

The Old Dominion goes dry: prohibition in Virginia

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Virginia enacted state-wide prohibition in November 1916 through a popular referendum, three years before national prohibition began. Virginia's experiment with prohibition did not come about suddenly. As was often the case throughout the United States, Virginia went dry after a long political battle led by groups such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Anti-Saloon League (ASL). These lobbying groups provided the leadership, the impetus, and finally, the votes that lead to Virginia's ban on alcoholic beverages. The story of how the WCTU and the ASL made Virginia legally dry step-by-step is an excellent case study of how Prohibition spread across the United States as a whole.¹

Virginia in 1910

In 1910 Virginia had a largely rural and native-born population of two million. Only 23% of the state lived in urban areas, defined rather generously as including towns with more than 2,500

people, compared to 45% nationally. Most of Virginia's nineteen cities were small. The state capital, Richmond, was the largest with a population of 127,000. Norfolk was the second largest city with 67,000. Only three other cities, Roanoke, Portsmouth, and Lynchburg had over populations over 25,000.²

Virginia also had a smaller percentage of immigrants in its population than was average nationwide. Only 1.3% of Virginia's residents were foreign-born. By comparison, about 14% of all Americans were foreign born. A handful of the state's cities had a slightly higher immigrant population. In both Alexandria City and Norfolk, over 11% of residents were either immigrants or had at least one immigrant parent, as did 9% of Richmond residents. Alexandria County, a suburb of Washington, DC,³ outdid them all, with 21% of its population either being foreign-born or having at least one foreign born parent. The most common among the numerous ethnic groups were German and Irish, both of which tended to be anti-Prohibition. Virginia was also heavily Protestant. All of these factors would play a role in the 1914 Prohibition referendum, as dry voters tended to be rural, and native-born Protestant.⁴

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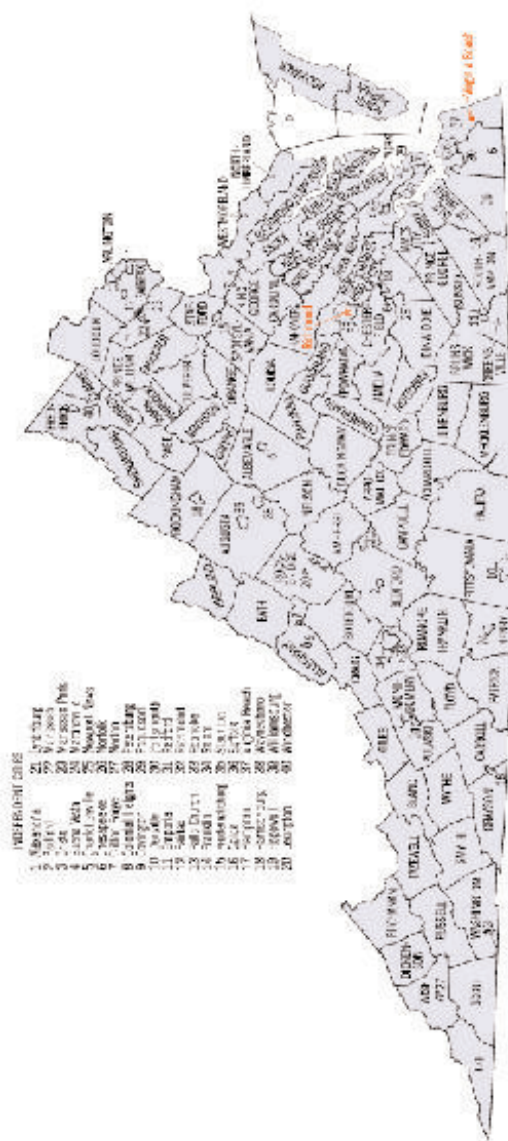


Figure 1. Map of Virginia showing the counties and major towns. This is a modern map so some of the cities listed were small towns in the 1910s.



Figure 2. Rosslyn, Virginia, circa 1908. Rosslyn, just across the Potomac River from Washington, DC, was a Red Light district for Washington and a sore spot for Alexandria County. Filled with saloons and brothels, it was this type of area that the Prohibitionists held up as an example of the result of legal alcohol sales in their anti-liquor campaigns. Photo from the author's collection.

Politically Virginia was dominated by the Democratic Party which was divided into factions. The Republican Party had, at times, been in power in Virginia during the post Civil War Reconstruction Era (1865-1877), but by 1900 had little political power outside of a few districts. The Democratic Party was dominated by a conservative political machine known as 'The Ring' and headed by US Senator

Thomas S Martin. The Ring's main opponent was a group of Democratic reformers who assembled coalitions each election year and had no set leader. State elections were often races between two Democratic candidates and the state almost always favoured the Democratic nominee for President. The Ring and its opponents both supported the existing white supremacist political structure that

kept black candidates out of office, a position that, early on, had ramifications for the temperance movement.

Virginia's temperance organizations

The temperance movement had been active in the United States, including Virginia, since well before the Civil War (1861-1865). The movement's overarching goal was to eliminate the production, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages. The campaign for prohibition lost momentum in the 1850s as abolition took front stage as a national issue. As the 19th century gave way to the 20th, the temperance movement began to regain political strength as one of many reform issues that drew public attention and popular support between the period 1890-1920, generally known as the Progressive Era. The Progressives were not one group but were comprised of many from across the political spectrum that supported many different causes including women's suffrage, worker rights, banning child labour, tax and currency reform, ending 'white slavery' (prostitution) as well as regulating or prohibiting alcoholic beverages.

Prohibition had wider appeal than is currently popularly remembered. Some pro-labour advocates supported banning alcoholic beverages because they believed the large breweries and distilleries used their products to prey on workers. Banning alcohol, however, found its greatest support among conservative

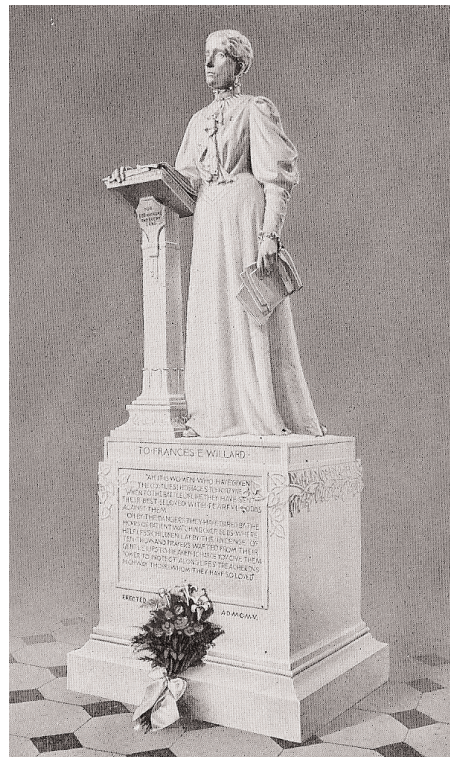


Figure 3. Postcard of a statue of Francis Willard. Every state has two statues of famous person's from their state in the US Capitol. Illinois chose this statue of Willard as one of their two contributions in 1905. From the author's collection.

