

# Spirited REPUBLIC

BY BRUCE I. BUSTARD

• ALCOHOL'S EVOLVING ROLE IN U.S. HISTORY •



**S**ince the first European settlers arrived, Americans have enjoyed a drink. At times, many of us have enjoyed *a lot* of drinks. But other Americans, fearing the harm alcohol would do to society and to individuals, have tried to stop our drinking or limit who, when, and where we could consume alcohol.

These two different views of alcoholic beverages run throughout American history. Sometimes they have existed in relative peace; at other times they have been at war.

A new National Archives exhibition opening in March 2015, “Spirited Republic: Alcohol in American History,” uses National Archives documents and artifacts from the Archives and other museums and libraries to show how government programs and policies changed over time and to illustrate the wide variety of views Americans hold about alcohol.

### “Good Creature of God” For Early Americans

In early America, drinking alcohol was an accepted part of everyday life at a time when water was suspect and life was hard. Drink was, in the words of Puritan minister Increase Mather, a “good creature of God.” Men, women, and even children swallowed “a healthful dram” with breakfast. Farmers took cider, beer, or whiskey into their fields. Employers gave their workers a mid-morning break for an invigorating swig. Ale accompanied supper, and a “nightcap” was typical before bed. And while drunkenness was seen as disruptive to community, social occasions such as weddings, barn raising, elections, christenings, and funerals were opportunities to indulge.

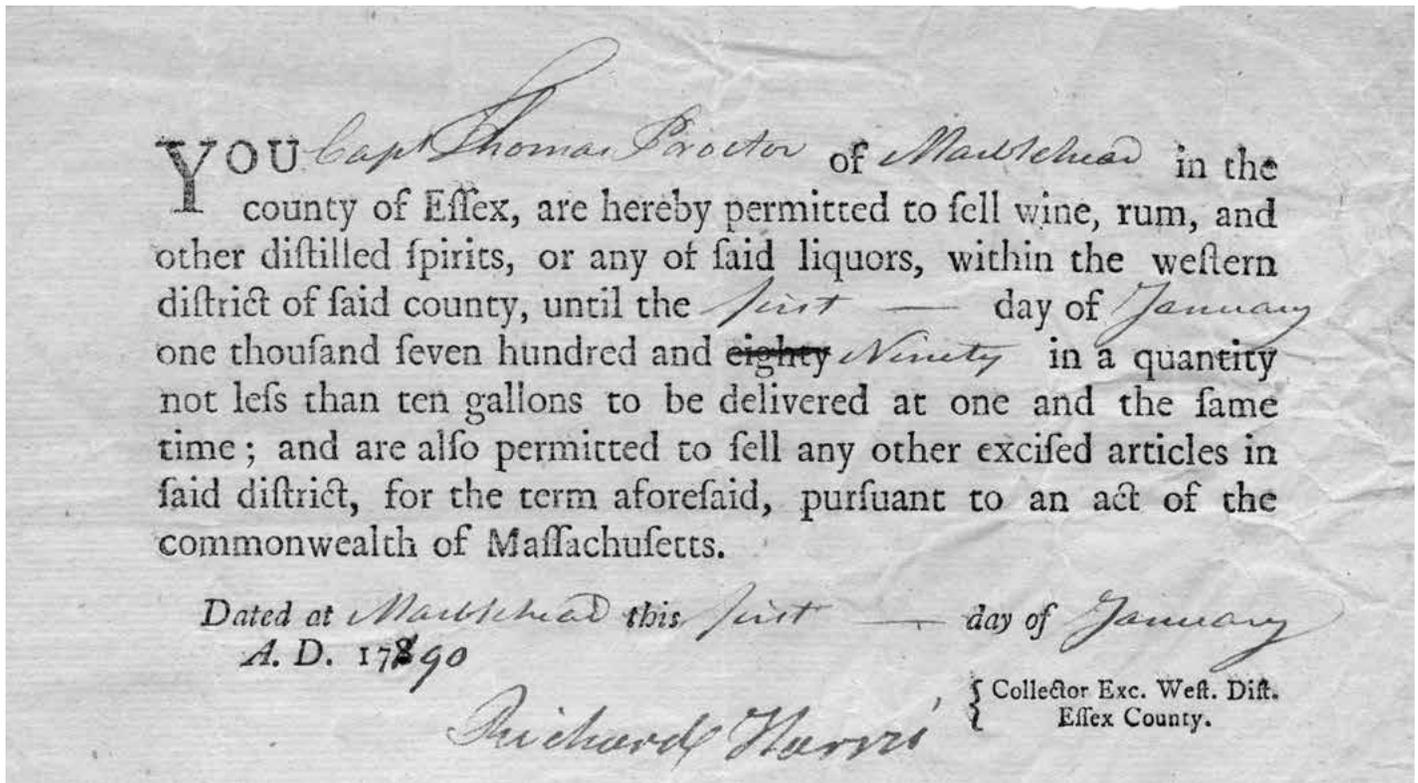
Alcohol was not just a beverage. It was often the first medicine a physician prescribed.

