



Rumrunning Across the Frozen Detroit River in an Automobile
Courtesy of Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

RUMRUNNERS

Following the passage of Michigan's prohibition law, most smuggling took place on the roads between Toledo and Detroit. Southern Michigan cities like Monroe served as midpoints. During one 1919 trolley ride to Detroit, fourteen women were caught hiding alcohol using hand-made "contrivances" placed under their clothing.



Beer Kegs Seized at Mouth of Detroit River by Coast Guard
© 1929
Courtesy of Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

Once national prohibition took effect in 1920, the Detroit River became the main site for "rumrunning," a term that likely originated from rum smuggling in the Caribbean before being applied to the transport of other drinks across waterways. So much alcohol crossed the Detroit-Windsor border that it was mockingly called the "Detroit-Windsor Funnel."

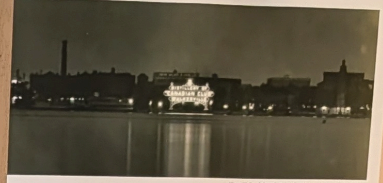
Women often attracted less scrutiny from law enforcement, giving them a valuable advantage over male bootleggers. Some female smugglers took advantage of gendered clothing, hiding alcohol in garters and stockings, specially-made camisoles, or even under fake breasts and fake stomachs that created the illusion

of pregnancy. Rumrunning women across the country received extravagant media attention, with the most notorious being labeled the "queen" of their city's bootleggers.

Grace Kiss - Newspapers alternately labeled Grace Kiss as "the mystery woman of Ecorse," "Queen of the Ecorse Bootleggers," and "Detroit's Bootleg Queen." When federal agents raided the 26-year-old hairdresser's garage in November 1923, they discovered 214 cases of Canadian Lager Beer, 2 beer, 14 quarter barrels of Labatt's Canadian Imperial Whiskey, 4 quarts of cases of Walker's Canadian Imperial Whiskey, 2 quarts of Gordon Walker's Canadian Imperial Whiskey, 2 quarts of Gordon gin, and 27 quarts of port wine.

Kiss had been working with her husband, Jack Beaton, to transport hundreds of cases of Canadian liquor across the Detroit River. Shortly after their motorboat reached the shore, federal agents were waiting to arrest them. In December 1924, Kiss was sentenced to six months in the Detroit House of Correction. Beaton received 13 months in Kansas' Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary. Their sentences were celebrated by Beaton's first wife, Irene Moran, who accused him of abuse and unlawful divorce.

Baggage Inspection at Bates Street
© 1926
Detroit Historical Society Collection



Street Scene in Detroit
© 1926
Detroit Historical Society Collection

BLIND PIGS

"Blind pigs," also known as speakeasies, were unlicensed bars that popped up across America during prohibition. They could appear in any setting, from the basements of private homes to the back rooms of businesses. On September 8, 1923, the *Detroit News* reported that there were at least 10,000 blind pigs in the city of Detroit. The newspaper claimed that on some blocks, nearly every house hosted one.

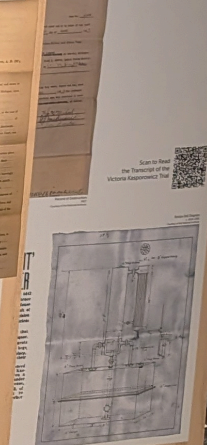
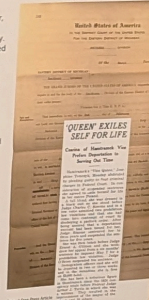
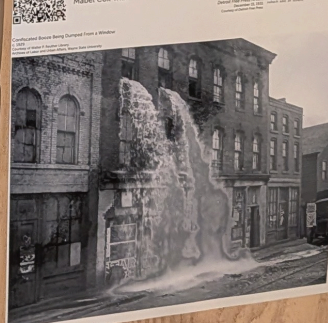
Many women operated blind pigs in order to supplement their family's income, converting rooms of their home, boardinghouse, grocery store, or laundry into a space for selling whiskey and beer. They had to keep a careful eye out for Prohibition Bureau agents, who would go undercover to buy drinks so they could bust blind pig operators.

