



In the 1950's, the F.P. Miller Company was open for business on East Michigan Avenue in Jackson, Michigan

THE F.P. MILLER COMPANY

A Family Business Success Story

Germany's William II was described by his English uncle, King Edward VII, as "the most brilliant failure in history." William loathed Great Britain and had imprisoned his English mother (Queen Victoria's daughter) after his father's death. He had a mania for a huge naval fleet and envisioned an armada so large that it would be able to destroy Britain's Royal Navy. The Prussian warrior king wanted to make Germany a world power. Under Grand Admiral Alfred van Tirpitz, Germany undertook a massive ship building program. It had two purposes: solve internal political problems and whip up enthusiasm for the fleet as a whole generation of little boys were forced into sailor and merchant marine uniforms. One of those boys was Francis Paul Miotk.

In 1882, Francis Paul Miotk was born in Danzig, Germany (today Gdansk, Poland), a seaport city on the Baltic Sea. The port city had a history of being a geographic football as it had been grabbed by whomever was the more powerful nation state. Danzig or Gdansk had been part of Poland, Russia, Prussia, and Germany at one time or another throughout its history. Young Miotk like other young people of Danzig were required to take eight years of schooling which was divided between academics, trades, and other curriculums. Young men also had a two year military commitment and with Germany's emphasis on building the world's largest naval fleet, Miotk was sent to the merchant marine. On his 18th birthday at the turn of the last century, young Miotk had completed his military obligation but he was aboard a German ship docked in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Francis was ambitious and talented but with the background of events in his native

Germany, he wasn't comforted by future prospects there. Miotk had a brother in Chicago and he decided to make a career decision. He jumped ship! There were two problems: Miotk couldn't speak a word of English and he really didn't know if Chicago was in New Jersey, California, or where?

Miller time

After jumping ship with his brother's address in hand, Francis was wandering through the streets of New York City and finally bumped into a New York City policeman. Miotk showed the officer his brother's address in Chicago and gestured that he wanted to go there. The cop asked Francis his name and Miotk tried to communicate but the policeman couldn't understand him. So the cop said, "Spell it!" Francis began to say, "M, m....." and he saw a billboard type sign upon a building advertising Miller Beer. Miotk pointed to the "M" in Miller and the cop said, "Okay, your name is Miller and you're going to Chicago." The policeman sent him to Grand Central Station. During the train trip to Chicago, Miotk was wearing the policeman's note like a badge proclaiming his name was Miller and he was going to Chicago. The name stuck! After arriving in Chicago, Francis moved in with his brother and soon learned the best opportunities for him because of his German trade school background were in Detroit. In a short time, Francis was back on the train with his newly found name Miller on a shorter trip this time but he knew where he was going.

THE F.P. MILLER COMPANY



The patriarch of the F.P. Miller Company,
Francis Paul (Moitk) Miller

Francis Paul Miller became known as F. P. to friends and family alike and was now gainfully employed at the Packard Motor Car Company as a machinist in Detroit. He worked six days a week and on Sunday would take the train to Jackson, Michigan, to visit his cousins. After following this routine every week for about a year, F. P. heard there was a good job available at the Jaxon Automobile Company in Jackson. After a few years, the Jaxon Automobile Company went bankrupt and after they came out of bankruptcy they renamed the company Jackson Automobile Company. Then it went on a successful run for 12 to 14 years before it finally folded. In those days, there were automobile companies like the Locomobile in Bridgeport, Connecticut, the Page in Detroit, and other startups sprinkled throughout the country. It was like the dot.com frenzy of today as an enterprise moved from its embryonic stages to become either solvent or face extinction as the industry grows up. F. P. liked Jackson because many of the people were bilingual and they could speak German and Polish as well as English. He accepted a job as machinist in the tool room of the Jaxon Automobile Company and within six months F. P. was promoted to superintendent of the tool room by the plant manager, John Marx. In 1910, F. P. married Margaret E. Falahee and they would raise a family of eight children: four girls and four boys. There were two daughters in the Falahee family and their father was a successful Jackson businessman owning a boot shop and real estate.

