

St. Cloud State University

The Repository at St. Cloud State

WPA Biographic Summaries

University Archives

5-22-1936

Miner, George H. (1866 -)

Dean Nelson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/wpabio>

Recommended Citation

Nelson, Dean, "Miner, George H. (1866 -)" (1936). *WPA Biographic Summaries*. 873.
<https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/wpabio/873>

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives at The Repository at St. Cloud State. It has been accepted for inclusion in WPA Biographic Summaries by an authorized administrator of The Repository at St. Cloud State. For more information, please contact tdsteman@stcloudstate.edu.

MINER, GEORGE H.

File No. B-904

George H. Miner was born in Yankton, South Dakota, November 1, 1866 son of William and Anna (Hoyt) Miner.

His father was born in Oswego County New York and moved from there to Kankakee, Illinois. William Miner came to South Dakota in 1855. He made the journey with Darling, who was making a survey for the Government. Later Mr. William Miner became a surveyer himself. He walked from Dubesque, Iowa to the present site of Yankton and with Mr. Bramble as a partner started the first store at Yankton. He also built the first flour mill and elevator there and operated bull trains to the Black Hills and Minnesota.

George grew up in his fathers store and amongst the Indians that traded there. He attended common school and Yankton College.

His first work was a herder and cattle rider sometimes his territory extended into Minnesota. He had a desire to explore and start business in Minnesota, but gave it up to start the clothing business at Yankton.

He later discontinued the clothing business and attended college again where he studied steam engineering. He followed the threshing outfits and finally became an engineer in the Frandean Indian School and he remained in this position four years, and finally passed an examination to teach the Indians at the School.

However, Mr. Miner still had his ambition to come to Minnesota so he finally came to Minneapolis and found employment with the Scanlan Lumber Company. After a short time he formed a partnership with E. L. Harkness and purchased the W. T. Clark Lumber Yard at Saint Cloud. This transaction was made in 1901. Mr. Miner purchased some land in East Saint Cloud, and when the Central Lumber Company wanted this land he sold them the business and the properties and became General Manager of the Company.

Mr. Miner married Adelia Howe, daughter of Sylvester and Louise (Stafford) Howe. Adelia Howe was a direct descendant of William Howe the patriot, who was born in England. Miss Howe was born in Saint Cloud.

She was very active in social work in Saint Cloud and a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Reading Room, and the Twentieth Century Club.

In 1917 Mr. Miner built and managed the Miner theatre, which still bears his name but has been leased since November 1, 1926. During the years in the theatre he enjoyed a prosperous and happy life.

Adelia (Howe) Miner died in

They had two sons, Dr. C. L. Miner, a Dentist in Saint Cloud, and William Sylvester of the Central Lumber Company also in Saint Cloud.

After leasing the theatre Mr. Miner became District Manager for the Pacific Mutual Insurance Company and later Manager of the Saint Cloud Elks Club.

He married again June 18, 1926 to Mrs. Vera H. (Kline) Denhart at Saint Pauls church and has one daughter Helen C. and one stepson Albert Denhart Miner.

Mr. Miner belongs to the Masonic Order, Saint Cloud Country Club, Kiwanis, Auto Club and the Chamber of Commerce. At present he is Manager of the Elks Club, but he is reconsidering the theatre business as the lease expires this year, 1936.

Reminiscing Mr. Miner related, "I knew Francis Bungo very well. He was son of Chief Bungo of Souix tribe and was a very good student at Frandreau. He often helped me keep discipline among the other Indian boys and certainly knew how to do it."

"When Francis got married he presented me with a peace pipe his

MINER, GEORGE H.

Page 3
File No. ____

father had made. The metal bands on this pipe are made from the lead melted from the printing presses of Yankton and New Ulm. These presses were taken during the Indian raid of 1862 through Minnesota and South Dakota."

