

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

Moonshine in the U.S. and on Indian Hill

Moonshine has many names, such as white lightning, mountain dew, hooch, choop, homebrew, and catdaddy. It is a beverage of high-proof distilled spirits that is often produced illicitly. Early moonshiners in America were Scottish and Irish immigrants who brought recipes with them in the 1700s when they fled Great Britain. They drank whiskey regularly. *Whiskey* means *water of life* in Gaelic. Early settlers used liquor as a health drink, mixing it with herbs for ailments such as fever, pneumonia, and snakebite. It was a remedy for being cold, tired, or depressed, too.

In 1791 a whiskey tax was passed by the infant U.S. government as a way of generating income to pay the war debt after the Revolution. Farmers on the frontier who distilled rye, barley, or wheat into whiskey protested this tax. The Whiskey Rebellion of 1794 pitted federal agents against Pennsylvania distillers. It proved difficult to enforce this law, and it was eventually repealed in 1802. Some distillers moved west where they began processing corn into whiskey.



Corn was cracked, placed in a container with a sieved bottom, and water was poured over it. When sprouts emerged, they were dried and ground up, then placed in a large pot with hot water, yeast, and sugar. After a few days of fermentation, this became corn mash. Next it was strained, put in a still, condensed to a purified liquid after vapors were trapped and burned off. Then the product was either aged in crocks or barrels, consumed, or sold.

Throughout the early 1800s, the U.S. government mostly let distillers produce moonshine without restrictions. After the Civil War, new taxes were imposed. It was still legal to make moonshine, but producers had to pay taxes on alcohol. In the late 1800s, the temperance movement gained strength nationally. Several states passed dry laws. The Women's Christian Temperance Union (founded 1874 in Ohio) along with Carrie Nation and her followers sought prohibition for the entire country. In 1921, the 18th Amendment went into effect, outlawing the manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcohol in the U.S. But Americans continued drinking and moonshiners continued making booze. Speakeasies prospered and organized crime gangs made millions from illegal alcohol sales. For 13 years, the nation was engaged in the "noble experiment", but in 1933 the 21st Amendment ended Prohibition.

After Prohibition, moonshining slowed in some parts of the U.S., but it never stopped. Farmers made extra income by producing liquor. Even Indian Hill had hidden distilleries. In December 1932, the Indian Hill Rangers discovered a 40 gallon still on Loveland-Madeira Road. It was confiscated and placed on exhibition at the Ranger hut. Nine months later in September 1933, Ranger Dick Valentiner was driving on Blome Road when he smelled corn mash. He entered the home of Mr. & Mrs. J.J. Wheeler. While he was investigating, the Wheelers got in their car and drove away. Valentiner obtained a search warrant and found a 500 gallon still, 3 vats of mash, 2 ½ barrels of liquor and 90 gallons of liquor in jugs ready for shipment. A truck loaded with materials for making additional mash was also on the premises. The Rangers waited all night for the Wheelers to return, but that did not happen. The next day, federal authorities took over the investigation. The still was removed from the property. Then in December 1934, Internal Revenue agents raided an isolated barn on Clark Road (now Spooky Hollow Road). There they uncovered a distillery with 6 stills. Two had 75 gallon capacities and four had 50 gallon capacities. A large quantity of liquor and 4500 gallons of mash were seized and destroyed. Five men were arrested.



Raided Still on Blome Rd., September 6, 1933

Illegal moonshiners were active in Indian Hill almost 90 years ago. Nowadays this liquor has entered the mainstream, as it was legalized in the U.S. in 2010. Yet the famous illegal drink of yesterday still remains part of the country's and the Village's history.