

## PROHIBITION COMES TO THE OKANAGAN, 1916

Prohibition in British Columbia was carried by referendum in 1916 and implemented in 1917. Across Canada prohibition was mainly a provincial matter, and for a short time even a national one. These facts provide sufficient justification for investigating the phenomenon and little historical research appears to have been done on the subject in British Columbia. Furthermore I already had some acquaintance with the temperance and prohibition movement across the province.<sup>1</sup> Restricting the study to a small area like the Okanagan appeared to offer an opportunity to further investigate the whole issue from a narrower perspective. I say "appeared", since the scarcity of source material and the difficulty of measuring and assessing influences from outside the Okanagan area permitted only tentative generalizations and nothing startlingly new emerged.

Okanagan newspapers and to a lesser extent church and City of Vernon records provided the source material. The temperance question never became really prominent in any of the Okanagan newspapers and given the present incomplete state of the other records, a full narrative of the coming of prohibition to the Okanagan was impossible. Names of prohibitionist leaders were readily found, but the actual activity on the street, the door-to-door campaigning was nowhere described, nor its importance assessed.

The outside influence on the Okanagan prohibition campaign in 1916 presented another major difficulty. Developments in Vancouver, and in the legislature in Victoria are sometimes of greater importance, even though many people of the Okanagan were perhaps not even aware of them. The whole effort led by businessmen in favour of wartime prohibition was masterminded from Vancouver and most of the political pressure put on the provincial government to enact prohibition came from there. Since the Prohibition Act applied indiscriminately to the entire province, it cannot be viewed solely as a local issue and to sort out the relative importance of local and outside factors was a problem.

The campaign that finally won prohibition came to an end on September 14, 1916. On that day the people in the Okanagan and elsewhere in British Columbia went to the polls to elect a provincial government and to answer two other questions

<sup>1</sup> Albert J. Hiebert, "Prohibition in British Columbia" Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1969.

by ballot: should women be given the vote, and should prohibition become law? The election produced a "political avalanche"<sup>2</sup> in favor of the Liberals, who now formed their first provincial administration under Premier Harlan I. Brewster, and decimated the Conservatives, ending a reign of fourteen years. Women obtained the right to vote and, as a result of a favorable vote, prohibition became law and remained so from 1917 to 1921.

In the Okanagan the Conservatives won two seats and only lost in the North, where Dr. K.C. McDonald, Liberal, defeated the incumbent Price Ellison in the wake of a scandal. Both the issues of prohibition and woman suffrage received strong support. Voters favored prohibition by a margin of almost two to one.<sup>3</sup>

The terms of the Prohibition Act, upon which the referendum was based, were known as well as any piece of government legislation can be known; people were not duped by misinformation on its content. If anything, the people voting for the Act probably thought it to be more severe, more "dry", than it really was. The act was adequately described in the newspapers months before the referendum of September, 1916, took place and its terms recounted at numerous meetings, especially temperance rallies. The Prohibition Act did not make drinking illegal, neither did it

<sup>2</sup> Margaret A. Ormsby, British Columbia - A History, Vancouver, MacMillan, 1958 p.394.

<sup>3</sup> Vernon News, Sept. 21, 1916; Sept. 28, 1916; Oct. 26, 1916 and Kelowna Courier, Sept. 21, 1916. The results of the balloting in the Okanagan on the Prohibition Act were reported in the newspapers as follows:

	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>
Enderby	133	62
Armstrong	235	61
Lumby	26	80
Mabel Lake	5	8
Trinity Valley	2	3
Lavington	10	23
Vernon	369	332
O'Keefe's	5	8
Okanagan Landing	22	13
Commonage	12	7
Oyama	22	12
Kelowna	243	161
Peachland	61	16
Summerland (East & West)	190	65
Penticton	275	112
Naramata	37	8
Okanagan Falls	14	20
Fairview	27	25

These results are incomplete. The provincial government did not preserve a record anywhere and the newspapers omitted some communities.

prohibit the manufacture of alcoholic beverages. But the consumer could neither purchase, nor could the producer sell the item. By its terms, the British Columbia Prohibition Act completely prohibit the sale of alcohol and liquor except for sacramental, medicinal or industrial purposes. Private individuals could obtain liquor only by importing it from outside the province, a practice which provincial legislation could not legally prohibit. Also, since liquor was defined as a beverage containing more than  $2\frac{1}{2}\%$  of proof spirits breweries continued to manufacture and sell a product called near-beer which contained some alcohol. Doctors, druggists and dentists could purchase liquor for medical uses from government appointed vendors and in government buildings constructed for the purpose. As it turned out, hotel and jitney bars selling near-beer set up a fair trade and so it was that prohibition did not even completely close down the bars. Bars closed in 1921 upon the introduction of government controlled sales closed packages, after prohibition had been revoked.

How did Prohibition come about? Was Prohibition implicit in the course of social and political history of British Columbia at the time, or was it a new and unexpected departure? Margaret Ormsby suggests the latter interpretation.<sup>4</sup> Her view can be defended, but requires careful explanation. In British Columbia, the temperance movement was old and hoary by 1916; it was respectable and not ineffective. The public call by temperance people for personal abstinence from liquor, or at least only moderate use, and for restrictive liquor legislation, had been heard and heeded in the Okanagan and elsewhere in British Columbia -- but primarily at the local level. Some degree of control over hotel hours, and quality of facilities was gained through city council by-laws; provincial legislation gave municipalities the right to express their will on the number of liquor licenses granted in their areas. As a result communities like Enderby, Summerland, Peachland, and Naramata in the Okanagan became "dry" as did Chilliwack in the Fraser Valley.

