

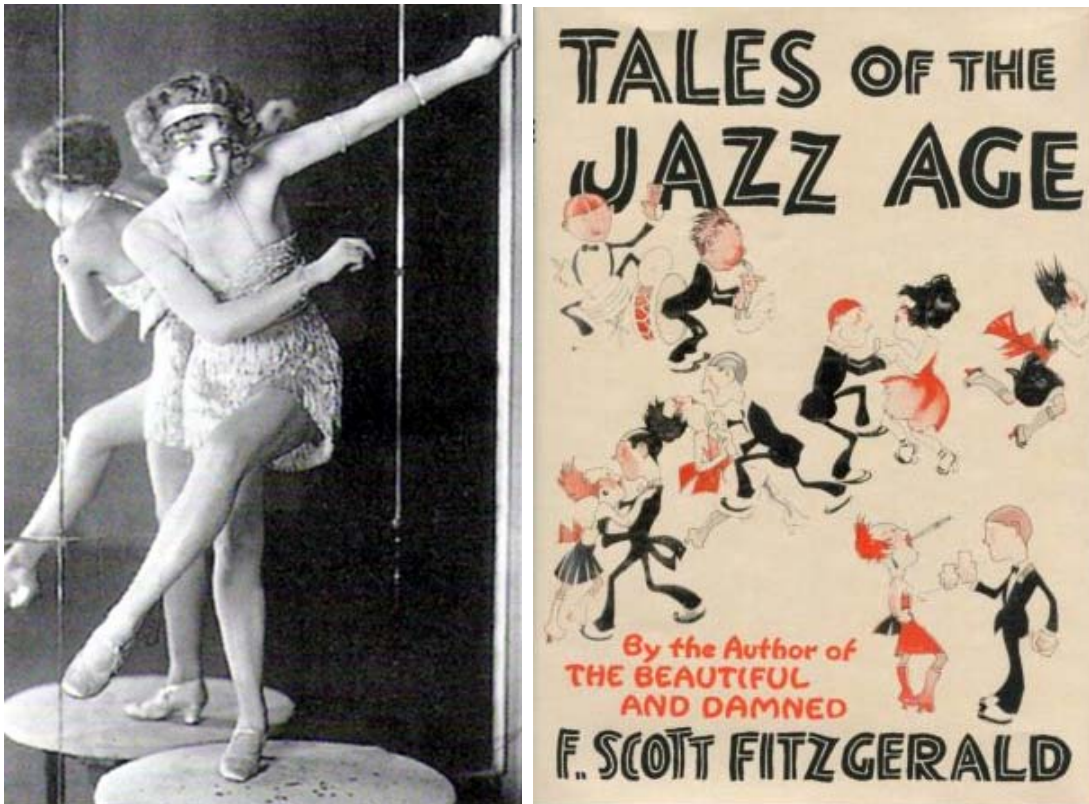
NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Prohibition in New Orleans

It was New Orleans that gave birth to the captivating rhythms that provided "The Jazz Age" with not only its name, but also its soundtrack. In 1931, the man who coined the term, F. Scott Fitzgerald, wrote of the period's "spectacular" demise "in October, 1929". Flappers with bobbed hair and their petting partners who'd danced the "Black Bottom" had now reached rock bottom.



"It all seems rosy and romantic to us who were young then," Fitzgerald wrote. "Now once more the belt is tight and we summon the proper expression of horror as we look back at our wasted youth."

He described the era further:

