

The Moonshiner Popcorn Sutton

Neal Hutcheson

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Neal Hutcheson's *The Moonshiner Popcorn Sutton* is the definitive biography of a famous Appalachian moonshiner known for his homemade "likker." Hutcheson, who first told the late moonshiner's story on film, expands on his earlier account, compiling a high-quality scrapbook about his subject.

Marvin "Popcorn" Sutton learned his distilling techniques from his father and grandfather, and was in demand for both his strong beverage and the stills he used to make it. The book describes his drive to perfect his craft, using Sutton's own words to capture his larger-than-life personality, which became a big part of his appeal.

Sutton, whose health was in decline, committed suicide in 2009 at the age of sixty-two, just before beginning a prison sentence for selling illegal liquor. Later, a distiller bearing his name claimed to have used his recipes and processes, though Sutton remains something of an anti-establishment folk hero in his native North Carolina and in moonshiner circles.

Hutcheson's book combines colorful interviews with Sutton, personal recollections of meeting with him and creating the movie about him, and descriptions of how Sutton made his signature stills and beverages. It also includes an interesting chapter outlining the history of Appalachian moonshine from the nineteenth century, putting Sutton in context of a regional tradition that has changed a lot over the years, but still retains its roots.

The production of *The Moonshiner Popcorn Sutton* is noteworthy as well: its beautiful layouts and glossy paper will make it work as a coffee table book and a keepsake. It features color photographs of Sutton at work and at home, of the Appalachian region where he operated, and of copies of newspaper stories and fliers about the moonshining legend. This is a comprehensive, enjoyable biography about a man and his famous moonshine.

JEFF FLEISCHER (May / June 2021)

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