

The Temperance Movement (1830s)

The Temperance Movement began in the early 19th century with the goal of limiting or even banning consumption of alcoholic beverages. Temperance was a reform movement largely inspired by the religious revival that swept across the country in the early 1800s. Temperance advocates pointed to alcohol's deleterious health effects and also blamed it for instigating domestic abuse, public disorder, financial ruin, and widespread moral decay. Early supporters of temperance tended to be white middle- and upper-class people, with many women among their ranks.

Evangelical Christians founded the American Temperance Society in 1826, with a goal of changing attitudes towards alcohol consumption in the United States. At this time in American history, taverns outnumbered churches and alcohol was served at almost every social gathering. Wages were sometimes paid in liquor or beer, and people sometimes drank while at work.

The message of temperance spread quickly and effectively through already existing church networks, and temperance soon became a badge of middle-class respectability and moral purity. After the Panic of 1837 and ensuing depression, temperance advocates made headway among the working class by arguing that temperance and domestic thriftiness would help sustain their families during these hard economic times. Per capita consumption of alcohol fell drastically between 1830 and 1845 as a result of the Temperance Movement.

Opponents of temperance included tavern and distillery owners as well as the farmers who supplied them with grain to make into alcohol. Other critics included European immigrants, many of whom came from cultures with looser social rules about alcohol consumption. Though temperance advocates did not succeed in having alcohol banned in the 19th century, the 18th amendment to the US Constitution that was ratified in 1919, launching the Prohibition Era, did have its roots in the Temperance Movement almost a century earlier.

Document 1: A Hasty Defence of the Farmers and Distillers of York County

A Hasty Defence of the Farmers & Distillers of York County, Against the Aspersions of Temperance Societies, etc. (York: Printed by W.C. Smyth, [1833]).
PHS Call number: PAM HV 5106 .P4 W6 1833

**See especially pages 10-12, "Great Public Meeting in Opposition to Proscriptive Temperance Societies."*

Source note: This document is a written account of a meeting that took place on November 12th, 1833. Attendees of the meeting are listed as being farmers and other citizens of York County, Pennsylvania, and the goal of the meeting was to respond to the accusations, demands, and actions of temperance societies. Henry Wolf is listed as chair of the meeting, and Jacob Welzshoffer (sometimes spelled "Welzhoffer") as secretary. All of the attendees listed are men.

Historical Context: At the time this document was written, Pennsylvania's economy was largely based on agriculture, with unusually fertile land allowing cultivation of wheat, corn, rye, and other grain crops. Transporting grain from farms to cities was expensive and slow, but distilling these same crops into alcohol allowed for easier and cheaper shipping. The state's alcohol industry thus brought large profits to farmers and also benefited distillers, tavern owners, and distributors of alcohol.

Reading questions:

1. Based on the title of this source, do you predict that it is pro-temperance or anti-temperance?
2. In the group's third resolution (page 11), they claim that alcohol has other uses besides being consumed in beverages. What are these uses, and why are they important?
3. The fourth resolution points out that temperance societies condemn consumption of whiskey and brandy, but allow the use of wine. Why, according to the writers, is this hypocritical? What does it say about temperance advocates?
4. On pages 11 and 12, the group's seventh and eighth resolutions take aim at the clergy's involvement in temperance. What role, if any, do you think churches had in the Temperance Movement at this time? What direct action against pro-temperance clergy, merchants, and other businessmen does the group advocate?
5. In the last resolution (page 12), the farmers and distillers outline the potential effects of the Temperance Movement. If temperance advocates have their way, what will these effects be?

Document 2: Albert Barnes's 4th of July Speech

Barnes, Albert. *The Connexion of Temperance with Republican Freedom: An Oration delivered on the 4th of July, 1835, before the Mechanics and Workingmens Temperance Society of the city and county of Philadelphia.* ([Philadelphia]: Printed by Boyle and Benedict, 1835).
PHS Call number: PAM HV 5081 .B37 1835

Source note: Albert Barnes (1798-1870) was an influential Presbyterian minister who supported abolition and the Temperance Movement. The Mechanics and Workingmen's Temperance Society of Philadelphia, despite its name, was led by wealthy, prominent members and founders such as Matthias Baldwin, a steam engine manufacturing magnate who was also a Presbyterian.

