

A 10-Year Spree

World War I was over. People wanted to forget it and have fun. During the 1920's they went on a spree. They called it "making whoopee." One writer called it "the time of wonderful nonsense."

What was it like back in the 1920's?

There was a law against making and selling liquor.

It was called Prohibition. But people still found ways to drink. Some people made liquor at home. Sometimes they made gin by mixing flavoring and alcohol in their bathtubs. Or they went to illegal bars called "speakeasies" for a drink. They would knock on the speak-easy door and say, "Joe sent me." Then they would be let m.

Men got liquor from dealers called "bootleggers."

They sold liquor that was made in illegal stills or was smuggled into the country from Cuba or Canada. Often it was very bad liquor. Sometimes it was poison. Bad liquor killed some people and made others blind. Women drank, too. They could vote now, and this made them feel "free."

Grownups weren't the only ones who wanted fun.

Young people wanted it, too. Girls were called "flappers" and the boys who wore the latest fashions were "cake-eaters." Many of them were "wild," or so their parents said. They danced to the fast Charleston and the Black Bottom. Flappers wore short skirts and rolled their stockings down below the knees. They bobbed their hair (cut it short) and painted their lips into a bright red Cupid's bow.

Boys wore long sideburns. They slicked their hair down and parted it in the middle. Heavy raccoon coats and bell-bottom trousers were "in" fashions. So were "knickers" - wide, baggy pants that tucked in at the knees. Both boys and girls had to have a yellow oilskin slicker (raincoat) painted with funny sayings.

The 1920's was also a time of fast cars and wild rides. Cars, which had been high and square-shaped, became lower and racier. The real sporty car was the Stutz Bearcat. Others were the racy Marmon and the Mercer with the bucket seat.

Teenagers wanted a little "roadster" with a rumble seat in the rear. The rumble seat was *outside* the car, where the trunk usually is today. It was great fun except when it rained. High school kids bought secondhand Model T Fords. They painted them bright colors and wrote on them "Oh you kid!," "23 Skidoo!," and "Joe sent me."

The automobile changed American life. One big change was that boys and girls could date in cars and get out of the house. Parents wondered what the younger generation was up to.

The 1920's was a time of many crazes. One of them was a contest to see which couple could dance the longest without stopping. Couples danced for days, hanging on to each other, half asleep. There were also "Bunion Derbies" - foot races across the U.S. for prizes. And some men tried to see how long they could sit on top of a flagpole. Alvin (Shipwreck) Kelly set the record.

He sat on top of a flagpole in Baltimore for 23 days and seven hours.

The 1920's was a time of great heroes, too. There were aviators like Charles A. Lindbergh and explorers like Admiral Richard E. Byrd. In sports there were heroes like Babe Ruth, swimmer Johnny Weissmuller, tennis champ "Big Bill" Tilden, Jack Dempsey, and "Red" Grange. And people "flipped" over movie stars like Rudolph Valentino, Douglas Fairbanks, Greta Garbo, and Clara Bow. Valentino died in 1926 at the age of 31. Thousands of women screamed, fainted, and cried at his funeral.

The 1920's was also a great time for "big business."

Many people gambled and made money on the stock market. Barbers, taxi drivers, and shoe shine boys put their money in stocks. A few of them got rich.