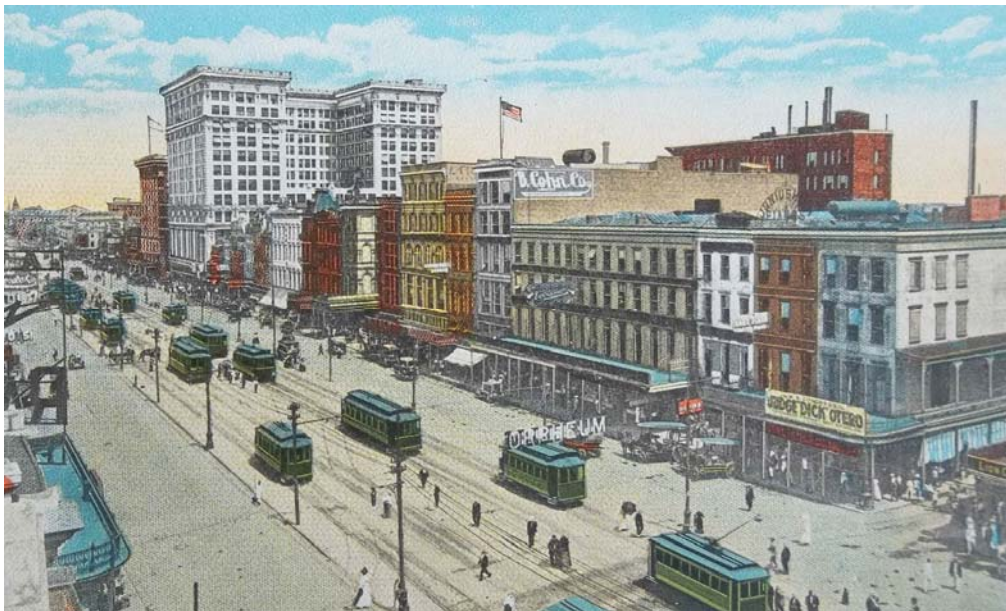
"It was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess, and it was an age of satire."

"A whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure."

"The word jazz in its progress toward respectability has meant at first sex, then dancing, then music."

"The people over thirty, the people all the way up to fifty, had joined the dance."

"In any case, the Jazz Age now raced along under its own power, served by great filling stations full of money."



View of Canal Street in the Roaring Twenties

Prohibition (1920-1933, the nationwide ban on the sale, production, importation, and transportation of alcoholic beverages) lasted just four years longer than Fitzgerald's Jazz Age, ending with the ratification of the Twenty-first Amendment on December 5, 1933. It repealed the Eighteenth Amendment (which was ratified on January 29, 1919 and went into effect a year later). The Volstead Act was the enabling legislation, that set down the rules for enforcement and defined the types of beverages that were allowed or prohibited. Many Louisiana parishes had already gone dry, but New Orleans was hoping for a last minute reprieve. With a city of a thousand saloons, this amendment was not something New Orleans wanted, nor easily accepted.

The dries, or prohibition supporters, believed the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to be a victory over the societal and health

problems caused by drinking. Anti-prohibitionists (the wets) believed the ban to be the infliction of rural Protestant ideals upon mostly urban Americans, largely immigrant and Catholic. The flouting of the law was widespread. Many Americans turned to bootleggers, who illegally distilled their own or served alcohol smuggled from abroad. In New Orleans, these activities were no different.

It is hard to believe that legislation designed to prohibit an undesired activity could have the unintended consequence of creating such a frenzy of excess (not to mention the criminal activity). And women, who never ventured into a saloon before Prohibition, were perfectly welcome at the speakeasies. There was, after all, money to be made providing the people what they wanted. And they wanted it now even more than before.

New Orleans showed its displeasure with Prohibition from the start.



**DRY WAVE IN FULL
EFFECT FRIDAY**

**Constitutional Amendment
Becomes Operative
Midnight of That Day**

John Barleycorn will be buried forever at midnight Friday.

At 12:01 a. m., Saturday national prohibition becomes effective, after which time it will be unlawful to sell, manufacture or carry from one place to another any kind of intoxicants.

*National Prohibition announced
in the New Orleans States,
January 15, 1920*

**COOKS ARE FAVORED
UNDER VOLSTEAD ACT**

Epicures of New Orleans
Take Heart from "Cooking
Liquor" Clause.

*Times-Picayune Headline,
February 8, 1920
Hope for sherry in turtle soup*

The *States* announced the impending burial of John Barleycorn and that "the passing of liquor will be the occasion of several wakes in New Orleans" staged in restaurants (many of which were once saloons). Those that didn't convert to some other purpose found themselves out of business. The paper reported, "The coming of prohibition put 798 saloons out of business in New Orleans and seven distilleries." They "changed to ice cream manufactories, vegetable dehydrating plants or soft drink manufactories. In fact seven of the breweries have become soft drink makers." Prohibition brought down "one of the landmarks of

New Orleans, the Crescent bar. It "operated for fifty-one years as a saloon," located at "Canal and St. Charles street." On a positive note, reported the *Times-Picayune*, "Lurking in an obscure corner of the Volstead act there is said to be authority for the issuance of permits to hotels and restaurants to keep a stock of brandy, whiskey and wine on hand for legitimate culinary purposes."



