

2014

Independent Republic Quarterly, 2014, Vol. 48, No. 3-4

Horry County Historical Society

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Horry County Historical Society, "Independent Republic Quarterly, 2014, Vol. 48, No. 3-4" (2014). *The Independent Republic Quarterly*. 162.

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The Independent Republic Quarterly

A Publication of the
Horry County Historical Society

Volume 48, No. 3-4

ISSN 0046-8843

Publication Date 2015

Calendar Events:

- **July 12—Saundra L. Parler will talk about the Horry Industrial School and Aynor Consolidated School, at the Bryan House at 3:00 p.m.**
- **October 11—William S. Walker will speak about his book, Down the Little Pee Dee River, Paddling South Carolina's Legendary Backwater River, at the Bryan House at 3:00 p.m.**

The Independent Republic Quarterly

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1928 Prohibition in Horry County

By Philip Michael Sherengos

Prohibition sentiments in 1928 Horry County were changing from their position when national Prohibition was enacted. There was talk of lax enforcement and law enforcement agents turning a blind eye. Yet, at the same time there was talk of the courts—clogged by violations of the Prohibition laws. Juries were blatantly letting guilty parties go free. There was a presidential election that had become a moral dilemma across the Southern United States. “Prohibition was as big a failure in South Carolina as it was everywhere else.”¹

Horry County was a microcosm of the events happening across the country. As such, this article is an investigation into the local events which offer insights into national Prohibition. It is based on an examination of the weekly newspaper, *The Horry Herald*, from 1 January to 31 December 1928.² A collection was made of all articles which were found that mention prohibition and alcohol. The criminal, political and social problems surrounding the use of alcohol was in flux in Horry County and an attempt has been made to capture an understanding of the prohibition issue as it existed.

South Carolina has had a long history of strong regulatory law concerning alcohol. The question hung for many years with changes in the 1880s and 1915. In 1885, *The New York Times* reports that South Carolina was “near to being a model State on the liquor question.” Unincorporated county lands were dry. The people of incorporated towns

and cities could vote and make their own decision as to selling liquor or not.³ By 1891, “seventy-eight communities were dry.”⁴ In 1892, Governor Benjamin R. Tillman⁵ pushed thru a dispensary system legislation where liquor sales were controlled by the state. The enforcement arm of the dispensary system became corrupt and willing to use excessive force against the populace so that the system became a social menace.

“The Law authorized Dispensary constables to enforce the law, and they did so with a zeal and arrogance that alienated independence-loving South Carolinians. Armed with warrants, they searched private homes on the slightest pretext and spied on their neighbors. They were quick to use their guns and even killed several citizens, but they were promptly pardoned by the governor.”⁶

The alienation of the populace existed long after the Dispensary was eliminated in 1907.

South Carolina voted “overwhelmingly” for Prohibition in 1915, a full three years before the rest of the nation.⁷ Prohibition was established across the United States with the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1919. The Amendment took effect on 17 January 1920.⁸ The amendment’s regulatory laws were enacted in the Volstead Act which prohibited the manufacture, sale and trans-

port of liquor.⁹ It was the Volstead Act which was being broken by the participants of the black market in liquor.

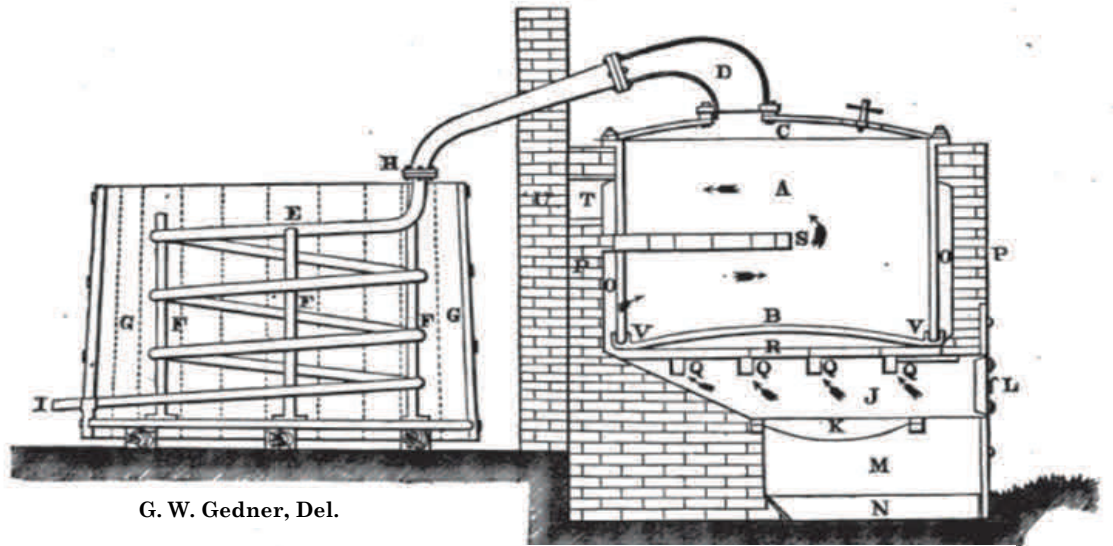
Violations of the Prohibition laws were common in Horry County and were a result of several causes. One was geographic which includes the land area, quality and usage. Horry County is the largest county in South Carolina with a land area of 1,134 square miles.¹⁰ It is composed of swamps, wooded land and farm lands. Horry County has miles of swamps surrounding the Pee Dee and Waccamaw Rivers. Wooded areas are found throughout the county. With a strong farming industry and many acres planted in corn, this main ingredient of moonshine whiskey was readily available.

The large land area had limited police coverage. Only two rural policemen were charged with law enforcement of the sparsely populated unincorporated areas,¹¹ so coverage of the rural acreage was sparse for the well over a thousand square mile area. This may have been a contributing factor to the active moon-shine industry which existed in the county.

