

THE 101 RANCH

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PREFACE

An effort has been made (1) to sketch in a broad way the early journey of Colonel George W. Miller to Oklahoma and the establishment of the 101 Ranch; (2) to explain and portray the extent and work of Colonel Miller's sons in building the vast prairie empire, the work of the ranch in cattle, agriculture and oil; (3) to tell the financial difficulties and the various schemes to reestablish the falling cattle domain and to give the final disposition of the great 101 Ranch; (4) to bring the entire history of the 101 Ranch up to date.

The influence of this 101 Ranch has been felt in the agricultural work of the founders. Also it has been a link in tying the old West with the new.

I wish to express sincere appreciation to the staff of the Oklahoma Historical Society for their use of newspaper files and their splendid assistance, and to Dr. T.H. Reynolds for his invaluable help and co-operation.

R. S. T.

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THE 101 RANCH

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND

The 101 Ranch has been called the showplace of the century and was truly one of the most outstanding establishments of modern times. The true spirit of the West was exemplified in its splendid customs and magnificent hospitality. This vast domain was the background for the most romantic of western stories. Here a pioneer spirit Colonel George Washington Miller built an empire which was carried on by his sons Joseph, George L. and Zack, until it became internationally famous.

Colonel George W. Miller¹ was born February 22, 1841 in Lincoln county, near Crab Orchard, Kentucky. Soon afterward, his father died and George was taken to the plantation of his grandfather, John Fish. This plantation was also near Crab Orchard, Kentucky. There the boy was reared in the traditions of the South. The love of fine horses was ingrained in him, as was a love of family. He worked with his grandfather from early childhood and was practically in charge of the plantation by the time he reached manhood.²

¹The title of "Colonel" is usually applied to any person of influence who holds a position of esteem in a community. Used more in Kentucky and Southern States than in other sections of the United States.

²Elsworth Collings; Alma Miller England, The 101 Ranch, p. 4.

On January 9, 1886, Colonel Miller married Miss Mary Anne (Molly) Carson in Louisville, Kentucky. She, too, was native Kentuckian, the daughter of Judge David B. Carson, owner of a large plantation in Rock Castle County. She was born August 26, 1844. Like her husband, she was reared in the traditions and customs of the old South. She was a robust, genial girl, with a steadfast spirit which went well with the impulsive, fierce nature of her husband.³

Soon after their marriage the young Millers assumed the full management of the Fish plantation. By this time John Fish was old and wished to retire. This was soon after the Civil War. It was here their first son, Joseph Carson Miller, was born on March 12, 1868. Through-out his youth Colonel Miller cherished a plan for making this plantation a great monument to his family, but he soon found this to be impossible. Government restrictions on estates in the South prevented his becoming sole owner of the plantation. Besides, the slaves who formerly worked the place were now free and lived in hope of receiving "forty acres and a mule" as a gift from the government.⁴

Like many other young men of the South, Miller began looking toward the West. Fabulous tales of opportunity in California reached his ears, so in the winter of 1870

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 5.

Colonel Miller, accompanied by his wife and two year old son, started overland from Kentucky to seek fame and fortune in the "Golden West."⁵

It was his intention to follow the Arkansas-Indian Territory line and then take the southern route to California. Due to the hardships of the season, Miller decided to winter at the village of Newtonia, Missouri, in Newton County. There he pitched his camp, and he was held there by the charm of the prairie. Colonel Miller was a born trader. He would go to town with practically nothing and return with a wagon, a mare and a couple of cows. As there were many settlers around his camp who had hogs to dispose of, he started trading various articles for the hogs. He then converted the hogs into bacon and hams. When spring came he set out for Texas with 20,000 pounds of cured meat, loaded in ten wagons, for he had learned from the cowboys coming up the trail that one hundred pounds of bacon would buy a full grown steer. The cattle on the Texas ranges had been let run wild and no man knew how many steers he possessed.⁶

Upon arriving in Texas, he found that he could purchase a steer for fifty pounds of bacon, instead of one hundred pounds. He traded his entire ten wagon loads for four hundred head of Texas steer, and started north up the old

⁵Charles Lane Callen, "The Story of the Great 101 Ranch," American Magazine, CVI, (July, 1928), 148.

⁶Ibid.

Eastern Trail through the Indian Territory. Colonel Miller's first drive was very successful. He arrived at Baxter Springs, Kansas, near the north line of Indian Territory, with no mishaps. The next step was to obtain permission from the Quapaw Indians to graze the steers on their reservation. Receiving permission to do so, he made his headquarters at Baxter Springs until he was able to sell his cattle to buyers from St. Louis and Chicago. The buyers would then drive them on to Wichita, Kansas. When the deal was completed the first successful drive of Miller cattle up the trail from Texas was ended. This served as their introduction to the cattle business.⁷

The success of the first drive put an end to Colonel Miller's dreams of going on to California, and led to the establishment, in the early part of 1871, of the first ranch near what is now Miami, Oklahoma.⁸

Colonel Miller's first ranch was known as the "LK" Ranch. Lee Kokernut was a noted Texas rancher with whom Miller had formed a partnership in the cattle business. The brand LK (Lee Kokernut) was on many of the cattle arriving at Baxter Springs from Mr. Kokernut's ranch in Texas, and, for that reason, Colonel Miller adopted this brand for his new ranch. He maintained his family home at Newtonia, Missouri, about twenty miles north of his ranch.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Collings; England, op. cit., p. 6.

Here he built a comfortable home for his family and on June 21, 1873, Alma, his only daughter was born, and Zackary Taylor, his second son, April 26, 1878. Mrs. Miller's younger brothers joined her at Newtonia for company and protection while Colonel Miller was in Texas on his trips, which were often quite long. In order to have necessary supplies for his ranch Colonel Miller established a general store at Newtonia, which was successfully conducted by his wife and her brothers. Mrs. Miller became a leader in the church and such society as existed in the small town. Mr. Miller, while not active in the church, could always be counted on for financial aid.⁹

Colonel Miller learned on his first trip to Texas that paper money was looked upon with suspicion by the Texas people, because the soldiers in the Civil War had been paid off in worthless Confederate paper. The only form of money they desired was gold, which was at a premium, or some other form metal currency. Therefore, instead of burdening himself with loads of bacon he took gold instead on his succeeding trips, since a steer that was priced at six dollars could be bought for gold at one-half that figure.¹⁰

It was on the first ranch of Colonel Miller that his sons grew to manhood and simultaneously grew up with the cattle industry. The boys learned to ride rope and became

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰George Rainey, "The Cherokee Strip," The 101 Ranch, p. 213.

steeped in the traditions of the cattle business. They received an education which could not have been obtained any place else at any price. The cattle business made of most men individuals who were strong, honest and capable in their dealings with their neighbors. Their first home was a sod house, their companions were cowboys. The Miller boys thus became cowmen and pioneers of the first order.

In the fall of 1880 the cattle business of Colonel Miller had grown so rapidly that he determined to move his family from Newtonia to Baxter Springs, Kansas. The town was about five miles north of his ranch near the present site of Miami, Oklahoma. It was here at Baxter Springs, Kansas, that George Lee, his youngest son was born on September 9, 1881. The boy was named for his father and Lee Kokernut.¹¹

About this time western railroad expansion began, and as the roads were moving on westward Colonel Miller decided to move his ranch to new cattle ranges. Just across the border south from Kansas was the vast Indian-owned Cherokee Strip. This "Strip" was a regular cattlemans paradise and was being overlooked by many people at that time. Another reason for this move was that Colonel Miller was driving large herds of cattle up the trail and his Baxter Springs ranch could not support such increases. He would take his cattle

¹¹Collings; England, op. cit., p. 14.

up in droves of 1,000 to 5,000 with two or three days between the herds to allow for feed and water and also to avoid stampedes such as would happen in a larger herd. The land in the "Strip" could be leased from the Indians for from two to five cents an acre, with unlimited amounts of water and grass for the oncoming cattle.¹²

Colonel Miller looked over the possibilities of the "Strip" and determined to found a ranch about twenty miles south of Hunnewell, Kansas. This was located near the present site of Lamont, Oklahoma. Accordingly, he established himself at that site. The headquarters consisted of a three-room log house, corral, and branding pen, with a horse barn roofed with hay. This was known as the Salt Fork Ranch; the other big pasture which was in connection was known as the Deer Creek Ranch. However, the headquarters were at the Salt Fork Ranch as most of the branding and pens were located there.¹³

The first barb wire fence in the Cherokee Strip was built by Colonel Miller on his Deer Creek Ranch. This fence was built about 1880 and enclosed a very extensive tract of land. At the time that he began to fence the land, he also began to lease from the Indians. He leased from the Ponca Indians against the time when that in the Cherokee Strip should be opened to settlers. Cattlemen as a class hated

¹²Rainey, op. cit., p. 214.

