

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS Colloquy

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“Illicit Distillation of Liquors—How the Article Is Carried to the Southern Market,”
Harper's Weekly, December 7, 1867.

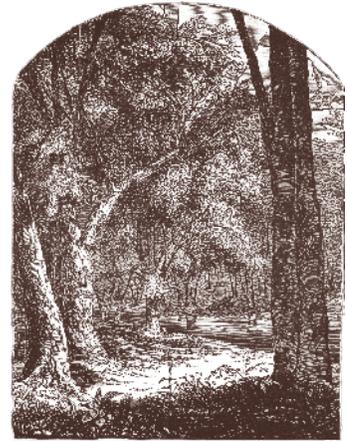
“Corn from a Jar”

MOONSHINE PRODUCTION IN THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS

Nothing evokes romantic stirrings of pioneer life in the Great Smoky Mountains more than tales of mountaineer moonshiners. It is perhaps more than just incidental that many of the well-known inhabitants of the mountains, those who are now the stuff of Smoky Mountain legends, were either bear hunters, moonshiners, or both. The escapades of the moonshiners appealed to the outsiders' sense of adventure, particularly the outward exercise of fierce, rugged defiance in the face of any authority who attempted to interfere with a quaint cultural custom that had been passed down through the family clans for many generations.

In the Smoky Mountains, moonshiners were that class of mountaineers who made a part of their living manufacturing spirits by moonlight in the hidden coves and caves of the mountains to evade taxes levied by the United States government. For the government, moonshining was a matter of lost revenue; for the Smoky mountaineer, it was a matter of simple economics. Wages in the Smoky backwoods were low. A good farmhand could be hired for fifty cents a day. The tax on a gallon of moonshine was ninety cents. If a moonshiner could produce just one gallon of his “mountain dew” each evening, he could employ a farm hand to do his hard work while he could spend his days hunting and fishing, still having forty cents to pocket. The forty cents could be accumulated to meet local property tax obligations which the mountaineers had no objection to paying.

(continued on page 2)



“Desirable Locality for a Moonshine Distillery.” George Wesley Atkinson.
After the Moonshiners, 1881.

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Corn from a Jar, continued

Smoky Mountain moonshine was made from corn which, in a backwoods market economy, was essentially worthless in its raw form. The expense of storing and transporting a bulk agricultural commodity out of the mountains was greatly outweighed by the revenue that could be generated by reducing the corn to its liquid form and sealing it in a jar, thus increasing the monetary value of the corn as well as making it considerably easier to transport. In a pioneering economy like that of the Smokies, moonshining was often the only source of cash income for the mountaineer.

The primary requisite for a moonshine still is a good stream of cold water. A spring is preferable because its temperature does not rise in hot weather and it is absolutely essential to have cold water to distill the “dew” condensate. The second requisite is seclusion. The Smokies afforded the mountaineers countless hollows isolated in deep, inaccessible reaches, hidden by thickets of rhododendron on all sides with a cold spring and plenty of firewood nearby. Furthermore, because the surrounding hills are so high, smoke from the fire used in heating the mash is dissipated into the atmosphere before it rises above the summits of the mountains, often making it difficult for the revenuers to locate a still from the smoke trail.

Moonshine, like any other sour mash whiskey, is made by soaking the mash in boiling water, allowing it to pass through a state of fermentation in which the alcohol is first developed. Corn was the Smoky mountaineer’s main staple of mash because it was cheap, sufficiently hardy to be grown on steep mountain slopes, and could easily be ground in a crude tub mill. Mountaineers exhibited great variations in the process by which they fermented the mash, some allowing the corn first to sprout in water warmed by the sun, while others committed the corn more immediately to the boiling water.



Successful raid on a still in Knox County. (PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM THOMPSON)



“Illicit Distillation of Liquors—Southern Mode of Making Whiskey,”
Harper’s Weekly, December 7, 1867.