"Chief Ma Ha Te Ho, (which means Little Bear) son-in-law of Sitting Bull, was once convicted of the murder of a stage coach driver called Jackson who drove the stage coach from Saint Paul to Yankton and then west. This charge was false and the president gave the chief three reprieves of thirty days each to catch the real murderer. Ma Ha Te Ho failed to find who he believed was the real murderer so the chief was hung. Before being hung he drew an Indian picture for me as a remembrance. I still have the original picture."

"When at Frandreau I used to come through Saint Cloud up to Cass Lake and enroll the Indians to go to school at Frandreau. Once we had about twenty-five little Indian children, on the way we had to stop at noon to give them something to eat, and while eating, one of the little Indian girls tipped over the coffee cup. I don't think a white child could ever feel as badly or as embarrassed as this little tot. She hardly got over this incident during the rest of the trip."

"One Souix brave that came to school used to trap at Cass and Leech lakes in Minnesota. He once told me about his experience during the Souix and Chippewa war. This brave was carrying his furs to Saint Paul on his back to sell or trade, because, if he used a horse he would have been killed in less than a mile from camp. He reached Saint Paul safely with his furs, but when coming back to camp he became very tired and hungry. He sighted a camp of Indians at about the spot where Clearwater, Minnesota now stands, and forgetting all danger he went towards the camp and to his dismay discovered they were Chippewa Indians. He had advanced

MINER, GEORGE H.

Page 4

File No. _____

to far to turn back so he walked on into their camp and pretended he was deaf and dumb. For the time being the enemy forgot their savageness and fed him well and gave him a blanket in which to sleep. He laid there until he was sure they were all asleep and then quietly slipped away. He told me that by morning they would have forgotten their pity for him and put him to death."

"At the school we used to have quit a time with the Souix and Chippewa Indians from Minnesota. Especially the young girls. The young men from other tribes would come to see these girls and finally the girls would decide to run away and marry these strange young braves from other tribes. Of course we couldn't let this happen because we were responsible for them and it finally ended up in hiring some Indian detectives to watch the school and all its' entrances to keep our pupils from eloping."

"I have found that the Indians of the North West made very good and sincere friends if you treated them right and tried to understand them. I've gone swimming and played with the Indians all my life. I can talk their language and some of my closest pals were Indian braves."

"I have a great many gifts from the Indians including hand carved peace pipes of pipestone, Mosocasins, belts, and various other articles."

"The way they made the pipes of pipestone was to quarry it under water. When they secure the stone it is soft on the exterior so it can be carved, after the article is complete they let it harden and it becomes granite like with a solid polished exterior."

"This stone is so famous that Indians from all over the North West come to Pipestone, Minnesota to make their peace pipes."

Mr Miner is well educated and he has so complete an understanding of the Indians that his supply of Indian stories is almost unlimited. He

MINER, GEORGE H.

Page 5
File No. _____

is respected highly by his fellow men.

Interviewed: George H. Miner
Date: May 22, 1936
By: Dean Nelson

DEATH RECORD BOOK R. PAGE 7 LINE 204

Adelia Howe Miner Born in South Dakota July 8, 1874. Daughter of Sylvester Howe and Louise Stauffer. Died Nov. 6, 1925. Age 51 years 3 months 28 days.

(From a personnel letter written to Mr. Fred Monfore)
(Yankton, South Dakota)

MINER, GEORGE HENRY

File No. _____

Mr. Fred Monfore

Yankton, South Dakota

St. Cloud, Minn.
Feb. 20, 1936

Dear Sir:

My father came from Oswego county, New York, to Chicago.
My Mother came from Onida, Michigan to Yankton.

He took up surveying and worked at this in Wisconsin. At the time of his father's death the estate was divided and he took his share with him to Mankato, Minn. His brother had a store there.

He joined a survey party under the command of Mr. Darling, who afterward had the contract of surveying the line between the United States and Mexico. They surveyed the first line for the government as far west as the Missouri River so to enable the settlers to stake out their claims. In time they reached Yankton.

My Dad said after crossing the James River, they came across a band of Indians who had lost one of their oxen in a well. The Indian well at that time was a large hole in the ground deep enough to reach water. They were in a quandry as to the best way to get the ox out. My father said that he would help them. They shoveled the hole full of dirt as the ox stayed on top of this he was soon at the top.

