

Flapperspeak: Dictionary of Words From the 1920's and 1930's

From the AACA Potpourri website and Mark McCutcheon's
Writer's Guide To Everyday Life From Prohibition Through World War II.

Ab-so-lute-ly – affirmative

All six, hit on – to hit on all six cylinders, 100% percent performance

All wet - describes an erroneous idea or individual, as in, "he's all wet."

And how - I strongly agree!

And howl – emphatic response like, “You said it!”

Applesauce- an expletive same as horsefeathers, As in "Ah applesauce!"

Attaboy - well done!; also Attagirl!

Baby - sweetheart. Also denotes something of high value or respect.

Baby vamp – attractive female usually used by college boys – other terms include: angel, thrill, bird, live one, peach, choice bit of calico, sweet patootie, panic

Balled Up - confused, messed up

Baloney - nonsense!

Bank's Closed - no kissing or making out - i.e. - "Sorry, Mac, the bank's closed."

Barb – college student that was not part of a fraternity

Barleycorn, John – popular personification of bootleg alcohol – this term was used throughout Prohibition

Barrel House – illegal alcohol distillation plant

Bearcat - a hot-blooded or fiery girl

Beat it - scam or get lost

Beat one's gums - idle chatter

Bee's knees - extraordinary person, thing, idea; the ultimate also “Cat’s Meow”

Beef - a complaint or to complain

Beeswax - business, i.e. *None of your beeswax.*"

Bell bottom - a sailor

Bent – drunk, ossified

Berries - That which is attractive or pleasing; similar to bee's knees, as in "It's the berries."

Bible Belt - Area in the South and Midwest where Fundamentalism flourishes

Big six - a strong man; from auto advertising, for the new and powerful; six cylinder engines

Bimbo - a tough guy

Bird - general term for a man or woman, sometimes meaning strange or odd

Blind Pig – place where illegal alcohol was served, like a speakeasy. Blind Pigs had deceptive or “blank” fronts –often were in basements, behind peep-holed doors or in the back of legitimate businesses

Blocker –Southern term for moonshiner or bootlegger

Blotto – drunk, ossified, bent

Bluenose - An excessively puritanical person, a prude

Bohunk- derogatory term to describe a central European immigrant (used from 1900-1930)

Bootleg - illegal liquor also called busthead

Breezer - a convertible car

Brown – Bootlegger’s term for whiskey

Brown plaid – bootlegger’s term for Scotch

Bubs – women’s breasts (used as description from 1900 on)

Bug-eyed Betty – unattractive or unpopular girl, often this term was used by college boys – other 1920's slang include: pig’s coattail, washout, mess, flat tire, chunk of lead, crumb

Bull - (1) a policeman or law-enforcement officer including FBI (2) nonsense (3) to chat idly, to exaggerate

Bull Session - Male talkfest, gossip, stories of sexual exploits

Bum's Rush - ejection by force from an establishment

Bump Off - to murder or kill

Bunny- term that conveys sympathy and endearment for lost or confused person

Bus – old, worn out big vehicle (used from 1915 onwards)

Bushwa – softer version of bull shit also spelled booshwash

Butterfly's boots, the – anyone or anything that is great or dreamy like the cat's meow

Cake-eater – a ladies' man

Canned – drunk, ossified, bent

Caper - a criminal act or robbery

Carry a torch - To have a crush on someone

Cash - a kiss

Cash or check? - Do you kiss now or later?

Cast a kitten – to have a fit

Cat's meow - Something splendid or stylish, similar to bee's knees; the best or greatest, wonderful.

Cat's pajamas - Same as cat's meow or cat's whiskers or gnat's eyebrows

Chase yourself, go -get lost (from 1900 onwards)

Chassis - the female body from 1930

Cheaters - Eyeglasses

Check - kiss me later

Chewing gum – double talk

Copacetic - Wonderful, fine, all right

Coffin varnish – bootleg or homemade alcohol, also called horse liniment, stuff, and tarantula juice

Crush - An infatuation

Daddy - a young woman's boyfriend or lover, especially if he's rich

Dame - a female (term used since 1900, gained wide use in the 1930's and 1940's)

Dapper - a Flapper's dad

Darb - An excellent person or thing (as in "the Darb" - a person with money who can be relied on to pay the check)

Dead soldier - an empty beer bottle

Deb – a debutante

Dick - a private investigator

Doll - an attractive woman

Dolled up - dressed up

Dope - drugs

Double-cross - to cheat, stab in the back

Dough - money

Drag – college dance

Dry – person who is against drinking and for Prohibition

Dry up - shut up, get lost

Dumb Dora - a stupid female also called Dumbbell

Earful - enough

Eel's hips – variation of cat's meow

Edge - intoxication, a buzz

Egg - a person who lives the big life

Ethel – effeminate man

Fag – before 1920, a cigarette, after 1920, a cigarette or effeminate man

Fella - guy

Fire extinguisher - a chaperone

Fish -(1) a college freshman also can be a first timer in prison

Flapper –free-spirited young woman

Flat tire – a dull, insipid, disappointing date. Also known as a pill, pickle, drag, rag, oil can

Flivver - a Model T; after 1928, could mean any old broken down car

Flapper - A stylish, brash, hedonistic young woman with short skirts & shorter hair

Fly boy - a glamorous term for an aviator

Fried – drunk, ossified, bent

Frosh –first year student at college

Gay - happy

Giggle water - an intoxicating beverage; alcohol

Gin mill - An establishment where hard liquor is sold; bar

Glad rags - "going out on the town" clothes

Gold digger - A woman who associates with or marries a man for his wealth

Goods, the – the desired material

Goof – stupid bumbling person

Goon - hoodlum

Hair of the dog - a shot of alcohol

Half seas over – thoroughly drunk also known as “half under”