F. P. stayed on as superintendent for many years but finally decided that although he had a lot of fun helping build the

automobiles now he wanted to sell them. He began to sell two or three different models of new cars out of a two story building on Jackson Street. In the 1920's when F. P. moved into the building, the name Jaxon Automobile Company was still on the building. During the 20's, it was laissez faire capitalism for better or worse. It was not uncommon for a startup company or even established companies to go in and out of bankruptcy only to make a fresh start later with new financial backers. The roaring 20's turned sour midway through the decade for the small businessman and farmer. It was one final fling for the money changers and the stock market until the economic system flamed out in 1929. These were hard times. By the middle 20's, many Americans were mired down in a serious depression and it buried F. P. Miller's business. Miller gathered up his tools and moved lock, stock, and barrel into an old barn behind his wife's inherited home at 607 South Blackstone Street. He started his business again out of the barn as an auto repair shop. It was the birth of Miller's Garage. F. P. began repairing cars by machining brake drums by turning them on a lathe. The horse and buggy days were fading fast and there was a demand for trailer hitches mounted on cars so they could pull wagons. Now Miller would machine trailer hitches and in addition to the lathe, he needed a drill press, a hack saw, and a milling machine. The trailer hitches became a regular staple for Miller's business along with other machining for automobiles that the shop slowly evolved into a machine works shop. The company changed its name from Miller's Garage to Miller's Machine Shop. Meanwhile the automobile companies were demanding more and more machine work from outside sources. The Reynolds Spring Company was making seats for auto companies and needed pig ring plyers for fastening springs to seats. F. P. with his mechanical aptitude developed a production system for making plyers and made thousands of them for the automobile companies, their suppliers, and farmers. The farmers used them to punch holes in a pig's nose for a marking ring or on the ear for tagging. Another income opportunity was Margaret's inheritance of four homes that were around the corner from their home and the garage. F. P. converted the four homes into seven apartments for income. To understand the economic temper of the times, the Millers would acquire another four unit apartment building in the early 1930's for \$100 down and monthly payments of \$15 per month. After struggling with their investment for a few years, they had to let the apartment building go because they couldn't afford to make their monthly payments. The original four homes and the family homestead were free and clear and no matter how much F. P. wanted to borrow money against them for equipment, Margaret wouldn't hear of it. It was her inheritance and she wouldn't let anybody including her husband touch it. The apartments were fetching two dollars a week in rent during the depression and an average renter's weekly pay check was only five dollars per week. The tenants were mostly single female workers who were working in Jackson's garment industry.

All in the family

Francis Paul Miotk later adopting Miller as his last name on a New York City street corner 30 years before was made of the right stuff. It was the hard immigrant stuff which helped build this country to its present status. An immigrant's credo is work, work, and keep working.

THE F.P. MILLER COMPANY



Miller's Garage was located behind the Miller home at 607 South Blackstone Street

They never short change themselves of the opportunity they've been given and double-down with more effort to accomplish an illusive goal they can't even define. The work began to take its toll on F. P. He had four sons: Emmanuel, Ray, Leo, and Louis. The immigrant's family business develops blood loyalties to provide the morale and habits of mind that are easily transmitted into the rationale of the company. An immigrant's family has a set of ethics and an attitude toward business that are strikingly different from those of native American middle class codes. The immigrant views business not as a conflict over how to obtain the best product at the lowest price but as a struggle for survival and advancement among competing groups. F. P. had pushed himself too hard, too long and he was tired and not well. The boys knew what to do. The oldest son, Emmanuel, dropped out of his second year at Michigan State and came back to run the shop. The family business never missed a beat and continued to grow and in 1933 the Miller family moved the business downtown and built a building on one of Margaret's rental properties on Francis Street. They changed the name of the company to Miller Tool & Die. Although his health was suspect, F. P. Miller was a man of endless ambition. Nothing was ever completed, each accomplishment was a challenge to reach for more. He was a businessman the like of which we shall not see again in this country, a man who bridged the different cultures and worlds of the 19th and 20th century. F. P. could not sit still. He was a great innovator and idea man. The restless immigrant began to dabble in machinery. If it was a good machine and Miller Tool & Die could use it, they kept it. If there was no application at the shop, F. P. would sell it. From this hobby as F. P. called it, the seeds of the F. P. Miller Company were planted to sprout and grow one day into a major international machinery company.