How many citizens were involved in the liquor industry in Horry County in 1928? The evidence is not listed for the year but is rather listed for the decade of the 1920s. Edgar reports that "Somewhere between twenty-five and forty thousand Carolinians made a living as bootleggers, moonshiners, and rumrunners."¹² The 1920 census lists South Carolina as having a population of 1,683,724.¹³ This equates to as much as 2.4% of the population being involved in the liquor industry. With a 1920 census population of 32,077 people,¹⁴ Horry County would have had approximately 770 people involved in these black market activities. This is a significant number. It is only with the support of the populace that such involvement could be tolerated. One explanation is that, over a long period of time, a cultural norm of resisting and disregarding Prohibition laws had developed for many "as normally law-abiding citizens flouted the law."¹⁵

A still is a machine for the distillation of alcohol. A

mixture of 'mash', composed of corn meal, sugar, water, yeast and malt, is fermented and then heated in the still. The condensed vapor is the moonshine. A simple still is pictured below.



Section of Still and Condenser

Diagram of a gooseneck still connected to a condenser (From Gesner, 1865)
www.elsmerecanyon.com/pioneerrefinery/refining/refining.htm (accessed 15 November 2012).

Stills were found primarily in the thickly overgrown swamp lands of the county which served as both a place of concealment and a water supply. Evidence which supports this statement is found in a mapping of some of the locations of raided stills as presented in *The Horry Herald* in 1928. Locations near swamps, rivers and creeks were found. The stills were found throughout the county.

O.L. Blanton was a rural policeman who worked throughout the year of 1928. July was touted in *The Horry Herald* as having been a stellar month when he captured six stills, 121 gallons of liquor and 2000 gallons of mash.¹⁶ How does the value of the alcohol from this bust measure in 2012 dollars? Evans, in his *South Carolina, A History*, gives the 1920's value of a pint of liquor in Greenville as \$2.50.¹⁷ The price of liquor in Horry County in 1928 was less perhaps due to a large supply. The following data was discovered in the article, "Bootleg Gets Great Profit". It gave prices for corn whiskey as wholesaling for \$3.50 per gallon and retailing from between \$4.00 and \$1.50 per pint.¹⁸ The 968 pints in the confiscated 121 gallons would have a retail street value of \$1452.00 in 1920s dollars. The retail markup would net over \$1000 in 1928 dollars. With the value of a 1928 dollar equaling \$13.33 in 2012 dollars,¹⁹ the haul is worth approximately \$19,355 in today's market with the retailer making over \$13,000 in profits. These are considerable sums which shows not only why

bootleggers existed but also that there was an active pursuit of violators of the Prohibition laws occurring in Horry County both in July and throughout the year.

An editorial in *The Horry Herald* calls the laxity of law enforcement²⁰ “under the Republican mockery of enforcement” as a cause of expanding bootlegging operations. This implies that much of the industry was not discovered. The question of enforcement is well worth examining and while this question is beyond the scope of this paper, a look at the enforcement as reported in *The Horry Herald* for the period can give insight. Evidence of active police involvement is found in the number of stills located and destroyed. A review of the paper found that 22 stills were located in 1928. While this average is over two stills per month for 1928, no conclusion as to lax enforcement can be noted. This is a result of having only one main source and needing to rely solely on those busted stills reported in *The Horry Herald*. What the comparison can show is that there was active police enforcement on the manufacture of liquor during the study period.

An example of pride by the law enforcement is found in the classic Prohibition show of enforcement. *The Horry Herald* reports “The pouring out of a total of 105 quarts of moonshine whiskey into the gutter....attracted a crowd of people on the first day of the court of commons pleas.”²¹

Locations of Stills Destroyed in Horry County in 1928

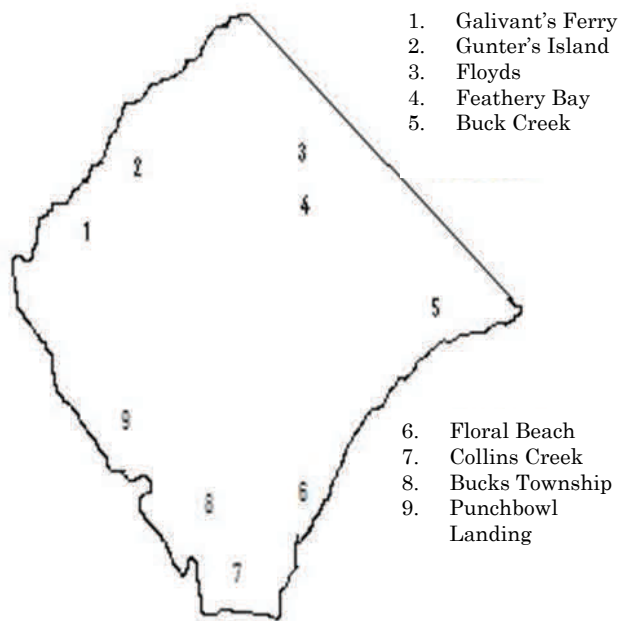


Figure 2: A mapping of some of the stills raided by law enforcement in 1928, Horry Co. *The Horry Herald*, *passim*. 1928

Evidence of retail distribution of corn whiskey was found in several articles. While no speakeasies or blind tigers (illegal bars) were reported during the search period, cars and gasoline filling stations played a major role. Selling from a vehicle had the advantage of always being on the move and, therefore, harder to locate and arrest. One such retailing vehicle was found via a tip leading to an arrest.²² Other vehicles were found with alcohol and were thought to be transporting the liquor out of the county rather than selling.²³

Filling stations were prime places for the retailing of liquor. In a tongue in cheek statement in an editorial, the author says “The filling stations from one end of the roads to the other appear to be the mecca of all those who may need pep in the gasoline tank, as well as pep in the driver’s boiler.”²⁴ With many customers coming and going, any extra illicit traffic would go unnoticed. A filling station near Myrtle Beach was raided twice in a week. The first time, evidence of liquor was found but no liquor was located. At least 75 fruit jars and two empty whiskey kegs which smelled of whiskey were found.²⁵ In the second raid, liquor was found hidden in the woods beside the station. The station owner was charged.²⁶

