

Silas Anderson
Upper Cumberland Revenue Agent
Compiled by Sue Russell

During an interview with Eugene Boles, a long-time resident of Clay County, I asked him if he had known any revenueurs. Without hesitation, he replied, "Silas Anderson." In searching for more information about Anderson, I came across two main sources. One, Audrey June (Denny) Lambert, shares, on her website, the exploits of her ancestor, Luke Denny who told his story to Dr. Stony Merriman in his book, *Midnight Moonshine Rendezvous, Secrets of Luke Alexander Denny's moonshine running adventures: 1930s-1960s*. Mr. Denny, a moonshine runner, had many encounters with Silas Anderson. The other source is a 3-part series, *Paul and Silas*, which was written by reporter Elmer Hinton, and was printed in the Tennessean in their Sunday Magazine in 1954. This article contains information from both sources, with their approval.

Silas Anderson was born in 1901, the son of a Deputy US Marshall and former sheriff of Dekalb County. Silas attended college at what was then Tennessee Polytechnic Institute and was a teacher/coach in Algood for several years. He began his law enforcement career in the late 1920s as a transporter of prisoners for the Marshall Service. He soon became a prohibition agent and later a federal revenue agent serving with the U. S. Alcohol Tax Unit, based in Cookeville, from 1954 until he retired in 1965. His partner for part of that time was Paul Knowles. Their territory was the 10-county district of the Upper Cumberland.

Both men were well educated, well trained, well paid, family men; a new generation of agents working under a new set of standards designed to avoid the past violent clashes between moonshiners and revenueurs. Those standards embraced fairness, trust, and respect in dealing with their adversaries. As Silas told the Tennessean reporter, "Treat them like human beings, never lie on them to make a case in court, be firm but fair with them and they'll respect you for it." That did not mean the agents didn't work hard at catching the shiners or that the shiners didn't work hard at avoiding being caught. It did mean that neither Silas nor Paul ever shot at a moonshiner and no moonshiner ever shot at Silas or Paul.

Silas was known for his ability to spot a still. As one shiner said in the Tennessean article, "Ain't nothing in this stillin business any more with Paul and Silas prowlin around. That Si, now he can spot smoke a mile away and he's keener'n a jay bird's chirp."

He was also known to be very successful at catching both shiners and runners. As Luke Denny said, "Sicy was clever and honest, too, and I can't say that 'bout all lawmen. Once he got wind you were makin', haulin' or sellin' illegal mountain dew in his territory he got after you, and he didn't get off your trail until he caught you or you quit. It was that simple."

Eugene Boles recalls that Anderson was a good man who busted moonshiners, but always gave them back “a gallon or two” of their shine.

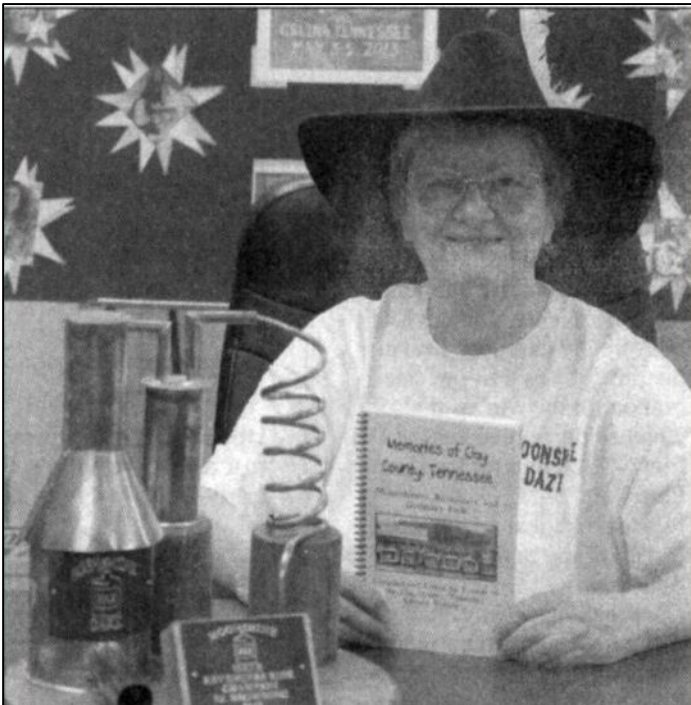
The whiskey makers used lots of tricks to keep their stills hidden. They placed threads and stones in ways that would be disturbed if anyone visited their still in their absence. They varied the paths they used to get to the stills, and they had folks watching the roads for cars known to belong to revenuers. Despite all that effort, most shiners were caught often, usually by Silas Anderson. He got to know all the moonshiners and even their families, and they knew, and respected, him.

When he busted a still, Silas Anderson did not take the operator to jail. He simply told him to come in at a specified time to either make his bond or go to jail. Most operators appreciated this honor system and came in on their own.

The old moonshiner runner, Luke Denny recalls that, “Silas Anderson was the best whiskey still buster there was in this area, period. Even his nickname (Sicy) struck fear into the hearts of many a ‘shiner... and me too.”

Silas Anderson died in 1988, but is still remembered by many folks in the Upper Cumberland.

*See Silas Anderson and Paul Knowles stories and more at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>



Moonshiners in Clay County, Tennessee

Sue Russell of Celina displays “Memories of Clay County, Tennessee: Moonshiners, Revenuers, & Ordinary Folk, Volume 2,” compiled and edited by Friends of the Clay County Library. Selling for \$10 a copy, the books are currently available at the Clay County Library, Chamber of Commerce, clay County Museum, Bank of Celina, Macon Bank & Trust, and will also be offered for sale at the upcoming Moonshine Daze Festival may 3-5, 2013. All proceeds benefit the Clay County Library Fund. Call (931) 243-2795 to reserve your copy or take your chances that some will still be available by the time Moonshine Daze rolls around.

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