Theatre, Culture and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America

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1

"He drank from the poisoned cup": temperance reform in nineteenth-century America

> God, if there is a hell on earth it is that experienced by the wife of a drunkard.
>
> *Diary of Jayne Chancellor Payne*, June 4, 1843

> In the history of the world the doctrine of Reform had never such scope as at the present hour.
>
> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Man the Reformer"

As the nineteenth century entered its second twenty-five years, intemperance and efforts to reform it, the subject of so many novels, dramas, short stories, newspaper serials and tracts to follow, was on nearly everyone's mind and tongue, and practically everyone charged with providing moral and/or political leadership seemingly participated in a discourse that moved increasingly toward the full-scale condemnation of drinking. Emblematic of this, a young Abraham Lincoln, in a temperance address in Springfield, Illinois, declared that "the demon of intemperance ever seems to have delighted in sucking the blood of genius and of generosity"; Horace Greeley inveighed against intemperance, both verbally and in print, imploring respectable men to "go on Sundays to church rather than to the grog-shop"; and the Rev. David Pickering, Pastor of the First Universalist Church, Providence, Rhode Island, in an attempt to warn his congregation about the pernicious habit of drinking, went so far as to publish a list of the "necessary effects of intemperance." Intemperance, according to Pickering's pamphlet, was "destructive to habits of industry and of health; was productive of poverty; impaired the intellectual powers; 'unfit[ed]' a man for both the duties and enjoyments of social life; led to other vices [i.e., gambling, stealing]; led to falsehood; and, extinguished the finest and tenderest sensibilities of the human heart."[1] Likewise, by the time of Lincoln's address, the remedy for drinking – temperance reform – was as common a topic of discussion as the problem itself, temperance activists were attaining celebrity

status, lurid temperance narratives were selling thousands of copies in novel form and attracting large audiences to playhouses, and temperance activity in one form or another was virtually ubiquitous in American society. By the mid 1840s, there were, according to author Bayard Rust Hall, temperance hotels; temperance saloons; temperance picnics; "temperance Negro operas; temperance theaters; temperance eating houses, and temperance everything."[2]

Such activism and public interest, common by the early 1840s, however, was virtually unknown just a quarter of a century earlier. Prior to the 1820s, there was no perceived need for such reform nor for the literary and dramatic activities that disseminated the temperance message nor was there the necessity of proclamations like Lincoln's or Greeley's. In colonial and early republican society, the consumption of alcohol was pervasive, respectable and deeply ingrained, crossing regional, gender and class lines, and drinking was generally regarded as an integral part of daily family life and as essential to routine social, commercial and political intercourse. In eighteenth-century America, alcohol in the form of beer or hard cider (wine or brandy in the homes of the wealthy) was consumed at daily meals by each member of the average family, children included, and home brewing was one of the routine duties of the colonial housewife. Brewing was done several times each week, so a visit to a neighbor invariably involved a sampling of a freshly prepared beverage from the bottle reserved especially for guests. As William Cobbett, a British traveler to the United States early in the nineteenth century, noted "you cannot go into hardly anyman's house without being asked to drink wine, or even spirits, even *in the morning*."[3]

When illness struck the family, a common prescription was a healthy "tug on the jug," because alcohol was believed to be, not only a relief for pain and an anesthetic, but a cure for colds and fever, dyspepsia, various inflammations, snakebite, "frosted" toes, broken legs and a host of other maladies. It was also believed to possess medicinal properties to both relieve tension and reduce depression. Even following childbirth, both newborn and mother were supplied with ample doses of rum, brandy or gin in the form of a toddy or punch. And, whiskey and rum were considered to possess restorative capabilities necessary to sustain men at work in the fields or the shop. Thus, in its earliest manifestation, most drinking took place in or around the home, as did much of the production of the beverages consumed, and the consumption of intoxicating beverages was thoroughly integrated into the average colonist's daily life.[4]

In the consumption of liquor, the church reinforced family and medical norms regarding alcohol. Wine was incorporated into the services of the Anglican and Puritan churches, and weddings, wakes, funerals, baptisms, ministerial ordinations and other church activities were routinely occasions for drinking. At a 1678 funeral of a prominent Puritan in Boston, mourners consumed over fifty gallons of wine, while at the funeral of a minister in Ipswich just a few years later, those in attendance drank two barrels of cider and a barrel of wine. And it wasn't just the laity who imbibed. At an ordination in 1810, Lyman Beecher observed that "drinking was apparently universal among the clergy" in attendance and it was not uncommon for ministers to be reprimanded for "drunkenness and riotous conduct."[5] While intoxication was universally considered sinful – the direct result of Satan's presence – most clergy agreed with Puritan leader Increase Mather's opinion that liquor itself was "the Good Creature of God" and that moderate consumption was allowable.[6] The ecclesiastical stance was therefore that habitual drunkenness was to be deplored and discouraged, but "routine" drinking was within church norms and expectations. Tolerance for alcohol use was so entrenched in church practice, in fact, that the Reverend John Marsh, an early temperance leader, recalled another clergyman who was branded a "pest and a blackguard" after he moralized about the excessive drinking in his church.[7]