There were no cases of rum running reported in Horry County in 1928. Rum running is the black market importation of foreign manufactured liquors via boat. Two instances of rum running were reported in the state. The first was out of Georgetown. The liquor was brought into the Port of Georgetown and loaded in a railroad car carrying lumber. Acting on a tip, a railroad car was seized in Andrews with 128 cases and 577 sacks of liquors such as “Bacardi Rum, peach and apricot brandy, champagne, crème de menthe, Irish Whiskey and other varieties of fancy liquors and wines.”²⁷ The second instance was in Beaufort. The liquor was confiscated as it was being uploaded from the boat. The eighteen hundred cases of bottled in bond whiskey had a 1928 value of \$129,000.²⁸ This equates to an astonishing \$1,719,570 in 2012 dollars. This huge amount of money demonstrated the diversity and scope of the bootlegging business.

Strawn, the head of the American Bar Association believed that “Enforcement or amendment and not nullification offered the only possible solution of the liquor question”²⁹ Across the country, politicians declared their preference. The Presidential election of 1928 was a dilemma for those Southerners who had strong views in favor of Prohibition. Al Smith, the former governor of New York, was the Democratic Party’s nominee for President, and was a ‘wet’: a person who favored the appeal of Prohibition. Herbert Hoover, the incumbent, supported continuing Prohibition and was a ‘dry’. Hoover won the election. While Prohibition was not the only issue in the election, it was an important one which held sway over many voters’ opinions—especially in the

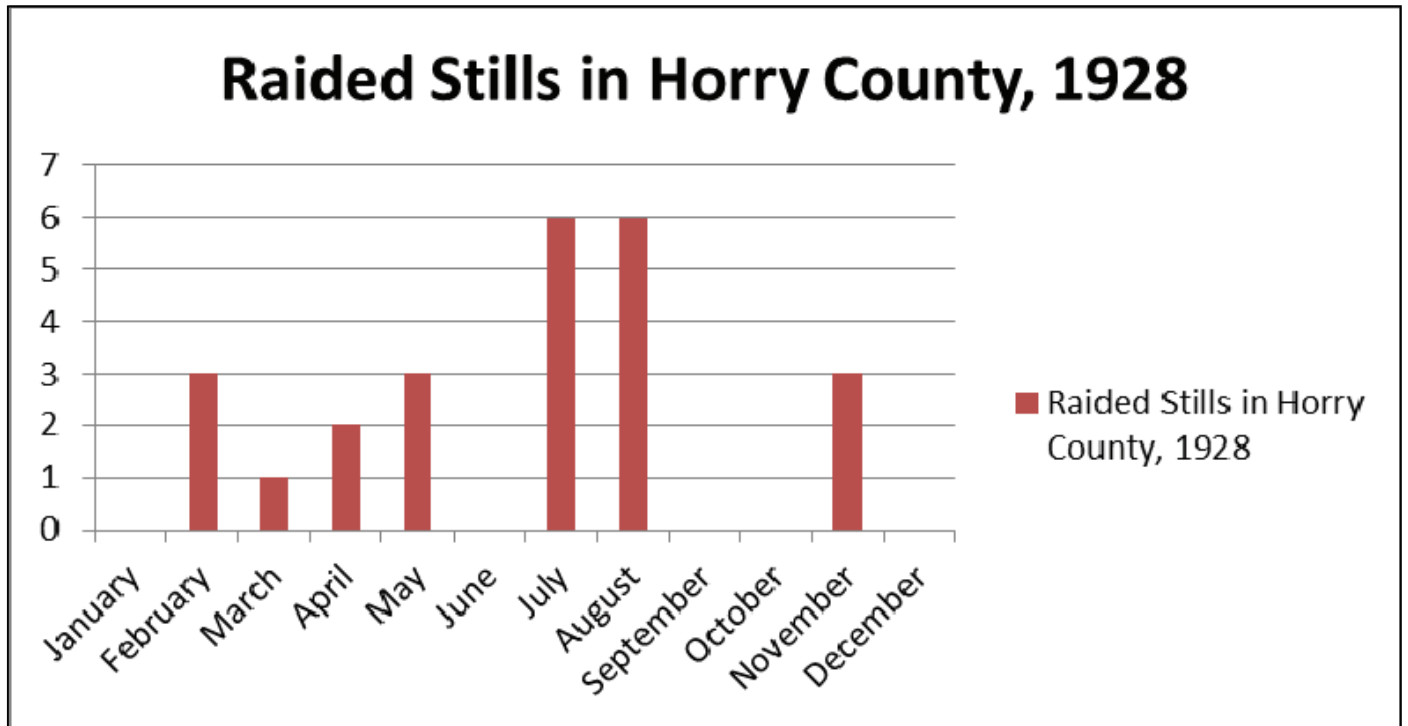


Figure 3: *Raided Stills in Horry County 1928*. The Horry Herald, *passim*. 1928.

South where religious sentiments were strong. Many religious groups were firmly pro-Prohibition. "To keep society safe from the evils of liquor, church leaders, especially Baptist and Methodists, advised their members to vote against any candidate who favored the repeal of Prohibition."³⁰

One editorial calls candidate Al Smith, 'Al-cohol' Smith due to his position on liquor.³¹ His position was paraphrased in *The Horry Herald's* editorial page as Smith's intention being "that, if elected, he will use the influence of his office to bring about a modification of the present prohibition laws."³² This statement is supported by a second editorial. It states that "as Gov. of New York, he promoted and signed the repeal of the Mullen-Gage enforcement act, nullifying prohibition in New York State."³³ Al Smith's northern roots, his associations and his heritage ran contrary to the Southern experience and, therefore, held apprehension for the Southern voter. "Smith was the prototype of those things rural and small-town America distrusted: the son of Irish immigrants, Catholic, and anti-Prohibition."³⁴ The Ku Klux Klan, for example, mailed thousands of postcards proclaiming that the Catholic New Yorker was the Antichrist."³⁵

South Carolina was a Democratic Party State. In fact, there was "only one recognized political party in the state and that, if a man votes in the primaries, he takes oath that he will support the party nominee in the general election." Therein lies the quandary: if one votes in the local primaries, one must vote for "Al Smith or not vote at all."³⁶ Yet, many could not vote for

changes in prohibition for religious or personal reasons and found Al Smith impossible to support. Just as hard was supporting a Republican candidate due to the party's part in Reconstruction. During the 1920s, blacks were firmly in the Republican camp.

