



# THE HISTORIAN



VOLUME FIVE, ISSUE THREE

WINTER 2020



Jacob Thompson House 1811



Fuller House 1869

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings:

The fall open house that took place on October 27<sup>th</sup> turned out to be very successful. Everyone was impressed by our new “hired mans” room in the second-floor attic. It is decorated to appear as it would have during the mid-nineteenth century, very sparse and utilitarian. We had our annual Christmas open house on December 15<sup>th</sup> and it was also well attended.

This month's story about prohibition was very interesting to put together. Thanks to the newspaper clipping and scrapbooking from some of our past Monson citizens, I was able to piece together a time line of Monson's involvement in the illicit production of alcohol. While reading some of these news reports, you can almost envision the Federal agents and our own police force speeding to the locations of the stills and the scrambling of the bootleggers from the scene. I was lucky enough to find some very early records of alcohol per-

mitting in our collection. I hope you all enjoy the article on prohibition as much as I did writing it.

We have a business rental available at 1 Green Street, Suite 4. Please spread the word.

Dennis



- Dennis Swierad**—President, Historian and Genealogist
- Tamara Cabey**—Vice President and Rental Manager
- Leona Brahen**—Secretary, Webmaster and Newsletter Editor
- Kevin McNabb**—Treasurer
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- EmmaLadd Shepherd**—Board Member Emeritus

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Sandra Fuller Personett—St. Matthews, SC

Therese Arbour—Monson, MA

Anne Sroka—Monson, MA

George Mamunes—Suffern, NY

### Mission Statement

To obtain and preserve historical data and articles pertaining to the town of Monson, Massachusetts, and to encourage and develop the pursuit and expression of such interests in all suitable ways.

Visit us on the web at [www.monsonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.monsonhistoricalsociety.org)

Email us at [monsonhistoricalsocietyinc@gmail.com](mailto:monsonhistoricalsocietyinc@gmail.com)

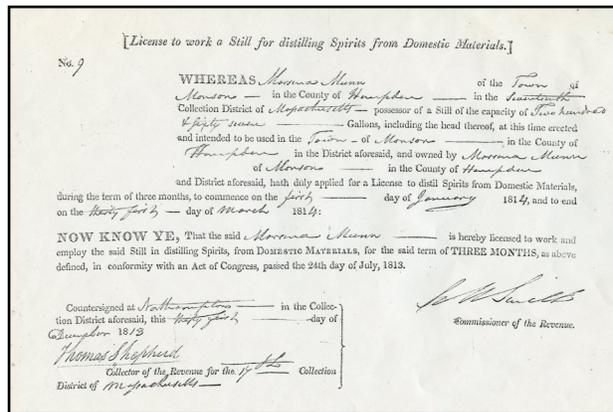
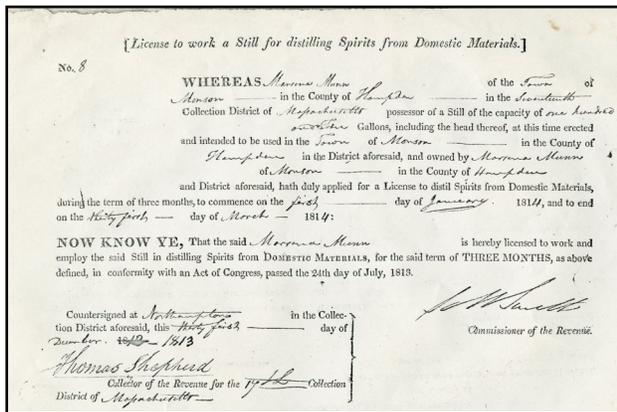
Do you need information about the history of Monson? Write, call or email us. We may be able to help.

## PROHIBITION BOOTLEGGING & SPEAK EASYS BY DENNIS SWIERAD

On this, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the enactment of the Volstead Act, (Jan.16,1920), which ushered in the period of prohibition, I would like to tell a few stories related to it as it pertained to Monson.

