

Hello! I'm June Simms in Washington. Thanks for joining us again for another As It Is!

At this time of the year, people all around the world are looking back at the past 12 months. What was good about the year? What was not so good? And what should I do differently in the months to come?

It's out with the old and in with new -- time to make some New Year's resolutions! Those resolutions are the promises we make at the end of the year to stop doing something bad or start doing something good. One of the most popular resolutions is to improve one's health. This may include eating healthier foods, exercising more, or even drinking less alcohol.

In the "spirit" of the holiday season, we begin our show with a report about the 21st Amendment to the United States Constitution.

It was 80 years ago this month that lawmakers approved the amendment. The amendment cancelled an earlier ban on the production and sale of alcohol in the country. It also marked the end of a political struggle that had lasted more than 100 years. The struggle had been argued, in part, through music. Jim Tedder has the report.

Music Marks the Battle Over Prohibition

Many issues captured the attention of Americans in the years between the War for Independence in the late 1700s and the Civil War in the 1860s. They included the separation of church and state and US relations with France and England. While those and other issues came and went, the battle over one subject never let up. That subject was alcohol.

The war against drinking in the U.S. started in the early 1800s. Before then, Americans had been heavy drinkers. Scott Gac is a professor at Trinity College in Hartford Connecticut, and the author of a book about reform in the 19th Century. He says that in the 1820s and 30s, American churches started highlighting the idea that God wanted people to take better care of themselves.

“So they start eating differently. There are people who actually became some of the first vegetarians in the United States. There are people who stop drinking alcohol -- about one in five Americans take a temperance pledge, that is an anti-drinking pledge.”

“The breadwinner in the family was going out, spending what little money he had, and thus creating poverty for his family. So his wife had to work, his kids had to go out and beg on the street, so drunkenness was eating at the core of American families.”

Because the temperance movement came out of the church, many of the songs were sung to the tune of popular hymns. People sang these songs at meetings of groups like the Women's Christian Temperance Union, who would go out and smash up saloons with axes.

By 1900, more than half of American states had gone "dry." In other words, they restricted or even banned the sale of alcohol. Of course, many people opposed the restrictions. Those people also expressed themselves in song.

In 1919, soon after the First World War, Temperance supporters finally gained enough votes to ban alcohol in the United States. The 18th Amendment to the Constitution prohibited "the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors."

But the Constitution still protected people's right to argue that prohibition was a bad idea. And they did. Like in this song from the year prohibition started. It tells how a man used to need a lot of money to get a date, but now all he needed was a secret supply of alcohol in the basement.

The ban on alcohol lasted only 13 years. By 1933, the anti-alcohol forces admitted defeat. The 21st Amendment repealed prohibition, and alcohol flowed freely again in the United States. And that too was cause for song.

For VOA Learning English, I'm Jim Tedder.

And I'm June Simms. Thanks to Richard Paul, who wrote that report.

Now back to those New Year's resolutions. On December 31st, some hopeful person will have their last drink of alcohol, smoke their last cigarette or eat their last unhealthy meal. Can I have fries with that please? At least, that is what they will tell themselves just before the clock strikes midnight. Only time will tell whether or not it holds true.

We took a look at several online lists of the top New Year's resolutions. We have combined those lists to create our own Top Five.

The most common resolution is the promise to lose weight in the New Year. Many people make that their number one goal. Not surprising the weight loss industry is a multi-billion dollar business worldwide.

Coming in at number two is a two-way tie to eat healthier and become more physically active. Of course, the two go hand-in-hand with losing weight.

Spending less money, saving more and getting out of debt are tied for the next position on our list.

Next comes spending more time with family. What could be better than that?

And rounding out our list is the plan to quit smoking. That resolution is one of my personal favorites.

I'm June Simms. Whatever your goals are for the New Year, I wish you all the best. Happy holidays from VOA Learning English!