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Crossing the Line
Canada's Capital Region and the Prohibition Era

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Crossing the Line: Canada's Capital Region and the Prohibition Era

ABSTRACT

While legislation in Ontario prohibited the sale and consumption of alcohol between 1916 and 1927, attitudes of citizens did not always reflect policy. In this paper, the City of Ottawa is used as a case study to show divergent attitudes towards prohibition. The letters to the editor section in the *Ottawa Evening Citizen* in the days leading up to a referendum on prohibition in 1924 is analyzed to show that many citizens – as much as one third – wrote into the paper opposed to the legislation. Moreover, this paper uses statistics to show that many bars in Hull, Quebec – directly across from Ottawa, and a place where prohibition was in effect only for a short period of time – were frequented by outsiders, and most of the crime in the city was committed by visitors. The crime, drunkenness and disorderly conduct facing Hull were not the result of the different attitude towards the consumption of liquor in Quebec; rather visitors from Ottawa took advantage of Quebec's more liberal policies of alcohol control and fostered the problems facing Hull. Legislation in Ontario certainly did not reflect many popular beliefs of citizens of Ottawa.

RÉSUMÉ

Bien que la vente et la consommation de l'alcool fussent interdites à Ottawa entre 1916 à 1927 par la loi de prohibition, il semble que les citoyens aient tenté de contourner cette politique entre autres en passant de l'autre côté de la rivière des Outaouais pour se rendre dans la ville voisine appartenant à une autre province. Cet article développe une étude de cas sur les comportements des résidents de la ville d'Ottawa pendant cette période. Inspiré par un article d'André Cellard d'une part et par les théories de la frontière d'autre part, cette étude de cas vise à compléter par des statistiques et une étude des lettres à l'éditeur du *The Ottawa Evening Citizen* le portrait des comportements reliés à l'alcool de chaque côté de la rivière des Outaouais. La ville de Hull, au Québec, était alors connue pour être « un petit Chicago »... l'ivresse sur la voie publique et la conduite contraire aux bonnes mœurs n'étaient pas le résultat des attitudes des seuls résidents de Hull mais impliquaient souvent des visiteurs du soir venus d'Ottawa.

KEYWORDS

Prohibition, Ontario-Quebec Border, Ottawa

Introduction

Picture Ottawa, the capital city of Canada. Now, consider the following passage written about the city's precursor, Bytown:

For chilling reading there are the many contemporary newspaper reports describing in full measure the years of fighting between the Irish Shiners and the French Canadian raftsmen, years which saw the dirt roads of Bytown stained dark from the butchery and madness of bigoted nationalists. Then too, there were the religious and political bands who, on the slightest provocation, gave battle to all who opposed their particular beliefs. The brawling, rioting, lusting, wenching Bytown of the 1840's well deserved its notorious reputation as the most feared community in all North America.¹

Today, Bytown (which was rechristened Ottawa in 1855)² is hardly the crime-ridden town it was in the 1840s. Ottawa, Ontario is a beautiful, modern city that has been the seat of the Canadian federal government since Confederation in 1867. Across the Ottawa River, which serves as the border between the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, lies the city of Gatineau. The area encompassing the two cities, which include other neighbouring urban and rural communities, has been known as Canada's Capital Region since 1969.³ The Capital Region has gone through a significant transformation since the rough-and-tumble pre-Confederation days of Bytown. As this paper will demonstrate, this transformation can largely be attributed to its status as a border region.

This paper is written through the academic lens of border studies. Geographer J.R.V. Prescott defines the terms relevant to this field of study as follows: a *boundary* is the line separating two different places; a *border* refers to "...the adjacent areas which fringe the boundary [;]"⁴ and a *borderland* is "... the transition zone within which the boundary lies..."⁵ As applied to Canada's Capital Region, the *boundary* is the line separating the provinces of Ontario and Quebec that has been drawn through the *border*, the Ottawa River. The *borderlands* are the cities of Ottawa, Ontario and Gatineau, Quebec. Throughout this paper, the borderland on the Quebec side of the border will not be referred to as Gatineau,

¹ Robert Haig, *Ottawa: City of the Big Ears: The Intimate, Living Story of a City and a Capital*, Ottawa, Haig and Haig Publishing Co., 1969, 12.

