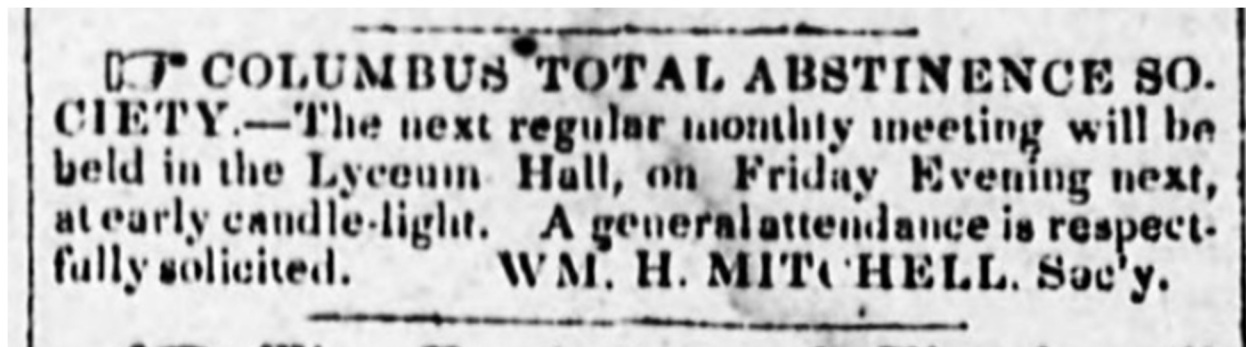


Today in Columbus History, October 26, 1842, in the *Columbus Enquirer* appeared this notice:



“COLUMBUS TOTAL ABSTINENCE SOCIETY -- The next regular monthly meeting will be held in the Lyceum Hall, on Friday Evening next, at early candle-light. A general attendance is respectfully solicited. WM. H. MITCHELL Sec'y.”

From the beginning, alcohol abuse and how to stop it were continuing social problems for the colony of Georgia, and later, for the town of Columbus. Over the years, elite white businessmen of Columbus tried to address the problem, for example, through public relations and peer pressure, and in attempts to pass local laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol, until the state was finally successful in 1907. (*New Georgia Encyclopedia*)

The Georgia State Temperance Society was founded in 1828 and as early as 1829, “a temperance society was organized,” according to John Martin (20) with Dr. E.L. DeGraffenried as president.

In an attempt to re-energize the group in 1831, at a “re-organization” meeting, they voted to publish the names of signers of a pledge “requiring entire abstinence.”

“Believing that it may more effectively guard those who have signed this paper for the public eye to be fixed upon them,” the names of the signers of the Columbus pledge were published in the newspaper, among them some recognizable ones:

Jas. S. Norman, R.W. Diggs, W.A. Hitchcock, G.W. Chatfield, Reverend A.P. Manley (president of the society), Henry Johnson, Thomas F. Scott, G.D. Johnson, Jesse Boring, James Ferguson, James Daniel, M.B. Lamar, Wm. Root, A.B. Curtis, Thomas W. Cox, R. Hooper, W.H. Alston, Geo. Chatfield, R.N. Diggs, James Mealing, J. Coleman, Samuel Parson, Thomas Jepson, Hiram Nourse, Wm. Lawrence, Jas. Burke, L. Beers, Charles Clarke, Angus M’Kenzie, F.S. Sewel, and John Milton (secretary).

