

Drowning in a Dry Town

Where Prohibition-era New Yorkers got drunk.



At the teeming outdoor market **Paddy's**, home winemakers would purchase lugs from California. You could make 200 gallons a year for your own use, although "your own" was rarely accurate. *Ninth Ave., from 35th St. to 42nd St.*

The speakeasy **Dickerman's County Fair Club** had a rustic theme—haystacks, picket fences, and square dances. *54 E. 9th St., nr. Broadway.*

The **Marlborough House**, a swanky speakeasy with silver leather banquettes, was a favorite of Noël Coward, who was known to enjoy the Muscovite duckling. *15 E. 61st St., nr. Madison Ave.*

Fred and Adele Astaire could be found dancing some nights at **The Trocadero**. *35 E. 53rd St., nr. Park Ave.*

By January 16, 1920, 80 percent of the booze stored in the cellars of the **Union Club** had been transferred to members' homes. *Fifth Ave. at 51st St.*

Club Durant was one of the rowdiest clubs around, with entertainment including "a tap dancer and monologist," a "cakewalking singer," and a "musical clown." *58th St., nr. Broadway.*



The **Central Park Casino** was Mayor Jimmy Walker's favorite playpen. *In Central Park, nr. 72nd St. entrance.*

Making wine at home was permitted, so every fall, California vineyards loaded thousands of tons of grapes, into boxcars headed east. The Pennsylvania Railroad expanded its **Jersey City freight terminal** to accommodate the surge (about 30,000 boxcars in 1928).

Behind the plaster-board in the upstairs party room of the now-closed **Beatrice Inn**, a low door leads to an alley off Eighth Avenue—likely a speakeasy escape route. Ironically, one of the violations that shuttered the club last April was the lack of fire exits. *285 W. 12th St., nr. W. 4th St.*

Racketeer (and Cotton Club owner) Owney Madden's \$1.5 million "**cereal beverage**" brewery was repeatedly raided by Feds who smelled ale in the air (though charges were inevitably dropped). *262-266 Tenth Ave., nr. 26th St.*

Opened in 1925 and financed with federal funds, the **Bridge Whist Club** was a setup to gather incriminating evidence about bootleggers. *14 E. 44th St., nr. Madison Ave.*

Jack Bleeck's **Artists and Writers Club** was a popular place for the artistic crowd. *213 W. 40th St., nr. Seventh Ave.*

There were **38 speakeasies** on 52nd Street alone.



Merry-Go-Round, *146-148 E. 56th St.*

The **Cotton Club** (644 Lenox Ave., at 142nd St.) practiced an especially bizarre form of segregation: all-black neighborhood, all-black entertainment, all-white clientele. But at the **Catagonia Club** (166 W. 133rd St., nr. Lenox Ave.), also in Harlem, blacks and whites mingled comfortably.

The proprietor of the **Golden Swan** (a.k.a. the Hell Hole), a dive where Eugene O'Neill regularly got sloshed, briefly closed his bar in 1920, only to reopen it as a "drug store," which was technically allowed to carry alcohol. *W. 4th St. at Sixth Ave.*



Leo, *154 W. 13th St.*



The Stork Rest, *51st St. at Park Ave.*



An explosion from the home still of a grocery importer caused a fire in his West 11th Street apartment, killing his infant son.



Leon-Eddie's, *18 W. 52nd St.*

In 1922, bootlegger, taxicab racketeer, and famed mobster Larry Fay opened the **El Fey Club** (123 W. 45th St., nr. Sixth Ave.). He hired Mary Louise Cecilia "Texas" Guinan as his hostess and mistress of ceremonies. She became known as "Queen of the Night Clubs" and went on to open many more, including the **300 Club** (151 W. 54th St., nr. Seventh Ave.), the **Salon Royale** (310 W. 58th St., nr. Eighth Ave.), and the **Club Argonaut** (151 W. 54th St., nr. Seventh Ave.). Her famous line: "Hello, suckers!"



The **Wing Club** was a favorite hangout for pilots. *8 W. 52nd St., nr. Fifth Ave.*

Larry Fay spent \$100,000 to renovate a mansion on East 56th Street for his last club, the **Casa Blanca**. He was shot there on New Year's Day 1933, by a disgruntled doorman. *33 W. 56th St., nr. Fifth Ave.*



Weeks before Prohibition was put into effect, **Franklin Delano Roosevelt**—then the assistant secretary of the Navy—had four cases of Old Reserve delivered to his townhouse. *49 E. 65th St., nr. Park Ave.*

An unidentified speakeasy on Water Street converted a bowling alley into a **100-foot bar**.

By 1923, from the Gulf of Maine to the tip of Florida—and visible off the Rockaways—an enormous fleet of old freighters, tramp steamers, and other ships, known as **Rum Row**, lay at permanent anchor just outside the three-mile limit. These vessels remained immobile for months at a time, serving as floating warehouses for a second network of smugglers who brought the goods ashore.

Under the auspices of the **Menorah Wine Company**, a local olive-oil dealer, Nathan Musher, imported 750,000 gallons of fortified Málaga wine—which he had certified as kosher and sold to "rabbis" with sacramental-wine permits (and names like Patrick Houlihan and James Maguire). *110 Bowers, nr. Grand St.*



Schapiro's, a kosher winery, sold sacramental wine to anyone who would sign up to join a synagogue as they made their purchases. *126 Rivington St., nr. Essex St.*

When novelist **Dawn Powell** threw parties at her apartment on East 9th Street, she was known to fill her aquarium with gin. *35 E. 9th St., nr. Broadway*



The Ha-Ha Club, *134 W. 52nd St.*



The Hollywood, site of the "Hip Flask Raid." *Broadway at 48th St.*

Meyer Lansky launched his bootlegging business from the car-and-truck-rental operation he ran in a garage underneath the Williamsburg Bridge.



The '21' club installed an elaborate engineering system in its sub-basement meant to destroy alcohol in the event of a raid. This became the subject of lore when, in the fifties, construction workers expanding the 53rd Street branch of the Public Library were said to have found that the soil still reeked of booze. *21 W. 52nd St., nr. Fifth Ave.*



A *New Yorker* reviewer called **Black Bottom** a "dull dump" of a speakeasy, suggesting "you would have to be in just the right slumming mood." *154 W. 56th St., nr. Sixth Ave.*



PHOTOGRAPHS: BROWN BROTHERS (PADDY'S, ARTISTS AND WRITERS CLUB, MADDEN); BETTMANN/CORBIS (HOLLYWOOD, CENTRAL PARK CASINO); AP (POWELL, ROOSEVELT); GRANGER COLLECTION (GUINAN); UNDERWOOD ARCHIVES (SCHAPIRO'S); COURTESY OF '21' CLUB; OSSIE LEVINSON (NY DAILY NEWS)/GETTY IMAGES (LANSKY); FRANK DRIGGS COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES (COTTON CLUB); MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK (CARDS)