

## Parking meter roots deep for Vaca man

By Kristin Delaplane

Sunday, June 14, 1998

'My father Samuel Lee Miller Sr., who was born in 1886 in Greencastle, Ind., started in the radio business in the city of Chicago in 1920. His business was located in a three-story building in the Loop where he was a wholesaler of radio units and radio parts during the era of battery-controlled radio sets.

"My father, who was mechanically inclined and at one time was an electrical engineer, invented the Miller Multi Coin Timer. This was a coin-operated machine that was attached to a radio. It was intended to be used by guests in their hotel rooms. The device weighed at least 30, maybe 40 pounds. People would put money in the slot and that turned on the radio for a certain amount of time. My father had patents secured in 1926-27, however, he did not immediately begin to manufacture the device. He did that in 1931, when he was forced out of his business by the Depression."

"Later, in that same year, he founded Coin Devices, Inc. when he joined up with Herbert Frost of Frost Radio Company to manufacture and promote the Miller Multi Coin Timer. Herbert Frost was well known in the radio manufacturing business, and he secured contracts with various hotels to put the Miller Multi Coin Timer in their rooms. One of those contracts was with the Stevens Hotel in Chicago, which, at the time, was the biggest hotel in the world. They placed an order for 300 machines.

"It was at this point that my father became very interested in developing a coin-operated parking meter. So while they were manufacturing the Miller Multi Coin Timer, my father was also in the process of developing the Miller Parking Meter. He was successful and his first sale of the completed product was to Mexico City, which contracted for 1,000 parking meters. That was in 1932 or 1933 and that became the first installation of the Miller Parking Meter. In 1936 and 1938, my father received his patents for the device. One patent was for the Coin Control Meter and the other patent was for the Parking Meter Casing.

"Since my father was an inventor, not a salesman, he knew that if his meter was going to get anyplace, he would have to tie in with someone who was a good merchandising man. In the '30s, Donald Duncan's Yo-Yo was possibly the most popular toy around the world at the time. All the kids had them. Duncan became quite famous and wealthy with that, so in 1936, my father went into business with Duncan making the business a corporation and the Donald Duncan Co., exclusive worldwide distributor of the Miller Parking Meter. . . . Donald Duncan's sales organization was

worldwide and as such was a natural for distribution. They knew how to handle the big cities.”

“The parking meter was revolutionary. The primary result was the ability to regulate parking, which had become a troublesome police problem. The resulting revenue was a major boon for the cities that installed the device. These first meters provided receipts that were numbered and contained educational printed matter on public safety. Many merchants were willing to refund the cost of parking to their customers when shown these receipts. The meters could be set from 15 to 90 minutes for 5 cents.

“In 1940, when my father was 54, my stepmother had a stroke and my father wanted to devote time to her and move to California, so he sold out to Duncan lock stock and barrel. From then on in his life, my father invested in California real estate.”

\* \* \*

‘The family clock was hand carved by my mother’s father, Darwin Almanzer Buck, who was born in 1846 in England and worked as a cabinetmaker. Darwin immigrated to eastern Canada, and that’s where my mother, Clarissa Buck, was born. The family then moved to Chicago.

“My mother married my father, Samuel Miller, Sept. 18, 1910, and the clock was a joint present from Darwin, the father of the bride, and my father, the groom. My grandfather, Darwin, carved the mahogany cabinet for the clock and my father was responsible for installing the movement, which was imported from England.”

When Lee and Irene Miller were making arrangements to move to a smaller place and to disperse of some of their items, they sought out the services of local appraiser and antique dealer, Charles Conti of Aaron’s Rod Antiques. Conti was very impressed with the Miller’s “homemade” clock. It is a beautiful grandfather clock, which stands a little over eight feet. It is carved from American mahogany.

This clock is decorated with reeded columns on either side of a beautiful oval beveled glass door. The hood piece reflects the lower body with small columns and is completed with a gothic style cornice. The face of the clock is highly decorated brass and Clarissa’s initials are etched upon the face. The clock has a turn of the century English movement and is weight driven.

After discussing what would be a fair price for both seller and buyer, Conti agreed to locate a proper home for the beloved clock. At that point, he contacted William Heigh, a well-known local interior designer. One of Heigh’s clients is the Buck Foundation and both Conti and Heigh saw this clock as a perfect fit for the Buck Mansion. Arrangements were made and the clock now stands proudly in the main entry hall. And

though no relationship has been established between the maker of the clock, Darwin Almanzer Buck, and the Bucks of Vacaville, the name connection is intriguing.

Meanwhile, the people at the Buck Mansion are very happy with the clock. Kathy Hazen, executive director of the Buck Foundation, thinks the clock is “absolutely fabulous. Of course, the person who thought it was necessary was Bill (Heigh). And it does suit the atmosphere here. During the recent home tour, people kept checking their watches so they would be sure to come back to the main entry on the hour to hear the clock strike. It has the Westminster chime, so it also strikes at the quarter hour, but that is very soft compared to the chime that sounds on the hour.”

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/664>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/664/>