

SHINE

MOONSHINER'S STILL GOING ON DISPLAY AT SMOKY MOUNTAIN HERITAGE CENTER

By Iva Butler: The (Maryville) Daily Times
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TOWNSEND (AP) – “The best moonshine you ever tasted.”

That’s the description Charles Mike “Chuck” Williams uses for the product his father, the late Charlie Williams, produced in an underground moonshine still on Carr’s Creek in Townsend.

(450-Gallon Still: This 450-gallon still was donated by Chuck Williams to the Smoky Mountain Heritage Center. William’s father, the late Charlie Williams, produced moonshine in the still on Carr’s Creek in Townsend. The center, located in Townsend, opens to the public).

Chuck Williams, a Venice, FL, resident, donated the 450-gallon still to the Smoky Mountain Heritage Center. The center, located on state Route 73 in Townsend, opens to the public today.

“They’re going to recreate the entire installation. They’re going to have an underground viewing area so it will be in its original configuration,” he said.

Charlie Williams’ operation gives a look back into the past and a common way mountain people got alcohol when there weren’t any liquor stores available.

“It was a way a farmer could turn his coin into money. You couldn’t always sell corn because everybody grew it, but you could always sell whiskey,” Chuck William said.

While many moonshiners operated stills beside streams far back in the mountains, Charlie Williams had a complex operation which was never found by Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms revenue agents.

ATF revenuers were constantly on the hunt for illegal stills so they could destroy them.

“They never came close to finding the still,” Chuck Williams recalled.

It helped that Carr’s Creek is a dead-end road.

Disposing of the mash was primarily what caused moonshiners to get caught by ATF agents.

“You can smell mash for miles. My father stored it in a big tank that was below the stillhouse. He stored it there until Carr’s Creek got up and then he released it into the creek,” Chuck Williams said.

Charlie Williams’ operation did not draw an excessive amount of traffic.

“My father just had a few customers. He was a whole-sale distributor. He didn’t sell it by the pint. He sold it by the case. There were six gallons in a case,” he said.

“Originally, glass canning jars were used, but then the ATF people cracked down on individuals buying large quantities of fruit jars,” he recalled.

“As an alternative we used plastic jugs. Usually they were recycled jugs. My father was recycling way before it became popular,” he said.

The still had to be removed from the 20-by-40 underground room that Charlie Williams built under a utility shed near his house.

The operation had an elevator that ran from the floor of the shed to the floor of the stillhouse.

The whiskey and supplies were transported in the elevator. “It takes hundreds of pounds of supplies to make moonshine,” Chuck Williams said.

It also had running water. “It takes enormous quantities of water through the process. There was a spring-fed reservoir that fed the house and the stillhouse. It came from a spring up on the mountain,” Chuck Williams said.

He detailed how the still operated.

The process starts with corn, which was obtained from local farmers or feed stores. “You had to use very clean corn. It had to be washed,” he said.

The corn was ground into meal and then put into boiling water in the pot to cook. It was then left overnight and the next day yeast and sugar were added.

Then it was allowed to ferment.

“The liquid is very thick and is 12 or 13 percent,” he said. “At this point it is called mash. The objective is to take the alcohol out of the mash and you throw the mash away and you have the alcohol left.”

To do this the mash was distilled and the stream condensed.

From the copper pot the product goes to barrels (called a thump keg because it makes a large thumping, rumbling noise) containing water. The steam heats the water until it boils and the alcohol is distilled off as steam again in a purer form.

It then goes from the thump keg to a copper condenser in a tank of about 5,000 gallons of water. The water cools the condenser. At the beginning it is vapor and when it hits the cold metal it condenses.

Charlie Williams' operation took the alcohol through three separate distillation processes. At the last stage, Williams could adjust the proof he wanted and then decant the moonshine into jugs or jars.

"My father made very good moonshine. When it comes out the bottom of the condenser you have the best moonshine you ever tasted," Chuck Williams recalled.

The whole process from the beginning of the fermentation process usually took six days. Chuck Williams said the amount of alcohol that could be produced from a 450-gallon pot varied, but "my father was very good at what he did. He had a better turnout than most people I knew of."

While moonshining is illegal, that's the way Charlie Williams fed his family. "That was his method of supporting the family," said Chuck Williams, who sometimes helped his father make the product.

Charlie Williams, who died in his mid-80s, is buried on the property on which he operated the still.

He didn't graduate but volunteered for the U. S. Army during the Vietnam War, where he served for almost a year.

He then traveled a lot, lived on a sailboat for 15 years and sailed around the South Pacific. He resided for five years in Mexico and another five in Australia.

Currently, Chuck Williams works casting bronze sculptures.

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