

## FORMS OF LIFE IN A DRY WORLD

### THE VOLSTEAD ACT

On 16 January 1919 the senators of the Nebraska state legislature, by a vote of thirty-one to one, ratified the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, prohibiting the sale of alcoholic drink throughout the nation. With the Nebraska vote, the amendment received the required support of a two-thirds majority of the states for it to pass into law. Now it would become effective a year from the day of the clinching vote—that is, at midnight on 16 January 1920—and it seemed clear that at that time, the drinking of wine (to say nothing of beer and whiskey) must come to an end for the people of the United States. The language of the amendment was curt and uncompromising:

The manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited.

To convert this sweeping command into practical administration, the U.S. Congress passed the National Prohibition Act on 28 October 1919, over the veto of President Wilson.<sup>1</sup> This piece of legislation was thereafter always called the Volstead Act, in reference to its ostensible author, Andrew Volstead, a veteran Republican congressman from Minnesota. Volstead's congressional career was devoted mostly to defending the interests of the farmers of the upper Midwest, but as a teetotaler and chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, he took on the task of drafting the bill that was to enforce Prohibition. Although