

Kansas Bootleggers

ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

"Kansas Bootleggers." *The Annals of Iowa* 51 (1992), 658-659.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9707>

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the first to explore the labor movement in this fashion, and future studies will likely confirm and refine Faue's analysis.

Community of Suffering and Struggle is an important book. It successfully uses the case of one midwestern city (with diverse industry and a racially homogenous population) to draw large conclusions about gender, labor, and the state. Historians will find much of value in this nicely written and inventive study, and local historians will also find a model for explorations of single communities as microcosms of larger national trends.

Kansas Bootleggers, by Patrick G. O'Brien and Kenneth J. Peak. Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1991. 135 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$14.95 paper.

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In selecting the southeastern corner of Kansas, Patrick O'Brien and Kenneth Peak chose an ideal setting to study early twentieth-century liquor trafficking. The wettest region in the driest state in the Union, the area known as the "Balkans" became infamous among antiliquor forces in Kansas who scorned the immigrant coal-mining population there. Unfortunately, by not analyzing the history of the region in a comprehensive manner, the authors failed to capitalize on the research opportunities presented.

Much of the information contained in *Bootleggers* was gleaned from the federal Wickersham Reports, prepared in 1931, and the authors' interviews with several dozen persons who lived in Crawford and Cherokee counties during the 1920s. Based on these sources, O'Brien and Peak determined that state prohibition laws had nurtured a bootlegging culture among the coal-mining population by the turn of the century that subsequently thrived during national prohibition. Despite urgent attempts by state and federal officials to enforce the laws prohibiting the manufacture of whiskey, production in these two counties increased after 1920. Thousands of gallons of "Deep Shaft" were transported every year to consumers in other states. Economic necessity, O'Brien and Peak argue, drove many residents to distill mash, haul whiskey, accept bribes, or earn money in dozens of other ways from the illegal liquor traffic.

From the perspective of an Iowan only marginally familiar with the Sunflower state, *Bootleggers* provides an interesting window through which to consider prohibition history in Kansas. Moreover, the region naturally lends itself to comparative analysis. In a state where relatively few eastern Europeans settled, the cultural makeup

of Cherokee and Crawford counties was atypically diverse as a result of the mixture of miners and farmers. Anecdotes offered by the elderly residents shed some light on the "folklife of typical bootleggers," their motivation, and the extent of the danger involved (61).

The historical implications of prohibition enforcement are not confined to the borders of Kansas. In Iowa, for example, which contained more coal shafts and more wet immigrants than the Great Plains states, liquor violations were apparently more common. The extent to which state prohibition laws in Iowa spawned a bootlegging culture in the southern coal counties in the days before national prohibition is just one of many liquor-related issues awaiting research.

While one cannot deny the utility of researching southeastern Kansas, the analysis of the region offered in *Bootleggers* is far from complete. O'Brien and Peak's narrative account of state-directed attempts to enforce prohibition in these two counties does not sufficiently describe the social setting, explain local politics, or discuss interagency relationships. There is very little vote analysis and no exploration of several curious events, such as the election of purportedly dry county officials in 1924. By the authors' own admission, the Wickersham reports and other sources are "sparse in details" and "enable limited perceptions" of the region (61, 48). Furthermore, the personal interviews—which might have furnished the information necessary to produce a comprehensive description—are not presented in such a way as to complement the narrative format. There is relatively little background information included about the persons interviewed and surprisingly few biographies of the counties' chief law enforcement officials and political party leaders.

The poor analysis is compounded by the book's organization and writing style. The one- and two-sentence paragraphs that appear throughout the book are more typical of a newspaper article than a professional textbook. In addition, *Bootleggers* does not contain a concluding section summarizing the major arguments presented. Finally, the documentation is not very convincing. The authors do not attribute sweeping generalizations in the text to other sources, a chronic problem that tends to raise nagging doubts about the veracity of the statements.

In the end, I could neither understand the social fabric of these two counties nor empathize with the individual residents. Not a true narrative history, *Kansas Bootleggers* ultimately contributes little to the national prohibition historiography aside from confirming the presumption that residents in the coal counties of Kansas routinely violated state and national liquor laws.

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