

The Miller Fund

Queenie Miller (nee Tapson) – Born May 1899
Eric Miller – Born April 1907



When Eric and Queenie Miller were born in England no one could have imagined the ongoing legacy that these two people would leave a world away from their birthplace to the community of South Canterbury some 85 years later.

Before their deaths, good friend Alan Hubbard, who recognising that they had no family to inherit, encouraged them to give back to South Canterbury. The Millers did just that, leaving the majority of their estate to the community. This gift was passed to the Aoraki Foundation to protect in 2013. It was to be invested as an endowment fund with the income generated each year being distributed for the benefit of the community.

As at 2023 over \$350,000 has been given back to the South Canterbury community from the Miller Fund. Under the careful stewardship of the Aoraki Foundation the capital has also grown, and the legacy of Queenie and Eric Miller will continue for generations to come.

The Millers

Eric was born in Croydon, Surrey, England. We know he, his brothers and mother immigrated to New Zealand in 1927, when Eric was 20 years old.



Eric Miller as a young man on arrival to New Zealand in 1927.
New Zealand Herald, Vol. LXIV, Issue 19813, 7 December 1927, Page 10.

There is some speculation as to where they went immediately, but we do know that Eric met and married his wife, Queenie Tapson in Dunedin in October of 1931 when he was 24 years old.

Queenie was born in London in 1899, an only child to John and Clara Tapson. Immigration records show their family arriving in Toronto Canada in 1907, confusingly, Queenie is listed as 9 ½ years old – it maybe that they arrived in 1908 or we have an incorrect birthdate. Information on the Tapson family arriving in New Zealand shows no record of Queenie, this is believed to be due to her age at the time of heading to New Zealand. We assume she was over the age of 18 and no longer considered a dependent. It is thought that maybe she was listed as a servant to be able to immigrate with her family.

In or around 1942, Eric and Queenie were living in Hanmer Springs where it is believed Eric was a truck driver and Queenie is understood to have been a nurse (source Graham Murray). Eric was also a truck driver in the Second World War and he sometimes alluded to this when chatting with his staff over the years.

By 1947 the Millers were residing in Hanmer until (possibly the mid-50s) they relocated to Timaru, where they stayed for the rest of their lives.

Eric and his brother Basil formed Millers Transport, initially with a lime spreader and a delivery truck, this fleet grew over the years and upon the closing of Miller Transport they had 20 trucks.



Queenie Miller and the lime spreader. Circa 1960s.

Eric and Queenie lived a very modest life and had no children thus, many of their staff became their family. All are in agreement, that the Millers were amazing people. Eric was tough, but fair. Willing to give you a chance to prove yourself and grow as an individual. Queenie is remembered as a quiet force, kind and generous and both are remembered as having strong faith and tenacity.

In 1960, Eric was involved in an on-farm accident whilst loading a truck with wheat sacks at the Perkins property “Hadlow Park”. The bag crane had not been attached correctly, it snapped and hit Eric breaking his neck in one place and his back in two – rendering him a paraplegic for the rest of his life. He was in Dunedin hospital for a year after the accident and upon his return home, Queenie looked after him until her death in December of 1977.

Whilst this was a setback this did not slow Eric down! His brother Basil was keen to sell the transport at the time of the accident, but Eric decided that he would continue, so, he and Queenie bought Basil’s share in the business and continued to run and grow the business until closing in 1972.

After the clearing sale of their business in 1972, the Millers bought a new caravan and regularly travelled across New Zealand. They loved to see the sights and often at camp sites offers of help to park up were made when it was seen Eric was in a wheelchair. Eric would smartly park up their caravan and let them know he needed no help – a man whose determination is clear from his success in life.

When Queenie passed in 1977, Eric was devastated – “where is my shadow” he was heard to say. However, he continued his travels around the countryside whilst he could and continued to live a humble and happy life. Eric passed away in 1992 aged 85 years, after a life of service and hard work, to join his beloved Queenie in repose.



