “that nothing will be gained in dealing further with him,” noting the obvious in justifying his expulsion: “He has already been given a number of opportunities to conduct himself in a way which a college student should, having made numerous promises in regard to his behavior.” Three years later, the ISGC expelled three young men, all of whom had been “the ringleaders” of a drinking party in a fraternity house, two of whom had sold alcohol, two of whom drank in a public park, and two of whom participated in an intoxicated serenade at a sorority house. The PUCD expelled the student who, after drinking to the point of intoxication, stole and wrecked the taxicab in Trenton in 1922. Several years later, the same fate befell the Princeton student who, after taking an exam “desired some form of relief or relaxation,” drove to Trenton with a friend, drank nearly a pint of applejack, and on the return to campus fell asleep at the wheel and drove into a bridge.68

College authorities appear to have become more lenient over the course of Prohibition, perhaps as a result of changing middle class attitudes toward drinking and the increasing perception that the noble experiment had failed. In 1920, a Smith student with no prior record was dismissed for becoming “partially intoxicated.” A month after Prohibition ended, Warden Scales wrote to two sets of parents whose daughters faced punishments for intoxication, “We had given our students a definite understanding that we would try not to handle the question of drinking as a matter of definitions and don’ts, but we would expect of them good behavior.” Both apparently received probation. In the

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68 PUCD Minutes, 14 March 1922, 29 May 1929, DUS Records, PUA; 75th Government Committee Meeting, 19 Dec. 1923, Box 2, SCC Records, ISUA; 315th Government Committee Meeting, 24 Sept. 1926, Box 8, SCC Records, ISUA.
early years of Prohibition, the PUCD regularly suspended drinkers for one week. By the fall of 1928, the PUCD instituted the “indefinite suspension” for most student drinkers. This suspension sounded harsh, but the punishment lasted as long as it took for the young man to visit his home, tell his parents of the incident, and return to campus with “a request from his father that his son be allowed to continue his studies.” Many Princeton students were back in class three days after receiving an indefinite suspension. Such increased leniency was also present in the American legal system. Most states had effectively defunded their Prohibition enforcement efforts by the late 1920s, with one historian noting that the states “together appropriated less than 15 percent of what they allocated for the enforcement of fish and game laws” in 1927.69

How did these punishments compare to those for other offenses? The only offense at Princeton that occurred nearly as often as drinking (and sometimes occurred alongside it) was having women in dormitory rooms after six o’clock in the evening. Even if the visiting woman was the student’s mother, the young man received a one-week suspension. As for expulsion, Princeton officials tended to reserve this for students caught stealing, whereas Michigan officials tended to use it for students who wrote bad checks. At both institutions, college authorities punished library misuse to a similar degree as drinking. The PUCD dismissed a student who removed a manuscript collection and suspended a student who checked out a book under a false name for three weeks, but punished most violators of the library rules with a one-week suspension. Smith made few distinctions among behavioral infractions: the first offense resulted in a warning and any subsequent issue

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placed the student in jeopardy for expulsion, regardless of whether it was staying out past curfew or drinking with men.\footnote{On one-week suspensions for having women guests in Princeton dorm rooms after 6:00 pm, see PUCD Minutes, 8 May 1923, 23 Oct. 1923, 14 Oct. 1924, 24 Jan. 1928, 2 May 1933, DUS Records, PUA. On library suspensions, see PUCD Minutes 31 May 1923, 13 March, 1925, 10 May 1926, 20 May 1926, 9 April 1929, 7 March 1932, 7 Nov. 1933, DUS Records, PUA; UMCD Minutes, 25 March 1927, 4 May 1928, 24 June 1932, CSD Records, UMA.}

An unacknowledged but ever present additional punishment was tacked on to each suspension or expulsion: the inability to attend another institution. Discipline authorities participated in an informal but effective national network of communication that usually prevented students under disciplinary sanction at one institution from enrolling elsewhere. Students who got in trouble at one institution had few options other than to wait out their penalty or make good with their punishers. College officials apparently placed punishments on transcripts. Officials from other institutions who received these red flags requested information from their counterparts. Administrators at the punishing institution replied with a letter containing a detailed account of the infraction, an assessment of the student, and a recommendation on whether to admit the student. Even if the college officials who had penalized the student encouraged acceptance—“We should be ready and glad to have you give her another trial,” Laura Scales wrote to the dean of women at the University of Wisconsin in 1923—their counterparts were usually more prone to reject than accept the student.\footnote{L.L. Scales to F.L. Nardin, 24 Aug. 1923, Box “Special Cases A-F,” Folder Ba, DC Records, SCA.}