*Rex reigns on Mardi Gras, 1920s stereopticon slide
from the collection of Ned Hémar*

SIDELIGHTS OF NEW ORLEANS PAGEANT UNDER REX VOLSTEAD

A February 9, 1921, article in the *Times-Picayune* with the above caption posed the "question as to what variety of liquid would be tendered the king". Seems that when "the psychological moment arrived, a white-clad waiter appeared" delivering Rex a mysterious "beverage of crimson color," so that any "prohibition enforcement agent ... must still be at a loss for an answer to the query: 'What was it?'"

A masker that Carnival Day, 1921, dressed as "a huge whiskey bottle," reported the *Picayune*, "with the caption ... 'I'm still with you.'"

On October 1, 1921, a parade headed by New Orleans' former Mayor Martin Behrman (who was noted for saying "You can make it illegal, but you can't make it unpopular.") and "several other prominent citizens" rolled along the streets of New Orleans. The citizens were "in a protest to amend the Volstead act to permit the sale of beer and light wines".

FORMER MAYOR HEADS NEW ORLEANS PARADE

**Citizens of Crescent City Protest
Against Volstead Act in
Great Parade**

(Associated Press)

As the apparent permanence of Prohibition sank in, the citizens of New Orleans (as well as the rest of the nation) had to seek alcohol through bootleggers or speakeasies. And in New Orleans, that task was not difficult. Izzy Einstein was a highly successful federal agent of the U.S. Prohibition Unit who (between 1920 and 1925, using countless disguises to aid him in purchasing alcohol) made 4,932 arrests of bootleggers, bartenders and speakeasy owners. He found the illegal alcohol quickly: only twenty-one minutes in Chicago, seventeen in Atlanta, and in Pittsburgh a speedy eleven minutes. But in the Crescent City, it was an astonishing thirty-five seconds before an arrest. Hopping into a New Orleans taxi, Izzy asked the driver where he could get a drink. The taxi driver reached back and produced the goods almost immediately, whereupon Izzy cuffed him and broke a new speed record.

Henry C. Ramos, mixologist extraordinaire of the South and creator of Ramos' Original Gin Fizz, was also respectful of the law. Operating the *Stag* saloon opposite the Gravier Street entrance to the St. Charles Hotel, he closed for good in 1919 with the arrival of Prohibition.

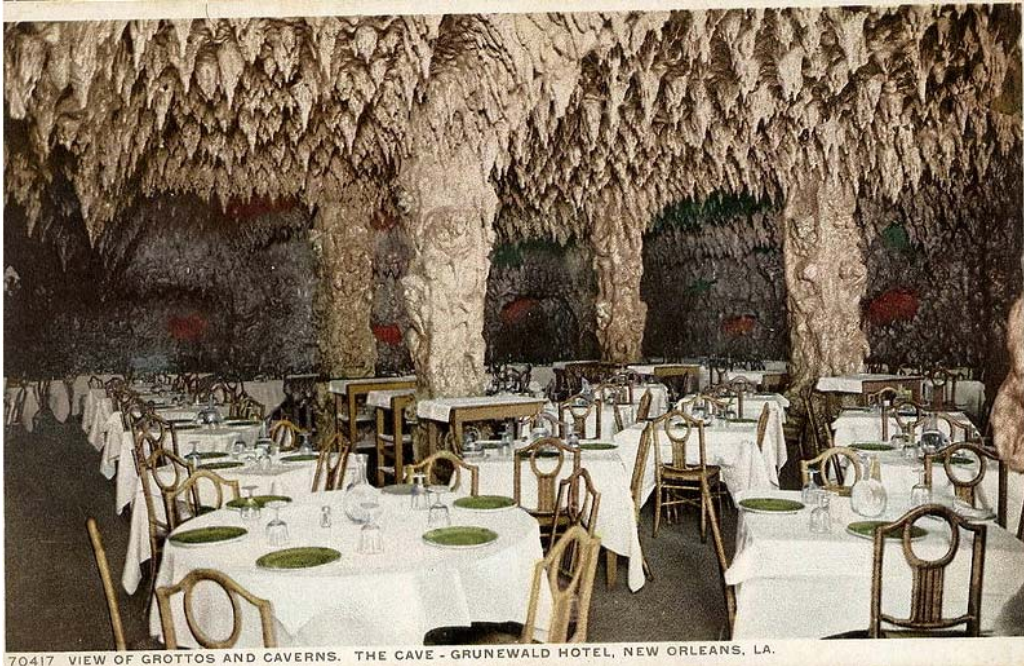


Henry Charles Ramos (his friends called him Carl)

