

## "McGinnis Distillery Robbed" Part II

Carroll County Times article for 15 March 1998

By Jay A. Graybeal

Part I of this story appeared last week.

"The Federal grand jury was called on to investigate the robbery it was announced Monday by Amos W. W. Woodcock, United States Attorney. Three other investigations are in progress, it was learned. These are being made by the field forces of the Federal prohibition unit, special investigators of the Internal Revenue Department and Carroll county authorities. All these are endeavoring to learn the identity of the thieves. Efforts also are being made to recover some or all of the stolen whisky.

Edmund Budnitz prohibition administrator, said that nearly his entire force of field agents had been assigned to the case. Mr. Budnitz and Lemuel Albrittain, assistant administrator, went to the scene of the robbery Sunday night and took part in the initial investigation.

"This investigation is being instituted so that the Federal inquest will learn at first hand just what took place, Mr. Woodcock explained, "Distillery property is, in effect, a government reservation and because of this any such untoward happening is by right a subject for Federal grand jury investigation. By this, however, I do not mean that this office or the Government has the least suspicion that the robbery was other than as reported. Neither do I mean that we suspect collusion, but we do want to learn the facts."

Prohibition Officer Ford and States Attorney Brown and a few others went to the distillery Sunday night to investigate further in the robbery, were fired on by the guards and warned them that any one trespassing would be shot.

Galen L. Tait, Collector of Internal Revenue, discounted the theory that the robbery was an "inside job." He said that while it was true that the robbers had gone to the seventh and eighth floors of the warehouse to obtain the best whisky, evidence indicated that they had "to feel their way" in locating the liquor. On nearly every floor he pointed out barrels had been tampered with and sampled. This, Mr. Tait declared, would not have been done had the robbers known just where the good whisky was stored. They evidently lost much time in this sampling, he added.

"It would have been suicidal for our guards to have attempted to resist such a force of men, all heavily armed," Mr. Tait asserted. "These whisky robbers are all gunmen and desperate characters. Caught one at a time, our guards had no chance to combat the bandits."

Launching a bitter attack on Internal Revenue Commissioner David H. Blair, George W. Crabbe, superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League of Maryland blamed "to much temporizing and to much politics" for the looting.

He asserted plans for concentration of liquor were begun more than three years ago and the Internal Revenue Department has plenty of power to enforce the orders. He continued:

"They have been entirely too slow. There was no excuse for the delay. This has resulted in this robbery and others that have occurred since the concentration plan was adopted."

Mr. Crabbe was in this city when the news of the robbery "broke". He said there was considerable excitement among church people, who felt it was a hard blow to prohibition.

The Federal Grand Jury began a probe of the robbery but failed to get any closer to the mystery.

All the guards and several of the others where the concentration distillery is located, were questioned at length by United States District Attorney Amos W. W. Woodcock.

Efforts of prohibition agents to trace any of the liquor concentrated at this point for medicinal use in various parts of the country, met with no success.

Edward and John Long, who were taken to Baltimore, complained of treatment by the dry agents. The guards said that they were told the Government knows whose truck carried some of the liquor and that the guards could throw light on the case. The above men were not asked to testify at the investigation as they had already been grilled.

The others who testified were Chas. Thomson, Frank M. Dowell, government guards; Miles Long and George Hughes."

A week after the robbery the body of a supposed "informer" was found murdered in south Philadelphia, "his bullet-shattered body being found in a meadow." He had apparently been on his way from New York to Baltimore "with information that would have solved the distillery looting." Investigators were eventually successful in locating the robbers and a Federal Grand Jury indicted James M. Geisey of Baltimore and six accomplices in April 1926. Most of the men were also charged with transporting six carloads of beer, worth \$36,000, into Baltimore via the Western Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroads. The robbery apparently ended the distillery. The October 8, 1926 issue of the Democratic Advocate noted that "a force of men started to tear down the two large brick storage warehouses" and that the bricks were being sent to New York.

Photo caption: Federal employees at the McGinnis Distillery near Carrollton mark a barrel of whiskey c. 1920. The barrel in the center was marked, "McGINNIS COPPER DOUBLE DISTILLED PURE RYE WHISKEY A. McGINNIS Co. DISTILLERS CARROLL COUNTY MARYLAND" Armed robbers stole 71 similar barrels in January 1926. Courtesy of Carl E. Ebaugh.