Heel – scoundrel

He-man - a masculine man

Hayburner - (1) a gas guzzling car (2) a horse one loses money on

Heebie-jeebies - The jitters, anxiety

High-hat - To snub or a snob

Hip – savvy –used since 1915

Hip flask – small container used to carry alcohol, hidden by the hip or in a big pocket –fad item in 1920's

Hit on all sixes - to perform 100 per cent; as "hitting on all six cylinders"

Hokey-Pokey – inexpensive candy or ice cream for children

Hooch - Bootleg liquor

Hooey - nonsense

Hoofer - Dancer

Horsefeathers - an expletive; same usage as applesauce

Hotsy - totsy - pleasing

Hurdy-gurdy – a hand organ often played in the streets

It - sex appeal

Iron - a motorcycle

Jack - money

Jake – all is okay, as in, "Everything is Jake."

Jalopy - Old car

Jane - any female

Java - coffee

Jitney - a car employed as a private bus. Fare was usually five cents; also called a "nickel"

Joe - coffee

Joe Brooks – someone who is fashionably dressed

Joe Zilch – any male college student also known as Joe College or Joe Yale

John - a toilet

Joint - an establishment

Juice joint - a speakeasy

Joint - A club, usually selling alcohol, also called speakeasy, club, juice joint

Kale - money

Keen - Attractive or appealing

Knock-up – get pregnant not on purpose

Know One's Onions – know what you are talking about

Lady legger – female bootlegger

Lam, on the – running away from the police

Lay off – knock it off

Level with me - be honest

Line - Insincere flattery

Live wire - a lively person - wild

Milquetoast – timid, mild person

Mind your own potatoes- mind your own business

Moonshine – bootleg alcohol

Neck - Kissing with passion

Nifty - great, excellent

Ofay – African American term to describe white people

Old Boy – male term to address other men also “Old man”

On the lam - fleeing from police

On the level - legitimate, honest

On the up and up - on the level

Ossified - a drunk person

Owl - a person who's out late

Palooka (1) a below-average or average boxer (2) a social outsider, from the comic strip character Joe Palooka

Pet - Same as neck, but more so

Piker - (1) a cheapskate (2) a coward

Pill - (1) a teacher (2) an unlikable person

Pin – announce an engagement or agreement to be serious by giving or receiving a sweetheart's fraternity pin

Pinch - To arrest

Pinko – liberal

Pip – extraordinary person or thing, sometimes used sarcastically

Prom-trotter – gregarious student who attends school social functions and likes to dance

Putting on the Ritz - after the Ritz hotel in Paris; doing something in high style

Quiff – cheap prostitute

Rag-a-muffin - a dirty or disheveled individual

Razz- to make fun of or take the piss out of, heckle

Ritzy - Elegant (from the hotel)

Rub – student dance party

Rube – hick

Rummy – drunk, alcoholic

Rush – try to get into a fraternity

Sap - a fool

Says you - a reaction of disbelief

Scratch – money

See a man about a dog, have to – phrase to describe “I need to leave now”, often referring to foing out and buying bootleg whiskey

Sheba - A woman with sex appeal (from the movie Queen of Sheba) or (e.g. Clara Bow)

Sheik - A man with sex appeal (from the Valentino movies)

Shiv - a knife

Sinker - a doughnut

Sitting pretty – in a great position

Snake’s hips – cat’s whiskers or bee’s knees

Snoot full, have a – to be drunk

Snuggle pup – teenager term for a sweetheart who likes to cuddle

Sockdollager – knock out punch

So’s Your Old Man – reply showing irritation from 1915 onwards

Speakeasy – Irish word to describe an illicit, undercover bar selling bootleg liquor also called blind pig and scatter

Spifflicated - Drunk. The same as canned, corked, tanked, primed, scrooched, jazzed, zozzled, plastered, owled, embalmed, lit, potted, ossified or fried to the hat

Spoon - to neck, or at least talk of love

Stuck On – infatuated, in love with

Struggle buggy - the backseat of a car (where young couples made out)

Stuck On - Having a crush on

Swanky - Ritzy

Swell - Wonderful. Also: a rich man – more in later 1930’s

Talkies – movies with sound

Tin Pan Alley - the music industry in New York, located between 48th and 52nd street

Tomato - a female

Toot, on a – drinking spree

Up and up – on the level, legitimate

Wet – stupid, unsophisticated also can be someone who is against Prohibition and for the legalization of alcohol

Wet Blanket - a solemn person, a killjoy

Whisper Sister – female proprietor of a speakeasy

Whoopee - To have a good time

Wife – affectionate term to describe college dorm roommate

Wooden nickels, don’t take any – a fad expression of 1920, that meant “don’t do anything stupid – take care of yourself.”

TERMS FOR DRUNKENNESS

Bleary-eyed, bent, blind, blotto, boiled, boiled as an owl, burning with a blue flame, canned, corked, corned, crocked, edged, embalmed, fried, four sheets in the wind, full, ginned, half-cocked, half seas over, half-screwed, half-shot, happy, high, hoary-eyed, jazzed, jingle, lathered, liquored, lit, lit up like a Christmas tree, lit up like a store window, lit up like the commonwealth, loaded, loaded for beer, loaded to the muzzle, lubricated, oiled, over the bay, ossified, owled, paralyzed, plastered, pie-eyed, pickled, piffed, piped, polluted, potted, primed, saturated, slopped, sloppy, stiff, stinko, soused, squiffy, stewed, sprung, tanked, tight, lit, under the table, wall-eyed, wet, woozy