



## Mile 146

Spring - 2017



Volume 10

Topeka Area Historical Society

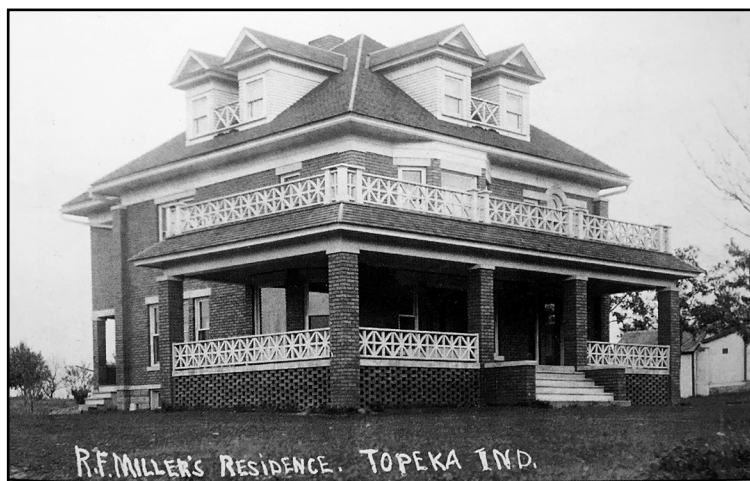
Number 2

### “Miller’s Butter and Creamery”

All you can see on the east side of South Main Street, behind the house and garage south of where the railroad track once lay, is a clump of brush that has grown up over the years. Most people don’t even know there is anything else there. Hidden away behind the garage of the large brick house, is the foundation of what was once the Topeka Butter & Creamery Company.

In its day, the business owned by Rudy and Alma Miller shipped butter and cream to eastern markets on the Wabash Railroad. Built in 1914 by Floyd Peck at a cost of \$6,000, the Millers’ magnificent brick home still stands as a landmark of Topeka’s early days. Rudy and Alma, along with her family, have a unique connection to the cultural and educational growth and development of the Hawpatch community.

Rudy F. Miller was a native of Lagrange County, born on a farm near Topeka. *The History of Northeast Indiana* published in 1920 (Volume II, page 242) provides a glimpse into Rudy’s early years. “He was born in LaGrange County July 27, 1862, grew up in LaGrange County and attended the common schools and is a graduate in the commercial and scientific courses from Valparaiso University with the class of 1900. He had a successful experience as a teacher and was formerly superintendent of the Topeka schools.”



In 1898, Rudy married Alma Babcock, (1871-1959) a native of Portage County, Ohio, and the daughter of J. Norman (1842-1918) and Laura (Kent) Babcock (1846-1927). According to the late Maggie Glick, *Greetings from Topeka, Indiana* (page 35), “The two met while teaching school.” The Millers had one son, John Harold Miller.

Topeka High School’s first yearbook *The Purple and Gold* ‘22, recorded much of the school’s early history. R.F. Miller is listed as the principal from 1894 through 1900. The yearbook says that, “he was Superintendent, Principal, Assistant Principal and Musical Director”. Alma’s last name was listed as Babcock from 1894-1899. For the 1899-1900 school year her name appears as Mrs. R.F. Miller. She was responsible for the Grammar Department. Neither Alma or Rudy were listed as members of the faculty after that.

Alma’s parents’ (J. Norman & Laura (Kent) Babcock) home is still standing on the east side of the intersection of Lehman Avenue and North Main Street in Topeka. *The History of Northeast Indiana* says this about J. Norman, “Mr. Babcock farmed, taught school, and also did some work as a cobbler for a number of years. In 1916 he moved to the Village of Topeka and helped organize the State Bank. He was president of this institution until his death. He was also instrumental in establishing the Sycamore Literary Society, and a personal interview with Andrew Carnegie brought a contribution from that philanthropist to the cause of this institution. He was a liberal supporter of all good things for the benefit of his community, was an ardent republican and one time represented LaGrange County in the State Legislature.”

