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Upcoming Events

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DEC. 21
• Christmas concert - Sedley School, 7 p.m.

DEC. 22
• Montmartre vs. Balcarres (Mainline league atom hockey) - Montmartre, 7 p.m.

JAN. 2
• Quad Town vs. Indian Head (Mainline league atom hockey) - Odessa, 6 p.m.

JAN. 7
• Quad Town 2 vs. Avonlea (Mainline league novice hockey) - Vibank, 1:15 p.m.
• Montmartre vs. Avonlea (Mainline league novice hockey) - Montmartre, 5:30 p.m.
• White Butte Eagles vs. Yellow Grass (junior C) - Odessa, 7:30 p.m.

JAN. 9
• RM council - Lajord, 9 a.m.
• Village council - Odessa, 7 p.m.
• Quad Town 1 vs. Montmartre (Mainline league novice hockey) - Odessa, 7:15 p.m.

JAN. 10
• O/V Bruins vs. Whitewood (QVHL) - Odessa, 8 p.m.

JAN. 11
• RM council - Franis, 9 a.m.
• Quad Town vs. Montmartre (Mainline league atom hockey) - Montmartre, 6:30 p.m.
• Town council - Francis, 7 p.m.

JAN. 12
• O/V Bruins vs. Milestone (QVHL) - Odessa, 8 p.m.

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The tunnels of Sedley?

A little bit of mystery, a whole lot of booze, and one family's century-old connection to Sedley

Brad Brown
quadtownforum@sasktel.net

If the Sperling family history has it right, this isn't the first time they've run booze through Sedley.

What it would be is the first time they've done it legally.

"I guess I'm kind of carrying on a family tradition," Adam Sperling said with a laugh in a recent interview.

Sperling is the proprietor of Sperling Silver Distillery in Regina, whose craft spirits have recently started appearing on store shelves in Sedley and Vibank.

The tradition he speaks of though dates back to prohibition when he says his great-great uncle, Peter Paul Sperling, briefly owned the old Sedley Hotel.

That hotel, according to the village's history book, was located on what is now the vacant lot directly across Highway 33 from Sedley's lone remaining grain elevator. Back then, a bustling train station was also said to be in operation to serve passengers along the busy Canadian Pacific Railway line between Regina and Arcola.

Attached to the back (south side) of the hotel were a dance hall and an abattoir.

Continued on Page 3



Distant relatives of Adam Sperling's appear here in photos at Sedley, believed to have been taken in the early 1920s. Supplied photos

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obsessed with doing it right.

Sperling family business returns to Sedley

Continued from Page 2

And as the Sperling story goes ...
"Underneath the abattoir, they had it set up so they had tunnels just like Moose Jaw," Adam Sperling continued. "I don't know if the tunnels are still there, but apparently they used to fill the train cars with moonshine and whiskey and ship it down to Chicago."

Tunnels? In Sedley?
Officially, they don't exist. Current mayor Bryan Leier, who has family roots there dating back more than a century, says he's never heard of any tunnels. Ditto for current village foreman Al Irvine, and 80-years-young Alfred Bechard, whose cousin Bruno is said to have been the old hotel's final owner before it burned down in the late 1930s.

But maybe it's not as crazy as it sounds.
As per the local history book, the old hotel was likely established sometime between 1904 and 1906, and quickly became known as a first-rate stop along the CPR's Regina-Arcola-Souris route, which itself was completed in 1904.

In time, a Chinese laundry also came to be on the premises, just a stone's throw to the east of the butcher shop, and numerous Chinese restaurants were also said to be operating in town around that time. (It's circumstantial evidence at best, but the official history has it that Chinese immigrants — many of them railway workers — were also largely responsible for the tunnels of Moose Jaw that have become such a renowned tourist attraction.)

And if there were indeed tunnels, of Chinese origin or not, they would have come in pretty handy after the United States enacted prohibition across the country in 1920, where liquor is said to have been much tougher to come by than it was in Saskatchewan.

(Saskatchewan voted in favour of prohibition in December 1916, though liquor was still readily available by doctor's prescription until 1919 and legal to import into the province until 1921. Saskatchewan re-



Adam Sperling took on a new challenge five years when he left the culinary world to open Sperling Silver Distillery in Regina.
Forum photo by Brad Brown

pealed prohibition in 1924 but according to retired University of Regina history professor Dr. Bill Brennan, the joke in Regina during that entire period was that "if you really were desperate to get a drink, the best place to go was to the Legislative Building."

As told in Chris Stewart's history of the Saskatchewan Provincial Police, this led to boom in private enterprise almost overnight.

"Canadians were driving carloads of whiskey as far south as Denver and Omaha, and Americans in fast-powered cars were driving north to boozoriums

in small hamlets in Southern Saskatchewan, loading up and racing back to their North Dakota destinations before dawn," Stewart wrote.

Was Sedley among them?

Well, notwithstanding the local history book's claim that an actual person named Mr. Shady owned the Sedley Hotel in 1917 (and if that's not a giant red flag, what is?), it also goes on to assert that "apparently Sedley had an enterprising individual or so, who used to run booze" during the Prohibition years.

To the best of Adam Sperling's understanding, that individual was his great-great uncle, whom he believes ran a successful enterprise out of Sedley, supporting the Bronfman family's efforts to supply liquor to the Al Capone-run operation out of Chicago.

The end of Sedley's days as a bootlegging hub, Sperling says, came upon the CPR's completion of the Canadian extension of the Soo Line from Moose Jaw to North Portal. The old CPR station in Moose Jaw — now a Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority store — at the north terminus of that line was completed in 1922.

"I've heard that when they moved the rail traffic to the Soo Line that went through Moose Jaw, Capone and his buddies moved the whole operation to Moose Jaw, and at that point Peter Paul Sperling, he just left apparently," said Adam Sperling.

(As an aside, Sperling still has relations living near Moose Jaw, as well as family members running a successful winery near Kelowna.)

So is any of this true?

As far as Dr. Brennan knows, there was never any large-scale bootlegging operation in Sedley. But if it turns out the Sperling story is in fact true, it would also shock him about as much as the fact that the sun came up today.

"I would be surprised if any town you named to me in Saskatchewan didn't have some kind of illicit liquor business," said Brennan, who has researched and written extensively on the early days of settlement in Saskatchewan.

"It's a colourful period in our province's history and it's hard to imagine ... any town that had at least one hotel where there wasn't some funny stuff going on back when alcohol was legally unavailable but still in high demand.

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