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 - toszy - 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 move 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
Snoo 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, crooked, 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