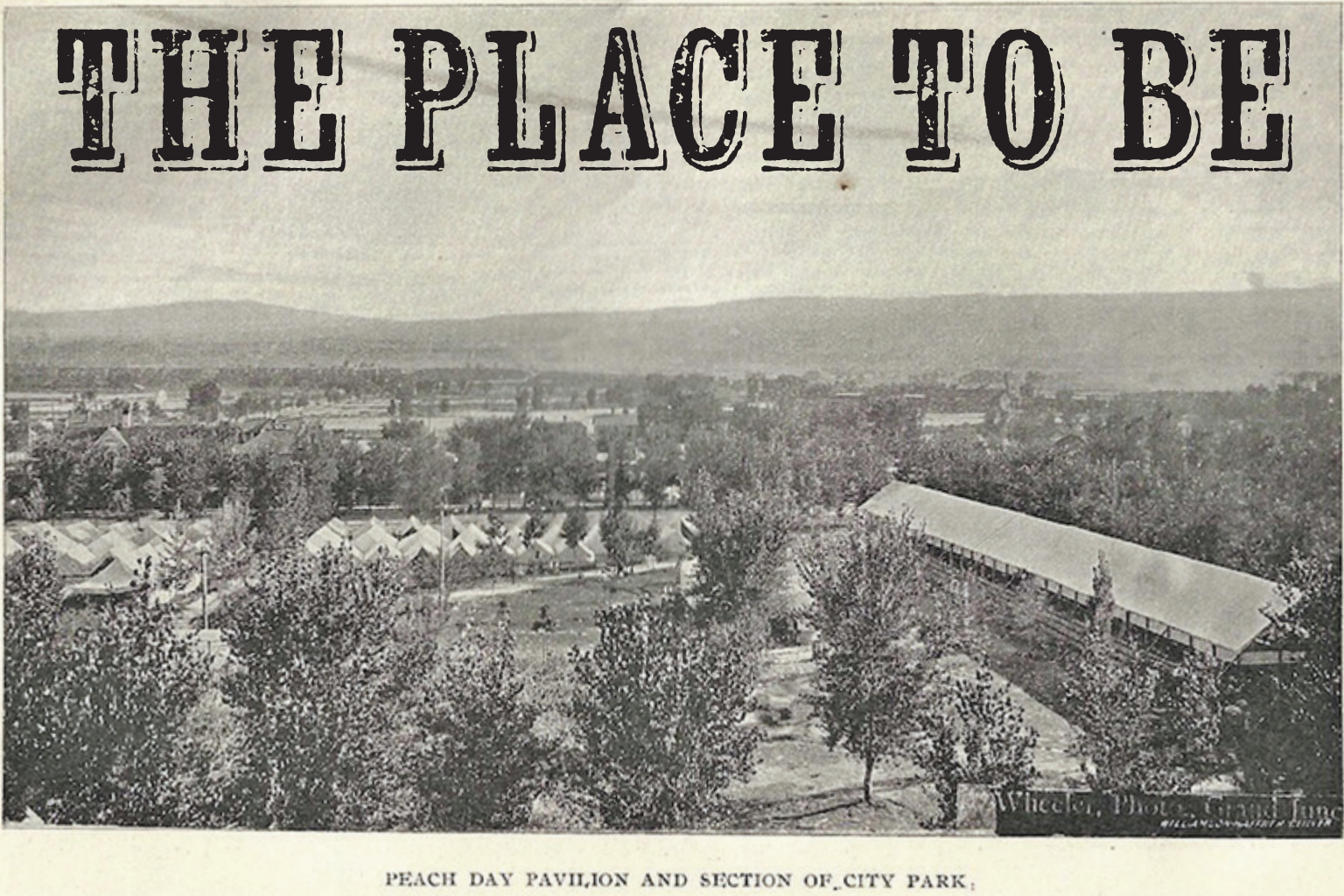


FIRST DRAFT



PEACH DAY PAVILION AND SECTION OF CITY PARK. PUBLIC DOMAIN

Peach Day tents and buildings set up in Lincoln Park in the late 1890s, in a photo from the 1899 promotional pamphlet A.A. Miller prepared for the county.

