

COVER STORY



A family photo, taken by Bradford Bachrach and dated in the mid-1910's of John Duvall's mother, third from back left, posing with family. **KARL MERTON FERRON/STAFF**

'A part of Howard County history'

Fourth-generation resident asks for plaque to commemorate his grandfather

By Lizzy Alspach

Four-year-old John Duvall followed his grandfather everywhere — in the police

car, tractor and pretty much anywhere Deputy Sheriff Frank John Miller would take him, Duvall recalled. Duvall's mother used to tell him about how inseparable he was from his grandfather, even from such a young age.

But in 1946, when Miller died of a heart attack outside the Historic Circuit Courthouse in Ellicott City after struggling with a female prisoner, that all changed. The 65-year-old husband, father and grand-

father left behind 10 children and more grandchildren — something not lost on Duvall, now 80, who is advocating for a plaque on the courthouse to commemorate his grandfather.

"I decided to take on this adventure because I wanted my granddad to be remembered," Duvall said as he gazed at the courthouse on a summer afternoon. "It's a part of Howard County history."

Duvall, a fourth-generation Howard

County resident, said his family has been in the county since the late 1800s. But now as the 182-year-old courthouse faces renovations with a \$15 million price tag to host the new Center for Arts, Culture and History, Duvall said he finds it a better time than any other to add some kind of commemorative piece to recognize his grandfather.

Duvall's grandfather — from whom Duvall received the name "John" — was

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first a Howard County Police Department officer for 31 years before joining the sheriff's office for an additional four before his death. Miller first worked on the family-owned, 100-acre Shady Oaks Farm, which is now a golf course, during the day and moonlighted as a police officer, Duvall said. He was also the second of six county law enforcement officers to die in the line of duty, according to Duvall.

"He was a very busy man. Probably that's why he had a heart attack and died at 65," Duvall said.

It wasn't until Miller's sons were older that he turned over the farm work to them, Duvall said. The family raised cows and worked milk delivery trucks, one of the first to do so in the county, he added. Miller soon turned to working full time in law enforcement when he no longer performed farm tasks.

Michael Hajek, the commander of the court services division in the Howard County Sheriff's Office, said transporting prisoners between detention centers and courthouses can very quickly become complicated. Hajek, who also worked with the police department before moving to the sheriff's office, said there's no one in the office left who worked with Miller. He's remembered by a portrait in the office's roll call room, Hajek added.

"It's a part of police culture to recognize the people that lost their lives," Hajek said. "It's a matter of reflecting back on the people that used to work [here] sometimes."

Each May, the police headquarters hosts a memorial service known as Fallen Heroes Day for the families of officers who died on duty. Miller's family attends each year, including Duvall, to help remember his service. But outside of the yearly remembrance, Miller lives on in the numerous pictures and items kept by Duvall's mother, including an edition of the Ellicott City Times, a weekly printed newspaper that published until 1958. He also holds on to his grandfather's old revolver, police badge and a commemorative piece of an officer holding the hands of two children given to the family after Miller's death.

But while holding on to the memorabilia helps Duvall commemorate his history, he feels his grandfather should be honored with a plaque or other marker outside the historic courthouse. Duvall said after his generation, there might not be anyone to remember Miller's work ethic and kindness. To him, a commemorative piece would remedy that. No matter how long it's been, Duvall said, his grandfather is still a part of the fabric of Howard County.

"I feel it's a legacy," Duvall said. "If you don't know where you come from, you don't know where you're going."



Holding the issued badge, revolver and handcuffs of his grandfather, John Duvall, grandson of Frank John Miller, who served as deputy sheriff for four years before dying of a heart attack in the line of duty in Howard County in 1946, stands outside the Ellicott City courthouse. **KARL MERTON FERRON/STAFF**