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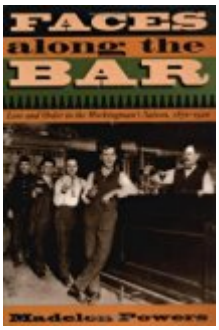

Madelon Powers. *Faces Along the Bar: Lore and Order in the Workingman's Saloon, 1870-1920.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. xii + 323 pp. $25.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-226-67768-2.

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On December 10, 1893, during one of the flamboyant British editor William T. Stead's famous visits to Chicago, he proclaimed from the stage of the Central Music Hall that "For what the saloonkeeper has done to supply humanity with the fundamental necessities of life I say God bless the saloonkeeper." The comments evoked scattered cheers and hisses, and one man shouted from the gallery, "Does the saloonkeeper do this because he loves his fellow man or because he loves his money?" Without missing a beat, Stead replied, "If he did it because of his love of the man, he would deserved to be called, not a saloonkeeper, but a saint" (Chicago Tribune, Dec. 11, 1893).

In many respects, that exchange of quips is what Madelon Powers' new book is all about. The saloon was an institution that could get no respect. Scorned and feared by many when it was alive, it suffered the indignity of being virtually neglected by academic historians until the 1970's, when a few began to venture behind the swinging doors. Jon Kingsdale's *American Quarterly* article broke the ice in 1975, followed in the next few years by books on Western saloons by Elliot West (1979) and Thomas Noel (1982) and by W.J. Rorabaugh's 1979 volume on alcohol consumption in general.[1] Roy Rosenzweig integrated the bar into Worcester's working-class culture (1983), the same year my 1975 dissertation on the saloon in Chicago and Boston was published.[2] Now comes the newest addition to the literature, Madelon Powers' delightfully written book, which expands on earlier works in one phase of the barroom's storied history, the places that catered to the working-class. Of the works done so far, this is the most generalized, the most anthropological in its approach, and the most successful at dealing with the thick layer of folklore surrounding the saloon.

The central theme of the book is community, or "clubbing," as the author calls it, and her goal is to present the saloon from the demand, or drinkers' side of the marketplace equation. The first chapter begins by placing "regulars" in the interpretive forefront, noting that the drinking place was not a refuge from the changes of the world, but thoroughly a part of it. It established the male status of the place. Chapter Two begins

with a discussion of the idea of manliness, then links it to connections with adolescent gangs and with family structure. The next chapter deals with he daily routine of the barroom, especially its role as a hiring center, and its connection with politics. Chapter Four explains the folkways of the barroom, especially treating, Americans' choices in beverages and other drinking customs that reinforced the sense of comradeship. The author then makes a nice segue from treating to political bribery. Chapter Six, "Clubbing by Collection," deals with growler-rushing, the back room, and voluntary associations. This is followed by a nice categorization of the types of games and gambling found in barrooms. Chapters Eight and Nine provide an excellent overview of saloon folklore, while the concluding chapter assesses the institution of the free lunch.

Alas, *Faces Along the Bar* is a Jekyll and Hyde for this reviewer. On one hand, it is a well written account with many interesting interpretive ideas that attempt to place the working-class swinging doors in the general context of American history. It does a marvelous job of relating the many literary references to the barroom and makes a number of thought-provoking points. Its footnotes are a compendium of the best secondary sources in parallel fields that place the story of the saloon in some of its larger contexts. It is also by far the most generalized book to be done on the subject. But it is in that level of generalization that the first of several flaws arise.

The initial clue to these problems can be found in the Introduction, which claims that "The tenacity of tradition makes it possible to study fifty years of salooning as a reasonably coherent and continuous whole, as well as to speak of saloongoers in the aggregate even while acknowledging their regional and ethnic differences" (p. 4). In other words, nothing of significance really changed over half a century. As a result of this interpretive fixedness, the book promises and delivers more of a composite stereotype than a study of the complexity of barrooms and their habitues. This approach appears to grow at least in part from the book's terribly narrow research base. While the author does a fine job of integrating literary sources--so well that it is sometimes hard to separate actuality from fiction--the endnotes reveal that the character of the hard base of research facts almost predetermine the book's interpretive framework.