Liquor played an equally important role in America's social intercourse and was present in abundance practically everywhere men gathered, playing a central role in men's relations with other men. Town meetings were seldom held without heavy consumption of alcohol by participants and spectators alike and court sessions frequently were "wet"; communal activities like clearing the common fields or raising the town church necessitated a cask of liquor for the citizenry; barn raisings required that the farmer who was to benefit from his neighbors' labor set aside several barrels of rum or cider for work breaks; militia musters, an important aspect of pre-republican life, often degenerated into drinking bouts and drunken revels; and at auctions, drinks were served to anyone who made a bid.[8] Liquor at social gatherings was so ubiquitous, in fact, that wine was served at early meetings of the Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance, one of America's first temperance organizations.[9]

Intemperance was also integrated into political practices early in America's history. Local elections were often considered occasions for drinking to excess, for it was generally acknowledged that the winners would be determined by which candidates could provide the most free liquor to the

electorate. While contemporary readers may regard this practice and the prospect of the nation's leaders being selected by drunkards as reprehensible, it is important to note that when Col. George Washington was seeking a seat in the House of Burgesses in 1758, he spent a total of thirty-seven pounds on election expenses, with thirty-four pounds of this designated for the purchase of liquor for those coming to the polls.[10]

Drinking was also fully ingrained in America's daily commercial life. Business deals were commonly consummated and sealed over drinks in the local tavern and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century employers, both in the village and on the farm, provided liquor for their apprentices and hired hands. In an era before distinct delineations between work-time and leisure-time and when work was still task-oriented, rather than time-oriented, it was considered "traditional" to imbibe during breaks, a practice reinforced by the common belief that alcohol was a stimulus to labor and a means of reviving strength after exertion.

The cultural centrality of liquor was reflected in the prominent stature afforded the tavern or public house, whose significance, according to social historian Ian Tyrrell, "lay in its service as a utility institution in a society lacking a complex structure of more specialized institutions."[11] A central focus of village life and, along with the church, invariably one of the first buildings erected, the local tavern was initially opened as a stopover where travelers could find food, libation and lodging. So essential were the services of the village inn to the comfort of travelers and the economic well-being of the village, in fact, that authorities reserved for themselves the power to order localities without a suitable public house to erect one.[12] While some of the early taverns were clean, well-appointed, comfortable establishments fit for "gentlemen," many were crude, rough-hewn places equipped with a handful of tables, stools and a plank bar. Regardless of their degree of refinement, however, colonial taverns were among the earliest gathering places for American males and one of the only regular sites of drinking outside of the home.

Gradually, over time, the local tavern's function as a refuge for travelers declined, while simultaneously its role as the center of community life grew. The tavern served, not only as a center of commerce where bartering took place and deals were finalized over a drink and as the village's principal conduit to the outside world, but as a polling place and the site of town meetings, auctions, lotteries and militia musters. After militia drills, worship services, town meetings and court trials (assuming that they were not actually held in the tavern), men repaired to the local inn to "refresh themselves," to swap

stories and to discuss politics and current events.[13] In some villages, taverns were erected adjacent to churches so that the congregation could adjourn for drink and socializing after Sunday services. Additionally, the tavern served as the communications hub of the village with notices of local interest being posted, letters received held for the citizenry and newspapers brought in by coach made available to patrons, and it was the logical staging site for such entertainments as boxing matches, bearbaiting, cockfighting and gambling.

Furthermore, because all men were believed to be "equal before the bottle," because it was widely believed in colonial male culture that "to be drunk was to be free" and because taverns had traditionally served as recruiting stations for the Continental army and informal headquarters and staging grounds for rebellion, the public house became a symbol of the egalitarianism Americans prized so highly and a vital institution in the "political culture of America."[14] As David Conroy has observed, in pre-Revolutionary times, the tavern was "a public stage upon which men, and sometimes women, spoke and acted in ways that sometimes tested – and ultimately challenged – the authority of their rulers and social superiors."[15]

Understandably, within the hierarchical social structure of the colonial era, established elites were quick to recognize the potential for social chaos should the taverns slip beyond their control. While colonial inns were routinely maintained by citizens of "good moral character" who, it was expected, would run "well-regulated, orderly and respectable" establishments, and even though a 1606 law passed by Parliament made drunkenness a crime, authorities nevertheless sought additional (i.e., legal) means to control the distribution of liquor. In practically all states, public houses were required to be licensed, unlicensed sellers were outlawed and, adopting a facet of the English licensing system, dealers were prohibited from selling liquor to certain segments of the population; while Massachusetts, according to a seventeenth-century statute, went so far as to require that only church members and property owners be eligible to be licensed and, even when day-to-day operation of the taverns was delegated to hired help, the publican remained subservient to upper-class wishes. Thus, according to temperance historian W. J. Rorabaugh, in the early years of the Republic the upper classes were able to effectively monitor drinking by controlling the taverns.[16]

The licensing of drinking establishments ensured that alcohol consumption would take place within a social structure that was "limited and controlled," and inebriation, when it occurred, was generally regarded as an anomaly, not as a significant threat to society.[17] As a result, in colonial

America there was a general lack of anxiety about drinking problems and, compared to middle-class efforts to institute and enforce social controls over working-class drinking and the resultant angry division of antebellum society into lower-class "wets" and middle-class "drys" that all too frequently characterized alcohol reform of the mid nineteenth century and later, class tensions were, for the most part, nonexistent. Colonial and early republican attitudes toward drinking remained laissez-faire; hence they were less confrontational, with efforts to control the consumption of alcohol restricted to the licensing of taverns. Intemperate apprentices and tippling farmhands could easily be punished by their masters, who were expected, according to custom and common law, to control their subordinates; children who showed symptoms of drinking to excess could be disciplined by their parents; and the "village drunk" was easily managed by the town constable.

Institutional controls notwithstanding, then, "the controlled drinking of the American colonies was largely a result of a social order in which an elite of religious, economic, and political leadership was able to develop social codes of conduct that were influential at most levels of society."[18] As Rorabaugh has noted, "the upper classes were able to monitor drinking and to impose restraints . . . due to the hierarchical nature of colonial society."[19] Accepting the orthodoxy of the era that opinions travel upwards, manners downward, America's elites viewed themselves as "the central point of departure for the diffusion of improvement in both ideas and behavior" and consequently presumed that paternalistically projecting a public image of moderation would serve as an adequate substitute for more formal constraints on the liquor consumption of both their peers and their inferiors.[20] Thus, through a network of both formal and informal social controls, intemperance in colonial America was kept in check and the distribution of alcoholic beverages, a "legitimate and useful trade that furthered [the average citizen's] welfare and happiness," was allowed not only to exist, but to thrive.[21]

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, however, traditional norms governing alcohol consumption came under siege and deference for America's elites and the complex system of social controls that they had instituted to regulate intemperance in colonial America was undermined, or more precisely, overthrown, by what some have characterized as an uncultured and uneducated mass of farmers and mechanics. Viewed from a historical perspective, "the American Revolution was a great solvent working to dissolve the rigid class and status structure of colonial society."[22] As America moved aggressively and inexorably toward the fervent egalitarianism of the

Jacksonian era, drunkenness as an act of liberation, the seeds of which had been planted in the pre-Revolutionary tavern, became a common feature of male culture; alcohol as a reinforcing agent of the bonds between free white men became even more ubiquitous than it had been in colonial times; and what remained of patrician norms governing drinking became insufficient to control intemperance.

The breakdown of upper-class social control was compounded and exacerbated by a whiskey glut in the 1820s that brought the price of distilled beverages within reach of every American. During the Revolutionary War, the importation of both rum and molasses from the West Indies was virtually eliminated by the British blockade of American ports, with one result being an increase in the distilling of whiskey to fill both military and civilian demand for liquor. Grain was so plentiful that farmers were unable to either consume it themselves or to sell it in its original form. However, when distilled, three gallons of highly marketable whiskey could be made from a single bushel of surplus corn. For western farmers, prior to the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, it was considerably easier and more profitable to transport whiskey to the east than it was to transport the grain from which it was distilled. In addition, the boom in road building following the revolution not only made liquor easier to ship, but a proliferation of new taverns (many unlicensed) along these roads made alcoholic beverages even more accessible and further reinforced the male subculture that revolved around drinking. Thus, at a time when alternatives to liquor were few (coffee and tea were too expensive for the average citizen to drink regularly and both water and milk were widely thought to be common sources of disease), when liquor was more accessible outside of the home and when a poorly paid laborer or farm worker who earned a dollar a day could afford whiskey priced at twenty-five to fifty cents per gallon and could obtain it with little effort, annual per capita consumption of distilled spirits soared by 1820 to over five gallons, nearly triple that of today's. Tacitly condoned by the laissez-faire attitudes of the remaining aristocracy, no longer checked by social controls and now subject to market forces that provided cheap, plentiful whiskey, America was rapidly becoming, as the Greene and Delaware Moral Society declared, "a nation of drunkards."

Simultaneously, long-established perceptions of drinking were changing as the "hearty, carefree, freewheeling, benign" drinking habits of the yeoman-artisan republic that had been monitored and controlled by the upper classes had eroded to such a degree that public drunkenness became commonplace and came to be associated with human misery, social disorder

and crime. Between 1790 and 1820 – a transitional period in the drinking habits of Americans – intemperance was becoming recognized as the principal contributing factor in wife-beatings, murders, incest involving a child and her drunken father, neglect and abandonment of families, assaults, lewd behavior, sexual promiscuity, increased indebtedness and idleness.[23] And even if crime and public disgrace were not the results of intemperance, as the ideology of separate spheres gained ascendance during the century and with less alcohol being produced in the home, men were increasingly forced to seek drinking places outside the home. As a consequence, the local bar became "a competitor for the family cash that was increasingly necessary for survival in a commodity economy."[24] As the republic moved into a new century, therefore, Increase Mather's "Good Creature of God" had already begun to be transformed into the "demon rum" of early temperance reformers as Americans, uneasy about their and the country's future, increasingly came to view intemperance as a significant threat to public order and came to recognize alcohol's capacity to, in the words of Roxbury (Massachusetts) lawyer Henry Warren, "unleash terrible passions on society."[25]

