**Spirited: Prohibition in America**

*Exhibit Overview*

In a tumultuous era spanning thirteen years, Americans could no longer manufacture, sell, or transport intoxicating beverages. Prohibition was now a part of the Constitution, holding the same status as freedom of speech and the abolition of slavery. Ratified in 1919, the 18th Amendment stirred up a passionate and sometimes volatile debate between “wets” and “drys” that will forever cement Prohibition’s place in history. *Spirited: Prohibition in America* is a traveling exhibition from NEH on the Road that brings visitors back to this period of flappers and suffragists, bootleggers and temperance lobbyists, and real-life legends, such as Al Capone and Carry Nation.

Adapted from the National Constitution Center’s flagship exhibition *American Spirits*, the exhibition *Spirited: Prohibition in America* explores the history of Prohibition, from the dawn of the temperance movement to the unprecedented repeal of a constitutional amendment in 1933. What made the country go “dry” and how did America change during this period in history? Visitors to *Spirited* will learn about the amendment process, the role of liquor in American culture, the cultural revolution of the roaring ‘20s, and how current liquor laws vary from state to state today.

The morality and illegalization of liquor split American opinion and created a subculture of rampant criminality. Organized crime grew from localized enterprises to a national network for manufacturing, distribution, and sales of alcohol. The issue catalyzed a number of federal regulations and the passing of the Volstead Act, but little resources were provided for enforcement. *Spirited* draws on histories told from both sides of the law. The exhibition demonstrates how America went from a nation drowning in liquor in the 1800s, to campaigns of temperance, and the upswing and downfall of outlawing prohibition.

The exhibition surveys the inventive and ingenious ways lawmakers and the American public responded to Prohibition. Legal provisions for sacramental wine, medicinal alcohol, and the preservation of fruit and the efforts of breweries to stay in business led to popularization of products such as “Dr. Welch’s Unfermented Wine,” “near beer,” and Coca-Cola. Visitors will learn how transportation networks and clever disguises were used to run liquor from state to state, and how speakeasies gave way to the popularization of jazz and the Charleston dance craze.

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