² "Settlement and Industrial Development," National Capital Commission, last modified December 5, 2005, http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/bins/ncc_web_content_page.asp?cid=16297-24515-24516-25145&lang=

³ "About Canada's Capital," National Capital Commission, last modified July 8, 2010, http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/bins/ncc_web_content_page.asp?cid=16297-24515&lang=1.

⁴ J.R.V. Prescott, *Political Frontiers and Boundaries*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1987, 12.

⁵ Prescott, *Frontiers*, 13-14.

but rather as Hull. Until the amalgamation of several cities on the Quebec side of the border in 2002, the city immediately opposite Ottawa was called Hull. Today, Hull is a sector of the amalgamated City of Gatineau.⁶ Existing research about sub-national borders, such as the one described above, will be explored in the first section of this paper.

This paper will focus on a specific period of Canadian history known as the prohibition era. For the purposes of this paper, the prohibition era is defined as the period between 1916 and 1930 during which prohibition legislation was at its peak in the majority of Canadian provinces and territories.⁷ Though prohibition bills tabled in provincial legislatures varied from province to province, legislation generally made it illegal for members of the public to sell, purchase or consume liquor in public.⁸ Prohibition legislation had a strong effect on the social behaviour of people living in the City of Ottawa during that period. This paper draws inspiration from research undertaken by scholars Marc Brosseau and André Cellard. Their work explores the consequences of prohibition legislation on the Ottawa-Hull border region, with particular emphasis placed on Hull. This paper will complement their work on Hull by describing the local, provincial and national events leading up to the 1924 prohibition plebiscite in Ontario. More specifically, it will examine attitudes held toward prohibition by those who lived in Ottawa at the time. To that end, it will include period accounts found in a local newspaper, *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, from the days surrounding the plebiscite in October 1924.

This approach has a few limitations that must be addressed. First, there is a limited amount of existing research on sub-national borders in Canada. As such, any attempt to develop an in-depth, overall analysis of border theory and the Ontario-Quebec border would be too ambitious for the purpose of this paper. Second, there is a lack of resources on prohibition in Canada—a concern that several historians have previously expressed.⁹ Possibly the most comprehensive source on Canadian prohibition is the book *Prohibition in Canada*, written by prohibitionist Ruth Elizabeth Spence in 1919—well before the Ontario plebiscite of 1924 and the end of the prohibition era. Though other works have been published since, Spence's work delves deepest into the lead-up to prohibition and its initial effects on Canadian provinces and territories. This having been said, the book is written by a prohibitionist and should be read with this bias in mind. Third,

⁶ "Important Dates," Ville de Gatineau, last modified January 8, 2009,

http://www.gatineau.ca/page.asp?p=histoire_cartes_statistiques/dates_importantes.

⁷ See Scott Thompson and Gary Genosko, *Punched Drunk: Alcohol, Surveillance and the LCBO*, Halifax and Winnipeg, Fernwood Publishing, 2009, 15.

⁸ Matthew J. Bellamy, "The Canadian Brewing Industry's Response to Prohibition, 1874-1920," *Brewery History* 132 (2009): 3.

⁹ See Reginald G. Smart and Alan C. Ogborne, *Northern Spirits: A Social History of Alcohol in Canada*, Toronto, Addiction Research Foundation, 1996, 39.

while *The Ottawa Evening Citizen* provides accounts of the attitudes held by Ottawa residents toward prohibition in 1924, the newspaper's owners, the Southam family, were strongly biased in favour of prohibition.¹⁰ Therefore, any analysis of information found in the newspaper must take this bias into account. This last limitation will be explained in further detail in the section concerning the 1924 plebiscite.

Through the approach outlined above, and keeping these limitations in mind, this paper will demonstrate that the prohibition era highlights the convergence of different legislative systems in Canada's Capital Region. It will also reveal that attitudes toward prohibition held by citizens on both sides of the border were more complex than provincial legislation might lead one to presume. As this paper will show, attitudes toward the sale and consumption of alcohol in Ottawa did not mirror prohibition laws in Ontario. Instead, people living in Ottawa tended to be more in line with their cross-border neighbours in Quebec. As such, this paper will add to existing research on this unique period in Canadian history and the evolution of what is today known as Canada's Capital Region. It is written in the hope that it will inspire others to continue filling the research void on both sub-national borders and the prohibition era in Canada.

