

George Miller

George Miller was born about 1830 in Bavaria, Germany.¹ His parentage and immigration are unknown. He may have been the brewery keeper in Placerville, Boise, Idaho Territory, in the 1870 census. It is certain that he was a saloon keeper in Silver Reef, Washington, Utah Territory, in 1879.² He served on the fire committee³ that year and provided a generous offering of whiskey and cigars to the newspaper office.⁴

The Miller saloon, called the Elkhorn, was a wooden building that faced west on Main Street. It was across the street from Wells Fargo Office, with a dance hall adjoining, and just north of the Louder store.⁵ The jail was just a few steps east of the saloon, which often served as a courtroom. The saloon was most noted for a pair of elk horns mounted above the doorway (they are now on display at the Silver Reef Museum). George was known for serving free salty foods so his clients would spend more on drinks.

Running a saloon has its dangers, and there were several episodes involving the property. In 1879, the case of Baron and Newell vs. Westfall and Kirk was proceeding in the justice's court, held in the dance hall adjoining the Miller saloon.⁶ Jack Truby entered the building with his hat on. Deputy John Diamond ordered him to remove it. Truby refused and the matter was taken outside, where they faced off and shot at each other. Both men died, but at the inquest it was found that others were involved as Truby was shot both in the front and the back with different caliber bullets.⁷

George is listed as a saloon keeper in Silver Reef on the 1880 census⁸ and dealt in "liquors" in the business directory there.⁹ Miller's Elkhorn Saloon was located on Main Street, next to the drug store.¹⁰ George provided free salty food at the bar so his customers would spend more on drinks.¹¹ George served as treasurer of the Odd Fellows.¹² He had a tame magpie who knew tricks and liked to perform.¹³

George continued in the liquor business¹⁴ and was listed as a cigar manufacturer in Silver Reef in 1884.¹⁵ In 1887, Abner Polleys and Erb¹⁶ Stewart met in front of Miller's saloon and had an argument about a chair. It seems Stewart had taken a chair from the saloon and carried it triumphantly about town. Polleys tried to get the chair from Stewart and in the struggle it was broken. Polleys as willing to

¹ United States Census, 1880.

² Utah Directory and Gazetteer for 1879-1880, p. 386.

³ Silver, Saints and Sinners, by Proctor and Shirts, 1991, p. 127.

⁴ *Silver Reef Miner*, 1 October 1879, p. 3.

⁵ Saga of Three Towns, by Marietta M. Mariger, p. 96.

⁶ Ibid; *Fairplay Flume* [Colorado], 24 April, 1879; Memories of Silver Reef, in Utah Historical Quarterly, 1930, p. 117.

⁷ Memories of Silver Reef, in Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol 3, No 4, p. 117.

⁸ United States Census, 1880.

⁹ Pacific Coast Directory for 1880-1881, p. 66.

¹⁰ *Silver Reef Miner*, 16 April 1882, p. 2; Utah Directory for 1883-1884, pp. 276-277.

¹¹ Memories of Silver Reef, Utah Historical Quarterly, 1934, p. 114.

¹² *Silver Reef Miner*, 13 October 1880.

¹³ *Silver Reef Miner*, 8 October 1881, p. 1.

¹⁴ Pacific Coast Directory for 1883-84, pp. 1348-1349.

¹⁵ Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Wyoming and Arizona Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1884, pp. 462, 667.

¹⁶ His name was Urban Stewart according to the *Salt Lake Herald*, 6 December 1887, p. 8.

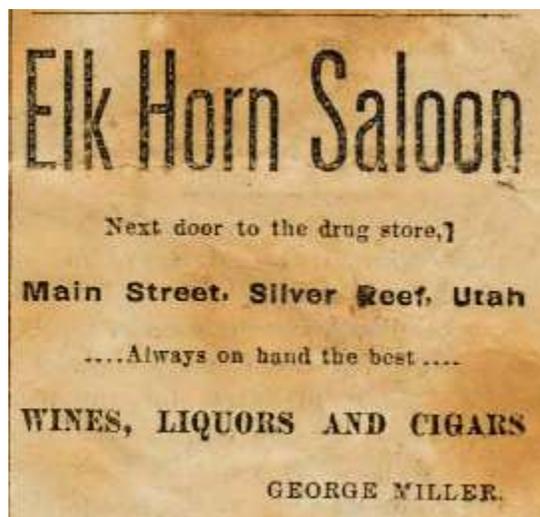
pay for the chair, but found the saloon locked. He returned to where Stewart was and exchanged hard and abusive words with him. Polleys sat down on a bench and Stewart struck him a powerful blow, knocking him backward onto some projecting rocks. The force of the blow carried Stewart over on top of Polleys, whom he pummeled frightfully. When released, Polleys was insensible. He was carried home where he died three hours later. During this time Stewart continued his spree about town, but was finally arrested by an officer and locked up.

A coroner's inquest stated the "deceased came to his death from injuries done at the hands of Erb Stewart, with malicious intent." Stewart waived examination and was bound over in \$1,000 bond to await the action of the grand jury.¹⁷ He denied any malice in the killing,¹⁸ but was indicted for manslaughter, re-arrested and placed under \$2,000 bonds to await trial.¹⁹

Another incident hit closer to home, when James McClane assaulted George with attempt to kill in 1889. The chief deputy from Beaver took McClane to the penitentiary for safe keeping. The grand jury indicted him and the hearing took place in the Beaver court.²⁰

One client made too much use of George's free snacks without drinking and George hit him with a billiard cue. The assault festered and the client got a six-shooter and went to the rear of the saloon one Sunday. George was sitting alone under the shade of a tree. The fellow "flourished his gun and called, 'Say your prayers, I have got you now.' Miller in a high pitched voice, said, 'Well, I iss here. Shoot away.' Two shots rang out but went wild."²¹

George stayed on after the camp was almost deserted. He grew very stout as the years went by (about 300 pounds). He could hardly get through an ordinary door, special chairs had to be made for him, and he was able to get to his feet only with great difficulty. George died in Silver Reef sometime after 1889.²²



(Image from the *Silver Reef Miner*, 16 April 1882, p. 2)

¹⁷ *Deseret News*, 7 December 1887, p. 751.

¹⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 7 December 1887, p. 1.

¹⁹ *Deseret News*, 14 December 1887, p. 761.

²⁰ *Salt Lake Herald*, 21 December 1889, p. 8.

²¹ *Memories of Silver Reef, Utah Historical Quarterly*, 1930, p. 114.

²² *Memories of Silver Reef, Utah Historical Quarterly*, 1930, p. 114.



(Image from [raptorguy14.deviantart.com](https://www.deviantart.com/raptorguy14))



George Miller's Elk Horn Saloon in Silver Reef, Utah Territory (image from [wchsutah.org](https://www.wchsutah.org))



(Image from *The Archaeology of Abandonment: Ghost Towns of the American West*, by Paige Peyton, p. 262).