The Samuel & Magdalena Miller family of Lancaster Co., PA, York Co., PA, Rockingham Co., VA, and Fairfield Co., OH - Part I
By Jeffrey E. Mason

Editor’s Note: The Miller family is a challenge to research with many family lines of both British and German descent representing varied religions. Mr. Mason’s extensive research is an inspiration to all who are curious about family and history.

My direct ancestor and 7th great grandfather Samuel Miller owned property at the head of Cooks Creek, three miles West-Northwest of Harrisonburg in Rockingham County, from approximately 1785 until his death early in 1788. His wife Magdalena may have never lived in Rockingham County at all, as she is not listed as a beneficiary of Samuel’s estate, so we are left to assume that she was deceased prior to 1788, and possibly even prior to 1785 when Samuel and his family moved from Manchester Township in York County, Pennsylvania.

According to the Kenneth D. Miller book Barnard-Miller and Allied Families, the author recalls a 1927 visit to the Samuel Miller house, west of Harrisonburg, which is now the “By the Side of the Road Inn & Cottages,” a bed and breakfast located at 491 Garbers Church Road in Harrisonburg. A picture of the house is contained in Kenneth Miller’s book, the appearance of which confirms the connection to the present day establishment. The house and the cemetery where Samuel Miller is thought to have been buried are within view of each other. The cemetery contains grave markers for Samuel’s son Michael and Michael’s wife Elizabeth (Brenneman) Miller and is completely surrounded by a brick fence, itself surrounded by asphalt, all of which is located in the middle of a modern day suburban neighborhood.

Celebrity Descendants
This article will focus primarily on Samuel’s parents and siblings, with further articles on his children, grandchildren, and successive generations to be published at a later time. But before getting into the early history of the family, there are two celebrity descendants that must be mentioned. First, Benjamin Russel Hanby, writer of the songs Darling Nelly Gray, Who is He in Yonder Stall, and the famous Christmas Song Up on the Housetop. Benjamin was a great-grandson of Samuel & Magdalena Miller. Benjamin’s father William Hanby, a saddler by trade, was instrumental in the underground railroad in central Ohio. Several books have been written about the Hanby family including the historically accurate Choose You This Day by Dacia Custer Shoemaker, which outlines the lives of the Miller and Hanby families. Author Rosslyn Elliott penned three titles, Fairer Than Morning, Sweeter Than Birdsong, and Lovelier Than Daylight, cumulatively referred to as The Saddler’s Legacy. The books beautifully weave together fact and fiction as they trace the steps of the Hanby family in 19th century Pennsylvania and Ohio. Having read all of these books, my opinion is that they are a must read for anyone even remotely interested in the Hanby and/or Miller families.

Another Miller family descendant celebrity whose creations are also known throughout the world, is Michael Crichton, author of Twister, Jurassic Park, The Andromeda Strain, and creator of the acclaimed TV series ER. Michael’s untimely death came on November 4, 2008. His mother, Zula (Miller) Crichton was a 5th great-granddaughter of Samuel & Magdalena Miller, and she passed away March 2, 2011, in Connecticut at the age of 91. Michael Crichton and I are “double” 3rd cousins once removed, as we share common ancestry among four of my 3rd great-grand-parents. Michael is famous for his writing and filmmaking skills and in 1994 became the first
writer to rank number one in books, film, and television all at the same time. Since Michael earned an MD from Harvard Medical School in the early years of his career, it is unsurprising that his favorite genres were of a medical nature.

Both Hanby and Crichton may have been interested to know the earliest domestic roots of their Miller family date back to at least 1717 when Michael Miller obtained land warrants for approximately 500 acres of land in the area of the Conestoga and Pequea Creeks in what was then Chester County, Pennsylvania. In 1729 this area split off from Chester County and became part of the formation of Lancaster County. The land was part of a larger tract of approximately 5,000 acres which were warranted to Martin Kendig and Hans Herr during the same year, and which were meant to be “settlements for several of their Country-men that are lately arrived here.”4 This group of countrymen, including the Miller family, were Mennonite in faith and emigrated from the vicinity of Zurich, Switzerland.5

**Starburst Migration Patterns**

After analyzing the migration patterns of the Miller family following their arrival in America, I have been surprised to discover that they were only one family surname among several dozen others who seemed to move and relocate together. They were no doubt connected by strong religious ties that came from their mother countries of Switzerland and Germany. This cluster of families settled in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, then moved either further east into York County, Pennsylvania, or south into Maryland. From there, many traveled to the Valley of Virginia into what are now the counties of Rockingham and Shenandoah, and from there into southeastern Ohio. From Ohio, many families jettisoned themselves into all other parts of the country in a starburst fashion. Surnames of families that were part of this cluster include Beery, Bibler, Brennemann, Brumbach, Cagey or Kagey, Coffman or Kauffman, Culp, Graybill, Groff or Grove, Heistand or Hiestand, Kemerer, Kneisley, Landis, Leib, Radebaugh, Schenk, Seitz, Stemen, and Strickler, among others. Of course, these surnames often had variant spellings.

