
The Elixir of Life or the Demon Rum? Liquor has been an integral aspect of Canadian culture since European contact. The contributing authors of this collection describe drinking habits, temperance movements, and the prohibition experience in Canada from the 1830s to the 1980s.

Through an international comparison, Cheryl Warsh introduces the major themes in both historical and anthropological studies of beverage alcohol use. In a separate essay she describes the stigma attached to female alcoholism, particularly its association with prostitution and child neglect. James Sturgis presents the collective biography of the Rennie brothers, who fell victim to alcoholism while attempting to make their fortunes in the late nineteenth-century boom-bust economies of Canada and the United States. Jim Baumohl recounts attempts to establish institutions for alcoholics on the model of insane asylums. Jan Noel describes the revivals organized by Father Chiniguy, a Catholic evangelist, which swept Lower Canada in the 1840s, unifying a French-Canadian populace threatened by the rapid influx of anglophone settlers. Glenn Lockwood pursues a similar theme in his essay, concluding that Ottawa Valley temperance lodges solidified loyalist American opposition to immigrant competitors for regional dominance. Jacques Paul Couturier analyses the regulation of prohibition in a mixed anglophone/Acadian community. Ernest Forbes demonstrates that Canadian and American prohibition provided vital economic opportunities during the prolonged Maritime depression. Finally, Robert Campbell surveys the post-prohibition experience of state monopoly as a means of liquor control.

Each author brings new sources and new research techniques to the discussion of alcohol, posing methodological and public policy challenges for the future as well as a solid survey of the past.