Years later while I was bailiff of the 2nd Judicial dist.-sub div. Yankton Chief Justice Edgeton presided. There was a case in the court requiring many Indian witnesses. A half breed named Louis La Plartt told me it was my father that helped him with the rescue of his ox and he said that he would never forget the way my father was dressed at the time. Instead of wearing an overcoat he had a blanket over his shoulders, the same as the Indians wore. They were used to sleep in at night. After the survey party reached the Missouri somewhere near the Yankton agency; the survey party returned east. My father was impressed with the looks of the country and decided to keep his **compass** and surveying outfit and run off claims for the settlers.

He met the daughter of Rev. Melancton Hoyt and married Anna Hoyt. Their children were Wm. (died age 1 yr.) Geo. Henry Miner, Clara, Abbie, Wheeler (died at child birth) Helen (died 3 yrs. 3 Mo.)

At my arrival into the world there was a contest on. Some of the settlers agreed to purchase a buggy for the first arrival. Lizzy Ash was just three months older than I was. Mr. Ash and family built a chalk stone Hotel. It was located on Broadway and third street. This hotel burned and the Merchants hotel was built on its site.

My first recollections as a little fellow are that the business section of the town was located on the Levee or River Bank. I remember the Press later Press and Dakotan newspaper, Mills and Purdy Drug Store, French Joe's Dance Hall, also other dances halls. The old city Jail, Brambel and Miner, Commadore Colson, steamboat office, three large ware-houses on the River Bank, one of which belonged to Brambel and Miner. In 1876 this ware-house was used for the horses of Gen. Custer thru the blizzard of April 22nd of

that year. Years afterwards this ware-house was torn down. The lumber was of cotton wood. That was about the only lumber obtainable when it was built. This lumber was used to build a barn on the farm of Wm. Miner, six miles North of Yankton and to this day vistors to the farm on going inside of the barn can plainly see places where Custers horses had nawed the lumber.

A lumber yard was at the foot of Capital St. They built a ways for the Steamboat to be pulled up out of the water during the winter, when caught in the River this far up stream at the freeze up time. Many times as a boy I have seen Nels Collamer with his big spyglass standing on the River bank looking down the River to get the name of the boat whose smoke could be seen near St. Helena. Before he could discern the name of the boat which might be the Far West, The Western, The Pening and Josephine, The Black Hills, Nelly Peck, Fort Benton, Josie L. K. and many others. At the time of the arrival of any boat almost the entire population of Yankton would be on the river bank waiting for mail, newspapers, and friends.

Mr. Brambel established a General Store in Yankton. My father suggested that he give him a position, stating that he did not want wages. This being the case he was hired at once. My father kept his money in a belt around his waist. With this they formed the partnership of Brambel and Miner. My father was made Postmaster under Abraham Lincoln, next he was Sheriff, Registrar of Deeds and finally the first Mayor of Yankton, in this office was organized the Territory of Dakota.

As the settlers moved in and the town grew the printing office moved from the Levee to second street and from there to third street on the 2nd floor of the brick block, corner of Cedar and 3rd.

As a boy I started to carry papers and followed the paper to the next move between Walnut Street and Cedar next to Purdy and Brecht Drug Store. I carried the Press and Dakotan route, West third Broadway and all west of Broadway for many years. If Henry Tammen is still alive (who I understand owns both theatres in Yankton) he will remember the Paper boys stopping each night for Tammen's Taffey candy.

About this time they had two bands in Yankton. One called the Bude Band who held their rehersals in Charlie Wambeau old Variety Theatre. Ed Kearny was leader. The German Band had Professor Venetre afterwards Mr. Klotz for leader, rehersals held in Mr. Badens Hotel on Broadway.

