

# (“Tick-eye”) John Miller (c1760-1816)

By Jerry Long, Owensboro, Ky.

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Mr. Johnson:

Yesterday I began abstracting the 1890 Owensboro newspapers. One of the first pages I read contained the enclosed item on your relative Jacob Miller, who died in Ohio County, KY on 4 January 1890. The small item referred to him being a son of the pioneer who was mentioned in the writings of Washington Irving. The item appeared in the Owensboro Messenger of 12 January 1890. The article was in two parts - one at the bottom of the first column and the other at the top of the second column. The former regrettably is missing a piece from the lower left-hand corner. After finding it I thought there might also have been something in the Hartford Herald (of Ohio County, KY) so I checked for 6 weeks after Jacob's death and was unable to find anything. I have also enclosed copies of a couple of cards from our surname file. I could not remember if you said you knew of this Giles Chambers researcher or not.

Best wishes,  
Jerry Long

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The following article was repeated in the Owensboro Daily Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 12 January 1890, p4 and Twice-A-Week Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 16 January 1890, p4. The first edition has part of the article torn away. The second edition had the article in full:

A few days ago the MESSENGER published an account of the death of Jacob Miller, of Ohio county, at an extreme old age. He was the last of the children of the hardy pioneers of the days of Boone and his followers. His father is familiar, at least, in name, to every reader of Washington Irving's delightful sketch of Ralph Ringwood, who was Judge Duvall, an eminent lawyer and judge in the early half of the century, came to Kentucky from Virginia when a mere boy and landed alone in the wilderness near the mouth of Green River. He wandered in the woods two days and was finally found by Bill Smithers and was cared for in his cabin, which

stood within the present limits of Owensboro. Duvall remained two weeks with Smithers and struck out again for the interior. Two days of tramping brought him to the hospitable cabin of Miller, who was known as "Bluebead" Miller, from a large, blue, bead-like wart over one of his eyes. He made the wandering boy stop with him, imparted to him a thorough training in woodcraft and gave him a start in the world. "Bluebead" Miller was a rough, untutored son of the wilderness, but was a man for all that with a head and heart that would have done credit to any civilization. These qualities he transmitted in their full force to the younger son who has just died at an age beyond the hope of those whose lives are wholly this side of the glorious old pioneer days.

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**Twice-A-Week Messenger**, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 9 January 1890, p2:

A PIONEER Gone  
Death of Jacob Miller, the Oldest Man  
In the Green River country

Mr. Jacob Miller, the oldest resident of Ohio county, and probably the oldest man in the Green River country, died at his home at Deanfield Monday afternoon. He was born in Ohio county in the latter part of the last century and had never lived outside of the neighborhood where he died. He was a young man when Daviess county was organized and had an intimate knowledge and vivid recollection of men and things connected with the early history of the section in which he lived. It is related of him that he killed the last wolf and chased the last bear ever seen in Ohio county.

He was an ardent politician during the whole of his life. He was a Whig during the existence of that party and was for many years before the war a strong advocate of the abolition of slavery, a doctrine that was extremely odious to many of the people at large. He had the courage of his convictions, however, and always spoke his sentiments. Notwithstanding the unpopularity of his political tenets he held office for a long time and was honored and trusted by all who knew him. He was a born humorist, and the number of practical jokes and pungent witticisms that had their origin with him were innumerable.

He was partially paralyzed for probably forty years before his death, but his health was always remarkably good. His death was the result of no particular disease, but seemed to come about through a general failing of his vital powers. He raised a large family of children, some of whom have already reached an advanced age.