While college authorities were ostensibly the only ones passing judgment in discipline cases, they became the target of criticism, often in relation to their handling of alcohol-related incidents. College authorities received criticisms from some Prohibition advocates that they did not seriously punish students’ alcohol-use. When a Michigan alumnus complained to an academic dean about his younger brother’s lengthy suspension
for being intoxicated at Swing-out, the dean responded, “I happen to know that there has been some criticism of the action of the University [Discipline] Committee for its lack of severity in cases involving objectionable conduct at the time of Swingout.” But more often discipline authorities received direct criticism for those negatively affected by their decisions. A handful of indolent, or brave, Iowa State students criticized every aspect of the Government Committee. Some did not take their punishments well. When the Government Committee suspended a student for his poor academic progress and his poor attitude for the remainder of the term in 1926, he responded, “I don’t give a damn if you make it ten years.” That same year, another student, apparently unaware of the difficulty involved in his proposal, “showed an extremely poor attitude and stated he would go to another institution” upon learning of his drinking-related suspension. Other students held a low opinion of the discipline system and believed the likelihood of getting caught was slim. A college woman under investigation for stealing, breaking social regulations, and drinking alcohol was “not afraid of the government board at all” and was quoted by several persons as saying, “‘All you have to do to get by with the authorities at this college is get a good story and stick with it.’” Others questioned the boundaries, or the lack thereof, of the campus discipline system. When the ISGC asked a student suspected of drunkenness about any experiences with alcohol before coming to Iowa State, he “refuse[d] to answer that question, stating that it had no bearing on the [present] situation and that this matter was beyond the jurisdiction of the college.” Iowa State officials also worried about “a rather common feeling” on campus, especially among fraternity men, that students who told the truth about their infractions received harsh penalties while “those who come up and falsify before the committee usually get out without any difficulty.”

72 J.B. Edmonson to H.A. Klein, 6 June 1933, CSD Records, UMA; 322nd Meeting of the Government Committee, 1 Nov. 1926, Box 8, SCC Records, ISUA; 337th Meeting of the Government Committee, 21 Oct. 1926, Box 9, ISUA; 347th Meeting of the Government Committee, 5 May 1927, Box 10, SCC Records, ISUA; 354th Meeting of the Government Committee, 18 May 1927, Box 10, SCC Records, ISUA; 356th Meeting of the Government Committee, 2 June 1927, Box 10, SCC Records, ISUA.
More troublesome to college authorities were the adults who attacked their process and punishments. Some parents were sympathetic to the campus disciplinarians but thought they had been too harsh toward their children. The heartbroken parents of the Iowa State student whose letter opened this chapter believed the ISGC had “been a little too severe” with their son, despite admiring “the standards of I.S.C.” and considering “only such rules ... make for a successful institution.” Several parents of Smith students who had been expelled for being drunk at dances at nearby men’s colleges demonstrated greater frustration and hostility. Warden Scales described “one of the stormiest scenes” in 1927 when a set of parents accused her of slander and a chaperone of lying. Another father, an attorney by training, argued that the college was “acting on hearsay and nothing was really proved” in dismissing his daughter for an alcohol-related offense.73

But another Smith father had sharper, and in many ways valid, criticisms of the college’s discipline system. He had asked for, and President Neilson had apparently promised to send, the specific charges that led to his daughter’s dismissal in 1920. Instead, he received a letter from Dean Comstock extolling the virtues of the Student Council’s Judicial Board. She wrote, “I have deep confidence myself in the validity of the Student Council’s decision ... and I feel that you would agree with me if you could know how carefully and by what standards it arrives at its decisions.” He did not. “You have sent me no evidence; no facts; you have none,” he responded. Claiming that his daughter had never known of any proceedings against her, he asked, “Is the Student Council, then, a sort of academic Camorra [a mafia organization], a Smith College Black Hand, which holds its meetings in secret and marks its victims for assassination without warning, without trial, without opportunity of defense? Do you call this a judicial board?” He then turned his fiery

73 A.T. Catlin to G.B. MacDonald, 2 July 1924, Box 3, SCC Records, ISUA; L.L. Scales to Dr. Fosdick, 19 Sept. 1927, Box “Special Cases A-F,” Folder Be-Bo, DC Records, SCA; Memorandum from L.L. Scales to President, n.d., Box “Special Cases A-F,” Folder Ba, DC Records, SCA.
pen away from the students and toward the administrator. “The astonishing thing to me is that the Dean of Smith College, an experienced and able woman, should be ready to defend and confirm such proceedings. You are worse than Torquemada [a leader of the Spanish Inquisition], for he at least gave his victims a chance to speak for themselves and recant, which you do not.”

