

TRAINS, PLANES and BOATS
A MEMOIR, 1918 - 1994

by

Capt. Richards T. Miller, USN [Ret]

Introduction -

Several years ago my elder daughter, Patti, asked me to write an auto-biography so that she and her sister, Linda , and their children might know more of my life. This memoir is the result.

Over the years I have enjoyed a consuming interest in trains, planes and boats; and, the waters of this world, whether the structured body of a Lincoln Memorial reflecting pool, a lovely tree-bound New England lake, a placid stream or broad river, a bay or sound, the ocean, or the quiet tidal creek in Maryland alongside which I've made my home for most of the past forty years. My story will be told episodically rather than chronologically. I hope it will prove interesting.

I - Roots

My roots stem from Germany and England. One on my mother's side stretches back to the 1682 voyage of William Penn's WELCOME.

My paternal great grandfathers were of German stock. Great grandfather William Miller was the son of a forester on an estate in the Black Forest of Germany. He came to the United States in his teens as an indentured farm hand under the sponsorship of a farmer who lived in the vicinity of Mt. Joy, PA. After working out his passage money and other obligations he pursued cabinet making as a career. Since cabinet makers made coffins, it was a logical step into the funeral business which occupied his later life in Elizabethtown, PA. I remember my great grandmother Susan [Way] Miller as a pleasant little old lady living with her school teacher daughter, my great aunt Kate, in Elizabethtown when I was a small boy. I do not know whether great grandfather Adam Geistweit was born in this country or in Germany. I suspect he was born here. One of my childhood recollections is of a visit to his farm near Elizabethtown when I was quite young.

My maternal great grandfathers were of English stock. Great grandfather Frederick Godfrey Thorn was born in or near Philadelphia, PA in 1836. He studied his profession of architecture in the office of John McArthur, Jr. in Philadelphia. From 1857 to 1861 he practiced in North Carolina. During the Civil War he returned to Mr. McArthur's office, and was engaged in the construction of military hospitals. After the war he worked with the chief engineers of the Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia and Erie railroads before joining the civil engineering and architectural firm of Wilson Brothers and Company as a partner. The firm designed bridges, stations, public and commercial buildings, and private homes. Great grandfather was a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects. One of his works, the public library in Woodstock, VT, still serves in the capacity for which it was designed. His wife, a Miss Richards from the vicinity of Camden, NJ, was the source of my given name.

Great grandfather William Magee Buckman was born in Bucks County, PA in 1817. He was descended from William Buckman of the Parish of Billingshurst, Sussex County, England, who arrived in Pennsylvania on William Penn's WELCOME in 1682. His wife, Catherine [Harper] Buckman, also was descended from a member of the WELCOME's 1682 voyage. Her ancestor, John Harper, was one of three brothers who arrived in Pennsylvania together. One brother settled in New York. The noted publishers, Harper Brothers, descended from him. Another brother, with his family, started for Virginia, but was prevented by high water from crossing the Potomac. He subsequently built the ferry known as Harper's Ferry. John Harper bought a farm and settled with his family in Lower Dublin Township near Philadelphia. William Buckman and Catherine Harper were married in Churchville, PA in 1858. He apparently was a man of several interests; for the 1863 Philadelphia City Directory lists him as a grocer; the 1864 directory lists him as a bookbinder; and the 1892 directory lists him as a bookkeeper, in his 75th year. Great grandmother Buckman as a widow lived with her daughter, my grandmother Thorn, when I was a small boy.

Grandfather George Way Miller was a skilled cabinet maker in Lancaster, PA. My grandmother, Ella [Geistweit] Miller, died in 1914 while dad was a senior at Penn State. The grandma, Nora [Harnish] Miller, I knew and loved to visit as a small boy was grandfather's second wife. Grandfather Frederick Godfrey Thorn, Jr. was a civil engineer, educated at the University of Pennsylvania. I knew him as the chief engineer of the United Gas Improvement Company, the Philadelphia gas works. He and grandmother Annie [Buckman] Thorn lived in a large semi-detached house on West Avenue, Jenkintown, PA all of their married life. It was just a block away from the house at 313 Hillside Avenue where I was born 31 January 1918, and spent the first nine years of my life.

