



# NEWSLETTER OF THE WAYNE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 104, Corydon, Iowa 50060  
641-872-2211

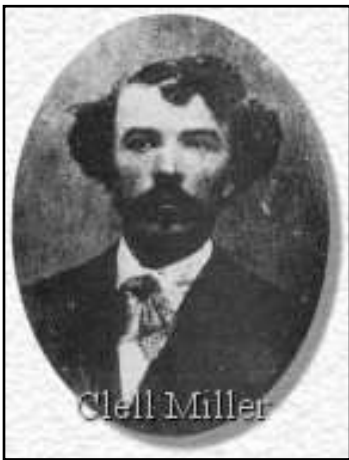
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[ptmuseum@grm.net](mailto:ptmuseum@grm.net)  
[www.prairietrailsmuseum.org](http://www.prairietrailsmuseum.org)

## THE TRIAL OF CLELLAND MILLER

On June 3, 1871 the Ocobock Bank in Corydon, IA was robbed by a gang of armed bandits known as the James-Younger Gang. The bandits included Jesse and Frank James, Cole Younger, and Clell Miller. In the 141 years since the robbery that shocked this small southern Iowa town much has been written about the gang and events surrounding that day in Corydon. The following story shares interesting facts taken from the trial transcripts of Clell Miller, who was tried in October 1872 in Corydon for the robbery of the Ocobock Bank in Corydon. This is the only known trial of a member of the James-Younger Gang. Copies of the original trial transcripts are in the collections of Prairie Trails Museum.

**Background** - Clell Miller grew up in Clay County, Missouri on a farm about five miles from the James family farm. Jesse & Frank James and Clell Miller were reported to be friends.



As the Civil War raged in October 1864, Clell Miller, at the age of 14, joined Capt. William T. Anderson's Confederate guerrillas. Anderson (known as *Bloody Bill*) was one of the most brutal confederate guerrillas and his band targeted Union Loyalists and Federal soldiers in Missouri and Kansas. Only a few days later, Miller was captured and Anderson killed by Union forces. Miller was kept in Jefferson Barracks Prison in St. Louis until April 1865 when he was released when family and friends proclaimed his loyalty to the Union.

Jesse James, age 16 and his brother Frank joined "*Bloody Bill's*" guerrillas in 1864 as well. The brothers rode with Anderson's band until *Bloody Bill* was killed on October 26, 1864; after which they joined William Quantrill's band until the war was ended.

When the war ended Jesse James was restless, unable to resume farm life, and formed a gang of a few fellow guerilla members and others. The gang's crime spree began with the robbery of Clay County Savings Association Bank on Feb 13, 1866 and didn't end until 1876 with the robbery of the First National Bank in Northfield, MN when two members of the gang were killed (including Clell Miller) and both James brothers, among others, wounded.

**Robbery** – In the days leading up to Saturday June 3, 1871 a group of four men wearing linen dusters and riding fine horses were seen by numerous people in Wayne County. When inquires were made about their business, responses varied from "We were in Centerville buying sheep" to a terse response that it was no one's business.

James Coddington and his daughter Dora would later testify that Clell Miller was one of the two men staying at their hotel the night before the robbery. Harriet Gallup worked at the hotel and identified Clell Miller as the man she served in the Coddinton's dining room.

John Alcorn, who lived just west of Allerton, testified that two of the robbers stayed overnight in his home on June 2. John & Susan Bracewell and J.W. King were to later testify that some of the men stopped by each home for a meal.

Around 1pm on Saturday June 3, 1871 four men rode into Corydon and went to the county auditor's office that reportedly held a large amount of tax receipts. The Corydon square was almost deserted since most of the citizens were at a meeting in the Methodist Church. Finding the office closed they went to Ocobock Bank on the north side of the square. Ted Wock, bank employee, was in his office at the bank with the door open. Two men appeared before him armed with colt revolvers. Another man closed the front door and each ordered Wock to not speak or they would shoot him. After filling a saddlebag with money outside the vault the men demanded that the safe be unlocked. The robbers took a total of \$5,242.07. One of the men bid Wock "Good day."