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**Kentucky: A History of the State**, J. H. Battle, W. H. Perrin & G. C. Kniffin, 1885, (Ohio County section):

JAMES BARDNEY MILLER, Ohio County, is the son of Jacob Miller and Martha (Whitler) Miller. The father was born February 28, 1804, in Pennsylvania, and settled in Ohio County, Ky., about 1812. His father was John Miller, a Revolutionary soldier, who assisted in the erection of the old fort at Hartford. He lost an arm in the early Indian wars, and was instrumental in saving the life of Miss Anderson at the Hartford Fort, by shooting the Indian who was in the act of scalping the lady. He was well known in early history as a famous Indian

fighter, and went by the name of "Tick-eye John Miller." He had three sons and three daughters; John, the eldest son, was in the battle of New Orleans; Jacob is the second son, and is now living at the advanced age of eighty-one. He has been known as a hunter of wild game. He was married, March 17, 1831, to Martha Whitler, who was born February 12, 1810, and died in March, 1882. She was the mother of eleven children, of whom James Bardney, the subject, is the seventh. He was born on February 24, 1847, in Ohio County, and received a good common school education, and was married, November 7, 1869, to Nancy, the fifth child of Addison and Margaret (Riney) Lanum, of Marion County, Ky. who was born March 29, 1848, and came to Ohio County, Ky., at the age of six. Mr. and Mrs. Miller are the parents of seven children: Loretta, Martha Ann, Elgiva, Lydia (dead), Magnolia, Theola, and James. Mr. Miller is trustee of schools and takes a deep interest in the education of his children.

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**Ohio County, Kentucky, in the Olden Days: A series of old newspaper sketches of fragmentary history by Harrison D. Taylor, Louisville, KY, 1926, Chapter VII, pp33-34:**

#### "RALPH RINGWOOD"

Before writing of the manners and customs of our early settlers and contrasting some of them with those of the present day, we will give the story of "The Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood"—a sketch by Washington Irving. Mr. Irving appends to this story of the Green River country the following explanation in the form of a footnote:

"Ralph Ringwood, though a fictitious name, is a real personage—the late Governor William P. Duvall of Florida. I have given some anecdotes of his early and eccentric career in, as near as I can recollect, the very words in which he related them. They certainly afford strong temptations to the embellishment of fiction; but I thought them so strikingly characteristic of the individual, and of the scenes and society into which his peculiar humors carried him, that I preferred giving them in their original simplicity."

In addition to quoting these remarks by Mr. Irving we would premise that in his sketch there are some inaccuracies in dates, names, and places, and in attributing some wrong qualities to certain individuals. For instance, he describes Bob Moseley as a great fiddler, but it is asserted by those who knew him well that he never played a fiddle in his life. Yet there were other persons answering to the character given Bob Moseley. His Bill Smithers is intended for Bill Smothers. John Miller, whom Irving also calls "Bluebeard [sic – original has Bluebead] Miller," was John Miller and is the same John Miller mentioned in our narrative of Stephen Statler as having his arm shivered by a bullet. It might be well to add that since publishing that narrative in the first issue of this fragmentary history, the writer has had an interview with his son Jacob Miller, now an old man, who says that his father was shot while on the Fork of White River, in what is now the state of Indiana, and he fully corroborated the statement as to the entire bone coming away and his still having his usual strength and use of his arm.

William P. Duvall, the "Ralph Ringwood" of Mr. Irving's narrative, was the owner of lands lying in Ohio County and frequently visited Hartford. He was a member of Congress from 1813 to 1815, residing at that time somewhere in Nelson County; and was appointed governor of Florida Territory in 1822, which office he held ten or twelve years. His visits to Hartford were perfect ovations. Crowds would gather around him, for his conversation abounded in wit, humor,

and anecdotes. Some of the older citizens still recollect hearing him relate most of the incidents which are given in "The Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood."

Upon the whole the individuals named by Mr. Irving were well-known among our early settlers, there being errors in the giving of the names of only two or three. Notwithstanding some small inaccuracies it is a very good description of early backwoods life. One of the principal scenes takes place at "Bob Mosely's own house, which was on the Pigeon Roost Fork of the Muddy, which is a branch of Rough Creek, which is a branch of Green River."

