

Beer shtrike? To (hic!) with it.

The beer strike is now heading into its fourth week and theoretically, the great thirst should be on.

The way brewers and their employees see it, dehydrated people should be begging, piteously pleading for mercy from both union and management, offering any amount of money for just one gulp of foaming suds.

Dry years

No, 1968 is not about to go down in Ontario's history as the Year of the Great Drouth. As the strike drags on, it is becoming increasingly evident that beer drinkers are turning to alternative measures.

While union and management haggle over mere money, unmindful of the needs of that segment of the population whose plumbing must undergo regular irrigation, many citizens, tired of waiting, have thumbed their collective noses at brewers and breweries and proceeded to produce their own.

"How does one go about producing his own?" We asked our Refreshments Editor, Willie. After all, our readers have a right to know.

"Elementary, my dear chaps," said Willie, and proceeded to demonstrate.

Enlisting the aid of Frank, that eminent chemical engineer from the Telegram, he headed for the nearest customs and excise office. First step was to secure a permit, which he did.

No lineup

They were told upon filing application that they were the third applicants last week for permission to brew their own.

"How about the weeks previous?" asked Willie.

"Nil," said the nice man behind the counter. "These are the first permits I have processed in Heaven knows how long."

The next step was to secure the ingredients which, in this case, consist mainly of concentrated malt extract sold in a sort of do-it-yourself kit form.

As it turned out, this wasn't quite so easy. Everywhere our experts went, they found the malt had "just been sold out". They finally found a supply in a little out-of-the-way shop in Metro.

Toil and Trouble

So Willie and Frank went home and fired up the old cauldron. Cooking the hops, they strained the resulting brew, stirred in the malt, added the yeast, following the recipe all the way except for a few insignificant variations that occurred from time to time as something or other dropped in by accident and dissolved before it could be retrieved.

The stuff should be ripe for bottling in four days. The boys figure it should flower into full, golden ripeness while union and management are still haggling.

They expect to present a detailed report within two weeks for our readers.

While do-it-yourselfers are doing it themselves, other thirsty souls are employing other means. Border towns in adjacent provinces and states are reported to be doing a landslide business at their watering holes and there is considerable traffic across borders.

Over Flow at LCBO

Thursday and Friday line-ups at LCBO counters have easily doubled in length.

Then there's the private stock. People around here seem to go in for wine-making. Some of this porch-climber is very good wine indeed.

One thing I haven't sampled here in Ontario is home-brewed whiskey, otherwise known as "barbed-wire juice" on the prairies and as "screech" in Newfoundland.



The Brewbasket

East-central Saskatchewan, where I come from, used to be known as the brewbasket of the U.S. during prohibition. Those were the days when grain didn't bring much of a price on any market until it was processed through a still.

Some of the raw spirits were blended and bottled in a hotel and an automotoive shop in Yorkton, Sask., while other consignments crossed the border in everything from railway tankers to McLaughlin Buicks equipped with special tanks.

When prohibition ended, the man who organized the dominion-wide rum-running operation invested his earnings into legitimate business and prospered while his suppliers, many of whom had become very proficient in the art of making whiskey, began to seek other markets.

Thus the art flourished in spite of excise laws as it still does today. Formulas vary with the individual artist and products are interesting.

The Formula

Basic ingredients for prairie whiskey are grain, sugar and yeast. Potatoes may be substituted for grain and sugar is not mandatory. Prairie farmers found several ingredients, including honey, worked as well at the time sugar was rationed during World War II. But most didn't bother. They simply bought their sugar on the black market.

One of the best and fastest methods of building a batch of whiskey goes as follows: Cook about a bushel of wheat until the starch granules begin to pop. Stir in 100-lb. sack of sugar. Cool. Add yeast. Cover and let ferment until surface clears of foam. Distill at 205-210 degrees F. Taste. Cool.

This method is widely accepted with small variations because of the quick-ripening of the mash which allows the distiller to get his whiskey brewed and buried in less than a week, lessening chances of anyone stumbling upon the operation, which could prove embarrassing — and costly.

Many whiskey farmers use raisins and overripe fruit in the mash. One farmer told me he added an armload of sliced rhubarb for that "certain tang."

Secret Ingredient

Some experiments with exotic ingredients have proved disastrous. One prominent distiller, engaged to turn out 25 gallons of whiskey for a neighbor's wedding reception for his daugh-

ter walked into my office, told me they had something to show me and suggested I bring along some photographic equipment.

Hustling me into their truck, they drove out along little-used country trails, doubling back and fourth with the intent of making me lose my directions. We stopped in an abandoned farmyard less than six miles from Canora, Sask., and proceeded to walk.

A hundred yards later we stopped in a clearing surrounded by dense willows. Before us was a still, an old kitchen stove and several 45-gallon drums of mash.

The men fired up the still and appointed me to the post of Sampler-in-chief.

The raw hooch had a sort of banana flavor to it. They said it was because they had tossed in a bunch of bananas for luck.

They told me this was their final batch. Finishing in the wee hours of the morning, they saluted, toasted The Queen and asked me to photograph the layout for their albums.

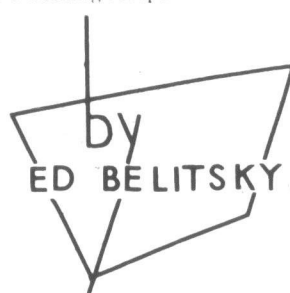
Beddy Bye

Pressing a 40-oz. bottle of whiskey on me, they delivered me home and out me in my bed. I learned in due time that I had witnessed the final chapter of a 200-gallon epic which they sold — all in one consignment — in Regina.

These boys were true artists and loved their work. They concealed several gallons of the stuff on various crossroads up and down the highways leading out of town and numbered them.

Many was the time during the summer when either of them would approach me with "Psst — sub-station No. 4 promptly at midnight."

There's a lesson to be learned here, but I don't know exactly what it is, unless it's to conclude that where there's a thirst, there's a way. It's been that way ever since Mighty Grog, the cave man, found he liked his wild grape juice better after it had stood around for a while.



ter, added a load of overripe plums to the mash with astonishing results.

The whiskey was excellent except for one thing. It drove people wild. Before the wedding reception was well on its way, the bride passed out, the groom was making passes at one of the bridesmaids and the mother of the bride was doing a lively flamenco among the chinaware on the head table. Several fights started and the local RCMP had to issue a frantic call for the riot squad from divisional headquarters.

As former editor of a western newspaper, I have had ample opportunity to observe goings-on on both sides of the law. I was careful to cultivate both sides for obvious reasons.

Both the RCMP and the shady element knew I could be trusted to keep a confidence which often resulted in getting more inside track information than I could ever consider publishing.

One morning in the summer of 1966 the local RCMP sergeant told me there was a lot of whiskey being made locally, but they couldn't find the source.

Come With Us

Late in the afternoon a couple of tough characters of my acquaintan-