The romantic image of the lone Smoky mountaineer huddled under a hastily-assembled pole lean-to hidden in some inaccessible ravine and tending to his crude handmade still is a fairly accurate reflection of the pioneer craftsman. In the still, a vapor is produced by boiling the fermented mash. The vapor is passed through coiled copper tubing known as the “worm.” The worm is submerged in cold water flowing from the spring. The coldness condenses the vapor into a fluid which is, in fact, the moonshine. The practiced art of the Smoky Mountain moonshiner, who did not use a thermometer and heated the still with kindling, was that of keeping the heat above 176 degrees, the temperature at which the alcohol evaporated, but below 212 degrees, temperature at which the water in the mash would evaporate.

Perhaps the most famous Smoky Mountain moonshiner was Quill Rose of Eagle Creek. Wilbur Zeigler and Ben Grosscup visited Quill Rose and in the early 1880s and included stories of him in *The Heart of the Alleghanies or Western North Carolina* (1883). Quill later figured in John Preston Arthur’s *Western North Carolina: A History* (1914) and Horace Kephart’s *Our Southern Highlanders* (1913). Quill’s motto was “never get ketched.” He got “ketched” once and standing before the judge he was asked if he ever aged his moonshine. Quill responded, “I kept some for a whole week one time and I could not tell that it was one bit better than when it was fresh and new.”

George Wesley Atkinson’s *After the Moonshiners by One of the Raiders: A Book of Thrilling, Yet Truthful Narratives* (1881) is one of the best accounts of the early moonshiners. Atkinson was a “revenuer,” and his book is filled with reliable information on the art of moonshine production as well as exciting stories about moonshine raids in places like Chestnut Flats, the outlier district of Cades Cove. From Atkinson’s book to the recent autobiography *Me and My Likker* by local moonshine legend Popcorn Sutton, moonshining remains a salient theme in Smoky Mountain lore.

Corn from a Jar, continued

Moonshine Recipe

To make the moonshine, father took a peck of shelled corn and put it in a cotton flour sack. He poured warm water over the corn to wet it, then put the sack in a warm, dark place. Several times a day he wet the corn with warm water. In three or four days the corn sprouted but he let it get about two inches before he spread it out flat to dry. After the sprouted corn was dry, he ground it up in the meat grinder and added it to twenty-five pounds of cornmeal and twenty-five pounds of sugar. He boiled water and mixed the dry ingredients into a mush—which he called a mash. After letting the mixture cool down, he added one-third pound of yeast to a gallon of lukewarm water and poured this into the container of mash. Last of all he added water to make thirty gallons of mash.

From: *More than Moonshine: Appalachian Recipes and Recollections*, by Sidney Saylor Farr, ©1983. Reprinted by permission of the University of Pittsburgh Press.

Wondering what to do with moonshine once you have it?

Try these recipes.

Moonshine Pie

<i>Mix:</i>	<i>Then add:</i>
1 c. brown sugar	1 ¼ of sweet [whole] milk
5 tbs. flour	2 tbs. butter
Dash of salt	

Cook in double boiler until thick as custard.

Add:
2 beaten egg yolks
1 tbs. Moonshine [or whiskey or 1 teas. vanilla extract]

Beat 2 egg whites until stiff and add to custard mixture. Put into baked pie crust and decorate with nut-halves, if desired.

From: *Southern Appalachian Mountain Cookbook: Rare Time-Tested Recipes for the Blue Ridge and Great Smoky Mountains*, edited by Ferne Shelton, 1964.

"Pappy's Recipe" for Cough Medicine

Made only the Fall.
Mullein [a wild plant, *Verbascum Thapsus*] handful washed
Wild cherry bark cut off of the north side of the tree, a handful
Cook in 1 quart of water for about 30 minutes then strain.
Add 1 pint moonshine.
Add honey to taste.

From: Nell Johnson. Submitted by Marie Johnson. *Recipes, Remedies & Rumors*, Vol. II, 2002. Reprinted by permission of the Cades Cove Preservation Association.

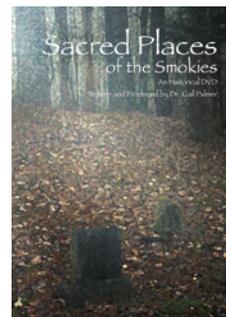
New on the Smokies Bookshelf

Sacred Places of the Smokies, by Dr. Gail Palmer.

FORMAT: DVD. LENGTH: 30 minutes.