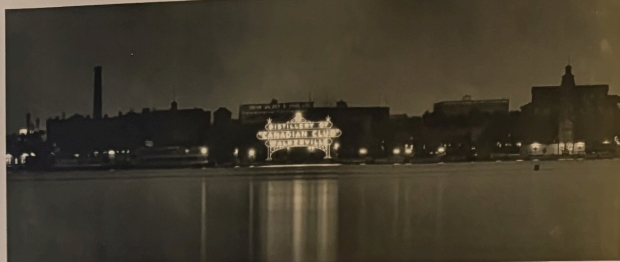
Mabel Cox - Mabel Cox was working as a waitress at the Italia Cafe on John R. Street and Adams Avenue when it was raided in October 1924. Agent Roy Nash accused the 25-year-old mother of selling him two drinks of whiskey. Cox denied the charges, saying she didn't match the description some witnesses provided: a black-eyed woman with a gold tooth. But despite her lawyer's efforts, she was sentenced to pay a \$1,000 fine and serve four months in the Detroit House of Correction. According to Cox, on the elevator ride down from the courtroom, Agent Nash offered a handshake to "congratulate" her on the conviction. She slapped him.

Ethel Freid - Born in Russia around 1880, Ethel Freid immigrated to Detroit in 1915. A decade later, she was arrested when thousands of counterfeit whiskey labels were seized in a raid of her property. Accused of running a blind pig, Freid was sentenced to pay \$1,000 or spend up to one month in the Detroit House of Correction. A judge ordered her \$65 East Warren home to be padlocked. Following her sentence, she continued to live in Detroit with her husband, a real-estate agent, and their six children until her death in 1941.

Josephine Tomczyk - Selling alcohol in her apartment on 13131 Charest Avenue, Josephine Tomczyk became known as Hamtramck's North End "vice queen." In 1931, Tomczyk and her managers were convicted of violating the prohibition act. To avoid prison time, she agreed to be deported to Poland. But her departure was delayed by her need to testify in the corruption trial of Hamtramck's mayor, Dr. Rudolph C. Tencorewicz. Tomczyk had allegedly been seen passing the mayor money and saying, "Doc, here's \$1,000 for a present." Tencorewicz was convicted, yet still reelected as mayor several years later.

Scan to Read the Transcript of the Mabel Cox Trial
Detroit Free Press
© 1924
Detroit Historical Society Collection





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Confiscated Booze Being Dumped From a Window
c. 1929
Courtesy of Walter P. Reuther Library,
Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University



HOMER

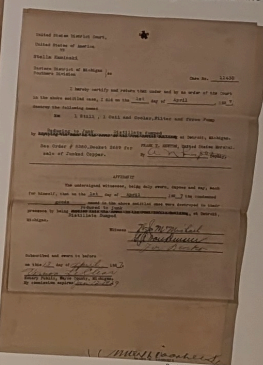
Along with the massive amount of alcohol homebrewing and distilling were rampant in of suspects' homes often led to the discovery of raids, the brewing or distilling equipment was product would be dumped into the sewer ne-

Some women manufactured small amounts operated on a larger scale: Gennie Green of 6 March 1926 for making 300 gallons of whiskey. Homebrewing cases could create legal headaches accused of raiding properties without a valid s

Stella Kaminski - Stella Kaminski was arrested at her home she shared with her husband - a laborer - for possession of a 50-gallon still, 45 gallons of whiskey, and 200 pounds of marijuana. She was taken to the Juvenile Detention Home where she was sentenced to pay \$200 and spend four months in jail. Her home was declared permanently padlocked.