However the temperance people were stymied in every effort to obtain "dry" legislation on a larger scale, as in the Dominion plebiscite of 1898, and the local option plebiscite in British Columbia in 1909. After these defeats, province-wide temperance organizations gradually disbanded since there was no reason to hope that any success other than in specific localities was forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> She describes the prohibitionist as one "who seemed completely out of character in a setting which had never been noted for its puritanical principles." Ormsby, p.389.

Suddenly, in 1914 the Great War began, and prohibitionists sensed a new opportunity. In this context one can understand Ormsby's suggestion that Prohibition was a new thing. It took World War I to provide the environment that finally made Prohibition possible in British Columbia and in the Okanagan.

The temperance idea arrived as part of the cultural baggage of some of the first white settlers in the Okanagan. A.L. Fortune of Enderby, a strong Presbyterian teetotaler, left his mark in that community. A total abstinence society existed there by 1887, providing entertainment to members as "a counter-attraction to the luring glitter of the bar-room" and "circulating petitions .... in favour of limiting the number of licenses".<sup>5</sup> Donald Graham, another early and prominent immigrant to the North Okanagan and at one time the legislative member of the district, also supported this temperance club. Around Vernon, then called Priest's Valley, a correspondent told of "strong feeling .... against the proposal of a firm to secure a license to dispense liquor."<sup>6</sup> A branch of the Good Templars operated early in Kelowna and for women, there was the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). The WCTU operated in the Okanagan at least as early as 1898 and began holding valley-wide rallies in 1910. Along with the early settler came temperance sentiments and organizations.

The loosely organized temperance groups saw immediate practical results from their activities. Certain Okanagan communities long remained completely "dry". In Enderby, the Lamblys voluntarily shortened the open hours of their Belvidere Hotel, and remained closed Sundays.<sup>7</sup> Temperance people were quick to note that group pressure could achieve desirable results and so temperance became a perpetual issue in local politics.

The political success of the temperance movement, particularly at the local level, can be better understood against the background of moral and democratic reform that concerned the communities of British Columbia and in fact, all across Canada. As communities grew more settled, a desire to improve them, to make them better places in which to live, became manifest. This desire led to the establishment of new or improved social services like hospitals, schools, juvenile courts. People began to work for better conditions in the prisons and for the rehabilitation of former prisoners. A workmen's compensation law was debated in the provincial

<sup>5</sup> Inland Sentinel, Kamloops, Feb. 12, 1887. The item refers to the Spallumcheen area, which included Enderby, as "somewhat of a temperance community".

<sup>6</sup> Inland Sentinel, Yale, Mar. 8, 1883.

<sup>7</sup> Inland Sentinel, Kamloops, 1887.

legislature in 1916 along with the Prohibition Act; the abolition of child labour took place in these years. One of the first hospitals for the insane, as it was called, was built in Vernon by the provincial government. Many of the people who involved themselves in the work for a high standard of service and morality in the community, like the WCTU, were the temperance people. In Vernon, after the war had begun, the first soldiers' aid groups were organized by the WCTU on a voluntary basis.

Obviously reformers had to come to terms with the political realities of their time. People did not always agree on the necessity of a particular reform, and sometimes they were unwilling to pay for it. Community leaders saw their task as one of building and preserving a peaceful, orderly community, and one that was inexpensively administered. City budgets were small and citizens intended to keep them that way. A community institution like a police force, a jail, a hospital, was not quickly established, until an overwhelming need for it was demonstrated. For some time the constable in Kelowna was hesitant to make arrests since this action meant taking the offender home for the night; there was no local jail. Vernon had no night constable before about 1904 and, although there was a jail, it was poorly looked after until complaints from the army in World War I forced better service to prisoners. In a partially serviced community a coherent, unified interpretation of decency was essential. Vernon's curfew law was intended to remove school age children and potential vandals from the street at night. No doubt a certain elitism operated in the choice of moral standards yet communities from Enderby to Penticton reserved and exercised the right to decide on the kind of entertainment residents could experience, often by extra-legal methods. Prostitutes were not duly arrested and tried and convicted in court -- this was an expensive and messy business. They were simply ostracized, ordered to leave town, or where this proved impossible, a "red light" district was tolerated. Moving pictures, boxing matches, and circuses were subject to council notions, and more often than not, refused the necessary license to appear in town. Decency was preserved not so much by law, as by a casual informality. Temperance people tended to interfere with this informality by insisting on more precise laws of right and wrong, particularly vis à vis liquor and often made a nuisance of themselves in this regard. In any case, in the years before World War I almost every community in British Columbia experimented with by-laws and other actions intended to maintain standards of decency and the

communities of the Okanagan were no exception. As part of this tendency, the temperance and prohibition movements attracted a considerable following.

Evidence that decency was a widespread concern in Okanagan communities is found in a newspaper editorial of 1913. The "'goody-goody' class" with "their extreme and impracticable views" did not have the answers for their community, a Vernon News editorial told residents, but the editor was strongly opposed to any effort to make Vernon an "open town":

God forbid that this should happen. We have lived in the West for thirty years, and know well what the conditions are in 'open' towns. Places where vice holds up its head unabashed, where gambling is rampant, where brothels flourish, where ruin and wreckage strew the streets with the flotsam of degraded humanity.