Sub-national Boundaries, Borders and Borderlands

Though the study of international boundaries and borders is a growing field,¹¹ there is little existing research on *intrastate* or *sub-national* borders. Canada is a federation, which means that, in concurrence with a central government, several legislative powers such as education and liquor control are devolved to provincial governments.¹² Although they are invisible, unguarded, and open to the free flow of people and goods, the borders between Canadian provinces symbolize a division of legislative power. Legislatures in each province enact laws that shape the way citizens live their daily lives. The effects of provincial borders on borderlands remain largely unaddressed by academics.

Canadian political scientist Ian Stewart, who has studied the common border area between the provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, argues that federalism is “inherently centrifugal”—pushing populations on opposite sides of a

¹⁰ Charles Bruce, *News and the Southams*, Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1968, 82-91.

¹¹ See David Newman, “The Lines That Continue to Separate Us: Borders in our ‘Borderless’ World,” *Progress in Human Geography* 30 (2006): 143-161.

¹² For more information on federalism in Canada, see Richard Simeon and Martin Papillon, “Canada,” in *A Global Dialogue on Federalism: Distribution of Powers and Responsibilities in Federal Countries*, ed. Akhtar Majeed, Ronald L. Watts, Douglas M. Brown. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 92-122.

provincial border apart rather than pulling them together.¹³ By contrast, academic Dallen J. Timothy suggests that, while boundaries are designed to separate, "...[they] may also be viewed as lines of contact: places where similar or dissimilar cultures and economies converge."¹⁴ With few exceptions, provincial borders do not separate urban populations living on, or adjacent to, the border. This paper addresses one of these exceptions: Canada's Capital Region. The Ottawa River serves as the border between Ottawa, Ontario and Hull, Quebec. While the river separates the two cities, they are connected by several bridges that are open to a free flow of citizens and goods. Though the cities are governed by separate provincial legislative systems, the proximity of the cities of to the provincial border (and to each other) has created a unique cross-border urban space. As Brosseau and Cellard explain:

...Hull est le seul point de contact Ontario-Québec qui soit proprement urbain, voire métropolitain. Ainsi, constitue-t-elle un rare exemple de zone de contact entre cultures anglophone et francophone coïncidant avec une frontière politique formelle, le tout à l'intérieur d'un tissu urbain presque continu.¹⁵

This paper will draw on the historical example of prohibition to highlight the effects of provincial legislation on this unique, urban, cross-border space. Legislation prohibiting the public consumption and sale of alcohol was preceded by what was arguably the strongest and longest social movement in Canada's history: the temperance movement.¹⁶ The next section will provide background information about this movement, which eventually led to the introduction of prohibition legislation across the country.

The Temperance Movement and Prohibition Legislation

The temperance movement was long and complex. Though prohibition was not to become widespread across Canada until the First World War, the temperance

¹³ Ian Stewart, "More Than Just a Line on the Map: The Political Culture of the Nova Scotia-New Brunswick Boundary," *Publius* 20 (1990): 99.

¹⁴ Dallen J. Timothy, "Political Boundaries and Tourism: Borders as Tourist Attractions," *Tourism Management* 16 (1995): 526.

¹⁵ Marc Brosseau and André Cellard, "Un siècle de boires et de déboires: Hull aux prises avec son histoire et sa géographie," *Cahiers de Géographie du Québec* 47 (2003): 10.

¹⁶ Smart and Osborne, *Northern Spirits*, 26.

movement dates back to the 1820s.¹⁷ Consider this passage written by historian Sharon Anne Cook:

The last quarter of the nineteenth century in Canada was a period of profound social change and uncertainty. The dislocating effects of industrialization, immigration, urbanization, apparent heightened continentalism, imperial decline, and secularization in public life were mirrored in a deep concern about the survival of the family unit as it had been idealized in nineteenth-century literature.¹⁸

In the 19th and 20th centuries there were many active temperance societies across North America. The largest societies in Canada were the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Dominion Alliance for the Total Suppression of the Liquor Traffic.¹⁹ Their members were, for the most part, Anglophone, Protestant, middle class women.²⁰ The primary goal of these societies was to promote the abolition of alcoholic beverages. As academics Reginald G. Smart and Alan C. Ogborne explain, "...[the] basic message was simple – drunkenness leads to poverty, family breakdown, men's infidelity, and hardship for women and children. Get rid of drunkenness and you eliminate all other evils."²¹ Though temperance societies served as forums for women to campaign for other social and political causes (women's suffrage, for example), for the sake of fluidity, this paper focuses solely on their influence in advocating the abolition of alcohol.²²