Exactly when or what circumstances lead up to the Miller’s venture into the creamery business is not known. One could speculate that it coincided with his no longer being the principal at Topeka High School. We get bits and pieces of what happened from *The History of Northeast Indiana* published in 1920, “Some years ago Mr. Miller bought the creamery at Topeka and by his energy developed it into a paying institution. He conducted it alone until six years ago, when he took in his brother-in-law, Lyman Babcock, as partner.

*Continued on page 2*

#### In this Issue

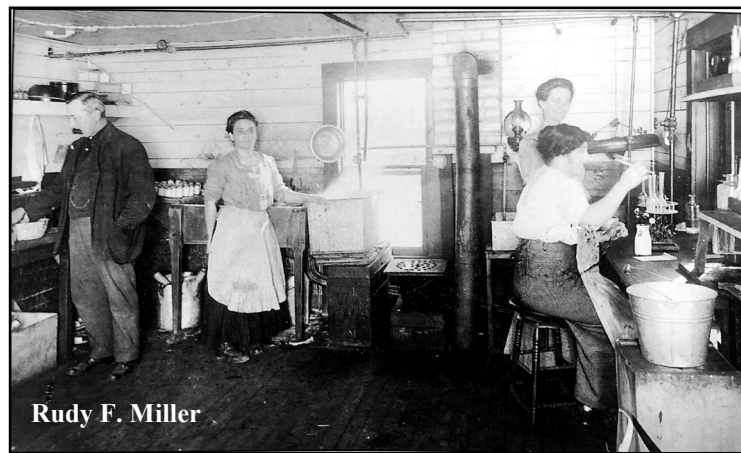
- Topeka Butter & Creamery
- Track Notes
- The Mile 146 Quiz
- The Hawpatch History Detective:

The business now employs about twenty persons, and is one of the important institutions in the farming and dairy-ing community around Topeka. Mr. Miller also has a farm of sixty acres in Clear Spring Township."

Area farmers hauled their cream by horse and wagon, and later by truck, to the creamery. The creamery work-ers made it into butter. The butter and cream was not only sold in Topeka and in area stores, a lot of butter and cream was packed in ice and shipped by train to markets in the east.

John H. Miller, Rudy and Alma's son, who was living in Louisville, Kentucky, at the time, identified his father in the picture to the right for the Topeka Area Historical Society's book *Greetings from Topeka, Indiana - A Col-lection if Postcards and Pictures*. He said, "Obviously this was the room and equipment for testing butterfat con-tent of cream samples." He continued, "I don't recognize the room or the women. This must predate the time I worked in the test room, washing test bottles."

Rudy Miller played a significant role in the formation of the Indiana Manufacturers of Dairy Products. Publications like *The Elgin Dairy Report* and *The Cream-ery and Milk Plant Monthly* from Septem-ber of 1914, reported on Miller's leadership in the organization's for-mation. "At a meeting held at the Claypool Hot-el, Indianapolis, on July 28th, plans were made for the organization of a state association of creamery men. The meeting was held in response to an invitation sent by R. F. Miller, of Topeka, Ind., to about two hun-dred of the creamery men of the state. The organization was not completed at this meeting, but a committee con-



Rudy F. Miller

sisting of H. C. Mills, Purdue; Samuel Schlosser, Plym-outh; W. E. Smith, Indianapolis; R. F. Miller, Topeka; O. F. Hunziker, Purdue; J. A. Rish, Vincennes; Edward C. Handy, Anderson; Edward Nance, Brazil; Ray Atkinson, Evansville; George Freese, Nappanee; Amos Newhouse, Vera Cruz; E. L. Martin, Markle; F. G. Graft, Liberty; E. A. Marple, Muncie, and C. W. Hale, Indianapolis, was appointed, and this committee met on August 13 and completed the organiza-tion. The committee pre-pared the constitution and by-laws and an official call for the first annual meeting of the association, which is to be held at Indianapolis, on Thursday, August 27. Per-manent officers will be elected at this meeting."