¹³Collings; England, op. cit., p. 14.

the settlers as they fenced the land and cut off the grass from the herds. Colonel Miller was very wise. Instead of making war on the settlers he adopted their tactics and in conjunction with his vast herds of cattle set up an empire within itself by fencing vast amounts of land for his own use.¹⁴

It was about this time that Colonel Miller adopted the 101 as a brand for his cattle. There are several versions of how he happened to select that particular brand. Popular belief was that the ranch contained 101,000 acres and was named accordingly. As a matter of fact, the famous ranch family never claimed that much property. Zack relates that his father was buying cattle down around San Antonio, Texas and there was a cabaret in that city named "101." Colonel Miller was having trouble getting his cowboys away from this cabaret to start back home. When Colonel Miller learned the name of the place he told them if they liked the name "101" so well he would brand his cattle with it and then the boys would not have to be away from their amusements. Another version is that Colonel Miller bought a small ranch near the Salt Fork Ranch acreage with the brand of Bar-O-Bar. As it was written —O— it was very hard to read upon the cattle. Therefore, he turned the bars upright and made it read 1-0-1 and naturally became known as "hundred and one". A brand

¹⁴Callen, loc. cit., p. 148.

must be simple to read and easily applied and this 101 seemed to fit all the requirements for a good brand. It was definitely proven that Colonel Miller adopted the brand in 1881 for almost all his cattle. This was branded upon the left horn of the cattle and "No" on the left side. The horses were branded with his old LK brand he had obtained from his Texas friend Lee Kokernut. In 1888 he abandoned the method of branding "101" on the horn and "No" on the side of the cattle and placed the 101 on the left hip of all his cattle and horses.¹⁵

In the spring of 1881 Mrs. Miller made her annual trip to Kentucky visiting relatives and friends there. Upon her return Colonel Miller moved his family from their Baxter Springs, Kansas, home to a new home at Winfield, Kansas. He then set out to establish the mammoth empire of which he had dreamed while he was still in Kentucky. Colonel Miller purchased a two-story brick dwelling and provided Mrs. Miller with all the luxuries of the time, even to a private horse and carriage.¹⁶

Colonel Miller now had thousands of cattle roaming over the Oklahoma ranges and many cowboys in his employ. He and Mrs. Miller traveled in the highest society of the time in Winfield. They conducted their home on the manner of the southern families and anyone who stopped was welcome to rest

¹⁵Daily Oklahoman, December 6, 1936.

¹⁶Collings; England, op. cit., p. 15.

and share in the hospitality of the Millers. There were always visitors, and carriages could be seen at their home at any hour of the day. Colonel Miller was very generous in his dealings with the poor people of the surrounding country. He instructed the Provident Association of Winfield to take care of the poor by giving them orders on the meat market he had established. When at home Miller would attend church dressed in a silk hat and carrying a gold-headed walking stick with the appropriate formal attire.¹⁷

At this time the Ponca Indians were becoming dissatisfied with their allotment in Oklahoma and were thinking of moving back to Kansas. Colonel Miller was looking over the land south of the present town of Ponca City when it occurred to him that this land was the kind the Indians would desire for a home. Not wanting to abandon his trip and knowing that Chief White Eagle of the Ponca tribe was going to start to Washington soon, he hit upon the idea of sending his son Joe to the chief to ask him to visit the new land. Joe was then very young, but his father knew that the boy was fully competent to carry out his mission with the greatest speed and deliver the message exactly as he was instructed. In addition he spoke the Indian language fluently. Therefore, Joe was sent to the camp of the Ponca Indians near Baxter Springs, Kansas. Joe rode all day and night, arriving at the Ponca camp in less time than his father had expected.

¹⁷Ibid.

It was well Joe had used such haste for White Eagle was ready to leave the next day for Washington, D. C. If Joe had been any later he would have been unable to see the chief. Without pausing to rest, Joe immediately explained to the chiefs by word pictures and drawings on the dirt floor of the tepee that the land to the South and West was the long awaited home of the Ponca Indians. He explained the lay of the land and the amount of grass contained on the rolling hills and in the valleys. The grass at that time was as tall as the knees of an ordinary cow horse.¹⁸

Chief White Eagle was favorably impressed and he abandoned his trip to Washington. Several of the chiefs, guided by Joe, set out the next day to explore the future home. Finding the country exactly as Joe had pictured it, the Indians were very anxious to settle upon this new land. The chiefs returned and advised their people to accept this land of bountiful grass and game. The Indians did so and moved in 1881 to their new home. The Millers promised the Indians they would never regret this move. This was proved true many times as the Millers always provided the Indians with plenty of blankets and food.¹⁹

An incident occurred about this time which shows the depth and shrewdness of Colonel Miller as a cattleman. He was one who would always stand up for the right and believed

¹⁸Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 17.

that other people should accord him the same courtesy. He had turned about 5,000 head of stock into the Cherokee Strip in the fall. When spring roundup came, and the count was completed he found that there were thirty head of cattle missing. This was a loss of less than three fifths of one per cent and Colonel Miller did not at the time think any more about the loss. The Santa Fe Railroad had a large outfit working on their road that winter with headquarters only a few miles from the ranch. In the early spring the crew moved their equipment down the line to a point near the town of Mulhall and established headquarters at that place. One day Jim Moore, one of Miller's foremen came to him and said, "We should go down to the railroad camp and collect the meat bill." Colonel Miller of course asked Moore for an explanation. He said that the day before as he was passing the abandoned camp of the railroad he found a steer's head with "101" branded on the horn. The next morning Moore and Zack rode down to the railroad camp to collect. They found the foreman of the camp and told him they had come to collect the meat bill the camp had made last winter. The foreman was dumbfounded but Zack told him to figure the cattle at thirty dollars a head. The foreman was frightened and went into a nearby tent for a consultation with someone inside. Directly he appeared and handed Zack a check on a Wichita, Kansas bank for the sum of nine hundred dollars in full payment for the lost thirty head

of cattle. The check was good and Colonel Miller as a result did not lose a single head of stock that year.²⁰

Colonel Miller was a lover of horses as are all true Kentuckians. He had, over a period of several years, accumulated a large number of aging cow horses which were past their usefulness on the range. His sons had repeatedly urged him to dispose of them but he was sentimentally attached to them and refused to dispose of them. Finally in the fall of 1888 he decided to get rid of the horses and gathered together about one hundred head. They were too slow for further use on the range, but were capable of doing good work in the fields. He placed an advertisement in the Winfield, Kansas, paper, offering the horses for sale at auction. On the day of the sale the farmers came from miles around in hope of obtaining some good work horses cheaply. Through an oversight the terms of the sale failed to appear on the sale bills. When the time came for the auction the farmers wanted to know the terms. Colonel Miller was a great sportsman and believed in having his fun. He was in good spirits that day so he mounted the auction block and told the crowd that they would not have to pay for the horses until Grover Cleveland was elected President of the United States. The opponent of Cleveland was Benjamin Harrison as the Republican candidate. It was generally conceded that Harrison would be elected

²⁰Rainey, op. cit., p. 215.

