

Lewis Miller, Coppersmith of New York and Ohio: A Case Study in Newspaper Research to Trace Migration

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Lewis Miller, a coppersmith, was born in New York State in 1778 and died at Painesville, Lake County, Ohio, 17 September 1866. He lived in Willoughby (then called Chagrin) from 1817 to 1825, and then in Painesville from 1825 until his death in 1866. He married Margaret Halsted (1780-1873), daughter of Revolutionary War veteran Edward Halsted and his wife Martha Ferguson. She remained in Painesville until her death. **This article will demonstrate how research in newspapers has significantly contributed to learning more about Lewis Miller, as well as giving hints about possible Miller relatives.** With a common name like Miller, every source and clue becomes especially critical.

The *Painesville Telegraph*

Lewis Miller's obituary in the *Painesville Telegraph*, 20 September 1866, page 3, tells only about his life in Ohio:

DEATH OF LEWIS MILLER -- We are called upon to chronicle the death of LEWIS MILLER, one of our oldest citizens, who departed this life on Monday last, in the 89th year of his age. Mr. MILLER has been a resident of this County since 1817; first settling in Willoughby, where he resided until 1825, when he moved to Painesville. [continues....]

His wife's *Painesville Telegraph* obituary of 23 October 1873, page 3, helpfully links Lewis to New York City:

Death of an Aged Gentlewoman.... Mrs. Margaret Miller, widow of the late Lewis Miller, ... was married to her late husband in New York City, at the residence of the father of the late Peter Force, the great librarian collector, in 1801. From New York she removed with her husband and family to Willoughby, in this county, in 1817, from whence, in 1825, the family removed to Painesville, where the deceased has ever since resided. [continues....]

Digging further, a lengthy article about Margaret's 91st birthday celebration in the *Painesville Telegraph*, 9 March 1871, page 3, names several relatives but does not go into great detail about pre-Ohio days:

Birthday Re-Union. Wednesday, March 1st, at the cottage of Mrs. Lewis Miller, on South street, the ladies whose names we give below, met with the daughters, Miss Margaret Miller and Mrs. Ann Sovereign, of Iowa, the daughter-in-law, Mrs. J. Miller, of Saginaw, and Mrs. Dwight Donaldson, Jr., great granddaughter of Mrs. Miller, to celebrate her 91st birthday..... Mrs. Miller was married in 1801, went to housekeeping in 1802....Lewis Miller and family came to Painesville in 1825 [continues....]

Due to the articles, the "1801" date and "New York City" location for the marriage enables a targeted search for church records to confirm that information. Fortunately, a 23 February 1802 record of marriage for Lewis Miller and Margaret Halsted exists in the records of Trinity Church, 75 Broadway, New York City.¹ Now, thanks to the newspaper and this church record, we have a firm link between Lewis Miller and New York City.

¹This record is indexed online at <<http://www.trinitywallstreet.org>> and was published in "Records of Trinity Church Parish, New York City," *New York Genealogical & Biographical Record*, 78 (1947): 116. A 19th century family record in the possession of the author traces the ancestry of Lewis's granddaughter, Sally Presley, several generations to the famous couple, Everardus Bogardus and Anneke Jans, and provides 20 February 1801 as the date of the Miller-Halsted marriage.

Before we leave Ohio newspapers, let's look at one more obituary. A 1908 obituary for Joel Miller reveals that his mother, Hannah Miller, was Lewis's sister.

THE LATE JOEL MILLER -- BRIEF SKETCH OF PIONEER RESIDENT

Joel Miller, the oldest resident of Willoughby, died June 3, 1908, aged 93 years, 6 months, and 8 days.

Mr. Miller was not only an old resident of Willoughby but as a child came to Lake County in 1825. He was born in Peakskill [*sic*], NY December 26, 1814. His parents were Melancthon and Hannah Miller, who came by way of the then newly opened Erie Canal and over the waters of Lake Erie in 1825, landing near what is now Fairport. Hannah Miller had a brother Lewis Miller, who had already settled in Lake County. Melancthon settled at first near him. Lewis Miller was for a long time Justice of the Peace at Painesville, and some of our oldest readers may remember him [continues] ²

Although Hannah Miller married a Miller, it is fortunate that her husband Melancthon's unusual first name makes him easier to identify in census and other records. In fact, in the 1810 census of Bedford, Westchester County, New York, "Malangton" Miller was living near a "Lewis Miller" as well as a "Louis Miller" and several other Miller families. It is possible that Lewis Miller is the right one, but that remains to be proven. "Melankton" Miller followed Lewis to the Fingers Lakes region by settling at Aurora/Scipio, Cayuga County, by 1830, and then to Willoughby, where his widow was enumerated in 1840.

New York City Newspapers

Now let's turn our attention to New York City newspapers.³ With online search capabilities, we have at least two search strategies to use. For example, (1) search for "Lewis Miller" since his combined name is unusual, and (2) search for "Miller" together with "coppersmith" since his trade is unusual. If we find anything, we can devise more searches. We strike true gold with an April 1805 advertisement:

TEN DOLLARS REWARD

STOLEN, yesterday morning, from the store of the subscribers, 5 brass Kettles, capable of containing from 6 to 7 gallons each; and 4 tea kettles, one of them of 5 quarts, and three of 6, with flowered spouts. The above reward will be paid to whoever can give such information as the offender or offenders may be brought to justice. ADAM & LEWIS MILLER, 9, Peck slip april 1 iw ⁴

Wow! I'm sorry for his loss, but I am grateful to the thief since this nice advertisement links Lewis Miller to a new name to search, "Adam Miller." Brother? Cousin? Father? That remains to be seen. In May 1805, the partnership split up:

The Partnership heretofore subsisting between ADAM and LEWIS MILLER, of the city of New York, coppersmiths, is dissolved this day by mutual consent. The concerns of the said partnership will be settled by the subscriber; who carries on the business in all its branches, and solicits the favours of his friends and the public. ADAM MILLER, 9, Peck slip. May 4 im⁵

²Undated newspaper clipping, obituary of Joel Miller, Hadden Scrapbook, Lake County (Ohio) Historical Society.

³Several are available online through GenealogyBank.com.

⁴"Ten Dollars Reward." *Mercantile Advertiser* (New York City), Issue 3952 (11 Apr. 1805), p. 3; repeated in at least two subsequent issues. Printer's notes at the bottom of advertisements, such as "april 11 Iw" [1 week?] help us figure out the earliest issue to look for and perhaps also how many more issues to search for the same ad.

⁵Untitled advertisement, *Mercantile Advertiser*, Issue 3970 (4 May 1805), p. 3; repeated at least twice.

Now we know that Lewis and Adam Miller were no longer partners in business after May 1805. Did Lewis move somewhere? Did he remain in New York City? The next advertisement, from January 1810, indicates he was in the City at that time:

ONTARIO COUNTY LAND.

ANY person owning Lot No. 5 or 9 in town No. 8 Ontario County, and would sell them for cash, will please to call on Lewis Miller, 304 Water-st. New-York, or Thomas Halsted adjoining said land.

Jan 23—Iw

LEWIS MILLER.⁶

This particular Thomas Halsted was the brother of Lewis's wife, Margaret Halsted Miller. As it turns out, research in land records in Yates County shows that Lewis Miller "of the city [*sic*] and county of New York" purchased land in Lot 38 in the town of Benton, Ontario (now Yates) County, from Elijah Kelsey and his wife on 2 May 1809. For possibly technical reasons a second deed for this property was executed on 21 January 1813 between the same parties. Meanwhile, Lewis "and Peggy Miller, his wife" executed a mortgage and a deed with Benjamin Runyan on 10 February 1813 to purchase 87 acres in Benton.⁷ Lewis Miller "and Peggy Miller, his wife" sold that land about the time they moved to Ohio.⁸ (Benton was part of Ontario County until Yates County was formed in 1823 from parts of Ontario and Steuben Counties.)

The Geneva Gazette

The village of Geneva, Ontario County, New York was a larger and busier place just a few miles to the north of Benton. On 17 May 1815, "Lewis Miller & Co." announced a new "Copper, Tin & Sheet Iron Manufactory" in Geneva, and he expected to do well enough to employ "three or four Journeymen."⁹ However, in July 1816, Lewis Miller and Jonathan Kinney announced dissolution of their partnership:

Dissolution of Co-Partnership.

The Co-Partnership heretofore existing between Miller & Kinney, under the firm of *Lewis Miller & Co.* is this day dissolved by mutual consent. All business relating to the firm will be settled by J. Kinney, who will continue the business at the shop formerly occupied by the firm.

LEWIS MILLER.

Geneva, July 29, 1816.

JONATHAN KINNEY.

N.B. All persons indebted to the above firm are requested to call and settle their accounts.¹⁰

That Lewis ended the business in 1816 is not surprising. The year 1816 was "the year without any summer." There was a hard freeze and snow every month of the year in the northern states. A terrible year of hard times when farmers planted their crops three times, only to have the plants die. A year when many

⁶ "Ontario County Land." *Mercantile Advertiser*, Issue 5996 (1 Feb. 1810), p. 2.

⁷ Deeds Transmitted from Ontario County to Yates County, New York, Elijah Kelsey and Catieine, his wife, to Lewis Miller, Vol. 2, p. 220; Elijah Kelsey and Cattaline, his wife, to Lewis Miller, Vol. 3, p. 222; Benjamin Runyan and Hannah, his wife, to Lewis Miller, Vol. 3, p. 224. Mortgages Transmitted from Ontario County to Yates County, New York, Lewis Miller and Peggy, his wife, to Benjamin Runyan, p. 215.

⁸ Deeds Transmitted from Ontario County to Yates County, New York, Lewis Miller and Peggy, his wife, to Aaron Saxton, Vol. 4, p. 117.

⁹ "New Establishment: Copper, Tin, & Sheet Iron Manufactory," *Geneva Gazette*, Vol. VI, No. 49 (17 May 1815): 3; repeated numerous times. A similar advertisement was published in the *Geneva Palladium*, Vol. I, No. 1 (10 Jan. 1816); repeated at least once.

¹⁰ "Dissolution of Co-Partnership," *Geneva Palladium*, Vol. I, No. 38 (25 Sept. 1816): 1.

livestock also perished, and people flocked to churches to seek redemption.¹¹ This disruptive year led many families to depart New England and New York in 1816 to migrate to the Ohio country, including Lewis Miller and many of his current and future kinfolk. Miller and Kinney also faced competition from another coppersmith, Phinehas Prouty, who had a shop in Geneva.¹²

Conclusion and Next Steps

Lewis Miller's migration from New York City to Ontario/Yates County (ca. 1809) and then to Lake County (1817) is well established by numerous newspaper articles and advertisements, as well as a mortgage, four deeds, and census enumerations. He was *possibly* in Westchester County in 1810 long enough, at least temporarily, to be enumerated in the census on or after the official census day of 1 August 1810, but further research is needed for positive identification.

More research is needed on other New York City Millers who were coppersmiths in order to establish their relationships to Lewis Miller. In early 1807, newspaper advertisements by Adam Miller and John Wright announced the dissolution of their coppersmithing partnership, with Adam Miller continuing in business at 50 Water St., New York City.¹³ Who was he? Did he also go west? Was he Lewis's brother?

Charles Miller was another coppersmith mentioned in New York City newspapers from 1795 until his death in mid-October 1801 from "bilious fever." Within a few days his wife, his wife's sister, and an apprentice all died of the same sickness. Tantalizingly, newspapers reported that "Charles Miller [was] the father of a numerous family" and "left three children, all young and helpless in themselves..."¹⁴ Was he Lewis's father? Further research is necessary.

Truly, Lewis Miller's unique occupation resulted in the important role that newspapers have played in this research. His business need to advertise helped document his work and migration.

¹¹ Jelle Z. De Boer and Donald T. Sanders, *Volcanoes in Human History: The Far-Reaching Effects of Major Eruptions*, 153-155 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002): 153-155; Brian Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History, 1300-1850*, 174-177 (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Harlan Hatcher, *The Western Reserve: The Story of New Connecticut in Ohio*, 57-58 (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1991), and other sources.

¹²See, for example, Phinehas Prouty's "Copper, Tin, and Sheet Iron Factory," *Geneva Gazette*, Vol. VII, No. 21 (1 Nov. 1815), p. 4.

¹³"Notice." *Mercantile Advertiser*, Issue 6503 (23 Feb. 1807), p. 2; repeated other dates.

¹⁴"New-York, October 24—1801." *New York Gazette and General Advertiser*, Vol. XV, No. 4938 (24 Oct. 1801), p. 2; "New-York, October 24—1801." *New York Gazette and General Advertiser*, Vol. XV, No. 4938 (24 Oct. 1801), p. 2; "Died." *The Spectator*, Vol. V, No. 430 (24 Oct. 1801), p. 3