Religion played a significant role in both supporting and opposing the temperance movement. Smart and Ogborne explain that, while many followers of Protestant faiths (including Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists), supported temperance, "other denominations, such as the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, and the Jews, were divided on the issue of prohibition and avoided taking any official stand."²³ If we consider this statement to be accurate and representative, statistics taken from the 1921 Census²⁴ show that the majority of people in both Ottawa and Hull would have opposed prohibition based on their faith. In Ottawa, 46.7% of the population identified as Roman Catholic; in Hull, an overwhelming 89.1% did the same. In addition, both cities had a significant Anglican population (e.g. 18.6% of Ottawa's population). According to Smart and

¹⁷ Smart and Ogborne, *Northern Spirits*, 15.

¹⁸ Sharon Anne Cook, *Through Sunshine and Shadow: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874-1930*, Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995, 6.

¹⁹ Gerald A. Hallowell, *Prohibition in Ontario, 1919-1923*, Ottawa, Ontario Historical Society, 1972, 8-9.

²⁰ Hallowell, *Prohibition*, 9.

²¹ Smart and Ogborne, *Northern Spirits*, 26.

²² For detailed information about temperance movements in Canada, see Cook, *Through Sunshine and Shadow*, or Ruth Elizabeth Spence, *Prohibition in Canada*, Toronto, The Ontario Branch of the Dominion Alliance, 1919.

²³ Hallowell, *Prohibition*, 14-16.

²⁴ See Appendix A.

Ogborne, followers of both faiths were unlikely to support prohibition. These statistics will be an important component of this paper's case study.

The temperance movement led to debate on prohibition in Canada's Parliament. The result of this debate, the *Canada Temperance Act of 1878*, became law on May 8, 1878. Under the act, if over 25% of electors in any county or city signed a petition with the intention of enacting prohibition locally, then a local referendum would be held. If a majority of electors voted in favour of prohibition, it would be "enacted for three years."²⁵ If enacted, the penalties of breaking this law were fines for the first two convictions and imprisonment for each subsequent conviction.²⁶ Several counties and communities exercised this option at the end of the 19th century, and the first province to enact province-wide prohibition was Prince Edward Island in 1901.²⁷

The Ontario Temperance Act (O.T.A.) was passed by the provincial legislature in April 1916 and came into force in September of the same year.²⁸ The law, which was introduced as a patriotic wartime measure, was only meant to last until the end of the Great War.²⁹ Though the law prohibited the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages in public spaces, doctors were still able to write prescriptions for liquor—ironically, booze was thought to offer positive health benefits.³⁰ In fact, "by 1923, the Ontario government had sold nearly \$5 million worth of alcohol by prescription, [and from] 1923-24 some 810,000 prescriptions were issued."³¹ All bars, taverns and vendors open explicitly for the sale of liquor were closed.³² The O.T.A. provided that a plebiscite, or referendum, would be held at the end of the war to determine the permanency of the law. In 1919, the first plebiscite was held, with a majority of over 400,000 Ontarians voting to keep the law in place.³³ In 1921, another plebiscite was held and, though the legislation was kept in place, support for prohibition had already begun to decrease.³⁴ A third plebiscite, held in 1924, will be discussed in detail below.

As suggested above, temperance was largely unsuccessful in Quebec due to the fact that the movement was normally associated with Protestantism and Quebec was, for the most part, a Roman Catholic society. The Roman Catholic Church preached sensible drinking and moderation, and the Protestant movement,

²⁵ Cyril D. Boyce, "Prohibition in Canada," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 109 (1923): 225.

²⁶ Spence, *Prohibition*, 124.

²⁷ Thompson and Genosko, *Punched Drunk*, 15.

²⁸ Spence, *Prohibition*, 404.

²⁹ Hallowell, *Prohibition*, ix.

³⁰ Smart and Ogborne, *Northern Spirits*, 52.

³¹ Smart and Ogborne, *Northern Spirits*, 52.

³² Hallowell, *Prohibition*, ix.

³³ Boyce, *Prohibition*, 227.