At this time Yankton was the Capitol of the state. In my younger years my playmates were about half Indians and half white boys. I had many wolf chases as well as jack rebbit hunts with Charlie Bradley. His father at Yankton agency named 'Jim Gummers' made Charlie a present of a very fine running pony. In those days every boy in town had one to ride. Charlie was adopted by Mr. Bradley who had one of the best boarding houses in town just north of third on Walnut St. I learned to swim with the Lyman boys whose

MINER, GEORGE HENRY

File No. _____

mother was Indian. Our swimming holes one of the best was located on the Rhine creek just west of the Insane Hospital grounds. The Insane Hospital at that time was of wooden construction. I remember the time it burned down. Just east of this wooden asylum is a knoll on which Jack McCall was hanged. The man that killed "Wild Bill". Of course all the boys that attended the hanging made a long procession from Yankton to this spot. When my playmates and I had learned to swim we then changed our swimming hole to the Missouri River. At this time as the land south of the Broadway River bank on Stuitty Bear bottom was covered with the most beautiful Cottonwood timbers being two feet in diameter. All big Yankton picnic's were held here. Farther out from the woods were great Willow patches in which we as boys made Indian tepees by pulling the tops of the willows together and then cutting out the center and covering with boughs. We there had a good place to learn to smoke. We all started on drift wood. After our pow-wow was over we would take our remaining driftwood smokes and any other things we might have and cache them in a little cave in the chalk stone bank just west of what we call the chalk stone cave.

I remember we made use of the chalkstone cave. We formed two bands, one made a fort of the cave using chalk rock to throw at the enemy. We were protected by a wall of chalk rock in front of the cave. The other gang used willows for spears.

When we were large enough to ride ponies we changed our playground to what we called the Mowhalk valley. Now Plankintons Cement Works which afterwards became quite a hiding place for horse thieves. I well remember when Charlie Wombo had this Saloon on one side of Broadway and Van Meter on the other. We would hear shooting going on and a big crowd running only to find it was Charlie and Van Meter shooting at each other across the street. No one ever heard of them hitting each other but the crowd soon filled both saloons and the business was good.

When Mr. Brambel and my father put in the Trading Store at Yankton Agency instead of receiving money for their goods, they took furs in exchange for their goods with the Indians. The buffalo hides would be dried and Brambell and Miner had a large press on the river bank to bale them. I have seen a steamboat loaded almost to capacity with them. When I was 7 years old my mother and I took quarters on the Nellie Peck for a trip to Fort Thompson where my uncle Dr. H. F. Swingston was Indian agent. On my trip up the river, I remember Capt. Kelly showed me a bullet that probably some Indian had shot at the pilot house just missing the pilots head and hitting the caseing and dropped to the floor. Before reaching Fort Thompson I saw a sight that I shall never forget. Hundreds of buffalo were crossing the river and milling in mid-stream. Our boat was forced to pull to the bank until this was over. The Captain was afraid the buffalo would get in the paddle wheel of the Steamboat.

The flood was in the year of '81. It washed out the town of Green Island Nebraska and I helped Jim Marsh after the flood, select a new site for his store at what is now called Aten. During this flood 42 people were seen on one house of brick. This was the only house that remained after the flood. Rev. Secom, Congregational

Minister lost his church which went down the river like a steamboat.

Two boys on a roof of the brick house saw their home floating by. They saw two men with a skiff and offered them \$500 if they would save their parents who were in the house. They were reluctant but finally decided to try and on arriving at the house, they saw the couple with their heads above the rafters as they were hanging on. They thought it impossible to get them. The couple pleaded and promised them \$500 which was in a trunk in the lower part of the house, if they would save them. They were saved. The house finally landed near a bluff four miles down the river. The trunk was found and also the money that was promised to them. My Dad's warehouse contained flour and this was covered with nine feet of water. He had a skiff stationed to a platform in front of the mill. The men all laughed at this when they saw it but before night-fall were glad to take a ride on it when he went. On this they floated to the front door of the Portland Hotel.

Boats were left high and dry after the flood about a mile or more in town. One double deck steamboat floated over the land past the Milwaukee Depot and landed near Stones farm now called Gurney Nursey Farm. The boats were taken back to water much the same way houses are moved.