With respect to the Millers, it is nearly certain that Michael emigrated with a very young son Jacob and without a wife.6 His wife was presumed to have died either in Switzerland or somewhere along their journey to Pennsylvania. Michael must have married Barbara Kneisly very shortly after his arrival in Pennsylvania, as their first child Elizabeth was born approximately in 1720. Michael predeceased Barbara, making his will on 23 Mar 1736/1737 in Lancaster County. The will was proven 20 Aug 1739 and Barbara was appointed administratrix, as Michael’s will did not name an executor.7 Shortly thereafter, an initial inventory of his estate was taken.8 The will mentions his wife Barbara and his children, but then mentions his son Jacob separately. An examination of various documents created in the years following Michael’s death and the coming of age of his children reveal that Jacob was not Barbara’s son, as he was never referred to as such.

**The Legacy of Research**

There are many books that have been written about this Miller family, or which contain information about them, and a debt is owed to these early authors who compiled family information which might have otherwise been lost forever. Among others, these books include *Forerunners: A History or Genealogy of the Strickler Families, Their Kith and Kin* by Harry M. Strickler (1925), pages 183-187, the *Genealogy and History of the Descendants of Samuel Miller* compiled by J.C. Miller (1912), and also *Barnard-Miller and Allied Families* researched by Kenneth Duane Miller and eventually published by his wife and daughter in 1952 following his death on January 28, 1948.

The continuation of this article will review the information contained in these genealogies and examine the underlying supporting documents in order to determine their general accuracy and provide a general refresher. Recognizing that earlier genealogists did not enjoy the technological advances available to us today as they pursued family information, I am pleased to note that the information was generally accurate and required only minor modifications. Accordingly, I am very grateful for the groundwork that was laid in their writings.
Endnotes:
1 - Rockingham County, Virginia, Real Estate Tax Records for 1817 lists a 205 acre parcel of land owned by Michael Miller, M84 above, who inherited it from his father’s estate, and its location is described therein.
2 - The 1783 Property Tax Records for Manchester Township, York County, Pennsylvania, show Samuel Miller being taxed for 154 acres and some livestock. They also list the number of inhabitants as 13. In 1784, Samuel is still taxed, but by 1785, he disappears from the York County tax rolls. However, he makes his first appearance on the 1785 Property Tax Records for Rockingham County, Virginia. There is another Samuel Miller who purchased property in Rockingham County by 1782 and also in 1784. I believe this to be an unrelated Samuel Miller, as the property continues to be owned by this Samuel well into the 1800s, which is past the date of death for the Samuel Miller who is the subject of this article.
3 - Rockingham County, Virginia, Minute Book, Page 748, meeting of 25 Feb 1788 lists Samuel Miller’s will as having been proven.
5 - Barnard-Miller and Allied Families by Kenneth Duane Miller (1952), Pages 156-157; An Authentic History of Lancaster County, in the State of Pennsylvania by J. I. Mombert (1869), Page 416; History of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, with Biographical Sketches of many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men by Franklin Ellis and Samuel Evans (1883), Page 984.
7 - Will Book A, Page 37, Lancaster County Archives, will of Michael Miller.
8 - Lancaster County Historical Society, 1739 Estate Inventory of Michael Miller, Object ID# Inv. 1739 F004 M, Container #079.
10 - Lancaster County Historical Society, 1733 Estate Inventory of Anthony Knissley, Object ID# Inv. 1733 F001 K, Container #064.

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Editor’s Note: The following genealogy has been carefully researched by Jeffrey E. Mason as described in the Winter 2014 edition of the HRHS Newsletter. The brief biographies of Samuel’s parents, Michael & Barbara (Kneisly) Miller, and siblings continue Mr. Mason’s article.

