

# A.A. Miller

## BUILDER OF DESOTO DAM



**The man who built the twenty-foot high dam above DeSoto Falls in the mid 1920's was Arthur Abernathy Miller, a brilliant self-educated electrical engineer. He built the dam to help supply power for his hydroelectric generator which he constructed below the falls, on the west side of the gorge.**

**A square concrete base still marks the spot where electrical power was generated for Fort Payne, Mentone, Valley Head, Collinsville, Alabama and Menlo, Georgia. Miller knew he had found an ideal location for his plant at this picturesque spot atop Lookout Mountain. And his home, to be built soon afterward, to the southwest of the falls, was to provide his family long afterward with the most perfect view possible of the beautiful falls and rock cliffs.**

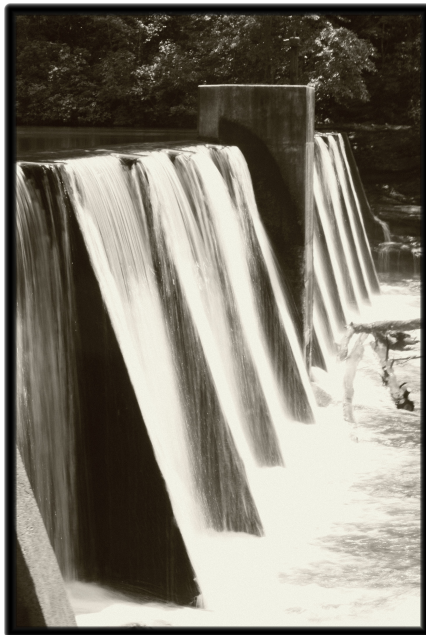
**Miller hired many local men for the construction of his dam, which was first built to a height of 10 feet. Later various people of the area contributed sufficient funds to raise the dam an additional 10 feet in order to increase the size of the lake. A timber dam up the river was flooded out; the lake was enlarged and stocked with bass and bream to provide better fishing as well as more enjoyable boating and swimming.**



**Before the days of T.V.A. and large power companies, electricity was supplied to rural areas by such imaginative and pioneering men as Miller. Although he sometimes engaged in other business ventures, electricity always intrigued him and was by far his favorite professional pursuit.**

**Miller was born in 1872 in Lincoln County, North Carolina and died December 26, 1943. He had one daughter by his first wife. His second marriage was to Pearl S. Callahan, of Bedford County, Virginia. They had two daughters.**

**Miller had furnished electrical power for two towns in Virginia and one in West Virginia before coming to Fort Payne from Chattanooga in 1921.**



**The heavy diesel machinery purchased by Miller posed a problem, as he was at the south end of town and some distance from the depot. There was no double track to aid in the unloading and train officials emphatically declared they could keep the train stopped for no longer than 30 minutes. They were certain this amount of time was totally inadequate for unloading such massive equipment. However, after skillful and detailed planning, Miller accomplished the feat in the allotted time.**

**At first Fort Payne was furnished with electricity from dark until midnight. Then, after a number of local women had purchased electric irons, power was supplied on Thursday afternoons to allow this task. Later electricity was made available all day and night.**

**As there was no central switch for the street lights, Ernest Wallis, a young school boy, became Fort Payne's equivalent of the "ole lamp lighter", riding his bicycle up and down the streets at dusk to turn the lights on and returning after dawn to turn them off**

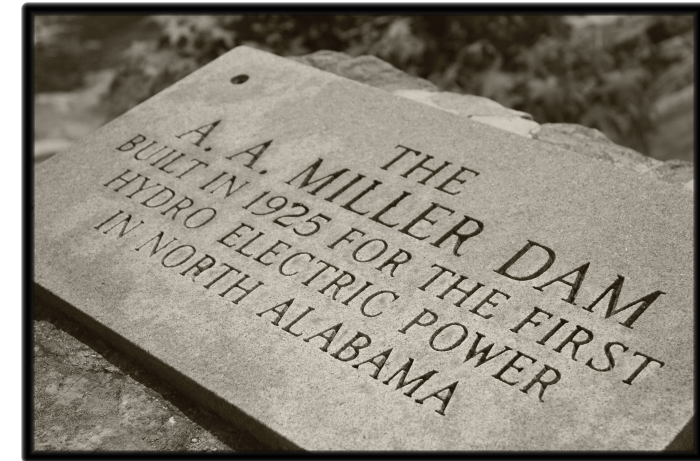


On many occasions Miller jumped up from his evening meal and rushed through the darkness from his home on the corner of third and Gault to restore electric service after an incident of power failure. But his worst such experience was to keep the power flowing during a carnival's visit to town. Every time the merry-go-round made a few turns, all the machinery stopped and the lights went out.

Miller built his first ice plant in Fort Payne, where previously ice had been secured from Chattanooga. His family also had the first electric refrigerator in town, after he had converted an old icebox into an electrical one.

Miller was also engaged in the automobile business while in Fort Payne. He and L.C. Jordan had the first Ford dealership for a time and he later formed a partnership with N.B. Haston, Sr. in a Chevrolet company.

After he decided to build his electric plant at DeSoto Falls, Miller's first problem appeared to be the area's inaccessibility. There were no roads at all and Miller's heavy Lincoln mired deeply in the muddy log trail on several occasions before he and Phiffer Smith built the first road to DeSoto Falls. The road connected the falls with the brow of the mountain, where a road already ran to Valley Head.



Miller and Smith saw great possibilities in further development of this beautiful area and purchased 300 acres of land surrounding the falls. They formed the DeSoto Falls Development Company, with Smith as president and Miller as secretary and treasurer. Their tract of mountain land was divided into 266 building lots, and plans were made for a community clubhouse and tennis courts. A historic old fortress area below the falls was to be preserved as a park.

An attractive brochure boasted of a variety of sports and entertainment, including swimming, boating, fishing, dancing, horseback riding and hiking. The beauty of this mountain retreat was stressed, with descriptions of the profusion of rhododendron, mountain laurel and other wildflowers, the thickly wooded plateaus and interesting geological formations.



The Miller home was built in the spring of 1929 under the supervision of Lee Crow, and Phiffer Smith. However the descending depression years prevented the further development of their park.

Those who do live in the area today enjoy the peaceful solitude, which crowded sub-divisions would have eliminated and they enjoy the full measure of nature's gorgeous panorama, including one of Dekalb County's most famous scenic spots. Viewing with awe the magnificent DeSoto Falls, tumbling 104 feet down the rock cliff - a living picture of foam and spray, one does not wonder at A.A. Miller's decision many years ago that -



"This is the place".







The 'cradle' for the pipe going down to the generator house at the base of the falls.