

## Beer and bloomers: Still-busting kept sheriffs busy

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Among the collections at the Limestone County Archives are the jail registers from the 1930s and 40s. If you happen to find your grandpa or great-aunt in that book, don't worry, you're not alone. It seems that nearly everyone in town was arrested at some point back then, for either making whiskey, selling it, or drinking too much of it.

Of course, that meant job security for Limestone County law enforcement, and the county's colorful characters include two sheriffs who left behind records of their forays into still-busting. The first is Van Buren Gilbert, sheriff from 1923 to 1937, pictured in the center of this photo. The back of this photo from our collection has at the Archives has the following notation:

“A group at a corn processing plant near Brown's Ferry. Note: This was a high energy producer, but not nuclear. Taken in early 20s.

“It is said that this group or part of it somewhat vandalized the plant before leaving it. They said it was a wildcat.”

The Archives treasures also include bootlegger log of Martin F. Whitt, sheriff from 1939 to 1947. It begins with: “Took charge of the Sheriff's Office 12:01 AM January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1939 and from the above date have made the following raids for whiskey.”

The first raid came just six days into Whitt's term, when he and his men raided a still near Carriger Schoolhouse. “No one at still but we found 124 gallons of untaxed whiskey and destroyed it all,” the log states.

Some of the other interesting entries (with names abbreviated, of course; after all, this seriously might be your grandma!):

- June 7, 1939: The Sheriff's force and police dept. raided E.P. residence in Booger Town and found untaxed whiskey.
- Jan. 5, 1940: Sheriff forces and ABC men raided L.G.'s place 2 miles south of Athens and found 4 one-half pints of bonded whiskey cached in Mrs. G.'s bloomers. I have thought for a month or so that she had whiskey on her person, so I deputized a woman to search her and she give us the whiskey before the woman searched her.
- Jan. 28, 1940: Sheriff and forces raided Mrs. A.T. two miles southwest of Athens and found that she broke a bottle of whiskey on top of stove in living room but we saved enough to convict her.
- March 30, 1940: Sheriff and forces raided still on the W. place near Cross Keys and caught G. and J.B., destroyed still and 800 gals of beer and 1 1/2 gal of moonshine whiskey, turn both over to the Government.
- April 28, 1943: Sheriff, Hargrove, J.B. Clem and P.H. Sandlin raided the L.B. home in Pleasant Grove beat and found 12 bottles of taxpaid beer in his Ice Box. Also raided the home of W.C. and found a number of molasses and syrup in his house and barn, we picked up a trail that led us to a 400-gallon capacity still with that amount of molasses beer and close by we found 4 100-pound bags of sugar.

These are just a few of the many “corn processors” that Whitt put out of business, at least temporarily. You can check out the log at the Archives if you want to see more.