A LOOK INTO OUR PAST BY SERGEANT KEN NEILSON

January 16th 1920 prohibition went into effect and brought along with it a major head ache for any honest law man. Such was the case for McHenry County Sheriff Lester "Doc" Edinger who became Illinois's youngest sheriff in 1922 at the ripe old age of 28.

Lester "Doc" Edinger

Sheriff Edinger estimated that approximately 30 speakeasies were operating in McHenry County at any given time. To track down and raid these illicit businesses became a daunting task for the sheriff since he only had two extra officers. In order to conduct a raid Sheriff Edinger was forced to deputize a posse of extra men.

In one such incident the duty bound sheriff arranged to raid a local farm in Hartland Township where the farmer was reportedly making moonshine. As the sheriff and his posse roamed the farm attempting to locate the illegal booze, the farmer slipped from their sight. He then snuck into the pig pen where he kept the illicit liquid hidden and tipped over the vats. By the time the good sheriff and his men happened on the pig pen all that was left of the evidence was a pen full of staggering pigs.

On another occasion the raid party started out during a very cold and wintry day. Their target was a rural Spring Grove farm. They however didn't get too far due to the heavy snow and drifting. Not wanting to admit defeat the sheriff borrowed a horse team and bobsled from a local farmer. The posse then ventured forth in the open sled for the remaining 20 miles. The sheriff vowed that he would never do such a thing again since the entire group nearly froze to death.

Sheriff "Doc" Edinger went on to distinguish himself in public office for a total of 41 years. Twelve of those years were as the McHenry County Sheriff. During one of his tenures he had even successfully held two of Al Capone's gang leaders, Dapper Dan McCarthy & Hymie Wiess both from the infamous Dino O'Banion gang.

One of Al Capone's gang leaders Hymie Wiess arrested by Sheriff "Doc" Edinger

Listed below are the offices that "Doc" Edinger had held and the dates.

1922 – 1926 McHenry Co. Sheriff

1927 – 1930 Woodstock Chief of Police

1930 – 1934 McHenry Co. Sheriff

1934 – 1938 McHenry Co. Treasurer

1938 – 1942 McHenry Co. Sheriff

1942 – 1963 Clerk of Circuit Court & Recorder of Deeds

We are looking for past photos, articles, stories etc. on the History of McHenry County Sheriff's Office.
Please contact Sergeant Ken Neilsen extension 4730 or Michelle Stechmuller extension 4700