



THE ROOSEVELT REVIEW

A TIMELESS TREASURE

WHAT TO DO IN
NEW ORLEANS

UNIQUE DINING AT
WALDORF ASTORIA BERLIN

THE FOUNTAIN
LOUNGE RETURNS

WEATHERING A DRY SPELL

THE ROOSEVELT HOTEL DURING THE PROHIBITION

BY SALLY ASHER

ON JANUARY 17, 1920, Prohibition went into effect. Cocktail concoctions were integral to New Orleans' culture and economy, and residents and institutions dealt with the drought in various ways. The Roosevelt Hotel weathered the changes creatively, spawning firsts, legends, and securing its place in history.

In response to Prohibition, many bars transformed into restaurants or closed entirely. The Roosevelt was then the Grunewald Hotel and famous for its bar The Cave, where patrons enjoyed libations at midnight shows while watching chorus girls shimmy to jazz bands. After converting the bar to serve soft drinks, business continued normally until October 1922. During the Grain Dealers' Association conference at the hotel, Prohibition agents busted in on rooms 1263 and 1265 to find full bars with no less than 27 barrels of beer and many bottles of Sazerac cocktails and Scotch. It took four trucks to haul away the contraband. The following day, someone hung a wreath on room 1265 with a placard: "DIED. The whole Damn Barley Corn Family ... The remains may be viewed at the home of their tender Uncle Sam. Mourners. Hangovers. Expectant Heirs are invited to attend services." One guest stated that the rooms would forever be a sacred "sanctuary." Shortly after the raid, the Grunewald was sold and became the Roosevelt.

Since the Roosevelt could no longer promise Sazeracs, it held dances with popular orchestras in the Venetian Room and the Fountain Grill for a \$1 a night and \$2 on Saturdays. It partnered with Jackson Brewery (whose "Sazerac" was now just ginger ale) to offer free reproductions of Ronald Hargrave's etchings to individuals who mailed in coupons and "promised" to give the new Sazerac a "fair trial" by ordering at least three bottles from their local druggist.

"Prohibition Agent No. 1" Isadore "Izzy" Einstein and his partner Peter Reager liked to stay at the Roosevelt while in New Orleans. Newspapers announced their arrival practically as tips for bootleggers to avoid being busted. The men registered under assumed names and disguised themselves as prizefighters, laborers and fruit peddlers, and they even brought women along to further their ruse. The men also brought results: in 10 days during the winter of 1923, they led more than 45 raids. The Roosevelt wasn't among them. The hotel wasn't immune to raids, however, (nor were its guests and employees), and it hosted both sides equally. The Rational American League, which aimed to weaken Prohibition, set up its local headquarters there.

When Prohibition dissolved like sugar into absinthe, the Roosevelt rushed to celebrate its demise. At noon on April 13, 1933, 3.2 percent beer became legal again under the Cullen-Harrison Act. The Association of Commerce's weekly luncheon at the Roosevelt formally recognized beer's return. White-coated waiters carried large platters of bottled beer. The men noted the moment's significance, removing labels and bottle caps as souvenirs. The same day, the Roosevelt opened a bar behind the Grill Room, touting it as the "pride of the south."

The true celebration, however, occurred on December 5, 1933, when Prohibition in Louisiana was officially repealed. The Roosevelt welcomed the first legal delivery of whiskey in New Orleans in 13 years. At 7 p.m., J.E. Garcia, sales manager of United Liquor Importers and Distillers, personally delivered the first case to Roosevelt's purchasing agent Joseph Samuel before a flurry of news cameras. The Roosevelt quickly returned to the good

Of Course

The Finest Bar
in New Orleans
is at

The Roosevelt
"Pride of the South"

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times of yesteryear.

One of Prohibition's earliest casualties was the Ramos Gin Fizz. Its creator, Henry Ramos, owned the elegant Stag saloon where tourists and locals lined up for his famed concoctions. When Prohibition hit, Ramos quit the bar business, sold the Stag, and as a parting gift published his drink recipe. In the spring of 1934, the Roosevelt had an "announcement extraordinary." It was now the exclusive dispenser of the Ramos Gin Fizz. The following year, Senator Huey P. Long went to New York, bringing along the Roosevelt's head bartender. Long attacked President Roosevelt's New Deal while simultaneously instructing the crowd on the finer points of the gin fizz, thus further ushering the hotel into legend. 