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**Obscure Political Figure Came  
From Lancaster Area**

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One of South Carolina's lesser known public servants, Stephen Decatur Miller, served his state and country ably as a state legislator, governor and senator. Of humble background, Miller's ancestors were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who had emigrated to South Carolina from Northern Ireland.

He was born in 1787 or 1788 in the Waxhaw Community of the Lancaster District. Although Miller's health in later life was poor, as a young man he had the build and vigor of an athlete — broad-chested, with well-developed muscles in robust health.

Soon after his birth, his father died. Not inheriting any money, the few slaves the family had were eventually sold to pay for his education.

He enrolled at South Carolina College, now the University of South Carolina, and became a member of the graduating class of 1808. Returning to Lancaster District, he ran for Clerk of Court and was defeated. Believing that opportunity lay elsewhere, he moved to Sumter, studied law under John S. Richardson, and was eventually admitted to the bar in 1811. Soon afterwards, Richardson became the attorney general of South Carolina, and Miller took over

his lucrative and well-established law practice.

In 1817, he began his career in public service as a member of the United States House of Representatives. He had married in 1814, but later his wife's illness prevented him from running for a second term. She died in 1819.

Miller married again in 1821 to Mary Boykin of Camden. A daughter by this marriage, Mary Boykin Chestnut Miller, wrote one of the greatest works to come out of the War Between the States, *Diary From Dixie*.

When he entered Congress he was a strong opponent of South Carolinian John C. Calhoun. Eventually, however, he converted to Calhoun's nullification doctrine. He was a leading opponent of several tariff acts of the federal government and condemned the federal appropriation of money for roads and canals.

The next year, he reentered politics winning the election to the South Carolina Senate as a member from Sumter. As senator, he held the important post of Chairman of the Judiciary Committee.

His climb up the political ladder continued, and in 1828 while still a senator, he won election as governor of South Carolina, an office he held for two years.

While governor he spoke out strongly in

favor of nullification and believed in militant action to support his views. He became well known for stating there were three ways to reform unequal congressional legislation — "the ballot box, the jury box, and the cartridge box."

Miller took his seat in the United States Senate in December of 1831. He strongly opposed the policies of Andrew Jackson, although, privately, their relations seemed cordial.

Like most South Carolinians at the time, he considered the federal tariff laws unconstitutional and oppressive. Although he spoke and voted against the tariff of 1832, it passed. Miller then joined most of the other members of the South Carolina delegation in an "Address to the People of South Carolina" which rejected the tariff rates as unsatisfactory.

Believing that a fair deal from the federal government could not be made and that the answer lay in the assertion of states rights, he voted for the Nullification Ordinance of 1832.

In the convention of 1833, he opposed the measure requiring all office holders to take an oath of allegiance to the state. Nevertheless, it passed with a solid majority.

In 1833, because of poor health, he resigned from the Senate and retired to Mississippi where he grew cotton. In 1838, Stephen Decatur Miller, the man who a few years earlier had been at the Center of South Carolina politics, died obscurely in Raymond, Mississippi.