As the country grew, drinking so freely and often never faded away completely. In fact, in the early republic, Americans drank quantities we would consider astounding today. In 1790, we consumed an average of 5.8 gallons of absolute alcohol annually for each drinking-age individual. By 1830, that figure rose to 7.1 gallons! Today, in contrast, Americans consume about 2.3 gallons of absolute alcohol in a year.

Many of the records in “Spirited Republic” highlight positive associations with alcohol. As visitors enter the gallery they see a reproduction of a still used at Mount Vernon, George Washington’s home. Washington ran a large distillery where he made brandy and whiskey.



Opposite and above: The federal government’s patent and trademark authority extends to labeling. These two beer labels were submitted as breweries began to ramp up production as Prohibition ended.



In the early republic, regulating the sale of alcohol was largely a state and local matter. This 1790 permit to sell liquor is from Essex County, Massachusetts.

Visitors can also examine a list of liquors delivered to the Navy during the Revolutionary War, an 1803 receipt for kegs of “strong wine” signed by Meriwether Lewis for the Lewis and Clark expedition to the West, and a 1790 permit to sell liquor in Essex County, Massachusetts.

Other records detail the use of alcohol by the military and the government support given to alcohol-related businesses, inventors, and entrepreneurs. An 1885 list of “stimulants” from Fort Snelling, Minnesota, notes who was prescribed alcohol, as well as the amount and type of drink. A patent drawing for a still by Eli Barnum and Benjamin Brooks and another for pasteurizing beer, by A. A. Busch—founder of the Anheuser Busch brewing company—are displayed. An 1898 letter from a distiller to the American consulate in Oman asks about finding markets for whiskey in that country, only to be told that there was little possibility of selling alcohol in that Muslim nation.

### Demonizing Drink Picks Up in the 1800s

Even while many Americans were drinking more, others were sounding warnings about

the dangers of drink. Some religious groups in the early republic were concerned about excessive drinking, and the first U.S. temperance organization was founded in 1808. By the mid-19th century, hundreds of local temperance societies preached moderation and pledged abstinence from distilled spirits. In response, between 1840 and 1860—when the temperance movement was most active—per person alcohol consumption per year fell dramatically, down to about 3.5 gallons.

By the late 19th century, support for prohibition—totally banning the manufacture and sale of alcohol—surpassed temperance sentiment. Prohibition found support especially among rural evangelical Protestants, as well as with urban businessmen concerned with improving worker productivity and reliability. Women activists, concerned with protecting the home and family, formed a key part of this powerful coalition.

Support for temperance and prohibition as well as concern about alcohol abuse are represented in “Spirited Republic” through petitions, product labels, letters, and hospital records.

An enormous 1843 petition arguing for an end to the Navy’s “spirit ration” measures over 10 feet long and contains the signatures of almost 400 individuals. Its signers agreed that “the use of intoxicating liquors . . . creates and confirms vicious appetites, fosters habits of intemperance, and vice, [and] predisposes the human system to disease.”

An 1827 extract from a letter to Congress from leaders of the Mohican-Stockbridge tribe makes clear one of the reasons the tribe agreed to resettlement from New York to what is now Wisconsin was to “flee from” what they described as “the alarming savages of Spirituous liquors” in their community.

