

HOMER MILLER and his wife Helen, who both work in the company store, where Homer's grandfather and father before him have worked.

## The Millers

BY HOMER MILLER

I wasn't interested in finding out where my people came from when I was a kid, but Aunt Della told me that Baxter Miller went to Hiddenite and brought them down here. They moved into one of these little three room houses here and my grandfather, Sanford Miller, opened the meat market in a little house here.



While Grandfather was runnin' the meat market in that little house, they had a tree behind the house where they would hang the meat and dress it. Then while he was workin' there he had a machine, I don't know where he got it, but it had little blocks in it and you poured milk in them and packed ice around it and then you'd shake it back and forth and it made ice cream bars. Then he'd sell 'em to the children. I guess that was the way the first ice cream bars were made.

Grandfather was in bad health when he came here. He had ulcers. But I don't know how long they had been here when Mr. B. D. Heath, Harry's grandfather, carried him and put him on the train to go to the hospital in Charlotte. Then when he got to Charlotte, they sent word that he was already dying when he got there.

My father was Clarence Alexander Miller. He was born March 7, 1893. His sisters and brothers were Della McKennon, she's living in Charlotte now; and Mae Lacy, Wade, Ross, and James. My mother was Mabel Thomas Miller and her family was here before the Millers. She had two sisters, Della Hough and Carrie Long; and four brothers, Otho, and Carl. When they married, Dad was 16 and my Mom was just 14. Then they had five children – Pauline and myself, Mary Lynn and James and Junior.

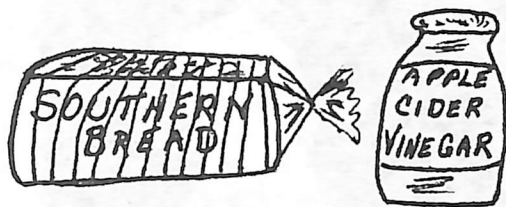


CLARENCE AND MABEL MILLER around 1910. "When they married, Dad was 16 and Mom was just 14." (Photo courtesy of Pauline M. Bolton)

Dad said that he went through the fourth grade and then went to work in the mill when he was about eight or nine years old. Dad and mother were both working in the weave room. Later he went to work part-time in the lower store to help fill orders. Then he quit the mill and went to work full time in the store. Then when I was about nine years old, he left here and went in the insurance business in Chester. But he said he saw real quick that it was costin' him more than he was gettin' out of it. Then he worked for Dunn over at the Baldwin Mill in Chester. He went from there to Brawleys in Chester and then came back here when I was ten years old and went back to weaving. Then later he went back to work for Mr. Heath in the store. Dad was working in the lower store when they built the new store and did away with

both old stores. He was manager there for twenty-two years. Then Mr. Gilbert Heath took the duty of Post Master and he had his office upstairs. Then later Mr. Heath was out of the store more as he took more to do with the mill.

Then in 1937, Dad borrowed money and went in business for himself. He rented the old Atkinson Store. Then it burned and we moved to a little store where that green house is by the Youth Center. Then they sold the land where the old Atkinson store was and we built that building that is the Youth Center now. Whenever the old store burned we lost everything. They didn't have a fire department here then, so the Rangers came, but it was too late, Dad said, all they could do was watch it burn. I wasn't here then, it was just Dad and Helen. Helen stayed here and helped Dad with the store when I went to Jacksonville, North Carolina. That was on a Thursday night. It was payday at the mill and everybody had bought their groceries and they had a copy of their bill of what they had bought and what they owed. We had a copy too, but they had all burned in the fire. But they brought their bills back to the store and paid them. Then we moved in that little house next to the store, and the bread man came by and we bought bread and had found one bottle of vinegar in the ashes and we started the business on that vinegar and bread. John Coker



and Wimpy Cooper helped us. Dad delivered the mail from Lando to Edgemoor three times a day to meet the train, and I went to Columbia to get produce about twice a week. Then when I was here, I delivered groceries on the hill. So John and Helen ran the store. After we built the building there where the Youth Center is Dad only lived about six months. He died in 1951.

