

GROUP COLLECTS STORIES ON MOONSHINERS

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By MEGAN TROTTER

UPPER CUMBERLAND — The creation and sale of Moonshine was a way of life for many settlers in Tennessee. It was not only used for drinking, but also for medicine,



disinfectant and even a type of currency. There are countless stories of how the corn whiskey impacted the lives of the people involved in its creation and sale — and from those involved in the attempt to control its creation.

Sue Russell shows off the three books on moonshine that she and other members of the Friends of the Clay County Library wrote for Moonshine Daze.

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“The organizers of the Moonshine Daze — the Clay County celebration — asked us to compile and publish stories about moonshine,” said Sue Russell of Cookeville who was a co-author/editor of the book.

And compile they did. So far they have three books about not only moonshine but interesting people from Clay County. The books are: “Cures What Ails Ye: Memories of Moonshining in Clay County,” “Memories of Clay County, Tennessee: Moonshiners, Revenuers and Ordinary Folk” and “Corn From a Jar.”

With help from Dr. Michael Birdwell, history professor at Tennessee Tech, Friends members learned basic information about moonshine and how to conduct and transcribe interviews. As they interviewed people, their interviewees gave them names of others they could talk to, until the group was overwhelmed by the number of people who had something to add.

“One of my favorite stories is in the first book,” Russell said. “It’s about a deputy sheriff, Jerry Rhoton, who busted up stills in the county. He provided photos from a bust in 1987 when they surprised a man making it in the woods.”

“He talked about feeling a little bad for the people making the moonshine,” co-author/editor Diane Morrison added. “They were just trying to make a living and feed their families.”

The books also touch on things such as folk medicine, moonshine still diagrams and moonshine laws in Tennessee, in addition to the stories and photos from people involved in moonshine.

The book was also edited by Adelaide Stephens of the Friends of the Clay County Library. The printed stories and the audio from the interviews is archived in Clay County, and the group is still collecting more interviews for future books. Anyone interested in sharing their moonshine story can email diane.morrison325@gmail.com.

The authors and editors will be holding a book signing tomorrow from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. tomorrow at Foxleaf Bookstore on West Broad Street.

*Read more about the people of Putnam Co., TN & surrounding areas at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>