The plight of “dipsomaniacs”—a 19th-century term for alcoholics—inspired sympathy and supposed cures, and many products were sold that claimed to help individuals stop drinking. This growing sympathy can be seen by viewing a label for Leslie E. Keeley’s “Double Chloride of Gold Cure for Drunkenness,” the most popular cure for alcohol abuse during the late 19th century. A page from a register of patients at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C., listing

patients suffering from dipsomania, also testifies to the growing understanding of alcoholism as a medical problem.

While many immigrants and labor organizations opposed prohibition, groups like the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, formed in 1872, and the Anti-Saloon League, founded in 1893, pushed several states and localities to restrict alcohol sales. Nationally, prohibitionists rode wider waves of reform that benefited from the drive for woman suffrage and from World War I. In 1919, Congress ratified a prohibition amendment to the Constitution. The original Joint Resolution for the 18th Amendment will be shown for six months in "Spirited Republic."

### Could America Become A Sober Republic?

Prohibitionists believed that the ratification of the 18th Amendment would be cheerfully accepted by the American people. At first, it seemed they might be right. Consumption of alcohol declined, as did alcohol-related crime and deaths from alcoholism. Sales of grape juice and soft drinks rose. Brewers marketed nonalcoholic beer.

But America was far from dry.

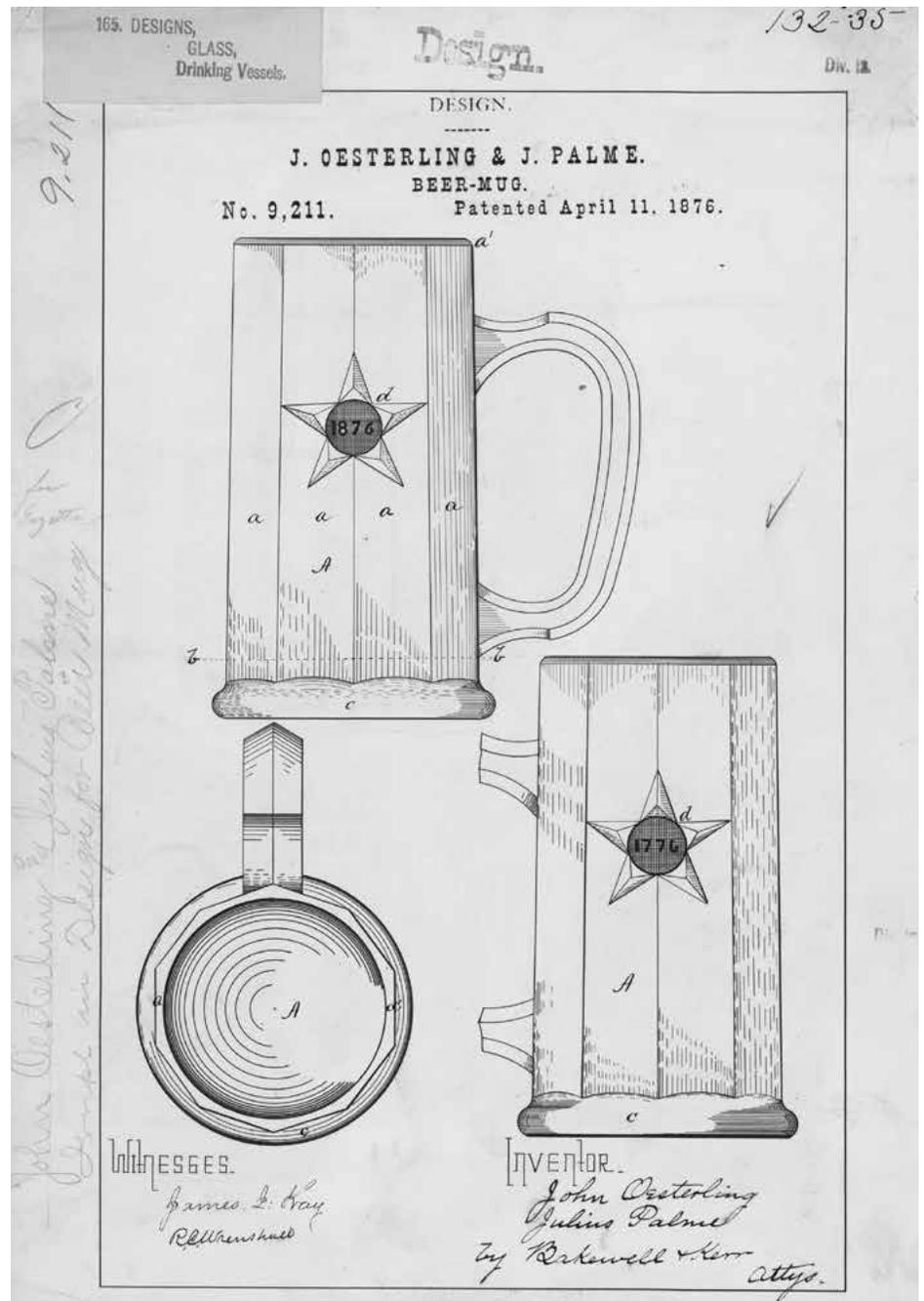
Those who wanted booze found legal and not-so-legal ways to get it. They began brewing beer or making wine at home or exploited other exceptions provided by the law, such as prescriptions for medicinal alcohol and home brewing. After the first few years of Prohibition, illegal manufacturing, importation, and sale of alcohol became big business, run by organized crime. In some states and cities federal Prohibition laws were ignored by local authorities.

