He Originally Bought Riverdale Land from Indians For Cash and Whiskey

BY ANNE M. TAND

RIVERDALE -- "A sort of eccentric who sported a long white beard and a 'Guster Brown' type haircut and had a tamed wolf as a pet" is the way Mrs. Richard Winkler describes her grandfather, David N. Miller. She also refers to him as the "Patriarch of Westbrook Valley" and a "true native son of the Wanaque area."

Miller, who died at the ripe old age of 91, sold his 40-acre farm for $40,000 in the 1920's to the New Jersey Water Co. for the development of the Wanaque Reservoir. His grandfather purchased 400 acres from the Indians with a deed written on birch bark and on file at the Hackensack Court House. The purchase price was said to be a couple of dollars and a keg of corn whiskey. Through the years parcels of land were sold off.

Millers Falls, with all of its splendor and beauty, carries the family name and may still be seen as one travels up West Brook Rd. from Wanaque. The old cemetery remains on the road by the old spring. The West Brook Valley Church has long since been torn down.

Mrs. Winkler prize a small watercolor illustrating the homestead of her grandfather near the spring on West Brook Rd., with Stonetown Rd. and the Winbeam Mountain in the background. It is the work of Minnie Mae Monks. The area was the subject of a book "Winbeam," written in 1930 by Minnie Mae Monks, which relates much of the area history. "Winbeam Brook" is one of several names given to the section by the Indians, according to Miss Monks, and means chestnuts. She recalls a location where chestnut trees abounded over a ten-acre plot.

The author, now 84 years old, was a niece of David Miller. Her father and Miller's wife, Frances Monks, were brother and sister. Miss Monks has made a study of the family tree and says it was her great-grandfather, John Allen, who began the first sawmill in Stonetown in 1775, and was the proud owner of the first clapboard house built in Burnt Meadows. The Monks family came from England in 1675, destination Boston. Their grandsoms came to New Jersey in the early 1700's.

Reviewing the names on the Miller family tree, Mrs. Winkler says her grandparents had one son, Samuel, who died in 1958. He was married to Anna Laura Vreeland, daughter of Peter and Jane Vreeland, a pioneer family from Boardville, which is in the present-day area of Erskine Lakes.

Mrs. William (Gertrude) Baldwin, Wanaque, Mrs. Henry (Maudie) Ganz, Teaneck and Mrs. Winkler are the surviving children of the marriage.

Two sons, Harry and Samuel, are deceased. The Miller name is carried on into the sixth generation from the original land purchases, great-great-great-grandfather Miller by Eugene Miller, Connecticut and Harry Miller, New York, sons of the late Harry Miller.

It seems fitting during our state's Tercentenary year celebration to glimpse into the past which has made way for modern day progress -- with a mention of old family names, descendents of some still in the area, and to spotlight locations with cherished memories of the past.