During the 1930's, the Miller family never knew there was a depression, they were too busy. Margaret was getting two dollars

a week from each one of her remaining seven apartments and she could feed the family for a dollar a day if she shopped late in the day after the perishable items were marked down. Emmanuel, the more serious-minded brother, was hard at work running Miller Tool & Die on a straight nuts-and-bolts basis. Ray Miller on the other hand was different from his no-nonsense brother. Ray was free wheeling, deliberately disorganized, and not as formal as Emmanuel. In 1936 at the height of the depression, Ray bought a spanking brand new Ford V-8 convertible with heavy chrome bars up front. His younger brother, Leo, remarked, "It was one beautiful automobile." In 1942, F. P. bought the old Interurban Barn which was the main depot housing all the street cars in Jackson. With the advent of the automobile, the street car company went bankrupt and the building was located behind Miller Tool & Die. This was the birth place of Miller Industries which Ray would operate as a high production shop. In 1939, Jackson was experiencing labor problems. The Reynolds Spring Company had the Bakelite Division which made plastic knobs for automobile dashboards, steering wheels, and other plastic products. Labor and management were at loggerheads. The seat division of Reynolds was booming but the Bakelite division went on strike. The company's owner, Charlie Munn, shut it down. F. P. had been a good friend of Munn's and did a lot of contract work for Reynolds. Munn told Miller to liquidate the place. F. P. called in an auctioneer who liquidated half of the equipment but the remaining half remained there. Munn gave Miller the green light to sell the remaining half and keep 10% on every sale. The German immigrant had been a pupil of native businessmen like Munn, learning their techniques, adopting their habits, and accepting their values. He had learned his lessons well. Rather than selling everything lock, stock, and barrel, F. P. cherry-picked the best equipment with the right applications for the family business and hired the operator along with the machine. Miller bought one machine for every three he sold.

THE F.P. MILLER COMPANY



Leo Miller working at Miller Industries before the war

Peter Hurst came to town. The young, German engineer arrived in Jackson with a lot of ideas and an armful of blueprints under his arm. Commercial aviation as we know it today was in its infancy then but this young man had a vision. He had ideas on how to make reusable hose fittings for hydraulic lines and fuel lines for airplanes. Hurst was being backed by several prominent Jackson citizens such as bankers, lawyers, and industrialists who for starters each put up \$10,000 of their own money to launch Hurst's new company called Aeroquip. Peter had one drawback, he couldn't speak a word of English, only German. Coming to his aid was F. P. Miller to help his compatriot to try and get his ideas off the ground. The parts were made of mostly aluminum with some magnesium and stainless steel. All sample fittings had to be tested and tested again. All the samples were made at Miller Tool & Die by the exceptionally talented workers from Bakelite. Miller's decision to buy the best equipment for their needs plus hire the operators with the machines was a godsend for Hurst's project. One thing was missing: a building. F. P. called Charlie Munn and asked if he wanted to sell the now dormant Bakelite building. Munn answered, "Get me \$10,000 and add a dime for yourself." When Hurst heard of the 10% commission, he made F. P. a counter-offer by saying, "I'll give you \$10,000 but why don't you accept \$1500 in Aeroquip stock instead of the extra \$1,000." F. P. asked his son, Emmanuel, if they should take it and the oldest son answered, "No. We need the money more than we need the stock." In 1965, that \$1500 of stock would've been worth somewhere between five and six million dollars.

In 1942, F. P. connected with the chief engineer of the Fox Machinery Company, Howard Corwin. The Fox Machinery Company specialized in manufacturing Fox multiple spindle

drilling machines. Corwin was a real find. He wanted to start an engineering company so Francis rented him space on the second floor of the Miller Tool & Die building and went into business with him as a partner. Corwin was respected in the industry. The new startup company was awarded a government contract through the Evans Products Company in Detroit to build a special applications machine for machining engine mounts on the big Pratt & Whitney radial engines for Corsair fighter planes. The Chance Voight Aircraft Company built the plane. It was a big job. Corwin engineered the job. Miller Tool & Die built a special machine six feet square and 10 feet high with four columns on the outside of the machine and a rotary table. It had drill heads above on each of the four corners. Previously it had taken 38 hours to machine the parts on big boring mills but now with this special machine the time was reduced to only 38 minutes. This new fighter plane would be used by the navy, army air corps, and the British in World War II. Leo Miller, the third son, had seen many pictures of what the plane would look like during the navy and marine production inspections. Leo kept telling himself, "I've gotta fly this plane." The navy was offering a pilot's program called V-5 and one year to the day after Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1942, Leo Miller enlisted in the navy for the V-5 program.

