

MOUNTAINS

Major Redmond, 'King of the Moonshiners'



Word from the Smokies

Anne Bridges
USA TODAY NETWORK

No one was more responsible for the romantic image of the moonshiner than Lewis Redmond.

His story was chronicled in newspapers including the New York Times and the Atlanta Constitution, the National Police Gazette (a periodical geared toward the curious public), a short book entitled "The True Life of Maj. Redmond, the Notorious Outlaw and Moonshiner" (supposedly nonfiction), and two dime novels, one of which bestowed him with the title "King of the Moonshiners."

The escapades of Redmond and his fellow moonshiners, often depicted as a kind of Robin Hood and his band of merry men, inspired local-color writers like Mary Noailles Murfree to portray the moonshiners as a unique artifact of the Smoky Mountain region.

According to Dan Pierce in "Corn from a Jar" (GSMA, 2013), Redmond, who was born in 1854, began his illegal whiskey business in what is now Transylvania County. In 1876, he shot and killed federal marshal Alfred Duckworth when the marshal stopped Redmond in the process of transporting his contraband product. He then fled to South Carolina, where he established an extensive moonshine operation employing a gang charged with defending the moonshine enterprise and terrorizing federal officers.

George Atkinson, in "After the Moonshiners" (Frew and Campbell, 1881), describes the then 37-year-old Redmond as being uneducated but with a "great deal of native cunning and shrewdness." Atkinson relates a story that purportedly Redmond told about himself. Redmond was on his way to Asheville with five barrels of "the precious fluid" hidden in a wagon under a pile of corn husks. He was wearing a disguise of a beard and butternut clothes in which "my dearest friend would not recognize me." "Butternut clothes" refers to garments dyed with walnut and butternut leaves and shells, which were commonly worn by Confederate soldiers and an indicator of poverty.

Three men who Redmond recognized as deputy marshals because of their pistols and Winchester repeating rifles approached him. Redmond proceeded to chat with the officers, pretending ignorance about their intent. When they asked where they might get some whiskey, Redmond faked a "cracker" accent and told them that no one dared to make whiskey anymore because they were afraid of the marshals. When pressed, he confessed that he did have a few gallons under his seat that he used "for his stomach's sake." He then offered to fill up their flasks. They took him up on the offer. After enjoying a drink together, Redmond and the marshals parted ways. Redmond proceeded on to Asheville. He subsequently made many more similar trips, utilizing both guile and disguise.

As the pressure of federal agents intensified, Redmond decided to move to the Smokies region of North Carolina in 1879, settling in what is now Bryson City.



This illustration included in "The True Life of Maj. Redmond" depicts the titular moonshiner's 1881 capture by federal marshals near his home in what is now Bryson City. PROVIDED BY EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

According to Pierce, he continued his moonshining activities but at a more modest scale. Redmond reportedly told the Smoky locals that "there are not enough men in Swain County to arrest me." Apparently, the Swain County residents agreed because they chose to ignore his illegal activities. Seven federal agents tried to arrest him but failed. Redmond outsmarted them by escaping through the chimney of his home.

The marshals finally caught up with Redmond in 1881. The events surrounding his capture were later related in the National Police Gazette on May 21 of the same year. Redmond told the story as follows:

"It was 10 o'clock one morning 'long 'bout the first week of this month, when my wife asked me to step out into the edge of the clearin' 'round the house and kill her a squirrel or two. She said that she heerd the dogs a barkin' up in the edge of the woods, and she 'lowed they'd treed one up thar. I got down the shotgun and started up the ridge on t'other side o' the house. When I got in 'bout fifty yards o' the dogs, 'bout half a dozen men stepped out from behind a cliff, and hollered, 'Halt.' I knowed them wasn't no squirrels, and I turned round and left. They kept a hollerin', 'Halt' and a shootin', and every once in a while I'd feel a bullet hit me. They followed me and every once in a while hitting me till at last they cotched up with me in the holler, 'bout two hundred yards from the house."