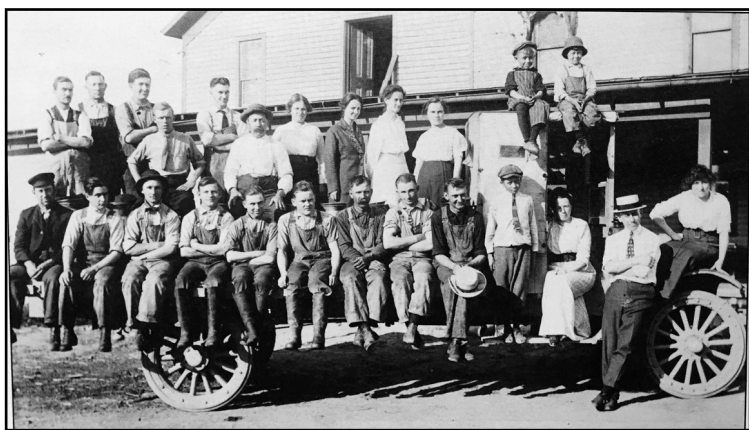
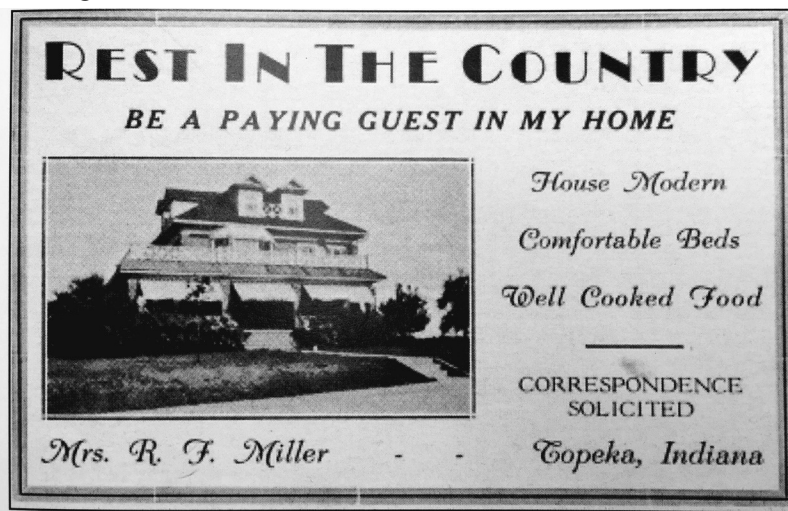
Miller had obviously es-tablished a relationship with people at Purdue University. How that came about we don't know. And we don't know why Rudy was the one to invite 200 creamery men to a state meeting. What we do know is that at the August 27th meeting, Miller was elected the association's first president, an office he would hold until 1916.

When the creamery was sold in 1922, the Millers moved to LaGrange where they both worked for Walb Construction. A few years later they came returned to their home in Topeka. Alma began to take in boarders inviting people to "Rest In The Country .... Be A Paying Guest In My Home."

Following Rudy's death in 1951, Alma sold the home and moved to Louisville to be with her son John. She died in 1959. Alma and Rudy are buried in the Eden Cemetery west of Topeka (Row 25, Lot 1) next to her par-ents and her brother Lyman who died in 1964.

The Miller home has had a suc-cession of owners. In 1974 it was purchased by Dr. Evan and Janet Thompson. Today it is owned by David Osborn.

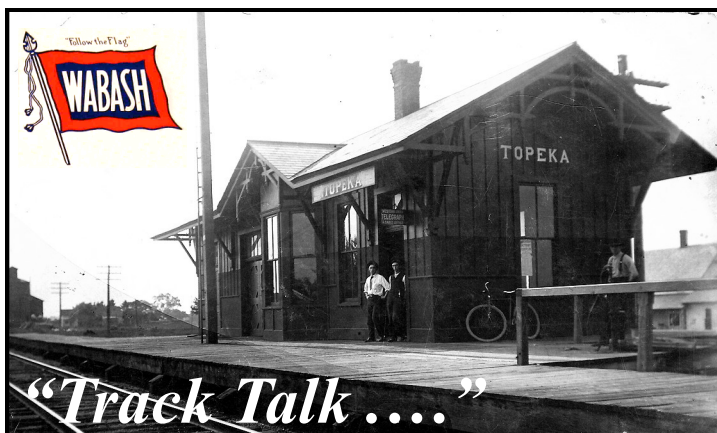
HG



While no one has been identified in this 1915 photo, R.F. Miller is most likely the man in the second row wearing the white shirt and hat. Lyman Babcock may be the man in the front row on the far right leaning back against the wheel.