As young boys the Indians hired us to swim out in mid-stream and ride the trees to shore. The trees had so many roots that they formed comfortable chairs. We sat on the back of these trees and guided them to shore. These were hauled in shore by the Indians and they used them for firewood. We were placed in a wagon and then were taken back to the starting place to have another exciting ride. These trees caved off the banks as far west as Yellowstone River. The river was often covered with trees and rifraf.

A circus came to town and an elephant broke lose. A farmer coalted him with oats and finally landed him in the barn and the elephant was contented and did not break down the barn. The farmer's barn was near Elk Point.

The first school I attended was Mrs. Meyr's private school located near the Rhine Creek not far from the old Milwaukee Depot. My classmates and I would often go over to the Rhine at recess to play. One of my classmates got into deep water and was drowned. His name was Willie Pound, another classmate Charlie McCook had equally bad luck. When the territorial legislature was in session his father and Mr. Wintermute got into an argument (and if I remember rightly) McCook rubbed Wintermute's nose in a cuspasor, he pulled his gun and shot and killed McCook.

At the time I attended Mrs. Meyr's school there was beautiful standing timber. Lots of wild plums and buffalo berries. This timber reached far out into what is now the Missouri River, and it was a wonderful camping place for the Indians with their teepees. One day when I was in a teepee with an old Squaw who was preparing dinner I asked her if she was going to put potatoes in the kettle. She said "No" but would show me how to get something to eat. She took a piece of willow about a foot long and an inch and a half in diameter and sharpened the end like a lead pencil. We then went out on the prairie towards what is now Guernsey Farm and looking

at the grass we soon discovered a little bushy plant with a furry stem. This bush had little purple flowers on it. She pushed the sharpened stick down by what I thought was the roots and pryed the plant out of the ground and showed me what she had. It was shaped somewhat like a beet with an outside like a cocoanut, very hard. The inside proved to be white like a cocoanut when she quartered this up I saw the centre was pithy. This pithy centre she cut out and then threw it away. After prying out many of these pumbalaw as she called them she took them back to the teepee and spread them out on canvass in the sun. She put part of them in the kettle for a vegetable, a piece of dog meat and rice consisted a stew.

After leaving Mrs. Meyr's school I attended the Parochial School of Rev. M.V. Hoyt located one block west of Broadway on 4th St. Then I attended the little old brown school house located on Walnut Street between 3rd and 4th. Then to the grade schools on 5th and 6th. I was one of the first scholars to enroll in the Congregational College. Our former Supt. of school Mr. Bristoll in charge.

When I attended the 4th grade school, Yankton had an earthquake. When the building shook we all thought it was Mr. Bristoll shaking the furnace in the basement. The quake was strong enough to shake a jar of butter off the scales of Capt. Lavenders Grocery store.

When I was twelve years old I felt most important being dubbed Captain Miner and it was my duty at the 4th of July parades to form lines of 8 then four and make it quite effective marching by the many riders. All boys rode horses those days. We rode in back of the Indians in the Parade. My appointment was made by Ole Baker who was Sheriff at that time.

When I was eighteen years old Albert Meslow and I made a never to be forgotten trip on horse back up the Missouri River then on to the Niobrara River up to the Kehapaha River to bring down a herd of cattle and 22 head s of horses for Dr. Lwinston and Mr. Van Tassel. Dr. Lwinston was disposing of his ranch at that part of the country.

I remember on this trip of the hanging of Kidd Wade for horse stealing. He was captured at St. Helena and taken up the Niobrara River not far from the Lwinston Ranch. We bought a few head of cattle for Dr. Lwinston from the Lieutenant of the Vigilantes Committee who examined us thoroughly. The questions he asked me plainly showed that they were suspicious of all horse back riders not known to them. He asked me where I was from. I said Yankton. He said "Do you know Madam Coates? and what business is she in?" I said a dance hall. He asked if I knew a man by the name of Bachelor? I replied, "Yes, he is the Methodist Minister." He then said, "O, you are all right you can go".