Queenie and Eric Miller’s final resting place in Timaru cemetery which has been kindly restored and maintained by the Aoraki Foundation.



As an organisation, the Aoraki Foundation is humbled by the gift of Eric and Queenie Miller. A gift that continues to provide so much to the people of South Canterbury every year. Through telling this story we hope that the memory of the Millers, along with their generosity, will continue to live on for generations to come.

Thank you to Sid McAuley, whose generous gift has enabled the production of this storyboard.



Millers

Eric and his brother Basil ran Miller Transport from early 1947, in the Hamner Springs region. At an unknown date they relocated to Timaru and ran the company from their long-term premises at King Street. Working in delivery and rural stock cartage, they began with one truck for town delivery and one lime spreader.



Eric and Basil in their original lime spreader.



A Miller truck showcasing their innovative metal stock crate.

Eric and Basil were a great duo. Eric was more of a logistics and organiser, while Basil was a skilled engineer and creator of innovations that made their business a truly pioneering one.

The brother's Miller were exceptionally hardworking. Many of their staff have talked of receiving calls from Eric at all hours of the night, ensuring his team were safely travelling the South Island, and when they turned up at the transport the next day Eric was always, already there. They often wondered if he slept at all!

Over the years their innovations saw the creation of the bag lift crane, the metal stock crate, and the purchase of many Austin, Mercedes and Bedford trucks that were all modified onsite to V6 or V8 Cummings diesel engines – very insightful for a transport at the time – to allow them to carry heavier loads in less time.

Whilst the Miller Transport company grew from strength to strength, in 1960 tragedy befell. Eric was involved in an on-farm accident – rendering him a paraplegic for the rest of his life.

Basil felt that the transport should be dissolved so that Eric could take things easy but instead Eric and Queenie bought Basil out of the business.