M – Michael Miller, likely born sometime during the 1690s in the area of Zurich, Switzerland of unknown parentage. He arrived in Pennsylvania probably sometime in 1717 with son Jacob but without his first wife, who was likely deceased. He acquired two parcels aggregating approximately 500 acres of land in what is now East Hempfield Township in Lancaster County in 1717 via warrants. One parcel was approximately 212 acres and the other approximately 285 acres, inclusive of the 6% allowance for roads.9 By 11 Mar 1733, the 285 acre parcel was patented in the name of Daniel Ashelman, so Michael must have sold the land to him by that date.9 Michael made his will on 23 Mar 1736/37, and it was proven on 20 Aug 1739 with second wife Barbara as administratrix.7

Sometime during the period from 1718 to 1720, he married Barbara Kneisly, daughter of Anthony Kneisly. Anthony made his will prior to 1733, as the administrator’s bond was posted on 17 May 1733 by John Kneisly10 who may have been Anthony’s brother. Anthony’s spouse Magdalene was mentioned in his 1735/1736 estate inventory, as was Michael Miller, and various other sons-in-law.10 The 285 acre parcel of land retained by Michael was bordered on the north by two parcels of land owned by Hans Kneisly10 who may have been...
Barbara’s brother or another close relative of the Kneisly family. Barbara was likely born sometime during the 1690s and had at least seven children with Michael. After Michael’s death, she married Fredrick Wooolsleile, as she is named as such on the inventory of Michael’s estate dated 21 Mar 1742/43 along with her new husband Fredrick. Barbara made her will 1 April 1771 later made several codicils, and it was proven in its entirety some years later on 21 Feb 1777. Fredrick predeceased her prior to 1 Jun 1772 when Adam and Anna Sheller were granted letters of administration over Frederick’s estate, he having died intestate. The only known child of Michael Miller and his first wife, name unknown, is:

M1 – Jacob Miller, likely born in or shortly before 1717. On 12 Dec 1739, Jacob releases Barbara from any amounts that may be owing to him from his father’s estate and otherwise quit claims of any interest he may have had to her. The release mentions Michael Miller as Jacob’s father, but makes no mention of Barbara being his mother.

The known children of Michael Miller and second wife Barbara Kneisly are as follows:

M2 – Elizabeth Miller, born about 1720, was married to Abraham Wohlgemuth and lived in what is now Mount Joy Township in Lancaster County. Gerald Faus Wolgemuth published Hickory Level and Chestnut Bottom: The Family of Abraham Wohlgemuth and Elizabeth Miller in 1999, a comprehensive genealogy of this family and their descendants.

M3 – Barbara Miller, likely born in 1721 or 1722, was married to Samuel Wohlgemuth who may be closely related to Abraham Wohlgemuth, husband of Elizabeth Miller, listed above; they lived in Maryland.

M4 – Christian Miller, born about 1723, was married first to Catharine Hegen on 30 Aug 1748, and second to Barbara Hicken (Frick?) on 21 Feb 1753. They lived in Lancaster County their entire lives. Of Christian’s several children, at least two lived to adulthood. Christian’s will was written 22 Oct 1795 and he is buried in the East Petersburg Mennonite Cemetery in East Petersburg, Lancaster County.

M5 – Michael Miller, born about January of 1726/1727 and was married to Susannah, whose last name is unknown. He lived in Lancaster County during his early adulthood, but moved across the Susquehanna River to Hellam Township in neighboring York County, Pennsylvania, where he and his wife raised their family. Michael’s will was written 1 May 1796 in Hellam Township. He died 9 Sep 1796 and is buried in the Strickler–Miller Cemetery adjoining the current York County prison in York County. His wife Susanna, born 9 Oct 1731, survived him. She was buried next to her husband shortly after her death on 05 Jun 1812.

M6 – Magdalena Miller, born about 1728 or 1729 and married to Peter Bawsler as indicated on the Lancaster County indenture dated 16 May 1758. Little else is known of Peter and Magdalena. They appear to have left Lancaster County, as no record of any will, estate, or deed could be located for either of them. There is a Peter Bassler who arrived on the Ship Brotherhood from Rotterdam on 08 Nov 1750 and initially settled in Lancaster County.

M7 – David Miller, born about 1730, was married to Elizabeth Miller (not a close relation to David), possibly a daughter of John Miller and Mary Brubaker. A very thorough article entitled Four Generations of the Family of Pequea Pioneer Jacob Miller (1663-1739) was published by Thomas A. Durkin on Elizabeth’s family in the October 2007 issue of Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage. It is not yet confirmed when David and his wife died, although they both signed a deed selling property to Jacob Brubacher on 22 Feb 1799. It appears that David was buried on the family farm on property owned by his son Andrew Miller at Oregon in Manheim Township, Lancaster County, having lived to the age of 84. Unfortunately there is no mention of the calendar year in which he died.
Endnotes:

7 - Will Book A, Page 37, Lancaster County Archives, Will of Michael Miller.