Ocobock Bank building in 1908

The robbers left the bank and rode westward past an overflow crowd gathered at the Methodist Church listening to Henry Clay Dean talking about raising funds to build a railroad through Corydon. As the robbers rode past at a fast pace, one called out "We have just robbed your bank, catch us if you can."

It took a few minutes for the crowd to comprehend the situation but soon a large posse was raised and the pursuit began. The posse, composed mostly of Civil War Veterans, led by William Littell pursued the four bandits south toward Missouri but by the following day lost the trail somewhere near Eagleville, MO.

The Ocobock Bank hired the Pinkerton Detective Agency in Chicago, the first involvement of the famous agency in the pursuit of the James-Younger Gang. Robert Pinkerton joined Sheriff Wright, Capt. Littell, J A Corbitt, and James Coddington on June 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> tracking the bandits to a farm in Civil Bend, 18 miles north of Cameron, MO. When the bandits saw the posse coming the men ran toward a stable and came out holding revolvers. A gunfight ensued and James Coddington's horse was shot from under him. Posse members fanned out in a wheat field hoping to cut off escape but the bandits soon mounted horses and escaped south toward their home base of Clay County. MO. The Pinkerton Agency later sent R. W. Westfall to continue the investigation of the bank robbery in Corydon.



Bank Safe at Museum

Westfall spent several months around Liberty, MO trying to gain the trust of Clell Miller, believed to have been part of the bank robbery in Corydon. In January of 1872 Miller told Westfall he had been accused of the bank robbery in Corydon but that he had proven an alibi in July 1871. Miller told Westfall there were not enough men in the state of Iowa to take him out of Clay County, MO for the bank robbery.

February 8, 1872 Westfall secured a warrant from J.A. McClananah, lawyer and notary public, in Corydon, for the arrest of Clell Miller. By this time Westfall held a rather low opinion of Miller and told McClananah that he had a plan for his arrest. Westfall would bring Miller to Corydon, turn him over to the court and have a mob ready to hang him and then collect the reward. These statements would later backfire on Westfall.

The sheriff of Clay County, MO refused to accompany Westfall to arrest Miller. The sheriff said he wouldn't go up there for all the money in Clay County because he was afraid he would be murdered or burned out. Westfall devised a plan to draw Miller away from his cohorts. Westfall sent a letter from Cameron, MO asking to hire Miller to steal back a team of horses that he felt had been unjustly taken from him. Miller met Westfall in Cameron and after much drinking, and, with the assistance of a local Constable and two revolvers, Miller was arrested without incident on March 7, 1872.

Miller was indicted on March 20 and bail set at \$5,000. The indictment stated the Wayne County jail was unsafe to hold Miller and he was taken to Wapello County jail in Ottumwa. Moses Miller, Clell's father, mortgaged 240 acres of his farm to post bail and bring his son home to Clay County, MO.

The trial of Clell Miller began on Monday October 22, 1872 and lasted five days. J.A. McClananhan, Corydon lawyer, successfully represented Clell Miller against the charges of bank robbery.

Miller's trial was attended by his mother, father, uncles, cousins, and neighbors. Each Miller family member testified that Clell had been with them at various family functions in Clay County Missouri in early June 1871.

Several people from Corydon and surrounding community testified but few were able to positively identify Clell Miller as one of the bank robbers. Did all the excitement surrounding the events of June 3, 1871 cloud people's memory? Or did the presence of numerous members of the Miller family have an affect on the testimony of witnesses?

Toward the end of testimony a number of people testified that Westfall was not of good character and a gambler; even people from Corydon stated Westfall had a bad reputation and was not trustworthy. Finally, J.A. McClananhan questioned R.W Westfall about his stated intentions to turn Miller over to a mob in Corydon upon his arrest. Miller was found not guilty by the jury on the first ballot and was released.

The James-Younger gang continued to rob banks and kill any unfortunate person who got in the way until their final bank robbery in Northfield, MN in 1876. The bank cashier refused to open the safe and was killed. Clell Miller and William Stiles killed, the three Younger brothers captured and Jesse & Frank James got away.

A Northfield photographer propped up the corpses, using toothpicks to keep the eyes open and snapped pictures. In less than a month the photographer sold 50,000 gruesome pictures, at \$2 a dozen.