In the same issue, society president A.P. Manley’s address to the group was published, appealing to the upper classes of Columbus to set the example, because of the dire situation of public alcohol abuse in the town:

“We feel that the circumstances which surround us, call, and loudly too; for every virtuous man, patriot, and philanthropist to make one mighty effort to suppress a practice which promises nothing but misery and disorder here...Who that casts but one attentive glance over society, can say to the contrary?” (*Columbus Democrat*, March 19, 1831, 3)

Less than two months later, fifteen more members joined:

“Jos. T. Kilgore, G.E. Thomas, A.R. Mershon, J.T. Camp, Henry C. Dawson, E.A.D. Brown, Caleb C. Dibble, Wm. Salisbury, John Johnson, Geo. W. Overton, H.P. Garrison, Lewis Leion...M.D. Robertson, J.N. Bethune, esq., —Richards, R. Rutledge, Ephraim Brown, R. Slatter.” (*Columbus Democrat*, May 7, 1831)

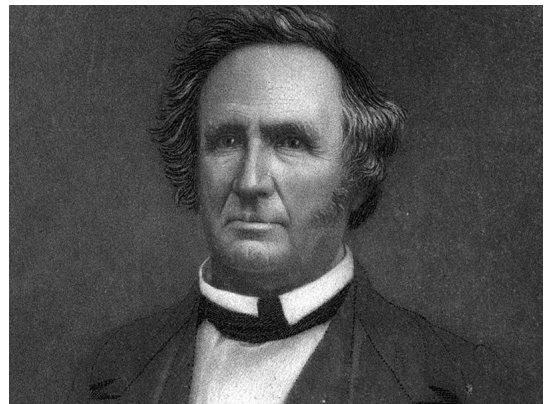
Although wine, beer, and spirits continued to appear regularly in newspaper advertisements, the Temperance Society persevered. Throughout the decade of the 1830s and into the '40s, newspapers in Columbus also regularly printed articles on the destructive effects of alcohol and about the temperance movement in other states and in England.

In 1839, during Georgia's gubernatorial race, a push to outlaw the sale of alcohol in the state seems to have taken hold. In April of 1839, Putnam County Temperance Society collected 471 names on a petition to ask the Georgia legislature to "pass a law to prohibit the further retail of spiritous liquors within the state" and the Muscogee group got involved. A notice in the *Columbus Enquirer* (April 24, 1839, p.3) that "Putnam Society members should return their petitions to James Boykin," appears to be evidence the two county groups worked together. Boykin, a Columbus resident, was on the committee in Columbus with James M. Chambers, James S. Calhoun, A.M. Walker, Nicholas Howard, Matthew Robertson, and G.E. Thomas. (The notice to return the petition to Boykin appears over the months, through September and into October, election month.)

By August, a letter from a West Georgia man who supported Charles J. McDonald, the Democratic candidate for governor, expressed confidence that the "anti-retailers" would not prevail.

The winning candidate for governor that year, Democrat Charles J. McDonald, did not support the petitioners. The state's economy was still in tatters from the Panic of 1837 and McDonald had to encourage its revival in every way possible, certainly not by squelching sales of spirituous liquors.

Without further digging, it's not clear whether the Temperance group was bipartisan or not, but I recognize many names of men who next year would support Martin Van Buren and the Democratic Republican Party against William Henry Harrison's Whigs, although in this year's gubernatorial race, the Democratic candidate was not on their side.



1. Charles J. McDonald, Democrat, elected governor of Georgia over Whig Charles Dougherty, in 1839. Courtesy New Georgia Encyclopedia.

The Georgia Assembly put its toe in the waters in 1841, passing taxes on a variety of activities in Columbus, including, "on all retailers of spirituous liquors, as a license for retailing one year, thirty dollars." Section Two of the act was devoted entirely to the details of the punishment of those particular retailers if they did not pay up.

By 1842, the phrase "total abstinence society" began to appear in national and state news articles published in Columbus newspapers. It's not clear from this quick dive into antebellum Columbus' alcohol problems if there was a divide between the members of the Columbus Temperance Society and the newer Columbus Total Abstinence Society that William H. Mitchell called a meeting for in 1842, or if they were the same group under a different name. It's clear, however, that efforts to dry up the social problems related to alcohol abuse continued into the next century, with varying degrees of success.