Such social decay, "poverty and misery, crimes and infamy, diseases and death" had actually been prophesied as early as 1784 by Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, pioneer in American medicine, and early reformer. In a tract titled *An Inquiry into the Effects of Spirituous Liquors on the Human Body and Mind*, Rush directly and aggressively challenged the orthodoxy of the era regarding alcohol consumption, not only by denying many of the commonly accepted benefits of drinking, such as its capacity to protect against extremes of weather or as a restorative after hard labor, but by intimating that one form of alcohol – the distilled beverage – was addictive for everyone who drank it.[26] While he continued to assert that beer, cider and wine (the so-called "wholesome" drinks) promoted good health and well-being, Rush unequivocally maintained that consumption of distilled beverages undermined a drinker's constitution and resulted directly in "physical, mental and moral destruction," even if the drinker did not drink to intoxication.[27] While Rush's notion of addiction was certainly far from a modern concept of addiction, he nevertheless convinced many readers that distilled liquor was a "substance of irresistible attraction and powerful effect, capable of overcoming human will" and that "like the demoniac mentioned in the New-Testament, [it conveyed] into the soul a host of vices and crimes."[28] By the end of the eighteenth century, Rush's findings and opinions had infiltrated mainstream public thought and were influencing attitudes toward drinking. Given his prestige in American society, his

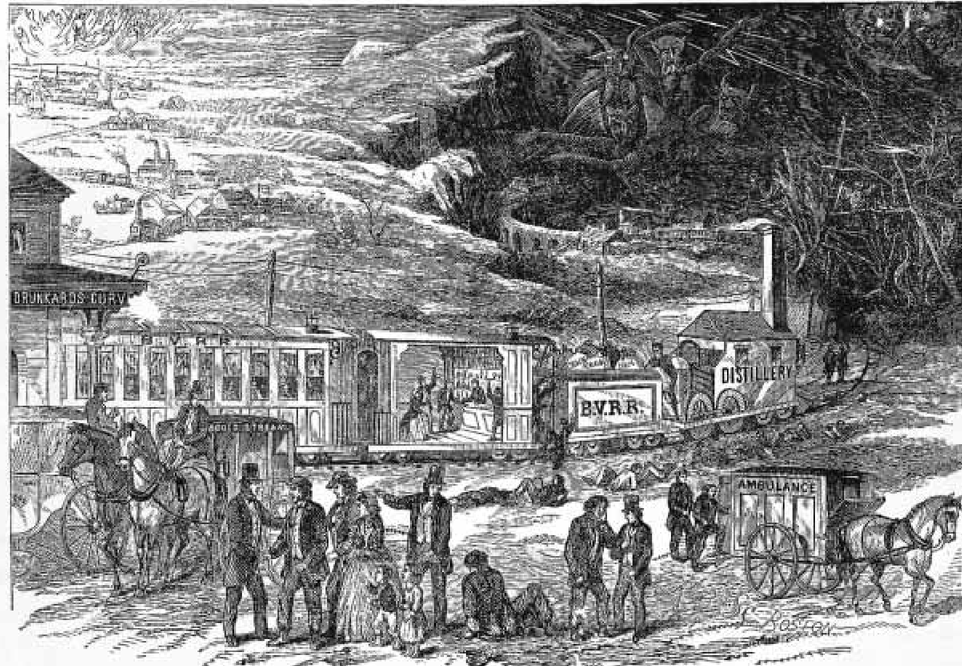

Figure 1. The Black Valley Railroad

reputation as a scientist, the logic and rationality of his arguments and the widespread dissemination of his findings, it is hardly surprising that Rush's voice would be one of the strongest and most persuasive in early temperance reform efforts and over 170,000 copies of his *Inquiry*, in pamphlet form, would be printed and distributed by mid-century.

Rush's success at popularizing his theories and attracting educated Americans to his views notwithstanding, his influence was just one factor in the emergence of a concerted effort to curb Americans' intemperance. The first temperance movement was born during a confluence of social developments that included not only the breakdown of patrician social controls and the market revolution that made distilled liquor widely available, but the emergence of new social problems spawned by the precipitous and uncontrolled growth of American cities (as outlined in chapter 2) and the effects of the Second Great Awakening, which social historians agree wrought radical changes in moral attitudes and outlook and had a profound impact on social reform during the first half of the nineteenth century. Between 1790 and 1820, the mass of revivals that swept the country not only generated an energy that easily translated into benevolence and service to mankind, but they introduced Americans to dynamic preachers like Charles Grandison Finney, Lyman Beecher, Timothy Dwight and Nathaniel Taylor, all of whom rejected Calvinist notions of "man's ineradicable depravity" in favor of a more optimistic outlook that allowed for the reclamation of sinners and social deviants and hence contributed to a mindset conducive to reformist activism.[29] Considering that a significant percentage of the converts to religion during this period were young, it is hardly surprising that this generation, which came of age in the 1820s, should form the nucleus of reform societies as well as the foundation of a middle class predicated upon a nexus of values that combined evangelical morality and the principles of free enterprise.

