

THE LUKE MILLER HOUSE OF BOTTLE HILL

An Eighteenth Century Treasure

In the mid-1700's the Miller family came to live on "The Ridge" (Ridgedale Avenue) in a tiny settlement known only as Bottle Hill, which was scarcely more than a crossroads. The settlement consisted of about twenty houses strung out along the old dirt roads, mostly on small farms of 12 acres or more. The original Bottle Hill Tavern, the one that had a bottle hanging outside, was located at the foot of Ridgedale Avenue where it meets Park Avenue (a bicentennial plaque marks the spot).

The Miller family was an old one. The original Miller to come to America was John, who came from Maidstone, England, resided first in Massachusetts, then moved with his wife, Mary Pierson, to Long Island sometime after 1640. Three more generations of Millers continued on Long Island, living at "Millers Place" in Brookhaven, a name that probably carried over to "Millers Station" as the name for Luke's property in Bottle Hill. Andrew Miller, Luke's grandfather (1695-1777), was reportedly the first Miller to come to Bottle Hill, but it is more likely that he remained comfortably at home at Millers Place, Long Island, while 10 of his 16 children migrated to New Jersey: Josiah, Theophilus, and Joseph coming to Bottle Hill.

Luke's parents, Josiah (1728-1775) and Betty, had three sons: Joseph (1753-1823) and John (1756-1817) and Luke (1759-1851). Josiah, like every farmer, had a trade, so when Josiah died he left his joiners' shop to Joseph, his blacksmith shop to John and "Millers Station" to Luke. A property division map of that time shows that John received 17 acres north of the homestead along with a house on the west side of Ridgedale Avenue, now demolished. Joseph received 17 acres to the south of the homestead on which his house is still standing on Ridgedale Avenue, marked with a bicentennial plaque.

Sleepy Bottle Hill woke up as the Revolutionary War approached. Rural New Jersey was not much affected by the Stamp Act and Sugar Tax imposed by England, and war news from Boston, Philadelphia and New York filtered slowly into the hinterlands of New Jersey, so when 1500 ragged soldiers trudged into the Loantaka valley on January 6,

1777, with officers requesting quarters in local homes, and George Washington quartered in Morristown, the area was suddenly transformed. Luke Miller, a teenager, joined the militia as a private, later becoming a major. His home, located midway between the outpost at Chatham and main headquarters in Morristown, became a hospitable meeting place, and not incidentally a place to have one's horses shod. George Washington may not have slept there, but he certainly sat there, for the Miller family had a special chair dubbed "The Washington Chair".

Luke Miller went on to marry three times and lived to the age of 91. The Miller Homestead -- now known as the Luke Miller House -- is one of only a handful still in existence in Madison reminding us of our 18th century heritage. Regrettably, other 18th century Madison houses have been so enlarged or altered as to be unrecognizable, most have been torn down.

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