Vernon at present has a widespread reputation as one of the best conducted towns in the province. It is a place where nobody need hesitate to come to and bring up a family under exceptionally good conditions. Women and children may walk its streets by day or night and be safe from molestation or insult as if they were on their own premises. We are noted as being a law-abiding community. In every respect the City is now a desirable place of residence for decent people. The Board of Trade and other agencies have been busy for years inviting immigration and setting forth these attractions. All their work would be undone by the introduction of an "open town" regime.

The statistics furnished by the Police Commissioners make a fine showing. Only seven men have been arrested for drunkenness in the last two months! This speaks volumes for the efficient manner in which the Commissioners have conducted their work. It is a credit to our Chief of Police. It also demonstrates the fact that our hotels live well up to the letter of the law. In fact we believe that there is no town in British Columbia where the hotel proprietors are more deserving of praise than in Vernon. We must see to it that this eminently

satisfactory state of affairs is maintained. If we lapse into deterioration it will be our own fault.

Business interests and all legitimate enterprises would suffer in the long run from the adoption of the "wide open" system. Experience has taught that the transient and fictitious prosperity thus introduced is overwhelmingly outbalanced by the evil which follows. Vernon by this means would receive a set-back from which it would not recover for years .... We are speaking to the decent, sensible, self-respecting citizens, who are looking ahead to the future of themselves and their families. And we say to them: Wake up! Get busy! The civic elections are not far distant. Prepare a slate of good men that will maintain the present splendid status of our town.<sup>8</sup>

Here was the true voice of the Okanagan speaking: the "decent, sensible, self-respecting citizens" it said, had a responsibility to ensure the continuation of communities built on high moral values by democratic means. Vernon never became an "open" town; it never became a dry town through local law. Apparently the residents, like the editor, didn't want prohibition, but they desired a "wide open" town even less.

So decency was a popular issue in local communities and temperance leaders could always rely on its popularity to help their particular cause. Proponents of temperance, like those of other moral reforms, took their bearings from certain social or theological views, but they claimed their main motivation came from practical evidence around them of the evils of intemperance. All British Columbians were in agreement that liquor was bad for some people and should be kept away from them. Certainly about Indians there was no question and the penalty was severe for selling or giving them liquor. In the small communities of the Okanagan everyone sooner or later heard of human tragedies resulting from too much drinking. There was the sad case of August Gillard, an early settler of Okanagan Mission, who drank and gambled away four hundred cattle, fifty horses, and three hundred and twenty acres of land and died in poverty.<sup>9</sup> The "town drunk"

<sup>8</sup> Vernon News, Nov. 21, 1913, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Buckland, Ogopogo's Vigil, Kelowna, Kelowna Courier, 1948, p. 67.

was a notable figure, and James Donegan of Vernon was fondly remembered fifty years after he had frozen to death in a drunken stupor.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes drink struck in high places, as in the case of Edward Tronson, whose name appears regularly in the Vernon Police Court Records of the 1890's. On the basis of what they saw, and on their principles, numerous individuals began protesting to their local Board of Licensing Commissioners<sup>11</sup> against the granting of new liquor licenses or about the conduct in some of the licensed premises. Some citizens urged the complete prohibition of liquor because it produced "vicious slums, haunts of vice, overflowing jails, lunatic asylums, workhouses and the wrecked and poverty-stricken homes."<sup>12</sup> Liquor, prohibitionists claimed, was involved in most of the undesirable, anti-social, even petty criminal activities in every community. Statistics appeared to back them up. Of 172 cases dealt with by the Penticton Police department in 1915, 97 involved liquor and 20 were dismissed.<sup>13</sup> C.W. Holliday, certainly no teetotaler agreed that the temperance people had their finger on a real problem:

Looking back, I can see that most of the minor offences and many of the crimes of violence were undoubtedly the result of over-indulgences in alcohol. It will please my friends of the WCTU to hear this ... but (things were) much worse .... then.

Would not a clearly defined prohibition law, enforced by the province, mean savings and social peace at the local level, prohibitionists asked. Others felt that all that was required was an emphasis on genuine moderation, and perhaps some controlling legislation regarding liquor.

The moral reformers held the belief that a high moral tone, a common standard of decency in a community, made that community better: from the theological viewpoint "better" in the sight of God; from the sociological viewpoint "better" as an environment in which to live, friendlier, safer, and more prosperous. The theological viewpoint, of course, came mainly from the

<sup>10</sup> C.W. Holliday, The Valley of Youth, Caldwell, Idaho, Caxton Printers, 1948, p. 290. Donegan was known as "Jimmy the Dasher" and he was often "siwashed".

<sup>11</sup> The Board of License Commissioners received frequent complaints from residents about activities in hotels they deemed undesirable. There were complaints that gambling went on in the Victoria Hotel, and 130 persons petitioned at one stage that the license of another hotel, the Vernon, not be renewed. Board of License Commissioners, Vernon, Minutes, pp. 20, 21, 125.

<sup>12</sup> Vernon News, June 14, 1917.

<sup>13</sup> Penticton Herald, Jan. 6, 1916.