President. The farmers were to pay ten per cent interest on their notes until paid. When Colonel Miller told the crowd this they immediately let out a yell because they saw, or thought they saw, an opportunity to obtain some much needed work horses for nothing. The farmers were very reckless in their bidding and the horses sold for prices far beyond their true value. They sold for prices ranging around one hundred twenty-five dollars where on the open market they could have been bought for seventy-five dollars at the most. The election came, Harrison was elected President of the United States and the farmers around Winfield had many a laugh at the expense of Colonel Miller.²¹

But in the campaign of 1892 the same candidates were opponents. At this Presidential election the tables were turned and Cleveland was elected. Colonel Miller remembered his deal with the farmers and dug up the old notes. He turned them over to a Winfield lawyer and had him collect the notes with forty per cent accrued interest. With few exceptions the notes were collected, and Colonel Miller had the last laugh at the expense of the farmers even though he had had to wait several years for his money.²²

At the time Joe was telling the Ponca Indians of the wonders of the Salt Fork River basin, Colonel Miller was looking over the land and thinking of the time when the Cherokee

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

Strip would be open to white settlement. When the Ponca Indians decided to locate on the Salt Fork they told Miller that if at any time he needed help just to ask them and they would do all in their power to repay their debt to him. He kept this promise in mind to be used at the time when the territory would be opened to white settlement. This was to come sooner than most cattlemen expected but Colonel Miller was prepared for this eventuality. In the spring of 1892 he asked the Ponca Indians for permission to locate his ranch on the south bank of the Salt Fork River. This new location was to be a few miles down the river from his original Salt Creek Ranch. The Indians were very much pleased and offered Colonel Miller any amount of land he wished for his cattle. He had to obtain permission from the Office of Indian Affairs at Washington but this was accomplished after a time. In the meantime word had been passed that the "Strip" was to be opened in 1893.²³

When the news came that the Cherokee Strip would be open for settlement, George Miller, the father, thought of the rich grass lands along the Salt Fork of the Arkansas on which in former days his cattle had fattened as they moved along the trail from Texas. Since then the Ponca Indians had loafed away their days on it. Now the government was opening it for homesteads, after allotting such sections to the individual Poncas.

So on the day of the opening, amid the rush of wagons, horses and men on foot, lined up on the border south of Arkansas City, Kansas, waiting for a pistol shot signal for the rush, was a tall bay thoroughbred racing horse from Kentucky bearing Joseph Miller, George Miller's eldest son. There was a gleam in the boy's eye and confidence in his manner.

²³Collings; England, op. cit., p. 25.

The homestead his father coveted was forty miles away, and he knew just where it was. Hundreds of others knew the land, but the horses were not Kentucky bred racers. With the pistol shot the rush began and far in the lead sped the bay racer.

Late that afternoon a tired youth dropped from a spent horse and planted a flag at the big bend of the Salt Fork of the Arkansas where the Ponca reservation began. The horse died where he fell. A stone now marks the spot--a memorial of the beginning of the 101 Ranch. George Miller followed his son into the territory and the two youngest boys, George Jr., and Zack, came too.²⁴

Colonel Miller immediately moved the ranch to the new site near the Ponca reservation. The first ranch house was a dugout on the south bank of the Salt Fork River. This first house was built of lumber and sod built into the side of the hill and served as headquarters of the ranch from 1893 until 1903.²⁵

A permanent home was not built until 1903, as the Millers were not able to purchase land from the Indians. The Indians were willing but the Office of Indian Affairs was very slow in issuing patents to the Indians so they could sell the land. During this time Colonel Miller was maintaining a home at Winfield, Kansas, in order to give his family the benefits of good education and the culture of city life. In 1903 Colonel Miller was able to obtain patents to a few tracts of land on the north bank of the Salt Fork River. He immediately started building a palatial home modeled after the beautiful plantation homes of his native Kentucky.²⁶

²⁴The Bliss Breeze, October 12, 1909.

²⁵Collings; England, op. cit., p. 26.

²⁶Ibid.

The home was started but unfortunately Colonel Miller did not live to see it completed. He died of pneumonia at the old headquarters of the ranch on the south bank of the Salt Fork River, Saturday, April 25, 1903. He had reached the age of sixty-one years and twenty days, an old age for the life he had led, but the open range and wholesome air of the west makes for a longer life. Short funeral services were conducted at the ranch and his body was then shipped to Crab Orchard, Kentucky, the old home of the family.²⁷

Colonel Miller was always vigorous in body, but when he felt his vitality slipping he called his family about him and told them he would not recover. He remained in good spirits until the end, playing with his grandchildren just before he died. His last will was that the ranch should remain intact forever in the family. Colonel Miller had a strong personality and the heart of a real Kentucky gentleman. He made many enemies and many friends. The ones who mourned his passing the most were his adopted children, the Ponca Indians. So passed one of the greatest pioneers of the West and a staunch friend of the Indians.²⁸

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., p. 27.

CHAPTER II
THE BUILDING OF THE GREAT 101 RANCH

When the present ranch was first planned it was to be entirely a cattle ranch; therefore, nothing was done about farming the surplus land. But, in 1893 there came a business crisis. Money was hard to obtain. This panic reached the Millers through the failure of a Kansas City commission house, which had acted as agent for all their cattle transactions. The commission house had on its books a \$300,000 credit for Colonel Miller from cattle it had sold for him.¹

This was entirely lost through the failure of the house; but that was not all the Millers were to lose. The commission house had failed to pay \$100,000 in notes, which they should have paid out of their credit account. This \$100,000 had to be paid by Colonel Miller himself, and the only method was to sell cattle enough to pay the debt. The eastern bankers who held the notes, sent in men to take the cattle, 17,000 head, to pay this debt. After payment only a few head of cattle and some worn out cow ponies were left. After this financial disaster there remained in the Miller holdings the vast prairie domain and a great amount of courage. They had no cattle and very little money. This was a panic year and Colonel Miller had a hard time getting any outside help. Therefore he sold his remaining cows to the Indians, kept the old

¹Time, (February 11, 1929), p. 63.

horses, and gathered together what farming tools he could without too great a cost. Before spring arrived Colonel Miller and his sons borrowed enough money to buy seed wheat and to hire help to plant 5,000 acres to wheat. This was a big gamble against adversities of nature, but it had already been proved to the satisfaction of Colonel Miller that wheat could be raised on Oklahoma land. The settlers had raised it since the "Strip" had been opened and usually had excellent crops. At the same time he managed to get five hundred calves, which he grazed upon the green wheat. The time for harvest arrived and the 5,000 acres were a waving golden field. This year had been a good one for wheat not only in the season but also in price. Wheat on the Chicago market sold at a dollar twenty a bushel. The Millers harvested 70,000 bushels of wheat on the 5,000 acres an average of fourteen bushels to the acre. This wheat brought to the Millers \$84,000 in cash-- not a bad investment for the first trial. This marked the turning point of 101 policy; hereafter it would combine farming with cattle raising. Following the crisis of 1893 Colonel Miller restocked the ranges with improved breeds of cattle. As a product of the open range, the longhorn cattle did well where pure bred cattle would have perished of travel and drouth. However, the markets now demanded a better grade of beef and in the fenced pastures of the new farm era, it was possible to improve the herd. Through the use of high grade

bulls, the sale of undesirable stock, and the retention of heifer calves from year to year, Colonel Miller had, at the time of his death in 1903, transformed his herd of gaunt and wiry longhorns into cattle of higher beef qualities.²

The 101 Ranch prospered from this new beginning and each year marked an improvement of some kind to that vast kingdom. It was truly an empire on the prairie of the Golden West. Colonel Miller had visions of grandeur that were not to be treated lightly. He was the type of person who could make visions become reality. At the time of his death the 101 had grown to vast proportions.

When Colonel Miller died in 1903, the 101 Ranch included 50,000 acres of leased land. Not one acre was owned, except the homestead. The reason for this was that each Indian must apply to the Office of Indian Affairs at Washington, D. C., for patents to the land before being allowed to sell. For this reason Colonel Miller was unable to purchase any land before his death. He had however, succeeded in obtaining options on several Indian tracts which would come up for sale in a short time. These he never saw added to the 101 as the first deeded land. But he left to his wife \$30,000 in insurance, which she used to purchase the first six sections of land upon which Colonel Miller had started the home for his family.³

²Callen, loc. cit., p. 147.

³Ponca City Courier, April 27, 1903.

After Colonel Miller died Mrs. Miller returned to the ranch determined to carry out her husband's policy of ranching. The house was completed. It had all the modern features which could be found at that time. The first social event held in the new residence was the marriage of Mrs. Miller's daughter, Alma, to William Henry England, an Attorney-at-law at Winfield, Kansas.⁴

At the time of Miss Miller's marriage she was to receive her share in the 101 Ranch estate. But, Colonel Miller had requested that the ranch remain intact and that the heirs make no division of the property other than to determine the share each was to receive in the estate. Therefore, she accepted as her share certain properties not directly connected with the 101 holdings. The 101 Ranch itself remained intact for many years.⁵

After Colonel Miller's death the management of the ranch passed into the hands of Joe, the eldest son, who had been trained for that position since childhood. In the later years of his father's life he had been de facto manager and had transacted most of the ranch business. That Joe was well fitted for this task is shown by an incident which occurred in his younger days. He attended Central University at Richmond, Kentucky for three years, but refused to return for the last year. His father, seeing that the boy was

⁴Collings; England, op. cit., p. 29.