Enola Gay

Leo Miller underwent a year and a half of training in the navy's V-5 pilot program. He was flying the plane he wanted to fly, the Corsair, all 2,000 horsepower of it. The Corsair was the first fighter plane that could get up to 400 miles per hour on a straight level. The plane was all engine. Second Lieutenant Miller left the states in March of 1945 fully on board an aircraft carrier arriving in Okinawa at the end of May that year. Leo was a fighter pilot in the Okinawa campaign. He flew cover for allied ships to intercept Japanese kamikaze planes on suicidal missions against targeted allied vessels and had flown on numerous bombing missions, too.

Early on August 6th, 1945, Leo Miller took off in his Corsair to fly cover for a B-29 bomber named the Enola Gay which had taken off from Tinian island in the Mariana island group east of the Philippines en route to Hiroshima. Leo didn't have any idea that the event he was about to witness would change history and usher in the nuclear age. Everything was classified top secret. His mission was to head off any Japanese plane trying to intercept the bomber. At 8:15 am Japanese time, the Enola Gay approached Hiroshima at an altitude of 24,500 feet and a few minutes later a single atomic bomb was dropped. The bomb exploded in mid-air and within seconds Leo saw flashes of light appearing in mid-air 1,800 feet above the ground. Then, a large fireball was formed and a terrifying tower of flames struck the ground and almost instantly shot up to form a giant mushroom-like cloud measuring 27,000 feet. The bomb destroyed 80 per cent of the city's buildings and killed 40,000 people in seconds. The thick black clay tiles covering most Japanese roofs boiled and bubbled over a mile away from the explosion. Hiroshima laid in a waste of ashes and ruin. Three days later Leo flew cover again and this time the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki with equal devastation. No one who saw it could forget it. President Truman was horrified by the results and called a halt to atomic attacks. The war was over.

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2nd Lieutenant Leo Miller posing in front of his hot-rod Corsair Fighter in World War II

After the Japanese surrendered, General MacArthur ordered allied forces to occupy the Japanese Naval Academy 15 miles north of Nagasaki. This was ten days after the second atomic bomb was dropped. A week after MacArthur's order, Leo was with a squadron which helped occupy the academy. Leo had promised his mother when he went into the navy that he would never miss attending Catholic mass on a weekly basis. He found a Catholic Church in Nagasaki which was half blown away and the other half didn't have a scratch on it. The city was still smoldering and smoking from a power equivalent of 20,000 tons of TNT. Leo and his comrades were treated well by their hospitable Japanese hosts at the church. Leo and his buddies gave them food, candy, and other gifts. On the way back to the academy, Leo spotted a Cincinnati mill, a drilling machine, and another milling machine in the middle of a bombed out building. Leo left Japan in March of 1946 on an American destroyer for the states. In a sense, every man is all the people he has been. World War II changed thousands of young men. Their lives were permanently changed by war. They traveled to the far corners of the world to places they had never even heard of before. They became buddies with fellow soldiers, sailors, and marines from economic and social classes far beyond anything in their previous experience. Leo Miller was thrown in overseas with men he never would have met otherwise, or mingled with by choice. His military experiences taught him to respect men, and he developed a genuine affection for them. It was here, in the navy, that Miller discovered he had a real rapport with men from different geographic areas, cultures, and economic strata. Leo became to understand, share common values, and liked pretty much the same things they did. And through it all, he ate with them, lived with them, and fought with them. Like them, Leo had seen the sacrifice, suffering, and death that war collects as its bounty. As he returned to the states to muster out of the service, Leo was a changed man but he still had deep feelings about his familiar city and his family. The Millers, with their strong familial loyalties and instilled tribal traditions, were accustomed to grouping together for the overall good of the family. There was no question where he was going...Leo was goin' back to Jackson.

