

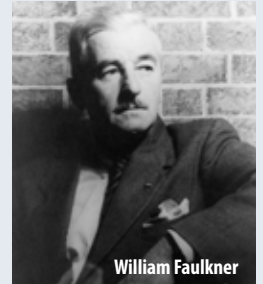
Moonshine Moonlight

MOONSHINE



In the summer of my 13th year, I was introduced to an amazing concoction the country folk called moonshine. *Moonshine!* The very word conjures up images of bootleggers, Dolly Parton singing “Daddy’s Moonshine Still,” or perhaps Faulkner’s steamy novel, *Sanctuary*, with its equally steamy character Pop-eye, and his unsavory past in the bootlegging business.

But bootleggers and steamy novels meant nothing to a thirteen-year old “city boy” who spent summers with his sweet Granny from D’Lo. Once school was out, I was packed off to Granny, and my summer of fun and frolic began. The summer also meant a week or two spent with my great-aunt, who lived on large cotton farm in central Mississippi. The cotton fields were cultivated by share croppers, and many a morning I got up at “dawn’s crack” to help them in the fields and experience



William Faulkner



A river where a still might be found.

the day's toil. It was hot, back-breaking work, but to a boy from the thriving metropolis of Gulfport it was also fascinating. Being what I was, a "city slicker," I was thankful the country folk took a liking to me, and allowed me into much of their inner circle.

Late evenings would find us sitting on the front porch, the country folk swapping tales of long ago, as the sound of croaking frogs filled the air and the sun was nothing more than a lazy orange fireball on the horizon. But one night the tale-telling ceased early. Goodbyes were exchanged and I got ready for bed. I said my prayers and slid beneath the somewhat humid sheets, in the days before air-conditioning. Later that night, I was awakened by the sound of soft whispers outside the house; low, masculine whispers that I recognized. Looking out the window, I could see a trio of gangly young men waking through the verdant-green cotton fields, awash in the silver-white glow of a huge full moon. "Why are they walkin' through the fields at this time of night?" I could not help but wonder. Curiosity may have killed the cat, but it had never had that affect on me. I quickly dressed, and like a curious cat, followed the men through the fields and down to the river. Once there, they walked along the river, which in the dappled moonlight was like an undulating ribbon of sterling silver. After what seemed like miles, they stopped, looked around, and headed down a path into the woods. Following on cat feet, I could see a flickering flame in the distance, and when the wind changed I was overwhelmed by the smell of rubbing alcohol. Little did I know what it meant, but I soon found out...

When the 18th Amendment passed in 1919, it may



Former moonshiner John Bowman, explains how a still works.

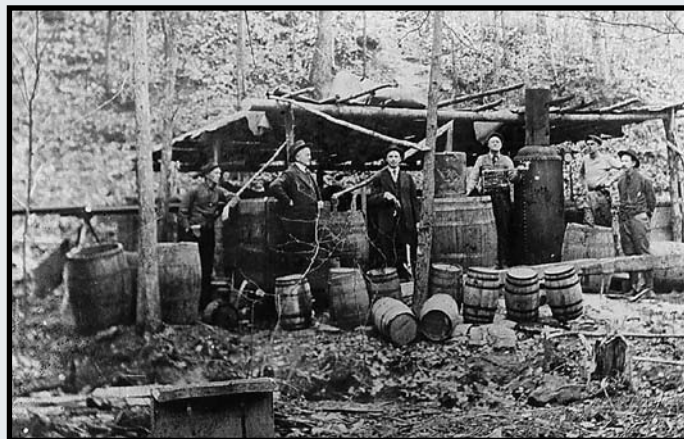
have been hailed as a step forward for the temperance movement, but it sent much of the country into alcoholic withdrawals. And to appease the dry parched mouths of the country, an era, that of the bootlegger and moonshiner, was reborn. Bootleggers smuggled the moonshine, and moonshiners made it. In the early days, bootleggers raced cars packed with moonshine at night to avoid detection by the police. Honing their racing skills not only affected their ability to out run the law, it also created a culture of car lovers throughout the South which eventually led to the creation of NASCAR racing. NASCAR trivia: the winner of the first NASCAR race had used the same car to make a moonshine run just one week earlier.

Moonshine, which the old-timers say gets its name from the moonlight

by which it is made, is created from a simple mixture of corn, sugar, yeast, and water. The corn is ground into meal and soaked in hot water which is contained in a pressure-cooker-of-sorts called a still. Sugar is added and then yeast - this starts the fermentation process. The ground-corn mixture, known as mash, is then stirred and heated to about 172 degrees Fahrenheit - that creates alcohol steam.