At least this criticism was a private affair. Back in Ames, G.B. MacDonald and the actions of the ISGC were, quite literally, put on trial in November 1927. MacDonald had been warned a year earlier. He had sent the committee’s records on a particular case to an interested and sympathetic man. Upon sending the records back, his friend enclosed a letter that read, in part, “I shall probably be in your contempt for suggesting it, but if your records are inspected by a court you will have either the records or your judgment ripped up for their inadequacy. The judgment you enter up is not supported by ... evidence.” The letter proved ominous. When the six fraternity members accused of stealing alcohol from the chemistry building went to trial, their defense attorney, a former judge who was disgruntled from being prohibited, like apparently all counsel, from defending students before the ISGC, took his revenge. The lawyer called MacDonald to the stand and, according to the most widely-read newspaper in the state, “unloaded both barrels” in an effort to show that a student’s confession had been coerced by the professor. MacDonald described the “rather disgusting situation” and admitted that he was “in reality being tried” in a letter to President Pearson, now leading the University of Maryland, noting that many of the questions “have no bearing on the case at hand and are merely for the purpose of embarrassing and humiliating members of the government committee.” The trial was so well attended that people spilled out into the hall and down the stairway. Many of the spectators were students who “applauded repeatedly” during the defense attorney’s cross-

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74 A. Comstock to R. Glasgow, 14 Sept. 1920, Box “Special Cases G-Par,” Folder Ga-GI, DC Records, SCA; R. Glasgow to A. Comstock, 20 Sept. 1920, Box “Special Cases G-Par,” Folder Ga-GI, DC Records, SCA.
The harsh criticisms directed at college authorities resembled growing frustrations directed at local and national political leaders from Americans unhappy with the results of national Prohibition.

Even if most student drinkers escaped detection, and even if most of those caught received minimal penalties, college students’ alcohol use contributed to many tragedies during Prohibition. For those students suspended or expelled, especially those few who were from poorer backgrounds, these penalties put in jeopardy the opportunity for social advancement. The Princeton student who kept in the basement of a campus building that large stash of alcohol was on scholarship, one he may have not been able to keep. Family members pleaded for leniency to the college authorities who had suspended several Michigan seniors for intoxication at Swing-Out in 1933. One older brother wrote, “Since our Father’s death two years ago certain members of our family, including myself, have supplied funds at considerable sacrifice to meet my brother’s expenses. It is our honest desire that ... [he] complete his work at this time and become self-supporting.” Smith officials dismissed a student who had become intoxicated at a Williams fraternity dance in 1927, despite knowing “her home situation is rather tragic” and “all but down and out financially.” When the young woman applied to another college, even with an honest but positive recommendation from the warden, she was denied admission. The ISGC suspended for one year a college woman who was one credit hour short of the graduation requirements (though she still needed to take two required courses for her program). Her father requested a conference with the ISGC, explaining “that a rather serious financial hardship would be brought by the action,” but the penalty remained in place. 76

75 E.R. Harlan to G. MacDonald, 20 March 1926, Box 7, SCC Records, ISUA; “Ames Passes Up Football for Liquor Trial of Three Students: Crowd Cheers When Lee Fires on MacDonald,” The Des Moines Register (Des Moines, IA, November 11, 1927), Morning edition, 3; G.B. MacDonald to R.A. Pearson, 12 Nov. 1927, Box 11, SCC Records, ISUA.

76 PUCD Minutes, 7 Feb. 1933, DUS Records, PUA; D. King to A.J. Groesbeck, 9 June 1933, CSD Records, UMA; L.L. Scales to Mrs. A.M. Hadden, 15 March 1927, Box “Special Cases A-F,” Folder Be-Bo, DC Records, SCA; 251 st Government Committee Meeting, 25 Feb. 1925, Box
Students’ alcohol use also caused tragedies beyond those created by their punishments for drinking. The PUCD learned in March 1926 that a woman who lived on a New Jersey farm begged her husband not to help two intoxicated Princeton students get their car out of the ditch in the early morning hours, fearing that “they might kill him as” “some Princeton students in an automobile had killed one of her relatives” five years earlier. Such tragedies involving alcohol were certainly not limited to these four campuses. Indeed, Prohibition began with an unfortunate bang at Dartmouth. In June 1920, two seniors who had just finished all their exams were on a drinking “spree” when they ran out of alcohol. They visited the dormitory room of a junior, later revealed “to be a leader” of a “rum running operation at” the college. A disagreement over the price ensued—the seniors wanted to buy a quart for a price for which the junior wanted to sell only a pint. The seniors distracted the junior, grabbed a quart bottle without paying, jumped out of the window, and ran back towards their fraternity house. As they ran away, the junior grabbed his pistol and fired three shots. The seniors thought it only “an attempt to frighten them,” but they were mistaken. As the seniors got ready for bed in their bathroom that evening, the junior let himself into the room they shared in the chapter house. When one of them walked into their room and saw the junior seated at their desk, he approached the student bootlegger. The younger student waited until the senior closed in and then “reached across the desk, pressed his pistol against ... [his] side and fired.” The senior “died almost instantly, being shot through the heart”; the junior pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was sentenced to fifteen to twenty years of “hard labor in state prison.” The two seniors never drank the stolen alcohol.77

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5, SCC Records, ISUA; 253rd Government Committee Meeting, 6 March 1925, Box 5, SCC Records, ISUA.

