

Joaquin Miller, Poet Laureate of Oregon

By Thomas Leander Moorhouse

Joaquin Miller was an Oregon writer and poet who first found fame in Britain by portraying himself as a flamboyant western frontiersman, telling colorfully exaggerated stories, wearing buckskin clothing and a Mexican sombrero, and, later in life, sporting a flowing white beard. Amateur Pendleton photographer Thomas Leander "Lee" Moorhouse took this photograph in about 1907, perhaps when Miller was visiting eastern Oregon.

In 1852, Cincinnatus Hiner Miller (1837-1913) moved with his parents to the Willamette Valley. He lived in various parts of the state and at one time was the editor of the Eugene *Democratic Register*. Later on, he and his second wife, poet Minnie Myrtle, lived in a cabin in Canyon City, Grant County, which has since been preserved as a tourist attraction and museum.

In 1870, Miller left his wife and Oregon, moving to San Francisco and then Great Britain in an effort to find fame as a poet and writer. He changed his name to Joaquin in honor of a legendary California outlaw, Joaquin Murieta, and found success with the 1871 publication of his book, *Songs of the Sierras*. In early 1880s, Miller returned to the United States and lived for a while in a cabin he built in Washington D.C. before moving to Oakland, California.

A tireless self-promoter, Miller told stories about gold mining and Indian fighting that probably had little connection to his actual life history. Accused of being a liar, Miller reportedly responded "I am not a liar. I simply exaggerate the truth." Some critics have asserted that Miller's literary work was unoriginal and mediocre.

Further Reading: Lewis, Nathaniel. "Authentic Reproduction: The Picturesque Joaquin Miller." *Arizona Quarterly* 57:2, 2001): 1-31.

Gafe, Steven L. "Lee Moorehouse: Photographer of the Inland Empire." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 98, 1997-1998: 426-77.

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