My father, Herman Geistweit Miller, was born and raised in Lancaster, PA with his two sisters, Ruth [Miller] Sheeler and Florence [Miller] Erb. After graduation from Lancaster High School he entered the Pennsylvania State College. There he was an Alpha Tau Omega fraternity brother of mother's brother Godfrey Richards Thorn. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemical Engineering in 1915. My mother, Helen [Thorn] Miller, attended the public schools of Jenkintown, PA, and took undergraduate courses at Beaver College in Jenkintown. She and dad were married on 9 April 1917. Dad was first employed by the Barret Corporation, a manufacturer of roofing materials and other coal tar and petroleum based products. Later he joined the Philadelphia-based Warren-Ehret Roofing Company. In 1927 he was made manager of the Washington, DC branch of the company. From then until his death in 1941 he won contracts to do the roofing and waterproofing of a major share of the government buildings erected in the Federal Triangle in those years, as well as other government buildings in the Washington area such as additions to the Library of Congress, the towing tank at the David Taylor Model Basin, and additions to Bancroft Hall at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD. He also was a sub-contractor on a number of commercial building projects. He was an active member of Kiwanis; and an occasional golfer, frequently with mother, though not in the league with uncle Godfrey who was a tournament-class player in his younger years and an ardent enthusiast all his life.

FOUR STAR BOND
SOUTHWORTH CO. U.S.A.
25% COTTON FIBER

II - Trains, Planes and Boats

The house in which I was born, and lived for my first nine years, was located across a couple of blocks of open fields from the main line to New York and a freight switching yard of the Reading Railroad. Consequently the sounds I remember from my youth were not those of cars and planes, but rather the distinctive chuffing of a steam locomotive's exhaust, cry of its whistle, and ringing of its bell.

FOUR STAR BOND

SOUTH WORTH CO. U.S.A.

25% COTTON FIBER

	A	B	C	D	E
1					
2					
3		GENEOLOGY of RICHARDS THORN MILLER			
4					
5					
6					William Miller [Muller] [1]
7					
8				George Way Miller	
9				[1868 - 1936]	
10				Katie Miller	Susan Way Miller
11				Emma Miller Brown	
12			Herman Geistweit Miller		
13			[1894 - 1941]		
14			Ruth Miller Sheeler		Adam Geistweit
15			Florence Miller Erb		
16				Ella Geistweit Miller	
17				[1868 - 1914]	
18				2d Nora Harnish Miller	Ella Good Geistweit
19					
20		Richards Thorn Miller			
21		[1918 -]			
22		Robert Thorn Miller			Frederick Godfrey Thorn
23		[1921 - 1989]			[1836 - 1915]
24		Virginia Miller Hardy		Frederick Godfrey Thorn, Jr.	
25		[1924 -]		[1866 - 1942]	
26					Anne Richards Thorn
27					
28			Helen Thorn Miller		
29			[1894 - 1950]		
30			Godfrey Richards Thorn		William Magee Buckman
31					[1817 - 1901]
32				Annie Buckman Thorn	
33				[1872 - 1937]	
34				Ella Buckman Ferguson	Catherine Harper Buckman
35					[1835 - 1923]
36					
37					[1] From the Black Forest of Germany

	A	B	C	D
1				
2				
3	GENEALOGY of RICHARDS THORN MILLER [continued]			
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				Isaac Buckman
9				[1729 - 1814]
10			Abraham Buckman	
11			[1777 - 1847]	
12		Isaac Buckman		Sarah Cutler Buckman
13		[- 1828]		[- 1814]
14	William Magee Buckman		Eleanor Comfort Buckman	
15	[1817 - 1901]		[1763 - 1823]	
16		Sarah Magee Buckman		
17		[- 1876]		Samuel Harper
18				
19			George Harper	
20				
21		William Harper		Ann Roberts Harper
22		[1795 - 1867]		
23	Catherine Harper Buckman		Mary Collins Harper	
24	[1835 - 1923]			
25		Esther Smith Harper		
26		[1801 - 1838]		[1] Father, William Buckman,
27				WELCOME, 8 October 1682, fr
28				Billingshurst, Sussex County, E
29				
30				[2] Grandfather, John Harper
31				WELCOME, 8 October 1682.