Because of the federal responsibility for enforcement, "Spirited Republic" draws from an enormous number of National Archives records for its Prohibition section. Exhibited documents include a prescription for medicinal whiskey, an advertisement for beer-making equipment, and a color-coded map of one Prohibition district showing a county-by-county depiction of public sentiments toward

*Inail Wilhelm Esq Philad. June 1<sup>st</sup> 1803*  
*for Cap Lewis - Do. of David Jackson*  
*30 Gallons Strong Sp. Wine @ 233 $\frac{1}{2}$  \$ 70*  
*6 Iron Bound Kegs — 1.20. 4.20*  
*\$ 74.20*

*Duplicate, Received the above articles.*  
*Meriwether Lewis*  
*Sept 1<sup>st</sup> US Regt Infly.*

Above: Kegs of "strong wine" were an important provision for Lewis and Clark's western expedition. Members of the expedition not only drank the wine, they also used it to trade with Native Americans. Below: John Osterling and Julius Palme patented this beer mug design in 1876 to commemorate the centennial of the Declaration of Independence.



# UNION TEMPERANCE MEETING.

"Here's the Pledge, Oh, come and sign it, sign and keep it true,  
Leave the cup, there's poison in it, misery and woe."

## HON. ELIJAH A. MORSE

Of Canton, Mass., State Senator, will give a Free

### TEMPERANCE

# LECTURE!

— IN —

TOWN HALL, BERLIN,

Sunday Eve'g, May 16, 1886,

AT 7.30 O'CLOCK.

MR. MORSE has also accepted an invitation to give a **RELIGIOUS ADDRESS** at the Congregational Church, Sunday morning, at the usual hour of service, 10.30.

Subject: "BLESSINGS OF THE GOSPEL FROM A BUSINESS STANDPOINT," Continued.

### EVERYBODY IS INVITED. ADMITTANCE FREE.

Before the Des Moines Reform Club, Sunday night, there was delivered by Elijah A. Morse (proprietor of the Rising Sun Black Lead Works, Canton, Mass.) one of the best lectures that has ever entertained a Des Moines audience. The Tabernacle was filled to its utmost capacity, but from the beginning of the lecture to the close, the speaker held his audience entranced by his eloquence, anecdotes, and logic.—*Register, Des Moines, Iowa.*

The gentleman is a fluent, agreeable speaker, and held the immense audience spell-bound for over one hour, by one of the best lectures ever made in the hall. The brilliant Massachusetts orator spoke from a Christian standpoint. At the conclusion forty came forward and signed the pledge.—*Local Option Democrat, Baltimore, Md.*

Hon. Elijah A. Morse, of Massachusetts, made a powerful, eloquent and logical address, and a large number signed the pledge.—*National Republican, Washington, D. C.*