Reading questions:

1. What is one cause of the country's "crisis," according to Barnes (pages 4-5)
2. Barnes claims that the influx of immigrants to our country has put a strain on our government and our constitution. What concerns does he have about the new arrivals (page 6)?
3. Note the structure of Barnes's argument that he sets up on pages 9-16. Why do you think he chose to list all the elements needed to keep our institutions running properly and our country strong?
4. What are the eight elements essential to keeping our republic intact?
5. Why does Barnes advocate for public schooling ("common schools")? What benefits would such schooling provide (page 11)?
6. Barnes suggests that universal suffrage is an essential element of our democracy, but at the time he wrote and delivered this speech, people of color and women still could not vote, and poll taxes and property requirements even prevented some white men from voting in certain states. What does Barnes's statement on voting rights say about his own social position?
7. Again note the structure of Barnes's argument (page 17). Do you think this was an effective way to structure this speech?
8. What is the main point Barnes is trying to make in this speech?

Document 3: Advertisement of an Honest Rumseller

Advertisement of an Honest Rumseller, undated [Broadside, circa 1850s]
PHS Call number: 12-0818c 115A

Source note: This broadside was created by a pro-temperance organization sometime in the 1850s. Broadside have been produced ever since the printing press was invented, and they were very popular in the 19th century. Printed on one side of a piece of paper, and relatively cheap to produce, broadsides could be handed out or posted in public places to communicate political messages, announce upcoming events, advertise products, or promote works of literature, along with many other functions.

Reading questions:

1. What was the purpose of creating this broadside? Who do you think was the intended audience?
2. What is the tone of the broadside?
3. What is the overall message? Do you think this was an effective message at the time it was produced?
4. According to the writers of the broadside, what was the one reason why “rumsellers” sell alcohol?
5. In what ways does the broadside claim that alcohol use affects more than just the person consuming alcohol?
6. What response do you think anti-temperance people would have had to seeing this broadside?

Document 4: Laurie Secondary Source

Laurie, Bruce. *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.

**See especially Chapter 2, pages 33-42.*

Source note: Bruce Laurie is a retired professor of American history from UMass Amherst, with research interests in labor history, American conservatism, and the Antebellum period.

Historical context: The Temperance Movement is closely linked with the religious revivalism that swept the United States in the early 19th century, sometimes referred to as the Second Great Awakening. Laurie mentions several religious movements and philosophies in this chapter, including revivalist Arminians (not to be confused with “Armenians,” the ethnic group native to Armenia) and orthodox Calvinism. Arminianism was a reaction against Calvinism, which was the dominant theology of several protestant groups such as Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Calvinism held that God controlled everything that happened in the world, that people were predestined to be sent to heaven, that no human action could prevent or provide for a person’s salvation, and that Jesus Christ only died for the Christians who were predestined for salvation. Arminianism, on the other hand, took a more liberal view that God could see whether people would have continued faith in him, and would choose people to be saved based on that knowledge. Arminians also believed that Jesus Christ died for ALL Christians, not just for the ones who were predestined for heaven. Arminians believe in free will, and that people have agency over their lives, but can still be faithful to a powerful God. Arminianism became particularly popular in the 19th century with rapid industrialization and the growing emphasis on individualism and personal achievement.

Reading questions:

1. Who is the author of this source, and what is their purpose for writing it?
2. What are some of the causes of religious revivalism (page 34)?
3. Why was Albert Barnes such a controversial figure in the Protestant church (page 36)?
4. According to Laurie, what are the main differences between the followers of the Old School versus New School Presbyterian churches (page 39)?
5. Why do New Schoolers oppose public programs and institutions such as poorhouses (page 39)?
6. Why was the Temperance Movement met with suspicion and even hostility by many workers (page 41)?