³⁴ Boyce, *Prohibition*, 229.

dominant in Ontario and other provinces, did not have much traction in Quebec. This having been said, the WCTU and Dominion Alliance did organize groups in Quebec, “and they were successful mainly in the areas where Protestants lived.”³⁵ In 1918, the Quebec Assembly unanimously supported prohibition as a wartime measure to be enforced in May 1919.³⁶ This provincial legislative attitude toward prohibition only lasted for a short period of time: in April 1919, “...by a nine to one vote on a referendum... [Quebec] returned to the sale of beer and wine under license, with sale of spirits under Government control.”³⁷ At a local level, meanwhile, Hull faced unique challenges due to its close proximity to Ottawa. It exercised its power to legislate prohibition differently, as will be explored in the section below.

Prohibition in Hull, Quebec

As explained above, the boundary between Ottawa, Ontario and Hull, Quebec separates two provincial legislative systems and serves as a point of contact for the populations of both cities in a unique, urban, cross-border space. Studies conducted by academics Marc Brosseau and André Cellard explore the impact liquor policies have had on Hull over time. Their research provides regional context and a point of comparison for the case study in this paper.

The City of Hull was arguably more affected by its proximity to Ottawa and its status as a border city than by social movements in Quebec during the prohibition era. As demonstrated above, prohibition was only provincially enacted in Quebec for a short time in 1919. This having been said, the situation in Hull was unique. When prohibition went into effect in Ontario in 1916, Hull suddenly became the only convenient place for Ottawans to consume alcohol. This led to a sharp increase in the number of arrests made for drunk and disorderly conduct in Hull. For example, while 295 people were arrested for drunken behaviour in 1912, 1,766 people were arrested for the same crime in 1917.³⁸ This increase in crime led the city to hold a vote over a period of twelve days in April and May of 1917 to determine whether or not prohibition should be enacted locally. On May 4th, 1917 Hull’s prohibitionists claimed victory.³⁹ Legislation prohibiting the sale and public

³⁵ Smart and Osborne, *Northern Spirits*, 23.

³⁶ Spence, *Prohibition*, 374.

³⁷ Boyce, *Prohibition*, 227.

³⁸ André Cellard, “Le petit Chicago : la ‘criminalité’ à Hull depuis le début du XXe siècle,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 45 (1992): 526.

³⁹Spence, *Prohibition*, 372.

consumption of liquor in Hull officially came into force a year later, on May 1st, 1918. As prohibitionist R.E. Spence expressed:

Hull was one of the strongest citadels of the liquor traffic; Ottawa, just across the river, was under prohibition, and from the Ontario city thousands of dollars poured into Hull, a fact which made the liquor interests all the more determined to maintain their hold. The victory was as valuable to Ottawa as to Hull.⁴⁰

According to Brosseau and Cellard, many of Hull's inhabitants felt that prohibition caused more harm than good because it led to the rise of an underground black market for the illicit trade, or "bootlegging," of liquor.⁴¹ In fact, Hull was known during the prohibition era as *le Petit Chicago*, as its per capita crime rates were similar to those in Chicago, Illinois during the same period.⁴² During the prohibition era, Chicago was well known for its organized crime and for being home to infamous gangsters like Al Capone.⁴³ To help paint a picture of the situation in Chicago, consider this passage:

The reason Chicago became synonymous with gang warfare – from 1920 to 1933, nearly eight hundred gangsters were killed in shoot-outs with other gangsters – was the irresistible profit motive [of bootlegging]. With no legitimate source of liquor left, clubs, speakeasies, and private dealers were compelled to turn to the bootleggers, and these, increasingly under the thumb of underworld bosses, became a ready prey.⁴⁴

In response to the widespread bootlegging, a local plebiscite was held in July 1919 and prohibition was repealed by a vote of 713 to 101.⁴⁵ Once prohibition had been lifted, citizens of both Hull and Ottawa returned to bars in the city. In fact, a report from 1925 found that up to 90% of people visiting bars in Hull came from outside of the city.⁴⁶ Consequently, the majority of those arrested in Hull for alcohol-related matters, such as drunk and disorderly conduct were outsiders. Statistics cited by Cellard show that in 1924, the year of the Ontario prohibition plebiscite that will be discussed below, 79.2% of arrests in the City of Hull involved visitors from outside of the city.⁴⁷ The following year, 81.6% of arrests made involved outsiders.⁴⁸ This trend continued past the prohibition era and through to the end of

⁴⁰Spence, *Prohibition*, 372.

⁴¹ Brosseau and Cellard, *Un siècle de boires et de déboires*, 14-15.

⁴² Cellard, *Le petit Chicago*, 519.

⁴³ Edward Behr, *Prohibition: Thirteen Years That Changed America*, New York, Arcade Publishing, 1996, 91.