Elliot Hall was crowded last Sunday by an audience attracted by the fact that Elijah A. Morse was to deliver a lecture under the auspices of the Young Men's Christian Association of Newton. Mr. Morse spoke for an hour, commanding the closest attention of his hearers to the very end. He impressed his hearers with his power as an orator, and all went away filled with respect for the speaker.—*Republican, Newton, Mass.*

We should like to have given his address verbatim, but that is impossible. He is exceedingly eloquent and forcible in style, convincing in argument, full of splendid imagery and telling anecdotes, and evinces through all a burning zeal for the spread of total abstinence and Christianity.—*Metropolitan Temperance Hall Journal, London, England.*

The first U.S. temperance organization was founded in 1808. By the mid-19th century, hundreds of local temperance societies preached moderation and pledged abstinence from distilled spirits.

making, selling, and possessing alcohol. There are also a variety of photographs and films showing federal enforcement efforts such as raids on bars and Coast Guard confiscation of illegal booze.

A display of original Prohibition Bureau ID cards allows visitors to understand the careers of agents such as "Izzy" Einstein, who, along with his partner, Moe Smith, arrested over 5,000 offenders and had a 95-percent conviction rate, and Daisy Simpson, the famous "lady hooch hunter" who used a variety of disguises in her undercover investigations.

By the early 1930s, Prohibition's modification or even repeal—once considered a fantasy—became politically possible. In the midst of the Great Depression, Americans were fed up with the skyrocketing cost of enforcement and were anxious to find ways to bolster the economy and respect for the law. The nation reversed course and moved toward an acceptance of alcohol, eventually ratifying a 21st Amendment to repeal the 18th. The campaign for repeal is documented through records such as publications, letters, and posters from repeal advocates.

#### Conditional Acceptance Grows after Prohibition

In 1933 Americans enthusiastically celebrated the end of Prohibition. In many cities, crowds filled the streets and bars opened their doors to a rush of customers. Anti-alcohol advocates still carried political clout at state and local levels, but there would be no return to national prohibition. Instead, a patchwork of local laws regulated aspects of alcohol policy such as Sunday sales, drinking age, and where, when, and in what form people could buy or drink.

The federal government again benefited from alcohol taxes and continued its patent and trademark functions, but other-

READ DIETARY AND SANITARY REGULATIONS IN MY PAMPHLET.

TWO BOTTLES EFFECT A PERMANENT CURE. NOS. 1 AND 2. PRICE, \$9.

THE GOLD CURE MUST BE TAKEN IMPLICITLY ACCORDING TO THE DIRECTIONS, IN ORDER TO EFFECT A CURE. SHAKE WELL BEFORE USING.

**DR. L.E. KEELEY'S.**  
**DOUBLE CHLORIDE OF GOLD CURE FOR DRUNKENNESS.**  
 A TESTED AND INFALLIBLE REMEDY DISCOVERED BY DR. L.E. KEELEY DWIGHT, ILLS.

PREPARED ONLY AT THE LABORATORY OF  
**DR. LESLIE E. KEELEY,**  
 DWIGHT, ILL.

**CAUTION.**  
 NONE GENUINE UNLESS THE SIGNATURE OF "LESLIE E. KEELEY, M. D.," IS PASTED ACROSS THE CORK. SHAKE WELL BEFORE USING.

In justice to the discoverer and as a service to humanity the consumer is requested to break this bottle when empty, in order to prevent its being refilled with a worthless mixture. The **Double Chloride of Gold Cure** is the result of a scientific chemical process, and is so prepared, under Dr. Leslie E. Keeley's personal supervision, that it can in no way act injuriously upon the patient. By complying with the above request the consumer will confer a benefit on humanity, as the use of a worthless imitation would bring discredit on this valuable remedy.

**DIRECTIONS.**  
 The medicine must be taken in teaspoonful doses, in half a glass of water, at least six times a day, and oftener if the desire to drink is intense. The first dose must be taken immediately on getting out of bed in the morning, the last dose just before getting into bed at night, and the other four before meals and between meals. If the medicine makes the patient sick at the stomach the first day or two, he must *reduce* the dose to half a teaspoonful till the sickness passes off; then gradually *increase* the dose to a teaspoonful as soon as possible.

