

[Jim Miller]

Redfield, Georgia B.

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JIM MILLER

Built First School for Roswell Community

Pioneer Sheepman and Ranchman

Promoter of Agricultural Development

J. M. Miller, affectionately called "Uncle Jim Miller" and as such, will probably always be remembered, first came to Roswell to visit a brother, during the month of March 1878. Besides visiting, he was also in search of a suitable location in which he could establish and develop a ranch home in which he and his family would be able to dwell in peace and harmony of surroundings.

In Roswell he found every thing esle but peace, and quiet and harmony.

Shooting contests, and practice with sixshooters and Winchesters were the chief diversions of both old and young for Roswell, and the country roundabout was seething with unrest and excitement over recent killings of John Tunstall, a young Englishman who was killed February 18th, 1878, just a month before the coming of Mr. Miller, by a posse, which was the climax of bitter feuds and fighting of rival cattle-men that formed the two factions of the Lincoln County War. The shooting of Mortan and Baker a few weeks following the Tunstall murder was the cause of much excitement on the arrival [???

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of Mr. Miller. Billy the Kid, a youthful desperado, had made his appearance at Old Seven Rivers during the spring of 1877 and had gone to Lincoln where he made his home and worked for John Tunstall for whose shooting he swore to have revenge. He was like a firebrand in blowing the hatred and lust for murdering, to extremes of almost frenzy, and to him more than any other persons, belongs the credit, or discredit, of bringing about the Lincoln War which was in full blast. No one dared venture out witho'ut a sixshooter or gun of some kind. Mr. Miller being a quiet peaceable man, after a short visit, returned to his home in Colorado. However, he had liked all that he had seen in this section of Southeast New Mexico. He remembered the great wide unfenced lands covered with green grass and the rivers, he had crossed filled with fine clear water. He knew the possibilities of this country which seemed to him to be ideal for the sheep business, he desired to enter into. After reaching his former home in Colorado, he turned his prairie schooner around and came right back again to New Mexico.

The Berrendo two miles north of Roswell was running bank full. North Spring River, now a bog hole, where Mr. Miller watered his team before entering the town, ran over the hubs of his wheels, while his four horses were drinking, just about where the Roswell Museum stands at the present time on the corner of North Main and Eleventh Streets. In the town of Roswell there were only two buildings. They 3 were built of adobe, one for a store and one for a hotel. Captain Lea had arrived a year earlier, February 12, 1877 and had purchased all the holdings of Smith and Wilburn and in August before Mr. Miller's return, Major W. W. Wildy purchased the holdings of Marion Turner, which included the store which contained the postoffice, a few drugs and a few dry goods and groceries. He could buy (when he returned the flour, sugar, coffee and whiskey (if he desired) all of which Marion Turner, the previous store keeper had run out of, on Mr. Miller's previous visit.

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Captain Lea had established the home for his wife, and Wildy the baby and only son, in the adobe built for a [?] hotel by Smith and Wilburn, in which Elinor, his daughter, the first white girl baby born in Roswell, was born.

Since the coming of Captain Lea, who insisted on having law and order, the town (all of which was owned by Captain Lea and his wife Sally Wildy Lea) had become the place of peace and quiet sought by Mr. Miller. He located on what is now known as the old Chisholm Hog Ranch, eleven miles south-east of Roswell. Mr. Miller talked with Captain Lea and Judge Stone, who owned a small bunch of sheep, and quickly realized that there was a promising future here for sheep raising, handled on a large scale, where they could range on hundreds of acres of fine open pasture land, the most of which from Seven Rivers to the Bosque Grande thirty-five miles Northeast of Roswell was used as free grazing land by John Chisum.

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Mr. Miller bought his first bunch of sheep in 1880, and at last, as he desired, was launched in the sheep business for practically all of the remainder of his life. He knew that the best blooded stock he could procure would pay better in the end. He paid a large sum of money for one of the finest rams that could be bought, for his own use, and the use of other smaller sheep men.

He continued in the sheep business about eighteen years. In 1897 he sold twenty-one thousand head, practically retiring from the sheep business, retaining only a very few head. He again entered the sheep business two years later, in 1899, on a large scale, in partnership with his sons Fred and Sherman, thereby aiding in establishing what has become one of the best paying industries in the Pecos Valley of Southeast New Mexico.

Property interests of Mr. Miller were fifteen blocks (from thirty to fifty acres each) in all about 525 in the Pomona Farm Tract, and 1,920 acres along the eight miles southeast of Roswell on the Pecos River, which was used by him for agricultural purposes and grazing.

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In 1881 he contracted and built the first school house, a one room adobe with a dirt floor, and sod roof, where his boys went to school, (about three miles east of Roswell) and were taught by the first teacher for the Roswell community, who was an attorney by the name of Asbury C. Rogers.

Mr. Miller was known as a man that was a friend of all 5 well-meaning men. It is said by old timers, that no one else could have run sheep on cattle land and keep friendly as he did, with cattlemen.

He helped other small sheep and cattle men in getting a start where it was hard to get established on land already usurped by large cattle holders. His home was open hospitably to the cowboy and small herd cattle men, as well as to the big cattle owners. He was generous to a fault in sharing with the poor and needy. During the hard days of depression, before his death in February, 1936, he gave aid to the poor and needy whenever he saw where it was needed.

He was a level headed business man and one of the leaders in all important business affairs of the town, especially in securing educational advantages, for the town children, as well as for his own children and the farming communities. While his older boys, Hugh, Fred and Sherman, received the best education a new country could afford, Prager and Jaffa Miller the two younger sons, both graduated from the New Mexico Military Institute, and college.

Mr. Miller is survived by his wife who lives in Oklahoma at the present time, and three sons - Sherman who lives in Roswell, and Prager who lives in Albuquerque, and Jaffa who lives in Santa Fe.

The last years of Mr. Miller's life were spent in the old Bankhead Hotel that was known as the cattleman's favorite rendezvous, and until his last days he enjoyed talking of the old

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days when Roswell was only a postoffice trading post, for cattlemen, and children walked the cattle trails around the town with sixshooters strapped to their belts.

His funeral in Roswell was attended by people from long distances and from all walks of life, who came to pay their last respects to their honored friend.

Sources of Information

From the subject himself as told to the Writer and History of New Mexico, Pacific States Pub. Co., Vol, 2