"From men so schooled in the thought and practice of evangelical revivalism," Ian Tyrrell points out, "came the architects of temperance reform, the religious leadership that founded the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance" (later known as the American Temperance Society or simply as the ATS) in 1826.[30] Although not the first voluntary society dedicated specifically to the correction of intemperance, the ATS was the first effort to do so on a national scale and, even in its earliest years, it was the hub of a national temperance movement.[31] From the outset, the ATS philosophy of temperance reform differentiated it from earlier efforts that concentrated upon encouraging the moderate use of all alcoholic beverages. Organized by an aggressive group of evangelical clergymen and inspired by Lyman Beecher's claim that "the daily use of ardent spirits [i.e., distilled

beverages], in any form, or in any degree, is intemperance" and his call for the public display of statistics reflecting the prevalence of alcoholism and its resultant social disruption, the ATS both advocated total abstinence from whiskey and related drink and created a strategy, an organization and a well-organized system of finance to disseminate their new approach.[32]

Since fourteen of the original sixteen ATS directors were members of the American Tract Society, it follows that they would adopt the printed word as their principal weapon and, following the example of their predecessors, that they would flood the country with millions of pamphlets. Tracts were cheap to produce, could be directed at specific target audiences like women or children and could be produced quickly to respond to special occurrences like the cholera epidemic of 1832 when temperance activists publicized the fact that most of those who perished were drinkers. The distribution of tracts was followed by itinerant speakers (mostly paid) who reinforced the message of the pamphlets with personal testimony and then solicited contributions from their audience and local sponsors. The combined propaganda/fundraising appearances ensured, not only the dissemination of the abstinence imperative, but full ATS coffers as well. More open and more democratic than its predecessors like the Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance, the ATS attracted and enlisted both individuals and local societies, bringing to its membership people who routinely were barred from the earlier, more "exclusive" temperance organizations. The inclusiveness of the ATS was reflected in their financial ledgers that showed that over two-thirds of the members contributed five dollars or less to the cause. Through their efforts to make temperance activism more accessible, the ATS "became one of the most successful reform movements in American history, whether measured by the decline of drinking in the near term or by the inculcation of temperance values in the long term."[33]

Tactically, the ATS approach was predicated upon two convictions: first, rather than an attempt to reclaim habitual drunkards, their goal, like that of Benjamin Rush, was to convince those individuals who were already temperate to sign the pledge and abstain from distilled drink. The ATS believed that if they targeted the young and the temperate, once the current generation of alcoholics died, the nation would be considerably "dryer," since there would be no new drunks to replace them. As Justin Edwards, the society's tactical leader maintained, "as all who are *intemperate* will soon be dead, the earth will be eased of an amazing evil."[34] Second, the ATS leadership adopted moral suasion as its principal tool for encouraging men to sign the pledge. In lieu of more coercive techniques, moral suasion relied

Figure 2. Signing the Pledge

upon informal persuasion, the pressures of public opinion, moral example, the fear of loss of independence and the creation of alternative institutions (e.g., temperance hotels) to encourage men to remain temperate and join the ATS cause. The necessity of promoting the morality of abstinence is often cited as one reason the ATS welcomed women into their movement.

In the 1830s, perhaps spurred on by their earlier success in reducing alcohol consumption during the early years of the century and perfectionist visions that emerged during the Second Great Awakening, activists adopted a new goal – requiring everyone interested in temperance to sign a new pledge, the “teetotal” pledge, that required the signer to swear off all alcohol including beer, wine and cider as well as distilled beverages. Spearheaded by a new national organization, the American Temperance Union, founded in 1836, activists sought to reform the drinking habits of everyone who imbibed and thus targeted drunkards and moderate drinkers alike. In their efforts, the temperance community was supported and bolstered by new scientific findings (most notably those of chemist William Brande) that both distillation and fermentation created alcohol and that intoxication could therefore result from consuming beer, wine and cider. Thus, the colonial belief that distillation alone resulted in alcohol was proven to be erroneous. Armed with this information, temperance activists brought all liquor under scrutiny and directed their moral suasion efforts at the eradication of fermented as well as distilled beverages.

Intemperance, however, was more than an issue of morality or medicine. At a time when the country was in the midst of both social and economic upheaval, it was seen both as a significant threat to existing public order and as a major impediment to progress and modernization – to the transformation from a rural, cooperative, agrarian society to an urban, industrialized, competitive one. It was also viewed as an impediment to the emergence and cultural advancement of the middle class. According to reformers and entrepreneurs alike, social progress demanded the adoption of an entirely new nexus of values – one that stressed self-mastery, industry, thrift, self-denial and sobriety – as well as the eradication of traditional attitudes and behavior patterns that might be construed as obstacles to change. Heading the list of obstacles to economic prosperity and social progress was the widespread public drunkenness that threatened to subvert the moral integrity and internal disciplines of the middle-class world and to stifle the economic expansion that, at the time, seemed imminent.[35]

In this context, it requires no "great unmasking" to discover the self-interest associated with the entrepreneurial class' attraction to temperance reform.[36] With the breakdown of the colonial shop/farm economic model in which apprentices and farmhands worked side by side with their masters and often lived on the work site, laborers in the increasingly industrialized America of the first half of the nineteenth century became independent of their employers during their leisure hours and increasingly sought companionship and entertainment in the countless bars that dotted the urban landscape. The results of late nights spent drinking included increased absence from the job, accidents, inefficiency caused by workers' exhaustion and, not infrequently, drunkenness on the job. In a workplace that employed hundreds of nameless, faceless workers, factory owners, desperate to maintain order and productivity and eager to reduce absenteeism and accidents, actively and quite publicly supported temperance societies. Thus, efforts to extend temperance reform to the working classes reflected more than the classism and nativism of the era; they demonstrated the economic interests of the entrepreneurial class as well. And it was this shift of focus, from the "respectable" classes to all classes, as well as the fragmentation of the first temperance movement, that indicated that American temperance reform had completed its first cycle and was on the verge of its second.