The post World War II days were a very active time. The returning veterans swept across the country, some returning home

while others pulled up stakes and moved to places like California. Many had been stationed there or passed through the west coast state in the military and wanted to go back there to build a life. The returning veterans were responsible for winning the war of all wars and they were ready, moving, generating confidence and their own style. There was a sense that these returnees were men of force, not cruel, not harsh, but men who acted rather than waited. There was no time to wait, they had defined history, and the time was now. Everyone was going someplace. Things were going to be done and it was going to be great fun; the challenge awaited and these men did not doubt their capacity to answer that challenge. Leo Miller fit the mold. He went back to work for all the family companies: Miller Tool & Die, Miller Industries, and now his father's growing and burgeoning hobby of buying and selling machinery. The crusty, old German immigrant never knew how to stop. It was a reflex action for him. F. P. was looking for new and better machinery for the family companies. He let Emmanuel and Ray take what they wanted and what was left the old man sold. In those days Leo was a mere blur running between his brothers' companies and handling the machines his father was buying and selling. Miller Industries had been busy making gear blanks and landing gears during the war and after the war, Ray Miller developed a very high volume for the company. It was a big business. Meanwhile Emmanuel's company, Miller Tool & Die, was a big tool shop employing over a hundred tool makers. F. P.'s health was waning again and he told Leo to run the F. P. Miller Company. Working out of Miller Industries, Leo began to rent warehouse space around town to inventory their equipment.

These were mixed times after the war for the used machinery business. The market was ripe for machinery because the industry had been involved in the war effort and there hadn't been many civilian products made in the last four years. Conversely the U.S. government was dumping machines on the market thereby depressing prices. In some cases, you could buy new machinery for 15 cents to 20 cents on the dollar. The government was told to give everything back and had warehouses full of machinery. The Detroit area was one of the central distribution points for government equipment. There was some political pressure brought to bear to hold some of the machines back in order to keep the new machine tool builders from going into bankruptcy. As Leo said, "There was lot of action in those days." Leo bought several government machines and developed a "Who's Who" customer list with the likes of Clark Equipment, Cleveland Pneumatic, and many big press and fab shops in Michigan cities like Albion, Hayes, and Walker. In the 1950's, new technology was making a big impact on the machinery business with various controls and the introduction of numerically controlled (nc) machines. One of F. P. Miller Company's key employees through the years, Alan Blank, recalls, "Prior to the war, industry had a lot of old cone drive machine tools but after the war, modern gear driven machine tools became available to modernize American companies." There were new theories and new machine applications spreading throughout the industry. In those days, the Miller boys couldn't wait to go to Chicago's International Machine Tool Show (IMTS) every two years. There they'd see better controls, better feeds, and faster cutting tools. IMTS would showcase the new technology and as Leo said, "You knew you were going to see a surprise at each new show."

THE F.P. MILLER COMPANY



Leo Miller

Good people

During a 1955 trip to IMTS, the founder, Francis Paul (Moitk) Miller had a massive coronary and died. He had been active with the F. P. Miller Company to the day he died. F. P. had a special relationship with his sons. F. P. had the vision to build a living legacy for his sons and took nothing for granted. He had absolute values, and on them everything depended. The delicate balance of mutual interests in which the entire family system depended on, rested fundamentally on individual self-restraint. This is why F. P. couldn't understand Leo's rationale of golfing in the middle of the day (Leo was a scratch golfer). Leo explained it was good for business relationships but the old man wasn't buying it. Leo alleviated the problem by buying an extra set of golf clubs to sit in his office thereby giving his father the impression he was out working instead of on the course. F. P. lived for his family and passed his creed on to his sons and their sons. A man had identity only as a member of a functioning family. What endangered it endangered him; what lowered its status lowered his. Each member of the family had to constantly examine his own conscience to judge carefully whether his or her behavior met the expected standard. If he fell below that standard, he endangered the foundations of his family's and his own self respect. F. P. Miller's life reinforced these values.