<sup>14</sup> Holliday, p. 305.

churches. In their more or less accepted role as guardians of the moral standards of the community the churches urged the observance of Sunday as a day of rest, and opposed practices like race track gambling and prostitution and unfamiliar forms of entertainment such as moving pictures, or even pool halls. The liquor question was of particular significance to the churches and the first ministers in the Okanagan warned and worked against the traffic and use of drink. "The Rev. Mr. Langill .... (was) circulating a petition in favour of prohibiting the sale and manufacture of .... liquors" in Vernon as early as 1891.<sup>15</sup> All churches taught temperance, but the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church defined it as moderate use. The Methodists were nearly all teetotalers and practiced "the Discipline" against members who indulged in the use of intoxicating liquors. In the Okanagan Methodist churches as elsewhere, members from time to time took "the pledge" to abstain from all alcoholic beverages. Candidates for the Methodist ministry were faced with the question, "Do you take snuff, tobacco, or intoxicating drinks" and there was only one acceptable answer.<sup>16</sup> Baptists and many Presbyterians agreed with the Methodists on the question of drinking, although the Presbyterian church never enforced total abstinence on its members. As the number of teetotalers increased the word "temperance" came to be defined as total abstinence from liquor, and was used interchangeably with the word "prohibition".

The churches taught temperance and some advocated prohibition but they were not constantly working toward a political showdown on the prohibition issue. Church records in the Okanagan, particularly Vernon, indicate that the churches, as churches, put less time and energy into the temperance question than is sometimes believed although the presence of mainly Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians in the temperance movement is an indication of the social effects of church teachings. Churches supported political movements considered commendable but did not really lead them. The churches in the Okanagan, many of them barely organized by 1900, did not have the manpower, nor financial resources to lead a political campaign. In Vernon both St. Andrews, the Presbyterian Church, and the Methodist Church had chronic financial difficulties and found it difficult to

<sup>15</sup> Inland Sentinel, Kamloops, Jan. 24, 1891. Langill was a Presbyterian minister.

<sup>16</sup> Methodist Church, B.C. Conference, Okanagan District, Minutes, May 9, 1907.

support their pastors and pay for church facilities, let alone expending resources on other matters.<sup>17</sup> No sizeable amounts paid out for temperance work or advertising are found in the financial records of these congregations although one cannot know how much individual members on their own donated to the temperance movement. Church temperance committees, both local and valley wide were set up from time to time but had no continuity or measurable influence outside the church.

In 1909, the year of the fight for local option, the Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist churches in Vernon considered supporting "strong moral (sic!) reform candidates for mayor" but "nothing definite" was done.<sup>18</sup> Not even in 1916, after a referendum on prohibition had been called, did the churches show intense concern about the question. The Methodists held a Valley-wide annual district meeting in May, 1916, in the middle of the final prohibition campaign, but the main issue was a theological dispute, Russellism, and the newspaper account on the meeting reported nothing on the prohibition question.<sup>19</sup> The actual political campaign for temperance and prohibition legislation was led by other groups.

Other temperance groups also objected to the liquor traffic on moral grounds. The WCTU lacked direct political power -- women could not vote -- and so couched its criticisms of society in moral tones. Children were organized into Bands of Hope, and taught about "the evil effects of alcohol and tobacco". Women were not permitted to enter barrooms at this time and it was widely held that their entry into politics would elevate the moral tone of the entire province. The drive for women suffrage can be partly understood as a part of moral reform, but the Department of Franchise of the WCTU also demanded the vote as a right. Women leaders in the WCTU were often the wives of known prohibitionists -- like Mrs. L.V. Rogers and Mrs. H.W. Swerdfager, both of Kelowna. Along with other

<sup>17</sup> In Vernon, the Presbyterian Church became self supporting in 1899; the Methodist Church in 1905. One large outside expense maintained by the Methodists was "Connexional fund" which included assessments for Columbia College, a seminary. In June 1916, the PPA appealed to the Presbyterian Sunday School in Vernon for funds, and a special collection was taken. Presbyterian Church, Vernon, Minutes, June 13, 1916.

<sup>18</sup> Methodist Church, Official Board, Minutes, Oct. 11, 1909 and Nov. 9, 1909.

<sup>19</sup> Penticton Herald, May 18, 1916, p.1.

local temperance people in the Okanagan, the WCTU did its part in urging stricter control over the liquor traffic. In the larger province-wide temperance efforts they played a more secondary role. In the final prohibition campaign of 1915 - 1916 the WCTU provided the new prohibitionist organization, the People's Prohibition Association (PPA), with moral and financial support, but leadership was definitely in the hands of the PPA. The WCTU still continued its role in criticizing the moral standards of local communities. All WCTU members in the Okanagan were asked to write to Sir Sam Hughes, Canadian Minister of Militia, "urging him to declare liquor out of bounds at the Vernon Camp, and to discourage in every way within his power the red light districts .... the Vernon camp is on many a woman's heart."<sup>20</sup>

Some prohibitionists argued that prohibition was in the tradition of other democratic reforms in social legislation and many people agreed with them in principle. Opponents of prohibition, like the residents of Okanagan Falls, who voted against it in 1916, do not on that account deserve to be called liberal or reform-minded; where the rest of the valley overwhelmingly supported woman suffrage, they came very close to defeating it in their own area.<sup>21</sup> A reform was a political action that "improved" a community and made it a better place in which to live. The more directly the people participated in the reform through plebiscites or referenda, the more democratic it was. A democratic society by definition implied that the people of any area surely had the basic right to make decisions about what institutions could exist in their own communities. Specifically, if most people wanted hotel bars and saloons closed, they should be closed. Was not this democracy in action? Perhaps the people of Vernon, Kelowna and Penticton could not dry up the entire province, but if most people in these communities demonstrated their support of prohibition, surely they could dry up Vernon, Kelowna and Penticton. Temperance people argued that the principle of local influence and control should be recognized as much in the case of prohibition as for any other reform and that if a local "dry" system was impractical, or not widely supported, then perhaps restrictive regulations on the liquor traffic was the answer.