Apparently dirty tricks could be played with a candidate's reputation by rumor mongering about associations with bootlegging. One such occurrence was noted. J. E. James, sheriff candidate, was the subject of a front page editorial rebuffing a rumor to that effect. "To the Voters in the primary, we wish to say that anything going around to the effect that J.E. James is in any way connected to the bootlegging business is absolutely false and is circulated by those who wish to still and haul whiskey and for the purpose of defeating him in the coming primary."³⁷

The President of the American Bar Association, Silas H. Strawn, stated that "Prohibition should be considered as a social problem, not a political issue." From *The Horry Herald* of 2 August 1928 in the article "Six Causes of Crime," Strawn lists his reasons why crime has increased under Prohibition. His six causes included hard roads and high-powered automobiles, prosperity, organized crime, liberal judges, apathetic citizens and the unrestricted traffic in firearms.³⁸

The twenties was an exciting time of prosperity and innovation. Strawn said the "vastly increased wealth of our citizens and especially of the criminal classes" created a climate allowing bootleggers and organized crime to thrive.

Liquor continued to be what it had always been—big business. With the revenues from the sale of liquors, bootlegging became more organized. The manufacture, distribution and retail sales of liquor differentiated and an underground industry thrived. In the article “Bad Whiskey Has Its Day”, it is stated “There is enough appearing on the surface [the streets of the county] just now to show that there is an organization of the makers and dispensers of corn whiskey.”³⁹

Governments also had more money. They invested in the development of transportation infrastructure with new bridges and paved roads. In Horry County, many main dirt roads became smooth with pavement. The Kingston Lake Bridge was built.⁴⁰ The Myrtle Beach airport opened in 1928.⁴¹ Paved roads and bridges allowed for faster travel for citizens and criminals alike. Paved roads led to an ease of escape for those transporting liquor. In addition, it led to increases in reckless driving as speeds increased⁴² with the resulting auto wrecks causing injury⁴³ and deaths.⁴⁴

With the advances in automobile manufacturing and engine design, more powerful cars were available. With pride, car companies advertised the faster cars. With a price of \$585 (\$7,798 in 2012 dollars), the cars would be affordable for a successful and motivated bootlegger. Criminal elements were using the new vehicles for the transportation of moonshine and imported liquors.⁴⁵ The newspaper often lists the make and model of vehicles caught.⁴⁶

There was a full docket for the Horry County Court of General Session on 5 June 1928. Thirty-nine old and new cases were to be brought before the judge. Twelve cases, the majority, were for ‘Violation of Prohibition Laws’.⁴⁷ (See figure 5) Prohibition cases were 32.5% of the thirty-nine. Many of the cases had been delayed. Strawn called the “delay in...[the] speedy punishment of criminals” as being “due in part to

the leniency and paltering of political judges.”⁴⁸ This does not seem to be the cases in Horry County. The backlog of cases for the Court of General Sessions was tackled through an additional session in September.⁴⁹ Reported after the June session of the court, the typical sentence for Violation of the Prohibition Laws was punished by three months of hard labor or \$100 fine.⁵⁰

Strawn believes that the “apathy and indifference of our best citizens” has led to a societal avoidance of juror duty. This issue is discussed in the *The Horry Herald* which points out that juries and the courts are exhibiting “a growing laxity”.⁵¹ Juries in Horry County