⁵Ibid., p. 30.

determined to stay out of school, told him that he would have to get out into the world and see what he could do in competition with his fellow men. However, Colonel Miller, unlike many fathers who coldly turn their sons out and expect them to make a living, gave him \$10,000 and told him to spend it as he saw fit. Joe accepted the money and went to Texas. There he deposited it in the bank, determined not to use it until he could make a good investment. He obtained employment in a store, but in a few days he tired of life as a clerk. So he decided to go to Alpine, Texas, where great herds of cattle were being gathered for northern drives. The 101 brand was well known and he met many friends there. He was very glad to get back into the atmosphere in which he was reared. He stayed around the camps for several weeks until one day he heard of the illness of his father's friend, Lee Kokernut. Joe immediately sought him out. Kokernut was very glad to see him. A person had told him about a herd of cattle Kokernut had gathered together to drive north.

Kokernut was lamenting the fact that he would have to sell them or postpone the drive indefinitely because of ill health. A postponement of the drive would cause him great loss as it was getting late in the season and grass would be scarce along the trail. The thought suddenly struck Joe that here was his opportunity to prove himself, and at the same time put his money to work. So, he offered to buy the herd himself

and drive it up the trail. A deal was arranged between them. Kokernut sent a note to the foreman in charge of the cattle telling him that Joe had purchased the stock and was his new boss. Joe immediately got the men together and told them to be ready to start up the trail the next morning. The men were more than willing, as they had loafed and wasted time enough already. The next morning the herd started and without any mishaps arrived at the 101 Ranch. Joe's father was glad to see him and went at once to look over the cattle. He was more than pleased and complimented his son on the fine cattle he had purchased, agreeing to take them off his hands. Colonel Miller realized a good profit from the cattle and Joe was established as manager of the great 101 Ranch.⁶

The second son of Colonel Miller was given the name of Zackary Taylor Miller and is the cattleman and trader of the family. The trader in him is revealed in his purchase of Mexican army supplies. While in Texas on a livestock deal, he went to Presidio to watch a skirmish between the Mexican Federals and General Villa. The Federals were beaten and forced to the American side of the Rio Grande. The United States and Mexico not being at war, the horses, arms and accoutrements could not be considered spoils of war but were subject to custom duty. Zack sent for Joseph, and they made the Mexican government an offer on all the equipment of the

⁶Ibid., p. 33.

army. The offer was accepted. Later the brothers resold the greater part of the arms and equipment to the Mexican forces. The livestock they sent to Texas pastures controlled by the 101 and to the Oklahoma ranch.⁷

George Lee Miller, the youngest son of Colonel George W. Miller, was given control of the financial affairs of the ranch upon his fathers death. George L. was a gracious host. In this respect he resembled his mother more than did the other members of the family. All matters of a financial nature were taken up with George L. before they were passed on by the other brothers. Joe, as manager, usually had the final word as to what was done, but he always consulted the rest of the family on the matter before deciding. George L. developed an accounting system for the ranch whereby a complete check on each of the varied enterprises was possible. This system has been pronounced by experts to be one of the simplest and most complete yet devised. The 101 Ranch prospered under his financial guidance.⁸

Together the three brothers, Joe the farmer and manager, Zack, the cattleman and trader, and George L., the financier, formed a powerful combination, which ably carried on the work which their father had started. The development of their natural aptitudes marked the beginning of the 101 Ranch's greatest growth. They were not afraid to venture. When they

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 34.

lost, they tried again.

This spirit was evidenced by their reaction to the ranch-house fire. Near two o'clock in the morning of January 14, 1909, fire broke out in the ranch-house. The fire had its origin in the cellar of the house and was of undetermined source. When discovered it had spread to nearly all parts of the house. The fire was first discovered by Mrs. Miller, about fifteen minutes before the walls fell. Nothing of value was recovered except a trunk of one of the guests. The remainder of the ranch buildings were at a distance from the house, therefore in no danger of becoming ignited. This was quite a loss to the Millers but with their customary spirit they made plans for a new home.⁹

The building of the new residence was under the personal supervision of Joe with the help of a competent architect. The new structure was entirely of fireproof construction. There are seventeen rooms in this beautiful three-story residence. It was equipped with every modern convenience, hot and cold water, hardwood floors, electric lighting and a basement fully modern. It was built on the southern colonial style, large porches, tall columns supporting the roof and enhancing the outside beauty. The whole was a dazzling white including roof as well as walls.¹⁰

During this time the farming and cattle operations were going along in full swing. Also the Wild West Show was having

⁹Ponca City Courier, January 14, 1909.

¹⁰Collings; England, op. cit., p. 37.

its day. The first show was given at the request of President Theodore Roosevelt who invited the Miller Brothers as representatives of the cattle business to give a display of life on the open range. This exhibition was given at the Jamestown Exposition, at Norfolk, Virginia. The show was a great success and after the exposition was over the Millers gathered a group together and sent them to New York City where the show broke attendance records. These two shows were only makeshifts thrown together for the purpose of showing only a short time.¹¹

The Millers had no idea of establishing a Wild West Show. In fact they resisted all overtures to establish this enterprise until finally it occurred to them that a few grown people and very few children had come in contact with the real west. Therefore, they determined to gather together a group of performers and try it out locally before going on the road. The first performance was given at Ponca City, Oklahoma, on April 17, 1909. It was immediately a success and was acclaimed by many as a show that would hold permanent interest of the people. Everything of the Old West was portrayed. Cowboys and cowgirls, trick riding, roping, shooting, Indian dances, and other wierd aboriginal rites, Indian massacres, long-horned Texas steer, buffalo, bulldogging--all these things and more made up the show. Joe Miller himself was one of the principal attractions. Almost all the per-

¹¹Ponca City Courier, April 8, 1909.

formers in the show were recruited from the 101 Ranch and vicinity. Many "Western" movie stars began their careers with the 101 Wild West Show.¹²

One of the most interesting side lights of the great 101 Ranch now comes into the limelight. The Millers employed negro laborers and cowboys as well as white. Among the negro cowboys was an outstanding example of daring and good horsemanship--Bill Pickett. The author has watched this negro bulldogger at his daring feats of skill and can say he made a fine art of his accomplishment. He was reputed to be the first bulldogger and no one has contested this claim. Zack Miller said when he first performed this stunt he would ride up on a horse, catch the bull by the horns, twist the bull's head and then sink his teeth in the bull's nostrils to bring him down. Later the teeth stunt was abandoned.¹³ When doing this stunt, at one of the numerous Wild West Shows, and roundups at the 101, he advanced on the bull grasped the horns with both hands twisted the bulls head back and pinned the bull to the ground by throwing him on his back. Pickett would land in such a manner that his feet would be in front of the bull acting as a brake to the drive of the bull and when pinned the bull's horns would be on each side of his body with Pickett in a sitting position. A truly grand stunt and having the

¹²Ibid.

¹³Collings; England, op. cit., p. 171.

spectacular and daring of a good showman that he was.

In 1909 when the Millers show was in Mexico the Miller brothers wagered their show against \$25,000 in gold that Pickett would hold a bull seven and one-half minutes. As a result of such a bet when the people got hold of the facts the scene rivalled the regular bull fights that were on the bill before Pickett's performance.¹⁴

Here is the account of the battle as given in part by the Mexican Herald. Bill Pickett, "The Dusky Demon of Oklahoma," star attraction with the 101 Wild West Show, attempted to throw a wild ferocious bull with his bare hands in a Mexican Bull ring at Mexico City. It was the first time such an attempt had been made in Mexico, and a huge crowd, prejudiced against the negro, hooted and threw everything they could lay hands on. Pickett was wounded by a bottle. After a fifteen-minute struggle, during seven and one-half minutes of which Pickett clung between the bull's horns, being shaken like a cotton rag, the negro was forced to give up to escape death. In spite of the jeering of the crowd general comment was favorable to Pickett. After this excellent performance there was nothing left but for the Mexicans to do but to pay off their wager.¹⁵

The show was such a success and its fame spread so widely that the Miller Brothers took it to England where it

¹⁴Ponca City Courier, April 9, 1909, citing, Mexican Herald.