In 1849, "a contract was made for the building of Temperance Hall. The cornerstone...was laid on the 22d of December." Fraternal and military organizations – the Masons, Odd Fellows, Sons of Temperance and Cadets – along with the Baptist and Episcopal churches, were among the organizations that enthusiastically took part in the ceremony. The hall was dedicated in January of 1851, standing as a symbol of civic support for abstinence from "spirituous liquors." (Martin, 36, 50)

Temperance and anti-prohibition forces continued to struggle for at least another fifty years. And then, “In 1907 Georgia became the first state in the South to pass a statewide ban on the production, transportation, and sale of alcohol. Prohibition in Georgia lasted until 1935, two years after the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment and the end of national prohibition (1920-33).” (*New Georgia Encyclopedia*)

— Rachel Dobson

Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.

While we have been compelled to bring to public notice, various infractions of the law, and of moral order, it affords us great pleasure to be able to advert to circumstances which seem to indicate the approach of a new era in the history of public morals; we allude to the efforts now in progress to bring to the consideration of the general assembly extensive and simultaneous petitions from the several counties of this State on the expediency of enacting a law prohibiting the retailing of spirituous liquors. After all that has been done under the auspices of temperance associations, we are satisfied that the root of the evil of intemperance will be found to exist in the permission which has been granted for the retail of spirituous liquors, and that the means of reformation should have commenced in the walls of legislation. If it be admitted

In May of 1839, a Columbus grand jury (whose foreman was James M. Chambers, an activist in the petitioning group), editorialized in their April term presentments. -- *Columbus Sentinel and Herald*, May 2, 1839.

‘The temperance, or rather anti-retail petitions, as was to be expected, are producing the greatest excitement amongst the people, who are rising in the majesty of their strength, determined, as they say, to put down all attempts to interfere with their natural rights, and unnecessary encroachments upon their privileges.’

By August 1839, a letter from a West Georgia man who supported Charles J. McDonald, the Democratic candidate for governor, expressed confidence that the “anti-retailers” would not prevail, because they were “producing the greatest excitement amongst the people” who were not going to allow “their natural rights” (i.e. to buy and sell alcohol) to be interfered with. – *Columbus Sentinel and Herald*, August 22, 1839.

To the Senate and House of Representatives,
of the State of Georgia:—

‘The undersigned, citizens of this State, believing the retail of spirituous liquors, an evil of great magnitude, come into the Legislature, by petition, and ask you, in your wisdom, to pass such a law as will effectually put a stop to it. We do not here attempt to name the mischiefs that have been done in this State, by quartering upon our cities, towns, villages, and highways, retail shops; they are so manifold and obvious, as not to have escaped the notice of every member of your honorable body. Your petitioners come with the more confidence, because several States in the Union have passed such laws as to make penal the retail of intoxicating drinks. We cannot see why a traffic, which is full of evil, and only evil, should not be banished by law, if it cannot be done otherwise. Let it be done. And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c., &c.’

Signed HAMPTON S. SMITH,
and by 470 others.

An appeal by Hampton Smith, member of the Columbus Temperance Society, to the Georgia legislature, appeared just a few days before the election. In the same issue is published a letter from the Democratic candidate, Charles J. McDonald smooth-talking his way out of supporting the anti-retail petitioners. – *Columbus Enquirer*, Thursday, Oct 3 1839, p. 2.

SOURCES:

- Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO), <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/> .
- Georgia Legislative Documents (GALILEO): <http://neptune3.galib.uga.edu/ssp/cgi-bin/legis-idx.pl?sessionid=7f000001&type=law&byte=21267393>
- *Columbus, Georgia, From its Selection as a "Trading Town" in 1827, to its Partial Destruction by Wilson's Raid, in 1865, Part 1 - 1827 to 1846*, John H. Martin, compiler (Columbus, Ga.: Thos. Gilbert, 1874) (Internet Archive).
- New Georgia Encyclopedia:
 - <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/temperance-movement>
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 - <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/charles-mcdonald-1793-1860>
- Etta Blanchard Worsley, *Columbus on the Chattahoochee* (Columbus: Columbus Office Supply, 1951), via Ancestry.com.