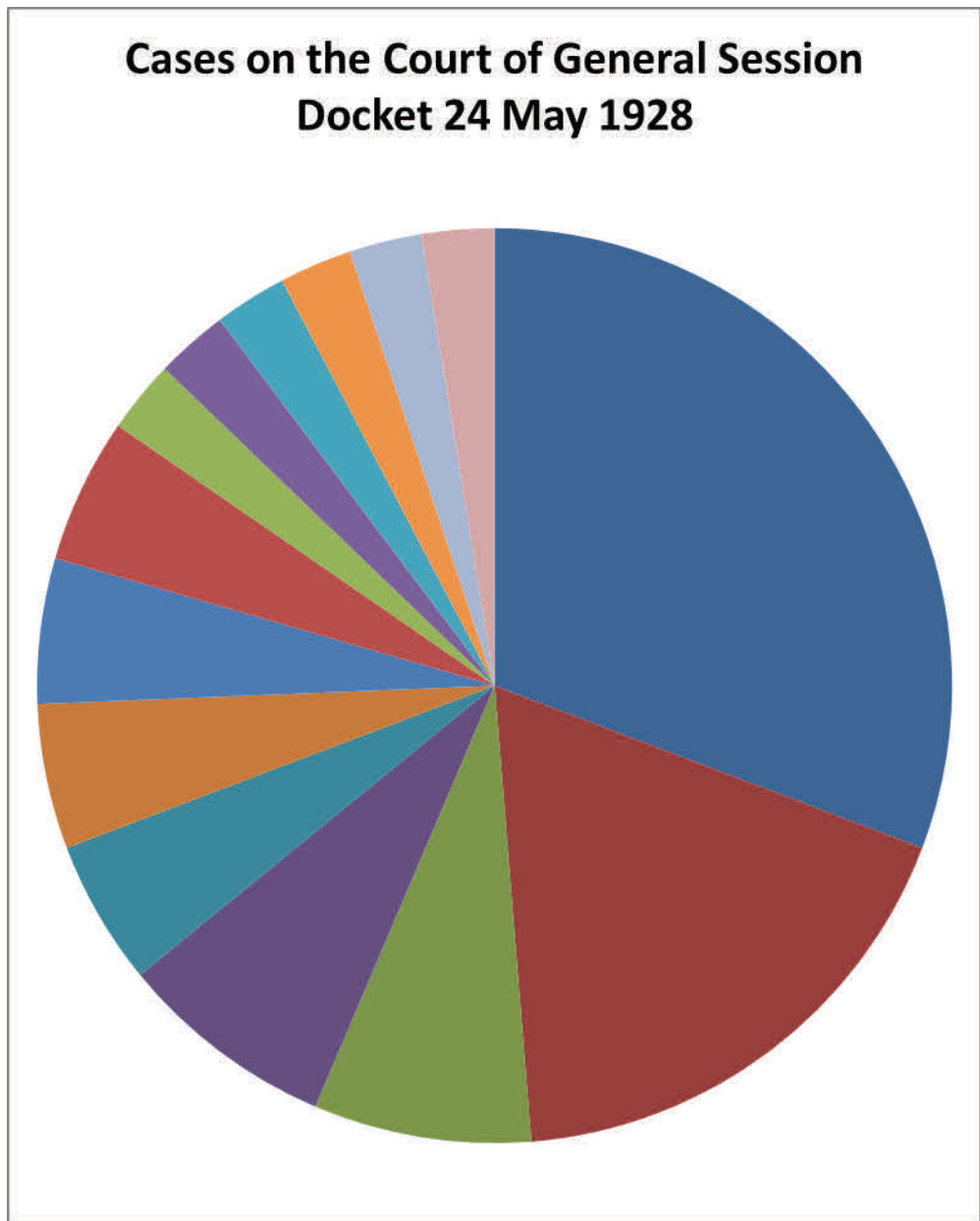


Figure 1: A graph of the cases of the Horry County, SC Court of General Session for 5 June 1928 showing the high percentage of Violations of the Prohibition Laws. “Has Big List Of Old Cases”, *The Horry Herald*, 2 August 1928.

were accused of having been lacking in their duties of meting out justice. "It will be remembered that at the Spring term of the court, several whiskey stillers were brought up for trial and the proof showed that they had been connected with the stills in one way or another, and yet the juries at that term saw fit to turn them all loose." Praise was given to the jury of the September session when "[t]here was no getting off upon the mere word of the persons accused".⁵²

Prohibition in Horry County, S.C. in 1928 was a criminal, political and social issue. The manufacture, distribution and retail bootlegging was common. There is evidence of active law enforcement with the arrest of violators, the busting of stills and the pour out of liquor in the street. Most of the cases coming up in the Court of General Sessions were Prohibition related.

The judges did their best with juries who sometimes did not convict. While "[m]uch of the rest of the country began a decade-long party in 1920."⁵³ Horry County held many who "did not like the new morality of the Jazz Age that challenged long cherished traditional values"⁵⁴ of small town, religious and rural America. This led to a quandary of ideals about Prohibition which culminated for 1928 in the Presidential election. It is asked in one editorial: "How long will the lawyers, solicitors, judges, citizens, jurors and courts of our land continue to wink at the violation of the prohibition laws of our state?"⁵⁵ The answer is that it lasted only until Prohibition was repealed.

¹Walter Edgar. *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998) 483.

²The Conway, SC library has a complete set of the year on microfilm. Coastal Carolina University's microfilm is unusable for the editions from August to the end of the year.

³"Prohibition in South Carolina", *The New York Times*, 9 December 1885. in query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?

res=FA0C16FC345D10738DDDA00894DA415B8584F0D3 (accessed 15 November 2012).

⁴Walter Edgar. *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998) 441.

⁵Walter Edgar. *The South Carolina Encyclopedia* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006) 961.

⁶Walter Edgar. *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998) 441.

⁷Ibid. 468.

⁸en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eighteenth_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution (accessed 13 November 2012).

⁹www2.potsdam.edu/hansondj/Controversies/Volstead-Act.html (accessed 14 November 2012).

¹⁰www.sccounties-scac.org/profiles/horry-profile.htm (accessed 13 November 2012).

¹¹"New Police Takes Hold", *The Horry Herald*, 12 April 1928.

¹²Walter Edgar. *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998) 483.

¹³www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/06229686v38-43ch2.pdf (accessed 14 November 2012).

¹⁴www.sciway.net/data/county-population/horry.html (accessed 13 November 2012).

¹⁵Walter Edgar. *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998) 483.

¹⁶"Record of Month", *The Horry Herald*, 9 August 1928.

¹⁷Walter Edgar. *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998) 483.

¹⁸"Bootleg Gets Great Profits", *The Horry Herald*, 29 November 1928.

¹⁹www.davemanuel.com/inflation-calculator.php. (accessed 29 October 2012).

²⁰"Mockery of Law Enforcement", *The Horry Herald*, 9 August 1928.

²¹"Crowd Looks On At Liquor", *The Horry Herald*, 19 April 1928.

²²"Gets Dodge Coupe", *The Horry Herald*, 2 August 1928.

²³"A Regular Business", *The Horry Herald*, 14 June 1928.

²⁴"Bad Whiskey Has Its Day", *The Horry Herald*, 17 May 1928.

²⁵"Station Man Under Charge", *The Horry Herald*, 10 May 1928.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷"Gets Carload Rum and Wine", *The Horry Herald*, 26 July 1928.

²⁸"Officers Get Much Bad Rum", *The Horry Herald*, 15 November 1928.

²⁹"Six Causes for Crime", *The Horry Herald*, 2 August 1928.

³⁰Walter Edgar. *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998) 483.

³¹"Why Can't Vote For Smith", *The Horry Herald*, 6 September 1928.

³²"Says Can't Vote For Smith", *The Horry Herald*, 2 August 1928.

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³⁴Tindall, George B. and David E. Shi. *America: A Narrative History* 7th ed. Volume II, 1011.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶"Says Can't Vote For Smith", *The Horry Herald*, 2 August 1928.

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³⁸"Six Causes for Crime", *The Horry Herald*, 2 August 1928.