Alcohol-related tragedies had a long history on campus before 1920, but the behaviors that contribute to that era’s disasters—drinking hard liquor of unknown origins, participating in an illegal market, and drinking and driving to avoid college authorities—could be attributed to the culture created by Prohibition. While they always wished and usually expected students to obey the law, many college leaders joined millions of other Americans to consider Prohibition a failure by the end of the 1920s. In 1930, a leading proponent of Prohibition and editor of the Christian Herald polled sixty-two college presidents to determine their views on the dry law. Only half responded, of which only another half, a group surely more sympathetic than the original sample, supported “strict enforcement of the prohibition act.” The survey organizer tried to spin these results as evidence of strong support for Prohibition among college presidents to a Congressional committee. But lawmakers heard otherwise. In 1932, two Yale educators testified before a U.S. Senate committee regarding the disastrous effects of Prohibition on campuses and urged passage of an amendment that would legalize beer production and consumption. One professor contrasted his undergraduate experience in the 1880s when students freely drank beer but avoided liquor to the current problem of students secretly drinking large quantities of hard liquor which they hid in flasks. Noting the large number of students who ignored Prohibition, a dean expressed his concern to the Senate: “It is a dangerous and ruinous thing for the country’s future to have its future leaders living at the present high tension and trained under a system which gives them unconsciously a deep-seated contempt for law.”78 A year later, these educators got their wish. On December 5, 1933, Utah became the thirty-sixth state to ratify the Twenty-first Amendment and thus repeal Prohibition.

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In sum, the campus discipline system served as one of many social features that failed to adequately enforce Prohibition. At the national level, neither Congress nor the Presidents were willing to provide the resources needed to effectively end drinking in America. In reference to the number of federal agents hired to end the illegal alcohol traffic, one historian concludes, “A few thousand well-trained and active agents would have been hard pressed to police the legal traffic allowed by the Volstead Act.” Charged with helping the federal Prohibition Bureau stop alcohol from being smuggled across the nation’s borders, coast guard patrols, customs agents, and immigration officials managed to stop only five percent of the contraband in 1925 alone. States stopped funding their enforcement efforts by the mid 1920s, while many cities did not put into action serious efforts in the first place.79

Back on campus, alcohol use dominated the discipline process, but college authorities rarely punished student drinkers harshly. College authorities adopted an approach to drinking that suggested violating federal laws did not place a college degree in jeopardy. At the same time, college authorities operated a complex discipline system that required an administrative staff to function, used a significant amount of faculty members’ time, incorporated students into university governance, and relied on parents to address college students’ alcohol use. Faced with rising problems of alcohol use on campus, many college leaders paradoxically wished away the only major attempt by the federal government to stop drinking.

After the repeal of national Prohibition in 1933, regulation of alcohol use returned to the state and local level for the next half century. But in 1984, Congress enacted the National Minimum Drinking Age Act, setting twenty-one years old as the minimum age for purchasing and possessing alcohol beverages and withholding federal highway funds from noncompliant states. For many jurisdictions, this raised the drinking age by three years,

79 Pegram, Battling Demon Rum, 157-158.
and a new generation of college authorities grappled with how to discipline illegal alcohol use. Institutional leaders returned to many of the disciplinary approaches first developed during Prohibition to confront a new paradoxical era in which a majority of students drink alcohol despite it being illegal, administrators spend a great deal of time on alcohol-related cases but address only a small fraction of drinking on campus, and significant resources are devoted to reducing student drinking with little success.
EPILOGUE

In 1933, Americans closed a long century of concerns over alcohol by repealing national Prohibition, the most ambitious effort to reduce drinking and eliminate its associated evils in their nation’s history. For most of the next two decades, they turned their attention away from alcohol as they tried to work their way out of the Great Depression and fight their way out of World War II. College students’ alcohol use again became the focus of many Americans’ attention as things returned to normal on campus and in the country in the late 1940s. Noting the prevailing perceptions regarding college student drinking—that many college students drank, often to excess and often resulting in “serious problems, embarrassment, or disgrace”—two Yale researchers, Robert Straus and Seldon Bacon, undertook an impressive investigation to prove or dispel these stereotypes. Their study, funded in part by an external grant and based on over 15,000 survey responses from students attending twenty-seven institutions during the 1949-1950 academic year, resulted in a two hundred-page book, *Drinking in College*, that garnered national press coverage and provided the first sophisticated portrait of student drinking on a national level.¹

Straus and Bacon’s study, by focusing on college students, relying on survey data, and receiving external support as well as considerable publicity, inaugurated a trend among alcohol researchers. *Drinking in College* was part of a larger Yale study on Americans’ alcohol use, and, at least initially, researchers continued to consider college students’ alcohol use in relation to drinking patterns in the broader society. Twenty years later, Lloyd Johnston at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan published findings from the Youth in Transition Project in 1973. Funded by the Grant Foundation in New York City,

