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*Searching For The Real Fiddler's Green*

By Nita Wise

"In Old Blacksburg, Dr. W. B. Conway Reminisces" was the title of an article published in Home News, September 9, 1916. The article was filled with names of people residing in early Blacksburg and gave locations of their residences. It also discussed places of businesses and their proprietors.

One of the names mentioned was Grief Miller. He was identified as owner of a tan yard. Also mentioned in the same article was his son, identified as "Judge Charles Miller of Fiddler's Green."

Using this reference as a starting point the search for locating the site and wonder of Fiddler's Green began. Personal questioning of older residents pointed toward the brick two story house standing on the corner of Draper and Miller streets. Several of those questioned vaguely remembered Fiddler's Green as referring to the house which is now occupied by Mrs. Houston Poff.

Mrs. Poff reported she and her husband purchased the house in 1921 from A. Warren Miller. Mr. Miller and his sisters Bessie and Laura, a school teacher, had resided in the brick home which replaced an older Miller home on the same property. The brick house had been constructed around 1916 by a Mr. Pascoe. It faces on Draper Road. The older Miller home faced Miller Street. Boxwoods which formed an entry to the old Miller home are still standing. The Miller's vegetable garden was located where Mrs. Poff's front yard is now located.

Bessie Miller married Morgan Davidson, one of the earliest Engineering graduates at VPI. They moved to South Dakota, where he was employed by the University of South Dakato.

The Millers had a large land holdings in the Blacksburg area. The land now crossed by Draper, Preston, Gracelyn Court, Allendale Court, South Gate was once part of the old Miller Property.

Mrs. Poff confirmed she had heard the name Fiddler's Green used in connection with the property. She was not certain who in the Miller family had first used the name. She indicated she had been informed the name derived from the fact that a male relative of the Miller family, a proficient fiddle player, used to stand in the front yard of the Miller place and play his fiddle. Crows were attracted to the scene by his music.

Grief Miller, owner of the tan yard, was born in 1807 and died 1880. His name, birth and death dates are recorded on a stained glass window in the Whisner Building of Blacksburg United Methodist Church. Nancy Miller, his wife was born 1805 and died 1891.

Another window in the same room contains the name Charles Miller, born 1830, died 1899 and his wife Margaret Earhart Miller, born 1839, died 1903. A check with the church office provided no further information.

A niece of Warren Miller was able to supply additional information. Miss Brenda Rucker, retired nurse, stated that Grief was the father of Charles, and Charles was the father of Warren Miller.

Charles Sr. and Margaret Earhart Miller had a large family. Miss Rucker remembered the names of some of Warren's brothers and sisters. Brothers were George, who moved to Texas; Wade, who "died early" from cancer; John, and Charles Jr. Sisters were Anna Miller, (married name Williams); Junaita Miller Rucker, mother of Miss Brenda Rucker; and Laura Miller, a school teacher, who resided with Warren before his marriage.

Charles was a magistrate and had been called "Judge." He was a veteran of the Confederate War. A family story has been passed down about his experience during the Civil War.

Charles was alone and proceeding north of Blacksburg toward Brush Mountain when he encountered a party of Yankee soldiers. He did some quick thinking when the Yankees approached. He threw himself to the ground and began shaking and jerking as if having an epileptic fit. The Yankees watched for a time and were convinced there was something wrong with him.

"Let's leave the old fool alone-he's mad" one of the Yankees remarked and the party rode off leaving Miller unharmed. As soon as the Yankees were out of sight Miller returned to Blacksburg and reported the incident with great glee.

Charles Miller married Margaret Earhart. The Earhart family home was called Rocky Mound and was located on Ellett Road. Emily Earhart, the aviatrix, was a distant cousin of Margaret Earhart and had visited in her home.

Warren Miller married Grace Townley of Terra Haute, Indiana. She was the first Extension Specialist in Food and Nutrition at VPI. Warren was engaged in farming and real estate. After their marriage the Millers remodeled an old tenant house on the Miler property. They moved into the house was located on the wooded area of the Miller property referred to as "Miller's Wood." The grounds around the home developed and a pond complete with geese and ducks was installed. The remodeled tenant house, which at one time had been called "Grace's Folly," became the show place of pastoral beauty in Blacksburg.

Grace Townley Miller was active in the Southwestern Virginia Garden Club. She served as secretary at the time the Amphitheatre of VPI campus was dedicated.

Warren and Grace Miller had no children. Warren died in 1955 at the approximated age of 78. His wife returned to Indiana and resided with relatives until her death.

Although evidence was located that indicates the old Miller property was called the original Fiddler's Green, the search for a more complete answer continues. A few scattered references indicate that Charles and Alexander Black, sons of John and Jane Alexander Blacks, both had homes where were called Fiddler's or Fiddler's Green.

Nannie Francisco Porter, in her book Blacks and Other Families, made the following statement: Charles Black, the ninth child of John and Jane Alexander Blacks, lived and died in the home left him by his father, known as Fiddler's Green." The Black Family Genealogy contains this statement: "Alexander Black, (illegible) the child of John and Jane Alexander Black, born Blacksburg, 1880. He was a violinist and his place was called Fiddler's Green."

Additional information indicates early American inns which provided food, drink, lodging and entertainment were commonly referred to as Fiddler's Green. Before that time old English inns were also called the same term.

A house (or houses?) in early Blacksburg was referred to as Fiddler's Green. Perhaps further research will provide a complete answer.

Where was Blacksburg's original Fiddler's Green and who was the first owner?



*Figure 1 Old Miller Homeplace, believed to be the original Fiddler's Green, in an old photograph. It was probably built around 1800.*



Figure 2 Warren Miller, when he was 30 years old. (Photo courtesy of Miss Brenda Rucker, Warren Miller's niece)