Leslie Keeley's "gold cure" was the late 19th century's most commercially successful remedy for alcoholism. Patients at "Keeley Institutes" around the country received injections of his serum four times daily, while others received oral doses through the mail.



Employees of Renault's pose in front of their champagne vaults at Egg Harbor, New Jersey, in 1910.

# CLOSE THE SALOONS



**IF** you believe  
that the  
traffic in alcohol  
does more harm  
than good —  
**Help stop it.**

**STRENGTHEN  
AMERICA  
CAMPAIGN**

**105 East Twenty Second Street,  
NEW YORK.**

MOONEYS N.Y.

This World War I-era poster shows an avenging female figure striking out against the liquor trade.

Sometimes called the “lady hooch hunter,” Prohibition Bureau agent Daisy Simpson was known for her acting ability and her skill at disguises, which allowed her to pose as a variety of characters and attempt to buy liquor at speakeasies, hotels, and restaurants.

wise restricted its role to warning about the dangers of alcohol abuse, researching alcoholism, and investigating problems such as drunk driving.

By the end of the 20th century, the noisy political battles of earlier decades had quieted. Americans, while still sometimes uneasy with alcohol, grew comfortable with the idea that drinking was an individual’s choice. Alcohol was again an accepted part of American life.

Film and photographs in “Spirited Republic” show the wild celebratory mood that accompanied the end of Prohibition, but other examples of change can be seen in the exhibit’s display of 39 labels for beer, spirits, and wine submitted to the Patent and Trademark Office in 1933 and 1934—just before and after the 18th Amendment was repealed. These labels show the alcohol industry preparing to produce old favorites and introduce new brands.

A shift in attitudes toward alcohol between the First and Second World Wars is documented by a display of two military cables. Concern about the morals of World War I servicemen had helped pass Prohibition, but when America entered World War II, prohibitionists hoped history would repeat itself, and they campaigned unsuccessfully to restrict



A well-stocked bar in Los Angeles, California, awaits the end of Prohibition in 1933.

 **To learn more about . . .**

- Exhibits at the National Archives, go to [www.archives.gov/exhibits/](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/).
- Teaching about the Volstead Act and Prohibition with Archives documents, go to [www.archives.gov/education/lessons/volstead-act/activities.html](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/volstead-act/activities.html).
- Prohibition and the rise of gangsters, go to <http://blogs.archives.gov/prologue/?p=8258>.

wartime alcohol manufacture and ban drinking around military bases. Instead, as these cables attest, alcohol was seen as providing a release after battle. Beer was shipped overseas, and the government set up breweries in Europe and in the Pacific when shortages occurred there.