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researchers surveyed male high school sophomores regarding their drug use, including alcohol, in 1966. The final sample, designed to be representative of the national population, consisted of 2,200 boys at 71 different public and private high schools. The researchers followed these students with subsequent annual surveys until one year after high school, at which time forty-six percent of the participants were enrolled in a two or four-year college.²

After completing the Youth in Transition Project, Johnston and his associates began a new study, Monitoring the Future, funded by the National Institute of Drug Abuse. Beginning in 1975, they annually surveyed high school seniors of both genders regarding their drug use at approximately 130 high schools, selected to be nationally representative. Over 15,000 students participate in the survey each year. From this larger group, a smaller sample of 2,400 students receive annual follow-up surveys. Like the Youth in Transition Project, this study had a broader research agenda than college students’ alcohol use, but revealed important findings about drinking on campus.³

In contrast to the Monitoring the Future study’s interest in the drug use of all American youth, beginning in the mid 1980s researchers increasingly refocused only on college students’ alcohol and drug use. At roughly the same time as the federal government’s mandate of a 21-year-old minimum drinking age, Cheryl Presley and colleagues at Southern Illinois University received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to develop a survey to measure alcohol and drug use among college students. The researchers’ goal was to create an instrument that was “statistically reliable and valid,


easily administered, of high quality, inexpensive, quickly scoreable, and capable of producing data that could be directly compared with data obtained from other major survey instruments.” Nearly one million college students have completed the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey (Core Survey) since its first administration in the 1989-1990 academic year. Although any college or university can use the survey to assess their students, Core researchers regularly combine the results from those participating institutions that achieve a representative sample of their student population to create a national data set of college student drinking. The Core Institute published its most recent findings in 2004, based on over 140,000 students’ surveys collected between 1998 and 2000.4

Both in its research design and its impact on policymakers and the general public’s perception of college student drinking, the College Alcohol Study (CAS), conducted by Henry Wechsler and his colleagues and the Harvard School of Public Health, serves as the most significant study of college students’ alcohol use to date. Students at over one hundred four-year colleges completed CAS surveys in 1993, 1997, 1999, and 2001. Receiving significant funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, their research led to over eighty related publications in a variety of highly respected peer-reviewed journals, including the JAMA, Journal of American College Health, NASPA Journal, and American Journal of Public Health. The CAS may be best known for popularizing the concept of “binge drinking.”5


Several themes emerge across these national studies. First, all of these studies explored the prevalence of alcohol use among college students, finding that a majority of college students have long chosen to drink. Straus and Bacon discovered three-quarters of college students used alcohol to some extent at midcentury. Twenty years later, Johnston found that seventy-eight percent of college men were either regular or “more than experimental” drinkers. Johnston’s subsequent work with the Monitoring the Future study revealed similar levels of college student drinking. From a high of ninety-two percent in 1985, the proportion of college students who have used alcohol at least once in the previous year had fallen to eighty-one percent in 2007. Over the course of the Core Survey, nearly eighty-five percent of college students reported having drunk alcohol in the previous year, a percentage the CAS confirms.6 As a whole, these national studies reveal at least two key findings regarding the prevalence of college student drinking: a majority of college students drank (with a remarkably stable rate over the sixty years of research); and a significant minority, approximately twenty percent, of college students chose not to drink.

These studies also suggest that college women have closed their historical drinking gap with college men. The earliest study found the largest difference, with a twenty-three percent gap in their first year of college (when forty-six percent of women reported drinking compared to sixty-nine percent of men) that shrank to ten percent by their senior year (seventy-seven percent of women compared to eighty-seven percent of men). Based on over thirty years of Monitoring the Future data, Johnston and his colleagues concluded that the annual use of alcohol “has been virtually identical for the two genders throughout the duration of the study.” Data from the Core Survey and the CAS also demonstrates similarities of drinking prevalence between the genders. The most recent results of the Core Survey found no gender differences in the number of students who have consumed

alcohol at least once in the previous year, and none of the four surveys conducted as part of the CAS found gender differences in alcohol use that exceeded two percent.  

In addition to the prevalence of alcohol use on campus, researchers have also investigated how often students drink. Straus and Bacon found that a significant proportion of college students who drank did so no more than once a month, but they also noted that over twenty percent of college men and ten percent of college women who drank did so two or more days a week. More than one-third of the college men participating in the Youth in Transition Project drank alcohol at least once a week, a sizable increase from Drinking in College. This increase in the number of students drinking each week would persist over the course of future studies. The most recent data from the Core Survey revealed that fifty-six percent of college men and forty-two percent of college women drink one or more times each week. Wechsler and his colleagues found that the percentage of college women who drank ten or more times in the previous month increased over the course of the CAS from twelve percent in 1993 to seventeen percent in 2001; the percentage for college men likewise increased from twenty-four percent to twenty-nine percent. Combined, these studies demonstrate that while the rate of alcohol use among college students has remained stable over time, many drink more often than in the past, and while as many college women as college men can be labeled “drinkers,” the former continue to lag significantly behind their male counterparts in the frequency of their consumption.