To historian Jack Blocker, American temperance reform was hardly a single, continuous movement that progressed in the shape of a tragic arc from the uncontrolled drinking of the 1820s through the triumph of Prohibition to ultimate defeat with its repeal; but rather was a series of interlocking cycles,

each with its own goals and tactics. "Although the various movements [were] united by the goal of control over drinking," Blocker maintains, "they [were] distinguished by the specific constellations of historic forces that impelled men and women at different times to choose temperance as a solution to what they perceived as a problem in their own lives or in the lives of others. Each movement was different as well because of the lessons temperance reformers drew from the remembered experience of their predecessors."[37]

While reformers' targets and intent may have shifted (or, more accurately, been expanded) by the early 1840s, temperance remained the "most persistent issue in American local and state politics" and in the public consciousness.[38] As Joseph Gusfield theorizes, "issues of moral reform are [often ways] through which a cultural group acts to preserve, defend, or enhance the dominance and prestige of its own style of living within the total society."[39] Influenced by revivalist activity and touted by religious and secular leaders alike, the non-drinking man became the model of respectability and the relationship between temperance and social status – a relationship aggressively promoted and reinforced by anti-liquor activists from 1830 to 1930 – was established. The rationale was simple: moral, abstinent men made better workers, husbands, fathers, leaders, borrowers, citizens; and, those who possessed the will power and strength of character to undertake a program of self-improvement could be trusted to accomplish whatever they undertook. Thus, membership in a temperance organization was "both a sign of commitment to middle-class values and a step in the process of changing a life style."[40] Once an example of "fidelity to saintly virtues," sobriety assumed a significant symbolic, secular dimension as well, having become a necessary aspect of good character and middle-class status, and a touchstone of middle-class respectability.

As the century progressed, the dominance of middle-class norms governing drinking and the targeting of working-class habits became more apparent and increasingly the identification of alcohol consumption with social status was reinforced. According to Gusfield, whose research on the relationship between abstinence and status remains instructive,

> the quest for self improvement implies a gap between those who remain dissolute and those who have achieved respectability [through signing the teetotal pledge]. The incoming group thus widens the status gap between it and the natives. If the lowly Irish and Germans were the drinkers and drunkards of the community, it was more necessary than ever that the aspirant to middle-class membership not risk the possibility that he might be classed with the immigrants.[41]

Such thinking – a mindset encouraged and disseminated by rabid nativists – increased social pressure on habitual drinkers, especially those from the lower classes. The term "rummies" (later, "wets") and the negative moral connotations that accompanied it, for example, became associated with the working classes; while later in temperance reform, "drys" was a label most often applied to someone respectable and middle class. As Christine Stansell observed in reference to evangelical reformers in *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789–1860*, there is a clear link between rhetoric and class intervention. "The language of virtue and vice, traditionally laden with social connotations," according to Stansell, "became for . . . evangelicals a code of class, which described their own mission of social domination in the language of ethical mandate."[42] Applied more broadly, to secular as well as to evangelical reformers and to temperance advocacy in particular, class came to be understood in moral terms. Having begun early in the century as a "vague impatience" with the intractable crudities and excesses of the working classes, the efforts of mid-century middle-class temperance advocates to reform those beneath them ultimately grew into a full-fledged assault on the mores of working people and immigrants.

As immigration brought new generations of drunkards to American cities and the working classes became more prominent and visible, the goals of some temperance proponents actively shifted from preserving the temperate middle class to reforming the intemperate working classes, many new activists joined the war against alcohol, and temperance reform moved toward increased democratization, becoming for the first time open to those who most needed it: diehard drunkards. It was this shift in focus – from moderate drinkers and the already temperate to heavy drinkers and groups previously excluded from temperance reform – that, even more than the collapse of earlier temperance movements, signaled the end of America's first phase of temperance activism.

The shift from a national, but restricted movement to a more inclusive movement began in 1840 when six artisans – a tailor, a carpenter, a coach maker, a silversmith, a wheelwright and a blacksmith – met at Chase's Tavern in Baltimore and, according to legend, having been profoundly moved by a temperance lecturer at a nearby meeting, decided to organize a temperance society dedicated to the reformation of drinkers of their own class.[43] Naming their society after George Washington, who had delivered the country from British oppression, the original Washingtonians began a campaign of moral suasion that they believed could deliver lower middle-class and working-class drinkers from the oppression of intemperance.