Protestant groups that saw Prohibition as not only a way to fight the 'sin' of drinking but also as a way to reestablish control over the large population of immigrants that were coming into the US. Many of the new immigrants came from communities where drinking was an acceptable and established part of family life. The



Figure 4. Thirteenth Annual Convention of the Anti-Saloon League of Virginia, Richmond, 21 January 1914. LOT 5599 no. 5 Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC.

new immigrants tended to settle in the cities and were from religions other than Protestant Christianity. Many were young single men who came to the US to make money before either going home or bringing their families to join them in America. To Prohibitionists, who tended to be rural Protestants, these new immigrants seemed threatening and in need of some form of control. This control took many forms, including advocating immigration restrictions, literacy tests for immigration or to vote, and regulating vice, including both prostitution and drinking. It is no accident that the movements to close urban red light districts, restrict immigration, and enact Prohibition all reached apogee at the same time and shared many of the same supporters.⁵

The two reform groups in Virginia that lead the successful fight for Prohibition in the 1910's were the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Anti-Saloon League (ASL).⁶ The WCTU President, Francis Willard of Illinois (1839-1898) visited Virginia in 1881 and met with local temperance supporters to encourage them to establish local chapters. The Virginia WCTU was founded in September 1882 about nine years after the national organization was formed. The original Virginian members met in the state capital, Richmond. In its first year it was joined by chapters in other Virginia towns; Alexandria, Charlottesville, and Staunton that first year, Harrisonburg and nearby Dayton in 1883, as well as a second chapter in



Richmond. The Virginia WCTU, like the national organization, concentrated on educational campaigns, printing temperance literature and lobbying for anti-alcohol education programs in schools. Under Willard's leadership, however, the Virginia WCTU supported the Prohibition Party, rather than dry Republicans or Democrats, in an effort to create a viable third party. Rather than creating a realistic alternative to the established political parties, Willard's support for the Prohibition Party diluted the WCTU's power in Virginia. The WCTU also supported woman's suffrage, a cause with little popular support in much of the country in the late 19th century. As a result, while the WCTU remained active and influential, especially in mobilizing

women activists, after 1900 it was replaced by the Anti-Saloon League as the leading prohibition organization. Nevertheless, the WCTU remained active in Virginia working alongside the ASL. By 1908 the Virginia chapter of the WCTU was the largest in the South and was actively lobbying the state legislature for more dry laws.⁷

In contrast to the WCTU under Willard, the Anti-Saloon League (ASL) was much more pragmatic about which candidates to support. Founded in Ohio in 1893, its national offices were in central Ohio, with a lobbying branch office in Washington, DC. The ASL's initial contact with various Virginia anti-liquor activists in the 1890s failed to yield local chapters in the state.

The ASL's difficulties organizing in Virginia mirrored its trouble organizing in the rest of the South. The region's churches were already active in dry campaigns and ASL leaders thought the region a fertile ground for recruitment. However, many southerners were suspicious of northern organizations so soon after the American Civil War. The ASL had an additional hurdle in the South because of the strong links between the abolitionist and the temperance movements before the Civil War, and the temperance movement remained tainted in the eyes of many southerners. In 1914 an anti-prohibition tract referred to the 'Ohio Anti-Saloon League' and noted that a 'large majority of Virginians are free and independent and will not bend to the lash of the invader's whip ...'⁸

In general, the ASL also seemed tone-deaf to politics in the South. The ASL's newspaper, *American Issue*, was published in each state, but only two to four pages of each 12-14 page issue had local material. The rest came from the main Ohio office. In 1908 *American Issue* ran a story on an Ohio temperance speech in which southern secession was compared to a 'slimy serpent hissing disunion.' Such anti-southern rhetoric contributed to the ASL's difficulties in organizing in the South.⁹

The ASL's biggest hurdle to organizing the region, however, was that Southern progressives (including prohibitionists) had to combat a regional predilection for political decentralization. The ASL was

organized like a corporation with a central office in Ohio, but such centralized control conflicted with the southern political tradition of local control. To be effective in the South the ASL had to convince southern voters that state control of liquor would be worth the cost of giving up some element of local rule.¹⁰

Along with entrenched localism, the Anti-Saloon League also had to deal with the question of African-American voters. Until southern fears that African Americans might win political power were quelled, temperance activists were not able to garner sufficient support for their anti-alcohol campaign. Third parties, such as the Prohibition Party, were viewed as a threat by the dominant Democratic Party machine because it might drain votes away from machine candidates and allow the outnumbered reform Democrats, or even Republicans, to win office. Single issue voters, such as those supporting temperance, might also be convinced to vote for factional candidates that split away from the main Democratic Party. The only sure way the white supremacist Democratic Party organization could maintain its hold on power was to disenfranchise African-American voters who supported Republicans. Once this was done, single-issue voters such as prohibitionists could be tolerated because, even if the machine candidate lost to a reform supporter, white supremacy would be maintained.

The ASL remained officially neutral on race. But while they did not officially sup-

port southern racial segregation, they were willing to use it to their advantage. For example, in 1908 the Tennessee ASL reported that the labels on gin bottles sold by a St. Louis company in the South featured labels with half-dressed white women in 'suggestive' poses. The Tennessee ASL charged that the gin dealers were abetting assaults by African American men on white women, a tactic the Virginia ASL would sometimes copy.¹¹

The Virginia Constitutional Convention 1901-1902

In 1901 a state constitutional convention convened, at least in part to find a legal means to restrict voting rights to white voters. As state Democratic Party Chairman J Taylor Ellyson noted,

the convention would never have been held but for the desire of the white people of this Commonwealth to have enacted such a constitutional provision as would take away from the negro the right to vote.