³⁹"Bad Whiskey Has Its Day", *The Horry Herald*, 17 May 1928.4

⁴⁰"Lake Bridge Is Much Ado", *The Horry Herald*, 5 July 1928.41

⁴¹"Airport Will Have Opening", *The Horry Herald*, 16 August 1928.

⁴²"Fowler Now Old Offender", *The Horry Herald*, 30 August 1928.

⁴³"Ernest Todd Hurt In Wreck", *The Horry Herald*, 9 August 1928.

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- ⁴⁵“Ernest Todd Hurt In Wreck”, *The Horry Herald*, 9 August 1928.
- ⁴⁶Ibid.
- ⁴⁷“Has Big List of Old Cases”, *The Horry Herald*, 24 May 1928.
- ⁴⁸Ibid.
- ⁴⁹“Change Coming—Law is Upheld”, *The Horry Herald*, 27 September 1928.
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✍ Philip Michael Sherengos wrote this paper for a History 498 class at Coastal Carolina University 15 November 2012.



Concerned with men spending rent money in saloons rather than on the family, groups like the Women’s Christian Temperance Union supported Prohibition.

THE RIVER HOUSE: A Simple Life Remembered

By Sandra Lockhart Parler

The gentle current of the Little Pee Dee River meanders toward the blue Atlantic, slumbers occasionally in small inlets and lakes, and leaves uncovered islands of sand where river houses have been built. In 1787 150 acres of land which included a group of islands along the east side of the Little Pee Dee River was granted to Henry Gunter for Revolutionary War service and is now referred to as Gunter's Islands. It was on one of these, Black Island, where Harry Parler and his son Joe, my husband, built a cabin in the 1950s for family and friends to gather for vacations, birthdays, and special occasions.

Our everyday world disappeared after we turned off the Jordanville Highway onto the Gunter's Island Road, a single lane dirt road curving through tunnels of tall pines, swamp hardwoods, and cypress trees. As we entered the swamp, the air grew darker and cooler with each mile driven. Without air conditioning in summer, we rode with our car windows down and our elbows on the window frame ready to swat yellow flies, mosquitoes, and even vines that reached in to tickle our noses.

The raw, pungent odor of the swamp preceded the three or four primitive bridges crossing the "runs" or deep areas of the swamps. At first glance a bridge looked as if it were just two "runners," two smooth parallel boards the exact width of the car wheels. But upon closer inspection, we saw that the runners topped large logs carefully placed from bank to bank so that the transition from road to bridge was as smooth as possible. At first I was afraid the car wheels would not fit, or we would drive off the runners, or the bridge would collapse, but I grew accustomed to the clacking sound of loose runner boards and came to trust the

strength of the bridge.

We have become so dependent on phones that it is hard to remember a time when there were none. When we vacationed at the river house, telephone lines had not been run through the swamp and cell phones had not been invented. We could not call a doctor. If the road flooded while we were on the island, we were stranded without a way to communicate. The nearest phone was in a store a few miles from Aynor. Whenever we needed to make a call, we went to the store and asked to "borrow" their phone which they generously allowed.

The dirt road to the cabin went through an area of cleared fields with a farmhouse, the home of Dero Cook, a colorful individual who ran for Governor of South Carolina in 1962, and campaigned as a write-in candidate for President of the United States in 1964. As was the custom, we waved to anyone sitting on the porch and our wave was always returned. We drove care-

fully, because unfenced chickens strutted around both the yard and the road. Dero treated his chickens like pets. My dad who owned a Gulf station in Conway was afraid of chickens. He said Dero often came for gas with his pet chickens roaming around in the back seat of his car.

Harry's cabin was one of four small fishing cabins on Black Island. None were permanent residences. The gray clapboard cabin was built on a foundation of cement blocks, high off the ground so it would not flood and boats could be stored underneath. Nails and hooks held cane poles, cricket buckets, boat paddles, tackle boxes, and other odds and ends. His collection of fishing equipment was unrivaled.



Joe and Sandra Lockhart Parler at the river house.

The cabin was divided into two areas, a living room with a kitchen in the corner and a bedroom with an attached half bath. The kitchen consisted of a white porcelain sink supported by two-by-fours, a gas stove, a refrigerator, and some shelves on one wall. Nearby a large oak table with surrounding chairs was the gathering place for all activities--eating, playing games, and conversing. In the bedroom, a double bed filled the space with barely enough room to walk around each side. A toilet and sink made up the half bath. Since the inside of the cabin was unfinished, shiny insulation stapled between the studs gave a mirrored effect making the cabin seem larger than it was. The studs were decorated with fishing caps, towels, calendars, and keys hung on large nails.

A couple of rocking chairs, some straight chairs, a porch swing, and a glider invited everyone to sit on the porch, to count the ripples in the water, to feel the breeze on their faces, and to absorb the beauty. The glider, a unique piece of porch furniture, was a sofa hanging on a metal frame. It was impossible to sit on it without beginning a gentle back and forth movement. It was a favorite place to nap and was used as an extra bed.

As the family grew, Harry added a sleeping porch out back where ten or more slept. The top half was screened; the bottom half was clapboard. Single mattresses were placed on top of army cots and two trunks were filled with old quilts for cover on cool nights

In winter a small gas heater warmed the cabin. In summer a large oscillating fan attached to a shelf in the corner of the kitchen cooled the kitchen and dining area.

Without a hot water heater, we took cold showers outside and boiled water in a large pot to wash dishes.

When all were bedded down and the last light turned off, we understood the word "black," the absence of light. There were no house windows softly glowing, no bright streaks preceding passing cars, no streams of light surrounding tall poles. I remembered a poem I learned in the tenth grade. James Weldon Johnson wrote in "The Creation" that "...as far as the eye could see darkness covered everything, blacker than a hundred midnights down in a cypress swamp." Without sight we heard the silence of the night, broken only by the rustle of leaves and sounds of unknown animals. We were warm under layers of quilts and slept peacefully.