Beginning with the reformation of Baltimore as its principal goal, the Washingtonian movement soon branched out to other cities and by 1842 not only had 11 percent of Baltimore's free population over ten joined the society, but similar numbers were being recorded in New York, Philadelphia, other major northern cities and the west.[44]

As historians of temperance movements are quick to point out, the Washingtonian appeal to the lower middle class and working classes was hardly the first attempt to do so nor was their inflammatory reformist rhetoric necessarily new. During the Panic of 1837, artisans whose livelihood was threatened by the growing power of their employers, had banded together for mutual protection into beneficial societies. While the initial motivation for such organizations was economic protection, not the eradication of drink, it is nevertheless understandable that a temperance imperative would have been included, since it was believed that intemperance in times of depression would be invariably catastrophic to the drinker, his family and ultimately to the unity and solidarity of the beneficial society.

Regardless of whether the Washingtonians were true pioneers in working-class temperance reform or not, their immediate success was undeniable and was due to discoveries and techniques that were to become standards of temperance reform for generations to come. The new movement attempted to reclaim chronic drunkards, previously considered irrevocably lost by its predecessors, and drew from the lower middle and working classes. These segments of society had been largely ignored by earlier temperance societies, but in the 1840s, activists were becoming increasingly convinced that the doctrine of personal self-control was the means to social mobility. Furthermore, the Washingtonian appeal was to the drinker's emotions rather than to his reason. Consequently, the intemperate were addressed directly and in person, not simply provided with tracts to read on their own, and, assuming that the most recalcitrant drunkards might not come to their meetings voluntarily, the Washingtonians sent missionaries into the bowels of America's cities in search of those most in need of saving. Furthermore, the Washingtonians, experienced in the bachelor subculture of the bar room and aware of the temptations it offered, worked assiduously to provide environments and entertainments to supplant and rival those of the tavern. Realizing that drunkards and their families might require financial and material aid in order to restore order to their lives, the Washingtonians offered that assistance as well.

Possibly, however, the Washingtonians' greatest assets were their accessibility and their egalitarian nature. Whereas earlier temperance societies

met infrequently and the membership sat passively listening to a featured speaker, Washingtonian meetings were held each week and any rank-and-file member could (and often did) speak. And it was the speeches by habitual drinkers or those who had just recently signed the teetotal pledge – the now-famous Washingtonian "experience speeches" – that both defined the society and attracted the public's attention to it.[45] Modeled upon the success of such speeches in the English working-class teetotal movement of the 1830s and predicated upon the assumption that working-class men would invariably resist the admonitions and the censorious moralizing of their social superiors, the Washingtonians enlisted men of their own class – reclaimed drunkards who understood the situations and feelings of those currently enslaved by alcohol – to narrate their own sufferings and to publicly embody the possibility of becoming temperate. Thus, the experience speech became the central and most publicized activity of the Washingtonian meeting.[46]

As described by Timothy Shay Arthur (in *Six Nights with the Washingtonians*, 1848) and others, the drama of the Washingtonian meeting began routinely with the society President's announcing, after the preliminaries were concluded, that the next "hour or so would be spent in the recital of their experiences by such members of the society as felt inclined to speak."[47] This announcement was followed by a heightened sense of expectation and excitement as a series of speakers took the floor, each to describe in lurid and painful detail his taking the first fateful drink; his neglect and abuse of his wife and children; his loss of position, family and respectability; his precipitous decline to a degraded state in one of any number of "skid rows"; his reaching the nadir of existence, frequently characterized by the onset of the DT's; his eventual discovery of the "miracle" of the pledge and his subsequent signing it; and finally, his rapid reclamation and reunion with his family and community. Delivered in a vivid, dramatic, emotional style, the "intensified sensationalism" of the Washingtonian experience speech rendered it a true "charismatic situation" – one that exhibited all the characteristics of folk theatre and domestic melodrama and one that ensured its appropriation as both a literary and dramatic model.[48]

Before the first year of the Washingtonians' existence was over, the inherent theatricality of their experience speech had attracted thousands to a life free of alcohol, and, having realized early that a riveting and theatricalized narrative delivered by a histrionic speaker was their best weapon, they had a number of exhilarating and inspirational "professional" speakers criss-crossing the country, recounting the horrors of drink and recruiting new society members.

Throughout the 1840s, then, despite considerable resistance from lower-class "roughs" and concerted efforts to subvert temperance organization by the liquor industry and its political allies, temperance activity proliferated among groups previously excluded with the result that thousands of artisans and craftsmen joined the Washingtonians and other fraternal societies. During roughly the same time period, Irish, German and African-American temperance societies were established; the role of women in temperance reform was expanded; and temperance activity in the South accelerated. Involvement of these previously excluded groups meant that by the end of the decade temperance activism affected a significant percentage of the American population.

