

Brown County Journal

May 15, 2012

Events:

Pioneer Women's Club
34th Annual Quilt Show
June 1 - 3

Brown County Historical
Society meeting
June 4

Brown County Genealogical
Society - Silver Anniversary
June 12

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Moonshiners in Ole Brown County

Making home brew as it is sometimes called is an age old tradition. It goes back to passages in the Bible, the French and their daily use of wine, and home-made moonshine in the Appalachian mountains. It encompasses many classes of people, cultures, and can be found all over the world. To know a little about moonshining in the Americas you need to know a little about the times that this cultural tradition came into the public eye during Prohibition. Prohibition, passed in 1919 and lasting until 1933, made it illegal to consume and make any alcoholic beverage. Of course it didn't last long, but many didn't want to wait to repeal the law and began to make their own home brew despite the law. Brown County is a lot like the Appalachian mountains with so many hills and hollars it is easy to hide anything especially a moonshine still. The moonshiners in Brown county were far from gangsters like in the movies. Most were poor trying to make a few extra dollars during the Depression. The following stories were found relating to four photos that are in the Archives. It was thought these four photos must have a good story behind them. Let's see what they are.

1920 Moonshine Arrest

Clinton E. Moore was Sheriff of Brown County from 1918 to 1922. On December 2, 1920 Clint Moore was given an arrest warrant and commanded to arrest Archip A. Sirbu, John Jackson, George Stanley, and George Sheta. They were charged with keeping intoxicating liquor to sell, barter, or give away. According to the court paperwork they were known to have two 20 gallon distillers and three 100 gallon batches of raisin mash in their possession. The court papers didn't indicate where the boys had the still or where they lived at the time. It's apparent at least two of them were not Brown County folk.



As for Clint Moore he was born and died in Brown County. He and his wife, Sarah, also owned and operated a restaurant in Nashville for many years. He was a member of Unity Baptist Church and also a member of the Masonic Lodge.

Sheriff Clint Moore, far right, in front of the old Jail - 1920

1926 Arrest

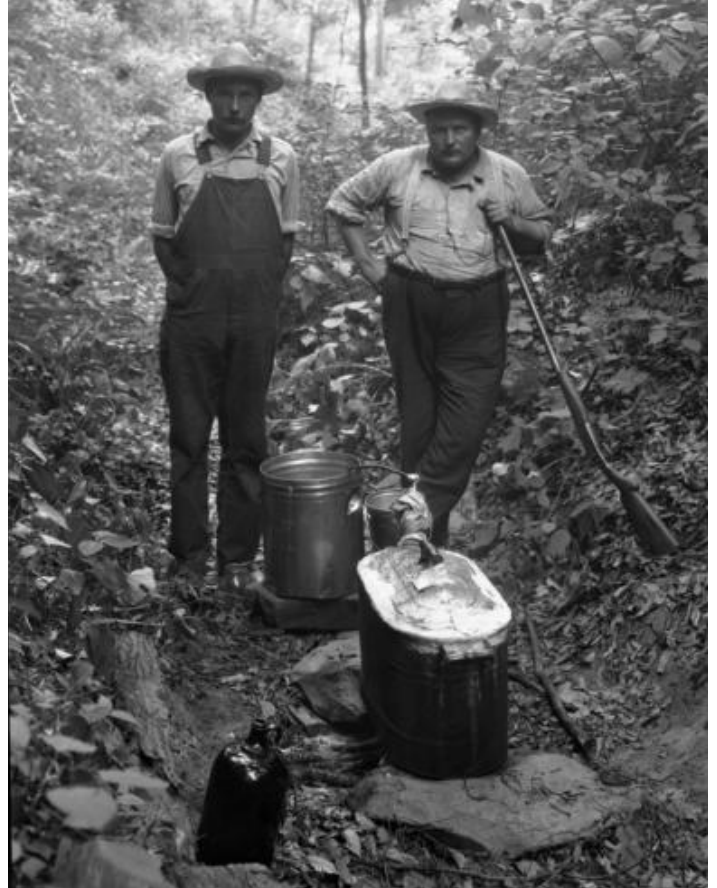
This story is from well-known photographer's, Frank Hohenberger's, journal dated July 23, 1926. The case is that of Game Warden Oliver Neal's arrest of Irwin Mullis for possession of a still. The journal account follows.