Miller was shot by a young medical student, Henry Wheeler, who later asked for the outlaws' bodies, saying his medical school was short on cadavers. Authorities refused the request but there is a story circulated in Minnesota that the bodies were quietly given to the medical student. After becoming a doctor, Henry Wheeler was reported to have the skeleton hanging in his office for many years.

Members of the Miller family refute that story. They say the bodies of the two bandits were placed in alcohol and exhibited around Minnesota for a time. Moses Miller, Clell's father claimed the body from Minnesota and returned it to Missouri. Family members said it is definitely Clell who is buried in the Miller family plot near Kearney, MO in Muddy Fork Cemetery.

According to an article in a Northfield, MN newspaper dated October 5, 2012 a research team from Minnesota hoped to dig up the body of Clell Miller and settle the mystery of which story is true. The Jackson County, MO medical examiner was ordered to exhume the body. When the Minnesota team and medical examiner arrived at Muddy Fork Cemetery they found the Miller family obelisk with four graves but no indication of which belonged to Clell. The exhumation is still on hold until the team might be able to secure DNA samples from Miller family descendants.

Isn't it amazing that almost a century and a half later there is still so much interest in the story of the James-Younger Gang, Clell Miller and the escapades of this most infamous gang!



# MILLERTON IN THE 1930's

The following story is taken from *Along the Way* written by Robert Stech in 1976.

In 1911 an Iowa road map showed a small town named Ovid in the approximate vicinity of what is now Millerton. In 1913 the Rock Island Railroad sliced through the countryside from Chariton to Corydon. With the coming of the railroad the sizeable, thriving town of New York, three miles to the east of where Millerton is located, soon died, as the merchants and the general population moved to the rail line.



Ellis & Zora Bull Drug & Hardware Store

In the early 1930's Millerton had a population of one hundred eighty seven. It had three grocery stores: Buoy's, Gilman's, and the Mulenburn grocery. Millerton also had two gas stations: one owned by Reese Dotts, a Pure oil station and the other a Phillips 66 owned by Earl Krouse. As in many small towns the gas stations were the favorite rest and recreation centers, havens for the town pitch and cribbage players. The average farmer stopped for an hour or two when he bought gas and played a few hands. They were also the local source for communications on the recent happenings in the community. Ellis and Zora Bull operated a drug and hardware store as well as a livestock buying station, mostly hogs bound for Morrells at Ottumwa.

John McClosky, the barber, cut hair for 25¢ per head. Dr. Corbin tended to the communities medical needs from his office upstairs above Bull's store. Floyd Hook managed the lumberyard, and Charlie Ammenell was the small building carpenter at the yard. Bill Green was the village carpenter and repairman and a fellow named Yeigh set up and operated a blacksmith shop for a few years. The local restaurant was operated by Maud Bone and Merle Owens was the local auto mechanic.

In the 1930's the local hotel had been abandoned as such and was used as a boarding house for teachers. Martha and Mary Stech also boarded teachers and custom quilted and hooked rugs.

The mail came to Millerton three times a day on the railroad. Harvey Double and Glen Draper (pictured at right) transported the mail to and from the depot and the post office in a red wheel barrow. The post office was in Buoy's store. Myrtle Buoy was the post mistress. As in most small towns in the 30's, Millerton's bank failed, never to reopen its doors.



The town fire department consisted of a man-powered fire engine, a light buggy wheel conveyance. It held somewhere between 50 and 100 gallons of water and had a pressurized water tank. The town water supply was a couple of cisterns in close proximity to Reese Dotts gas station. The water supply came from the roof of the gas station that captured the rain water. After several years of non-use, it was discovered that the water would burn. The station's underground gas tank had rusted out and the gasoline had polluted the cistern water.



Millerton High School ca.1930

Millerton High had a new gym and six basketball players. These six fellows out-played the larger schools and won a consolation trophy in a county tournament. There was also a girl's team at Millerton High.

Millerton even had a mini Fourth of July celebration. A fellow from Corydon tried to start an open air movie on a vacant lot between the restaurant and the bank building. A small flickery home movie type of projector showed movies to the people on Saturday evening. The admission was a quarter and there was a drawing for a basket of groceries.

