

Miller, Helen Topping ^[1]

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Miller, Helen Topping

By E. D. Johnson, 1991

8 Dec. 1884—4 Feb. 1960

Helen Topping Miller, novelist, was born in Fenton, Mich., the daughter of Isaac Wallace and Maria Augusta Chipman Topping. She was the niece of John Dewey, the philosopher. Helen began writing stories as a child and had one published in *St. Nicholas* when she was fifteen. After graduating from Michigan Agricultural College (later [Michigan State University](#) ^[2]) in 1905, she taught school in Michigan for two years. She moved with her family to Morristown, Tenn., in 1908 and lived there until 1910, when she married Frank Roger Miller, a journalist and Chamber of Commerce official.

After her marriage she lived for several years in Macon, Ga., where she taught for a time at [Mercer University](#) ^[3], meanwhile writing short stories, serials, and poems for several national magazines. From 1924 to 1942 she made her home at Arrowhill, near Asheville; at different times during this period she also maintained homes in Washington, D.C., and Dallas, Tex. In 1942 the Millers bought a century-old home—which she renamed Arrowhill Farm—near Morristown, Tenn., where she lived for the remainder of her life. Her husband died in 1944.

Mrs. Miller's first book-length novel was *Sharon* (1931), a light romance that achieved modest success. It was followed by similar ones, such as *White Peacock* (1932), *Blue Marigolds* (1933), and *Splendor of Eagles* (1935). In all, she wrote over 40 works of light fiction. By 1949 she reported that she had written and published more than 30 books, 11 serials, and 314 short stories.

After 1945 Mrs. Miller varied her light romances with historical fiction. The first of these was *Dark Sails: A Tale of Old St. Simons*, a novel of the South Carolina coast in the nineteenth century. This was followed by *The Sound of Chariots: A Novel of John Sevier and the State of Franklin* (1947) ^[4] and *Rebellion Road: A Civil War Novel* (1954) ^[5]. In the latter case, she completed a novel begun by her brother, John Dewey Topping, but left unfinished at his early death.

Still a third type of fiction appeared in the 1950s with Mrs. Miller's successful stories of Christmas at the homes of famous men. This series began with *Christmas at the Hermitage: A Tale about Rachel and Andrew Jackson* (1955) ^[6], followed by others such as *Christmas with Robert E. Lee* (1958) ^[7] and *Christmas at Mount Vernon* (1957).

An Episcopalian and a lifelong Republican, she was a member of the [Authors League of America](#) ^[8], the [Daughters of the American Revolution](#) ^[9], and the Tennessee Press Writers Club. She died at her home in Tennessee. The Millers had two children: John Wallace (1913) and Frank Eugene (1917).

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