Since the earliest days of temperance reform, women had been involved in activism, albeit in subordinate roles. From its beginnings, the ATS included them and was, as historians have recorded, "one of the first American voluntary organizations to attract large numbers of women," with 35 to 60 percent of local societies comprised of females. As the century progressed, women became even more prominent in temperance associations, ultimately establishing and administering their own organizations.[49]

Female inclusion in temperance associations was only logical, considering the havoc a drunkard could wreak upon his family and cultural perceptions regarding women's moral superiority. Jed Dannenbaum observes:

> Female influence within the domestic sphere was the key to the success of the moral suasion efforts that dominated temperance reform activity after 1830. In her role as the ultimate moral authority of the family, a woman could inculcate strict temperance ideals in her children, refuse to serve alcoholic beverages to guests, abandon their use as ingredients in cooking, maintain so attractive a home and fireside that male family members would not be tempted to seek the conviviality of the saloon, and urge sons, husbands, fathers, brothers and suitors either to adopt or to maintain teetotal pledges.[50]

Although arguably as much myth as reality, the power of woman's moral influence as partial solution to intemperance was written into countless temperance novels and into dramas like *Aunt Dinah's Pledge* (1850) by Harry Seymour, Charles Morton's *Three Years in a Man-trap* (1877), *The Drunkard's Warning* by Charles Taylor and *Saved, or Woman's Influence* by Edwin Tardy. In Tardy's drama, this view is succinctly stated by the heroine, Ellen Mortimer: "'Tis said a woman's influence rightly wielded can accomplish seeming impossibilities, trusting to the spirit of truth for aid, and counsel,

no means shall I leave unturned, to save, and win him back to himself, his country and his God."[51]

In the 1840s, such views were immensely popular and women's involvement in temperance activities increased with the Washingtonian emphasis upon moral suasion as the path to national temperance and with the advent of social and economic forces and pressures that urged frugality and personal self-control as the means to, not only family stability, but upward mobility. In these efforts women became the natural allies to the factory owner and the shop foremen whose livelihoods relied upon a sober and reliable work force. As Ruth Alexander notes, the Washingtonians especially had "revealed a deep absorption in the affairs of the home and the conviction that the use of alcohol was inimical to family happiness" and economic well-being.[52]

To support and advance the Washingtonian cause, separate Martha Washington societies designed to "provide food and used clothing for reformed inebriates and their families, both to give relief and to supply the head of the household with a respectable appearance so that he might 'seek employment with any hope of success'," sprang up along side the male associations.[53] Comprised mainly of wives of artisans, throughout the 1840s the Martha Washingtons searched the streets and alleys for those in need of their services and visited countless homes to offer aid to those families ravaged by alcohol abuse and to invite embattled wives to meetings where, in their own experience speeches, they might recount the horrors of a life with a drunken spouse. While these activities in their own right were crucial to the ultimate success of temperance efforts during the 1840s, according to historians of women's rights activism, female involvement in and leadership of organizations such as the Martha Washingtons and its successor, The Daughters of Temperance, provided women invaluable experience in public speaking, founding and administering social organizations, and editing the pamphlets, newspapers and journals necessary for disseminating reformist ideology. As Ruth Bordin points out, "women found in temperance the most congenial cause through which to increase their involvement in public life . . . It was in the temperance movement that large numbers of women were politicized, and it was through temperance that they experienced wider spheres of public activity in the nineteenth century."[54] And, in fact, such noted women's rights activists as Amelia Bloomer, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony learned their organizational, leadership and oratorical skills within the temperance movements at mid-century. Such a degree of activity has led Blocker, Tyrrell and other temperance historians to conclude that temperance was unmistakably the largest and most attractive

reform movement to nineteenth-century women and a significant "weapon with which women could shape their own consciousness and distinctive aspirations."[55]

Like women, African-Americans were involved in temperance almost from its outset and, like women, their involvement and efforts historically have been overlooked, presumably because, having been prevented from joining white societies, they formed their own societies that have yet to be studied. At first, drinking among African-Americans was carefully controlled by colonial governments or slave masters who, although they permitted and even furnished alcoholic beverages to their laborers, restricted its use. Nevertheless, over time alcohol abuse became a problem among both freed blacks and slaves. Many slave owners, having discovered that making their slaves dependent upon the bottle rendered them more subservient, increased daily liquor rations thereby ensuring additional social control over their slaves; and, increased intemperance.

African-Americans responded to the threats of intemperance much as did white reformers. As early as 1788 liquor was branded an evil, causing the Free African Society of Philadelphia to refuse membership to drinkers, and in 1829 African-Americans formed their first temperance organization, the New Haven Temperance Society of the People of Color. Two years later, following the lead of these organizations, two hundred African-Americans in Baltimore founded a temperance society that practiced the established methods of moral suasion and staunchly contended that adopting "temperance and moral reform would prove the worthiness of black character and thus serve as a weapon against" racism.[56]

From the outset, African-American temperance societies resembled their white counterparts in accepting the distinction between distilled and brewed beverages; in employing moral suasion as its principal approach; in eventually espousing total abstinence as the only goal; and in adopting slavery as a metaphor for alcoholism. If the latter was a persuasive argument in white temperance ideology, it was doubly effective in African-American temperance efforts. "By rejecting all alcohol, [organizations like the New England Colored Temperance Society] not only sought to establish [African-Americans'] personal integrity but they saw themselves as promoting the interests of the larger black community by offering practical and symbolic resistance to the forces of racism and slavery."[57]

By the 1840s, abolitionism and African-American temperance activism had become intertwined and inseparable, with famous abolitionists like Frederick Douglass preaching temperance while they spoke against slavery. Having signed the pledge at the behest of Father Theobald Mathew, whom