

The incorrigible exaggerator, philanderer, poet — and county judge of Canyon City

POLICE FORCED TO RESCUE CORPSE AFTER FUNERAL DESCENDS INTO RIOT

By Rylan Boggs
Blue Mountain Eagle

Though Joaquin Miller's life is well documented, it is largely documented by Miller himself.

An incorrigible exaggerator, Miller was known for frequently stretching, if not entirely fabricating, the truth. As such it is necessary to take any information about Miller with a grain of salt. The writer Ambrose Bierce called him "the greatest liar this country has ever produced," according to Literary Traveler, an online compendium of famous writers.

The self-styled Indian fighter, horse thief and gunslinger is known to have settled in Canyon City for a time and worked as a lawyer as well as a judge from 1866 to 1870. His cabin and many of his belongings have been preserved by the Grant County Historical Museum in Canyon City.

Born Cincinnatus Hiner Miller in 1839, he later took the name Joaquin Miller for theatrical purposes, according to museum documents. His Quaker family lived in Liberty, Indiana. His mother was a homemaker and his father a school teacher. He had two brothers, George and James. When Miller was about 15, his family headed west in a wagon train to the Willamette Valley in Oregon.

Soon after arriving in Oregon, Miller and a friend left to mine gold in Northern California. While there, Miller found working as the camp cook more to his liking than mining. However, he contracted scurvy from eating only what he cooked. In response to criticisms he wrote,



Joaquin Miller first known photograph, subtitled by his brother, Geo Miller June 27th 1927. Contributed photo/Grant County Historical Museum

"I cooked all winter for 27 men, and every man was alive in the spring," according to Literary Traveler.

Miller is said to have turned down an invitation to take part in an unauthorized military expedition to Nicaragua but claims that he had fought in the country. He was forced to leave the mining camp after writing less than flattering poetry about another miner who did not take kindly to Miller's words.

Upon leaving the camp, Miller lived with Native Americans in California. He is known to have fathered a daughter named Cali-Shasta, meaning lily of Shasta, with a native woman named Paquita. However, he grew tired of life with the natives and abandoned his daughter and Paquita to return to Oregon.

Miller attended Columbia College and is said to have graduated as valedictorian in a record three months. However, the school burned down shortly after, destroying all records and making it impossible to say what he studied.

He then returned to California to live with Paquita and Cali-Shasta. His time in Cal-

'The greatest liar this country has ever produced'



Contributed photo/Grant County Historical Museum

ifornia is thought to have inspired his book "Life Among the Modocs." During this period, Miller ran into trouble with the law on two occasions. The first time he was alleged to be fighting alongside Native Americans against settlers, and the second he was arrested for stealing horses after not being paid for work as a cowhand. As hanging was typically punished by death, Miller made it a point to escape quickly, according to Literary Traveler.

How he actually facilitated this escape is not known. Some records show that a cell mate was responsible for triggering a breakout, while Miller writes it was Paquita who slipped him a file, allowing him to earn his own freedom.

From here, Miller returned

again to Oregon. Despite being a fugitive and a complete lack of legal education, he took up work as a lawyer and then a teacher. After failing at these occupations, he answered an advertisement to work as a Pony Express rider between Idaho and Washington, according to Literary Traveler and museum documents.

In 1862, museum documents show he purchased a pro-southern newspaper called the Democratic Register in Eugene. His inflammatory editorials quickly turned the public against him and ended his publishing days.

It was at the paper that Miller first read the poetry of "Minnie Myrtle," the pen name of Theresa Dyer. The

two began exchanging letters, and Miller eventually went to visit her in Cape Blanco. They were married three days after his arrival. For their honeymoon, they rode on horseback to Eugene through the Sierras, which gave both of them ample material for their poetry.

The couple gave birth to their first child, a girl named Maud, in the summer of 1863.

It was after the birth of their child that the couple moved to Canyon City, where Miller worked as a lawyer. His most notable case was his defense of William Kane, who was the second man hung in Grant County for the murder of a man named Sullivan.

