



By Richard Procyk

12/3/2005

Prohibition in Jupiter

When talking about the "old days" pioneer families often tell tales, some humorous, about prohibition and the bootleggers who came to Jupiter. Jupiter was still a small town in the late 1920's; the National Prohibition Act had attracted mobsters to south Florida including the infamous Al Capone. Capone bought a house on Palm Island, Miami Beach, in 1928, supposedly to escape the cold winters in Chicago. A big spender and tipper, Scarface became a local celebrity. His houseguests included a long list of mob members that accompanied him to race tracks, nightclubs and prize fights.

The Jupiter connection to Big Al may have started in Lake Worth where, according to residents there, he arrived every Friday during the "season" in his big Packard touring car for the boxing matches. His gang was also seen driving their Packard's through Lake Worth during the winter months. When Capone bought his house on Miami Beach he did it through a "dummy" buyer to prevent objections from neighbors and local authorities. Rumors and folktales have persisted that Big Al once owned land in Jupiter on "Italian Farms Road", now known as Jupiter Farms Road, using a "dummy" to purchase the land. Although there are no witnesses that Capone visited here, "old timers" say that gang members were observed driving on Italian Farms Road.

Years later Burt Reynolds bought the property that allegedly belonged to Al Capone. Burt Reynolds ranch was sold a few years ago and in all this time no official ties have been made to Capone, his family or the property. But rumors persist. Historian Bessie Dubois was in her 90's when she profiled prohibition days in Jupiter. "Rum runners", she said, used to bring gunny sacks of liquor in from the Bahamas into Jupiter Inlet. "Sometimes the contraband would be found on the beach after it was thrown overboard when the law got too close". She continued, "Once a rum runner's boat was abandoned in a small creek but the cargo was still intact". She told with a knowing smile how the residents lined up to remove the boat's contents including the local authorities "who got their share". Scarface's activities were long and varied and smuggling from the Bahamas into the Jupiter Inlet would have required a holding area until the liquor could be transported north. Which brings me to a "wives' tale" told by an old timer about a local citrus grove owner who got involved in moonshining.

Although somewhat humorous now, I'm sure the owner didn't think it was funny. According to this tale, a Jupiter grove owner apparently found a connection through one of the mobsters visiting Jupiter to a mob boss in Philadelphia. Moonshine stills were common during prohibition



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(and after) and the grove owner conceived a plan to transport the "white lightning" by covering his truck with oranges and grapefruit concealing the booze hidden underneath. The plan was working well until the truck broke down in Georgia. Stranded by the side of the road, with the hood up, the men driving the truck thought their number was up when the local sheriff stopped to investigate. The grove owner apparently was a good talker as the sheriff, acting as a Good Samaritan, offered to find a mechanic; which he did. The truck drove off bumping along the road leading north and the police never knew that they helped send a cargo of booze to the mob. In Philadelphia, the grove truck owner was greatly relieved to turn the liquor over to the mobsters after a long harrowing journey. Now time for payment, the mob boss, surrounded by six of his henchmen, whose jackets bulged with hidden weapons, offered to pay by check. The grove owner refused --"it's a cash deal" he said. The mob boss slowly pulled back his jacket revealing a large chrome plated revolver, "you'll take a check, or you'll take this"! The worthless check was accepted wisely, but the grove owner always wondered if the mobster from Italian Farms Road was part of the deal.