

The **Maine Law** (or "Maine Liquor Law"), passed on June 2, 1851^[1] in [Maine](#), was the first^[2] statutory implementation of the developing [temperance movement in the United States](#).

History

[\[edit\]](#)

Temperance activist [Neal Dow](#) helped craft the Maine liquor law while he was mayor of [Portland, Maine](#).^[3] The law's wording included that the sale of all alcoholic beverages except for "medicinal, mechanical or manufacturing purposes" was prohibited. Word of the law's passage quickly spread elsewhere in the nation, and by 1855 twelve states had joined Maine in total prohibition. Known as "dry" states, these states were the opposite of "wet" states, where no prohibition laws existed.^[4]

The act was unpopular with many [working-class](#) people and [immigrants](#). Opposition to the law turned violent in Portland on June 2, 1855, during an incident known as the [Portland Rum Riot](#).^[5] Opponents of the Maine Law stormed [Portland City Hall](#) because they thought Mayor Dow was keeping liquor in the basement.^[5] Newspapers reported that Dow ordered rioters to be fired upon, killing one and wounding seven.^[5] The riot was a contributing factor to the law being repealed in 1856.^[4] However, despite repeal, prohibition was re-enacted in various forms and eventually was written into the state constitution in 1885.

The Massachusetts legislature passed a "Maine Law" in 1852 which was struck down a year later by that state's Supreme Court. Two years later, in 1855, the legislature passed a revised prohibitory liquor law to avoid the constitutional flaws of the first law.[[]

Connecticut's legislature passed a prohibitory liquor law in 1853 but was vetoed by the governor. The next year, with a new governor, the legislature once again passed a "Maine Law" with a majority in both houses.