Today, most of the population has changed. Many of those who lived then in Millerton have gone to their just reward, and their descendants have spread to the four winds. (Editor's note: The author Robert Stech was born in 1921 on a farm near Millerton. In 1974-75 he wrote a weekly column, "Along the Way" for the *Town and Country Journal/Farmers Weekly* of Humeston, IA).

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**MEMORIALS:** Memorial gifts have been received by the Wayne County Historical Society since our last Newsletter for: Kenny Halfhill, Carleen Schooley, Oscar G. & Anna Miller Allen, Ruth Richard, Jim & Lela Montgomery, Richard P.(Dick)Fain, Richard (Pete) Lucas, and Lloyd & Blanche Nelson. A contribution was also given in Honor of Bill Gode's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Many thanks to all those who have chosen to honor these fine people through a gift to the Historical Society.

## PIONEER FESTIVAL

The weather turned very cold for our 11<sup>th</sup> annual Pioneer Festival and the crowd was small. Still, those who attended seemed to enjoy all the activities. The Inn of the Six-Toed Cat hosted a "Dinner with Lincoln" on Friday evening with wonderful food and good company. Jeanie Jackson is pictured at right with Lincoln enactor Lance Mack.

The Iowa Dept. of Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War organization held a dedication ceremony, (pictured at left), on Saturday afternoon for the Lineville G.A.R. window. The beautiful window was donated to Prairie Trails Museum last spring by the group; a lasting legacy to Wayne County Civil War veterans.

The Civil War enactors proved to be hardy souls as they camped at Corydon Lake Park all weekend. There were more cannons and enactors this year and the battle reenactment even included mounted Cavalry.

We want to thank all those who participated or helped in so many ways with the Pioneer Festival; without the dedication of so many volunteers museum events would not happen. We will all hope for warmer weather in 2013.



## Wayne High School Community Service

Wayne High School students have been busy this fall performing community service for organizations in the area. After the success of the school's community service day last spring it was decided to expand to one hour on one day each month of the school year. A group of students under the direction of Mr. Nekvinda have been helping at the museum raking leaves and clearing the garden. On November 14<sup>th</sup> four of the students carried Heritage Hannah to the barn for winter.



## Iowa Museum Association 2013-2014 Board Members

Cedar Falls – The Iowa Museum Association has announced the names of the Board of Directors who will lead the organization in 2013-14. The Iowa Museum Association is a statewide organization, serving a constituency that includes art centers and museums, botanical gardens, children's museums, historic sites, historical societies, living history sites, nature centers, natural history museums, planetariums, science and technology centers, and zoos. The mission of the Iowa Museum Association is to provide quality training and development to Iowa museum professionals and volunteers, advocate for support of Iowa's museums, and build a strong community of museums and museum supporters in Iowa.

Leading the organization for the next two years will be: **Angela Stanford\***, Danish Immigrant Museum, Elkhorn, who will serve as President; Al Harris-Fernandez, Sioux City Art Center, Sioux City, Vice President; Shalla Ashworth, Old Capitol Museum, Iowa City, Secretary; and Elaine Raleigh, Des Moines Metro Opera, Des Moines, Treasurer. Board members will include: Linda Willeke, McNeider, Art Museum, Tom Schmech, National Sprint Car Museum, Terry Pitts, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Kelly Halbert, Sawmill Museum, Tina Popson, Hitchcock Nature Center, Sandra Leininger, French Icarian Colony, Jodi Evans, State Historical Society of Iowa.

There are seven IMA Standing Professional Committees. Brenda DeVore serves as co-chair of the Marketing SPC.

The IMA Board meets four times per year and plays a critical role in setting the long term direction of the organization and raising funds to sustain the organization. The IMA Standing Professional Committees play a leading role in providing mission based services for IMA members. For more information on the Iowa Museum Association, please visit [www.iowamuseums.org](http://www.iowamuseums.org) or e-mail Director Cynthia Sweet at [imasweet@cfu.net](mailto:imasweet@cfu.net)

*\*Angela Stanford grew up in Wayne County and worked at Prairie Trails Museum before becoming Curator/Registrar at The Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk horn, IA.*