

Photo of the Month

Still Busting Near Bentonville, CA 1920s



Still Busting near Bentonville, ca. 1920s.(Neg. # N010702)

Around the time of Carry A. Nation's visit to Rogers in 1906, a wave of temperance movements was sweeping across the nation. In 1919 the National Prohibition Act, more commonly known as the Volstead Act, was passed making the sale and importation of "beer, wine , or other intoxicating malt or vinous liquors" with greater than 0.5% alcohol by volume illegal in the entire United States. The act enabled the recently ratified 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

As with anything that people want that is made illegal, a thriving black market sprang up overnight. This not only involved the smuggling in of commercially manufactured liquors from other countries, but a resurgence of the time-honored tradition of distilling "moonshine" in home-made stills.

The rural areas of Northwest Arkansas provided not only the traditional knowledge, but the isolation needed to run numerous stills producing bootleg whiskey. At one time in Rogers "there was so many bootleggers," one former practitioner of the art said, "you had to wear a name badge to keep from selling to each other."

This sort of activity was naturally frowned upon by the Federal authorities, not only because it was illegal, but also because the trade provided no way for the government to collect taxes on it! Federal agents, assisted often reluctantly by local law enforcement officers, began to crack down on such operations in Northwest Arkansas and nationwide. In the Ozarks, the lines of communication in small, tight-knit communities usually assured that the moonshiner was absent when the stills were discovered and destroyed.

The Twenty-first Amendment in 1933 repealed this law. But many counties in Arkansas remained "dry" and so bootlegging continued, in one form or another, until the present day.

The photo above, taken in the 1920s, shows (left to right) Willie Graham, Sheriff Joe Galey, and Deputy Edgar Fields destroying a still near the Missouri border north of Bentonville.