Lloyd Johnston’s Youth in Transition and Monitoring the Future studies provide opportunities to compare college students’ alcohol use with that of their same-age peers who did not enroll in higher education. In the earlier study, Johnston found that college


students demonstrated the lower drinking rates than their peers, thirty-eight percent of students being “regular drinkers” compared to forty-eight percent of those employed and fifty-five percent of those serving in the military. But as the Monitoring the Future Study progressed, college students overtook their peers in the workforce regarding the frequency of alcohol use. By 1990, fifty-percent of college men had consumed five or more drinks in a row during the previous two weeks, four percent more than non-college men, while the thirty-four percent of college women who had done so was ten percent higher than non-college women. Noting the change in state laws that effectively established a nationwide 21-year-old minimum drinking age in the mid-1980s, the Monitoring the Future researchers speculated that college students may be presented with more opportunities to drink than their non-college peers because of the close proximity to and friendships with college students of the legal drinking age. The results of subsequent Monitoring the Future studies appeared to confirm the researchers’ earlier speculations. In their most recent publication, Lloyd Johnston and his colleagues concluded, “Because both their noncollege age-mates and high school students were showing greater declines [in monthly alcohol use and occasions of heavy drinking], the college students stood out as having maintained a high rate of heavy (or binge) drinking.”

These studies also explored the negative consequences of college students’ alcohol use. Straus and Bacon found that students who drank the most demonstrated more “social complications” (e.g., missing class, failing to study, injury, damaged friendships, etc.) than less frequent drinkers. In the Youth in Transition study, Johnston found that the higher the college man’s grade point average, the less likely he was to be a regular drinker. The Core Survey revealed that, as a result of their alcohol use, a majority of college students have experienced a hangover and vomiting, nearly twenty percent had reported trouble

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9 Johnston, Drugs and American Youth, 164; Bachman (1991); Johnston, Monitoring the Future, 22; Wechsler, “Trends in College Binge Drinking,” 207.
with the police, almost forty percent had driven while intoxicated, and twelve percent had been taken advantage of sexually. The CAS found that college student binge drinkers missed more classes, studied less, earned lower GPAs, engaged in riskier sexual behavior, committed more acts of vandalism, and were more likely to get into trouble with police compared to their non-binge drinking peers. Students who attended institutions with high rates of binge drinking were more likely to experience the secondhand effects of college student drinking—including having their sleeping or studying disturbed, property damage, and sexual violence—than those who attended institutions with lower levels of binge drinking.10

Over the course of these four studies, researchers provided different definitions of problematic drinking. Straus and Bacon divided the effects of alcohol into three categories: high, tight and drunk. High described a noticeable effect of drinking that did not exceed socially acceptable behavior given the setting; tight described an unsteadiness of physical actions that might include noticeable aggressiveness or slight nausea; drunk described an overstepping of social expectations and loss of control of physical activities. Only fifty percent of the men and twenty percent of women had been tight six times or more. Half of the men and ninety percent of the women had been drunk once or never. More recent studies have used “binge drinking,” or the consumption of five or more drinks in a sitting, as the primary measure of problematic drinking. Over the past thirty years, the Monitoring the Future study has consistently found that around forty percent of college students have drunk five or more drinks at least once in the past two weeks. The most recent results of the Core Survey determined that forty-six percent of college students drank five or more drinks at least once in the previous two weeks, while twenty-one percent consumed five or more drinks three or more times during the same time period. The CAS revealed a similar

10 Straus and Bacon, Drinking in College, 115; Johnston, Drugs and American Youth, 165; Presley, Alcohol and Drugs (2004) 27-28; Wechsler, “What We have Learned,” 483-484.
consistent rate of binge drinkers across their four surveys: forty-four percent in 1993, forty-three percent in 1997, forty-five percent in 1999, and forty-four percent in 2001.\textsuperscript{11}

Perhaps the most important distinction among these studies is how researchers have broadened the definition of problematic drinking over time to include more students. Students in the mid-twentieth century had to drink far more alcohol to be labeled “drunk” than today’s college students have to drink to be considered “binge” drinkers. This narrowing of acceptable drinking behavior apparently had direct relationship to the conclusions these scholars reached. Writing in 1953, Straus and Bacon concluded that only a small segment of college students experienced the advanced effects of alcohol, and that this finding “contrasts with the stereotype of college drinking as heavy, frequent, and often accompanied by drunkenness.” Following the four national surveys that comprised the College Alcohol Study, Wechsler and colleagues painted a far different, far gloomier picture five decades later: “Heavy episodic alcohol use, or binge drinking, and the resulting problems gained national recognition in the 1990s as the number one public health problem affecting college students.”\textsuperscript{12} To a certain extent concerns about student drinking may be higher today because researchers have relied on a too broad definition of problematic drinking.