As pressure builds, the steam is forced out the top of the still and down a long tube into the thump keg which is simply a heated barrel. It gets its name from the thumping sound the bits of mash make as they drip into the barrel. This process re-evaporates the alcohol, filtering out the mash. From there, the steam travels into a coiled length of copper pipe known as a worm which winds down the middle of another box called a worm box. The worm box is a crate or barrel that holds cold water usually obtained from a nearby creek or river. As the alcohol steam in the worm pipe condenses, it turns into a liquid. A spout, attached to the end of the worm tube, allows the clear liquid to fall into a bucket - that liquid is moonshine, and it is now ready for market. There are, of course, many variations when it comes to making a working still, but the ingredients and the basic design remain the same.

Quality moonshine is very strong, about 150 proof which is about 75 percent alcohol. It can have a very hard taste or "kick," because unlike commercial whisky it has not been aged. The moonshine "kick" is perhaps one of the reasons for the wicked drink's survival since the days of George Washington. Drinking moonshine may have also have been "fashionable" because it was



Busting up a moonshine still.

illegal to make and illegal to sell; its illegality adding to its beguiling allure. Not long after the American Revolution, the struggling U.S. Government started taxing liquor to help pay for the war. The government dispatched agents called revenueurs to collect the tax. This did not please the moonshiners. Their displeasure boiled over into the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794, and controlling it was the first major test of the young government's ability to govern. The rebellion was eventually squashed, but that did not squash moonshiners or their ability to make "shine."

In the years leading up to the Civil War, there were gun fights between revenueurs and moonshiners. The violence escalated as the moonshiner's tactics became more and more brutal. In the years following the Civil War, the vicious, bloody shoot outs between moonshiners and revenueurs eventually led to the Temperance Movement of the early 1900s which in turn led to Prohibition. Over night, legal liquor was unavailable; the thirst of the vast drinking public could not be legally quenched. That led to a whiskey rebellion of another sort - a rebellion whose leaders included Al "Scarface" Capone, "Baby Face" Nelson, and George "Bugs" Moran. Speakeasies sprung up in most every city; those secret saloons and hootch parlors that were hidden behind doors and came complete with secret knocks, passwords, and escape routes just in case the hated revenueurs raided the joint!

Hollywood made a fortune during the 20s and 30s capitalizing on the public's fascination with bootleggers and the makers of moonshine. Who could forget Jimmy Cagney slamming a grapefruit into the face of his mistress in the movie, *The Public Enemy*, or Edward G. Robinson's famous last line in *Little Caesar* - "Mother of God! Is this the end of Rico?" But all things must come to an end, and when Prohibition was repealed in 1933, the moonshine

market almost went dry. Still, the allure of making illegal moonshine continued to be a problem for federal authorities well into the 60s and 70s.

The Mississippi Gulf Coast has been no stranger to bootleggers, gangsters, or moonshine. Ocean Springs was once home to Del Castle, a Spanish-style mansion built in 1925 which was reputed to be the southern hideout of Al Capone. It survived Katrina in 2005, but not the wrecker's ball in 2007 - another

terror finally came to an end in 1991 when he was convicted, along with others, of conspiracy to kill a local circuit court judge and his wife. Two good summer beach reads that flesh out the reign of Mike Gillich and other Coastal gangster types are *Mississippi Mud* by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Edward Humes, and *Dream Room* by Gulfport lawyer Chet Nicholson.

But forty-five years ago, on a bright-as-day moonlit night, I knew nothing of moonshine, bootleggers, or the Dixie Mafia. I only knew that the smelly, bubbling still that lay deep in the woods was a fascination. My fascination soon turned to nausea when I was discovered by the country boys whom I had followed into the woods. Thankfully, they were not angry, but insisted that I be given a lesson on the do's and don't's of drinking. Then came the moment of truth - a big guzzle of moonshine. I hemmed and hawed, laughed nervously, and then took a sip. Whoooooe! My sinuses opened with a gush! My eyes teared-up like a bathtub overflowing! And I felt like I had liquid napalm sloshing around in my mouth! The older boys

howled with laughter as I spit out the moonshine with great force. The taste of that moonshine is something I've never forgotten, and from that early lesson in life, I learned that it's more fun to write about moonshine than to actually drink it.

Please remember to keep our troops in your prayers. May God bless, and keep a song in your heart.

Kal



Anthony Wayne Kalberg
Come visit me at
www.anthonyskalberg.com



er bit of our Coastal history gone with the wind. There was another Coastal gangster element that was gone with the wind by the time Katrina roared into town - the Dixie Mafia. The Dixie Mafia, unlike its more famous twin the Sicilian Mafia, was not linked by family or ethnicity. The gangster-glue that held it together was a vicious brew comprised of bootlegging, gambling, prostitution, and murder. At the peak of its power during the early 60s and into the late 80s, the Dixie Mafia's godfather was Mike Gillich, Jr. He owned motels and strip clubs along the Biloxi "strip," and was a force to be reckoned with. If anyone tampered with his business or hindered his pleasure, they might find themselves wearing a proverbial pair of concrete brogans, while vacationing at the bottom of the Gulf. His reign of