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Book Review: *Grappling with Demon Rum: The  
Cultural Struggle over Liquor in Early Oklahoma* By  
James E. Klein

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**Grappling with Demon Rum: The Cultural Struggle over Liquor in Early Oklahoma.** By James E. Klein. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008. x + 238 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

When asked to review this book for *Great Plains Research*, the first thought to cross my mind was of Jimmie Lewis Franklin's *Born Sober: Prohibition in Oklahoma, 1907-1959*, for Franklin set a high standard on the subject of prohibition in Oklahoma with that 1971 work. Indeed, Franklin, now retired from Vanderbilt University, provided one of the endorsements for the dust jacket of James E. Klein's work, calling it "An engaging study of the intense battle over liquor in the early years of the Sooner state. In a careful and sophisticated analysis Klein shows that tensions over prohibition arose from class and cultural distinctions between workers and a middle class that saw prohibition as a symbol of respectability and a means of ensuring social order."

In mentioning class, Franklin went to the heart of Klein's work. Both of the other endorsements, by Jack S. Blocker Jr., author of *American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform* (1989) and David M. Fahey, author of *Temperance and Racism: John Bull, Johnny Reb, and the Good Templars* (1996), also mention class. As Fahey puts it, "Klein's important book strengthens the case for seeing the American temperance movement as a middle-class struggle for social control." So it might be said that the two most obvious differences between Klein's work and Franklin's is that Klein focuses on "Early Oklahoma," while Franklin covered the entire period from statehood in 1907 to repeal in 1959, and that Klein emphasizes more

than Franklin the centrality of class in understanding Oklahoma's prohibition movement, though it should be noted that Klein is not insensitive to other issues, such as race, gender, and religion.

It is an interesting challenge to think of *Grappling with Demon Rum* in relation to the Great Plains. Oklahoma seems always to be a transition zone; it has been called, at one time or another and with some justification in every case, part of the Great Plains, the Southwest, the Midwest, the West, and the South. Perhaps the South is the most helpful categorization in understanding the prohibition movement. Indeed, the late, great Oklahoma historian Danney Goble insisted that if one wants to truly understand the Sooner State, the starting point is to forget the predominant frontier/western cowboys and Indians image and realize the extent to which Oklahoma is part of the South, including its racial patterns and its political system. As to the Great Plains, perhaps it makes sense to suggest that of the two territories that were forced together into the state of Oklahoma in 1907, Oklahoma Territory, the westernmost of the two, was a part of the Great Plains (the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian gets close to being the dividing line), while Indian Territory, more easterly, was not, and has a unique history because of the concern, perhaps racially based, of keeping alcoholic beverages away from Native Americans. (Klein notes that the first prohibition law in the United States was actually passed by the Cherokees in 1819.)

Oklahoma has been unique in many ways; it was, for example, the first and only dry state to come into the union, in 1907, more than a decade before the experiment with national prohibition began. Klein writes that "the campaign to make Oklahoma a dry state can be seen as part of a larger aridity crusade, which was particularly effective in the American South at this time." Notice, again, the South.

Klein most clearly states the class nature of his analysis when he writes: "The liquor issue pitted a middle-class culture, championed by the Oklahoma league [Anti-Saloon League], against a working-class saloon culture. The respected merchants and professionals who supported the liquor ban, viewed the saloon as a source of numerous sins and social evils. Oklahoma wage earners saw the saloon, legal or illegal, as a place to socialize and recreate. This class-based cultural conflict was at the root of the liquor debate." Klein probably handles the issue of prohibition as a means of social control as well as any who have studied the matter; more than any other scholar, he has used county-by-county statistics to buttress his argument.

Finally, Klein is aware of the relevance of his work for understanding Oklahoma today, as when he writes:

Respectable people . . . publicly abstained from drinking and sought to restrict others' access to alcohol; those who did not share this view were stigmatized as less virtuous, less than righteous. Vestiges of this mentality remain in Oklahoma a century after the state banned liquor; the prohibition experience has left a deep imprint on social propriety in the state: a prominent outspoken population expresses disdain for the liquor culture whereas a less visible, less vocal population continues to consume alcohol as a beverage but does not attempt to justify its actions in the public forum.

*Grappling with Demon Rum* was among the finalists for the 2009 Oklahoma Book Award in nonfiction. **Davis D. Joyce**, *Professor of History, Emeritus, East Central University, Ada, Oklahoma*.