Other prominent local establishments tried to be available, as well as elusive. The Crescent City Steak House on Broad Street was founded by John Vojkovich in 1934. His son Anthony explained that the building was built about twenty years earlier, and the curtained booths were there before (where a little something extra could be added to one's coffee unobserved). At Galatoire's, there were private rooms on the second floor, and at Tujague's there were bottles concealed in the staff's aprons. "Count" Arnaud Cazenave of Arnaud's had several run-ins with the law in order to keep his customers satisfied (a local jury refused to convict). At the Southern Yacht Club at West End the signature cocktail, The Pink Lady, was served; and at Antoine's, a door in the ladies room directed one to a secret bar called the Mystery Room, where it was no mystery what went into one's coffee cup. The Holland House on City Park Avenue (today the location of Ralph's on the Park) was another place to be served liquor during Prohibition.

On November 21, 1926, the doors of the historic Old Absinthe House were closed by an injunction of the U.S. Court. According to the *Times-Picayune*, "the century-old rendezvous of bon vivants and haunt of many famous characters" was "under a padlock order handed down ... against Pierre Cazebon and others". Earlier that year historic Maylie's Restaurant was raided over wine being served at a banquet.

The Roosevelt, today a Waldorf Astoria Hotel, was originally the Grunewald Hotel from 1893 to 1923. Its basement was home to "The Cave", considered by some to be the very first nightclub (or jazz club) in the United States. It featured stalactites, waterfalls and chorus girls dancing to New Orleans own Dixieland Jazz played by groups such as Johnny DeDroit and his band and The New Orleans Owls.



70417 VIEW OF GROTTOS AND CAVERNS. THE CAVE - GRUNEWALD HOTEL, NEW ORLEANS, LA.

"Grottos and Caverns" of "The Cave", the country's first nightclub

There were many speakeasies in the French Quarter, as many as three to a block. Some were elegant and others were rough. The Old Press Club was one of the nicer venues. One spot raided in 1931 by "dry agents" was "a grocery and poolroom at Burgundy and Conti streets, reported the *Picayune*, that had "a tank concealed ... in an outhouse 150 feet from the grocery" containing "five compartments each filled with a different sort of liquor." Hidden was a "panel door in the back room" with "five faucets out of which the liquor was drawn." Other speakeasies raided were at 917 Poydras (upstairs), 1111 South Rampart, 443 Saratoga Street. Once ordinary citizens, many found themselves involved in breaking an unpopular law.

To obtain bootleg hooch outside of a restaurant or speakeasy, there were innovative purveyors. Some sold out of their cabs, like Frenchy Perez. Joseph Messina was arrested in his car in front of 849 Camp Street with three gallons of whiskey. During Prohibition, Jazz singer Blue Lu Barker's father owned a pool hall, grocery and a candy store from which he sold bootleg liquor he distilled in his backyard.

STUDENT IN RUM CHARGES GRANTED PROBATION PLEA

Court Acts to Permit Youth
to Complete College
Course

Leo Francis Bruno, 23 years old,
2109 South Carrollton avenue, former
Tulane university student who in-

Leo Bruno's
College Inn
7537 MAPLE at HILLARY
4 Blocks off B'way WA. 9306

On February 18, 1933, the *Times-Picayune* revealed how a 23 year old "former Tulane university student" Leo Bruno told the judge "how, after financial reverses, he sold liquor from his car to college students, in the vicinity of St. Charles avenue and Broadway." After being "placed on probation for a period of five years," the young Leo Bruno "assured the court 'I have learned my lesson. There is nothing to the liquor racket'." The very next year, he founded the famous Bruno's College Inn at the corner of Maple and Hillary – for years one of the most popular taverns catering to students in the University Section of New Orleans. The other "College Inn" on Carrollton added "Ye Olde" to its name to distinguish it from Leo Bruno's establishment.