While trying to assure poor white voters that 'no white man would lose his vote,' the delegates decided that under the state's new constitution, a man would be eligible to vote if he could satisfy one of three requirements:

He could read or understand the state constitution

He had paid taxes on property worth at least \$333

He was either a US or Confederate veteran or the son of a veteran

The first two provisions would disenfranchise mostly poorer and often illiterate voters who were disproportionately non-white. The third provision, a 'grandfather clause,' was aimed at providing a loophole for poor white voters who might otherwise be unable to meet either of the first two conditions. The franchise was restricted further by setting age, residency, and literacy restrictions as well as establishing a poll tax which required voters to pay a special fee for the right to vote.¹² Legally the new constitution had to be ratified by the voters of Virginia. Fearing the reaction of white voters who were about to be disfranchised, the convention instead proclaimed the Constitution of 1902 to be law and put into effect as of July 1902. As a result, the old voting rolls were purged and the Virginia electorate was cut in half, eliminating most African-American voters in the state along with many poor whites. With a largely white electorate assured, the issue was resolved and the temperance campaign was unfettered from this southern political concern.¹³

In 1902, as the constitutional convention convened, the Virginia Anti-Saloon League was founded in the basement of Richmond's Second Baptist Church. Dr Samuel Chiles Mitchell was named president and the Reverend Charles H Crawford was named superintendent and publisher of the state ASL newspaper, *The Christian Federation*. The newly

formed state ASL tried to amend the new constitution while it was being written with language that would ease the way for prohibition to be enacted via local political control. The ASL proposed a provision that no license to make or sell any alcohol be granted unless requested in writing by a majority of voters within a given precinct. The resolution was met with opposition not just by wet forces, who threatened to fight against the new constitution if it were included, but also by some dry supporters who felt that it was too radical and would provoke public opinion against local option campaigns. The opposition within the dry ranks

proved to be decisive and the resolution failed.¹⁴

The failure of the ASL to have dry provisions included in the new constitution forced the group to use more gradual methods. Passing local option and other piecemeal laws allowed prohibition forces to make specific areas of the state dry, one by one, with the eventual goal of making the entire state, and then the entire country, dry. In the meantime, temperance forces worked to convince Virginians of the evils caused by the alcohol trade. ASL superintendent Crawford became a temperance move-



Figure 5. A label from Robert Portner Brewing in Alexandria, Virginia. Portner's was one of the largest brewers in the south in 1910. From the author's collection.

ment celebrity in 1902 when he was attacked by a whip-wielding judge in Amherst, Virginia. A local druggist was on trial for selling thirty barrels of 'medicinal whiskey,' an excessive amount which seemed to indicate he was selling it for recreational rather than strictly medicinal uses. Local judge Clarence Campbell instructed the jury in the druggist's trial in such a way that they had to find him innocent. Crawford wrote in the temperance paper *Christian Federation* that it wasn't clear which was doctored more, the whiskey or the judge. In response Campbell tried to convict Crawford of contempt. When that failed, the judge publicly attacked and whipped Crawford. Judge Campbell was impeached for his action and removed from the bench. Crawford used the attack as an example of wet corruption to good effect. By January 1903 half of Virginia's counties had organized ASL chapters.¹⁵

In 1903 the ASL also successfully pushed for the Virginia legislature to restrict licenses for selling alcohol. The legislature passed the Mann Law, named for Senator William Hodges Mann of Nottoway, which made most of rural Virginia dry by creating a set of very complex procedures to purchase a liquor-selling license. For example, in a district or town with less than 500 people the judge granting the license had to decide not only if the person requesting the license was of good character, but if a majority of people in that district favored granting the license. This provision automatically counted those who

did not express a preference as being opposed.¹⁶

Bishop Cannon

In 1904 the Virginia Anti-Saloon League gained a new president, who proved to be instrumental in making not only Virginia dry, but also the entire US. The Reverend James Cannon Jr. (1864-1944) was principal of Blackstone Female Institute and a Methodist minister. As a delegate to the Virginia Methodist Conference, he was also the editor of the conference newspaper, the *Baltimore and Richmond Christian Advocate*. In it he wrote about moral and social issues in the church, with a special focus on prohibition. Cannon's energy and political skills, plus a long-held devotion to the anti-alcohol cause, helped propel Virginia into the dry column, and made Cannon one of the most influential prohibitionist leaders in the country.

Five years after it first passed, the Mann Law was strengthened in 1908 with the Byrd Law named after Speaker of the Virginia House, Richard E Byrd.¹⁷ The Byrd Law defined liquor as 'all mixtures, preparations and liquids which will produce intoxication' and outlawed any malt drink with an alcohol content greater than 2.25%. The law eliminated the possibility that a judge might issue a permit to sell alcohol in any district of under 500 people by omitting any procedures for such a permit to be issued. It outlawed so-called 'private clubs' which sold



Figure 6. Bishop James Cannon, Jr. 1930. LC-USZ62-72966. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC.

alcohol in dry areas. The new law also prohibited selling liquor from a still in a dry area, thus closing a loophole that allowed some stills to continue to operate. The Byrd Law also increased regulations regarding selling liquor on passenger trains, at drug stores, on the common practice of giving out 'samples,' and on making cider (even non-intoxicating), and wine. Finally, it increased the measures police could use to enforce dry laws. The result of the Byrd Law was not a completely dry Virginia, but one in which most legal alcoholic beverages were limited to a few large towns and a handful of counties. Virginia had moved to the very edge of being completely dry.¹⁸

ASL President Bishop Cannon was active in the campaign to pass the 1908 Byrd Law and after it was passed began to look at last towards passing state-wide prohibition. It seemed to Cannon that the political momentum was fast shifting to drys throughout the South. Alabama and Georgia's legislatures passed state-wide prohibition measures in 1907. In 1908 Mississippi joined the dry ranks. Even states that did not go entirely dry in this period, such as Arkansas, passed local option laws.