¹⁵Ibid.

was on exhibition for six months at London. They planned a tour of Europe, but war broke out. With the show was Mrs. George W. Miller, mother of the famous trio. One of the main features of the show was its magnificent horses and mules. These looked good to the British government and were commandeered for military use. Those were parlous times and Mrs. Miller didn't know whether she would be able to get home herself, but she remained until by persistent effort and diplomacy she secured the restoration of her property or its equivalent. During the war years the show was disbanded and the Millers turned to expansion of production on the ranch.¹⁶

Another activity of the ranch was the production of oil. Oklahoma, as discovered by geologists, well showered with geological highs in the earth structures. These 'highs' are indications of oil and oil bearing strata. To most untrained individuals the surface of the earth would give no indication of underlying hills and valleys. The geologists call the ancient upheavals of the earth anticlines and the valleys between the upheavals, synclines. The oil was formed by the great pressure on oil bearing strata forcing the oil into porous sands. Since oil is lighter than water and the sand contained sea water--that is, salt water--the oil and gas would naturally seek higher levels and as a result formed

¹⁶Ponca City Courier, July 14, 1918.

in pockets. These pockets were naturally formed at the top of an anticline, or highest place in this reservoir.

Mr. Earnest Whithworth Marland, the present governor of Oklahoma, was visiting friends in Chicago when he chanced to meet Colonel F. R. Kenney, who was at that time recruiting service officer in that state. Colonel Kenney was a friend of George L. Miller and made arrangements for Mr. Marland to visit the 101 Ranch. Mr. Marland had been engaged in the oil business in Pennsylvania and had a wide experience in the oil industry.¹⁷

Mr. Marland consented to visit the 101 and arrangements were made by George to take him over the ranch. They spent several days observing the large estate, riding and walking by turns. A week or so after Marland had first come to the ranch they rode up a hill to see the cemetery of the Ponca Indians. These Indians always placed their dead on wicker platforms above the ground. Mr. Marland noticed as he rode up that the hill was a natural high on the surface. He also noticed that the outcropping of rock indicated an anticline as well as a topographical high. Further investigation showed the cemetery was a true geological dome.¹⁸

The 101 Ranch at this time contained about 100,000 acres, approximately 10,000 acres of this total were owned

¹⁷Collings; England, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹⁸Oklahoma City Times, July 20, 1934.

outright, the remainder was under lease from the Ponca Indians. Mr. Marland was convinced that the Indian cemetery was an oil formation, and he told George he would drill a well for a lease on the 101 lands. Miller would have to obtain a lease from the Indians to allow them to drill on the land. George had quite a time gaining leases from the Indians but finally they were persuaded to lease the land.¹⁹

In the early part of February, 1909, the first oil well location was staked. The leases obtained covered 10,000 acres of Miller land and 4,500 acres of Indian land. The Indians gave George a lease to drill in the cemetery if he would not drill where the Indians were burying their dead. George gave Mr. Marland one-half interest in the lease on condition he would drill on the leased land. This entire lease included what was later to become the Ponca Oil Field.²⁰

The first oil well was drilled in the Ponca City territory near the headquarters of the ranch. Conditions for drilling were bad, as the nearest supply house was at Tulsa, Oklahoma, about one hundred twenty-five miles distance. There were no heavy draft horses in the country, only cow ponies. Therefore, all heavy timbers were hauled from the railroad by oxen. The nearest railroad siding was at Bliss (now Marland) about four miles from the ranch. The well was drilled with old tools and Manila cable to a depth of 2,700 feet. This well was

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Collings; England, op. cit., p. 104.

finally abandoned after locating five different oil and gas sands which were non-producers.²¹

The derrick and boiler were now skidded to a new location about five miles from the first and higher up the geological high. This well was drilled on what was known as the Iron Thunder tract, named after an Indian of that name. The conditions of work were nearly as bad as those of the first well. This venture was a success however, and at five hundred feet an extraordinarily large flow of gas was encountered. This well was "brought in", in the spring of 1910. It produced between 11,000,000 and 12,000,000 cubic feet of gas every twenty-four hours. This gas was piped about four miles to the headquarters of the ranch.²² Thus, the oil and gas business was added to the vast undertakings of the Miller Brothers. This opened up the Ponca field and led to the establishment of the Marland Oil Company (now Continental Oil Company). The Ponca field was the largest field in Kay County and was largely owned by the Miller Brothers and Mr. Marland. One well produced as much as \$1,000,000 in one year. This well was owned by George Brett, a hardware merchant of Ponca City. Several more fields were opened on Miller land but no attempt will be made to classify all. The Miller Brothers received several million dollars from the sale of oil and gas upon their lands.²³

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

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Among the varied activities of the Ranch Empire farming played an important part. After the first successful wheat crop the Cattle Millers became the Farmer Millers. They planted corn, oats, alfalfa, and other crops as well as wheat. They bought calves to fatten, and added more horses, mules, hogs, geese, ducks, and buffalo to their farms. Every year they extended their operations, and every year they put in some new crop. Furthermore, they used scientific methods and continually produced new and better types. Garden vegetables and melons received their share of attention. Fruit trees also abounded on the ranch, although the apple orchard originally started through an accident.

The story of the first orchard is an interesting one which shows the spirit of the Millers. In the fall of 1910 a nursery shipped two carloads of apple trees to Winfield, Kansas, with the idea of selling the trees to farmers in that vicinity. When the shipment arrived the nursery could not pay the freight bill and it looked as if the shipment would be a total loss. But, Joe Miller happened to be in Winfield at that time and heard of the huge shipment. He immediately inquired about the trees and found they could be bought for the freight bill. He lost no time in arranging payment of the freight bill and had the apple trees shipped to the 101 Ranch. These were set out with great speed in order to save as many as possible. In the mixup of shipping,

the trees had become separated and it was impossible to tell the difference in the varieties. As a result, various strains of apples were scattered all over the orchard. There were enough kinds to produce apples from June to November every year. There were nearly 6,000 trees in these two carloads and originally covered one hundred sixty acres. The orchard was located on the south bank of the Salt Fork River about two miles east of the ranch house. The river changed its course after the trees had been planted and began to eat into the high bank taking about sixty acres of trees into its bed. This was quite a loss but still left a good number of trees. The first year they bore fruit the yield was about three hundred bushels. When in full production the orchard averaged about 25,000 bushels. Not bad for trees bought at a cost of two cents each. In monetary value, the orchard produced about two hundred dollars an acre each year. It was valued at one thousand dollars an acre. This was not the only orchard on the ranch. There was a second containing one hundred seventy-five acres which was devoted entirely to experimental trees. This included apple trees, walnut, fig, persimmons and many others of similar type. The Miller Brothers won many prizes and premiums with their vast orchards and berry tracts on the 101 Ranch.²⁴

Another experiment which brought widespread comment was the crossing of the buffalo with the common range cow.

²⁴Daily Oklahoman, February 6, 1927.

Buffalo had thrived in the same and similar sections. The Millers conceived the idea of perpetuating the virtues of the buffalo by means of this cross. The experiment was successful and at one time the Miller Brothers had about two hundred head of this strange cross. They called the new type of cattle "Cattleo" a contraction of the words cattle and buffalo.²⁵

The success of this first cross led to a more fantastic one than the first. One of the troubles of the cattleman was the drouth on the prairie. Cattle died for want of water and grass. So, the Miller Brothers with characteristic foresight set out to overcome this difficulty. Joe Miller did not know whether a drouth resistant breed of cattle could be produced, but he set out with determination to settle the question. He knew that in certain sections of the world such a type of cattle existed. He also knew it was impossible to import such cattle in large numbers as the expense would be too great. It was decided to import some of these cattle and introduce them into his herds.²⁶

In India there was a breed of drouth resistant cattle known as Brahma which were selected as the ones to conduct the experiment of cross breeding for drouth resistance. The large Brahma bulls were crossed with the common range cow. The small Brahma bulls were crossed with Jersey cows. The

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Callen, loc. cit., p. 146.

experiment was a success from two angles; first, a drouth-resistant breed of cattle was secured, second, a wonderful beef type of cattle resulted. Yearling steers of the Brahma cross would bring on the market one hundred dollars compared to sixty dollars for the common type of beef steer.²⁷

The ranch was growing and making a name for the Millers in the Southwest. In the midst of all this prosperity and advancement occurred the death of Mrs. Miller, mother of the Miller Brothers: Joe, George, and Zack. She died on Sunday morning, at the "White House", July 31, 1918, at the age of seventy-two years.²⁸

Mrs. Miller was the guiding genius of the ranch being an interested observer and taking a hand in many of the activities of the great ranch. "Mother" Miller was the name given to her by the many employees of the big ranch. She was always a patient listener to any tale of woe that one of her boys or ranch hands had to tell, oftentimes lending a hand or suggesting a solution to the problem. She was a gracious and hospitable hostess. Her death was a blow to the community and to her three sons and one daughter. Mrs. Miller was buried in the I.O.O.F. cemetery at Ponca City, Oklahoma. Her death left the three brothers in charge of the ranch.²⁹

The whole countryside mourned Mrs. Miller's passing. The Ponca City Courier of July 24, 1918 said, "In the death

²⁷Ibid., p. 147.