Raked clean of all leaves, the area surrounding the cabin looked like beach sand. Unlike the beach, it turned black as coal dust when it got on our hands and clothes. Children drew houses in the dirt with a stick and made roads for toy cars and trucks. Straws were twirled in mounds of sand to encourage doodlebugs to



Harry Parler in the river house kitchen.

appear by reciting, "Doodlebug, doodlebug, come out of your hole. Your house is on fire and your children will burn."

The grandchildren walked in the woods behind the house and discovered a pretty place where they buried secret treasures and called it their church.

Harry kept an arsenal of rifles, shotguns, and pistols in a locked gun cabinet for protection from "things that go bump in the night" or things we might "bump in the day," mainly cottonmouth water moccasins.

As the river flows toward the coast, it spreads out over an uneven landscape of depressions where fishing is superb. Harry knew where these swamp lakes were, fished them frequently, and as far as I know never got lost. He read the trees like road signs and the currents of water like well-marked highways. Swamps, he said, were easier to read than a forest of trees because the rising and falling water left distinguishing marks on the land and trees.

One time Harry took me to one of those lakes. The boat was loaded with a gun, an extra can of gas, worms, crickets, buckets, paddles, water, a tackle box filled with a variety of needed items, and several poles. The path leading to the lake took us through a section of shallow water where we had to cut off the motor, pull it up, and paddle among the cypress knees sprouting like young plants in a new garden. At one spot, Harry told me to put my head down. I complied without question. When I looked up, it was not Spanish moss hanging from a low-lying limb, but two snakes with their heads and tails almost even with each other. With a short wooden paddle, Harry had



Irene Bell Blackwell cleaning fish.

quietly moved the boat a great distance with a minimum disturbance of water, a skill acquired over many years of fishing. Those two snakes never knew we were there.

An artesian well in the front of the cabin provided a continuous flow of cool, clear water to drink. A cement and brick basin had been built under the pipe to collect water. I don't know the original purpose of the basin, but we put fish in it until we were ready to fry them.

Perfect circles of sand about the size of a large garbage can lid periodically appeared in a shallow finger of water in front of the cabin, a redbreast bream hatchery. The female laid eggs and the male protected them until they were large enough to be independent.

Family and friends were encouraged to get a cane pole and fish off the bank while sitting, leaning, or holding on to one of the many cypress knees lining the bank. It was fun to hold a cane pole over the water, watch the cork disappear, feel the tug on the line, and pull it up to discover what was on the end of the line. Surprisingly, little fish would eat the worm off the hook without getting caught. We kept fish bigger than our hands and threw smaller ones back. We told children that they had to be quiet and still when they were fishing, but they talked loudly, slapped their poles in the water and amazingly caught fish anyway.

A story is told about the "Missus," as her husband called her, who occasionally came to one of the cabins and could not swim but loved to fish. To keep her safe, the "Mister" tied her to one of the cypress trees and gave her a cane pole and a bucket of bait. Content, she

fished for hours.

Hanging from nails around the porch were live crickets in wire cages and live worms in buckets of moist dirt. I preferred worms. I held the worm in my right hand, the hook in the left, folded the worm in half and gently pushed it on the hook so that it was attached in two places. The worm still wiggled so that fish would be attracted to it. Harry said fish would not bite dead bait.

Joe's grandmother, Irene Bell Blackwell, took her great grandchildren, Jean and Mary, on walks through the woods in search of blackberries and huckleberries so she could make blackberry jelly and huckleberry pie. She made huckleberry pie without a recipe and with just three ingredients—enough huckleberries to make a pie, enough sugar to make juice, and enough flour to thicken the juice. Years of experience and an innate ability allowed her to define "enough" with precision. I observed the process and estimate that for a ten-inch pie she mixed three cups of huckleberries, one cup of sugar and two tablespoons of flour. The mixture was put in an unbaked pie crust, topped it with another pie crust, and baked at 350 degrees for about one hour. The pie plate was placed on a larger pan so that the juices would not bubble out of the pie and spill in the oven. Irene said blackberries had natural acid, so you could make jelly without adding Pectin, an ingredient to make it jell. Blackberries were put in a large pot, covered with about one inch of sugar and allowed to sit at room temperature overnight or most of the day until it developed juice. Then she boiled it gently, watching so that it did not spill over the top. Seeds were strained out of the jelly by using a cheesecloth, then poured while still hot into sterilized baby food jars, and sealed with paraffin. Smooth blackberry jelly was sweet with a little tartness. Lip licking good on biscuits or toast!

Two essentials for frying fish were a gas cooker and a collection of cast iron cookware. Cast iron retained heat well and could be heated to a high temperature without cracking or warping. A cast iron pan was never washed with soap, just rinsed with clean water and dried with a paper towel. Before using it again, it would be sanitized by heating it on a gas flame.

Others have said, and I agree, that the best fresh water fish are the redbreast bream from the Little Pee Dee River. We fished specifically for redbreast by using the proper size line, hook, sinker, cork, and bait. However, occasionally Harry fished for catfish and made a delicious stew by boiling catfish with potatoes and onions.

He taught us how to clean and cook fish. Cleaning looked so easy when he did it. With just one small sharp knife, he scraped off the scales, cut off the head, made a triangular cut at the anus and sliced from there all

the way to the head, cleaned out the inside organs, rinsed it clean and then dried the fish with a paper towel. Seasoned with salt and pepper and coated with cornmeal, the fish were dropped in hot peanut oil. When browned on both sides, they were drained on brown paper bags.

Harry bragged that he could teach anybody how to eat fish without swallowing bones. He held the fish in one hand, pulled the dorsal fin out, and then gently peeled the white flesh from both sides of the bones, leaving the fish skeleton completely intact.

French fries and hush puppies were fried in the hot grease after the fish were cooked. With the addition of slaw, sliced tomatoes, corn on the cob, sliced bread, and sweet tea made with artesian water, the meal was completed.

We ate fish around a unique outdoor table made from a big, old metal Esso sign retrieved from the trash. Harry retired from Exxon after forty years of service and often bragged that he worked for three companies without changing jobs--Standard Oil, Esso, and Exxon.