'Mr. Taylor quotes the greater part of "The Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood." The story is not reprinted in this volume for lack of space; furthermore, it can be found in full—about forty pages—in Washington Irving's *Wolfert's Roost and Other Papers*, or the *Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon*, or in some of his other books of *Sketches*. Mr. Taylor's introductory remarks are republished in full, for they will always be of interest to readers of the early history of Ohio County and of the Green River country. Besides Bob Moseley, Bill Smithers, or Bill Smothers, and John Miller mentioned by Mr. Taylor, the Green River characters, as named by Irving, in "Ralph Ringwood," are Simon Schultz. Patty and Polly Schultz, Jemmy Kiel, Bob Tarleton, Joe Taylor, Wesley Pigman, Sally Pigman, Peggy Pugh, Sukey Thomas, and Judge Broadnax. There is also an unnamed peddler. Judge John B. Wilson, of Hartford, speaking of the location of Pigeon Roost Fork of Muddy Creek, recently said: "The stream referred to has its source just south of Rosine Tunnel and runs parallel with the railroad until it gets to Sandifur's Crossing, just below Horton, where it unites with Muddy Creek proper. From the best I can learn Old Bob Moseley's house was at or near what is now Excelsior School House which is on Muddy Creek proper and about one mile south of Pigeon Roost Fork. I have some records, also the testimony of some old citizens, that bear me out on this, but the fact that makes me feel most confident is that my grandfather Reverend George W. Jones, who lived on Muddy Creek and owned a tanyard there, often, in his talks, referred to this Pigeon Roost and Pigeon Roost Fork of Muddy Creek."

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**Fogle's Papers: A History of Ohio County, Kentucky**, by McDowell A. Fogle, Ohio County Historical Society, Hartford, KY, 1981, pp8-9, 12, 437-438:

Page 8 - ... when he [William Pope Duvall, alias Ralph Ringwood] to Kentucky. Ralph Ringwood was a personable youth and soon won the friendship and help of old John Miller, whom Irving calls "Buleveard Miller", but who was known to his frontier associates as "Tick-eyed John." This doughty old pioneer leader, who was then a bachelor, took Ralph to live with him, in a comparatively short time, made a skillful woodsman of his young protege...

Page 9 - ... "Old Miller, who really began to take some pride in me, was confounded when he understood that I did not intend to go to Bob Mosley's; but when I told him my misfortune and that I had no dress. 'By the powers', cried he, 'but you shall go and you shall be the best dressed and the best mounted lad there.' He immediately set to work to cut out and make up a hunting shirt of dressed deer-skin, gaily fringed at the shoulders, with legging of the same, fringed from hip to heel. He then made me a rakish raccoon-cap, with a flaunting tail to it, mounted me on his best horse, and I may say, without vanity, that I was one of the smartest fellows that figured on that occasion at the Pigeon Roost Fork of the Muddy.'

Page 12 - ... Besides Robert "Old Bob" Moseley, "Ralph", really Gov. W. P. Duvall, mentions in his sketch of olden times in Ohio County the following pioneer folks... John

“Bluebeard” [sic] Miller, who later took Ralph to his bachelor home to live and became his “guide, philosopher and friend” as long as he remained in Ohio County... and last but not least, Sukey Thomas, “who lived at the White Oak Run”, and whom old John Miller took to wife after Ralph had left for the “upper counties” a step which his former protégé seemed not to regard as a “good end” after his former carefree life as a hunter...