- Answers:
- 1) J. Norman Babcock
  - 2) Floyd Peck/\$6,000
  - 3) David Osborn
  - 4) Valparaiso University
  - 5) John H. Miller





## Topeka 3rd Graders Visit the Depot

Students from the three 3rd Grade classes of Topeka Elementary enjoyed a morning field trip to the Topeka Area Historical Society's Depot Museum on Wednesday morning, May 10th.

Dewayne Bontrager, former Topeka Clerk/Treasurer, was on hand to help guide the tours.

One of the highlights for the students was exploring the Wabash caboose that is on permanent loan from the New York Central Railroad Museum in Elkhart.

Topeka 3rd Graders study local history. Each student is provided a copy of the historical society's quarterly newsletter "Mile 146" free of charge over the course of the school year.



**Maggie Glick**  
June 22, 1926 - April 12, 2017

It is with great sadness that we note the passing of Maggie Glick who was a charter member of the Topeka Area Historical Society.

This organization owes Maggie so much. Her work in compiling and editing our two commemorative books *Celebrating a Century 1893 to 1993* and *Greetings from Topeka, Indiana* (a collection of postcards and pictures) continues to be an invaluable resource.

We are also grateful to the family for designating us as the recipients of her preferred memorials.

### Coming Events:

**June 17, 2017** THS Alumni Banquet  
(noon) Topeka Elementary School

**July 18, 2017** Show & Tell (Carry in)  
Topeka Branch Library

**Sept. 19, 2017** Topeka Area Historical Soc. Meeting  
program to be announced

Topeka Area Historical Society Meetings are held  
at the Topeka Branch Library - 6:30 PM  
Everyone is welcome

Visit us online at: [www.topekahistoricalsociety.com](http://www.topekahistoricalsociety.com)

### The Mile 146 Quiz:

1. Who was Alma Miller's father?
2. Who built Rudy & Alma Miller's home and how much did it cost?
3. Who owns the Miller house today?
4. Where did Rudy Miller attend college?
5. What was the name of Rudy & Alma's son?

**Topeka Area Historical Society**  
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[www.topekahistoricalsociety.com](http://www.topekahistoricalsociety.com)

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## *The Hawpatch History Detective*

### **Wolfe Grain Elevator Loses Top Levels**

The Topeka skyline continues to change with the removal of the top two sections of the old Wolfe Grain Elevator on Indiana Street. A combination of years of deterioration and weather related damage were the primary reason for the deconstruction.

Yoder Farm Service, who purchased the property a number of years ago, still uses the facility that stood on the north side of the railroad tracks for grain storage. Yoder Farm Service's primary location is on West Lake Street.

While lovers of our historic buildings will miss the iconic image of the elevator as it once stood, they can take comfort in the fact that a significant portion of the building remains.

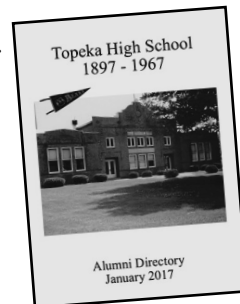


### **Now Available**

The final edition of the Topeka High School Alumni Directory is now off the press and available for purchase for only \$10.00 plus shipping.

This 116 page spiral bound volume is filled with the name of each graduate, numerous class photos, and other special features that celebrate the school's history.

Every living THS graduate will receive a copy of the directory at the final THS Alumni Banquet being held on June 17, 2017.



Proceeds from the sale of these directories will benefit the Topeka Area Historical Society.

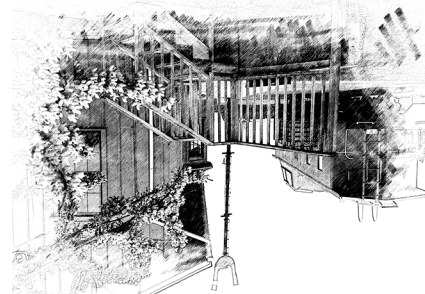
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