Both individually and collectively, these national studies of college students’ alcohol use provide an impressive amount of information regarding college students’ alcohol use and illuminate changes and continuities regarding college students’ drinking behavior over the past sixty years. The studies use representative samples to provide a national portrait of


\textsuperscript{12} Straus and Bacon, \textit{Drinking in College}, 141; Wechsler, “Trends in College Binge Drinking,” 203.
college student behaviors, enjoy high response rates, and use instruments with high levels of validity to provide a rich and detailed account of the students’ drinking patterns.

What they do not do, obviously, was solve the problem of college students’ alcohol use. Even aggressive and well-funded efforts, relying on data from national surveys, have not made major reductions to college student drinking. In the late 1990s, researchers at Harvard School of Public Health implemented “A Matter of Degree” programs at ten institutions with particularly high binge drinking rates participating in the CAS. These programs, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and receiving programmatic support from the American Medical Association, aimed “to reduce binge drinking and related harms among college students by changing campus and community environments.” In particular, they targeted the access and availability of alcohol, campus drinking norms, and binge drinking rates. Participating institutions and communities aggressively implemented many new policies and practices, including: increased penalties and parental notification for alcohol-related discipline incidents; alcohol-free programming and residence halls; more aggressive regulations on bars and other businesses that served alcohol; more involvement of faculty in reduction efforts; heightened scrutiny of fraternity and sorority activities; and banning alcohol-related advertisements in the student newspaper and alcohol-relate merchandise in the campus bookstore. Despite external funding and improved collaboration between town and gown, even those institutions that implemented the most aggressive changes just barely reduced college students’ problematic alcohol use and its consequences.13

History may be no better positioned than the social sciences to “solve” the contemporary crisis regarding college students’ alcohol use, but it can provide much needed perspective. The four reoccurring themes regarding college student drinking raised by this study—that alcohol use on campus reflected behavior in the larger society, that negative consequences have often resulted from student drinking, that drinking has long been a discipline problem on campus, and that drinking on campus has marked privilege—cast a fresh light on, or at least provide probing questions for, our modern problems.

Today, there seems to be no segment of society over whose drinking behavior Americans express more concern than college students. Most quantitative research reflects this situation (and probably contributes to it) by generally studying student drinking without reference to their same-age non-collegiate peers or to older Americans. Yet, as we have seen, college students’ alcohol use has historically reflected larger social patterns, raising several questions for our modern age. Do college students drink more than their same-age peers, and if so, why? Have Americans developed a life cycle of alcohol use that involves excessive alcohol consumption during the few years of college followed by moderate drinking over their adult years? Or do they develop problematic drinking practices in college that continue and worsen long after they graduate? Both perhaps. Has our current focus on and, via the national minimum drinking age, the regulation of college students’ alcohol use allowed many other Americans to avoid scrutiny for troubling drinking behaviors? That is, do concerns about college student drinking obscure problems in the larger society? Researchers who better situate the use of alcohol and its associated consequences among college students in relation to the broader population may provide guidance to future educational leaders and policymakers in how best to instill acceptable and healthy relationships with alcohol in youth that minimizes the problems among both college students and older adults.

That college student drinking has long led to many negative consequences may not prove comforting for modern readers; that most college students escaped relatively
unscathed should. Some negative consequences persist over time, such as poor academic progress and vandalism, while others enter and exit the campus community, such as the late-night bell ringing and the violence perpetuated against faculty members in the antebellum period. While many college leaders and faculty members are justifiably concerned about student drinking today, to a large extent they, unlike their antebellum predecessors, are fortunate to no longer be the explicit targets of students’ alcohol-related misbehaviors. But perhaps the outward shift of misbehavior into the larger community has contributed to wider concerns about college students’ alcohol use. At the very least, realizing the long duration of problems related to student drinking should encourage college leaders and policymakers to take measured and consistent approaches to reducing problematic drinking on campus, rather than undertaking sporadic periods of aggressive actions followed by years of inattention.

Both historically and currently, college authorities have long wielded a powerful weapon to combat student drinking and its negative consequences that they have seldom used: expulsion. In part reflecting the nation’s divided attitudes over alcohol, college authorities have long split the difference in disciplining collegians’ alcohol-related infractions. To be sure, some college students have been banished from campus for their misdeeds involving alcohol, but such actions have been relatively rare and reserved for the most egregious offenders. Most student drinkers, most of the times they drank, circumvented the discipline process entirely. Those who were caught often received serious, though not severe, punishments. This disciplinary tradition continues today as most student drinkers avoid detection entirely and those who do not usually receive educational sanctions, warnings, and fines instead of long suspensions or expulsion, even for illegal alcohol-related activities.

