

*From stories told  
to Louis Gray by Captain Miller.*

## MAN OF THE SEA - CAPTAIN FRANK L. MILLER

(Thirty Years on Sailing Ships - Thirty Years on Steamships)



"A sailor's first duty is to learn the sea, not the ship. Under sail, he learns the habits of currents, waves, winds and storms. It is a hard life but one which makes a sailor."

—Willard Price

Frank L. Miller was born in Boston, October 20, 1855. The Miller family moved to Rockland when little Frank was an infant and remained there for thirteen years. At this time Frank's father was engaged in "coasting," that is, outfitting a small vessel with merchandise which he sold as he sailed along the Maine coast eastward from Rockland then returning to the home port with a different sort of goods.

When the boy, Frank, was thirteen years old, he went with his father on coasting trips. On leaving Rockland, their vessel, of twenty tons burden, was outfitted with dry-goods and groceries for the people in seaside villages. From these village folk who came on board to trade Captain Miller used to buy old metal, old rubber, eggs and fish to take back to Rockland. There being no provision for refrigeration, no fish could be carried except dried fish which brought a fair retail price of six cents a pound.

On these coasting trips Captain Miller's vessel, the Fox, used to put in to Prospect Harbor. There the Captain and his son, Frank, made many friends and decided it would be a pleasant place to make a home.



One incident which happened in Prospect Harbor made a lasting impression on the boy. In 1869 Captain Justice Bickford and his brother, Obediah, killed a seventy foot whale off Schoodic Point and towed it into Prospect Harbor. Country folk came from miles around to see this amazing sight, a seventy-foot fin-backed whale pulled up in Clark's Cove. The Bickfords, after extracting a thousand dollars worth of oil, set the carcass adrift. A man in Buck's Harbor pulled the carcass ashore and got a hundred dollars for bones and sinow. Sam Brown of Prospect Harbor soöoped up oily drippings from the water and sold this for a hundred dollars. Village people dipped up blubber and fed it to their hens and pigs. It is said that for some time eggs and pork tasted of whale oil.

On the second coasting trip for the boy, Frank, the vessel was cast away at Cutler. Frank's father had taken Isaac Moore as pilot. The vessel had put into the harbor and was anchored there when a terrific squall struck her. The painter broke and the boat was set adrift. Isaac Moore took a rope and braving the high wind and foaming sea, swam ashore where he made fast the rope. Then the captain and his son, neither of whom could swim, went ashore hand over hand on the rope. This gale of October 1869 was a real hurricane. Forests and small buildings along that part of the coast were blown down and many vessels were sent ashore. When asked how it was that he who had chosen a sea-faring life had never felt it necessary to learn to swim, Captain Frank answered, "I never feared the sea. I took God in partnership and left it all to Him."

After the loss of the vessel, the Fox, Captain Miller took his family to live in Bunkers' Harbor. Here the father bought materials and made eighty lobster traps and with these he set up his two small boys in business. Charlie was ten and Frank fifteen. The boys lobstered all one summer, selling their lobsters to the smacks for canning. They were paid 55 cents per hundred wieght. The boys used to spear lobsters, boil and sell them for 5 cents each. The boys had worked hard all one summer when a hurricane at sea caused them to lose all their traps. It was after this hurricane that Uncle Mel Cole, light-keeper at Petit Manan, said that as far as eye could see there was only white water.

The Miller family did not remain long in Bunkers' Harbor. They moved to Birch Harbor where the mother and small son, Charlie, lived in a house with the family of Cod Handy, son of William Handy. The boy Frank went to sea with Captain John Lindsey sailing from Calais to Boston, a trip that took fifty-five days. The vessel was frozen in at Neponset so it was necessary to cut ice all the way out. They kept the ice for drinking water. On this trip in the vessel, the John Tyler, they took lumber to Boston and there at T-Wharf they loaded freight for Calais.

There followed short voyages on small vessels: on the Sea Pigeon from Steuben to Rockland with Captain William Handy



and Captain Seavy who came from Digby, N. S. Here Frank was paid \$17 a month for being chief mate. This vessel was employed by the Portland Packing Company and was owned largely by Prospect Harbor people and by a few from Portland. Then there were voyages on the bark, Tekelet. (It was on the last voyage of the bark that Stephen Clark and Captain Winslow Allen lost their lives.)

The first long voyage for Frank, now a young man of nineteen, was on the vessel, Marina, built at Columbia Falls for Joseph Handy, Marcus Handy and Daniel Deasy. Among the other persons who invested money in this vessel were Eugene Hale and Monroe Young of Ellsworth. In 1775 the Marina made her first voyage, from Portland and Boston to Cienfuegos, Cuba. The roster consisted of Captain-Daniel Deasy, 1st Mate-Marcus Handy, 2nd Mate-Welch Moore, Steward-John Coombs, Seamen-Frank Norris, Frank Miller, Del Cole, George Young (son of Monroe Young), Joe Crowley. The Marina made three trips to Cuba before she made an ocean crossing.