With the passage of the Byrd Law, Cannon had clearly demonstrated his political clout in Virginia. The ASL now represented a sizable voting bloc for the coming 1909 gubernatorial election. Hoping to tap the growing dry vote, the conservative Democratic political machine, Senator Martin and his political organization, The Ring, considered who to back for governor. Although his political machine was normally wet, Martin was concerned more with maintaining political power than with temperance issues and he chose state Senator William Mann, Vice-President of the Virginia ASL and sponsor of the Mann Law, as candidate for governor. The rival independent reform Democrats chose Henry St. George Tucker, a vocal, if moderate, wet. Martin's choice of Mann proved to be a wise one for The Ring, as Cannon decided to ally the ASL with Martin for the election.¹⁹

The wet press charged Cannon with hypocrisy for making a deal with Martin,

accusing him of winning Martin's support in exchange for a promise that no new prohibition legislation be introduced while Mann was governor. Cannon denied that he had made such a deal, as did Martin and Mann. However, in his book, *Dry Messiah*, author Virginus Dabney quotes a former senate clerk as claiming that he was present when Martin and Cannon made this deal.²⁰

Such an agreement would not have been out of character for either Cannon or Martin. Both men were skilled politicians and would have appreciated the benefits an alliance would bring. Martin knew with the ASL's dry votes, any candidate he supported would win. With a sympathetic Mann in the governor's office, however, dry proponents might continue making incremental progress and could dominate Virginia's politics.

Mann publicly came out in favour of local option and opposed full state-wide prohibition in early 1909, re-assuring the wets that full prohibition would at least be delayed. Nevertheless, anti-prohibition legislation did come before the Virginia legislature during Mann's tenure as governor as the dries decided on a new tactic. With most of the state now under prohibition, the WCTU and the ASL began to back a referendum on full state-wide prohibition. The few remaining wet areas that had held out under local option could be overwhelmed by a state-wide dry majority. During the 1910 legislative session, a bill calling for a state-wide referendum on prohibition was submitted



Figure 7. Senator Thomas S. Martin. LC-H25-11944-B. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC.

and failed. Governor Mann, adhering to his public stance, refused to support the bill, noting that he had been elected on a local option platform. Two years later another prohibition bill was submitted, which would have authorized a state-wide referendum on prohibition. By then, more dry members had been elected to the lower house during the 1911 mid-term elections, but until then the Senate remained under the control of Martin's 'Ring.' ASL President Cannon nonetheless pressed for the referendum bill's passage during the 1912 session. He met with legislators, testified in favour of the bill in committee hearings, and was a prominent figure in the Senate public



Figure 8. Governor William Mann and wife, 1911. Underwood 134398, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC.

gallery where he conspicuously took notes during debates. He even threatened to split with Martin, growling that 'the parting of the ways has been reached.' Despite Cannon's efforts the referendum bill failed again. It passed easily in the House, but lost in the Senate by a vote of 16 in favour and 24 opposed.²¹

In his memoirs Cannon quoted an editorial he published after the Senate vote asking, 'Do the leaders of that party [Martin's Democrats] propose to allow the "wet" cities of Virginia to defeat all moral

legislation?' He levelled a clear challenge to Martin not to take the dry Democrats' support for granted ...

Moral issues are supreme, and party policy must conform to aroused moral sentiment, or the framers of the party policy will go down in defeat, and the new man will be selected who will conform the party policy to moral sentiment.

Having issued his warning, Cannon and the ASL began their preparations for the 1914 legislative session.²²

Although efforts to pass the prohibition referendum bill in 1910 and 1912 failed, Cannon, the ASL and the WCTU did more in Mann's four years as governor (1910-1914) than simply lobby in Richmond. Knowing that increased public support was necessary to win a referendum on prohibition Cannon created an extensive propaganda apparatus in Virginia. Most of the major newspapers in the state were wet, so in January 1910 Cannon started his own newspaper, the Richmond *Virginian*. Published six days a week, the *Virginian* advertised itself as 'A Clean Paper for the Home.' Cannon used it to attack the wets and the other Richmond newspapers, to pressure elected officials, and preach the gospel of prohibition throughout the state. Until Cannon sold it in 1920, the *Virginian* proved to be a continual drain on its owner's finances. It survived on subscriptions and loans and gifts from wealthy supporters, but it gave Cannon and the ASL an effective voice in the media.²³

The Enabling Act

When the 1914 legislative session began, the ASL and the WCTU both believed that the time was right to push a bill through both houses to schedule a referendum on state-wide prohibition. In the 1913 elections Henry C. Stuart had been elected governor with no opposition and he promised that he would sign any referendum bill. The newly elected Lieutenant Governor was J Taylor Ellyson and he promised that in case of a tie vote

in the Senate he would vote for the bill. The only remaining obstacle was a handful of Senators who answered to Martin and his Ring. They had successfully killed referendum bills in 1910 and 1912.²⁴

In January 1914 a bill named the 'Williams Enabling Act' passed the House by a vote of 75-19. It called for a state-wide referendum on prohibition. If it was approved by a majority of voters, the bill stated that during the 'regular session held next after the date of such election' (the 1916 session) the legislature would pass a bill establishing state-wide prohibition beginning 1 November 1916. The Senate vote was expected to be close and if Martin again instructed his men to vote against it, he would again prevent it from passing. Unlike in 1910 and 1912, however, this time there was a prospective third party-the Virginia Progressive Democratic League-which competed for Cannon's support against Martin's political machine. Faced with the possibility of Cannon siding with reformers against the Senator's organization, Martin decided to give Cannon and the ASL what they wanted. Martin instructed the swing vote Senators to support the bill.²⁵

Despite Martin's capitulation, however, the vote was still close. Facing defeat, the night before the vote a group of wets took a senator who voted dry but still drank, out for an evening's entertainment at a local hotspot. Early the next morning, the day of the final vote, several of Cannon's men found the senator woozy

from a night of heavy drinking and carousing, and helped him stumble back to the Senate chambers to cast his vote. Some sources hint that the partying senator was found in a brothel. The observer can look back with amusement at the thought of several loyal ASL members, probably good Methodists or Baptists, searching through Richmond's houses of prostitution looking for the Senator. The drunken senator's vote created a 20-20 tie. As promised, Lieutenant Governor Ellyson cast his promised vote in favour of the bill and it passed.²⁶

Governor Stuart signed the bill on 18 February using a pen from a prominent local prohibitionist minister. The bill called for a state-wide referendum on full prohibition for all of Virginia. The election was to be held on 22 September 1914 providing the governor received a petition requesting the election with the signatures of qualified voters representing at least one quarter of the total votes cast in the November 1913 election for governor. Stuart had run unopposed in 1913, but 72,000 votes had been cast, so 18,000 signatures were required. This provision had been a last-minute amendment to the act submitted by wet state Senator Walter Oliver of Fairfax as an added hurdle for the dries to overcome. Confident that they could collect enough signatures, the Senate's dry proponents did not oppose the amendment. On 11 July dry supporters presented their petition with over 69,000 signatures, almost four times more than required. Prohibition opponents tried to have the petition declared

invalid, claiming that it had been padded with illegitimate signatures, but their efforts were rebuffed by Governor Stuart's administration. Despite wet protests, the ballot would present the voter with two simple choices, 'For State-Wide Prohibition' and 'Against State-Wide Prohibition.' The referendum opponents had wanted the opposing choice to read 'For Local Option' which would allow moderate dries to vote against the state-wide option while still technically voting dry. By starkly wording the ballot as a straight up or down vote on prohibition, they hoped to capture more of the moderate dries' votes.²⁷

The Referendum

During the seven months between the bill's passage and the referendum Virginia's voters were inundated with campaign propaganda both for and against prohibition. Most of the state's major newspapers were wet, while many small town and county papers, including Cannon's *Virginian*, called for a dry vote. Cannon spoke at rallies and meetings throughout the state and published a stream of editorials. In one typical example, he proclaimed that alcohol produced only


pauperism and insanity and crime and shame and misery and broken hearts and ruined homes and shortened, wasted lives.