Monson from its earliest days appears to have embraced the idea of alcohol production in many ways. The first attempts at its production was no doubt out of necessity in the production of cider and particularly the production of "hard cider". There was an abundance of apples and turning them into cider to extend their storing capacity was only natural and also a health concern because of the sometimes questionable water supply. The creation of hard cider, by letting it ferment longer, was another way to produce a product which lasted longer and could be sold or used for bartering, which was the method of settling accounts in early times.

The earliest record I could find at the Historical Society of the legal production of alcohol were in two permits obtained starting on December 31, 1813 by Marsena Munn of Monson. These permits, issued in Northampton, MA which at that time was the seat of county government, allowed for the running of a 275 and a 110 gallon still for spirits made from domestic materials which I assume to be fruits, berries, grains, etc.



The next record I found was the Distillers ledger book, owned by Daniel Green for the years 1870-1872. This book, which appears to be an official record book of the Distilling of Brandy from apples, peaches or grapes, kept an account of the production and quantities of alcoholic beverages made by Mr. Green. Entries from November 19-30, 1871 indicated that 600 gallons of brandy and 7,720 gallons of cider were produced.



*Cote place, and the officers found abundant evidence that such had been the fact. There was practically everything needed in the manufacture of the stuff but the stuff itself and the still. There was a large odor which comes from nothing else but the cooking of the mash; molasses evidences were plentiful as well as others of the necessities of hooch concoction. There were also indications that a still had been set up and operated but that was all. Cote is a carpenter and works away from the place. He is not accused of making the stuff or of having an interest in the business, but it is said the manufacture was without his knowledge and permission. The actual work and management of the business was in the hands of persons who came to the farm from outside the town. No arrests were made."*

Throughout the 1920's, raids of this type took place often. Our next raid was a step up in quantity at a farm owned on Maxwell Road by Alonzo Tassinari around the middle of June, 1930. The federal agents and state police arrived at the plant just before noon, surprising the two men there and giving them no time to make a getaway. Following the actual raid, the work of dismantling the huge still was started and it was several hours before the elaborate plant had been removed in three 5-ton motor vans. The plant, which was characterized by the raiders as one of the largest ever confiscated in Western Massachusetts, was located in a three-story barn. The stack which led to the cooler located near to the ridge of the structure was over 25 feet long, twice the length of the stack in the average still.

The raid was conducted by enforcement agents from the Western Mass headquarters in Springfield under the direction of J. Walter Bowers, in charge of the local office. State trooper James Lyons was also in the raiding party. The two men arrested were taken to Palmer and were later jailed for appearance before the United States Commissioner.

Tassinari who lives on the property denied ownership of the equipment and stated that he had leased the barn on June 1<sup>st</sup> to a man from Worcester by the name of J. P. Wilson. A Mr. Dasels told the police that he had come from Rochester, N Y and had been employed at the establishment for only two weeks, the time the still had been operating. The huge apparatus, which was demolished by the agents, was estimated to be worth \$10,000 and capable of producing over 700 gallons of liquor a day.

The last article about bootlegging will be about the largest still ever raided in Monson.

### ***"POLICE AFTER LEADS TO MEN OWNING STILL"***

*"Plant of 5000 Gallons Capacity Provides Mystery; Equipment Estimated Worth \$7000."*

*"MONSON, July 29, 1929 – Monson police today were working on several leads in the hope of locating the operators of a large alcohol distilling plant uncovered early Sunday morning in the factory building known as the old Branch mill (located on Elm Street). They said this morning that they had little upon which to base their operations.*

*The distillery, reported to be one of the largest ever found in this part of Western Massachusetts, had apparently been evacuated but a short time before the raiding party descended upon the place. A hot fire was burning under the large boiler and 50 pounds of steam was shown on the gage when the police entered. What alcohol and mash may have been in the plant had been dumped into the river.*

*The elaborate plant of 5000 gallons capacity, occupied the three floors and basement of the structure and included besides the still six 650-gallon vats and two large condensers. It was estimated the cost of the equipment found in the building would be at least \$7000. Police said the operators of the distillery started erection of the plant about six weeks ago but that it had been in actual operation but a very short time. The layout was cleverly concealed, windows in some portions of the mill being covered with sheets of heavy wrapping paper preventing escape of any rays of light. The mill's steam plant was used for operation of the still and hard coal was used as fuel in order to keep the smoke from the boiler to a minimum.*



