

William Miller Story

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Submitted by Evelyn Shanklin*

"Work hard, tend to your own business, be honest and let Providence take care of the rest!"

That is the recipe for a long life, advocated by William Miller of Whitestown, Boone county, who today observed his 100th birthday and who is a healthy, alert example of practicing what he preaches. Believe it or not, despite his age, he has a hankering to ride in an airplane.

The centenarian, keen-eyed and active, full of interest in everything going on around him, is amazing, for he splits wood for his little stove, carries it in, carries out the ashes, walks over to see his son, "a couple of city blocks" down the road, almost daily, reads incessantly when indoors, eats three square meals a day and sleeps soundly seven or eight hours each night.

Mr. Miller owns the 235-acre farm on which he lives near Whitestown. It includes the land on which he settled when he, his wife and children came to Indiana, with all the hardships of pioneer life facing them. The old log cabin that he built from trees he felled, still stands on the farm although it is not used and is somewhat dilapidated.

"We came from Green county, Tennessee, in a covered wagon, camping along the way at nights," said Mr. Miller, as he reminisced of days gone by. "And it took us eleven days. Sounds powerful slow to folks riding automobiles and airplanes today, but we thought we made pretty good time. We came up to Madison, taking the steamboat ferry from the Kentucky side and came to Indianapolis on the old Madison road. I remember well what a hunt I made in Indianapolis which was just a village itself then, for some bread for we had run out! And you wouldn't believe it, but I couldn't buy a bit of bread in town, but I got some corn meal, so we went on up north of town on the river, and camped for the night. I built a fire, my wife got out the frying pan and made some corn bread for supper. The next day we came on. I had just \$5 when we arrived.

"All these farms were woods, with here and there a low log cabin, and not many of them either. There were no roads and Lebanon was just a mudhole, although it had a post office and a kind of courthouse. That courthouse was a sight, just a pile of mouldy bricks about ready to fall down. It did fall down pretty soon and then they put up a right solid building, and later replaced that one with the fine building they've got now.



William Miller

"We rented a few acres north of here for a while, but I soon took over some ground, about forty acres, from a fellow who wanted to leave and I built my cabin in 1852. I did most of the work of clearing, cutting down trees and building the cabin myself, and I'll never forget how bad the mosquitoes were, we had to build smudges to keep from being eaten up while building the house. I've been on the land ever since, and this is the third house I've lived in, this one being built about thirty years ago. Right under the living room there's a big oak stump. I remember that fine tree that had to be cut down to put up the house. I didn't have much money in those old days, but I didn't have very big taxes either. In 1854 I paid \$2.50 and I pay about \$600 now."

Mr. Miller was born in Green county, Tennessee. He likes to recall his boyhood days and life in his old home:

"Why, when I was a boy at home," he said, "in the south, the darkies used to play their banjos and sing and there'd always be one little pickaninny to dance for us and we thought that was fine entertainment. I can just see my old home now of cold winter evenings. We used to have a big open fire, mother'd be standing by her big wheel spinning and sometimes she'd spin way into the night. It would be my job to take care of the fire and I'd throw on big pine knots that would flame up and smell so good.

"The older brother went to the Mexican war and I was just rarin' to go. I went down to enlist, but they wouldn't have me for I was just a boy then. I've lived through several wars, but haven't been in any of them, although my father was in the Indian wars. I

had my family when the Civil War came along. I was a Southerner, too. My father's house was burned down with all their possessions, even their clothes, during the Civil War and he came up to live with us until after the war was over."

Mr. Miller remembers clearly events of the years that have passed and also talks just as clearly about problems of today.

"I never miss reading the newspapers and the magazines; I listen to the radio, ride in the automobile, go to the movies once in a while, and I'll tell you, I'm just a hankering to take an airplane ride. That's the truth. If one would come around here, I'd hop right in and take a fly!"

"Wouldn't you be nervous?" asked a listener.

"Not much," chuckled Mr. Miller.

Mr. Miller said that women today in regard to styles are just like they always were.

"Why I remember the hoop skirt. Mercy, but the men made fun of them, but the women kept getting them bigger and bigger, started with just stiffening and ended with steel barrel hoops! It was just a spurt though and first thing we knew they had turned to the bustle. That's the way with the short skirts, they kept getting them shorter until they just wore the style out and turned to something else.

"I expect the girls, or men either for that matter, wouldn't have so many clothes today if they had not

only to make them but spin the thread that went into the material, cut the flax and shear the sheep before that. Some way, you can't seem to picture a bobbed-hair woman today at a big spinning wheel. But I think the styles today are all right, a lot better than those bustles and hoops."

Mr. Miller also told of how he used to drive into Indianapolis with a team of oxen hitched to his wagon carrying corn to the mill to have it ground.

"It took me all day to drive there," he said. "I'd stay all night in town and take the whole next day to coming home. The grist mill was on the canal. I've seen Indianapolis grow up into a city during my life here. I'm glad I've lived during this last 100 years, for it seems like everything's been invented imaginable."

Charles Miller, a son, and his wife live with Mr. Miller. Near by lives another son, John Miller. A son, W. H. Miller, and two daughters, Mrs. John Bruce and Mrs. Eber Reser, live in Indianapolis. There are seven children dead. Twenty-two grandchildren are living and nine great-grandchildren. Mrs. Frank Walker, a granddaughter, and Jerome Hauser, a grandson, also live in Indianapolis.

Open house was kept at the home of Mr. Miller today and members of the family from far and near gathered to help him observe the anniversary. ☆



Charles, Elizabeth, Mahala, and William Miller