Pages 437-438 - ... “Bluebeard” [sic] Miller Typical Frontiersman: Reverting to 'old John Miller,' this typical Kentucky hunter figures in several thrilling episodes in Ohio County's early history. Governor Duvall described him as "a gray-haired man, hardy and weatherbeaten, with a blue wart, like a great beard, over one eye, whence he was nicknamed by the hunters “Bluebeard.” Also sometimes called "Tick-eyed John," he seems to have once been a member of the Barnett's Station garrison or lived nearby, for he it was who in April 1790 arrived just in time to save the lives of the other members of a party of women and children, who were returning from a preaching at Hartford, after Mrs. John Anderson had been scalped, her two children killed, and Hannah, the ten year old daughter of Colonel Joseph Barnett, carried off, the little girl, however, being rescued by her brother-in-law, Robert Baird, that fall, and Mrs. Anderson recovering. Kin of Old Indian Fighter in County: Again quoting 'Ralph Ringwood,' John Miller "had been in these parts since the earliest settlements and had signalized himself in the hard conflicts with the Indians which gained Kentucky the appellation of 'the Bloody Ground. In one of these fights, he had had an arm broken; in another he had narrowly escaped, when hotly pursued, by jumping from a precipice thirty feet high into a river." This arm wound was received in an exchange of shots with a party of Indians which the Ohio County settlers had pursued, after the redskins had made a foray into the Green River country. Harrison D. Taylor, in his "Fragments of the Early History of Ohio County," says this fight, according to John's son, Jacob, occurred on White River in the present state of Indiana and that "the ball from the Indian's gun struck Miller in the elbow and passed up his arm to his shoulder, shivering the bone as it went. The only remedy applied was a slippery elm bark poultice and bone came out of the wound in broken pieces." In spite of such an injury, the doughty pioneer retained good use of this arm, as we have learned from Irving's narrative. But old John Miller was never reconciled to becoming a farmer, seems to have never owned land and told "Ralph" he would have gone West had he been younger. However, his son Jacob did become a landowner, and was, no doubt, the ancestor of some of our present-day citizens of the Miller clan.

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**Ohio County, KY 1810 Federal Census:**

John Miller	2 males 0-10	1 female 0-10
	1 male 10-16	1 female 10-16
	2 males 16-26	1 female 26-45
	1 male over 45	
John D. Miller	2 males 0-10	3 females 0-10
	1 male 26-45	2 females 10-16
		1 female 26-45

Note: in the first tax list of Ohio County, KY there are two John Millers listed. In the 1810 census of Ohio County, KY two John Millers appear as heads of a household. The John D.

Miller in the 1810 census also is enumerated as a household head in the 1820, 1830 and 1840 censuses of Ohio County, KY. The John Miller, age over 45, in the 1810 census is probably the pioneer, John "Tick-eye(d)" Miller.

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**Nelson County, KY marriages:**

John Miller to Ruth Thomas 5 August 1805

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**Ohio County, KY Will Book 1, p205:**

Will of JOHN MILLER, asks that his just debts be paid, and the remainder of his estate of every description he gives to his beloved wife, RUTH MILLER during her natural life and widowhood, and after her death or marriage, whatever remains is to be divided equally among all his children. Written on October 29, 1816. Benjamin Kelley and George Bond, witnesses. By codicil appoints Thomas Smith and Alexander Barnett as his executors. Probated on November 4, 1816, in which the will was proved by George Bond, one of the witnesses; further proved, by Benjamin Kelley, the other witness, on December 2, 1816.

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**Ohio County, KY 1820 Federal Census:**

Ruth Miller	1 male 0-10	2 females 0-10
	1 male 10-16	2 females 10-16
	1 male 16-26	1 female over 45
	2 males 26-45	

**Ohio County, KY 1830 Federal Census:**

Ruth Miller	1 male 15-20	2 females 15-20
	2 males 20-30	1 female 20-30
		1 female 50-60

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**Ohio County, KY Order Book 6:**

Page 204 – At a court on 27 April 1846 Jacob Miller, George Miller, Sally Chambers, Rebecca McGlocklin, Catherine Colquist (?) and Hannah Crow came in court to prove that they are the only surviving heirs at law of the late John Miller who as an enlisted soldier in the war of 1812 and who died while in said service. That said John Miller enlisted under Lieutenant ? of the 4<sup>th</sup> regiment of United states infantry in June 1814 for the period of during the war from Ohio County, Kentucky and never returned from said service. That said Miller was born in Ohio County, Kentucky was about 21 years of age when he enlisted about 5 feet 8 inches high blue eyes and dark hair and was when he enlisted a laborer.