After growing into the mill supply business for about 20 years, Leo decided it wasn't for the company. He sold the mill sup-

ply business to Danny Kahn of Production Tool and Supply Company of Detroit in the early 1960's and decided to concentrate on machine tools full time. They moved the company from East Michigan Avenue to Ingham Street in 1963. Leo remembers, "We got into bigger deals and that's when things really took off!" The rapid growth of the F. P. Miller Company was achieved with a 35,000 square foot facility complete with overhead cranes, and better handling facilities. The company got into the repairing of machines and manufacturing of machine tools. Leo bought the manufacturing rights to Fermet Presses and two models of Johnson Band Saws. As Leo often reiterates, "You can't do it alone, you need a good people. I was very fortunate. I was blessed with great people." Alan Blank started in 1963 and was an excellent salesman. Blank had expert knowledge in buying and selling machinery. He was especially helpful to Leo in buying equipment from the government. He was an excellent teacher. Alan taught all of Miller's sons the machinery business. The Miller boys often wouldn't listen to Leo but they always listened to Alan. An early and longtime employee, Albert Cain, was a master rigger for the company. Another career employee was Darwin Aiken who did the electrical work, machine repair, and made sure the equipment was in good working order. A real find was Guy Ruppert, an electrician, who was way ahead of his time. Early on Ruppert could decipher the early controls when everybody else was having trouble with them. Bill Leslie would follow after Ruppert's retirement and was F. P. Miller Company's top mechanic and shop superintendent for years. Pete Waltz was a master electrician and made a great contribution to the company. With the Millers' permission, Waltz was hired by another company to setup plants in Mexico. The Gier brothers: Harry, Ray, and Wayne were a family affair within the F. P. Miller Company and spent their entire careers at the company. They were all excellent riggers.

The Miller Truck & Storage Company was established in the late 1960's. It was a natural offshoot of work being done at the F. P. Miller Company. They had always been involved with trucking and rigging with the buying and selling of machinery. In the early 1970's, they decided to get into trucking and rigging in a big way with David Miller at the helm. They purchased a large block of property in Jackson's railroad area from Penn Central that they had previously been leasing and made Miller Truck and Storage a separate stand-alone company. Today Miller Truck & Storage is a large concern. They normally have five rigging crews working throughout the Midwest. The Company has a large fleet of trucks and is involved in just in time delivery for various auto suppliers. The Miller's have developed an industrial complex approaching 500,000 square feet with the railroad property and other industrial and commercial property in the Jackson area.

Leo's youngest son, Martin, heads up the Keystone Development Company. It's a separate entity, which develops and builds industrial, commercial and residential properties. The Company is in its third year and recently completed a 60,000 square foot facility for a Japanese transplant company, Kaneco America, on the outskirts of Jackson.

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Another son, Joe, is President of Air Hydraulics Inc. This is another company that the Miller family owns part of and it manufactures a propriety line of small tonnage air and hydraulic presses, rotary tables, and custom assembly machines. F. P. Miller originally invested in this company back in the 1940's. Leo's only daughter in the family business, Lynn, is the Controller and responsible for all accounting and financial reports for the various enterprises. Other sons, Steve and Jim work for the F. P. Miller Company. Currently Steve holds the national office of Treasurer for the Machinery Dealers National Association (MDNA). Jim has been active in the Detroit/Toledo Chapter for a number of years and is currently Chapter Treasurer. From the very start each of F. P.'s eight children had stock in all of the various Miller companies. Twenty years ago Leo convinced his brothers that they should each control their respective companies. So Leo, Emmanuel, and Ray each sold their stock in each other's business establishing voting control for each of their families in the future. Leo has had macular degeneration of the eyes since 1970 and it has become progressively worse over the years. In 1990, he decided to take a step back and stepped out of the business in 1995. He's turned it over to the family and he's there if they need him. He used to

make excuses for not being available because he wanted to play golf or do something else. Now when he sits by the phone he wishes they'd call him. Leo says he's happy to be staying out of the way and the boys are doing a great job. He's very proud of them and considers himself to be lucky. In fact, he considers himself to be very fortunate for all the help he's received from his father, brothers, and his boys. Emmanuel also suffers from macular degeneration but he still manages to get down to the office nearly every day. Brother Ray died in 1998 and brother Louis who worked for all three companies died in 1974.

Leo Miller found himself in a situation that was unique in many ways. Many American families immigration process was a gradual progression of being drawn into the country on a careful course. The Millers, however, erupted on the Jackson scene at the turn of the last century. They increased in numbers, worked hard, and with the development of their business skills maintained themselves as first among equals in the Jackson community. The Millers could rely on each other. They were close. Their attention was not easily diverted, diffused, or blurred. It was easy for them to keep focusing in on a single target. Francis Paul (Moitk) Miller had done alright by himself and his family. He was the founder of a great family tradition that still lives and thrives today. ■