

Townsend Miller

Miller, Townsend Clare: Born June 3, 1919, in Gainesville, Texas, Townsend Miller was a twice-weekly columnist for the *Austin American Statesman* from 1972 to 1983. He covered the newly emerging progressive country music scene in Austin and helped to bring national recognition to the progressive country movement.

As a child, Miller became interested in country music through a local radio program, which featured the Light Crust Doughboys, whose members included Bob Wills and Milton Brown. As a young man, Miller attended North Texas State University, where he earned a B.S. in Journalism. After college, he joined the Air Force and served as a navigator with the 8th Air Force Division in World War II. During the 1950s, he worked as an editor at *Texas Game and Fish* magazine.

In 1972, Miller began a new career as a stockbroker for the Merrill Lynch Investment Firm and decided to dedicate his nights to bar hopping around Austin, sampling the local country music talent. He soon began writing columns about the city's music scene for the *Austin American Statesman*. As he chronicled the growing outlaw and progressive country music genres in Austin, Miller became a fixture of those movements himself. A number of Texas musicians, including Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings, were on familiar terms with the columnist. Bobby Earl Smith of Freda and the Firedogs, a long-haired hippie band that played traditional country music, recalls that Miller often helped find work for bands that did not fit the traditional country music mould by recommending them to club owners.

Miller's columns were often upbeat and enthusiastic. This led to some criticism of his writing style, although he did not consider himself so much an actual music critic as a journalist, reporting on the growth of an industry he loved. He also was well known for refraining from direct criticism of bands in his column, preferring instead to provide constructive suggestions to musicians in private. Although his personal preference was for more traditional country music, he was supportive of the new sounds ushered in by progressive and outlaw country artists of the 1970s.

Miller wrote his last music column in 1983 and retired from Merrill Lynch in 1984. He remained active in the Texas country music scene after his retirement, and many of the performers would still meet with him before and after events, even though he was no longer part of the press. Tragically, he died during the early morning hours of April 2, 1989, in an accidental car fire. During his life, he helped to foster and promote the growth of an industry that bolsters Austin's claim to being the "Live Music Capital of the World."

Amanda Deen