Each time we went out in a motor boat, Harry reminded us to go upstream. If the motor quit, he said, we could easily return home with the aid of the downstream current. This was commonsense, but just one thing we all remembered because we heard it so often. We valued his advice and were happy to have him teach us about the natural environment.

Although the road may be paved, the bridges made of concrete, and the cabin finished out and in, the tranquility and beauty of the Little Pee Dee does not change. Neither does the life of the fishermen whose knowledge of fishing has been passed from generation to generation.

Biographical Note:

Thomas Harry Parler, (July 28, 1913-November 13, 1996), an avid hunter and fisherman, lived in Conway and was a salesman for Exxon. The river house was his favorite retreat and where his wife, Mary Locke Blackwell, chose to spend her last days when she was dying of cancer. After her death in 1973, the cabin was sold. He later married Juanita Causey Long.

☞ *Sandra Lockhart Parler is married to James Joseph Parler and has one daughter and two grandsons. A son died at age 23 in a car accident. In 1998, she retired from Horry County Schools as an Administrator of Special Education at the Center for Exceptional Education and in the District Office where she specialized in the Preschool Program for Children for Disabilities. She graduated from Conway High School, Winthrop College, and the University of South Carolina. She is a member of and supports the activities of*

Trinity United Methodist Church, Horry County Historical Society, Daughters of the American Revolution, and Theatre of the Republic.

Dero Cook: The Perennial Candidate

By V. Chyrel Stalvey

Dero Cook (13 August 1903 – 21 January 1983), an Horry County lumberman, lived in the Gunter's Islands section. He ran as a Democrat for governor of South Carolina in 1962, a write-in candidate for president of the United States in 1964, governor of South Carolina again in 1966 but switched to run for Lieutenant Governor instead, and also ran for Horry County sheriff. With little or no tabulated votes, he was never taken seriously in his attempts to be elected. However, he was colorful by nature and enlivened the contests.

His platform was legalized bars and pari-mutuel horse and dog betting. While expounding his platform, he said, "I want to let the young people do the twist under the bright lights and not somewhere out in the woods among a bunch of broken bottles and empty beer cans."

In the 1962 race, one of his opponents was the Rev. Mr. Milton Dukes. Their lively debates were called the "Dukes and Cook Show." On one occasion when Cook was carefully reading his speech at his regular rate, the wind shuffled the pages.

"The wind got me blowed here," he observed. "I need the Duke now," he said, turning to prohibitionist candidate Milton Dukes of Charleston.

After a brief pause, Cook got the pages back in order and again read out his program for open bars and legalized gambling.

Dukes, following Cook to the stand, said the next time such a wind blows he will remove from Cook's speech the sections endorsing open bars and gambling.

"I'll take out the pages I don't like," Duke said.

Cook did win one a contest—with a bear. While traveling in his compact car on his way to make a speech in Spartanburg somewhere between Conway and Sumter, he met up with a bear.

"That big black bear came out of the Wateree River swamp and ran right out in front of my car," Cook explained. "I couldn't dodge it because I was meeting a tractor-trailer truck...."

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And hitting the bear wasn't enough.

The auto stopped with the bear under the front part of the vehicle, and he was very much alive. Attempting to get back into the swamp the bear actually picked up the front of Cook's car and swung it around.

When the animal finally freed itself and scampered off, Cook's car was hanging halfway off an embankment.

"That bear really gave me a ride," said Cook who escaped injury and continued his trip to Spartanburg.

He added that it was a good thing the engine was in the rear or "I never would have made it to Spartanburg."

Cook was a big-time bootlegger. In 1963 Federal alcohol tax agents were determined to stamp out illegal whisky operations in ten South Carolina counties and Robeson County, North Carolina. Cook and 70 others were arrested in sweeping raids by "Revenoo'ers" staging a full-scale knockout war against bootleggers. It was the largest crackdown on moonshine in the state's history. Most of the arrests were made on charges of selling moonshine. Only a few were charged with operating stills. When served with his arrest warrant at his trailer home in Gunter's Islands, Cook came to the door with a shotgun, but didn't seem to have any intent to use it.



Cook made his entrance into the courtroom with a jaunty air at his arraignment, nodding to newsmen and asking, "did anyone bring me a cigar?" After waiving a preliminary hearing, he was released under a \$500 appearance bond pending his attendance in Florence Federal Court on December 2, 1963.

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As he left the arraignment, Cook turned it into a stump meeting and declared that he was on his way to Philadelphia to make a national announcement of his write-in candidacy for the 1964 presidential race running against Democrat Lyndon B. Johnson and Republican Barry Goldwater. With newsmen gathered around, he outlined his U.S. foreign aide program and discussed national affairs.

During the trial, Federal Alcohol and Tobacco Division Agent Wayne Wilson stated that while he was working undercover, Cook offered to set him up in a liquor still operation with Wilson taking a third of the profits. The operation was never consummated. Several times Wilson took delivery of illegal whisky hidden in the area around Cook's house trailer. On one occasion he purchased 12 cases of liquor from another defendant after making arrangements with Cook. Another time Wilson said he paid \$330 for 42 gallons of bootleg liquor. The liquor was stored near the trailer. After pleading guilty to federal bootlegging charges, Cook and three others were given five years' probation.

When announcing that he would run again for governor in 1966, Cook stated that he was willing to run either as a Republican or Democrat. It must have become apparent that he didn't have a chance against Democratic incumbent Governor Robert McNair for governor. Cook said, "I've done a lot of stumping with Bob McNair and I like him. I would hate to run against him even if I could beat him." Cook switched over to the lieutenant governor's race, still on his original platform.

Not one to give up, the perennial candidate Dero Cook announced again in 1970 that he would run for governor. This time he added school desegregation to his campaign platform. Nothing more has been found at this time regarding this announcement.

Though he never held a public office, Horryites of a certain age respond to the mention of his name with a smile and at least one good story.

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