

# North Carolina Map Blog

A great place to discuss North Carolina's cartographic history

## C. M. Miller: North Carolina's preeminent county map maker

Posted on **15 January 2019**

C.M. Miller authored at least eleven North Carolina county maps (nine separate counties) during the early 20th Century. Who was this forgotten cartographer, and which counties did he map?



— C. M. Miller, from the *Winston-Salem Journal*, May 17, 1908.

Calvin Milas Miller (C. M. Miller on his maps) was born “a poor country boy” in Rowan County on 10 April 1865, presumably in the Rockwell community a few miles southeast of Salisbury. Although he (briefly?) attended [North Carolina College](#) in Mt. Pleasant, Miller apparently became a “civil engineer and pioneer road builder in North Carolina” through on-the-job training. A biographical note published in 1908 states:

*He acquired his education by hard work. He started low down in his profession, but has steadily risen to be one of the most widely known engineers in North Carolina.*<sup>1</sup>

C.M. Miller's first occupation was not as surveyor or engineer, but as a school teacher. On his 23rd birthday in 1888, Miller closed a school he was operating:

*Mr. C.M. Miller will close his school in District No. 7, on the 9th inst. Mr. Miller is a first grade teacher, and his system of teaching has given general satisfaction. Several of the children, at the beginning of the school not knowing their letters, have spelled through their book and are now reading very well. Advanced students have made fully as much progress.*<sup>2</sup>

Upon closing his school, Miller accepted a dual post as a Salisbury engineer and a Rowan County engineer and surveyor. He was promoted to County Surveyor in March 1892:

*In our report of the county commissioners' meeting last week it was stated that Milas C. Miller had been elected to fill the position of county surveyor made vacant by the resignation of B.C. Arey. It turns up that it should have been Calvin M. Miller, of Rockwell. It was not our fault, as we copied the name directly from the records and printed it as it was there. Mr. Miller, by the way, is one of Rowan's rising young men. He has vim and business and will doubtless fill the place with credit.*<sup>3</sup>

Miller's occupation is listed as "Surveyor Land" in the 1900 census. In June 1901, at the direction of the Salisbury board of aldermen, Miller began work on a map of Salisbury.<sup>4</sup> This is the earliest known published map by C. M. Miller.



- Map of Salisbury N.C. (1902/1903). Drawn by C. M. Miller. The map measures approximately 4 x 7 feet.

Calvin M. Miller, "Butner Map of Salisbury," Edith Clark History Room, accessed October 27, 2018, <https://edithclark.omeka.net/items/show/10>. (The Butner appellation does not refer to

anyone associated with the creation or publication of the map, but to the family who donated this copy of the map to the Rowan Public Library.) A low resolution image of the entire map is available [here](#), and a series of about a dozen photos of sections of the map are available on these web pages: [page one](#) and [page two](#).

Unfortunately, Miller's Salisbury map is not dated, but it was likely completed no later than 1902. By March 1903, Miller had been "engaged for some time" on a map of Rowan County; his completed manuscript map was presented to the county commissioners on 6 July 1903, and "\$50 was allowed for changes".<sup>5</sup>

The map of Rowan County apparently was not formally published until early 1904.<sup>6</sup> The following newspaper announcement was printed on page four in *The Morning Post* (Raleigh, NC), on Thursday, 14 April 1904:

### ***New Map of Rowan County***

*Salisbury, N.C., April 13. — Special.*

*County Surveyor C.M. Miller of Rowan has sold a large number of maps of the county which he completed about a week ago and the first shipment of which he has just received from the Rand, McNally Company of Chicago. The map, which is one of a very few county maps in North Carolina, is complete and unique in every respect, showing as it does each township, village, public road, all rivers and creeks, and shows the name and location of each land owner in the county. The granite and copper belts are also shown, as well as all churches, school houses and mills in the county. It is pronounced one of the most complete pieces of work of the kind ever exhibited in this section. It required about one and one-half years' work to get it out.*

Within two weeks, the State Librarian acknowledged receipt of one of Miller's Rowan County maps, and lamented the paucity of such county maps in the State Library:

### **COUNTY MAPS FOR THE STATE LIBRARY**

*The Post is glad to receive and publish the following from its good friend, Hon. M.C. Sherrill, State Librarian:*

*"Raleigh, N.C., April 27, 1904.*

*To the Editor:—*

*I am in receipt of a beautiful map of Rowan county, presented to the State Library by Mr. C.M. Miller, Civil Engineer and Draughtsman, Salisbury, N.C. It is needless for me to say that Mr. Miller has done his work well. Persons needing work in his line will do well to write to him. I will thank the newspapers of the State to call attention to the fact that only eight (8) counties of North Carolina have county maps in the State Library, to-wit: Bladen, Catawba, Moore, New Hanover, Randolph, Robeson, Wake and now Rowan. It would be well for each county to send in a map. Often persons call in the State Library to see a map of certain counties and I am unable to accommodate them.*