*The factory building is owned by the Rayon Worsted Company, of which Henry D. Converse of Palmer is the head. Mr. Converse said he had no knowledge of the use to which the place was being put. The plant was leased last fall to a New York man whose name was given as Silverman.*

*Increased activity about the mill in the last few days during which time a truck was seen going back and forth carrying large drums similar to those used for oil aroused the suspicions of townspeople. It was said about a dozen men had been seen working about the place. It was at first thought the work about the plant was in connection with plans of the rayon company to commence operations there. The concern is yet in the formative stage."*

About a week later, after the initial raid, the owners of the still made another bold move.

### ***"Still Equipment Is Carried Away"***

*"Trucks Speed Off with Big Vats; Mystery Veils Removal."*

*"MONSON, Aug. 8, 1929 – The air of mystery that has attended events in connection with the raid a short time ago on the Branch mill here, in which a large distilling plant was seized was*

*intensified last night by the removal by unknown persons of some of the distillery equipment.*

*In the early part of the evening two large trucks, neither bearing any marks of identification, were seen at the old mill. Several of the large vats that had been used in the manufacture of alcohol there were loaded on the machines, with a number of heavy timbers that had served as supports for the vats.*

*Chief of Police Herbert A. Aldrich said he had no knowledge of who was responsible for the removal of the equipment. Chief Aldrich said the place has been locked and is under the eye of a watchman and that as order from Henry D. Converse of Palmer, owner of the mill, is necessary before entrance can be gained.*

*Efforts to learn anything from Converse failed. He refused to say a word concerning the plant.*

*Townspople saw the trucks leave the place shortly before 7 o'clock last night and reported they were driven through the town at a high rate of speed, this fact alone serving to draw attention to them. The trucks were seen a few minutes later in Palmer and were reported to have gone in the direction of Springfield. Whether entrance was gained at the mill by legal means could not be learned.*

*The still seized some time ago by local police under the direction of Chief Aldrich was reported to be one of the largest yet found in the section of the State. Nothing had ever been learned of the identity of the owners of the outfit which was very elaborate, estimated to be worth at least \$7000."*

Despite its best attempts, the town of Monson never seemed to be able to get an upper hand on the illegal production of alcohol. In looking back in the town reports leading up to prohibition, the town voted every year a sum of money (around \$300) for the suppression of the production and stopping the illegal sales of alcohol. During the actual period from January, 1920 through December, 1933, the amount spent on the suppression dwindled down to as low as \$8.50 in the mid 1920's back up to \$200 by its end.

We can only speculate on the goings on in town during this period in our history, but I think it is safe to assume that officer Aldrich probably was hard of hearing and had equally poor eyesight with regards to illegal still operations.

I end this story with a frequently used phrase to end most of the news articles: "No one knew what was going on at the sites" and "No Arrests Were Made."

#### *Bibliography*

*Scrapbook of Newspaper clippings from the Springfield Union 1929*

*Newspaper clipping from the Tassinari family and an interview with members of the family*

*Photograph, bottle, permits, ledger book and copy of newspaper clipping of 1920 from the archives of the Monson Historical Society, Inc.*

# NEW ACQUISITIONS



Journals, cash books, receipts, etc. from Rogers Store; Monson Academy programs, brochures and photographs; Insurance company calendars; Letters, wedding announcements, photographs, etc. originally from Ferncroft Farm.

*Purchase*



Picture Postcard of Flynt's Store

*Purchase*



Monson Academy Class Ring

World War II Bar Pins

*Donation from Brimfield resident*



Monson High School Class of 1929 graduate photographs, programs and year-books; Unitarian Universalist Church fashion show programs from 1934 and 1936; Copy of 1936 Monson Register

*Donation from Connecticut resident*



Miscellaneous Rebekah Lodge paperwork and photographs

*Donation from Monson resident*



Antique baby clothes

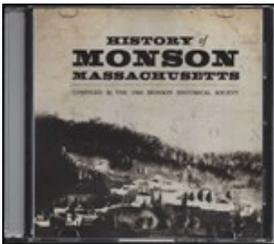
*Donation from Wilbraham resident*

## ITEMS FOR SALE

### 1960 History of Monson Book CD

The History of Monson, written in 1960 for the Bicentennial of the formation of the town, is now available in PDF format on a CD.