<sup>20</sup> Kelowna Courier, June 1, 1916, p.5.

<sup>21</sup> Okanagan Falls defeated prohibition 20 to 14. Woman suffrage barely passed, 26 to 23.

The temperance argument for local democracy was finally heard and a plebiscite on local option was held in 1909. The plebiscite was defeated. A local option law would permit, as it did in many other parts of Canada, and the U.S., "wet" areas, such as cities or even entire electoral districts to go "dry" by popular vote. The question of the local option law was put to a plebiscite in 1909 and obtained a slim majority in British Columbia, but failed under its terms of reference. The vote in the Okanagan at this time exactly reflected the rest of the province.<sup>22</sup> The theory of democratic control of the prohibition question, while logically coherent within a democratic society, failed on its own terms, i.e., not enough people voted for it.

Known prohibitionists, like R.W. Timmins, mayor of Vernon, 1908-9, did not force "dry" law on an unwilling community; there is no evidence that he even tried. In Penticton a serious dispute arose over the vigor with which the police department enforced certain by-laws. Zealous in duty, Police Chief Gale charged various citizens of the community with violations of by-laws regulating their hotels and poolrooms. The charges did not stand up in court, and the district had to bear the court costs. Gale was forced out of office.<sup>23</sup> The "goody-goodys" as the editor of the Vernon News called some prohibitionists did not command universal respect, and the news media made fun of groups like the WCTU if they made a moral stand on insignificant (to them) issues. "Listen to this", chuckled a writer at the Penticton Herald, as he reported a WCTU meeting at which members had criticized the suggestive style of demonstrating women's clothes in Eaton's Catalogue.<sup>24</sup> Decent moral standards were desired by a wide segment of every community, but these standards bore the marks of local feeling. An emphasis, even a preference, for decent and temperate living, if not on temperance itself, was evident in the Okanagan, whether based on moral or reform considerations. And this preference was held by enough people, with sufficient influence, to effect real changes in the social habits and attitudes of British Columbia.

From the beginning of the temperance movement in the Okanagan, the names of the men behind the "dry" cause reads like a Who's Who of the area.

<sup>22</sup> The plebiscite was held in conjunction with a provincial election. A rule was made that if 50% of those who voted for candidates also voted for local option, the government would bring in a law. Of ballots cast, a slight majority in the province voted for local option, but their total fell short of the required 50%. So it was in the Okanagan. The area was short of the 50% by 16 votes.

<sup>23</sup> Penticton Herald, Sept. 2, 1915.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., Nov. 11, 1916.

Many of these men doubtless avoided liquor personally for religious reasons -- they were all Methodists or Presbyterians -- and they had a significant influence on the standard of decency in their respective communities. In Vernon, the names R.V. Clement, lawyer and onetime mayor, J.S. Galbraith, businessman and alderman, and J.A. McKelvie, editor, the Vernon News, occur in the movement in the 1890's and later. In Kelowna, chief prohibitionists included J.A. Bigger, chairman, Board of School Trustees, J.W. Jones, city Mayor and financial agent; both principal of the high school, L.V. Rogers and of the elementary school, James Gordon. Alderman Matthew McCauley, B.A. Moorhouse, civil engineer and land surveyor, and Charles Greer, Ford dealer, led the dry forces in Penticton.

Under such leadership communities were able to get specific laws passed on liquor and other moral questions, laws that progressively reflected the prevailing definition of decency in the community. These laws bore the marks of the sometimes petty, sometimes ridiculous (to us) concerns of small struggling cities in the Okanagan and elsewhere, but the concerns were real, and the laws were locally applied to local leaders. Even before 1900 the Provincial Liquor Act was amended and all new liquor outlets, wholesale and retail, were made dependent on local consent. A new license could be challenged by local residents and defeated in a local plebiscite. Residents of Peachland and Naramata, considered strongly Baptist communities, long remained dry through local opposition to liquor outlets. When other hotel facilities were needed, a large hotel, the Syndica, was built in Naramata, but without a barroom. In Peachland, a delegation presented to council "a petition with the signatures of 75 rate-payers asking for exemption from taxation, water and light rates for five years for anyone who would build and operate a strictly temperance hotel."<sup>25</sup> Council agreed, but apparently no one took advantage of the offer, and the "temperance" hotel was never built. By 1911, communities everywhere were eliminating saloons and permitting only hotels to sell liquor, in an effort to ensure better facilities, and standards of service. Also, according to the provincial act, local judges were permitted to interdict individuals ("siwash" was the popular term) who repeatedly caused disturbances while drunk. No one could legally sell or give liquor to a man under interdict.

At the local level, communities were empowered through legislation pertaining to municipalities to license and set hours of business for barrooms, and to inspect them. This they did through a local Board of License Commissioners.