*Churches, school houses, copper, gold, granite, etc., are located in the Rowan map, a good advertisement of Rowan County.*

*Yours truly,*

M.O. SHERRILL

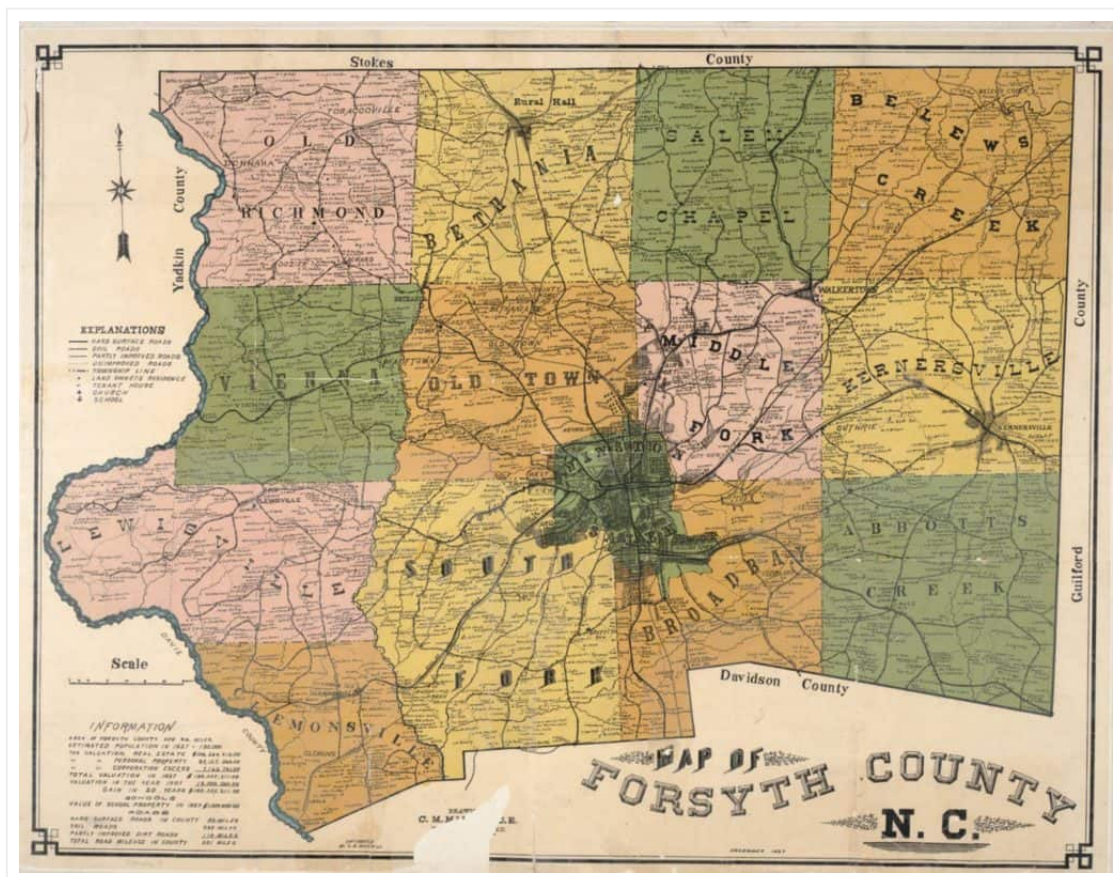
*State Librarian."*

*Mr. Miller has certainly done his county – Rowan – and the State in a sense, a real service in placing this map in the State Library, and we are surprised to learn, as we do from Mr. Sherrill, that such a map of each of the counties of the State is not there. The cost of preparing a map of a county cannot be enough to approach being a burden, and each county should have the work done, and by all means have a good one, showing locations of churches, schools, and industrial plants and mineral or other deposits as far as may be, in the State Library.*

Calvin Miller, more than any other map maker of his era, certainly did his part to provide current maps of North Carolina counties. In the span of approximately ten years, Miller surveyed and published maps of the following counties:

- |               |            |
|---------------|------------|
| 1. Rowan      | 1904, 1913 |
| 2. Forsyth    | 1907, 1927 |
| 3. Union      | 1907       |
| 4. Guilford   | 1908       |
| 5. Stanly     | 1909       |
| 6. Durham     | 1910       |
| 7. Davidson   | 1910       |
| 8. Cabarrus   | 1911       |
| 9. Rockingham | 1912       |

Several of the above county maps can be seen on the [NC Maps web site](#).



— Map of Forsyth County N. C., drawn by C. M. Miller, C. E., Winston-Salem, NC, December 1927. This example is in the Forsyth County Library and the image is courtesy of the North Carolina Maps digitization project. Click on the image above to see high resolution image on the NC Maps web site.

Due to the scarcity of Miller's 1904 map of Rowan County (many copies had burned in a house fire a few months after delivery), Miller published a revised map of Rowan County in 1913. A change in Forsyth County's western boundary (adding territory to the county) was one factor prompting a 1927 revised edition of Miller's Forsyth County map.

