



## Bring on the Booze! Seattle was crazy during prohibition

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by JOHN PRENTICE

Seattle loves to drink. From craft beer to fine wine and spirits, delicious alcohol can be found all over this city. But it wasn't always so easy to get a drink in this town.

From 1920 to 1933 Federal law prohibited the production, sale and transportation of alcohol but Leonard Garfield from the Seattle's Museum of History and Industry says Seattleites did their best to ignore the rules.

"Prohibition was a wild time, I mean this city went crazy! Here in Seattle, because you have to remember Seattle is a town of hard working people who love to drink" Garfield says.

Seattle was thirsty for illegal liquor and speakeasy bars like Doc Hamilton's on 12th Ave kept the drinks flowing. But where did they get the booze?

"The King of Rumrunners was a guy named Roy Olmstead, he started out as a police lieutenant but soon discovered the other side of the law was much more profitable" Garfield says.

Olmstead made tons of money smuggling hooch from Canada, with the help of a secret weapon. A radio station.

“He was actually the founder of a radio station that became KOMO” Garfield says “Elise, his wife would read stories to kids over the radio and every couple of minutes she would have a secret message telling the guys on the boats from Canada where to go and make the drop. Eventually that was shut down and he went to prison.”

Rumor has it Olmstead’s radio station had studios at Smith Tower. Perhaps he would be proud to know the top floor has been turned into a bar. Talk about irony!

Marissa Brooks works at Smith Tower and says “Just about a year ago, August 25th we re-opened what we’re sitting in. Now known as the observatory formally known as the Chinese room, we built our own a speakeasy type bar, kind of an effort to pay homage to the prohibition, rum running, history of this building... we’re really well known for our craft cocktails, the Smith Tower Sazerac another one called The Dry Squad... and up here in our speakeasy inspired bar, we have a lot of events and people who choose to come here in period gear, the gangsters, the flapper girls.”

Marissa says Halloween at the Smith Tower observatory is tons of fun but if this sky-high bar is too high profile for your drinking habits head to Belltown.

If you know where to look, you’ll find Bathtub Gin. It’s a modern speakeasy with an intimate feel, fantastic drinks and a liquor license. So, unlike its 1930’s counterparts there’s no need to fear a police raid. Just grab a drink, sit back and enjoy the prohibition atmosphere.

“It was party time when prohibition was lifted. We could finally have a drink legally.” Garfield says. “Now let’s remember, people were drinking throughout prohibition so it wasn’t novel to have a drink of liquor but it was novel to have it legally. This was a town with big breweries, big parties and big drinking people... so when prohibition ended, Seattle went back to its normal self.”

Cheers to that!