A.A. Miller enthusiastically promoted Mesa County and its resources

On January 21, 1899, the Mesa County Commissioners appointed A.A. Miller as county immigration commissioner. He became chief propagandist for the county, touting all that Mesa County had to offer in order to encourage people to move here.

Miller was a former Mesa County commissioner and county treasurer. He had been an original member of the Grand Junction City Council. He was a leading fruit grower and a bank director. Although largely forgotten today, Miller was among the county's most important early leaders.

As immigration commissioner, he arranged to have a brochure printed that extolled the virtues of this county. In doing so, he drew the ire of local newspapers.

The Grand Junction Daily News suggested the \$500 spent on the pamphlet could have been better spent giving 1,000 households in other communities subscriptions to local newspapers.

The Daily Sentinel noted that Miller had the pamphlet printed in Denver, and said the printing company did a poor job. "Any printing office in this city could have turned out the work as well as it has been done and doubtless better and it is a crying shame that such work is taken from the city," the paper said.

Miller apparently shrugged off the criticism, got the brochure printed by Aug. 1, 1899, and moved on to other projects.

Born in Ontario, Canada about 1840, Albert A. Miller arrived in the West in 1867 while helping to build the Union Pacific Railroad. He lived in Wyoming, Utah and Colorado territories before farming briefly in Kansas. He worked as a miner in Leadville and the San Juan Mountains before moving to Grand Junction in the spring of 1882.

"He arrived here May 1st, and at once commenced the manufacture of brick," an early history of Mesa County reported. He was a partner in the Board of Trade saloon and billiard hall, and acquired considerable farmland around Grand Junction. For a time, he was the largest land owner in the county.

Miller joined other residents of Grand Junction in voting to incorporate the city in June 1882, less than a year after the first settlers arrived. He was one of five men elected to the first city council in August, 1882 and was re-elected the following spring. In 1885, Democrat Miller was elected Mesa County Treasurer.

He became a leading voice for the fruit growers of the community, then one of the driving forces promoting a sugar-beet factory here.

In 1894, he was a director of the First National Bank of



BOB SILBERNAGEL

Grand Junction. That same year, he ran for Mesa County Commissioner, but not as a Democrat. In the wake of the 1893 silver bust, the Populist Party was gaining power and Miller became a Populist.

Even so, newspaper reports indicate that many Populists didn't support him because he was associated with a bank. Populists despised bankers. Still, county records show that in November 1894, he defeated a man named S.J. Scoville by 50 votes, out of about 2,500 cast.

Miller didn't seek re-election in 1898. His time was consumed with constructing a new hotel and office building downtown, and as chairman of the committee pushing for a sugar-beet factory.

However, he was available to become immigration commissioner the following January.

That job wasn't unique to Mesa County. Other counties had their own immigration commissioners who, like Miller, often traveled to other states to lure immigrants. Colorado even had a state immigration commissioner.

Based on newspaper articles from the time, Mesa County had appointed an immigration commissioner as early as 1894, and it continued to maintain the job through the first decade of the 20th century. In 1913, according to the Sentinel, 40 people applied for the post, but the county had no money to pay for it.

During his tenure as immigration commissioner, Miller's primary achievement was the 1899 pamphlet. It accurately reported the cost of land in the county, of the necessity for irrigation to make crops flourish, and on the excessive cost that immigrants would face if they tried to ship too many house-



PEACH TREES IN BLOOM. PUBLIC DOMAIN

A man, believed to be A.A. Miller, stands in his peach orchard, in a photo from the 1899 promotional pamphlet Miller prepared for the county.

hold items by rail to the county.

But Miller wasn't above a little exaggeration to help persuade potential immigrants. Despite 100-degree temperatures in the summer, "No such thing as sunstroke is known here, nor has there been any case of prostration from excessive heat," he wrote. This was "due to the dryness of the atmosphere."