Higher education leaders could implement aggressive and sweeping disciplinary systems that immediately removed students who drank alcohol illegally or dangerously from campus. Leaders at other institutions could, as they did during national Prohibition,
generally not offer admission to these dismissed drinkers. Such an aggressive discipline approach would certainly raise problems of its own. Implementation would have to be widespread, as prospective students who planned to drink at college, as most do, would likely learn to avoid institutions that severely punished drinking while others continued to permit the behavior. Moreover, removing many student drinkers would result in a loss of tuition revenue at a time when most institutions are financially strapped. But in an era in which college credentials are increasingly necessary for professional success, such high punishments might prove most effective in reducing students’ illegal alcohol use. Such aggressive enforcement might actually lead to eliminating the federal twenty-one-year-old minimum drinking age, a more limited form of national Prohibition that many college leaders believe contributes to drinking problems on campus, by motivating parents of punished students to seek political change for a policy they do not agree with.

Perhaps the most important aspect of student drinking that this dissertation uncovers is the longstanding role of privilege in shaping alcohol consumption on campus. Wealthy young men drank far more than poorer students during the early decades of the nation's crisis with alcohol. When women first arrived to campus in the late nineteenth century, they abstained while many men imbibed. In more recent years, the extent to which historically underrepresented groups drink at parity with financially well-off white men may be an ironic indicator of increased equality on campus. Yet much evidence, both quantified and anecdotal, suggests that forms of privilege continue to factor prominently in regard to drinking on campus. “Party schools” tend to be state flagship universities or relatively elite private institutions that primarily enroll upper-middle class and wealthy students whose families have long attended college, and fraternity and sorority members tend to be the heaviest drinkers at all institutions. Concerns about student drinking rarely reach students who commute from home to college or who are much older than their traditionally-aged peers, much less the community colleges where a majority of these students enroll. While rates of binge drinking among college women have reached near
parity with their male counterparts’, the threshold they must meet to earn this designation has not. Women who consume four drinks in a single sitting receive the same label as men who drink five. Put another way, women who drink twenty percent less alcohol earn the same label as men (a percentage that is remarkably similar to the present and persistent wage gap between men and women). Researchers assert that this disparity is based on the most advanced medical understanding of the biological differences between men and women, though history reminds us that the most advanced medical understandings of an earlier era helped vilify women’s alcohol use by insisting that biological differences made them spontaneously combust in far higher numbers than drinking men. The financial costs of alcohol use, especially for underage drinkers, continue to prohibit many low-income students from participating in this aspect of campus life. In Iowa City, for example, an underage student caught drinking in a downtown bar receives fines and legal fees that exceed one thousand dollars.14

The continued position of privilege enjoyed by most student drinkers raises a troubling, and perhaps unanswerable, question: Do concerns about and efforts to reduce college student drinking shift attention and resources away from the most disadvantaged students? That is, focusing on college student drinking may perpetuate a pattern that allocates disproportionate resources to those students who have long benefited from the best the American education system has to offer. At the same time, many Americans who have attended underfunded schools and struggled to gain access to higher education, have fewer resources allocated to ensuring their success. Indeed, instead of raising concerns about the fairness of their nation’s educational system and determining the quality of the education their children receive, many well-off parents worry, “Will my kid drink too much at college?”

But it does not appear that concerns about student drinking will subside any time soon. As college students arrived at their respective campuses in August and September 2008, over one hundred college and university presidents joined the Amethyst Initiative. This group, believing that the nation’s drinking age laws encouraged college students’ binge drinking, called for an “informed and dispassionate” debate regarding the 21-year-old minimum drinking age. One president noted the “real conflict” facing higher education: “We live in a time when efforts to enforce the prohibition on drinking before age 21 are more aggressive than ever, yet there is a common assumption that most young people routinely violate the law.” The reaction to the initiative was passionate. Mothers Against Drunk Driving claimed that the presidents had presented “deliberately misleading information to confuse the public,” while the *New York Times* editorial board considered the presidents “on the wrong track” because the real problem regarding college students’ alcohol use was “the culture of drinking at school.”

Though they likely did not realize this, the Amethyst Initiative leaders’ arguments harkened back to the two Yale educators who testified before Congress about the disastrous effects of national Prohibition nearly eighty years ago. Historian Robert Shafer claims that his discipline’s most important role is to “guard against the temptation of each generation to see its problems as unique.” For over two hundred years, Americans have been conflicted about alcohol. Many believed that access to and regular consumption of alcohol made life worth living; others believed few things would improve their society more than the elimination of problems attributable to alcohol use. The college campus has

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proved to be a particularly volatile environment in societal debates about alcohol. Generations of college leaders have long attempted to promote socially acceptable alcohol use in college students in an effort to prepare young men and women to become productive and contributing members of society. We have much to learn from their successes and failures.
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Secondary Sources

Books


**Articles, Chapters, and Theses**