<sup>25</sup> F. Ivor Jackson, "A History of the Municipal Council of Peachland, 1909 - 1947", mimeographed by author, n.d., p.81. 48

By-law 141 in Vernon passed in popular referendum in 1910. Under its terms opening hours of wholesale and retail liquor places were ordered closed 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. Barrooms were to leave lights on blinds up to permit inspection.<sup>26</sup> Establishments failing to meet these terms found themselves in trouble, and Charles Levasseur of Victoria Hotel, Vernon, had his license suspended for two months. Even bartenders were required to purchase a license through city officers, in an effort to ensure that the position would be filled by men of good character. If prohibition was not often part of the standard of decency accepted by Okanagan communities, restrictive liquor legislation certainly was.

So the keepers of the moral standards of the communities had enjoyed considerable success before World War I. Saloons were gone, and hotel bars had come very much under community control. Yet many temperance people were dissatisfied and in 1915 they joined in another campaign for prohibition. Why did they do this? There is no evidence that the majority of the people of the Okanagan were dissatisfied with restrictive liquor legislation. The mind of the prohibitionist is difficult to explain. He was invariably a Methodist or Baptist churchman, yet there are no imperatives in the basic literature of Christianity to justify his political attitude. Most Anglicans and Catholics remained doubtful about prohibition through law. If prohibition is considered reactionary, why was it so long espoused by the Liberals in the province? My hunch is that the prohibitionist was more in time with the politics of the future than he is usually given credit for. He was not a vestige of the past, in support of negative and conservative government, but he is the ancestor of positive, involved, social welfare oriented government. It is a popular notion that prohibition was ill-conceived because it could not work. I think we know that now, but neither prohibitionists nor anyone else knew this before it was tried. The temperance people, like the good democratic liberal reformers that some of them were, had a great faith in law. They were sure society could be changed, even greatly improved, if "good" laws were framed.

Whatever the depth of commitment by the Okanagan prohibitionists to their cause, one can argue that they were less actors, and more acted upon in the final campaign of 1915-16. The real prohibitionist was a product of the

<sup>26</sup> In addition, no one under 21 could enter a barroom and barrooms were required to close during election hours. The by-law passed 152 to 49. Vernon News, Sept. 8, 1910.

cities of British Columbia -- Vancouver and Victoria. Out in the rural districts and communities, like those in the Okanagan, city and district leaders had worked out a modus vivendi with the "red light" district people and the policeman and the prostitute both kept their place. Over the hotel keeper, a satisfactory level of control was now exercised. Then from Vancouver came the prohibitionists and stirred up the prohibition issue again. A clearly defined prohibition law, they said, enforced by the province, could mean savings and stability at the local level. The cost would be to give up the income from liquor licenses. The concept of local control would also be lost. Prohibition meant a further extension of the provincial government into the communities of B.C. Local licensing control over hotels would be given up. New government liquor stores would be required, with employees hired by the province to operate them. The expected gain was the final solution of the whole liquor problem, locally as well as over the entire province. Such temperance arguments were old hat and they had not been accepted by great enough numbers before to become law. But this was 1915, the Great War was on, and the prohibitionists stalked out of Vancouver into the countryside with a bold new confidence.

To say that World War I caused far reaching changes in all of western society is a truism, yet an important fact in considering the coming of prohibition to British Columbia. The wartime climate of opinion had unique elements in it -- patriotism of course -- but a patriotism that included the willingness on the part of many to make personal sacrifices, to give up luxuries, even ordinary enjoyments of life. This wartime climate of opinion provided a congenial environment for prohibitionists to get their law.

The campaign that won prohibition was predominantly an economic one, built on an emotional foundation of patriotism. "What will it be," asked the prohibitionist, "the Bar or the War?" The economic emphasis was on the conservation of resources, in civilian life, or to better aid the war effort, especially food and financial resources. All residents of B.C. were urged to conserve food, grain, and flour by the Food Board. Bills needed to be paid, victory bonds required selling. The campaign thus was primarily a call for "wartime" prohibition, and coupled an emphasis on economic efficiency with patriotism. "A tensely righteous type of patriot," Ormsby called the prohibitionist.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Ormsby, P. 389.

In this final and successful prohibition campaign of 1915 and 1916 the business and professional people, particularly of Vancouver, took the lead. Early in the campaign John Nelson placed his newspaper, the World, in the "dry" cause and his was the only major daily newspaper to take this direction. The paper was therefore promoted throughout the province by the prohibitionists. An apparently short-lived Prohibition Bulletin was printed by the same establishment and reached the Okanagan. If newspaper items in the Okanagan are a fair indication, the local temperance people allowed themselves to be pretty well dominated by the more prominent temperance people -- Rev. J.S. Henderson and Archdeacon Lloyd -- who lectured the entire province. No doubt many of the local "drys" cooperated willingly, but their role was definitely a subservient one and the issues as well as the tempo of the campaign became entirely dependent on what the Vancouver "drys" were doing.

By the spring of 1915 petitions and requests for wartime prohibition were pouring into the federal and provincial government offices across Canada. The most prominent Canadian prohibition lobby, the Dominion Alliance, sprang into action and held a rally in Toronto in March at which a resolution was passed requesting the federal government to prohibit the manufacture and sale of liquor for the duration of the war. Renewed interest in the liquor question was shown in British Columbia as well, particularly in Vancouver. In May, 1915, between five and six hundred business and professional men of Vancouver and district attended a prohibition banquet in Dominion Hall and unanimously endorsed prohibition in the province by a standing vote.<sup>28</sup> John Nelson, the owner and editor of the World, interpreted the wartime prohibition movement to his readers as something new. In a front-page editorial entitled "Prohibition During the War" he stated that :

We believe that without exception former temperance movements have been crusades having their origin in the moral and religious life of the community ....

