

The Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified on January 16, 1920. The amendment reads, in part, "After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all the territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited."

After nearly thirteen years, the 18th Amendment was repealed by the ratification of the 21st Amendment, on December 5, 1933.

Prohibition against the sale of alcoholic beverages resulted in widespread bootlegging and rum running. From the very beginning, all manner of vessels were employed for smuggling alcoholic beverages from the French islands in Newfoundland, Canada, the Bahamas, and Mexico to coastal cities and towns in the United States.

The Outer Banks, in a strategic position on the east coast, saw its share of rum running.

On August 13, 1921, lookouts at the Portsmouth Island and Ocracoke Coast Guard Stations spotted a two-masted British schooner, the *Messenger of Peace*, hailing from Nassau, ashore on the north side of Ocracoke inlet. Both stations sent boats to offer assistance.

The ship's captain reported that he had been seeking a port where he could obtain fresh water. Coast Guard personnel brought three barrels of water, and, after one failed attempt to free the vessel, they were successful in refloating the schooner in the early morning hours of August 14.

Within 24 hours a heavy blow once again forced the *Messenger of Peace* ashore. She was refloated at 3 p.m. However, remarks by some of the crew led Coast Guard officers to suspect she had been engaged in smuggling liquor into the United States. A search revealed no contraband, or so it was reported, and the vessel was released.

Four months later, at 4 p.m. on December 30, 1921, the lookout in the Portsmouth Island Coast Guard Station reported that a schooner had run ashore on the south side of Ocracoke Inlet.

It was the *Messenger of Peace*. The vessel was again refloated and boarded. Using the same explanation that he had offered in August, the Captain claimed that he was seeking a port where he could obtain food, water, and fuel (the schooner had been fitted with a 45 hp engine).

It turned out that the schooner was loaded with more than 1,000 cases of illegal liquor worth \$100,000. The schooner and her crew were seized, and officials of the state Prohibition Commissions in Raleigh and Wilmington were notified, but not before Portsmouth islanders had an opportunity to partake of her bounty.



The *Messenger of Peace* had a colorful history. According to Robert Carse in his book, *Rum Row*, “Even a member of the clergy felt the call to fortune. The Reverend Mr. Dunn, who had worked long years at the propagation of the gospel through the Out Islands [in the Bahamas], resigned to become the master of [the] rum runner, [*Messenger of Peace*].”

Official reports of the seizure of the rum runner at Ocracoke Inlet neglected to include Portsmouth islanders’ enthusiastic reception of the stranded vessel. According to James E. White, III, in his book, *Paradise Lost, an Oral History of Portsmouth Island*, the *Messenger of Peace* was “full of rum and whiskey. The people on Portsmouth got that booze and divided

it up.”

Carse relates that when the *Messenger of Peace* arrived at Ocracoke Inlet the captain “slid two cases of whiskey soundlessly over the stern for the crew of the Coast Guard patrol boat that pulled his craft clear into the channel. The county sheriff, however, ...arrested the captain...” When he was released, Carse notes, it was with “the best wishes of the sheriff and shouts to return soon from the citizens.”

In 1969 Julian Gilgo recorded an interview with his grandmother, Mattie Gilgo (1885-1976). She was 36 years old when the rum runner ran ashore, and she remembered it with considerable amusement.

Speaking about the *Messenger of Peace*, Mattie Gilgo says, “Blessed Lord, she was nothing but whiskey, beer and wine. She come right on [chuckle] right on up almost to the [Life-Saving] Station dock [chuckle], that she did [chuckle]. Henry [Pigott] and Joe Roberts had it stacked up. He sold it. Henry, black Henry, were on his right legs [wasn’t drunk]. They made him a millionaire [chuckle] I mind [might] as well say. The money they paid him...God only knows.”

Mattie Gilgo’s son, Cecil (1912-1995), in a conversation with Ellen Cloud, recollected that Coast Guard officers became suspicious when they noticed the hatches on the *Messenger of Peace* were all sealed. When the captain and crew were taken ashore, three Coast Guardsmen were put on board. Cecil Gilgo explains that they opened the hatches. Soon, “word got out that it was whiskey,” and “they had a lot of visitors that night.”

When asked why the *Messenger of Peace* came into Portsmouth, Mattie Gilgo explains: “Why, Mac, Charlie Mac [Charles McWilliams], he got word to ‘em some way or the other, to bring it...bring some in. He and Wash [Washington Roberts] [chuckle],...when he got in there, the Captain went up to John Wallace’s, to have supper on the other end of the island [chuckle, chuckle]. The men went aboard and took charge of [chuckle] his whiskey [chuckle]. Lord, it was buried everywhere. It was buried in the hills, on the beach [chuckle], and I reckon there’s some there today. Some of it washed out by storms and tides, ‘cause some of it they couldn’t find. They had buried it [chuckle] but couldn’t find where they buried it. Abner, he had it buried in the wood house. He took the floor up and buried it under [chuckle] the house.”

Miss Gilgo continues with a degree of irony: “I reckon they all got drunk. There was Wash...now I don’t know ‘bout Captain Leonard [Williams]. I wouldn’t say if Mr. Leonard got drunk or not. There was Wash and Walter Yeomans [Officer in Charge, Portsmouth Coast

Guard Station], you know he didn't [chuckle] touch any of it, he's a Harker's Islander...."

Cecil Gigo echoes Mattie Gilgo's recollections, saying "there were more drunks on Portsmouth then than there ever was at one place at one time." In addition to native islanders, a group of hunters who were staying at Tom Bragg's club house, learned of the illegal whiskey. By the time the revenuers arrived, "half the whiskey [was] gone."

Mattie Gilgo laughs when she recollects those days: "Lord have mercy, why he [the ship's Captain] stayed around Portsmouth. Walked around with his hands in his pockets...Let's see now, what was his name? The boat's name was the *Message [Messenger] of Peace*...that was the boat's name....he [the captain] was a foreigner, he was not our nationality. I don't remember what become of the crew." According to Cecil Gilgo, the captain was eventually tried in New Bern, and sent to prison, but the Portsmouth islanders, thanks to the influence of the wealthy hunters, were released.

The 1920s were exciting times for Outer Bankers!

In 1923 another prohibition-era rum runner ran aground near Harker's Island. The story of the misadventures of the *Adventure* is celebrated in the song "The Booze Yacht" (sung to the tune of "The Sidewalks of New York"), written by Ralph Sanders, and popularized by Ivey Scott. (The "Beehive" was Cleveland Davis' general store.) The song could have been written about the *Messenger of Peace*.

Down around the "Beehive," Harker's Island retreat,
Every night and morning the fishermen would meet.
One day there came a rounder; came running by the door,
Said, "Boys, let's go to Cape Lookout;
There's a Booze Yacht run ashore."

This way, that way, to the Cape they'd run.
The coming of the *Adventure*, put the fishing on the bum.
Some lost their religion and back-slid by the score,
The "King Lock" stoppers they stood waist high
When the Booze Yacht run ashore.

Times have changed since those days.
When some were up in their "Gs".
Others, they are down and out, but most feel just like me.
Some would give a hundred, and some a little bit more,

To see another time like that
When the Booze Yacht run ashore.

This way, that way, to the Cape they'd run.
The coming of the *Adventure*, put the fishing on the bum.
Some lost their religion and back-slid by the score,
The "King Lock" stoppers they stood waist high
When the Booze Yacht run ashore.