



# Outlaws of the Lakes: Bootlegging & Smuggling from Colonial Times to Prohibition

*Edward Butts*

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What Great Lake was the hunting ground of a twentieth century pirate? Where did Canada's ""King of the Bootleggers"" end his days? Who was the only man Al Capone ever truly feared? Since early colonial times, the Great Lakes, the Upper St. Lawrence and Lake Champlain have been smugglers' highways. They have borne silent witness to trafficking of almost every commodity governments could tax or ban. Smugglers kept commerce alive in Canada in the early nineteenth century, contributed to the British-Canadian victory in the War of 1812, and carried escaped slaves to freedom in Canada in the decades before the American Civil War. They also corrupted government officials, terrorized honest citizens and committed acts of ruthless violence. A French bootlegger founded the city of Detroit in the eighteenth century. Two hundred years later, American and Canadian bootleggers supplied booze to the criminal empires of Al Capone, Dion O'Banion and the Purple Gang during the doomed experiment called Prohibition. Some became rich; others died with their boots on. Some were cut down by Coast Guard bullets; more were gunned down by rival bootleggers. All of them were brazen and ingenious (Rocco Perri had a front as a macaroni salesman) and they stopped at nothing. Whether they operated in defiance of unjust laws or out of pure greed, the smugglers and bootleggers carved a legacy of violence and adventure, one that has had a profound impact upon the histories of Canada and the United States.



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