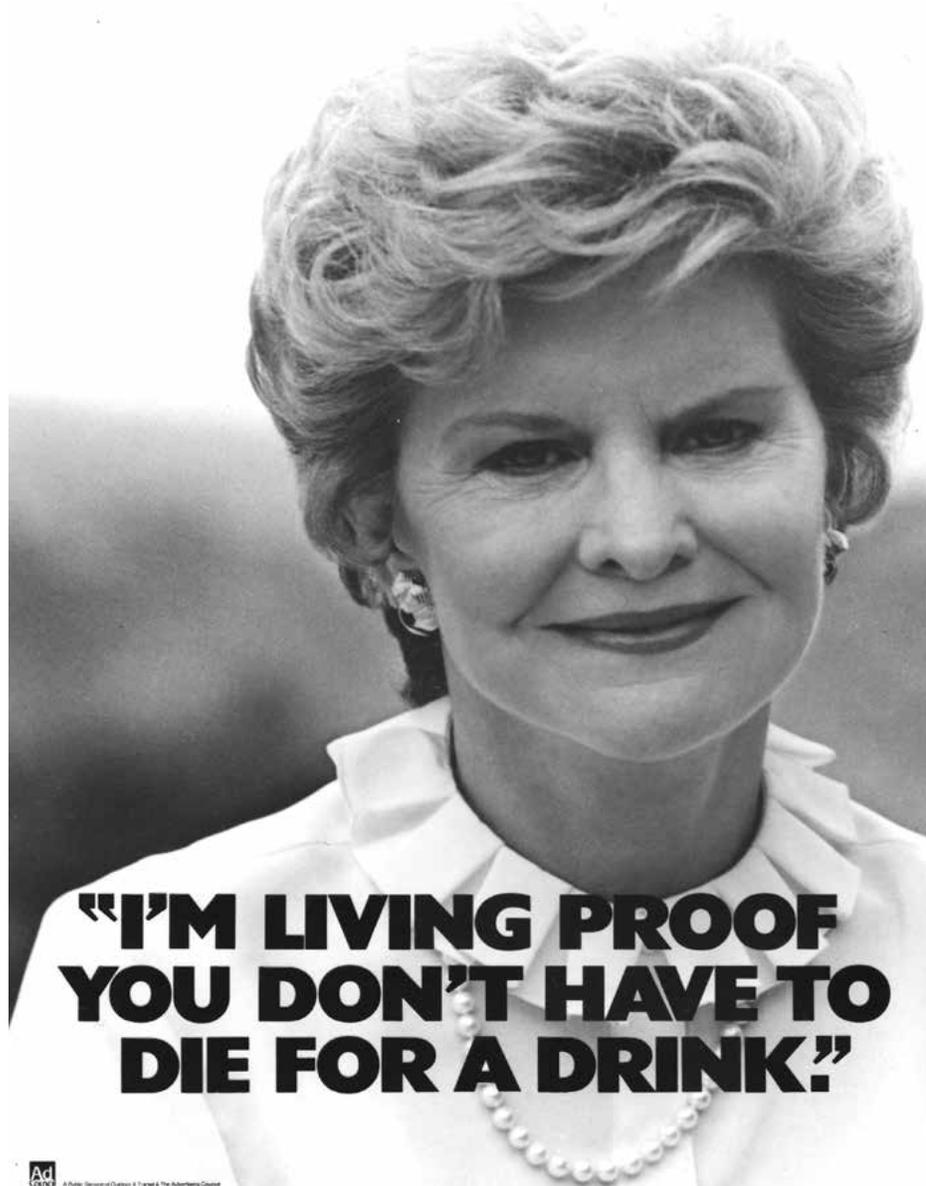
While there were still millions of abstainers, by the mid-20th century Americans became more tolerant of moderate alcohol use, and alcohol manufacturers promoted “responsible” drinking. We also worried about the societal costs and individual trage-

dies associated with alcoholism and alcohol-related crime.

More recent documentation in the exhibit highlights these concerns by exhibiting an early version of a breathalyzer—called a “drunkometer,” a first edition of the 12-step guide *Alcoholics Anonymous*, written by “Bill W,” the co-founder of the self-help group of the same name, and a letter from country music star Johnny Cash to First Lady Betty Ford, describing his struggle for sobriety.

“Spirited Republic” closes with a brief look at alcohol and the modern presidency.

When former First Lady Betty Ford publicly acknowledged her addiction to alcohol and prescription painkillers, her honesty brought greater awareness to these diseases and inspired others to face up to their addictions.



After the Prohibition era, alcohol once again became an accepted part of the President’s social and diplomatic agenda.

While modern Presidents still deal with alcohol policy such as drunk driving or mental health legislation, they are more often involved in diplomatic and social rituals that feature alcohol, such as toasting, dinners, and gift giving. Presidential gifts such as a decanter given to President Ronald Reagan and the glasses used by President Gerald Ford and Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev of the Soviet Union at their 1975 meeting in Helsinki, Finland, illustrate this acceptance.

“Spirited Republic” will be on display in the Lawrence F. O’Brien Gallery at the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C., from March 6, 2015, through January 10, 2016. An eBook of the exhibition will be available through the iTunes bookstore.



In 2004 the Department of Health and Human Services created this Spanish-language poster warning of the dangers of fetal alcohol syndrome.



**Author**

**Bruce I. Bustard** is senior curator at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. He was curator for “Searching for the Seventies” and for “Attachments: Faces and Stories from America’s Gates” in 2012. He was lead researcher for the “Discovering the Civil War” exhibition in 2010.