Buying bootleg liquor from the wrong seller, however, could be deadly. In 1923 alone, some 2,000 people died from consuming pure poison disguised as drinkable liquor. Other crime was organized. New Orleans was a favored port of the rum-runner, and the islands of Cuba and the Bahamas were the source of much contraband liquor. Sylvestro "Silver Dollar Sam" Carolla transformed Charles Matranga's "Black Hand" gang into the New Orleans Mafia crime family in 1922, becoming its leader upon Matranga's retirement. It is said that Chicago Mafia boss Al Capone arrived at a New Orleans train station demanding Carolla supply him (rather than a rival) with imported alcohol. Carolla, accompanied by several local police officers, disarmed Capone's bodyguards and broke their fingers, forcing "Big Al" to return home to Chicago. Or so the story goes.

Women were independent and liberated during the Prohibition years. Lois Bancroft Long, writing for the *New Yorker* about the speakeasy lifestyle with wit and satire under the pen name "Lipstick" offered, "Tomorrow we may die, so let's get drunk and make love."

According to Zelda Fitzgerald, "The Flapper awoke from her lethargy of sub-deb-ism, bobbed her hair, put on her choicest pair of earrings and a great deal of audacity and rouge and went into the battle."

Don Marquis wrote, "They put a foot on the brass railing" and tossed "down the feminine esophagus the brew that was really meant for men ... The last barrier is down; the citadel has been stormed and taken."



Leatrice Joy

New Orleans born Leatrice Joy, nee Leatrice Johanna Zeidler (1893 – 1985), who attended the Academy of the Sacred Heart, was a prolific actress of that period. With her close-cropped hair and youthful persona, she epitomized the strong-willed and independent woman of the Jazz Age. She was married to the popular screen star John Gilbert, known as "The Great Lover".

The Academy of the Sacred Heart also produced Corinne Griffith, one of the most popular film actresses of the Roaring Twenties and considered by many to be the most beautiful actress of the silent film era. She was known as "The Orchid Lady of the Screen".

New Orleans sent its musicians and jazz ensembles to other parts of the country, especially Chicago and New York. It was the music once played in the city's brothels and saloons, now closed by Prohibition. In 1922, Louis Armstrong joined the exodus to Chicago. Jazz violinist and bandleader Armand Piron's New Orleans Orchestra was one of the most popular bands in the Crescent City in the 1920s, playing regularly for local society events. His band also recorded for the Columbia, Okeh and Victor labels from 1923-1925. In 1923, they played the Cotton Club and the Roseland in New York.



"What constitutes a 'Speakeasy?'" asked Mr. Philip M. Allison in a letter to the Editor of the *Times-Picayune*, February 5, 1932. He complained about "the testimony of a prohibition agent" after a raid: "noise, merry-making and loud radio playing ... we knew it was a speakeasy." Fearful that the testimony was equally descriptive of his own residence, Allison opined that "raiding a joint" for those reasons "would seem to belong to the czarist regime of old imperial Russia or the mandarin rule of ancient Cathay." He argued that it was "about time" for the *extermination* of prohibition and its agents." Didn't he mean to say *termination*? Or did he?

If it was a large coalition of women that brought about Prohibition as the law of the land, it was going to take a motivated group of women to repeal it. Pauline Sabin was an elegant, wealthy, socially and politically well-connected Republican party official whose leadership showed women they could make a difference. She began to see the hypocrisy of the Eighteenth Amendment, and by 1928 she was an outspoken critic. She saw politicians passing stricter enforcement while downing cocktails less than an hour later. She also observed the unintended consequences of Prohibition, such as an actual decline in temperate drinking, the misplaced prestige of bootleggers and the flagrant flouting of and disregard for the law. In May 1929, Mrs. Sabin founded the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform (WONPR) with some two dozen of her society friends as its core.

*Dry Law Repeal
League Unit Led
by Mrs. Werlein*

Statewide Organization In-
cludes Prominent
Women

Mrs. Elizabeth Werlein has been made chairman of the Louisiana branch of the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform, the organization announced Monday.