If you are currently a member of the Monson Historical Society, the fee to obtain the CD is \$15.00. For non-members, the fee is \$20.00, which includes one year free membership and our quarterly newsletter *The Historian*. Shipping costs for the CD are included in the fee.

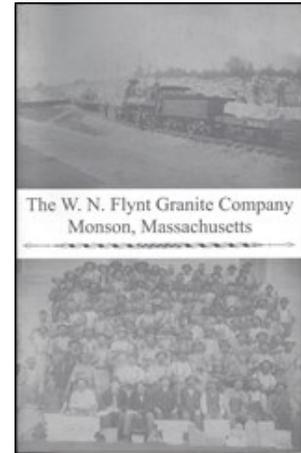


Please include whether you are a member or not and mail your request to:

Monson History CD  
Monson Historical Society, Inc.  
One Green Street, Suite 1  
Monson, MA 01057

Please include your email address to receive the newsletter. Make your checks payable to

**Monson Historical Society, Inc.**



Also available is the 12-page booklet about the W.N. Flynt Granite Co. Cost is \$3.00 which includes shipping.

## WHERE IS THIS?

***Answer to last edition of the newsletter "Who was this young couple and what was their connection to Monson?"***

It was General Tom Thumb and his wife Lavinia, who were married in 1863. Tom and his wife worked for P.T. Barnum and appeared before Queen Victoria and Abraham Lincoln, to name a few. They appeared here in Monson at Green's Hall on September 23, 1875, as this fact was handwritten and recorded by Mr. Daniel Green in his personal appointment book for his Hall. The rental cost was \$15.00.



***This tiny 45 star flag contains a very faint stamp mark that reads "Monson, Mass. July 4, 1898".***

***What was the occasion for this souvenir?***



**\*\*\* MEMBERSHIP \*\*\***

Membership Renewals occur on May 1st of each year and are good through April 30th of the following year. (For example, a "5/1/2020" membership means you are a paid member from 5/1/2019 to 4/30/2020).

**For Postal Mail Recipients of Newsletter**

Check the date on your mailing label. If it reads "**5/1/2020**" (or a later date), your membership is **current**. If it reads "**5/1/2019**" (or an earlier date), it is time for you to renew.

**For Email Recipients of Newsletter**

Check the "Subject" line in the email. If it reads "**Monson Historical Society Newsletter**", your membership is **current**. If it reads "**Monson Historical Society Newsletter/Renewal**", your membership has expired and you will need to update it. Please read the text in your email for renewal instructions.

**NOTE**

Until we get set up on the Historical Society's email account, please be aware that the newsletters will be sent from this email address: [DCDuquette@msn.com](mailto:DCDuquette@msn.com) (Denis Duquette).

**Check your "Junk" email folder, in case it gets sent there.**

**MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL INSTRUCTIONS**

Please take the time today to complete the membership form and mail it back to the address listed on the form, along with your check.

Your membership will be updated.

**MONSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. MEMBERSHIP FORM**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address (for newsletter) \_\_\_\_\_

**(PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY!)**

Indicate a membership category and enclose a check made out to:  
**"Monson Historical Society, Inc."**

**(Note: Membership renewal is May 1st of each year)**

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual \$10<sup>00</sup>      \_\_\_\_\_ Family \$20<sup>00</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_ Life Membership \$250<sup>00</sup>

**Return to: MHS Membership - One Green Street, Suite One - Monson, MA 01057**

Any information you provide us will be kept in strict confidence and will NEVER be given out or sold at any time.

***And as always, we **THANK YOU** for your continued support of the Monson Historical Society, Inc.!***