The present campaign will ... be an economic one. Throughout the province it is being fathered by shopkeepers, miners, professional men, mill hands, lumbermen, farmers and businessmen of all kinds. It has no political boundaries or limits .... Total abstainers will, in this campaign, find themselves reinforced by the votes of club men and moderate and even immoderate drinkers throughout the province.

<sup>28</sup>

World, Vancouver, May 19, 1915, p. 12.

The candid opinion of most sensible men today is unmistakably in one direction, namely, that no country that is at war has any business permitting the continuance of a trade which imposes unnecessary burdens on industry and commerce and entails worse ravages than war itself.<sup>29</sup>

One of the decisions reached at the banquet, was to send someone around the province, sounding out the views of businessmen, and to "request their support in a new drive for wartime prohibition". The man chosen was D.F. Glass, an insurance agent in Vancouver. In July, Glass addressed a Board of Trade meeting in Kelowna, attended by about 30 people, the Courier reported.

Mr. Glass ... explained the purpose of the meeting, which was to induce the businessmen of Kelowna to cooperate in a movement set on foot by the businessmen of Vancouver to secure prohibition of the sale of alcoholic liquors on the lines recently enacted in Alberta or Saskatchewan. Resolutions were passed as follows: (1) asking the measure at the next session of the Legislature or (2) should a provincial election be held before the legislature meets, to submit a plebiscite on the question to popular vote.<sup>30</sup>

To better organize the work, a prohibition convention was held in Vancouver, August 24 and 25. The Vernon delegation consisted of H.W. Knight, J.S. Galbraith, Thos. Robertson and Rev. C.O. Main. From Kelowna, the mayor, J.T. Jones, and L.V. Rogers attended. Local committees were set up, headed by businessmen in the various communities, and with the return home of the delegated from Vancouver, work began in earnest and meeting after meeting was held. The delegates brought back the word that the prohibition movement was basking in political respectability. The day before the convention opened Premier McBride had sent a letter to the convention committee stating that "it has been decided after careful deliberation to submit the whole question to a plebiscite of the electorate".<sup>31</sup>

Considerable popular enthusiasm was generated by the convention and a public rally in Vancouver attracted 4,000 persons who came to hear the guest speakers, Principal Lloyd, President of the Dominion Alliance, and Nellie McClung of Manitoba. To maintain interest in prohibition the People's Prohibition Association (PPA) was organized on a province-wide basis. Then the out-of-town delegates returned home to work.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Aug. 10, 1915, p.1

<sup>30</sup> Kelowna Courier, July 29, 1915

<sup>31</sup> Cited in World, Vancouver, Aug. 24, 1915, p. 12.

The PPA organization was elaborate and the executive committee centered in Vancouver became the key group in maintaining a politically audible voice on the prohibition issue. The role of local groups was to distribute campaign information, bulletins, literature, and to help in coordinating the lecture tours of prominent lecturers and agents sent out from headquarters. Interested people were not required to sign or pay a fee to become members and hence the actual strength of the PPA locals is unknown. Jonathan Rogers, a prominent Vancouver businessman and head of the movement claimed that all but two of the thirty electoral districts contained prohibition committees by January, 1916.<sup>32</sup>

The prohibition campaign began immediately. Mr. Charles Reid, a Vancouver businessman, was in Peachland in September. He came

.... in the interests of the Vancouver World and the People's Prohibition Movement ... He is arranging for organizations in the smaller towns, to be affiliated with the central or main organization .... paving the way for Dr. McGuire, of Vancouver .... provincial organizer.<sup>33</sup>

The local officers were H.W. Knight, President, L.J. Ball, Vice-President, D. McBride, Secretary-Treasurer. The membership was estimated at 50 people.<sup>34</sup> The Kelowna Courier reported on the organizational meeting there at which Mayor Jones and L.V. Rogers, principal of the high school spoke and J.A. Bigger was made president. Others involved in the committee at Kelowna were James Gordon, J. Ball, W.B.M. Calder, J.M. Brydon and H.D. Riggs. J.A. Bigger

called to mind how good it looked for Kelowna to see the principal of the high school and the principal of the public school both figuring at the head of such a movement.<sup>35</sup>

At Penticton, Archdeacon Lloyd spoke to an "excellent attendance" at the prohibition meeting which was chaired by Councillor Matthew McCauley.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Victoria Daily Times, Feb. 1, 1916, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Penticton Herald, Sept. 30, 1915.

<sup>34</sup> Vernon News, Nov. 18, 1915.

<sup>35</sup> Kelowna Courier, Sept. 31, 1915.

<sup>36</sup> Penticton Herald, Sept. 2, 1915.

The featured temperance meetings were those dominated by prohibitionists with a province-wide reputation but local people did not remain uninvolved. Most Okanagan communities reported some temperance activity before Christmas of 1915. In Penticton, Sunday School children marched in a temperance parade under a manifesto that read

Follow the lead of the King! For the sake of the children,  
the future citizens and homemakers of Penticton show your  
sympathy with the "People's Prohibition Movement."<sup>37</sup>

The parade was followed by a public temperance rally, and was well attended. However, even in the crucial years of 1915-16 the prohibition issue did not dominate Okanagan newspapers -- the War did. Probably this was fortunate for the prohibitionist cause. Most newspapers only mentioned meetings at which some prominent person, usually from out of town, gave a lecture. Thus information on the local effort is very scarce, and the differences of opinion are reflected mainly in the letter-to-the-editor columns. The Enderby Commoner ignored prohibition completely.