Miller ran for county judge in 1866, was elected and served until 1870. The family's life in Canyon City was less than ideal, Miller was said to have been neglectful of his wife, preferring to spend his time writing, working or drinking. However, he was present enough to conceive two more children with Theresa, George and Harry. Theresa was liked by the people of Canyon City, who saw her as a patient woman with whom they sympathized with for putting up with Miller.

Theresa eventually left Miller, taking the children with her. She filed for divorce, destroying Miller's ambitions of gaining a seat on the state supreme court. The children were placed in school at Miller's expense. He sent regular child support payments as well as additional money to his ex-wife, according to museum documents and Literary Traveler.

He abandoned his pursuit of law and left Canyon City in 1870 for California to pursue poetry. It was during this time that he wrote some of his best known works, including "Songs of the Sierras." Unable to find a publisher for the book in the United States, Miller headed to London.

In Europe, Miller took to wearing such eccentric items as sombreros, bright red shirts

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RANCHING IN THE GOOD OL' DAYS

Drinkwater recalls feeding cattle by sleigh in wintertime 1940s cattle drives from Prairie City to Logan Valley and from there to Seneca

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

Billy Drinkwater of John Day, who will celebrate his 100th birthday in May next year, remembers the days of no electricity or indoor plumbing.

When his parents had a phone installed, their number was "five rings."

Ranching was a big part of life for Drinkwater, who was born in Burns in 1917 and grew up on a ranch 20 miles north of Burns on the Silvies River.

His pioneer ancestors helped settle the area in Harney County.

Drinkwater said in the winter months a person, in this day and age, can drive down the highway and see a tractor in a field.

"The tractor is pulling square bales, probably with the heater on," he said.

He recalls feeding cattle by sleigh in wintertime.

"The hay was loose, stacked hay," he said. "It had to be pitched by hand with a pitchfork."

All the work was completed with horses in those early years, and he still remembers his team of horses used to feed the cattle.

"When we would come to the gate, I would holler, 'Whoa,' at the them, and they would stop at the gate and wait until I opened it," Drinkwater said. "Then I would speak to them, and they pulled the hay wagon through the gate. They would stop until I got on the wagon and spoke to them."

There were 20-24 work horses needed to help during haying season, and in the afternoon, a new set of horses would take over the work of bucking the hay. His family's first tractor,

a John Deere, was purchased when he was in high school.

After graduating from Burns High School, Drinkwater attended Oregon State University's agriculture school, graduating with a two-year degree.

It was there he fell in love with Francis French, and they married in 1941.

They lived on the ranch near Burns, then, about a year later, moved to Prairie City where they eventually became owners of the French Ranch, previously owned by Francis' parents, Frank and Elsie.

The Drinkwaters ran cattle at the home ranch in winter and spring, and the cattle summered in Logan Valley.

Back in the '40s, they had a cattle drive to Logan Valley, overnighting near the Trout Farm at Turman corrals.

"In those days, we sold cattle by contract," he said.



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter

Billy Drinkwater, nearing the century mark, has a story or two to tell about how life was in the good old days.

"We'd drive cattle from Logan Valley to Seneca where the Oliver scales were," and

this would determine the price.

From there, the cattle were

loaded on the train that traveled from Seneca to Crane and Vale. The livestock then traveled from Ontario to Portland.

In Portland, buyers would bid on cattle in different stockyards, purchasing a "lot" of cattle, he said.

Billy and Francis raised their four children, Ronny, Jay, Jean and Jerry, in Prairie City.

The children attended Riverside School, a two-room schoolhouse managed by teacher Betty Stanbro, who owned a Prairie City ranch with her husband, Irving.

Francis died of cancer in 1960, and Billy married Betty Bogue in 1963.

Also widowed, Betty and her two children, John and Judy, combined with Billy and his children.

The family was self-sustained, growing a garden, slaughtering pigs and cows and selling cream at the local creamery.

"I've always thought that the ranch was a good place to raise a family because they learned how to work, and play," Drinkwater said. "Everything we did was done as a family."