

Secret Stinesville beer party rudely interrupted

A night in jail was not what the host of the party had in mind on that evening in 1910. Nor did the guests have any idea that their little clandestine meeting would be rudely interrupted.

It should be noted that it was a very dry May in Monroe County — local option dry, that is — which means that the importation and consumption of alcoholic beverages was illegal. The confrontation with the law was written up in the *Bloomington Weekly Courier* of May 17, 1910.

The beer party was the idea of John Ferry, whose daytime occupation was working in a stone mill. After having imported a sugar barrel of beer in bottles from Martinsville, he issued word-of-mouth invitations to discreet friends and neighbors.



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

Rumors have a life and energy of their own and find their way into the unlikeliest of places. So, too, did the one about the prospect of a little party near Stinesville.

According to the *Weekly Courier*, the little drama began when Bloomington attorney and Monroe County Deputy Prosecutor J.F. Regester got a tip about the illegal gathering. Since the sheriff was ailing, the lawyer enlisted the help of Will Hays and swore him in as a deputy.

Regester and Hays drove to Sti-

nesville in a buggy, arriving about 8 p.m. Related the newspaper, "The officers hitched their horses to a fence near a thicket just outside the little town. Soon after they had alighted from their buggy, they heard voices over in the jungle and later the sound of a hatchet knocking in the head of a barrel."

If Regester and Hays had any doubts about whether they had found the right place, what happened next certainly pointed them in the right direction. Continued the *Weekly Courier*, "Then a man came up where the officers were standing and inquired, 'Has the fellers from Martinsville come with the beer yet?'"

Following the man down the path, Regester and Hays found a party of about 30 males. They appeared to range from ages 17 to 60,

each with a bottle in his hand.

Ferry hadn't gotten the group together to pay back social obligations. Instead, he was engaged in selling the beer to the gathering.

According to the newspaper, "The three intruders (Regester, Hays and the other man) were welcomed and given a pint bottle of beer for 15 cents per. The man in charge was reaping a harvest and taking in money right and left.

The two officers weren't sociable enough to share their names with their drinking companions. Or, perhaps they gave some fake names. Presumably, they drank some of the beer.

Continued the *Weekly Courier*, "After the drinking had continued for half an hour, Mr. Regester, who had not been recognized, stepped

out into the group and said, 'Gentlemen, we are deputy sheriffs of Monroe County, and place you all under arrest.'"

The good male citizens of Stinesville made instantaneous decisions to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the representatives of the law. As the newspaper put it, "The other members of the party hastily fled in all directions, as if a bomb had been suddenly dropped."

The stone worker host was not among them. After a struggle, Regester and Hays managed to get Ferry handcuffed and put into the buggy.

Just before the two deputies had announced their presence, Ferry had boasted, "I'm the worst g-d bootlegger in Monroe County." Apparently he was right.