First, the book depends heavily in secondary sources. George Ade's brief 1931 volume, *The Old-Time Saloon*, is cited fifty times.[3] The oft-reprinted article by Kingsdale and the books by Rosenzweig, Noel, and West appear in the notes with similar frequency. My book, *The Saloon: Public Drinking in Chicago and Boston, 1890-1920* is cited forty-seven times, and even then my ideas about the importance of the saloon's ubiquity, its daily temporal routine, and the information-exchange role of the bartender appear in *Faces* without proper attribution.

While the strength of the book is in interpreting image and language, the disappointingly thin level of primary source work yields little new information about what actually happened in working-class bars. There are only a handful of newspaper sources, several more from contemporary magazines, but only one endnote makes any reference to a manuscript collection. Granted that saloonkeepers were hardly literary talents who left behind personal papers, but reformers who worked in their neighborhoods most certainly did. It is particularly disturbing that the author completely ignored the untapped wealth of information in such liquor trade journals as *Mida's Criterion*, *New England Trader*, and *Bonfort's Wine and Spirit Gazette*. Instead, when the book need factual information, it heavily depends on either the aforementioned secondary works, or on four turn-of-the-century anti-saloon sources. Three of the latter are articles in the *American Journal of Sociology* and deal with Chicago, one by E.C. Moore of Hull House, and a two-part study by

Royal Melendy who was affiliated with Chicago Commons.[4] The text of ***Faces*** contains so many quotes from these three articles which are cited fifty-seven times, that the reader might almost reconstruct their texts. Melendy's articles were written as a factual contribution to Raymond Calkins, ***Substitutes for the Saloon***, the single book cited most repeatedly (sixty-five times) in the footnotes and praised in the Introduction (p. 5). This volume, which contained fairly brief descriptions submitted from seventeen cities, was produced by the Committee of Fifty, a national temperance organization that struggled unsuccessfully to find institutional replacements for barrooms. While the sketches of individual cities in ***Substitutes*** provide an interesting overview, none of them is really an adequate description of what went on in any one town.[5]

What is also significant about the most heavily used primary sources is that they are nearly all form the years 1897 to 1901, perhaps explaining why Faces could make the claim that its generalizations held true over a fifty year period, when the facts demonstrate that to be untrue. In my book I tried to point out that saloons constantly evolved in response to the changing economic structure of their wet-goods suppliers, local licensing laws, real estate and transportation trends, legislative attacks from temperance interests, ethnic transitions, competing diversions, rival dealers, and a host of other factors. The ability of the saloons to adjust and reinvent themselves when necessary was one of their virtues. Many observers noted that the barrooms of 1880, which tended to be owned by their proprietors, were different from the brewery-owned outlets that in many way reflected the growth of chain retailing in grocery stores and lunch counters. The dozens of Schlitz-owned bars near the steel mills of South Chicago and the German workingman's neighborhoods of the North Side operated in a very different manner than mom-and-pop operations. The dependence on the 1897-1901 sources also deprives the reader of a description of the full impact of the anti-prostitution and post-1901 high license campaigns, let alone World War I. ***Faces at the Bar*** occasionally hints at change, but its topical structure promotes an incorrect compression of time that allows examples drawn from half a century apart to appear in a single paragraph and gives the illusion of timelessness.