Victoria Kasprowicz - In September 1925, fed Avenue home of Victoria Kasprowicz, a 34-year-old woman. From outside, they smelled alcohol and saw men in the street. They were spotted driving in and out of the garage. There were eleven 100-gallon copper vats, six half-full barrels of alcohol. Kasprowicz reportedly told them, "You can't take this away from me. This is my life. This is in my name, and he has nothing to do with it."

But Victoria, her husband Joseph, and three other women were sentenced to 365 days in the Detroit House of Corrections for 90 days, under the assumption that she was coerced into the act. They appealed their case, arguing that a "nose war" (a fight over a man's nose) was not a good enough reason for the raid.



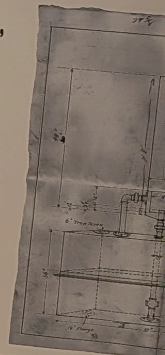
'Nose Warrack' Newman

'NOSE WARRANT' JAILS RUMMER

JOHN KASPERWITZ, 24, of 6442 Traverse avenue, began a sentence of 365 days in the Detroit House of Correction, today, as a result of Judge Arthur J. Tuttle's decision that a "non warrant" was sufficient for arrest.

Kasperwitz's attorney held that his client had not sold liquor. Judge Tuttle held Federal agents smelling the beer alone, seeing keys tumbled on trucks from the place, were justified in carrying out their duties.

Others who were sentenced under the same decision were: Kasperi's wife, who was given a fine of \$10; 30 days; Alexander Lyde, 37, of 189 Wythe avenue, 120 days; Alexander Hoot, 37, of 200 Perrine avenue, 120, 30 days; and Joseph, 1204 Beech avenue, 30 days.





Katarina Bielko (far right) With Sisters
c. 1920s
Courtesy of Ryan Baker

PROHIBITION: A FAMILY HISTORY

Prohibition plays an important role in family histories all across Michigan. Here are a selection of stories from the community:

"During the Prohibition Era, Katarina [Bielko] operated an illegal moonshine business in the Saginaw and Carrollton area. Katarina gained renown as 'Moonshine Katie,' and was arrested on more than one occasion. Katarina enlisted the help of her husband's brothers, Paul (my great-great-grandpa) and Stefan, and they worked as her moonshine runners. In other words, Katarina was both the brewer and the brains behind the operation. Katarina's actual recipe is lost to history, but according to a family member, it is likely that she brewed a fermented liquor common to rural Slovakia called slivovica."

-Ryan Baker

"My grandma Selma told me on her wedding night in 1925 my grandpa Otto told her he had to make a 'quick trip to Chicago' and left her alone. I guess he did this a number of times. She was pretty certain he was a rum runner, but she didn't figure this out until much later in her marriage. After they were married he would tell her he needed to go in the evenings to meetings with his buddy politicians, but he wasn't drinking, 'just milk.' At first my grandma believed him, she was a bit naive, but eventually it became clear to her that he wasn't telling the truth. His family was living quite comfortably for the times. This was a way for my grandpa to make extra money for his family."

-Donna Rose

"My father was of Sicilian descent but avoided any Mafia related work offers and advised me to do the same. This was in part because in his neighborhood (Grixdale) as a young teen he had seen a local grocer machine-gunned in front of his store for refusing to obey the bootleggers. It affected him greatly and was a vivid memory his whole life, 'I never knew there was so much blood in a person. It was running down the gutter.'"

-Loren Mannino

"My grandfather, Virgil Kipper, was born in 1907 and raised on the family farm in North Vernon, Indiana. He moved to Detroit, Michigan, in the late 1920s during Prohibition to work for his uncle, Peter Holdreith, who owned a prominent Detroit restaurant called the Holdreith Chop House. Virgil worked as a waiter by day and smuggled booze from across the river in Canada by night supplying the restaurant during Prohibition."

-Nicholas Kipper



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Virgil Kipper and Chevrolet
c. 1930s
Courtesy of Nicholas Kipper