10 - Lancaster County Historical Society – 1733 Estate Inventory of Anthony Knissley, Object ID# Inv 1733 F001 K, Container #064.

11 - Lancaster County Historical Society - 1742/3 Estate Inventory of Michael Miller, Object ID# Inv 1742/3 F002 M, Container #079.

12 - Will Book C, Page 393, Lancaster County Archives, Will of Barbara Wolslegel.


16 - Information retrieved in 1983 presumably by Roberta Miller-Herbert of New Market, Virginia (now deceased) from Edmund M. Miller of York Haven, Pennsylvania. Mr. Miller apparently was in possession of a family bible containing detailed information on Christian Miller and his family. All of Mrs. Miller-Herbert’s genealogy research was left with the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society in 2012 following her death. This information was obtained from her papers.


18 - Will of Michael Miller of Hellam Township of York County, Book I & J, Page 309, obtained from the York County Archives.

19 - From a letter written by David P. Hively of Red Lion, Pennsylvania, to Augusta Anita Miller of Sacramento, California dated 26 Sep 1983; part of the collection at the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society by Roberta Miller-Herbert see footnote 16.


22 - History of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania with Biographical Sketches of many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men by Franklin Ellis and Samuel Evans (published 1883), Page 984.

Article continued with M8 Samuel Miller and his family with additional history of their time in Rockingham --see Summer 2014, Vol 36, No. 3.
Additionally, an indenture dated 16 May 1758 naming Samuel and his wife “Maudlin” (a phonetic form of Magdalena), among others, concerned real property that he inherited from his father Michael’s estate. The indenture year suggests when Samuel reached the age of 21. As the youngest child, Samuel would have had his share of the inheritance managed by his mother until he reached a lawful age since she was the executor of Michael’s will in 1739. The estate was likely finalized until Samuel received his inheritance. Based on the author’s observation, it was common practice during this time for a male child to receive a parental inheritance only when he reached the age of 21. The indenture mentioned above indicates that Samuel sold his inherited interest in the real estate to his mother, who in turn immediately sold it to Samuel’s brother Christian. According to the 1758 property tax records, Samuel owned only a single horse and was listed as “poor.” By 1764 (the next available Lancaster County tax records) Samuel is no longer listed on the property tax rolls. He almost certainly relocated to nearby York County between 1758 and 1764.

Most publications and resources list Samuel’s wife’s maiden name as Wiley; however, research suggests that her name was more likely Meili (pronounced Miley), as has been postulated in Kenneth Duane Miller’s book. Abundant information in Lancaster and York Counties on the Meili surname, as opposed to very little on Wiley, supports the postulation. Errant transcriptions are not uncommon, especially when translating from German. The will of a Jacob Miley written in Lancaster County lists several daughters, including one named Magdalena, but the will does not mention the sons-in-law. However, DNA analysis indicates a connection between the writer and descendants of a great-great-grandfather of Jacob Meili.

Samuel and his family moved across the Susquehanna River to Manchester Township in York County, Pennsylvania, by 26 Jul 1765, on which date his land was surveyed. He was listed as the then present owner of 154¼ acres. By this time, Samuel’s older brother Michael owned land in Hellam Township in York County, which adjoined Manchester Township to the south and east. In 1770, Samuel was appointed by the York County Court to be Township Overseer of the Poor. Samuel had his real estate in York County surveyed on 03 Jun 1774. In 1781, he was appointed Supervisor of Highways for Manchester Township.

The family’s Mennonite faith prohibited them from engaging in any kind of violence, including war. While a resident of York County, Samuel paid various fines for non-performance of tour of duty between 1777 and 1780. Further fines were levied for Samuel’s failure to take the Oath or Affirmation of Allegiance to the revolutionary government of Pennsylvania. Also, his three oldest sons, Jacob, Christian, and John, paid £1 fine each for “Non Attendance on Days of Exercise” in Captain Yost Herbach’s Company for the year 1783.

