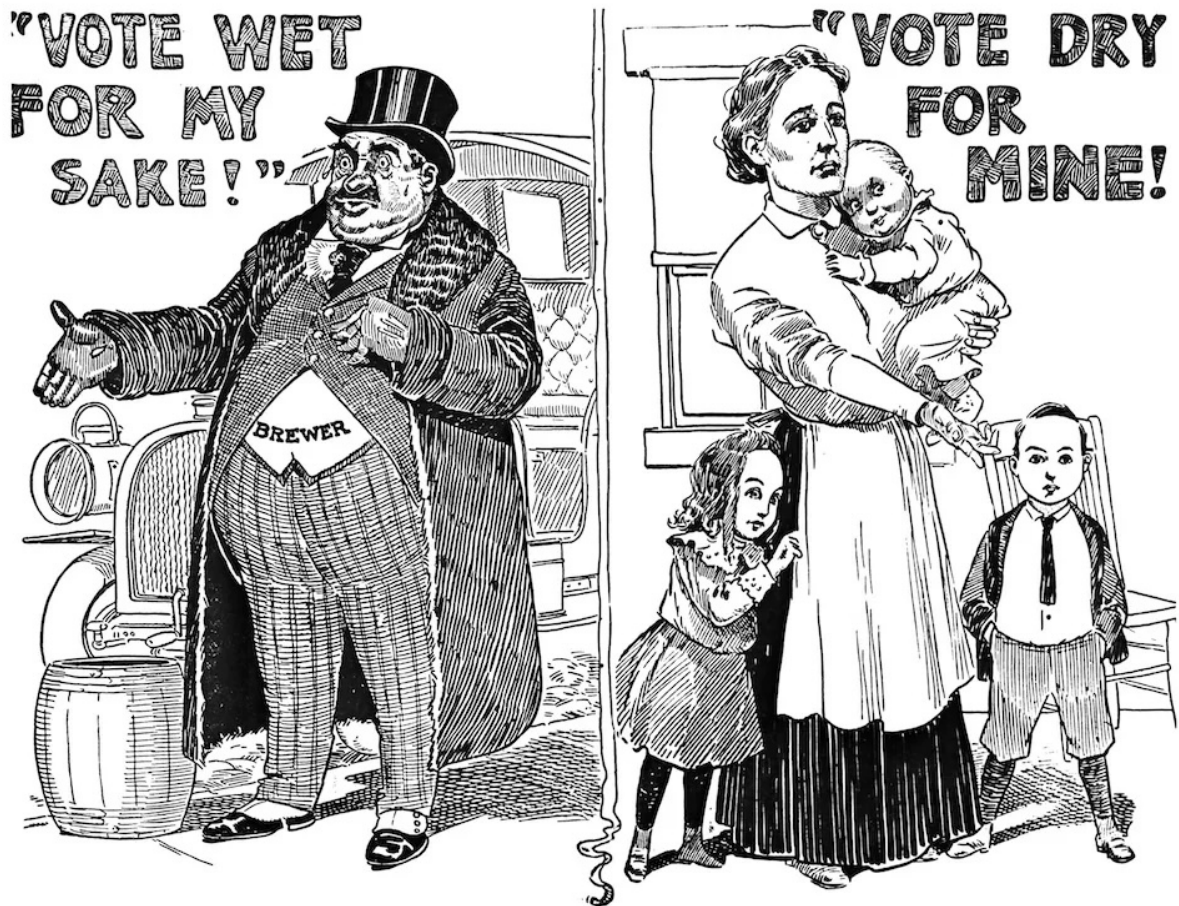




Source: Fotosearch (a common image)

Prohibition on the Central Coast

Published July 2nd, 2026

Humans have had a love/hate relationship with liquor throughout recorded history. In the 1860's and 1870's in the United States many people benefitted from the sale of liquor (not to mention those who regularly imbibed). But there was growing political support for the belief that alcohol was "an evil that must be stopped by law." This movement was organized by the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Anti-Saloon League, and the Prohibition Party. In 1920, the Prohibitionists were successful in forcing the U.S. Congress to pass the 18th Constitutional amendment outlawing all intoxicating liquors.

However, enforcement of the Act was impossible, and seasoned drinkers ignored it. It led to bootlegging, gangsters, speakeasies, and corruption. By the early 1920's bootlegging was an important part of the Central Coast economy. Much of the illegal liquor came down from Vancouver, Canada where it was legal. The most popular

locations to offload illegal liquor were Spooner's Cove, Pismo Beach, Avila, and Morro Bay. It was easy to do because there was no Coast Guard or federal law enforcement officials between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

During the night the Canadian ships would dock outside the three-mile limit, send signals to shore, and boats would go out to meet them and unload the cases of alcohol. A single shipment could be worth as much as \$50,000. The cases would be brought to shore where canvas-covered trucks were waiting. The trucks had to find local farmers who were willing to hide the trucks during the day until the next evening when they would take their cargo to Los Angeles.

There were also local farmers who distilled their own alcohol for personal use or to sell to local speakeasies, which were in basements, back rooms, or upstairs apartments (often disguised as a different establishment). Happy Jack's saloon (now The Siren) opened during Prohibition. Of course, everyone involved in the operation was paid some money and/or got to keep some of the contraband.

The U.S. Treasury Department appointed local Prohibition Officers – also called – Revenuers – to help enforce the law. And not everyone escaped The Revenuers. One prominent case involved Alden Spooner's grandson, Quincy, who served two years in prison and paid a \$2,500 fine for using the cove and ranch for trafficking liquor. Reportedly he was turned in by the rumrunners themselves who turned coat and joined the I.R.S. Quincy apparently made a deal with federal authorities so that his younger brother, Carson, could avoid conviction.

In 1933, after 14 years of trial – and failure – the 21st Amendment was passed, repealing the 18th Amendment and ending Prohibition.