

Prohibition Exhibit Opens at Pottery Museum of Red Wing

By Steve Ketcham



Dozens of pre-Prohibition liquor jugs made in Red Wing are on display in the Prohibition exhibit now open at the Pottery Museum of Red Wing, Minn.

A new exhibit focusing on the advent of Prohibition in America has recently opened at the Pottery Museum of Red Wing.

The exhibit explores the impact of Prohibition on the potteries of Red Wing.

The roots of the prohibition movement in America date to the Colonial Era. By the early Nineteenth Century, decades before the state of Minnesota was established, various religious and cultural groups were encouraging abstinence from alcoholic beverages. The Women's Christian Temperance Union, established in 1874, proved to be a driving force toward Prohibition in America. Carrie Nation, its most famous member, went beyond simply protesting the consumption of strong drink by putting her beliefs into action as she violently attacked saloons with her hatchet. Her actions caused many a saloon owner to post a sign behind the bar which read: All Nations Welcome, Except Carrie.

Despite the efforts of lobbying groups like the United States Brewers Association, the Prohibition movement eventually took hold in Washington. The U. S. Senate proposed the Eighteenth Amendment in December of 1918. Once approved by 36 states, the amendment was ratified as a part of the Constitution in January of 1919. Congress passed the Volstead Act, authored by Minnesota's own Senator Andrew Volstead, in October of 1919. The law took effect in January of 1920 and act established the legal definition of intoxicating liquors as well as penalties for producing them.

The effects of Prohibition were far reaching. Hundreds of breweries and distilleries were closed, resulting in unemployment for thousands of American workers. Supporting industries from farmers to barrel makers were also affected. Glasshouses and potteries faced reduced demand for their products.



Jugs like this Sterling Wine House example from St. Paul are on display as part of the Prohibition exhibit. Pottery company records show that the Sterling firm ordered 1,000 half-gallon jugs and 300 gallon jugs in February of 1907.



The Sandell Brothers ordered 1,000 half-gallon jugs, 300 gallon jugs, 100 two gallon vessels, and 50 five gallon jugs in October of 1906.



The Michaud Brothers ordered 500 one gallon Red Wing jugs in November of 1906 according to pottery records.

Before Prohibition, hundreds of saloons and liquor dealers from 21 states ordered stoneware liquor jugs stamped with their names from the potteries of Red Wing. A Minneapolis city directory shows that in that city alone 326 saloons were operating in 1918. Many of these saloons used Red Wing stoneware jugs as product containers, filling them from liquor barrels at their establishments.

And just how many jugs are we talking about? The orders for jugs stamped with liquor dealer names from January of 1910 alone, as found in the ledgers of the Red Wing Union Stoneware Company, numbered 6,445 pieces. Prohibition would cause such production to cease.

Some would suggest that bootleggers pushed the demand for unmarked stoneware jugs throughout the Prohibition Era. After all, Stearns County, Minnesota, was home to a popular Prohibition moonshine known as Minnesota 13. During Prohibition, it was in high demand at blind pigs (speakeasies) in Minnesota and beyond. The chances that such products were transported in jugs made in Red Wing are quite high. So significant was Minnesota 13, St. Cloud State University professor Elaine Davis wrote a book telling its story in 2007.

Once Prohibition was repealed in 1933, federal laws forbade the filling of liquor jugs at the point of sale. Stamped Red Wing liquor jugs became a thing of the past.



Pre-Prohibition back bar decanters such as these are also part of the Prohibition exhibit at the Pottery Museum of Red Wing.

Shown here are examples of the many stamped jugs once produced by the potteries of Red Wing for use in the packaging of liquor by saloons and liquor dealers. All date to before Prohibition. Dozens of such jugs are found in the new Prohibition exhibit at the Pottery Museum of Red Wing. The pre-Prohibition bottles and advertising items which are pictured are also a part of the exhibit.

Because saloons often offered cigars to their patrons, an as-

sortment of early cigar boxes adds another colorful facet to the exhibit.

Located at 240 Harrison Street, the Pottery Museum of Red Wing is open Tuesday through Saturday, 9:00 am - 5:00 pm. Sunday hours are 11:00 am to 4:00 pm. In addition to the Prohibition exhibit, roughly 6,000 pieces of pottery made in Red Wing between 1877 and 1967 are on display for visitors to enjoy. Admission is free.

