

GILMANTON FARMER FACES COUNT AFTER 'MOONSHINE' RAID

BY Al Olson, Republican-Herald Area Editor 1954

Prohibition's ghost stalked in Buffalo County Wednesday as a 'moonshine still' was discovered near here on the Clifford Marsolek farm. There, inside a ramshackle hog brooder house, state beverage tax agents and local authorities found a 15 gallon still. And behind pantry curtain in the Marsolek farmhouse were six gallon jugs of illicit liquor, Buffalo County Sheriff Verona Rhyner revealed. No weak stuff, this 'moonshine' tested 100 proof when agents tested it at Sheriff Rhyner's office in Alma Wednesday noon. The raid was begun at 8 AM and completed about two hours later. Marsolek was taken to the County Jail in Alma. His father, Frank Marsolek, arrived about 1:30 PM and posted his son's \$5,000 bail bond. Clifford appeared before District Attorney B F Schlosstein waived preliminary hearing and has been bound over to the spring term of Circuit Court in Alma. The 36 year old farmer, father of four children, is charged with possessing equipment and property designed for unlawful manufacture of intoxicating liquor and 'for the purpose of evading or violating the law of Wisconsin'. Conviction on the charge carries a cash fine and/or possible imprisonment, Sheriff Rhyner said. The raid came as a climax to several weeks investigation in Buffalo and Trempealeau Counties by state agents who were checking rumors that illicit liquor was being manufactured and distributed here.

Sheriff Charles N Keilholtz, Trempealeau County, had been working on the case for two weeks. He and several deputies plus state officials were checking possible still locations Wednesday morning too but did not uncover additional sites. Three state men, Sheriff Rhyner and two Buffalo County deputies—Orville Abts and Lutz Ambuehl—went to the Marsolek farm. After reading a search warrant to Marsolek, his wife and a hired man who separating cream at the time, the authorities began their search. Sheriff Rhyner said that immediately afterward the tax agents went over to the brooder house and opened the door and uncovered the still. It had not been used recently, she said. Included in the equipment was a wood-burning stove with the 15 gallon copper still on top.. A tube led from the cooking vat to a barrel with the copper tubing coiled inside the barrel. It was filled with cold spring water. Authorities then split up and began an intensive search of the farmyard, barn and other sheds.

"About that time two of the agents and I asked Mrs Marsolek to show us inside the house," explained Sheriff Rhyner. "At first Mrs Marsolek seemed hesitant, complaining that her house was a mess. Then, however, she led the way and we entered the kitchen".

One of the agents asked where the pantry was, explained the Sheriff and he found the gallon jugs behind curtains on a lower shelf. "We called the others in then and opened one of the jugs. Marsolek asked us if we wanted to sample it, which one of the agents did. He sure made a face." The Sheriff said Marsolek also had a drink of the liquor. The Sheriff added he admitted making it for use at home. Nervous and shaking, Marsolek evidently had been taken by surprise when the three carloads of authorities descended on his place, Sheriff Rhyner declared. The still was dismantled, labeled by the state agents and taken to the Sheriff's office in Alma along with the six gallon jugs of liquor. A clear, white liquid, the 'moonshine' had been made with sugar and yeast, Marsolek told Sheriff Rhyner. It was not the potato mash type which was one familiar during Prohibition, the Sheriff added. Authorities at Alma were unable to recall how many years it has been since a moonshine still was found in the county.

'When my husband was first elected sheriff in 1937,' Mrs Ryner recalled, 'there was some tubing in the basement taken from a still by some previous sheriff. But we never did find out how far back it dated. I don't think there's been any still seized here during the past 15 years, though.'

Marsolek told her had just made one 'batch' of the liquor and that was sometime before Christmas, the sheriff said. State agents did not reveal whether any of the 'moonshine' had been sold in the area. Sheriff Keilholtz is investigating. Marsolek's farm is located in Dover Township just across the Buffalo-Trempealeau county line about four miles from Lookout.