



# Gentlemen Bootleggers: The True Story of Templeton Rye, Prohibition, and a Small Town in Cahoots

*Bryce T. Bauer*

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During Prohibition, while Al Capone was rising to worldwide prominence as Public Enemy Number One, the townspeople of rural Templeton, Iowa—population just 418—were busy with a bootlegging empire of their own. Led by Joe Irlbeck, the whip-smart and gregarious son of a Bavarian immigrant, the outfit of farmers, small merchants, and even the church Monsignor worked together to create a whiskey so excellent it was ordered by name: Templeton Rye. *Gentlemen Bootleggers* tells a never-before-told tale of ingenuity, bootstrapping, and perseverance in one small town, showcasing a group of immigrants who embraced the American ideals of self-reliance, dynamism, and democratic justice. It relies on previously classified Prohibition Bureau investigation files, federal court case files, extensive newspaper archive research, and a recently disclosed interview with kingpin Joe Irlbeck. Unlike other Prohibition-era tales of big-city gangsters, it provides an important reminder that bootlegging wasn't only about glory and riches, but could be in the service of a higher goal: producing the best whiskey money could buy.

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