⁴⁴ Behr, *Prohibition*, 177.

⁴⁵ Brosseau and Cellard, *Un siècle de boires et de déboires*, 15.

⁴⁶ Cellard, *Le Petit Chicago*, 528.

⁴⁷ Cellard, *Le Petit Chicago*, 529.

⁴⁸ Cellard, *Le Petit Chicago*, 529.

the 1930s.⁴⁹ Though the figures provided do not show which cities the outsiders were from, a speech made by Hull's Chief of Police at a city council meeting in 1924 gave a clear indication. He said:

Si l'on prend en considération le fait que notre ville est située a proximité de la Capitale, comme aussi de la province de l'Ontario, dont les lois prohibitives ont pour effet de déverser dans nos murs une foule d'indésirables, nous avons raison de prétendre que la situation a été des plus calmes malgré [de] nombreux délits d'ordre secondaire...⁵⁰

Although the Chief of Police in Hull felt that the city was relatively calm despite the influx of drinkers from Ottawa, Ottawa police were often sent to monitor the bridges connecting the two cities to ensure that alcohol was not being brought back into Ontario.⁵¹ This is a unique example of sub-national borders being guarded. As explained above, sub-national borders in Canada are unguarded and open to the free flow of people and goods between provinces. The prohibition era highlights the fact that each province is in charge of enforcing certain kinds of legislation inside its borders, regardless of rules in place in other parts of the country.

The evidence above supports the suggestion that issues facing the City of Hull during the prohibition era—namely crime, drunkenness and disorderly conduct—were largely caused by visitors from Ottawa. These findings may lead one to ask the following question: despite provincial prohibition legislation, were a majority of residents in Ottawa unsupportive of prohibition? The next section will seek to provide an answer.

Ottawa and the Ontario Prohibition Plebiscite of 1924

Across the river, the City of Ottawa had been under prohibition legislation since the enactment of the O.T.A. in 1916. *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, the precursor to today's *Ottawa Citizen*, was one of the region's primary news sources during the prohibition era. To serve as a case study for this paper, a series of articles and letters found in the *Citizen* from the period of October 22nd to October 24th 1924 will be analyzed to determine how local citizens felt about prohibition. Period newspapers are useful to evaluate because they provide a glimpse into the daily issues facing people during that time period. These specific dates were chosen for three primary reasons. First, there was a plebiscite held on October 23rd 1924 on the issue of prohibition in Ontario. There were two questions on the ballot: 1) "Are

⁴⁹ Cellard, *Le Petit Chicago*, 529.

⁵⁰ Cellard, *Le Petit Chicago*, 528-529.

⁵¹ Cellard, *Le Petit Chicago*, 527.

you in favour of the continuance of the Ontario Temperance Act?” and 2) “Are you in favour of the sale as a beverage of beer and spirituous liquor in sealed packages under government control?”⁵² Second, this plebiscite was the first to be held in Ontario after other provinces, namely Quebec, British Columbia and Manitoba, had repealed prohibition legislation and introduced government-controlled systems for the sale of liquor.⁵³ These provinces offered models for Ontarians to consider and evaluate. Third, an analysis of the articles and letters from the *Citizen* during this period complements research conducted by scholars like Brosseau and Cellard and adds to the existing research on the history of Canada's Capital Region.

While the *Citizen* is a valuable resource for gauging public reaction to prohibition in the Ottawa area leading up to the 1924 plebiscite, there is a limitation that must be addressed. As mentioned in the introduction, the *Citizen* is a biased news source. It was one of many newspapers owned by the Southam family during the prohibition era. Owners Harry and Wilson Southam held strong political and religious beliefs that would influence the voice of their newspaper. For example, the Southams strongly supported “...the rightness of Christian Science.”⁵⁴ They also had very strong opinions about prohibition. As they were staunch prohibitionists, “...the *Citizen* began to campaign against the liquor traffic.”⁵⁵ The editor of the newspaper explicitly declared this bias on October 22nd 1924, the day before the prohibition plebiscite:

The Citizen is convinced that more lives will be wasted and ruined [if prohibition is repealed]. Some of those who drink whiskey will spend time in jail. Some will find their way in the wards of the hospital. Some will simply give up the struggle that makes life worthwhile and become hopeless and useless members of society... In The Citizen's opinion the wise course to pursue is to stick to Ontario's Prohibition law and try to make it better.⁵⁶

Given this bias on the part of both the Southam family and the editor of the newspaper, letters that the newspaper chose to print may have been carefully selected to provide a skewed version of popular opinion. With that in mind, this paper will now turn its attention to what was printed in the pages of that broadsheet.