²⁸Ponca City Courier, August 1, 1918.

²⁹Ibid.

of Mrs. Miller, a notable woman closes a long, eventful, and useful life. The world is better for her having lived in it."

In 1917 a disagreement had arisen between the three Miller Boys and Joe had sold his interest to the other two brothers. He returned, however, when his mother was dying. There was a complete reconciliation between the three sons and a definite agreement that Joe was to be considered an equal partner with the other two. When Mrs. Miller died she left all the Ranch holdings to her three sons.³⁰

³⁰Collings; England, op. cit., p. 104.

CHAPTER III
OTHER ACTIVITIES OF THE 101 RANCH

Up to the time of Mrs. Miller's death there had been no written agreement as to a means of keeping the far-flung 101 Ranch intact. Following it, however, Mr. England, Alma's husband, saw the need of such a contract, and proposed the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch Trust. It was approved by Joe, George, and Zack Miller, and became effective September 12, 1921. W. A. Brooks and J. E. Carson were elected trustees to administer the trust agreement. This type of trust did not have to be organized by law, but was formed merely by naming the trustees and deeding the land to them. Shares were required however which were issued to the Miller Brothers Joe received 33,333 shares, Zack the same number, and George 33,334 shares, the controlling interest. There were no other shareholders, as Alma had already received her interest.¹ After the formation of the trust, the brothers brought the great ranch to the period of its greatest prosperity.

However, there was some legal difficulty in connection with the ranch holdings. The Miller Brothers 101 Ranch Trust revealed that the ranch included 15,252.97 acres of deeded lands located in Noble, Pawnee, Osage, and Kay counties. Thereupon, the federal grand jury charged the brothers with fraudulently obtaining large tracts of land from the Ponca

¹Daily Oklahoman, March 25, 1932.

Indians. The charges at first were general, so the Millers demanded that their counsel be furnished with dates and issue of patents and alleged false reports. Federal Judge J.H. Cotteral instructed the government to furnish the desired information. The Federal attorneys then presented forty-eight counts against the 101 owners, charging them with using unfair persuasion on incompetent Indians, and force on those indebted to them. Nothing, however, could be proved against the Millers, and the case, heard before Judge A. G. C. Biever at Guthrie, was decided in their favor. The case was then taken to the United States Supreme Court, but the higher court upheld the decision already handed down.²

In addition to the deeded acreage, the ranch included vast acres of leased land which was divided into two classifications. The first included the leased Indian lands with preferential rights, which gave the Millers the first bid in case the owners wished to sell. These tracts were used for either farming or grazing. Most of them were more or less surrounded by Miller property, and were valued at four dollars an acre. The total amount of preferential acreage was about 10,000 acres. The second classification contained land leased from individual Indians to be used exclusively for grazing purposes. It also contained land leased from other persons holding leases from the Indians.³

²Collings; England, op. cit., p. 49.

³Ibid., p. 50.

A large part of the land owned by the Millers was bottom-land along the Salt Fork of the Arkansas which was used for agricultural purposes. In June, 1923, there was a disastrous flood, which cost the owners several hundred thousand dollars. The water covered the best farming land, and everything movable was swept away. Approximately four hundred hogs were lost when a one hundred acre pasture of alfalfa and wheat about two miles from the ranch house was submerged. All wagons and light machinery in the path of the flood were swept away. The chickens were drowned in the chicken house in the orchard directly north of the house. Buffalo, horses, and cattle were carried away in the treacherous current. Directly in front of the "White House", the flood gouged out a huge hole in the main paved highway. The bridge across the river was destroyed and for about a year afterward the Miller Brothers operated a ferry across the river. The flood waters never entered the ranch house because it was built on higher ground, but its occupants, including Jess Willard the prize-fighter, were marooned for several days until the water receded.⁴

The damage was stupendous and to prevent further losses by flood, the Miller Brothers constructed a levee several miles in length along the Salt Fork River, where it makes a southward turn west of the ranch headquarters. This made impossible any further floods except by back-water from the Arkansas

⁴Ponca City News, June 12, 1923.

which contingency was very unlikely.⁵

During the years from 1921 to 1927, the Miller Brothers launched huge enterprises. First of course was cattle breeding. Then came horses, hogs chickens, turkeys and the like. They built a packing house which could take care of a hundred beeves and fifty hogs daily. The average annual income from the packing plant alone was \$175,000 a year.⁶

Another industry grew out of the packing plant. Not long after the plant was established a huge quantity of hides had accumulated. The price on raw hides was too low to be considered, while the price on finished hides was considerably higher, so the Millers built a tannery near the packing plant. It had not been in operation long when a tornado swept it away, leaving only the foundation intact, but a new tannery was soon erected on the old foundation. Disaster seemed to follow the brothers in this undertaking for it was soon again destroyed, this time by fire. Not to be beaten by elements which were beyond their control, they again rebuilt it and the process of tanning hides went on. Then the bottom dropped out of the market.⁷

Most men would have been discouraged by this turn of events, but not these builders of empire. Zack bought the

⁵Collings; England, op. cit., p. 48.

⁶Ibid., p. 113.

⁷Callen, loc. cit., p. 150.

equipment of a bankrupt harness factory in Texas and moved it to the ranch. There it was set up on the second floor of the tannery. Next he brought former employees of the harness factory to do the work of converting hundreds of hides into saddles, harness, handbags, in fact everything made of leather. They did a very profitable business for several years. Then a second fire destroyed the tannery and harness shop. They did not rebuild, as they no longer needed an industry of this type.⁸

Seemingly no enterprise was too big for the Millers to undertake. In 1927, Florida put into effect a new law which required the previously unregulated cattle industry to clean up and dip all cattle. This brought panic among the Florida cattlemen and many of them prepared to sell out. At the peak of the crisis, there appeared in Florida two men, one broad shouldered, booted, wearing a big cowboy hat, the other a slender man in conventional clothes, resembling a banker. They were Zack and George Miller, who introduced themselves as farmers from Oklahoma interested in buying a few cattle.⁹

Naturally, the Florida cattlemen had no idea of selling them many cattle, but took them around. The two saw steers which, properly cared for, would make good beef cattle in the spring. They saw calves and young stock that needed only good grass and age to fit them for market. After they had

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

seen thousands of cattle untouched by rope and wild as deer, they began to buy. One pasture contained a thousand cattle; they bought the thousand intact. They bought ranges full of cattle by the hundreds and by the thousands. George handled the business details, while Zack picked the cattle. In one stroke they purchased a single herd of 9,000 head. In all, they purchased 36,000 head.¹⁰

Then they sent to Oklahoma for their cowboys to move the huge herd. This had to be moved by railroad, eight hundred cattle cars comprising thirty long trains. Animals ready for market were sold in towns through which they passed.¹¹ Others were taken to pastures in Louisiana, Kansas, Arkansas, Texas, and even Old Mexico. Ten thousand head were taken to the 101 Ranch and later used there in the slaughter houses. Eventually all the cattle purchased were sold at a profit.¹²

Another undertaking of the Miller Brothers was the production of motion pictures "Wild West" a Pathe serial, and "Trail Dust" were produced on the ranch. Many others were produced but no records of income from this source are available. To give some idea of the business transactions of the 101 Ranch, it might be stated that from 1923 to 1930 there was an annual turnover of nearly a million dollars in livestock, farm crops, industries, oil rents and royalties, exclusive of the 101 Ranch Show.¹³

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹26,000 were sold enroute. Time, (February 11, 1929), p. 63.