During the war, Dad built that pavilion on the old Atkinson Store and put in a piccalo for the soldiers to dance. There was



JAMES MILLER and Alex Bolton at the pavilion. (Photo courtesy of Pauline M. Bolton)



LIB MILLER with Lee Miller (left) and Alex Bolton. Note pavilion and store in background. (Photo courtesy of Pauline M. Bolton)

soldiers everywhere camped around here getting ready to go to war. Thousands of 'em bivouacked everywhere over the countryside. They went to Dad and asked him if he would put in beer. They had two big old long ice boxes and they hauled in truckloads of beer and stacked it in there and put three or four blocks of ice on it. Dad hauled it out of Chester and while they were buying up one load, he'd be hauling in another load. It kept him going back and forth haulin' beer. Dad didn't like the idea, but the commanding officers asked him to do that to help keep the soldiers here. They told Dad, said, "We'll keep peace here. If one gets out of line, we'd take care of him." And sure 'nough, if they staggered a couple of times and uttered something they shouldn't say, well, he was soon gone. They kept two or three jeeps of M.P.s just hanging around there. Dad kept that pavilion runnin' all through the war, and after the war was over, Dad fenced in the pavilion and put wire and started raisin' chickens in the pavilion where they used to dance. Then he had chickens to sell. He had gas pumps too, and sold gas. It was a old hand pump. Lot of places sold gas here then – Brooks, Tadlock, Burns and Reid sold it but the trouble then was that nobody had the money to buy gas.

I've heard Dad say that when he was young they delivered groceries on a flat bed truck with a chain around it. He said sometime it would be two or three o'clock in the morning when they finished, because, you see, they had such a large business. Sam Featherstone worked for Dad then in the lower store. People couldn't just walk out of the store with their groceries back then. They bought flour in barrels and got fat back by the slab. You didn't have automobiles and most didn't have a horse and buggy. So, if you got it, you had it delivered.

Why, you used to could buy pickled pig feet out of barrels. They sold two for a nickel and they were big ones – some broad as your hand. I've bought many a one and sat down and just gnawed on it for 30 or 40 minutes. They packed

salt mackerel in 25 gallon kegs. And they used to have a candy counter with a licorice, peppermint sticks, and little tin containers with a tin spoon for you to eat the candy with.



*THE CANDY COUNTER at the Company Store: "They used to have a candy counter with licorice . . ." (Photo courtesy of Harry Heath)*

I remember that my Dad would never charge the minister or old Dr. Gaston one penny profit on anything. Sometime he sold to them below cost. He was Secretary and Treasurer of the Sunday School and Methodist Church for about thirty years.

They had two bands here — the brass band and later a string band. The first brass band was before WWI, but I

played in the string band. A fellow from Rock Hill by the name of Stover came down here and taught us. Everybody had to buy their own instruments then. The company didn't have anything to do with it. The old round band pavilion stood in the pasture for years and years where the old brass band used to play, but they just gradually tore it down. People'd just tear a board or two off at a time, 'til it was finally gone. And they had park benches all in the pasture, but people tore 'em down, too.

I'll tell you the truth, I'd like to go back to the days when I was comin' up. You didn't have automobiles. You'd go to church on Sunday mornin', come home, put on your overalls, stick some biscuits in your pocket and light out to the woods. Bud, Dewey, Clyde and Jack Sanders, Walter Helms — why, all we did was stay in the woods.

The only way you could go out of here was to ride the dummy to Edgemoor and catch the train to Chester. From there you could catch the train to Charlotte. That was the Seaboard. Now, you could go to Rock Hill on the Southern if when you got to Chester, you'd walk from the Seaboard over to the Southern.

I guess the most people I ever remember livin' here was about 1,200. On election day, Lando would carry about 300 votes. People were always comin' through here tryin' to get votes. They built a paltform up there in that vacant lot by where that garage used to be, where the fire station is now — and all the politicians would come through here and speak. ■



*THE LANDO STRING BAND in 1927 (Photo courtesy of Laura Alley)*