The dry campaign put on parades and rallies. Speakers and printed material

NOTICE!

To Vote to Retain the Present
LOCAL OPTION SYSTEM of
Virginia and Against STATE-
WIDE PROHIBITION, be Sure
and Mark Your Ballot Like This:

Draw Your Pencil Through the
Words
~~For State Wide Prohibition~~
Against State Wide Prohibition



See that every voter in your precinct who is
opposed to State-wide Prohibition understands this.

Figure 9. This flier was distributed by opponents of the proposed state-wide dry law during the 1914 referendum. Voters had to draw a line through the option they did not want. Courtesy The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

alike emphasized the cost to home life from liquor, using women and children to emphasize their 'protect the home' theme. Get rid of the liquor trade, they promised, and the levels of crime, poverty, broken homes, and mental illness would all drastically decrease.²⁸

The wets did not have the same level of local organization as the dry cause, but they were represented by the Association for Local Self-Government (ALSG). The ALSG was based in the Richmond Chamber of Commerce building and included numerous influential businessmen from around the state as well as judges and lawyers from the state bar association. The ALSG started its campaign with a rally at Richmond's Academy of Music on 14 May. ALSG leaders spoke to a crowd of 2,000 claiming that prohibition

violates the fundamental principle of local self-government, and has invariably caused social and political unrest, bitterness and hypocrisy, and has brought the law into contempt.


They published a newspaper called the *Trumpeter* which ran anti-prohibition editorials and news articles. They also printed broadsides, pamphlets, and booklets, carrying the message that prohibition would only create more problems that it would solve. Their message was also carried by most of the state's major newspapers, a majority of which were wet.²⁹

To be successful, however, the ALSG had to expand outside of the state capital,

but most of their leaders were from Richmond and limited in their state-wide contacts. As their leader they picked Henry St. George Tucker, who had lost the 1909 governor's race. He had political allies throughout Virginia and was associated with the non-machine faction of the Democratic Party. This was crucial because the wets needed to maintain distance between themselves and the 'liquor interests,' specifically breweries, distillers, and whisky sellers. Martin's political organization had close ties to liquor businesses in Virginia, so the ALSG spokesman needed to be someone who had no ties to Martin. Tucker fit that role perfectly. He wrote out a statement on local option to be distributed throughout the state. However, Tucker refused to go on a state-wide speaking tour, although he helped the ALSG assemble a list of prominent local Democrats who would speak within their own Congressional districts against state-wide prohibition. The resulting loosely organized group became the ALSG's state-wide 'Executive Committee.'³⁰

The wet Virginia campaign followed a pattern similar to that used in other states. Prohibition, they argued, would violate local self-rule and it would also deprive the state of over \$600,000 a year in tax revenue. This would require an increase in other taxes to make up the difference. Drunkenness and other abuses would only be driven underground, and dry campaign claims that crime and poverty would fall were false. They also warned that once alcohol was outlawed,

As
Wholesome
as
Expert
Hands
and
Pure
Materials
Can
Make
It.



Delivered
to
Any
Part
of
the
City
in
Unlettered
Wagons.

SAY, I'm the ad, man for the **ARLINGTON BREWING COMPANY**, who're making that scientifically pure **BEER, ALE, and PORTER**. Ever try 'em? A Washington Brew for Washington People. Sparkling, exhilarating, refreshing, strengthening, and delicious; that's just my way of expressing some of the goodness contained in every bottle or glass of Arlington goods. Satisfying and benefiting. Gee! I'm getting thirsty—are you?—call up West 129.

Yours,
ROSS-LYN.

Stock Porter <small>(Keg.)</small>	Sparkling Ale <small>(Bottled.)</small>	Columbia Beer <small>(Light.)</small>	Augustina Beer <small>(Dark.)</small>	Stock Porter <small>(Bottled.)</small>
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Arlington Brewing Company,
ROSSLYN, VA.

Figure 10. A 1902 advertisement for Arlington Brewing Company. Note the promise to deliver their product in unmarked wagons. From the author's collection.

tobacco would be next, threatening one of the state's most important crops. Moreover, according to the wet campaign, prohibition would increase popular disre-

spect for the law because average citizens would ignore and violate it. In short, the wets argued, prohibition would be an unpopular law and would be unworkable.³¹



Figure 11. A bottle from the Norfolk bottling plant of Christian Heurich Brewing in Washington, DC. From the author's collection.

The wets were handicapped by not being able to openly argue that drinking was a good thing in and of itself. Dry educational campaigns been too successful in pressing the idea that alcohol was a poison to argue against prohibition on any grounds except personal liberty. This also meant that those businesses that

were most obviously affected by prohibition—breweries, wineries, distillers, and their dealers and saloons—had to keep a low profile. They had to find ways to launder their campaign donations through front groups. Any group opposed to prohibition that openly took money from the alcohol industry faced charges of allying with, in Cannon's words, 'the most unscrupulous organization of capital in the world.' Despite this handicap the wets outspent dry proponents by a factor of at least four to one.³²