¹²Collings; England, op. cit., p. 76.

¹³Ibid., p. 124.

In order to systematize the enterprises of the ranch and bring all the departments into a closer working organization the Miller Brothers organized the Wheel Club. This was composed of the heads of the departments as active members, and the Miller Brothers as honorary members. The idea of such a club came from Rotary training and association, as the Millers were members of the Ponca City Rotary Club.¹⁴

Another club organized by the Millers was the Cherokee Strip Cowpuncher's Association. Its members were cowboys, most of whom had fought the Indians during the early days. There were about four hundred members of the club, which was organized on September 6, 1920, on Cowboy Hill in the buffalo pasture of the 101 Ranch. The organization had as its purpose the bringing together of those Indian fighters and cowboys in the West prior to 1893, at least once a year to exchange yarns of the trail.¹⁵

At the first meeting of the Cowpunchers Association, Abe Banta of Billings, Oklahoma, was elected president, but at the second, Joe Miller was elected president for life. The organization flourished and grew so large it was necessary to form a governing body. There was also a ladies' auxiliary. Oscar Brewster of Crescent, Oklahoma, was secretary-treasurer of the organization. At all of their reunions he was asked to bake the biscuits. He said he learned how from the recipe

¹⁴Daily Oklahoman, February 6, 1927.

¹⁵Collings; England, op. cit., p. 156.

on all cans of baking powder sold in the early days. The Association always met on Cowboy Hill, which was set aside for the purpose by the Miller Brothers.¹⁶

With the Miller Brothers, to think was to act. For instance, one day Joe received the idea, while watching some land terrapins crawl about near the ranch office building, of having a Terrapin Derby. He had never heard of one but believed it would be a good stunt, so he advertised for entries. This occurred in 1924. After considerable experimenting, he learned that the only thing which would move the sluggish creatures was bright sunlight. Therefore, the one hundred fourteen contestants, all named and numbered, some supposedly well trained, were placed in a cage in the center of a one hundred foot circle in the sun. The circle was divided into eight sections with a judge at the outside of each section. Fortunately, the day of the Terrapin Derby was exceedingly bright, Joe took out rain insurance on the race, and 5,000 people gathered to witness sensational event. As was to be expected, the terrapins having the most training refused to budge, others started and then turned back, three got to the finish line and stopped without crossing, some engaged in fighting, and one, "Shingles" by name, owned by Harry Cragin of Ponca City, finally grew tired of the sun and dived for the area of shade immediately outside the finish line. Then two others, "Ponca Agency" owned by George

¹⁶Ibid.

Hoya, Superintendent of the Ponca Indian Agency, and "Zev", owned by Charles Hurford, a Ponca City merchant, crossed the line. All during the race there was intense excitement among the spectators and owners, even though none showed in the contestants themselves.¹⁷

The prize money consisted of two hundred twenty-eight dollars collected by the entry fees--two dollars for each entry--and was divided as follows; one hundred fourteen dollars for first prize, sixty-eight dollars for second prize, and forty-six dollars for third prize. The whole thing was so much fun, even though there was no profit in it for the Millers that it was repeated every year on Labor Day along with the annual round-up.¹⁸

It was in 1924 that Joe Miller again started up the Wild West Show. He had been watching the 101 Ranch bank balance for some years, and by that time it had grown large enough to finance the kind of show he wanted. The new show was so magnificent that it required a year's preparation before the initial performance in Oklahoma City, April 21, 1925. The opening exhibition was dedicated to the "Eighty-niner" celebration. The performers were all new, well-trained, and highly paid. The Miller Brothers had scoured the world for talent. An entire troop of Russian Cossack riders and dancers were imported. Everything about the new show was

¹⁷Ibid., p. 152.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 149.

done on a magnificent scale. No expense was spared. But in spite of the effort and money put into it, the show did not succeed financially, although it met with tremendous approval of the people.¹⁹

In the first place, the new super-wild west show met with the greatest opposition any business ever met, the Barnum and Bailey, Ringling interest on one side, and the American Circus Corporation on the other. This opposition was a heavy drain on the income of the new show. In the second place, the expenses of operating were enormous, because of the high class performances added in the reorganization. From the beginning, the show lost money and finally stranded in Washington D. C., August 5, 1931. After some legal difficulties the equipment was shipped back to the 101 Ranch.²⁰

Probably one contributing factor to the failure, as, indeed, to the entire 101 Ranch was the accidental death of Joe Miller in 1927. He died October 21, the victim of carbon monoxide gas poisoning. He was found dead in the garage where had apparently been working on his car with the motor running when stricken by the deadly gas. Evidently life had passed before he fell. Attending physicians who were called, said without doubt or hesitation that death was caused by monoxide gas thrown off by the running motor.²¹

¹⁹Ibid., p. 184.

²⁰Ibid., p. 186.

²¹Tulsa Daily World, October 22, 1927.

The oldest of the three brothers, his was the duty of holding the guiding hand--the kindly spirit over all. For every stranger calling upon Joe Miller, there was a friendly word and a smiling greeting. Everyone felt the warm touch of his interest. He was alert and active in his constant endeavor to find new and better farming methods. Hundreds of experiments were tried out on the 101 Ranch under his personal supervision. He possessed rare ability as a farm manager, ability which was indispensable in directing the 101 agricultural enterprises. At the time of his death the ranch expressed magnificently, the West of today.²²

It was, no doubt, the death of Joe Miller that started the downfall of the ranch. His guiding hand was badly needed.

George Miller brought in enough money through his oil business, to keep the ranch up to standard after the death of his brother, but he too met death through an automobile accident. He was returning home from a trip to Texas to look over his oil interests in Ponca City, when his car skidded on the slippery pavement not far from home. He evidently tried to jump when he lost control of the car, but was caught beneath the front wheel. It was some time before he was found, and he died before those who found him could get him to the hospital at Ponca City. His death occurred February 2, 1929. For a number of years George L. Miller

²²ibid.

had been financial head of the ranch. His death was an irreparable loss.²³

²³Ponca City News, February 2, 1929.

CHAPTER IV
THE LAST ROUND-UP

For over half a century the 101 Ranch had prospered, first under the direction of George W. Miller, and later under his three sons. It was a vast empire stretching for many miles under the bright Oklahoma sun, truly a monument to a great industry that was passing. There were probably three things that contributed to the downfall of this mighty cattle domain, the deaths of Joe and George Miller, the creating of the debts as a result of huge loans contracted in better times to finance the ranch, and the depression that set in in 1929 which sapped the strength of their credit.

After the death of George Miller, the management of the ranch passed into the hands of Zack, the cowman of the family. He had the help of his nephews George L. and Joe C. Jr., sons of Joe Miller. Soon after they took over the management of the ranch, the bottom dropped out of the financial structure of the country. Also the oil business, from which they derived much of their revenue, collapsed and left them no means of acquiring ready cash. Livestock sold at a very low figure, and agricultural products could not be sold without a great loss.¹

Thinking that the economic depression was to be a temporary affair and would soon right itself, the Millers

¹Collings; England, op. cit., p. 192.

secured a mortgage of \$500,000 to finance the ranch operations. Conditions not only failed to improve but grew steadily worse. The year of 1930 saw the ranch suffer a net loss of \$301,064.08 for the year. When the taxes, mortgages, and notes became due, there was no money available to take care of such an emergency. The operations of the ranch came to a standstill. It was impossible to re-finance the ranch, yet the assets trebled the liabilities.²

The creditors stepped in and demanded payment of their notes and mortgages. They did not want the ranch; they only demanded that their notes be paid. Zack Miller believed that the debts could be paid if the creditors would allow him time in which to raise some money. He told them at a meeting that they would all be paid one hundred per cent on the dollar. But individuals with money to loan at this time were hard to find, and the only ones who would loan money under any terms were the ones who wanted to have a controlling interest in the ranch. This Zack would not allow, and as a result he was unable to find anyone with money to advance on the enterprise. This stubbornness on the part of Zack brought the 101 empire tumbling down upon his ears. It was at this time the 101 Ranch show was stranded in Washington D. C. He had hoped to make from this enterprise enough money to bring him out of the dilemma but with its failure his last hope along that line was gone.³

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 195.