I had been wanting a picture of a real still and Oliver Neal told me he would let me know as soon as he located a specimen. Wednesday, July 21 he told me had a still for me we would leave the next morning to photograph it. He and his son, Fred, called at 6:40 a.m. and we were on our way. We followed the Weed Patch road to the old building at the crest and then went over past the old Smith house. It meandered down a very winding road to the right for about a mile and a half. Nothing but a Ford could have followed the road. We alighted near an old shed, locked the car, and started along a very narrow path. Followed it for a quarter of a mile and then Oliver darted off the main road. Here he said is where I discovered the path to the still. "My first clue was some spilled water near the old well." The path Y'd and one had a limb across it.

We sidestepped the best we could down the steep bank, over logs, having a care for snakes. When we came to the first resting place Oliver said, "now don't talk and maybe we can catch the hen on the nest." A little further on Oliver must have cracked a limb for he attracted the attention of the operator fixing the fire. He might have seen my light colored shirt too, for he started to take to his heels through the narrow ravine and just then Oliver let go with a round of shot. "I think I hit him in the back, but don't know for sure." He was asked to stop, but said, "I can't." Then Fred said, "give him another and we'll help him." Oliver yelled again, but he went on and disappeared in the dense thicket. Oliver said he was Irwin Mullis and that he had been warned. The still was about five rods over the State Preserve line. Mullis evidently got home unusually early that morning and his wife no doubt wondered why. The still

was a complete outfit. I brought home an extra coil and we didn't disturb the outfit at all. Water was carried from about a half mile away from the old well. The water in the well was almost stagnant and dark with tadpoles playing in it. That was the quality of water used to make the liquor, which, I must admit, was quite clear after the distillation process. The old well was possibly a hundred years old.

The weather was unusually hot by the time we got out of the valley. Fred led the procession to the old well with the gun, looking for snakes everywhere. He missed a black one at his heels which I spied. He made his getaway and his slippery body was out of striking distance in the twinkling of an eye. There was a bear wallow close by. Oliver was a natural born detective. John Reddick and Hershel Mobley want a copy of the picture. Others would like blueprints of the outfit. Officers hunted for three hours and couldn't find the still. Oliver helped them find it again and put his hand on it saying, "boys, this is a still." Fred Neal, his son, said the operator must have peeled the bark from all the trees in his flight. Dewey Mullis was arrested and gave bond.



Fred Neal and Game Warden Oliver Neal - 1926

This is the final outcome of the Mullis court case on July 26, 1926. There were about 35 people in the courtroom. Jones and Rufus Reddick helped on the defense side. The State didn't get all the witnesses in on time. Squire Calvin decided the State had no case. It all lasted about an hour. The crowd remained evidently thinking the liquor would be divided up.

1928 Arrests

The next account is that of the arrests made by Sheriff David "Sol" Wilkerson and Deputy Sheriff Clarence "Nub" Moore. Wilkerson was Sheriff from 1926 to 1930. It was said that Deputy Moore ruled with an iron fist when it came to the law. When he went out to serve an arrest warrant he would ride his horse out to the offenders home no matter how far out in the county they lived. Then the subject had to walk all the way back to Nashville with Moore right up on that horse leading them back. He had five arrests in 1928 for illegal possession of a still and making or selling liquor. These were just for the year 1928 alone.

May 24, 1928 - the State vs. Phillip Ludwig and Russel Morgan for possession of intoxicating liquor, and they did then and there unlawfully possess, sell, barter, exchange, or give away certain intoxicating liquor to wit: five gallons of white mule whiskey.