Some historians have noted that the beer and wine industries were slow to recognize the threat of the nationwide Prohibition movement, assessing, erroneously, that the temperance groups were a threat mainly to the distilled liquor industry. There are no surviving records of donors to the Virginia anti-referendum campaign to measure how much financial support came from each individual industry. However, there are signs that the brewing and wine businesses in Virginia took the dry threat seriously. For example, selling low-alcohol beers was a common tactic by breweries in other parts of the country when threatened by dry laws as a way to market their beers as appropriate for families.³³ Of the state's five breweries, only Portner's seemed to have tried selling a non-alcoholic malt drink before the referendum. That the Virginia breweries did not use this approach suggests that they did not believe that dry laws would target only distilled beverages. After all, those counties and towns that had already gone dry

had not differentiated between hard liquors, such as whiskey, and lower alcohol products such as beer. Moreover, the Virginia Brewers, Wine and Spirits Association was active in trying to rally wet votes in 1914. A wine maker led the association, and, unlike in other states, did not try to differentiate between 'light' beverages with low alcohol content and hard liquors. In other prohibition campaigns some wets claimed that light wines and beer were really 'temperance' beverages. In 1918 The United States Brewers Association declared 'The true relationship of beer is with light wines and soft drinks - not with hard liquors'.³⁴ However, in Virginia in 1914 the wets did not emphasize that distinction. Most importantly, the act that called for the referendum clearly lumped all manufacturers of alcoholic beverages together. Taken together, these factors strongly suggest that the beer and wine industries in Virginia knew that they shared their fate with the distillers and whisky sellers.

Before the election both sides predicted victory. The wet press expressed confidence that the 'zealots' would be rebuffed by the voters. A headline in the *Alexandria Gazette* the day before the election forecast that 'Prohibition will be defeated by no less than 10,000 majority.' Richmond's *Times-Dispatch*, one of Bishop Cannon's main antagonists, was more cautious noting that both sides were predicting a large victory. The *Times-Dispatch* editorial page, however, clearly took sides, noting on the morning of election day,

Left to themselves the vast majority of the people of the State, upon whom Virginia's prosperity and progress depend, would not have dreamed of attacking local self-government in order to agitate state-wide prohibition, a system which makes the liquor traffic immensely more complex and menacing than it can be and is under local option. The agitation has come from without.³⁵

On election day the drys won easily with almost 60% of the vote. The referendum passed by a vote of 94,251 in favour and 63,886 opposed. Of Virginia's 100 counties, 71 voted in favour of prohibition. Eight of the state's ten congressional districts voted dry, and one of the remaining two voted against prohibition by only ten ballots. Surprisingly, 16 of the state's 20 cities also voted in favour of going dry. Traditionally cities were strongholds of wet votes. However, only Alexandria, Norfolk, Williamsburg and Richmond stayed wet. The turnout was also remarkably high with over 158,000 total votes cast. For comparison, during the 1912 presidential election, there were 136,900 votes cast in Virginia even though the Democratic nominee, Woodrow Wilson, had been born in the state.³⁶

Why did the referendum pass by such a large margin? Recent studies on voting in prohibition referenda show that the incremental campaigns carried out by groups such as the ASL and WCTU not only made states dry county by county, they also discouraged wet voters in areas that went dry first. Not surprisingly, there

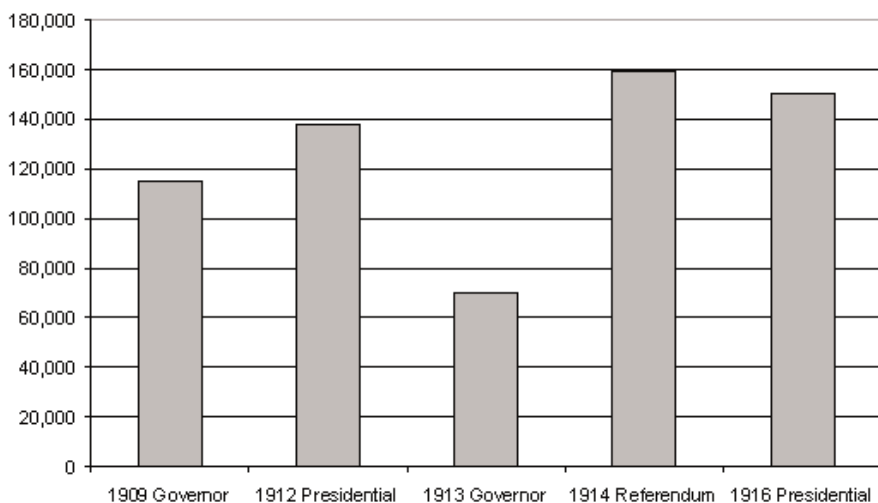


Table 1. Votes cast in Virginia.

Source: Voting numbers from <http://uselectionatlas.org> and www.ourcampaigns.com. Accessed 7/18/2010. The chart includes all votes cast.

was also be a relationship between wet votes and businesses that depend on alcohol, not only saloons, but also breweries and distilleries. These businesses provided a rallying point for wet voters, as well as a source of funds for anti-prohibition campaigns. Finally, areas with larger immigrant populations, especially those from countries such as Germany, where alcohol use was an accepted part of family life, also provided more wet votes. As noted earlier, Virginia had a very small immigrant population in 1914, and it was centred in its cities. How did the other factors apply to Virginia in 1914?³⁷

As in other states that had referenda on state-wide prohibition, wet voters in dry

areas of Virginia simply did not go to the polls. The wet vote was significantly lower in already dry areas and the physical distance from wet areas has additional impact. In Virginia over 80% of the voters supported state-wide prohibition in the areas furthest from those counties where alcohol was still legal. In contrast, in wet areas 59% of voters voted dry, still a majority, although obviously smaller. The difference in percentages, however, was not due to an increased number of dry votes, but to a depressed wet vote.³⁸

What impact did the presence of breweries have, providing jobs as well as anti-dry campaign funds? Of the six breweries active in Virginia in 1914, five

were based in or near the few towns that voted against Prohibition. Robert Portner's brewery was in Alexandria City and Arlington Brewing Company was in neighbouring Rosslyn, in Alexandria County. Richmond and Home Brewing companies were in Richmond and Consumer Brewing was in Norfolk. Norfolk and Richmond were also home to several bottling companies that bottled and sold the products of large regional and national breweries, including Christian Heurich of Washington, DC, St Louis' Anheuser Busch, and Milwaukee's Pabst Brewing. Of the cities which hosted

a brewery, only Roanoke, home to Virginia Brewing, bottling companies, and whisky mail order businesses, voted dry.³⁹

Why, then, did Roanoke vote dry? On the surface the alcohol businesses would appear to be a natural source of anti-prohibition votes. Roanoke, in southwestern Virginia, was the state's third largest city and a major railroad hub for the region. It had long had a reputation of being full of saloons and brothels that catered to railway workers passing through town. Besides the local brewery and bottlers,