Despite being shot several times, Redmond survived to face trial in federal court. According to Pierce, the prosecutors decided not to charge him with the murder of Duckworth. In exchange, Redmond pled

guilty to violations of federal revenue law and criminal conspiracy. He was sentenced to 10 years in federal penitentiary in Auburn, New York. After serving three years, he was pardoned by President Chester A. Arthur.

After his pardon, Redmond returned to South Carolina, finding work with the Biemann distillery, a legal operation, in Oconee County. The distillery capitalized on Redmond's fame calling a new brand of whiskey "Redmond's Moonshine" and gracing the bottles with a picture of the famed moonshiner. The New York Times reported his return and his new legal profession. But one article called him a "physical wreck and an invalid." He had apparently contracted tuberculosis in prison.

Redmond lived out the last years of his life as a quiet farmer, husband, and father to several children. When he died in 1906 at the age of 54, his family had inscribed on his tombstone "He was the sunshine of our life" — a curious epitaph for a man who lived such a notorious life.

Anne Bridges is the former co-director of the Great Smoky Mountains Regional Project at the University of Tennessee Libraries and a contributor to Smokies LIVE, a blog at SmokiesInformation.org hosted by park partner Great Smoky Mountains Association, which provides this column. Her publications include "Terra Incognita: An Annotated Bibliography of the Great Smoky Mountains, 1544-1934," "The Terra Incognita Reader: Early Writings on the Great Smoky Mountains," and two edited books by Paul Adams.

Search warrants reveal details of Buncombe's largest fentanyl seizure

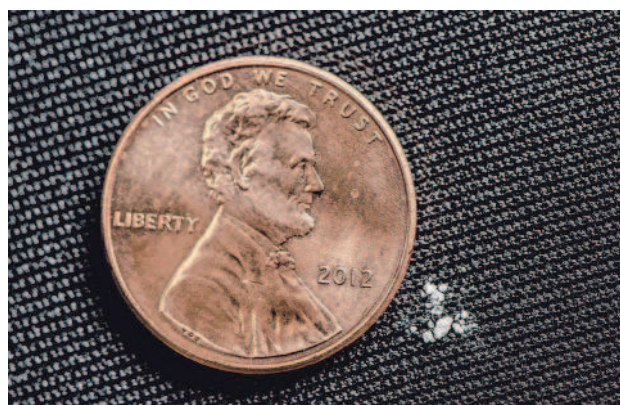
Ryley Ober
Asheville Citizen Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

ASHEVILLE — After the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office conducted the largest fentanyl seizure in the county's history, search warrants reveal more detail into the five-month investigation involving undercover operations, confidential informants, numerous surveillance operations and a member of the Bloods gang.

The sheriff's office seized a little over 5 pounds of fentanyl after the execution of three Oct. 11 arrest warrants, according to a news release, which is about 1.1 million lethal doses of fentanyl.

The investigation into the large-scale drug trafficking operation began in June, when agents with the sheriff's Illegal Gun Reduction and Narcotics Taskforce discovered a drug trafficking organization "distributing methamphetamine, fentanyl, ecstasy and illegally obtained prescription pills" from two apartments at 60 Eastview Circle in West Asheville, a search warrant says.

The landlord had called in a complaint of drug activ-



The Drug Enforcement Agency says 0.02 grams of fentanyl is enough to kill most adults. COURTESY OF US DEA.

ity, telling an IGRANT agent there were numerous cars and people coming in and out of the apartment at all hours of the day, staying a short time before leaving

See FENTANYL, Page 4A

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Postal information
The Citizen Times, USPS# 236-000, ISSN# 0336-0000, is published 6 days per week excluding Saturday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving (observed), Christmas Day (observed) and New Year's Day (observed) by Gannett Media Corp, 14 O. Henry Ave., Asheville, NC 28802. Periodicals postage paid at Asheville, NC and additional mailing offices. **Postmaster:** Please send address changes to Customer Service, PO Box 1387, Fort Smith, AR 72902.