The first ocean crossing for the Marina was a voyage to Liverpool with a load of Mexican mahogany. The run to Liverpool was made in thirty days. In Liverpool the docks are locks so the vessel rests in "high tide" all the time. On the return trip, Liverpool to Gloucester, with a cargo of salt the vessel, battling heavy winds, came by way of the northern passage and required sixty-five days to make port. On this return trip the Marina lay over for three days in Prospect Harbor, taking shelter from heavy gales, before proceeding to East Gloucester.

On the next voyage of this vessel, Marcus Handy was the Captain and Luere Deasy came on as an ordinary seaman, his first sea experience. His father, Captain Daniel Deasy had told the mate to show the boy no favors. On the contrary, to treat him rough. The ship was chartered to go to City Point, Virginia, General Grant's Headquarters during the Civil War. There she loaded tobacco in hogsheads for Genoa, Italy. The stevedores at City Point were negroes, former slaves. When the vessel was loaded, she sailed down the James River and in twenty-two days she was in the Strait of Gibraltar. Marcus Handy, the captain, had his wife Linda and little son Dan, Welch Moore was 1st Mate, Joe Handy, William Handy's son, 2nd Mate. It was Christmas when they passed through the Strait. Welch Moore, a harsh master, was for all work and no fun but because it was Christmas, he said they might celebrate. Lue Deasy brought out from his sea bag two jars of baked-apple-berry preserves given him by his mother. (These berries came from a heath near Corea.) Two Swedes, seamen taken on for this trip, knew all about this kind of berry, their native berry, the heath mulberry.

The boat had sprung a leak in the heavy seas and gales in the Lion Gulf. Rats were on the masts. Seven hogsheads of tobacco were spoiled. The boat had to be caulked, so she was put into dry dock at Genoa. Pitch and tar everywhere! The men wore

"Son Dan"  
my father -  
the childrens  
great grand father



stockings on their hands. At Leghorn they took on marble, hoisted by man power, a treadwheel. It was necessary to use wood for dunnage in stowing the marble. The wood was bought near a tavern. Frank Miller and others had to guard it. A freshet with very high tide made it difficult to get out of this port.

The return trip was by way of the northern passage—a long hard trip. Coffee gave out. The cook used to serve boiled water sweetened with molasses for warm drink. Food was low. The cook made "cracker hash," crackers fried in grease taken from the top of boiled beef. Shoes gave out. Lue Deasy (age seventeen) called his shoes "scuppers." Welch Moore caught two cod off the Grand Banks. On the 10th of May the vessel was back in New York. (She had left City Point December 3, '75.) The cargo which was unloaded at New York consisted of marble, pumice stone, garlic, rags and fleas. Because of the harsh treatment at the hands of Welch Moore, Lue Deasy never wanted to go to sea again.

In 1875, with Marcus Handy-Captain, Welch Moore-1st mate, Frank Miller-2nd mate (Captain Daniel Deasy was always the agent for the Marina when he did not go as Captain.) the vessel went to Progreso, Yucatan by the way of Jamaica. The cargo to Jamaica was flour delivered to a Jew named Levi. Then the vessel proceeded to Yucatan with ballast of rock, fifty tons, loaded by negro women wading in water to their waists working for 25 cents a day. At Progreso, the cargo was hemp. This sometimes gets afire when wet. The Indians brought palm leaves to place between the bales when they were stowed away. It took twenty-five days to sail from Progreso to Havana, light winds. A hurricane was encountered on the voyage from Havana to New York.

Soon after this, the Marina, still in the able hands of Marcus Handy-Captain, went to Seville with hogsheads of tobacco. There were on board five seamen and three officers, Frank Miller acting as 1st mate. There the boat was one of many to be forced up on top of concrete quays by a mighty freshet. The sailors showed great resourcefulness in working to prevent damage to their vessels. It was weeks before the freshet went down, leaving twelve inches of mud on the docks. The boat was then loaded with wine, olives and bales of corkwood for the return voyage.

Another trip which Frank Miller made in the Marina was to Montevideo, Uruguay. From his experience on these trips he acquired a deep admiration and affection for Marcus Handy. Of him he says, "Marcus was one of the finest of men—an excellent disciplinarian, a master navigator, an intelligent, kind and considerate officer whose orders everyone was happy to execute." Frank was not on the Marina in Cienfuegos in 1881 when Marcus was stricken with yellow fever and died at the astonishing age of ~~twenty-eight~~. *thirty-three*



Toward Captain Daniel Deasy, Frank Miller, now nearly ready to become a captain himself, harbored sentiments of warm friendliness and deep gratitude. Of him, he says, "Captain Deasy was so good to everyone, so full of advice and encouragement for the young boys who shipped out as seamen. Those of us who followed his advice were benefitted both morally and, in the end, financially." Daniel Deasy had learned to handle a square rigger from Dr. David Small. Dr. Small was a naval officer in the Civil War after which he bought and sold ships. He bought the biggest brig afloat, the C. C. Sweeney,

Some admonitions passed from Captains Small to Deasy to Miller were:

Don't ever tempt God Almighty.

Don't ever think you are right without finding out by sinking the lead.

Don't own anything that is not worth insuring.