Times-Picayune, May 3, 1932

Mrs. Elizabeth Werlein

Locally, Elizabeth (Mrs. Philip) Werlein (1887 – 1946) headed up the Louisiana branch of the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform. Born in Bay City, Michigan, the daughter of a dynamite manufacturer, the adventurous Elizabeth Thomas Werlein hunted tigers in India, shot big game in Africa, had lunch in a submerged submarine, was one of the first three women in the country to go up in a hot air balloon, broke stallions on the steppes of Russia and flew in the Wright Brothers' plane in Paris. As a girl, she *shocked* London by wearing a "sports costume" that fell almost an inch above the soles of her shoes. It was supposed to drag the ground. The Empress Eugenie gave this future suffragette a heavy gold ring.

Engaged to a Russian prince, she jilted an English earl to marry Philip Werlein III (of the New Orleans Werlein's music publishing family) in 1904. She met him while shopping for her trousseau in New Orleans. "It was love at first sight and we both knew it," she said. At home in Louisiana, she headed countless political, civic, cultural and business organizations, and she played a major role in preseserving and restoring historical architecture in the New Orleans French Quarter. She wrote a book, "Iron Railings of the *Vieux Carré*".

On December 10, 1920, she organized the League of Women Voters, and was its first chairwoman. *The Evening News* of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, announced in 1921 that she was off to "China and India in the near future to study ants," due to her interest in a "gynarchy". "A gynarchy is a government ruled by a woman." Mrs. Werlein's daughter, Betty, married Southern journalist and author William Hodding Carter, II, of Greenville, Mississippi.

WONPR members were influential in ending Prohibition. Mrs. Sabin

told the House Judiciary Committee: "In pre-prohibition days, mothers had little fear in regard to the saloon as far as their children were concerned. A saloon-keeper's license was revoked if he were caught selling liquor to minors. Today in any speakeasy in the United States you can find boys and girls in their teens drinking liquor, and this situation has become so acute that the mothers of the country feel something must be done to protect their children."

Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected in 1932, campaigning for the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. Shortly after he entered office in 1933, the Cullen-Harrison Act passed (March 21), heralding the end of "near beer" like the "Bevo" produced by Anheuser-Busch and allowing beer with an alcoholic content of 3.2 percent and wine of a similarly low alcoholic content. Louisiana's Prohibition law, the Hood Act, was repealed soon after (as shown in the headlines below). It was several months later when the Twenty-first Amendment was ratified on December 5, 1933. The "Return of Liquor" was "Taken Quietly by City Celebrants," proclaimed the *Picayune*. "Shouldn't have been on a Tuesday," thought some barkeeps. "Speakeasies consequently cast all secrecy aside, displayed their wares in show windows, and operated just as though prohibition were only a bad dream." Repeal in New Orleans was quietly ushered in, and the great national experiment known as Prohibition was over for good.

THE TIMES-PICAYUNE, MONDAY, APRIL 3, 1933

Washing It Down!



Times Picayune, April 3, 1933

NATION WELCOMES REAL BEER; HOOD ACT CASES DROPPED HERE

Stanley Orders Erasure
from Court Dockets of
About 100 State Law
Violations

Foam-Topped Steins Lifted
in Celebration Over 19
States and District of
Columbia

STORE OF EVIDENCE
DESTROYED IN JAIL

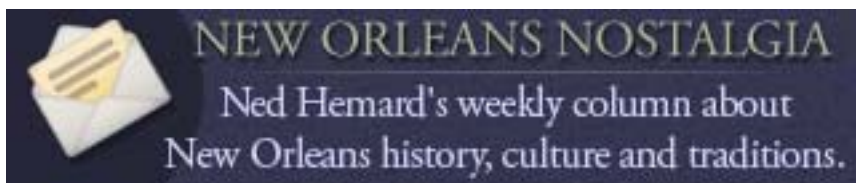
WHITE HOUSE GETS
BREW AT 12:05 A. M.

Judge O'Donnell Grants
Rule to Dispose of
Whisky, Beer and Wine
Seized in Arrests

Orderly Festivities Along
Broadway, Other Gay-
Lamped Haunts Mark
End of 13-Year Drouth

Times-Picayune Article, April 7, 1933

To learn more about the 1920s in New Orleans, visit neworleansbar.org, click on this box:



Then, select the following articles:

"Quite a Flap" on flappers,

"Risqué Rhythms" on Armand J. Piron, and

"Shaken, not Stirred" on Henry C. Ramos and his Gin Fizz.

NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
"Prohibition in New Orleans"
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