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# The Dry July 4

Modern-day Alexandrians associate the celebration of Independence Day with fireworks and grilling. Often included is the expectation that beer will be served along with the grilled items. In 1842, Temperance Societies advocated celebrating the birthday of the United States without alcohol as a part of the festivities. Far from being a fringe movement, Temperance Societies enjoyed multiple chapters both in Great Britain and the United States. One of the chapters was here in Alexandria.

June 15, 1842, the Alexandria Gazette published a column that argued:

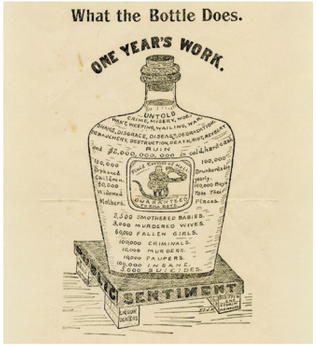
"We, too, as our forefathers, have signed a Declaration of Independence,…from the demoralizing tyranny of King Alcohol." Like many abstinence advocates of that decade, the author claimed, "We speak not of Temperance as it used to be. We refer to Total Abstinence as being the only true grounds of Temperance."

The Temperance Movement found natural allies, and a home, in Protestant churches. Much of the movement overlapped with the abolitionist movement. Given the movement's emphasis on how alcohol hurt women by "causing man to neglect the wife of his bosom for the filthy dram shop" according to the Gazette writer, the Temperance Movement offered a cause that allowed upper and middle-class women to engage in political issues at a time when women were not allowed to vote.

The Temperance Movement eventually succeeded in its goal of outlawing the manufacture, sale, or transportation of alcohol in the United States with the ratification of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution on Jan. 16, 1919. Its success in Alexandria was more limited.

On June 13 1933, Alexandria businessmen petitioned the Alexandria City Council to allow the sale of beer within city limits. Council removed Alexandria's Prohibition Laws on June 29, 1933, although offenders could still be prosecuted under state law. Only six months after that petition, the passage of the 20th Amendment ended Prohibition.

Alexandria then reclaimed its reputation as a "wet" town with renowned taverns and bars. The inroads made by the Temperance Movement in the 1840s seem to have little connection to the Alexandria of today.

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A 1900 poster from the Virginia Anti-Saloon League.

*Out of the Attic is provided by The Office of Historic Alexandria.*