At the time of one of the last big Indian parades in Yankton there were about 700 of them camped on the prairie north east of the Milwaukee Depot near the old race track. Among them were two old squaws who did house work for my mother when I was a tiny boy. They immediately recognized me saying, " Georgie, Georgie, " and emphasized their speech by drawing a finger across their nose where I had a blue vein.

In later years when I was bailiff under District Attorney Cambell at the time Brave Bear was hanged in the court yard I have a picture in my possession today drawn by him in colored pencil of an Indian on horse back with his photograph pasted on the side of the picture. Just before he went to the gallows he gave me the picture. Just before he went onto the gallows he gave me this and said, " Me go Good Bye " and he pointed up.

In 1889 I was a member of the South Dakota Guards. My Captain was Geo. D. Adamson. Major John T. Coxhead commanding the 3rd batillion. Thos. H. Ruth commanding the Regiment. I received my discharge May 25, 1894. I served in Company E. and C.

The old Fairgrounds and race track were located between the Gym River and the Rhine Creek. When Yankton celebrated on the 4th of July it was always a scene of excitement. Nearly everyone in those days had what he thought was the fastest trotting horse in the country. Ole Baker owner of 'Yankton Girl', Barney Cole from Boh Homme with his famous black called 'Smoker', Wm. Miner owner of 'Dido', L.D.F. Poore of Springfield with his famous horse bought in Watertown and many others. I remember one race, seventeen horses were lined up for the start. When it came to the running races they generally consisted mostly of Indians and their ponies. I remember one race in particular in a free for all they were all Indian horses except two, these being two thorough breds from Sioux City Iowa. Everybody of course expected them to win. Very few bets were placed on the Indians horses, but behold, at the finish down the home stretch came one of the Indian horses looking as though he had never seen a curry comb. The Indian riding him was digging his heels in the horses flanks knocking the wind out of him with every jump, but he brought his horse under the wire at least 60 ft. way ahead of all of them. The best race of all was when they finished with the squaw foot race, the course of which was about a block in length. Everybody would put some money into a hat giving all to the winner. It was a great sight to see them grab up their calico dresses and come down the stretch to the judges stand, and these Indian women were not so slow.

In 1928 I visited Yankton and we stayed with Guy Livingston and wife. Helen and Grace Miner were daughters of my fathers brother Ephriam. Their home was next door to Guy Livingston.

On looking around I naturally wished to see my fathers old chalk rock flour mill that was erected in 1872. I found the mill elevator and ware house occupied by the Guerney Seed Co. with a Broadcasting Station nearby.

While calling on Mrs. Ohlman I was reminded of the many happy nights my playmates and I had coasting and tobogganing on the long hill between her residence and the river. We called this Shannons Hill. Back of Mrs. Ohlman's residence along the bluff about a quarter of a mile there were many old trees on the edge of the bluff used by the Indians in the early days. We used to pick up beads and relics. Sioux Indians place their dead in a tree or on top of a platform held by four posts. Later these are taken down and put in the ground.

When I asked for my mail at your Post Office I was recognized by Mr. Carr at the window who said he remembered me as the best snare drummer he ever heard.

My relatives Harry Livingston and wife, Everett and wife showed us such a good time that I wished I could come and live in Yankton. Guy Livingston had such a large home that would have been a good place to live. His son drove us to many places of interest and we had many real old fashioned picnics.

I also had the good fortune to meet Chris Steinbach, Anthony Regan, Judge Richey, Henry Luebke, Charlie Bradley, Will Bruce, all old boyhood friends.

At the time I met Will Bader in his grocery store on Broadway I could not help think of the days gone by when the big stockade was built around what is now the grocery store he has and the Merchants Hotel. At that time stood a chalk stone hotel owned by Mr. Ash.

The feeling of anxiety at that time being eased up when Strike the Rea the Indian Chief called off what might have been a repetition of what happened at New Ulm one of the worst massacres of the early days.

Thank you very much for the opportunity and privilege of writing to you.

Give my best regards to Miss Fishbeck.

Yours truly,
(signed) George H. Miner