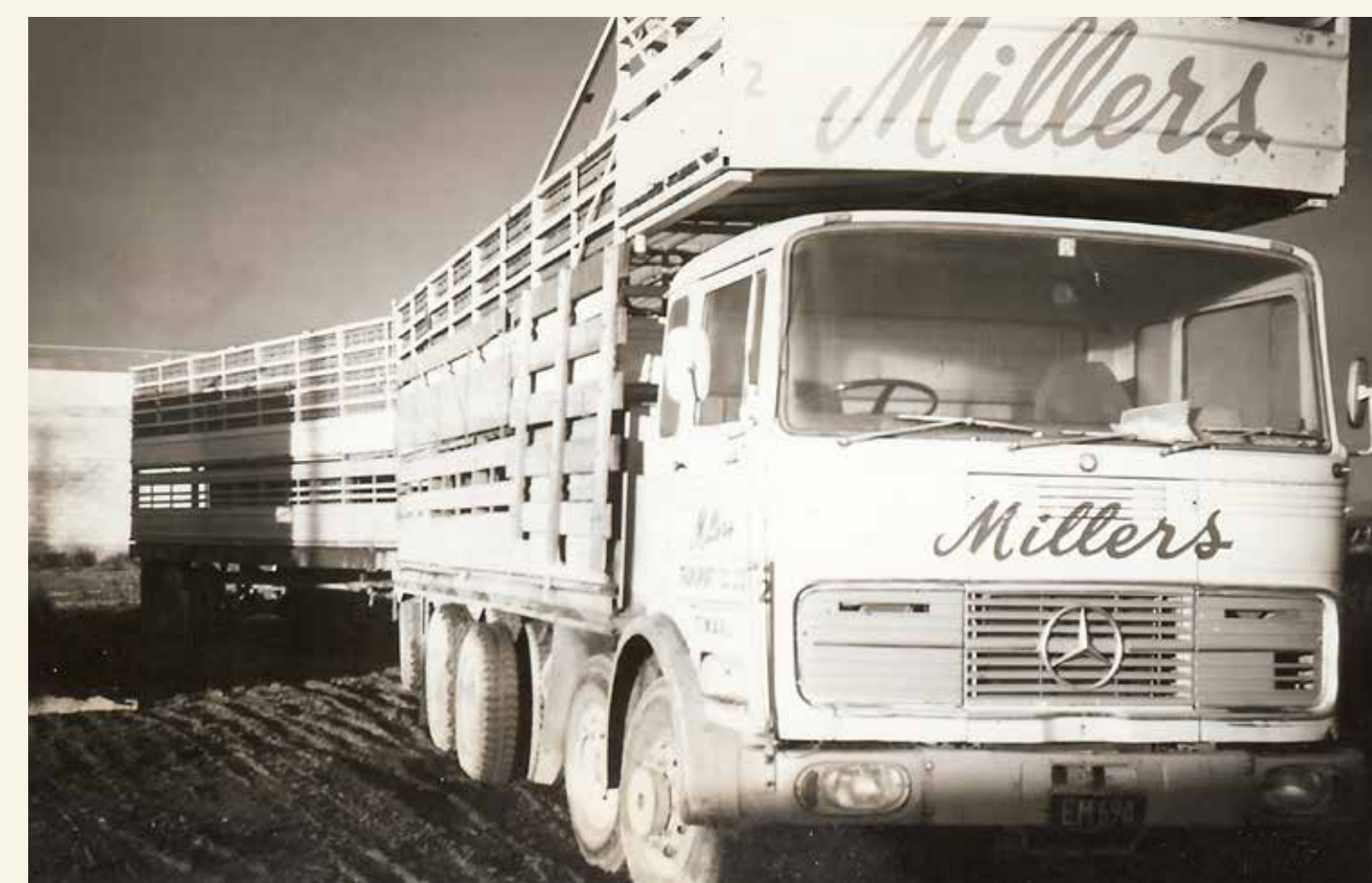
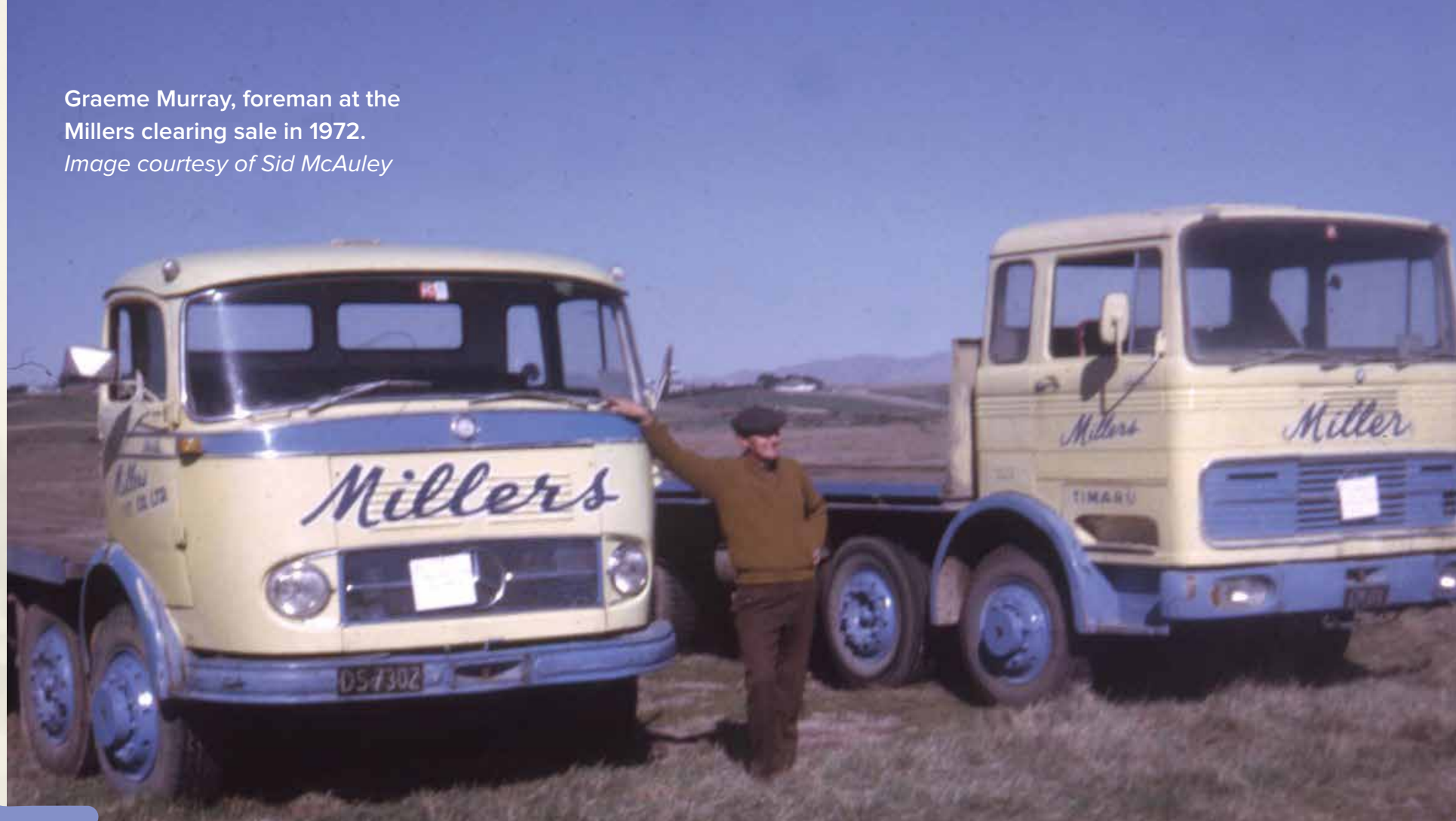
With Queenie's dedicated support along with several key senior staff members Eric kept on going – never letting his wheelchair, or his pair of walking sticks slow him down.