⁵² The Moderation League of Ontario, Ottawa Branch, “Important: To the Supporters of Temperance and Moderation,” *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, October 22 1924, 9.

⁵³ Thompson and Genosko, *Punched Drunk*, 15.

⁵⁴ Bruce, *the Southams*, 82.

⁵⁵ Bruce, *the Southams*, 84.

⁵⁶ “Editorial,” *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, October 22 1924, 24.

October 22nd 1924 was the last day for both supporters and opponents of the O.T.A. to communicate their messages regarding “the crucial liquor issue”⁵⁷ through the local media. Both the Moderation League of Ontario, which supported a repeal of prohibition legislation, and the Ontario Plebiscite Committee, which supported the O.T.A., placed large advertisements in the newspaper to plead for voters’ support. The Moderation League asserted, “Government control is people’s control”⁵⁸ while the Plebiscite Committee argued, “Ontario’s only safe course is to keep the gate closed against booze.”⁵⁹ These advertisements highlighted a divergence of attitudes toward prohibition that, in turn, mirrored the divergence of attitudes held by the city’s citizens.

A two-page spread in the same issue contains letters to the editor expressing citizens’ opinions concerning the plebiscite and, more broadly, prohibition in Ontario. As one might expect, given the *Citizen’s* editorial bias, the majority of the 22 letters featured in the spread favoured keeping Ontario’s restrictive prohibition policies in place. Letters with titles like “Booze the Enemy of Thought,” “Liquor Doing No Good Now, Nor Will it for Posterity,” and “Overthrow of O.T.A. Would Bring Sorrow” fill the pages with strongly worded opinions about temperance and the evils of alcohol.⁶⁰ One reader, Dr. H. Arnott Sr., sent a letter that highlighted the “degeneracy” of drinking. This letter presented prohibitionist propaganda as “scientific evidence” and included such hyperbolic assertions as “...a man might never be really drunk and yet leave behind him a family of weaklings that, if they lived, would go through life suffering in some way for the fault of the father,” and “experiments on animals prove that even when the male only is made to inhale the fumes of alcohol the offspring will be nervous and undersized.”⁶¹ Such letters demonstrate that the proliferation of misinformation and propaganda was a common feature of the prohibition era. As Hallowell explains:

Much of the prohibitionist case was based on fact; and most of it was based on sincerely held beliefs. But there was a strong element of hyperbole, of emotionalism, and even of fanaticism in the arguments used. Both sides were guilty of distorting the facts on occasion, but there is no doubt that the prohibitionists possessed the most powerful propaganda...⁶²

⁵⁷ “Ontario Votes on Crucial Liquor Issue Tomorrow: For Sixth Time in Thirty Years People of Province Will Decide For or Against Prohibition Law,” *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, October 22 1924, 1.

⁵⁸ “The Moderation League of Ontario,” *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, October 22 1924, 22.

⁵⁹ “And Now Comes the Day to Vote,” *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, October 22 1924, 14.

⁶⁰ *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, October 22 1924, 16-17.

⁶¹ “Drink and Degeneracy go Hand in Hand, Admissions to Asylums Show,” *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, October 22 1924, 17.

⁶² Hallowell, *Prohibition*, 27.

Not all letters featured in the *Citizen* supported prohibition. Some of the letters supported the proposal to repeal the O.T.A. and argued that drinking alcohol in moderation was acceptable. One reader sent a letter that not only supported a repeal of the O.T.A. but also made reference to the absence of prohibition in Hull. The letter cited a prohibition rally held in Ottawa before the plebiscite during which a local Reverend was said to utter, “As a city [Hull] is a disgrace to civilization. In it one may see the tarpapered shacks in which families live.”⁶³ The Reverend’s remarks implied that alcohol and drunkenness were the cause of the poor living conditions in Hull at the time. In response, the resident wrote, “this intemperance utterance of the prohibitionist extremist is indefensible and no fair-minded citizen of Ontario should desire to forward the cause of the Ontario Temperance Act at such a price.” The resident also argued that a major problem in Ontario was the “hypocrisy” of the province’s prohibition legislation. The O.T.A. allowed for alcohol to be manufactured in the province and then exported outside of its borders to other places.⁶⁴ Additionally, Ontarians were still consuming liquor—bootlegging, doctor’s prescriptions, and out-of-province sources kept glasses full. That having been said, those from Ottawa who drank in Hull were not acting hypocritically; rather, they were simply taking advantage of their proximity to a province where legislation did not bar them from purchasing or consuming alcoholic beverages. As these letters have illustrated, though many Ontarians were not supporters of prohibition, all were affected by it.

