Convention delegates eager to imbibe during their Olympia sojourn could visit the tawdry saloons left along the original waterfront townsite or patronize the "elegantly furnished saloon" at Third and Main which advertised "The Choicest of Wines, Liquors, and Cigars." The gaudily elaborate Olympia Hotel, intending to serve the whims of legislators and other officials, was as yet uncompleted.

But availability of drink was also an issue before the convention itself, for the merits of temperance and prohibition had long been argued by wets, drys and the uncommitted. Almost inevitably, the issue was drawn into convention deliberations.

The pleasures, the evils, and the economics of liquor had come under discussion in the territory almost as soon as the first fur traders discovered that spirits were easy barter in the race for pelts. As more inhabitants entered the Oregon country, efforts to slow or halt the flow of liquor increased. Missionaries inveighed against its evils; Hudson's Bay Company officials, though surely not their employees in the field, tried to curb the liquor trade; pious settlers sought to limit use. As early as 1852, when settlement was still sparse north of the Columbia River, Salem hosted a temperance convention dedicated to electing sympathetic officials throughout the Oregon Country, and three years later voters in the new territory of Washington voted down prohibition for the first but not the last time. The margin was 564 in favor and 650 against. Such stalwart pioneers as Seattle's Denny brothers Arthur and David, Judge Thomas Burke, the Reverend George Whitworth, and the in-again-out-again Olympia newspaper publisher John Miller Murphy endeavored to protect the new citizens of towns abuilding from the immoralities associated with booze.

In the decade before the convention formal efforts were made to forestall the use of alcohol in Washington Territory. By 1880 the International Order of Good Templars, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, several churches, and other interested groups and individuals had formed the Territorial Temperance Alliance, which began to work for temperance legislation. Laws were passed to close saloons on Sundays and make saloon owners liable for injuries resulting from drinks sold on their premises. In time, the legislature added local option laws along with an act requiring schools to teach about the dangers of alcohol and narcotics. Such efforts got a further boost in 1888 when the Reverend Edward B. Sutton, a Michigan Methodist and full-time organizer for the Prohibition Party, arrived. He crisscrossed the territory holding meetings, 1200 he claimed, all the while orating passionately about the evils of liquor and organizing clubs. Then came disaster: the next June the Great Seattle Fire whipped through the party's headquarters, destroying nearly all their supplies.

Meanwhile, as the constitutional convention approached, efforts to control alcohol became entangled with another reform, the women's suffrage movement. The conventional wisdom, fostered by opponents of both,
held that a female electorate would soon vote in prohibition. Leaders of both campaigns quarreled over how
great a role each should play in the other’s.

Although many convention delegates had strong reformist inclinations on other issues, the leaders would
have preferred to eschew prohibition. But it could not be avoided. Sutton built up pressure and bombarded
the convention with petitions. The "Committee on Miscellaneous Subjects, Schedule and Future
Amendments" voted that the petitioners' "prayers...not be granted." But on July 17, committee member
Sylvious A. Dickey, the young Kitsap County school superintendent, proposed a minority report that would
make it illegal "for any individual company or corporation within the limits of this state to manufacture, to
sell, offer for sale, or in any way dispose of any alcoholic, malt, or spiritous liquors, except for medicinal or
scientific purposes?" Legislative maneuvering shifted toward whether the convention should accept the
Dickey report or submit the issue to the voters. Some strategists feared that including the two issues in the
constitution might spell defeat for the document itself. A proposal for a popular vote was first rejected, but a
few weeks later sentiment changed.

The Judicial Committee, chaired by George Turner, a longtime foe of both prohibition and women’s suffrage,
recommended that the two issues be placed on the ballot alongside the Constitution itself. Perhaps the
decision to submit the matter to voters involved suspicion that a significant percentage of the electorate
favored prohibition; historian Norman H. Clark further points out that the liquor forces offered no organized
opposition such was yet in the future. But Turner and his colleagues may well have had another thought in
mind: if the two issues were sufficiently intertwined in the public mind, both might lose. Perhaps the sight of
prohibition on the ballot would remind males that women voters would bring prohibition in the future.

In the two months between the adjournment of the convention and the October 1 election, prohibitionists let
loose a barrage of attacks on the evils of drink and its effect on society. Seattle's prohibitionist newspaper
held liquor responsible for the brothels in the cities, for "the bloated-faced staggering drunkards along our
streets" and for the "spider legged tin horned gamblers" on street corners. "If you would save your boy and
your neighbor's boy from becoming a drunkard," the editorial warned, "vote for prohibition."

But such hysterics went unheeded. Over 52,000 people voted on election day. Some 40,000 supported the
constitution itself, but fewer than half that many favored prohibition and it was defeated almost two to one.
Sutton shouted fraud, claiming that thousands of ballots with the two reform measures crossed out had
been dispersed throughout the state. But fraud or not, the decision on prohibition was final. Its supporters
had argued and the delegates had wavered, but the people had decided.

The prohibitionists would have their day, their decade, in fact, but not for a quarter century. Washington
voters would approve a statewide prohibition initiative in 1914, and four years later they would ratify the
eighteenth amendment to the United States Constitution by a two-to-one margin. In another era, all this
would be repealed. But prohibition was not to become a part of the Washington Constitution.

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MLA Citation: