Friends here have learned of the death of James Ray Miller, a former managing editor of the Fort Collins Express-Courier, predecessor of the Coloradoan, a former secretary of the Colorado State Board of Agriculture, and a one-time state senator.


He was born Sept. 22, 1891, on his parents' farm near Moorefield, Neb., and spent most of his boyhood and youth in rural Edgar and Argus, Neb. His long and active career included three years' service in the U.S. Army, several years of invalidism as a result of that service, a long list of civic activities in Fort Collins, and many responsibilities on behalf of Colorado State College, which became Colorado State University.

After three years as a school teacher, graduation from Kearney State Normal School, and a few months as city editor of the Kearney, Neb., Times, Miller volunteered for service in the Army Signal Corps during World War I. His service of three years included a year in France with the American Expeditionary Force.

Consequent disabilities resulted in three years of hospitalization in seven hospitals of the Army and the Veterans Bureau. He came here in 1924 as a Veterans Bureau trainee, working as a reporter for the Express-Courier. He became successively city editor and managing editor. For about 14 years he wrote a daily humorous column, "The Old Mill," which was widely quoted in other newspapers.

Miller was elected to the State Senate as a Democrat in 1934, with the support of the Express-Courier publisher, Alfred Hill, and served a four-year term. In December, 1935, he was appointed the first editor of publications for the Agricultural Experiment Station of the college.

In March, 1939, he was appointed executive secretary of the State Board of Agriculture, governing board of the college. His duties included work as treasurer, purchasing agent and business manager. During and after World War II he acted as assistant to four presidents of the college. He retired in 1957.

Miller also served on a variety of college and university committees, and as secretary to the faculty and Faculty Council. From 1953 to 1956 he was regional director of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Allied Institutions. He was awarded membership in Phi Kappa Phi, national scholastic society.
At various times he was commander of the local chapter of the Disabled American Veterans and held offices in the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. He was an organizer of the Community Chest, predecessor of the present United Fund, and a director of the Chamber of Commerce.

In the summer of 1954 Miller was elected vice-chairman of the city convention which framed the original version of the present Fort Collins City Charter.

Ten years later he was chosen historian of the Fort Collins Area Centennial Commission. During the city's centennial year (1964) Miller wrote extensively for the Coloradoan on anniversary topics —- pioneer history and biographies and a series headed "Remember When?"

After retirement, his other work as a writer included a biography of the college's first president, Dr. E. E. Edwards, which involved extensive travel and research. He and his family resided for several years in a country home near the intersection of South College Avenue and Horsetooth Road.

Miller was a member of the First Christian Church, where he taught Sunday school. He was a life member of the Fort Collins Elks Club and a founder of the Fort Collins Writers Club.

He was Colorado State University's commencement speaker for the graduation ceremonies of June, 1958. At that time he received an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters.

Miller and his wife, the former Mary E. "Bess" Mason, were married at Ord, Neb., Oct. 21, 1920. They had been classmates at the Kearney college. They returned to that town, Mrs. Miller's girlhood home, in 1972, from their winter home at Mesa, Ariz.

Besides his wife, Miller is survived by two sons—Mason E. Miller, Fairfax, Va., and James R. Miller, Saratoga, Calif.—a brother, Ralph W. Miller, Eronoga, Mo., six grandchildren and three great-granddaughters.

David Wathons
26 Oct 1978
Former editor dies

James R. Miller, 87, former editor of the Fort Collins Express-Courier, predecessor of the Coloradoan, died Monday at Valley County Hospital in Ord, Neb.

A graveside service will be held at 11 a.m. Thursday at Ord City Cemetery. Memorial contributions may be made to the Valley County Hospital in care of Ord Memorial Chapel, Ord, Neb., 68862.

Miller lived in Fort Collins more than 34 years, serving as secretary to the State Board of Agriculture (governing board of Colorado State University), state senator and editor of publications at CSU's experiment station.

Known as Fort Collins' "historian," Miller was born on his parents' farm in Moorefield, Neb., on Sept. 22, 1891. Except for five years spent in Washington, he spent his childhood in Nebraska, graduating from Nebraska State Normal School in Kearney in 1917.

Prior to becoming city editor of the Kearney Times daily newspaper in 1917, he taught in an elementary school and a business college. He resigned as editor to serve with the U.S. Army overseas during World War I.

On Oct. 21, 1920, he married Mary E. Mason in Ord. She survives.

Miller began his association with the Express-Courier in October 1924 as a reporter. When he resigned in 1935, he was managing editor. He was well-known for his humorous daily column, "The Old Mill," which for some time was syndicated and published in other Colorado newspapers.

In 1934, Miller was elected to the Colorado state senate, serving Larimer County for one term. He also was the first editor of publications with the CSU Agricultural Experiment Station in 1935.

The State Board of Agriculture appointed him secretary to the board and to the faculty in 1939, a position he held until retiring in June 1957.

Other service at CSU included chairmanship of the student loan fund committee and of the faculty courtesy fund, vice president of the Faculty Club in 1951-52 and president in 1952-53.

He was a sponsor of the Independent Students Association from 1936 to 1940 and was a regional director of the Association for Governing Boards of Universities and Allied Institutions from 1953 to 1956. This board voted him a permanent position of honorary advisor in 1965.

CSU granted him an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. After retirement, he had an office on campus for several years while he worked on a manuscript on Dr. E.E. Edwards, first president of the college from 1879 to 1882. During his research, Miller traveled to Fort Myers, Fla., where he discovered Edward's unmarked grave.

Miller also wrote a history of the First Christian Church of Fort Collins, of which he was a member. His writing talents included prose and short stories. He was often a classroom lecturer on regional history or journalism and was a member of the Fort Collins Writers Club many years, often serving as president.

An honorary member of Phi Kappa Phi, he also taught Bible School, was a member of Elks Lodge and was the historical consultant to the Fort Collins Area Centennial Commission in 1964.

For three years, he was commander of the Fort Collins chapter of the Disabled American Veterans and junior vice commander of the Colorado department for a year.

He was co-organizer of the Fort Collins Community Chest, forerunner of the United Fund, and served three years as a board director. He also was director of the Fort Collins Chamber of Commerce for three years.

The Millers left Fort Collins in the 1960s, moving first to Mesa, Ariz., and then to Ord six years ago.

Survivors include sons, Mason E. of Fairfax, Va., James R. of Saratoga, Calif.; a brother, Ralph W. of Oronogo, Mo.; six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.