On October 23rd 1924, Ontarians took to the polls to vote on the plebiscite. Ottawans voted in record numbers, which shows the significance of the issue to the people of the day.⁶⁵ The following day, after a long campaign for both supporters and opponents of the O.T.A., the *Citizen*’s front-page headline declared that prohibitionists across the province had won; the O.T.A. would remain in effect. However, this result did not mirror the outcome of the vote in Ottawa. The local vote tally revealed that a majority of over 10,380 voters in Ottawa supported the proposal to establish a government-controlled system for the sale of alcohol.⁶⁶ Although several of Ontario’s larger cities (including Ottawa, Toronto and Hamilton) voted to repeal prohibition, rural counties favoured maintaining the O.T.A.⁶⁷ These results should not come as a surprise. As explained above, the temperance movement was strongest in small towns and rural areas, not large

⁶³ “Should Look With Kindness in Hull and Humble Homes,” *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, October 22 1924, 17.

⁶⁴ “Should Look With Kindness in Hull and Humble Homes,” 17.

⁶⁵ “Ottawa Gives A Large Majority in Wet Column,” *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, October 24 1924, 1.

⁶⁶ “Ottawa Gives A Large Majority in Wet Column,” 1.

⁶⁷ “Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton Were Strong For Government Control; Total Vote Polled about Million,” *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, October 24 1924, 15.

urban centres like Ottawa.⁶⁸ Also, the statistics provided above reveal that a majority of Ottawans did not follow Protestant faiths that typically supported the temperance movement. Rather, a majority of citizens in Ottawa identified as Roman Catholic or Anglican.⁶⁹ Additionally, it has been shown that Ottawans took advantage of living in a borderland by frequenting bars in Hull where prohibition was not a factor. Ultimately, those who supported lifting the ban on alcohol would have to wait another three years to escape the grasp of prohibition; booze would not be legalized in Ontario until 1927.⁷⁰

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the sub-national border separating the provinces of Ontario and Quebec in the area known today as Canada's Capital Region has contributed to the significant transformation of the area since the violent pre-Confederation days of Bytown. The prohibition era highlighted the convergence of the two provincial legislative systems and the effects this convergence had on those living in the borderlands of Ottawa and Hull. Supported by the work of Brosseau and Cellard, this paper has reinforced Timothy's argument that borders are as much contact zones between populations as they are dividers, for many Ottawans took advantage of their proximity to Hull and crossed the border to escape the constraints of prohibition in Ontario. Additionally, an analysis of newspaper articles and letters to the editor taken from *The Ottawa Evening Citizen* during the week of the 1924 plebiscite revealed that attitudes toward prohibition in Ottawa varied: some citizens strongly supported prohibition while others greatly opposed it. Though divergent opinions were held, the results of the 1924 provincial plebiscite showed that a majority of Ottawa's voters wished to repeal the O.T.A. These results demonstrated that, despite the presence of a border separating the populations of Ottawa and Hull, attitudes toward drinking in the two cities were not as divergent as each province's liquor laws might have suggested. These findings support the theory that sub-national borders can greatly impact adjacent populations and underline the need for further study in this field.

⁶⁸ Cook, *Through Sunshine and Shadow*, 7.

⁶⁹ See Appendix A.

⁷⁰ Thompson and Genosko, *Punched Drunk*, 15.

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Appendix A:**Population by Religion in the Cities of Ottawa and Hull, 1921**

Religion	Ottawa	Hull
Anglican	17,446	1,576
Baptists	2,251	257
Christian Science	250	8
Congregationalists	528	-
Greek Church	581	31
Jewish	2,733	66
Lutherans	868	220
Methodists	8,134	576
Presbyterian	15,355	1,760
Roman Catholic	43,772	38,796
Salvation Army	236	3

	Ottawa	Hull
Total Population	93,740	43, 541

Source: Government of Canada. *Sixth Census of Canada: 1921: Volume I: Population*, Ottawa, Government of Canada, 1924, 582-593.