By Christmas, temperance activity was dwindling and a "very small" attendance was reported at a Penticton temperance rally.<sup>38</sup> The PPA had cranked up enthusiasm everywhere and hoped to force the provincial government into a quick referendum on prohibition, but the Premier disappointed the leaders, and as a consequence temperance activity declined everywhere. Instead of a separately held referendum on prohibition, Premier Richard McBride told the PPA by letter that the government was opposed to direct legislation and would therefore return to the plebiscite policy, and that for reasons of economy and because it made the largest vote possible, the plebiscite would be held on election day and the question of prohibition would be treated in conjunction with other questions on the issue.<sup>39</sup> After this setback, Okanagan newspapers reported no temperance meetings for several months. Not until the spring and summer of 1916 was any temperance work done in the Okanagan, and again it was the prohibitionists from the coast who got things moving both in their own area and in the Okanagan.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Dec. 30, 1915.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Dec. 20, 1915

<sup>39</sup> World, Vancouver, Nov. 9, 1915.

Shortly before the end of the year 1915, Richard McBride resigned as premier and was succeeded by his former Attorney General, W.J. Bowser. At first Bowser made no commitments to the PPA and despite "all kinds of pressure" in "letters, resolutions, newspaper articles" he ignored all demands for an explanation of his policy on prohibition.<sup>40</sup> He thus ignored the growing strength of the PPA and a widespread interest in the question. When Bowser set by-election dates in late February, 1916, for the election of three new cabinet ministers the PPA decided to use the by-elections as a test of strength. The PPA openly opposed the Conservative candidates and two of them were defeated, one in Victoria and one in Vancouver. Bowser blamed their defeat at least in part on the activities of the prohibitionists.<sup>41</sup> Within a day of the by-elections Bowser completely reversed himself and espoused a policy that exceeded the expectations of the PPA. To a large prohibition delegation in Victoria, led by J. Robers, Bowser pledged that a referendum, not a plebiscite, would be held on a prohibition act acceptable to the prohibitionists.

In late April and early May, the Rev. J.S. Henderson, a seasoned prohibition campaigner from eastern Canada, and on full time loan to the PPA from the Presbyterian Church, was sent on a speaking tour of the Okanagan. He stopped at virtually every community along the way and in Kelowna he was joined by George J. Hammond, a Vancouver financier. The economic emphasis of the campaign was retained and soon local temperance people were applying the categories of argument developed in Vancouver to their own communities. Vernon prohibitionists lamented the waste of resources represented by the "net drink bill" of the Okanagan of \$1,340,000.<sup>42</sup> Mayor Jones of Kelowna, soon to become the Conservative candidate in the provincial election, referred to prohibition as a "great mortgage lifter" and L.V. Rogers parroted the usual statistics "to prove that if the money invested in the manufacture of liquor were to be invested in any other manufacture, the producing power of the country would be increased many fold."<sup>43</sup>

Since Premier Bowser called for the prohibition referendum in conjunction with a provincial election, the temperance question was bound to become part of the political campaign, but, with the possible exception of the South Okanagan

<sup>40</sup> Canadian Annual Review, 1916, p. 770.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 755

<sup>42</sup> Vernon News, Dec. 2, 1915.

<sup>43</sup> Kelowna Courier, June 1, 1916.

riding in the area around Kelowna, the issue was not significant in the Okanagan. L.W. Shatford, Conservative member from the Similkameen riding, which included Penticton, spoke at length in Victoria on the accomplishments and prospects of his riding in a long address and as reported in the Penticton Herald contained not a single reference to prohibition.<sup>44</sup> He took no clear stand on the issue. However, H.H. Stevens, Conservative M.P. from Vancouver visited Penticton in September 1916, just before voting day. He only endorsed prohibition on behalf of Shatford and local conservatives, who had been reticent on the subject. As previously mentioned, the Enderby Commoner ignored the subject and the issue did not appear of great political significance in the North Okanagan, even though the incumbent Conservative, Price Ellison, was defeated by K.C. McDonald, a Liberal. The dominant issue here was a scandal in which Ellison, a cabinet minister, was accused of using his influence to personally profit in the sale of beef cattle. In Kelowna, both candidates, Mayor J.W. Jones, Conservative, and L.V. Rogers, Liberal, both claimed to be prohibitionists but the Liberal Committee of South Okanagan had supported a referendum on prohibit on six months prior to the Conservatives. Ultimately Jones emerged the winner.

The prohibition issue was decided on September 14, 1916, and, after a delay caused by controversy on overseas balloting by soldiers, a Prohibition Act went into force October 1, 1917 and remained so until June 14, 1921. A prohibition commissioner was appointed by the province to keep watch over the Prohibition Act, but he and the communities who hoped to benefit from prohibition soon found themselves in difficulty. The commissioner could not single handedly enforce the Act and the province gave little help to incorporate areas with their own police departments. Having given up their income from liquor licenses, communities now found they were required to enforce the Prohibition Act. But this is another story pertaining to the failure of prohibition.

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<sup>44</sup>Penticton Herald, Mar. 23, 1916.