

Local author

captures

colourful

characters

By Sarah MacWhirter
The Intelligencer

When you think of rumrunning, you think of fast boats, crates of hard liquor and machine gun-toting lawmen — not women, kind gentlemen and hapless farmers.

All of these unexpected characters are captured in Belleville author C.W. (Bill) Hunt Sr.'s latest short book, *Gentleman Charlie & The Lady Rumrunner*.

It tells the tale of Charlie Mills, a gentleman with a fancy and knack for rum-running, and his lady friend Jennie Batley; the "only known woman to smuggle whiskey across Lake Ontario during U.S. Prohibition — and get away with it."

As usual, Hunt brings a past era and its inhabitants to life, from the rumrunners themselves to all the others who tried to get a piece of the action — including the farmers involved in the priceless tale of "the case of the wandering whiskey cases."

An entertaining read packed with pictures from the times, Hunt's book makes this reader, at least, want to sit at a lunch counter with the rumrunning couple, and later visit the Mariner's Museum on South Bay to see artifacts from the Prohibition era and other days.

"It was all because of the Mariner's Museum — that's where the idea (for this book) came from," Hunt said.

The museum's curator, Bob Townsend, told Hunt about a tender, a small boat meant for going ashore, that reportedly belonged to a smuggler named Mills and was donated to the museum recently.

"As soon as he said that I knew exactly who he was talking about."

Hunt also knew the museum needed funds, so he decided to write a booklet about Mills and give the museum the royalties.

Mills and Batley are just Hunt's types. Through his writing, Hunt introduces readers to scores of colourful characters — and his latest work is no exception. Hunt comes by his interest honestly.

Working as a cookware salesman and later as a "finance man collecting from deadbeats," Hunt met "a lot of people who are on the cusp of the law, on the cusp of being law abiding and of being criminals."

True crime holds some fascination for the author, but all-out criminal behaviour is too extreme for his tastes. So, too, is the other side of the spectrum.

"We tend to write about people who accomplish things and hold public office, and rightly so. But then there's this other side, that's more colourful and that tends to get ignored."

There you find the characters Bill Hunt Sr. writes about.