July 25, 1928 - the State vs. George Rush who unlawfully and feloniously have in his possession a certain still and distilling apparatus for the unlawful manufacture of intoxicating liquor.

October 15, 1928 - the State vs. Noah and Elma Woods who unlawfully and feloniously have in their possession a certain still and distilling apparatus for the unlawful manufacture of intoxicating liquor.

November 17, 1928 - the State vs. Raymond Stevens who unlawfully and feloniously have in their possession a certain still and distilling apparatus for the unlawful manufacture of intoxicating liquor.

November 26, 1928 - the State vs. Mose Garrett for possession of intoxicating liquor, and did then and there unlawfully possess, sell, barter, exchange, or give away certain intoxicating liquor to wit: white mule whiskey. He also had in his possession one still and distilling apparatus for the unlawful manufacture of intoxicating liquor.



Hill McGee, D. S. Wilkerson, Nub Moore, and Glen Hutchinson with a captured still - Nov. 16, 1928

1931 Arrest

Sheriff Fremont Weddle was sheriff from 1930 to 1934. This was a more well-known case. On May 19, 1931 Sheriff Weddle went to Alex Mullis' home on Upper Schooner Road to serve a search warrant. There he found two coffee boilers and lids and one coffee coil that were being used to make moonshine. Alec was arrested for illegal possession of a still for the unlawful manufacture of intoxicating liquor. In his court documents there was a long list of witnesses. Old Alec Mullis must have been making moonshine and selling it for quite a while. The list of witnesses was quite lengthy and they were: Henry Rose, Joe Robertson, Frank Gentry of Monroe Co., John R. Mullis, Harley Sturgeon,



Rachel Sturgeon, Marion Adams, Clarence Aynes, Bert Bond, Trevie Fleetwood, Dan David, and Oral, Bernard, and Sam Hoy of Martinsville. On one subpoena alone several other names were listed such as Gil Sturgeon, John Allison, Enoch Robertson, and Leatha Robertson. I don't know if he was a well liked man or something happened that the evidence wasn't concrete enough, but the final document in the packet had a Not Guilty slip signed and stamped. It looks like those Mullis boys sure were slick!

Alex Mullis did do other things too. Besides raising hogs he made staves for barrels and shingles for roofing. He was known as the 'king of the clapboard makers.' He also was an avid fox hunter. His wife was Mandy Fleetwood. There are several Hohenberger photos of him and his family at the Lilly Library in Bloomington.

The Art of the Moonshiner

Moonshine, also called white lightning, mountain dew, or Tennessee white whiskey, is an illegally produced distilled beverage. The word is believed to derive from early English smugglers and illegal Appalachian distillers who clandestinely - by the light of the moon - produced and distributed whiskey. Making alcohol revolves around two processes: fermentation and distillation. As with all distilled spirits, yeast or naturally occurring bacteria ferments a sugar source to produce alcohol. The alcohol is then extracted through the process of distillation.

If you are going to make good whiskey, you have got to have a good still to cook the mash off in. From the top of the still an elbow-shaped pipe juts out that tapers down from four inches to about one-inch in diameter. Attached to the end of this outlet is a coiled copper pipe known as the "worm." The worm is looped inside an adjacent barrel kept full of cold water during distillation of the sour mash.

Moonshiners set up near creeks and rivers to assure a ready supply of water. Almost all whiskey comes from sour mash, but recipes can vary. Commonly, the operator mixes ground-up corn meal and hot water in "mash barrels." Sometimes malt is added to help the corn meal turn its starch into sugar. Later you can add more sugar if needed and the most important ingredient, yeast. After two days, the fermenting mixture begins to bubble actively and continues to do so for several days. When the mash quits "working," it is ready to be transferred to the still. A fire is built under the still, pressure is built up when it heats up, and the alcohol vapor rises to the top. It then condenses into liquid as it passes through the worm. A rivulet trickles from the end of the worm into waiting canning jars.
