written by Dick Caster
for the
Historical Society of Federal Way
effective immediately and the 18th Amendment went into effect on January 17, 1920.\footnote{http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?displaypage=output.cfm&file_id=9630, accessed April 16, 2015, p 7 of printer-friendly version.}

On April 20, 1933, the United States Congress passed the 21st Amendment to the Constitution, repealing the 18th Amendment. After ratification by the states, the 21st Amendment was ratified by the United States Congress on December 5, 1933.\footnote{http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?displaypage=output.cfm&file_id=9630, accessed April 16, 2015, pp 7, 8 of printer-friendly version.}

### Wagon Wheel Inn

The Wagon Wheel Inn was often referred to as the “Wagon Wheel Restaurant.” The Wagon Wheel Inn probably opened sometime between 1931 and 1934.

Prior to the ending of prohibition in December, 1933, the rural aspect of the Brooklake area allowed for liquor-producing stills to operate nearby relatively securely outside the eye of the law.\footnote{Marie Stowe Reed, Historic Preservation Chairman, Historical Society of Federal Way, King County Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Brooklake Community Center, July 27, 1989, 4, in the files of the HSFW.} There were many rumors of stills operating in the general area due to the presence of fresh running water and copious tree cover.

One known example concerns the Henspeter family. Norman Henspeter was the nephew of Henry Henspeter who purchased land before 1920 just west of First Avenue South and between the present South 348th Street and South 356th Street.\footnote{Some Recollections of Norman Henspeter, Re: SW Corner of King County and the NE corner of Tacoma, no date, in the files of the HSFW.} Henry Henspeter died March 1930.\footnote{Henry Henspeter, Washington State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Certificate of Death, Signed: Carl Q. Hilb, M. D., March 25, 1930, in the files of the HSFW.} Norman Henspeter in his reminiscing about the 1920s and 1930s discussed what he knew of stills only about a half mile away from the Wagon Wheel:

Henspeter’s family owned 40 acres of property along the west side of present First Avenue between 356th and an imaginary extension of 348th\footnote{The author, Dick Caster, currently lives on this property about 300 feet from the West Branch of Hylebos Creek that probably was the source of the water for the still discussed.} (South 348th did not yet exist this far in the early 1930s and South 356th Street was called Libo Road.) Henspeter and his wife Clarabelle both have lived in the area most of their lives. Their property did not include Panther Lake. . . .
Economics, a supply of pure running water and availability of sites with cover were the elements which encouraged (a number) of stills in this area. Prohibition, voted in 1918 and in force in the twenties provided a vacuum in the supply of alcoholic beverages and thereby a means of livelihood for those who could find a location for clandestine manufacturing operations of a substitute product.

Quality of the substitute moonshine varied from low quality rotgut to a higher quality that went far to fill the demand for an acceptable liquor. Federal surveillance of manufacturing and sales was for the purpose of tapping in on taxes on the sales much as federal taxes are paid today.

The illegal stills were of course made possible by the “buying off” of the representatives of the law at all levels.

One or more stills may have operated along the stream (Hylebos Creek) in its meandering under the road (1st Avenue South) through heavy swampy vegetation and low spots.

Another still operated within the shell of a former small lumber mill on the Henspeter property.

Carloads of raisins, grain and sugar were (available) at the railhead in Auburn supplied the stills with their raw materials. The liquor … retailed at about $4.00/gallon or $0.75/pint.93

Liquor presumably could have been brought in from other areas for possible sale at the Wagon Wheel. Therefore, the Wagon Wheel could easily have operated as a “speak easy” and roadhouse.

At an early date in its operation, the Wagon Wheel was operated by the manager, R. K. Ruffo, as a “gambling den.” A former caretaker indicated that the window at the north entrance served as an admission window and for the collection of guns, knives and other weapons.94

By the early 20th-century, gambling was almost uniformly outlawed throughout the United States. Gambling became a largely illegal activity, helping to spur the growth of the Mafia and other organized crime syndicates. Often illegal liquor sales and illegal gambling operated in the same establishments. Gambling has only started to become legal again in recent years mainly through Indian casinos.95 Therefore, illegal gambling would also have been a source of revenue for the isolated Wagon Wheel Inn and later Rickey’s Club.

93 Some Recollections of Norman Henspeter, Re: SW Corner of King County and the NE corner of Tacoma, no date, in the files of the HSFW.
94 Marie Stowe Reed, Historic Preservation Chairman, Historical Society of Federal Way, King County Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Brooklake Community Center, July 27, 1989, 4, in the files of the HSFW.
They soon became well known throughout the area and performed for many other community, church and school functions as far away as Highline to the north, Enumclaw to the east and Olympia to the south.

Advertising indicated the group had singing, dancing, and instrumental solos, and occasionally a little magic act was thrown in for good measure. One letter indicated they charged the facilities they visited 25 percent of the gross ticket sales or a minimum charge of $25.00 for their services. The performers were all volunteers and received no pay. All proceeds went to Brooklake Community Center projects.323 They also participated in parades throughout the area. An undated [although probably 1949

or 1950] newspaper article indicates they would participate in the Auburn Days Parade.324 A letter to the Auburn Days Parade Committee indicates the Brooklake Community Club would participate in the July 31 parade through downtown Auburn with a float. They were given by the parade committee the option of entering the non-commercial or best comic award categories.325 The announcement from the Auburn Days Parade Committee indicated that 20,000 people had attended the 1950 Auburn Days Parade.326

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323 C. R. Fleming, to Mrs. Albert Nelson, Spanaway Washington, May 28, 1951, in the files of the HSFW.
324 "Brooklake Hillbillies to Parade Auburn Day," clipping from unidentified newspaper, undated [probably 1949 or 1950], no page number, in the files of the HSFW.
325 Charles M. Fread, President, Brooklake Community Fair, to H. T. Hughes, Chairman, Auburn Days Parade Committee, Auburn, Washington, May 29, 1951, in the files of the HSFW.
326 56th Auburn Days Celebration” flyer, Auburn Days Parade Committee, July 21, 1951, in the files of the HSFW.