Furthermore, there were no "poisonous insects, reptiles or injurious animals" and there were no hailstorms, he claimed.

Fruit growers in the valley had more consistent crops than farmers in other states, he maintained. "There is not another spot on earth that can show such a record."

The commissioners reimbursed Miller for the cost of the pamphlet in late August 1899.

How large a role Miller and other county immigration com-

missioners played in attracting newcomers to Mesa County is unclear. But there is no question the county grew rapidly. U.S. Census Bureau figures show county population increased from 9,200 in 1900 to more than 22,000 in 1910.

Miller sought the Populist Party nomination to run for commissioner again in 1900, but in a straw vote at the group's convention, he came in second among three candidates. His name was not on the ballot in November 1900.

He made a brief foray to the Klondike in 1899, examining business opportunities, but soon returned to Grand Junction.

Miller remained involved in this community for the next dozen years. He was a regular speaker at meetings of the Grand Junction Fruit Growers Association. He continued

to work for construction of the sugar beet plant, and he remained involved in downtown real estate.

In 1910, when a fire destroyed the Majestic Theater on Main Street, Miller owned the building but not the business. Miller said his property was fully insured and he would be fine financially.

In 1915, although he no longer lived in Grand Junction, Miller was still associated with the Fruit Growers Association, when there was a brief scandal over whether the major stockholders such as Miller were shortchanging those who only had small amounts of stock.

By 1914, he and his wife Rachel had sold their house on North First Street and moved to California. By January 1917, the family was living in San Diego. Son William L. Miller was living near them, and was a partner with his father in an automobile accessories business and real estate investments. Another son, Charles, also lived in California.

A.A. Miller died in San Diego on July 3, 1927, but his body was returned to Grand Junction to be buried in the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows cemetery here, now part of the city's Orchard Mesa Cemetery.

Miller's obituary in The Daily Sentinel said, "Mr. Miller was always active in the civic and political circles in this county." It described him as "one of the pioneer settlers who had much to do with the early history of this city."

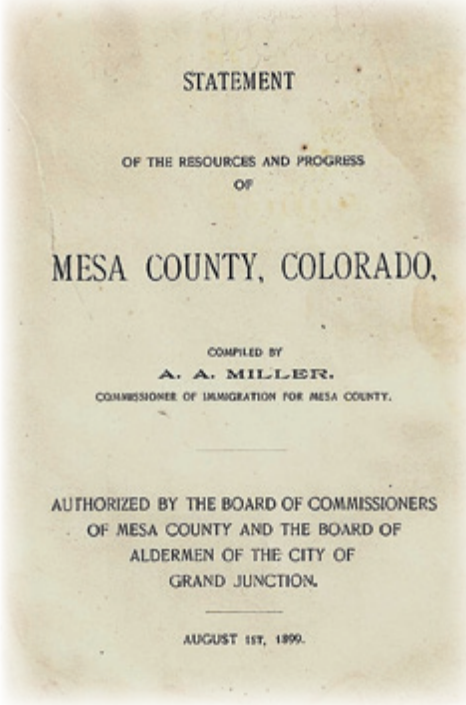
Sources: "History and Business Directory of Mesa County Colorado," 1886, courtesy of Garry Brewer; "Statement of the Resources and Progress of Mesa County, Colorado," compiled by A.A. Miller, 1899, courtesy of Nancy Lofholm; historic newspaper articles from www.newspapers.com.

Bob Silbernagel's email is bobsilbernagel@gmail.com.



A. A. MILLER, County Treasurer. HISTORY AND BUSINESS DIRECTORY OF MESA COUNTY COLORADO, COURTESY OF GARRY BREWER

Portrait of A.A. Miller when he served as Mesa County Treasurer in the mid-1880s.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

Cover of the 1899 pamphlet that A.A. Miller prepared for Mesa County.