Figure 12. Portner's Brewing in Alexandria closed when the state went dry. From the author's collection.

the city also housed several large mail-order whiskey retailers, including the Casper Company, which bragged that it was the 'largest mail order whiskey concern in the world.' As the surrounding towns and counties went dry one by one, Roanoke became the main local provider for anyone in the region who wanted a legal drink. It was an early battleground for wet and dry proponents, each of which won some battles. In 1903 the wets defeated the dries in a local option election. In 1908 the dry cause won, but their victory was thrown out by a local judge for election irregularities. In 1909 Roanoke held yet another local option referendum, and for the second time the wets won.⁴⁰

In 1914 the city's population had fewer immigrants and more Protestant Christians from dry denominations than many of Virginia's other cities. Few of its residents, slightly more than 5%, were either non-native born white or had at least one immigrant parent. There were also a substantial number of dry voters in the city, as witnessed by their victory in the 1908 referendum. In 1909, when the wets won, many dry voters likely felt disheartened by the judicial decision depriving them of their victory. In contrast, in 1914, dry voters in Virginia were motivated to turn out to vote while many wet voters proved less likely to cast their vote, despite the local presence of alcohol-based businesses.⁴¹

Virginia then fit the pattern of prohibition referendums. The presence of alcohol

based businesses - saloons and breweries - aided the wet vote, as did an immigrant population. However, in 1914 these factors were not enough to make the difference. Virginia's population was both more rural and more native-born than the country as a whole. Moreover, by the time the referendum was held, so much of Virginia was already dry, that anti-prohibition voters outside of a few urban centres had little reason or encouragement to go to the polls.



Figure 13. A Portner's bottle reused by a Washington, DC soda company. From the author's collection.



Figure 14. The closed Arlington Brewing Company. It later housed a company making a cherry flavored soda. Photo from the author's collection.

The Virginia legislature met again in March 1916 and quickly passed a prohibition law. The Mapp Law, named after state Senator Walter Mapp of Accomack County, made the entire state dry as of midnight, the morning of 1 November 1916. The new law closed hundreds of saloons and deprived bottling companies and distributors of business. Breweries and distillers were allowed to stay in business

as long as they sold their product out of state. Five of the six Virginia breweries stayed open at least temporarily. Only Robert Portner's in Alexandria, then one of the largest breweries in the South, closed immediately. Several breweries also turned to making soda pop or bottled water. For example, Richmond's Home Brewing Company became the Home Products Company and made soft drinks.⁴²

A dry Virginia? Not quite

Virginia's prohibition law was in some ways more strict than those passed in other states. The Mapp Law defined 'ardent spirits' as

alcohol, brandy, whiskey, rum, gin, wine, porter, ale, beer, all malt liquors, absinthe, and all compounds or mixtures of any of them ... and all beverages containing more than one-half of one per centum of alcohol by volume.

Breweries in other states with less restrictive laws survived nationwide Prohibition by making malt syrup for 'home baking,' although, in reality, they serviced home brewers. The new Virginia law, however, made this very difficult by making it illegal for

any person to grind malt ... to be used in the manufacture of ardent spirits and the burden of proof shall be upon any person grinding malt to show that such malt is not to be used in violation of this act.⁴³

Virginia's law did have loopholes, however, and it wasn't quite the bone dry regime that the ardent prohibitionists had hoped to establish. Home consumption was allowed if the user had purchased the alcohol before Prohibition began on 1 November 1916. Adult males or female heads of family who were not college students could also import a small amount of alcohol for personal use, with a maximum of one quart of distilled liquor, one gallon of wine, or three gallons of

beer per month. Doctors could prescribe alcohol for medical reasons and wine could be sold for religious rites. The state had several grand hotels at popular resorts and they could purchase alcoholic beverages for 'culinary' purposes or for use in massages.⁴⁴

In 1916 the ASL and WCTU had high hopes for Virginia successfully remaining dry. Most neighbouring states were already dry. North Carolina had established state-wide Prohibition in 1908, West Virginia in 1914. Tennessee followed in 1917. Washington, DC went dry by an act of Congress in November 1917. The Webb-Kenyon Act banned the use of the mail to transport alcoholic beverages into dry areas, regardless of whether or not local laws allowed such shipments, which effectively closed the loophole allowing individuals to import a small amount of liquor purchased out of state. When the 18th Amendment went before the states in 1918, Virginia was the second state to ratify it.

Despite the dry's high hopes, Virginia suffered the same difficulties enforcing Prohibition that the rest of the country faced and there were a few outlets for illegal alcohol that were never successfully closed. Virginia shares the Chesapeake Bay with Maryland, and the bay seemed designed for smuggling with its many small islands, coves, and inlets. Maryland remained resolutely wet, with the exception of a handful of dry counties, and its state government made only a perfunctory effort at enforcement



Figure 15. A rum runner is caught in the Atlantic. The Coast Guard ran regular patrols out of Norfolk. From the author's collection.

during nationwide Prohibition from 1920-1933. Maryland Governor Albert Ritchie went so far as to declare that prohibition was a federal law, so the federal government could enforce it. Norfolk, on Virginia's coast at the southern end of the Chesapeake, voted wet during the referendum and remained a popular spot for smugglers to import alcohol. Finally, Virginia had a long-standing tradition of producing moonshine, especially in the western mountains and in the far south, areas which traditionally resented Richmond's control. Moonshiners found

that Prohibition offered an even larger market for their product.⁴⁵

Epilogue: repeal

By 1933 Virginia seemed ready to join the movement to repeal Prohibition. The benefits promised by the Drys - such as an end to most crime and poverty - never materialized. Indeed, the national Depression and the growth of organized criminal gangs seemed to make a mockery of such promises. In the 1932 presiden-

tial election anti-Prohibition Democrat Franklin Roosevelt easily defeated the dry President Herbert Hoover, who was blamed for the Depression in the US. Virginians, who voted for Hoover in 1928, gave Roosevelt 68% of their votes.⁴⁶ In March 1933 the US Congress passed the Cullen-Harrison Act which legalized the sale of beverages containing not more than 3.2% alcohol by weight. Virginia still had a state-wide prohibition law in effect and Virginia Governor John G Pollard was a dry. However, Senator Byrd convinced Pollard that there was enough support for repeal to call the Virginia General Assembly into special session.