Zack Miller saw that he was through. So he decided to call a conference of all the creditors at the ranch headquarters to consider the situation. The creditors met on August 10, 1931. Zack's idea was to save the ranch and preserve the traditions that surrounded the vast empire. This conference found several things that would have to be remedied. First, the indebtedness that was due and past due with interest was \$626, 762.33. The products raised that year on the ranch were valued at \$231,734. The ranch lands were valued at \$977,800. The assets when added made a total of more than \$1,000,000.⁴ Zack proposed that the creditors give him six months to bring in new money to refinance the ranch and pay off all outstanding bills. The bankers and creditors were willing that he should be allowed that time, but they expressed doubt that he would be able to raise the money with conditions in the country so bad. They expressed the belief that if the ranch could be put on its feet it could be done within sixty days. L. K. Meek, president of the Security State Bank of Ponca City said that it would be impossible to obtain the money at any rate of interest as people were not lending money. Furthermore, the person who would lend his money would want control of the ranch. Zack positively refused to give up control under any circumstances. It was also brought out at the conference

⁴The Receiver's Report to the Kay County Court, September, 1931.

that the value of land, even at reduced prices, would more than pay off the creditors secured as well as unsecured. Zack requested that no new law suits be filed against the ranch during the moratorium period.⁵

Judge W. E. Rice of Ponca City suggested that the unsecured creditors hold a separate meeting and agree to hold off any more law suits until they could see the result of Zack's work toward refinancing the ranch. Two other parties in the ranch trust, heirs of the late George L. and Joe Miller, were represented by George W. Miller, Ponca City, son of Joe Miller. Joe Chambers of the Exchange National Trust Company, of Tulsa was there, but neither the heirs nor Chambers expressed any opinion as to what they would do regarding their shares of the ranch.⁶

On August 27, 1931, shortly after this conference, a surprise suit was filed by the heirs in the district court of Kay County against Zack Miller. This was the beginning of the long legal trouble that has torn the 101 Ranch apart. The petition stated that the estate of the late George L. Miller was being depreciated because of conditions on the ranch. They requested that a receiver be appointed to take over the business of the ranch. This led to many more suits. Among the most important were those of the Passumptie Savings Bank

⁵Collings; England, op. cit., p. 196.

⁶Ibid., p. 197.

of Maryland and that of the John Hancock Life Insurance Company. After much discussion among the creditors they agreed on the appointment of Fred C. Clarke, ranchman near Winfield, Kansas.⁷

The appointment was confirmed by Judge John S. Burger of Kay County district court on September 16, 1931. The bond of Clarke was set at \$50,000 by the court. A restraining order was issued by Judge Burger preventing any suit or execution against the ranch involving the crop or other property, or the filing of foreclosure actions.. Judge W.E. Rice, trustee of the ranch, was ordered to turn over all records to Clarke. The John Hancock Life Insurance Company and the Passumptie Savings Bank of Maryland withdrew their petitions and agreed to Clarke as receiver. They also agreed not to foreclose on any of the acreage covered by their mortgages until January 1, 1933.⁸

When Fred Clarke, took over the activities of the 101 he had in mind the rehabilitation of the ranch and to make it a paying proposition. Several things, however, were working against such a plan: first, lack of funds upon which to base his operations, and second, was his lack of experience in dealing with such a vast enterprise. Zack had hoped that he would be asked to help in the reorganization, but Clarke

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 198.

wished to accomplish this task alone. This was possibly a mistake, but nevertheless, Clarke refused to ask the help of Zack. When the plans of reorganization failed, the only other recourse was to sell all the stock, hogs, cattle and agricultural products of the ranch. Therefore, on March 24, 1932, Mr. Clarke advertised for sale the personal properties. Everything was billed except the personal belongings of Zack, which were housed in the "White House" of the ranch.⁹

The day of the sale arrived and a crowd of 3,000 persons came to see the dismemberment of the empire of the prairie. Some came to buy, but the great majority came to look with curiosity on the last of the Millers great possessions. In the "White House", while the sale was going on, was Zack Miller. He roared defiance to the attorneys who were seeking a conference with him. His anger reached such a height that he threatened to blow up the "White House" and even fired a shotgun in the general direction of the attorneys. They deemed it best to leave the belligerent Zack alone for the time being.¹⁰

As a result of this defiance of the law he was arraigned on charges of resisting the law and faced criminal prosecution for this armed defiance of the auctioneer's hammer. He was faced with the charges and imprisoned in the county jail at Newkirk, Oklahoma. His release was obtained through the order of the Governor of the State of Oklahoma. The Governor

⁹Ibid., p. 199.

¹⁰Daily Oklahoman, March 25, 1932.

at this time was William H. Murray. He stated that it was a shame to imprison a man in jail for debts, and that it was against the principles of the state to allow any such action to take place. Zack's former wife came from Louisiana and began to cause more difficulties for Miller.¹¹

After Zack was released from jail, he set about the task of getting Clarke dismissed as receiver for the 101 Ranch. Miller charged that Clarke had not carried out the policies as he should, had let the ranch run down, and had been guilty of gross neglect. Zack was unable to get an immediate hearing on the petition but he drew up a new plan of reorganization for the ranch. The creditors agreed to the plan and to a two-year moratorium period. Certificates of indebtedness were to be issued to all creditors and were to become due at the expiration of the two-year lease, January 1, 1935. The Kay County district court approved the reorganization plan on March 25, 1933, and dismissed Fred C. Clarke as operating receiver, returning the management of the ranch to Zack and two trustees for the two year period.¹²

This moratorium was just a gesture on the part of the creditors because even before the date of the reorganization plan the various mortgage holders had filed suits and bit by bit the vast 101 Ranch was sold on the auction block, until finally the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company of

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Collings; England, op. cit., p. 205.

Boston filed an injunction proceedings in the federal court at Guthrie, Oklahoma, demanding that Zack Miller vacate the "White House". The company had already taken over all the land surrounding the "White House". Zack claimed the "White House" as a homestead and refused to vacate the property. But on June 3, 1936, by order of federal district judge, Edgar S. Vaught, he was ordered to leave the "White House". No definite time was set for his departure from the property but Zack secured a stay of execution of the order if he could furnish bond by August 2, 1936, for an appeal of the case.¹³

Therefore, on July 5, 1936, Zack held an auction of the furnishings of the "White House" on the 101 in order to raise money for this appeal. The sale was attended by many old time friends and people of the surrounding territory. It was a very sad occasion and marked one more step in the dismemberment of the 101 Ranch. Famous buffalo pictures were sold as low as eighty-five dollars when at one time \$1,200 had been refused for the same picture as it had hung in the famous "White House".¹⁴

Miller fought the case for several years, but it was a losing battle and he was finally evicted from the property and forced to admit that he was defeated. The next step in the ranch history has been taken in the last several years. In Payne County, the United States Government is building a

¹³Ibid., p. 206.

¹⁴Muskogee Phoenix, March 7, 1937.

dam which will cover several thousand acres. The people in this section had to be moved to a new location. The 101 Ranch was an ideal place to locate these families, so the government purchased the land from the various creditors.

The ranch was divided into forty acre plots by the resettlement administration and hundreds of farmers took the place of the cowboys who had roamed the pasture lands of the 101. The government obtained options on 3,300 acres of the land. The land was leased to farmers for a five-year period to prove themselves. If successful, the farmer will be allowed to purchase the land. They have forty years in which to pay.¹⁵

The plans of the government call for transforming the "White House" and grounds into a recreation park and community center. D.P. Trent, regional director of the resettlement administration at Dallas, said the money was available for this purpose.¹⁶

The titles for the land was approved and the government has transported tenants from the sub-marginal land near Stillwater, Oklahoma, to the 101. The Resettlement Administration has lent these tenants money not to exceed \$2,700 each to build homes and barns and to drill water wells. Most of the farms range from eighty to two hundred fifteen acre farms for elderly families. Construction of the first homes began in July, 1937, and the cost ranged from \$1,200 to \$1,500 per unit.¹⁷

¹⁵Oklahoma City Times, October 31, 1936.

¹⁶Tulsa Daily World, June 18, 1937.

¹⁷Ibid.

Although, Zack Miller has continued to object to the United States Government's placing of families on his old ranch site and former home, the work has gone on unabated, and the once large prairie estate has been miraculously transformed into homesteads.

While the ranch remained intact one could say with certainty that the west still lingered in Oklahoma. With its passing, the state has lost a very memorable landmark.

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