Their reputation both locally and nationally continued to grow. They ran a smooth transport, were honest, hard working and did a great job for anyone they worked for.

Their staff were well trained and highly regarded, and it was under their tutelage that many great transport operators were born. With their open attitude to 'giving people a go' some of New Zealand's strongest transport companies are now owned or run by ex-Miller crew. People like Rowdy Aitken, Des Cunningham, Bill Andrews, Angus Murray and Sid McAuley to name a few. Many staff over the years have been able to use the skills and knowledge they learned at Millers to transfer into truck and transport across the country.

Queenie was a quiet force in the background. Always there for Eric and on hand at morning tea with 'water crackers and cheese', she is remembered fondly by all those that knew her. Eric was a tough but fair man – with a work hard and the rewards will come mantra.

Graeme Murray, foreman at the Millers clearing sale in 1972.
Image courtesy of Sid McAuley



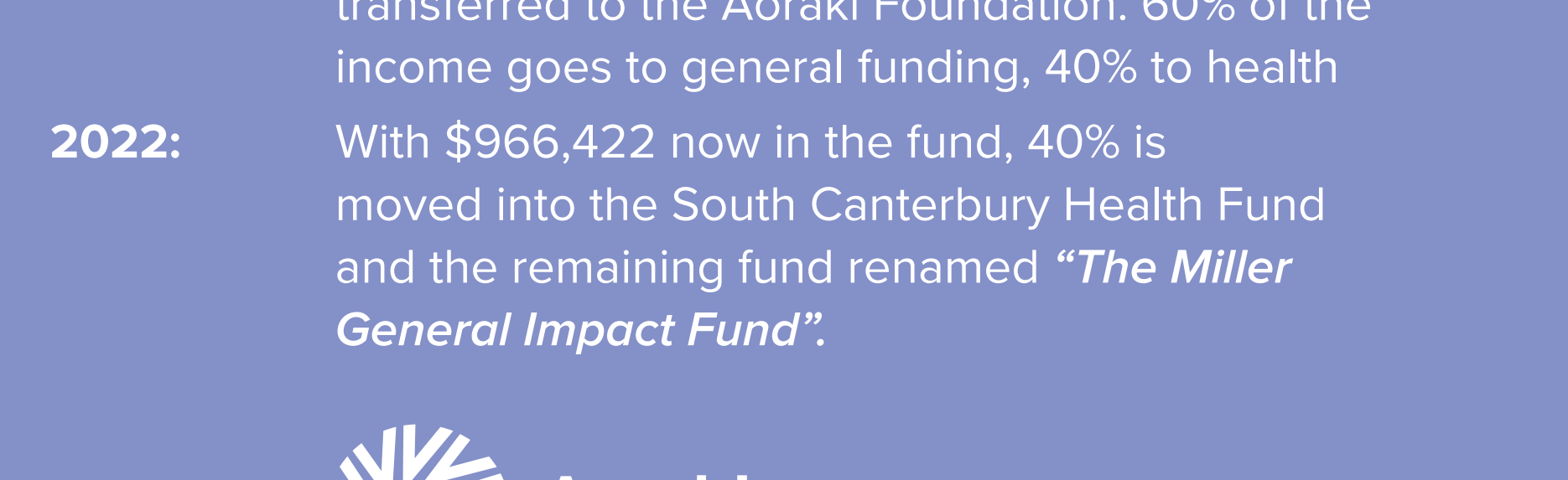
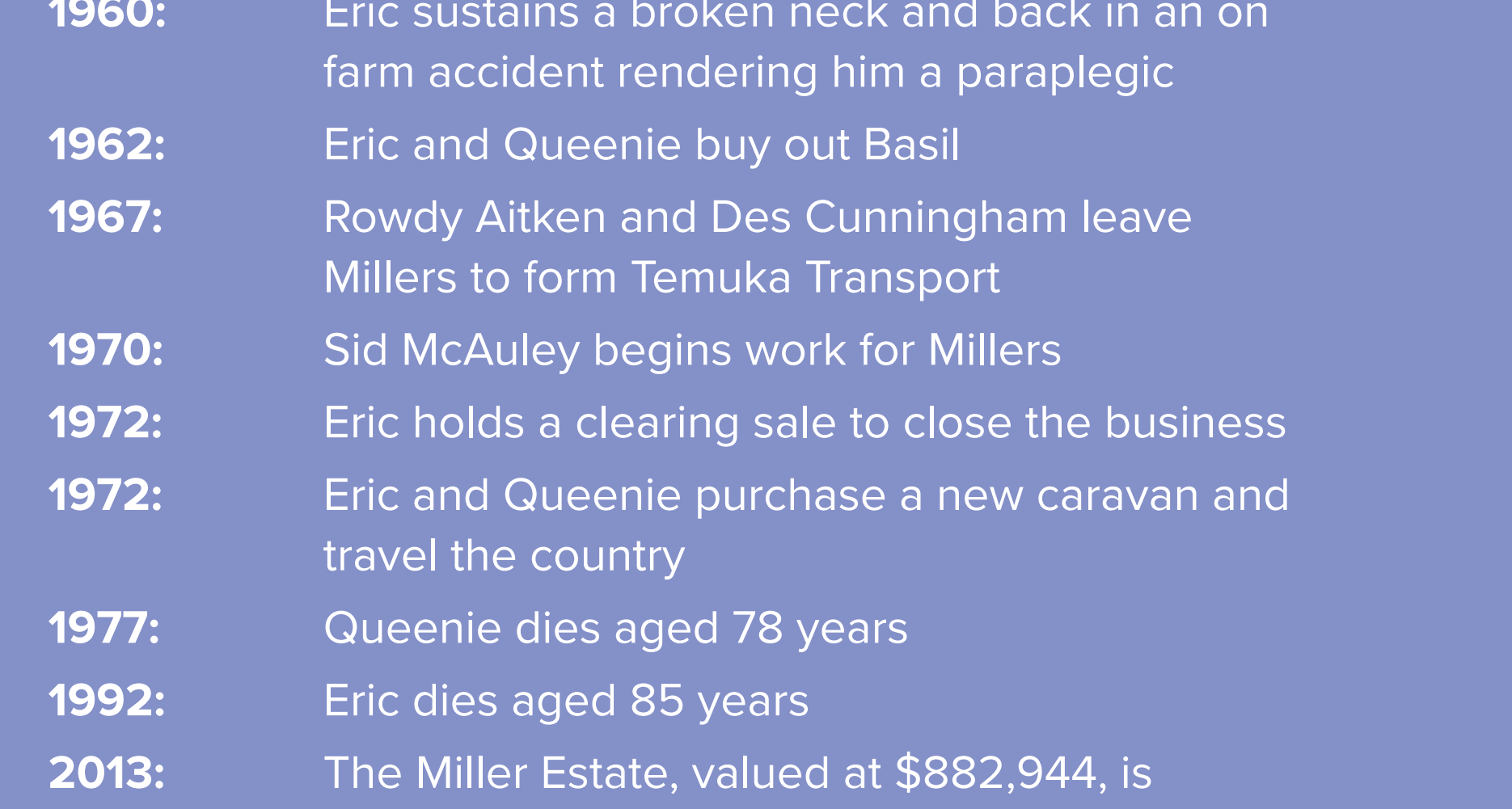
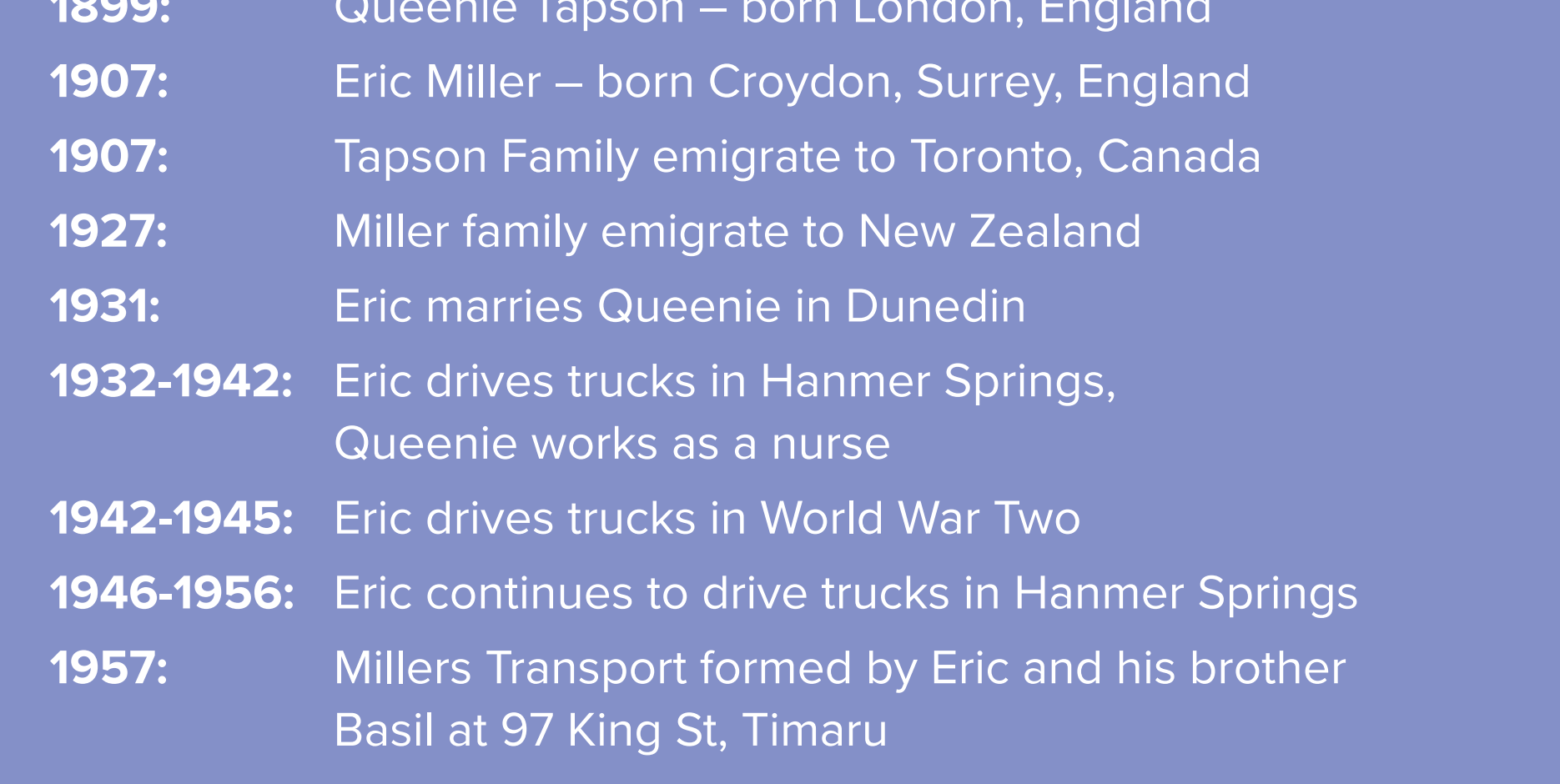
Mercedes stock truck and trailer
Image courtesy of Sid McAuley

