

David Miller  
of  
West Brook Vally<sup>e</sup>  
by  
Minnie May Monks

Now that the fishing season is at hand, our thoughts turn to trout streams, and many are the fishermen in this section who are thinking of the good old days when they fished in West Brook, one of the best trout streams in Passaic County. And when they think of West Brook, they will be thinking of that rare spot of beauty - Miller Falls, and the man named David Miller who owned Miller Falls. Probably no man in Passaic and Essex Counties was better known to fishermen, hunters, and picnickers, than David Miller - Hear his cordial "cer-tainly, cer-tainly," when you asked the privilege of fishing, hunting, or picnicking on his property. Yes, Uncle Dave gave pleasure to hundreds of people who came his way. He was the third generation of his family born on his West Brook Vally Farm, and he lived his life-time there. His great-grandfather bought the land in Indian days.

When David Miller was thirty years old he married Sarah Frances Monks, a young girl of seventeen, and when he married that aunt of mine, he got a helpmate worthy of the name. If ever a couple pulled together that couple did. The spring they were married they planted their first garden together, and they continued to plant that same plot of ground below the old spring for over fifty years. Why Uncle Dave thought he couldn't make his garden without Aunt Sarah Frances' help! If his fences needed mending Aunt Sarah Frances was "right on the job" holding up rails while he hammered the nails into place. Uncle Dave, in his turn, helped with the housework. Every spring house-cleaning time found him white-washing the walls. Every churning-day Uncle Dave vigorously worked the dasher of the old blue churn. They took turns milking their two good Jersey cows. Their

pleasure and content in life was based on making a home and working together. They rarely went anywhere except to Church and funerals and the store. Their old horse Harry, ran wild, kicking up his heels thru the woods and fields every day in the week till Saturday afternoon; then, if you happened to be down in the meadow by the brook fishing or paddling your feet in the cool water you'd hear old Harry's clop, clop, clop, and the rattle of the old surrey and you'd look up to see Uncle Dave and Aunt Sarah Frances on their way to John G. Rhinesmith's store in Midvale - Off for their weekly supply of groceries and horse-feed. And while you sat there with your fish-line over a cool brown pool, or kicking the water with your toes you'd hear the cackle of hens up against the sunny hillside and Shep's familiar bark and the squeal of hungry pigs, and you'd look up into the big dark evergreens back of the falls and you'd think - "This is the life all right! There goes two people who surely have got the sane idea of how to live!"

Perhaps once a year Uncle Dave and Aunt Sarah Frances drove down to Paterson to do a little shopping.

"Why don't you and Uncle Dave take a good trip?" I once asked my Aunt.

"Why should we take a trip?" she said. "The world comes here to our door. Why we have had all kinds of interesting people come here - some of them the very best too," she added with a touch of pride, - professional people, business men, and artists, and even a Governor. One day when we lived in the old house, Governor Griggs of Paterson with a party of his friends came riding up a-horseback. I had just taken a rice pudding out of the oven when Governor Griggs came to the door and asked if he and his party could have dinner at our house. I told him I had plenty of fresh eggs and smoked ham and potatoes if that would satisfy him. Well you should have seen that party eat! Then I used to have a Lawyer from Paterson come

up to the old house week-ends, and he always wanted a bread and milk supper. I'd milk one of the cows early, and set the milk in a covered pail under the spout at the spring to cool, and how that man did enjoy his suppers of fresh home-made bread and milk!"

Mr. Vernon Royle, President of John Royle and Sons of Paterson was a frequent visitor up West Brook way about forty-five years ago. He had a first-class camera with the finest lens that could be bought. His hobby was taking photographs of interesting scenes, and many were the fine pictures he got in this beautiful region. One Saturday afternoon Mr. Royle met Uncle Dave just around the bend in the road driving to Midvale for his weekly supplies. "Howdy-do, Mr. Miller," said Mr. Royle, "I'm on my way to your place to get a picture of you plowing with oxen."

"All right!" said Uncle Dave, "I'll turn around and go back," and he did.

Uncle Dave drove into his barnyard, hitched his yoke of pure white oxen to the plow, and Mr. Royle got several excellent photographs.

How Uncle Dave loved to tell yarns. He stretched them a bit sometimes, but they sounded good. One of the stories he told was about the old days in his great-grandfather's time when Indians traveled from Macopin to Wanaque along the brook trail when West Brook was called "Wimbemus Brook." Said Uncle Dave, rolling his eyes and stroking his whiskers - "One day an Indian and his squaw with their papoose came down the trail and stopped at the home of my great-grandfather. The squaw lay her papoose down along the trail and followed her man into the log cabin by the spring. They hadn't visited in the cabin long when they heard a fearful racket out of doors and ran out to the trail where half a dozen wild hogs were squealing and fighting. They reached the trail just in time to see an old boar crunch the bones of their papoose with his tusks. Yes Sir! That old boar ate their little papoose up slick and clean."

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About ten years ago the North Jersey District Water Supply Commission bought the old Miller Farm and gave Uncle Dave his life-right there. The last three years of his life he lived like an old hermit, alone and lonely- No longer, did the fishermen and visitors come down by the waterfalls, for the falls were fenced in - No longer, did he have his helpmate to comfort him in his old age - Shep, his faithful collie, was no more, and here in his white house by the waterfalls lived Uncle Dave to within three weeks of his death - lived to the age of ninety-one years, and well named - "The Patriarch of West Brook Valley."