They met on 17 August 1933. The special session:

1. Legalized the sale alcoholic beverages of not more than 3.2% alcohol by weight.
2. Called for a special election to let Virginia's voters chose between continuing State Prohibition if National Prohibition was repealed or adopting a 'plan of liquor control'.
3. Created a committee charged with drafting appropriate legislation if voters approved ending prohibition in Virginia.⁴⁷

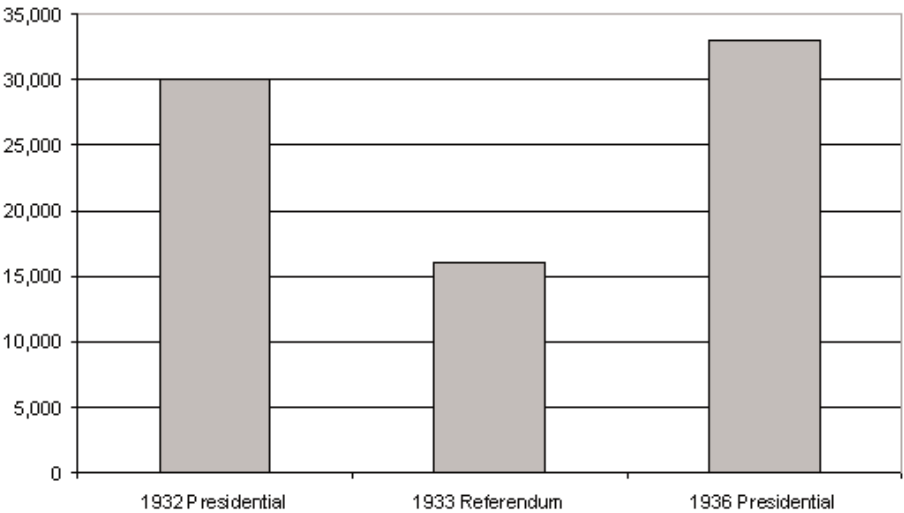


Table 2. Votes cast in Virginia.

Source: Voting numbers from <http://uselectionatlas.org>. Accessed 7/26/2010. The chart includes all votes cast. The number of votes cast before 1920 are noticeably lower than totals after wards because women in Virginia did not get the right to vote until 1920 when the 19th Amendment was ratified.

Virginia's special election was held on 3 October 1933. The wets won easily. Voters chose to end prohibition by a vote of 99,640 to 58,518 carrying all of the major cities and 65 of the state's 100 counties. Virginia's voters also approved creating a plan for state liquor control by 100,445 to 57,873. As shown in Table 2, turnout for the referendum vote was notably lower than in either of the presidential elections before or after the 1933 repeal vote. Why? Many dry voters likely were discouraged by the seeming failure of Prohibition. Although levels of alcohol consumption had dropped from pre-Prohibition levels, it had not ended drinking, nor had crime disappeared. Certainly in the midst of the Great Depression they could not argue that poverty has vanished.

In contrast, wet voters would have been encouraged. Congress had already legalized low alcohol beers and wines in March 1933 and the renewal of alcohol taxes seemed to promise help for financially stressed state and local governments. The result was an anti-dry landslide. Virginia's state delegates elected to vote on the 21st amendment met on 25 October 1933 and Virginia became the 32nd state to ratify the 21st amendment. While a few counties and towns kept their local Prohibition laws, by the end of 1933 the officially-dry Virginia envisioned by Cannon, the ASL and the WCTU had vanished.

Virginia prohibition timeline

1901: The Virginia Anti-Saloon League was founded in Richmond.

1903: Virginia passed the Mann Law, eliminated almost all saloons from rural districts by establishing stringent requirements for allowing alcohol sales in small towns and rural areas. This closed about one quarter of Virginia's saloons. Also, 24 towns and cities held elections on local option, and 18 vote to go dry.

1906: Six more towns vote to go dry.

1907: Thirteen towns have votes on local option, eleven go dry. The Twelfth National Convention of the Anti-Saloon League was held in Norfolk.

1908: Roanoke voted to go dry, but the results were thrown out by a local judge who ruled that election irregularities made the results invalid.

1909: The Anti-Saloon League estimated that only about 600 saloons remain in Virginia. Charlottesville voted to go dry. Roanoke rejected another local prohibition law.

1910: Attempts to reverse prohibition in Winchester and Fredericksburg fail as both voted to remain dry.

1911: The Anti-Saloon League reported that eight of the 19 cities in Virginia were dry, as were 145 of 161 towns. The rural areas of the state were almost entirely dry as well.

1912: The House of Delegates in Virginia's legislature passed a resolution to put state-wide prohibition on a referendum in the fall, but the bill is defeated in the Senate by a vote of 24-16.

1914: The bill for an election on state-wide prohibition passed both houses of the legislature, the lower house by a large margin, and the Senate when the Senate President cast a tie-breaking vote. The election was held on 22 September and state-wide Prohibition passed 90,000 to 60,000 (approximate totals).

1916: In March the Virginia legislature passed the Mapp Law, making Virginia dry as of midnight, the morning of 1 November 1916.

1918: 11 January. Virginia was the second state to ratify the 18th Amendment.

1933: 17 August. The Virginia legislature meet in special session to legalize 3.2% beer and to make arrangements for a referendum on Prohibition on 3 October. In the referendum, voters vote to end statewide prohibition. On 25 October a state convention ratifies the 21st amendment making Virginia is the 32nd state to ratify.

Breweries closed by Virginia's dry law

Alexandria

Robert Portner, aka Tivoli Brewery. (closed 1916)

Norfolk

Consumer's Brewing Company (closed 1918, reopened 1934)

Richmond

Richmond Brewery (closed 1918)
Home Brewing (closed 1918, reopened 1934)

Roanoke

Virginia Brewing Company (closed 1918, reopened 1934)

Rosslyn

Arlington Brewing Company (closed 1918)

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16. *ibid.* pp 231-2.

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45. Mills, E. (2000) *Chesapeake Rumrunners of the Roaring Twenties*.

Centreville, MD: Tidewater Publishers. pp.49-50.

46. Virginia was normally part of the solid Southern Democratic bloc. When Hoover carried Virginia in 1928 against New York governor Al Smith, it was the first time a Republican had carried the state since Ulysses S. Grant in 1876. Smith lost Virginia in part because he was an urban wet, but also because he was Catholic. The first Catholic presidential nominee of a major political party, Smith did poorly in the overwhelmingly Protestant South.

47. <http://www.abc.state.va.us/admin/hist1.htm> (accessed 21/6/2010); Ironmonger, E.H. and Phillips, P.L. (1958) op. cit. p.80.