In 1972, Eric went about the business of selling Miller Transport as a going concern to Hec Cox who ran Longmans Transport out of St Andrews with a promise of payment next week. Unfortunately, payment was never received, so Eric held a clearing sale at Redruth to recoup his losses. According to Sid McAuley "Eric never stopped smiling that day, he made more off the clearing sale than Cox had agreed to pay, so he won out in the end!"

There are many more stories and memories about this remarkable man and his equally amazing wife, but with time, the detail has been lost, the photos are gone and there is no family to tell their story. Luckily through their gift to the Aoraki Foundation their legacy has a way to live on – for now and forever.



End of an era – clearing sale, 1972
Image courtesy of Sid McAuley



Austin truck, purchased by Angus Murray and Sid McAuley carting hay
Image courtesy of Sid McAuley



Austin Artic hauling building materials

Timeline

- 1899:** Queenie Tapson – born London, England
- 1907:** Eric Miller – born Croydon, Surrey, England
- 1907:** Tapson Family emigrate to Toronto, Canada
- 1927:** Miller family emigrate to New Zealand
- 1931:** Eric marries Queenie in Dunedin
- 1932-1942:** Eric drives trucks in Hamner Springs, Queenie works as a nurse
- 1942-1945:** Eric drives trucks in World War Two
- 1946-1956:** Eric continues to drive trucks in Hamner Springs
- 1957:** Millers Transport formed by Eric and his brother Basil at 97 King St, Timaru
- 1960:** Eric sustains a broken neck and back in an on farm accident rendering him a paraplegic
- 1962:** Eric and Queenie buy out Basil
- 1967:** Rowdy Aitken and Des Cunningham leave Millers to form Temuka Transport
- 1970:** Sid McAuley begins work for Millers
- 1972:** Eric holds a clearing sale to close the business
- 1972:** Eric and Queenie purchase a new caravan and travel the country
- 1977:** Queenie dies aged 78 years
- 1992:** Eric dies aged 85 years
- 2013:** The Miller Estate, valued at \$882,944, is transferred to the Aoraki Foundation. 60% of the income goes to general funding, 40% to health
- 2022:** With \$966,422 now in the fund, 40% is moved into the South Canterbury Health Fund and the remaining fund renamed "The Miller General Impact Fund".



Thank you to Sid McAuley, whose generous gift has enabled the production of this storyboard.

