

A Tribute to Harry Miller

JL brings this poem from the local history, Historical Highlights of the Kearney Area , 1865-1983, by Ralph Bice. We reprint it here in its original spelling and punctuation, with an excerpt from the article that introduced it.

Not so long ago I was shown a short poem written by a friend, about another old friend who has gone on. I showed it to several and each wanted a copy.... [T]he Millers arrived shortly after 1880. They settled on the south side of the lake. Bill Miller's eldest daughter still lives in the Miller house, which I visited many times more than half a century ago.

The Millers were accomplished woodsmen, could do any work that had to be done in the woods, and both were blacksmiths. But Harry was known as an excellent violinist, or perhaps [we] should say fiddler. Just to brag a little, I have corded [sic] on the piano many times for Harry, a few times at the home of Wes Mason. He mentioned romances being started at the dances. Well, three of the Mason boys married three of the Miller girls. Seems like the Masons raised many sons, but on the Miller side the three men amongst them have only one boy. There were Mason girls, some still living close. Some Miller girls, but their names are of course not Miller.

Odd how a poem like the one that will follow can bring back so many memories, and while I am not so young anymore, those families were here thirty five to forty years before I was. And it is nice when one thinks how they contributed to the community, that there are still some of the descendants around. And besides the families, there are many of us who can remember those dances with Harry Miller providing the music.

There was a settlement called Sand Lake
Where prosperous farmers were very few
a few of us were raised back there
where there wasn't much to do

But we had our old time dances
where we used to have our fling
to the square dance calls we shook the walls
and made the rafters ring

Now there was one we should never forget
Harry was a master of the fiddle
we would dosey doe on the outside
and swing our partners down the middle

And when we had those old time dances
Harry was one musician we could afford
He would never say, who is going to pay?
will you have someone there to cord

Someone would like bring some scotch
and someone else some gin
with this bestowed, how the music flowed
from the strings of the violin

And when we would pass the hat around
Harry would just sit and laugh
for the nickles and dimes in those hard times
came to about one dollar and a half

And at those old time dances
many romances were begun
and for every Miller daughter
the Mason's had a son

Of course there was some religious folk
who thought dancing was a sin
I don't agree, I was there to see
when Harry played his violin

But Harry took his violin
for his appointment with the Lord
he met St. Peter at the Golden gate
and said is there anyone here to cord

Then Harry said, well speak up Lord
for if the answer is "No"
then I'll just take my violin
and join my friends below

Down there will be no streets of gold
no angels with harps and music sweet
but you will hear my violin
and the sound of dancing feet.

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Alan Mills to Vera Johnson, undated.