C. M. Miller wasn't just a county map publisher. In addition to the Salisbury map mentioned above, he also drew several other town maps, frequently for the purpose of improving land tax records, as in Spencer:

*An official map of the town has been completed by City Engineer C. M. Miller, showing every building as well as every street and lot in Spencer. By the use of the map many thousands of dollars worth of valuable property will be taxed which has heretofore escaped the attention of the tax assessors as well as that of the town officials.<sup>7</sup>*

Calvin Miller provided private and industrial property surveys and topographic surveys for roads. His work as a civil engineer included the construction of roads and bridges.

*Mr. Miller also has to his credit another fine piece of highway construction in Western North Carolina. He built the now famous turnpike from Lenoir to Blowing Rock.<sup>8</sup>*

Miller's work covered a broad geographic territory, from Union County bordering South Carolina, to Surry, Stokes, and Rockingham counties bordering Virginia; from the Blue Ridge to the easternmost point of Wake County. After unsuccessfully lobbying for a position in Forsyth County, Miller was appointed Wake County Highway Engineer in 1915. Miller and his family lived in Raleigh for the next 7 years.

During 1922 political campaigning, Calvin Miller bore the brunt of criticism from the political opponents of his superior. When the opposing party took control of the Board of Commissioners after the elections in November, Miller was informed that his contract would not be renewed in May 1923. Miller made a pre-emptive move, submitting his resignation in December 1922. The following year, Wake County hired a young engineer for \$2,500/year, a substantial savings compared to Miller's salary of \$3,600 plus perks. Calvin Miller wasted no time procuring employment. He once again offered his services to Forsyth County, proposing a salary of \$3,600. When the current Forsyth County highway engineer refused to take a \$300 cut in salary, the position was given to Calvin Miller. He served in that capacity until the early 1930s when the legislature transferred all highway construction and maintenance to a State office. Calvin Miller remained in Winston-Salem until his death in March, 1947. He was buried in Salisbury.<sup>9</sup>

Want to read more? A bazillion newspaper clippings mentioning Calvin Miller and/or his maps have been transcribed and are available, in chronological order, [via this pdf](#).

Want to search for more? The Rand McNally archives, at the Newberry Library in Chicago, could contain records pertaining to Calvin Miller's business dealings with that company. Rand McNally's name is not found on Miller's county maps, but they were the publisher according to one newspaper article. County commissioners' minutes for Rowan, Wake, Forsyth, and any county for which he published a map may contain additional information. Comments, questions, and especially corrections are greatly appreciated. Please use the "What's on your mind?" comment box below.

## References

1. This quote and those in the above paragraph are from a special "industrial edition" of the *Winston-Salem Journal*, Sunday, May 17, 1908, p11, in an article titled: "Mr. C. M. Miller / Rowan County's Engineer Who is Well Known Throughout The State as a Maker of Maps." ↩
2. North Carolina Herald (Salisbury) – Wednesday, March 14, 1888, p1 ↩
3. Carolina Watchman (Salisbury) – Thursday, March 17, 1892, p3 ↩
4. The Charlotte Observer – Sunday, June 9, 1901, p3 ↩
5. The Charlotte Observer, Tuesday, March 24, 1903, p3; also Salisbury Evening Sun – Tuesday, July 7, 1903, p1 ↩
6. As early as 1909, Laney et al give the date of the Rowan County map as 1903 (Laney, Francis Baker, and Katharine Hill Wood. 1909. *Bibliography of North Carolina geology, mineralogy and geography: with a list of maps*. Raleigh: E.M. Uzzell & Co., State Printers and Binders; Entry #654, p348). Perhaps the map was published with a date imprint of 1903. However, the earliest mention in newspapers of the published Rowan County map is 6 April 1904 issue of the Charlotte Observer, stating that the first copies of the map arrived in Salisbury on 4 April 1904. ↩
7. Greensboro Daily News, Friday, June 28, 1907, p3. ↩
8. Winston-Salem Journal, Sunday, Mar 04, 1923, Page 7 ↩
9. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/86671229/calvin-milas-miller> ↩

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ONE THOUGHT ON “C. M. MILLER: NORTH CAROLINA’S PREEMINENT COUNTY MAP MAKER”



Larry Tise

on **15 January 2019 at 10:57** said:

Thanks for the back ground on C. M. Miller. As a native of Winston Salem, I always assumed that he derived from one of the Moravian Millers who live in great abundance in the Forsyth County area. To my mind, the precision of Miller’s maps bespoke the same kind of precision that went into Wachovia maps from 1750s to the late nineteenth century. But from this rendition, it is clear that Rowan’s C. M. Miller picked up and made good use of the century and a half of great cartography that already existed in Moravian Salem.

I’ve used Miller’s county maps extensively and they are really the best early county maps we have for all of those counties.

Many thanks.

Larry E. Tise

Philadelphia, PA

ECU History