ORDER: www.smokymountainpublishers.com

Dr. Palmer, retired University of Tennessee professor, has turned her extensive research on graveyards in the Smokies into an entertaining and educational media presentation. The graves vary from elaborately-commemorated spots in manicured cemeteries to barely-noticeable depressions marked by illegible headstones of slate in tangled undergrowth. They tell not only of isolation and hardship, but also of love and revenge, romance and loneliness, friendship and murder.



The DVD offers a glimpse into the culture and peculiarities of the mountaineers thorough vignettes on individuals who lived and died in the Smokies. Here one is introduced to Sophie Campbell, a Gatlinburg woman who smoked clay pipes, Turkey George Palmer who was nearly killed by flock of turkeys, Black Bill Walker who sired twenty-six children with one wife and several lady friends, and Jesse R. Palmer, a noted Smoky Mountain bear hunter who insisted on being buried in a metal casket for fear of being exhumed by revenge-seeking bears.

There are no less that 152 cemeteries within the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. *Sacred Places of the Smokies* is not only an introduction to these cemeteries, but an invitation to go, seek, and find the stories behind the stones.

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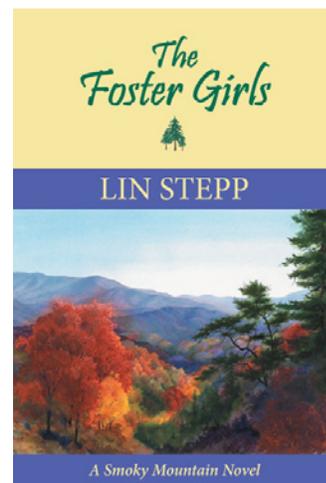
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Lilley, Kathryn. *A Killer Workout: A Fat City Mystery*. Signet, 2008.

Ross, JoAnn. *Out of the Mist*. Pocket Books, 2008.

Saperstein, David and George Samerjan. *A Christmas Passage*. Kensington, 2008.

Stepp, Linn. *Foster Girls: A Smoky Mountain Novel*. Parkway Publishers, 2009.



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New on the Smokies Bookshelf, continued

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Gratz, Alan and William Shakespeare. *Something Wicked*. Dial Books, 2008. [contemporary story based on Macbeth].

Skurzynski, Gloria and Alane Ferguson. *Night of the Black Bear: A Mystery in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park*. Paw Print, 2008.

Tubb, Kristin O'Donnell. *Autumn Winifred Oliver Does Things Different*. Delacorte Press, 2008.

— Kossack, Steve, Tim Bloomquist, and Mike MEDIA Vogel. *Great Smoky Mountains*. Professional Video, 2008. Instructional video on landscape photography.

Sutton, Popcorn and Neal Hutcheson. *The Last One*. Sucker Punch Pictures/Arbor Media, 2008. Reminisces and brewing techniques from Southern Appalachia's most famous moonshiner.

— Albino, Joseph. *Great Smoky Mountains National Park: America's Most Visited National Park*. Xlibris, 2008.

Baldwin, Juanitta. *Smoky Mountain Tales, True and Tall*. Volume II. Suntop Press, 2008.

Crowe, Thomas Rain. *The End of Eden: Writings of an Environmental Activist*. Wind Publications, 2008.

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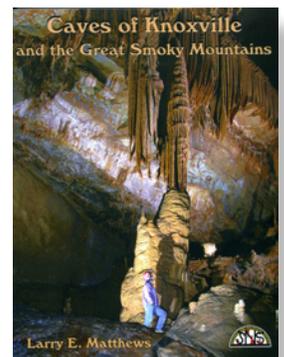
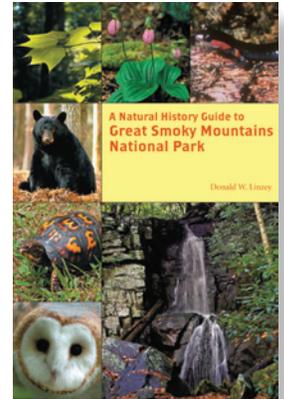
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Plott, Bob. *A History of Hunting in the Great Smoky Mountains*. History Press, 2008.



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