Samuel continues to appear on the property tax rolls for York County through the year 1784, after which time he disappears completely. It is probable that Samuel sold the real estate in 1784 or 1785 with money and/or notes changing hands, but without record in the Clerk’s office in York. Unrecorded sales of real estate were a common occurrence in those early periods. It is likely that Samuel sold rather than abandoned the property since when he died his estate was valued at greater than £1,000. The property tax records of Rockingham County, Virginia, first show Samuel’s ownership of property beginning in 1785. The Minute Book for Rockingham County describes 636 acres of property purchased by Samuel from Josiah and Nehemiah Harrison. The property was located approximately three miles west of the Harrisonburg Courthouse. Many publications have suggested that Samuel came to Rockingham County three years earlier in 1782. There is a record of a Samuel Miller paying property taxes beginning in 1782, which consisted of 174 acres valued at 7 shillings 6 pence per acre; however, this is unlikely to be our Samuel Miller. Another Samuel Miller purchased a 215 acre parcel in 1784, but this parcel clearly belonged to one of Irish descent, as indicated on the property tax records.

Samuel Miller’s will was proven on 25 Feb 1788 in Rockingham County, Virginia, but the will itself was completely burned during the Civil War. Nonetheless, charred remnants of portions of related records remain, including among them a couple of singed pages from 15 Nov 1803, in which particulars of what appears to be the
final accounting of Samuel’s estate are described. These two pages are a true linch pin connecting Samuel Miller to all of his children and serve to authenticate most of the information contained books on the Miller family. Despite the burned edges on the pages, each beneficiary is named along with his or her share of receipts from Samuel’s estate. As was customary, the daughters’ inheritance shares were issued to their husbands. Marriage records from Rockingham and Shenandoah counties identify the daughters and their husbands, and, in some cases, identify the brides specifically as daughters of Samuel Miller, deceased. Photocopies of the estate accounting pages, made from microfilm, were found in the burned records collection in The Heritage Museum Genealogy Library.

Samuel and Magdalena had at least 11 children, all of whom are mentioned in Samuel’s (Final?) estate accounting dated 15 Nov 1803, and all were born in Pennsylvania:

M81 – Jacob Miller, born about 1758; death date and place unknown
M82 – Christian Miller, born about 1760; died 25 Feb 1808 in Fairfield County, Ohio
M83 – John Miller, born about 1762; died in March 1808 in Fairfield County, Ohio
M84 – Michael Miller, born 1765; died 17 Apr 1817 in Rockingham County, Virginia
M85 – Abraham Miller, born 18 Jul 1766; died 03 Sep 1831 in Fairfield County, Ohio
M86 – Barbara Miller, born 08 Aug 1768; died 15 Aug 1838 in Fairfield County, Ohio
M87 – Anna Miller, born about 1771; died 11 Jun 1831 in Walnut Twp., Fairfield County, Ohio
M88 – Samuel Miller, born 20 Apr 1773; died 31 Jul 1832 in Rushville, Fairfield County, Ohio
M89 – Mary Magdalena Miller, born 03 Feb 1775, died 03 Apr 1864 in Fairfield County, Ohio
M8A – Elizabeth Miller, born about 1777; died 07 May 1833 in Fairfield County, Ohio
M8B – David Miller, born about 1780; death date and place unknown

Endnotes:
3 - Rockingham County, Virginia Minute Book, Page 748, meeting of 25 Feb 1788 lists Samuel Miller’s will as having been proven.
7 - Will Book A, Page 37, Lancaster County Archives, will of Michael Miller.
24 - Will Book J, Pages 151 & 152, Lancaster County Archives, will of Jacob Meily.
25 - Manchester Township Survey #2658, land owned by Samuel Miller and earlier by John Hoffman; obtained from the York County Heritage Trust.
27 - Lancaster Co., Penn Tax Records, 1750-1855, on microfilm, obtained from the Lancaster County Historical Society.
28 - Results of Family Finder DNA test match as processed by FamilyTree DNA, between Jeffrey E. Mason and another test participant.
29 - York Co., PA Clerk of Courts Quarter Sessions reports, March 1770 quarter, Book 1-3, Page 242, obtained from the York County Archives.
30 - York Co., PA Clerk of Courts Quarter Sessions reports, March 1781 quarter, Book 1-3, Page 284, obtained from the York County Archives.
31 - Property Tax Records for Manchester Twp, York Co., PA: Microfilm #5220 (1758-1769 & 1771), #5740 (1783), and #5222 (1784 & 1785) obtained from the York County Archives.

More information on Samuel & Magdalena’s children and their families will be provided in the future in The Heritage Museum Genealogy Library