**Ohio County, KY Order Book 6:**

Page 218 – At a court on 22 June 1846 satisfactory evidence was this day advanced in open court to prove that Jacob Miller, George Miller, Sally Chambers, Rebecca McGlocklin, Catherine Colquet (?) and Hannah Crow are the only surviving heirs at law in fee of the late John Miller who was a soldier in the war of Revolution from the state of Pennsylvania and who served in said war as a drummer for the period of seven years and who died in Ohio County, Kentucky on or about the 31 day of October 1816. Said John Miller was born in the state of Pennsylvania and was about 55 years of age at the time of his death 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high blue eyes and fair hair and was a boy about 14 or 15 years of age when he first entered said service.

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John “Tick-eye” Miller, was born c1760 Pennsylvania. He was a resident of Fort Hartford (later Ohio County) in April 1790 when he rescued a Mrs. Anderson during an Indian attack. He married at least twice – he was married 1<sup>st</sup> by 1793. John Miller married Ruth Thomas on 5 August 1805 in Nelson County, KY. Ruth could be the “Sukey Thomas” who in Irving’s Ralph Ringwood states became the wife of John Miller after Duvall’s visit to Ohio County (circa 1798-1802). John Miller died 31 October 1816 in Ohio County, KY. His widow, Ruth Miller, is listed as a household head in the 1820 and 1830 censuses of Ohio County, KY.

When Gov. William Pope Duvall (1784-1854) arrived at the home of John Miller he was age 15 or 16. When he departed Ohio County Duvall went to reside in Bardstown, Nelson County, KY. When he was 18 he commenced his training at Bardstown for the practice of law, this would have been in 1802 or 1803. He was sworn in as an attorney-at-law in 1804. William P. first appears in the Nelson County tax lists in 1802 and he married Nancy Hynes there in October 1804. Irving in the closing passages of his “Experiences of Ralph Ringwood” wrote: “I had not been long in successful practice, when I was surprised one day by a visit from my woodland patron, old Miller. The tidings of my prosperity had reached him in the wilderness, and he had walked one hundred and fifty miles on foot to see me... He remained with us three days. My wife did everything in her power to make him comfortable; but at the end of that time he said he must be off again to the woods. He was tired of the village, and of having so many people about him. He accordingly returned to the wilderness, and to hunting life. But I fear he did not make a good end of it, for I understand that a few years before his death, he married Sukey Thomas, who lived at the White Oak Run.” Duval subsequently served in the US Congress and as a Governor of Florida.

John Miller had three sons and three daughters:

1. John Miller, Jr., 1<sup>st</sup> son, born c1793 Fort Hartford, KY, died during service in the War of 1812; he was in the Battle of New Orleans in January 1815.
2. Jacob Miller, 2<sup>nd</sup> son, born 29 February 1804 KY, married Martha Whitler (1810-1883, daughter of Tarleton Whitler & Elizabeth Cox), 18 March 1831 Daviess County, KY, died 6 January 1890 Ohio County, KY; He was the father of eleven children – Martha J., John H., Elizabeth, Mary, Josephine, William T., James Bardney, Arena A., Charles, Nancy M. Miller and one other died infancy.
3. George Miller, 3<sup>rd</sup> son, died 1846-1890.

4. Sarah Miller, "Sally", born c1807 KY, married Abraham Chambers (1805-1876, son of Giles Chambers), 3 July 1828 Ohio County, KY, she died 1860-1865.
5. Rebecca Miller, married \_\_\_ McGlocklin / McGlacklin, she died 1846-1890.
6. Catherine Miller, married \_\_\_ ?Colquet, ? (two entries on her name in Ohio County order book 6, pages 204 & 218, is difficult to decipher), she died 1846-1890.