Although the endnotes would indicate that study draws very heavily on the Chicago experience, the author gives the incorrect impression that the saloon was geographically homogenized. Various cities are mentioned in passing, but their names do not even appear in the index. Most importantly, there is not systematic attempt in ***Faces*** to make the necessary link with the urban context of the saloon. This results is an almost complete disregard of the importance of location, even though saloons were unique mirrors of their surroundings. Control over each barroom grew out of highly localized laws, and my reading of primary sources indicated that the resulting drinking practices were not really the same in any two places. Obviously, brewery chain-ownership and perhaps the inter-city migration of drinkers and discussion of fads in the media promoted some small degree of uniformity, but there were contrasts. That was my entire purpose in choosing wide-open Chicago and tightly-regulated Boston for my own dissertation and book. Don't look in ***Face along the Bar*** for the famous Raines Law Sandwich in New York (The Raines Law Hotel is relegated to a brief footnote), Boston's Common Victualer Law, or Philadelphia's quirky court-based application process. While Powers was aiming at the very creditable goal of attempting to write a national study, she should not have plucked the facts and examples from their contexts and treated these city-to-city differences so lightly. A reading of the trade journals would have made it obvious that saloonkeepers were indeed very aware of these localized traditions, constantly asking themselves whether a business-boosting gimmick or new temperance tactic or organized labor problems in another city or state was rele-

vant to their own situations. Their organizations were locally-based and seldom grew into anything beyond the citywide level. The major trade journals had regular correspondents in cities scattered across the country who reported local news and trends.

Finally, there is the matter of over-all definition. The subtitle of the book refines the focus to the "workingman's" saloon, but we are never quite sure what that term means. The effort to emphasize the sense-of-community theme causes the author to downplay the important factor of the workers' daily geographical mobility, which is a main point of my book and one of the central interpretive facts of urban history. The commuting patterns of factory workers and tradesmen who had to travel across the city brought them into saloons what were miles from home. Workers were also at the center of the Sabbatarian conflict that especially involved beer gardens that were often located far from home. Where did the definition of "workingman" begin and end on the social scale? The lowly-paid among those with white collars were also workers, but they are omitted. The very large number of men who survived neat the bottom of society are similarly absent. Every city had some sort of a transient areas; Chicago's West Madison St. Main Stem was the largest. These rundown districts adjacent to downtown contained many seasonally-idle workingmen, not just hardcore non-working tramps; these down-at-the-heel drinking places are absent from the study. These drinkers were actually the main clientele of Michael "Hinky Dink" Kenna's famous "Workingman's Exchange," which is mentioned in the book.

The "workingman" is therefore more of an author's construct than a factual description. Anselm Strauss' fine old book *Images of the American City* taught us how we make stereotypes of cities as well as categories of people as a way of dealing with complexity.[6] To some extent, I think that this book suffers from a similar process of stereotype formation. Some social historians might not object to this homogenization. And one can even argue that urban history should emphasize similarities rather than differences. But at the risk of appearing to be a troglodyte, this reviewer can only conclude that there needs to be a step that reaches beyond the basis of obvious similarities and stereotypes and confronts differences and contrasts among cities and their institutions.

The saloonkeeper deserves that kind of respect, even if he was no saint.

Notes

[1]. Jon Kingsdale, "The 'Poor Man's Club': Social Functions of the Urban Working-Class Saloon," *American Quarterly* 25 (October, 1973): 472-89; Elliot West, *The Saloon on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979); Thomas J. Noel, *The City and the Saloon: Denver, 1858-1916* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

[2]. Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours For What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Perry R. Duis, "The Saloon and the Public City: Chicago and Boston 1880-1920" (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1975), published as *The Saloon: Public Drinking in Chicago and Boston, 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1893).

[3]. George Ade, *The Old-Time Saloon: Not Wet--Not Dry* (New York: Long and Smith, 1931).

[4]. Royal L. Melendy, "The Saloon in Chicago (Part 1)," *American Journal of Sociology* 6 (Nov. 1900): 289-306; "The Saloon (Part 2)," Ibid. 6 (Jan. 1901); 443-64; E.C. Moore, "The Social Value of the Saloon," *American Journal of Sociology* 3 (July 1897): 1-12.

[5]. Raymond Calkins, *Substitutes For the Saloon* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1901).

[6]. Aselm Strauss, *Images of the American City* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1961).

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