

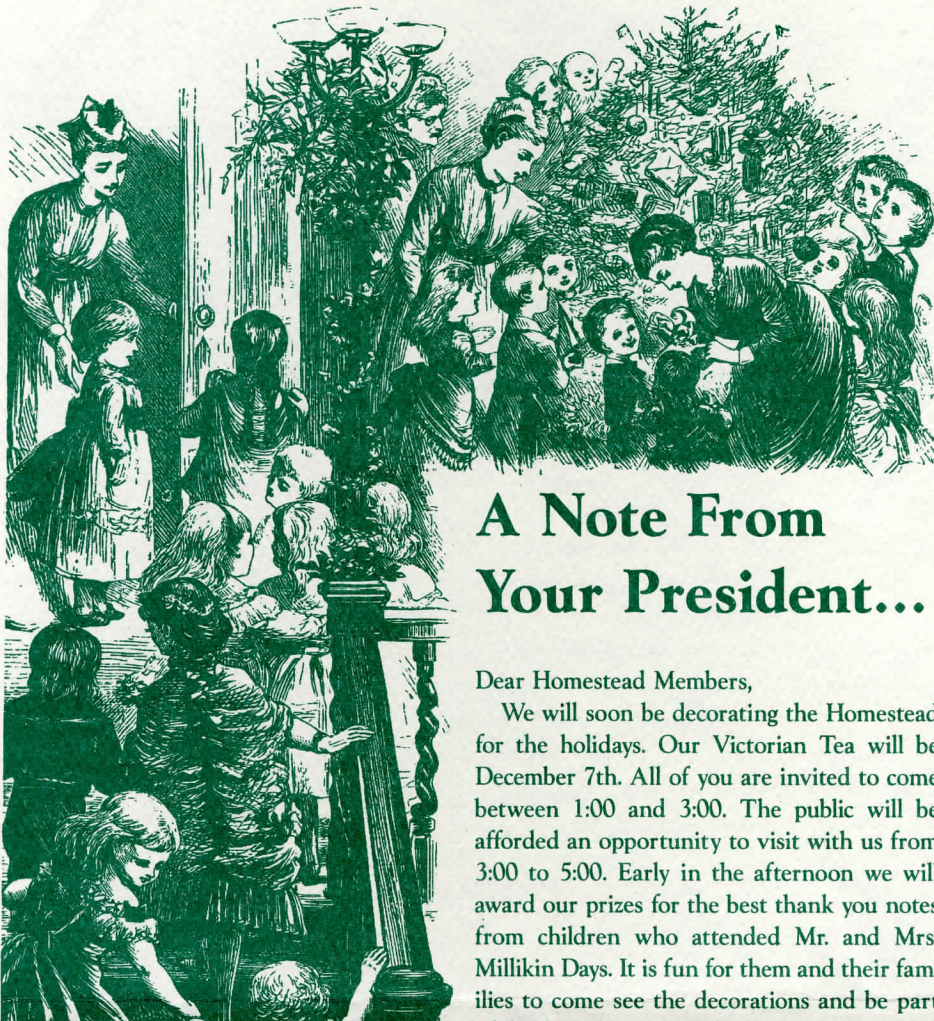
THE HOMESTEAD FAMILY

GAZETTE

Vol. XXII, No.2

JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC., DECATUR, ILLINOIS

November 1997



A Note From Your President...

Dear Homestead Members,

We will soon be decorating the Homestead for the holidays. Our Victorian Tea will be December 7th. All of you are invited to come between 1:00 and 3:00. The public will be afforded an opportunity to visit with us from 3:00 to 5:00. Early in the afternoon we will award our prizes for the best thank you notes from children who attended Mr. and Mrs. Millikin Days. It is fun for them and their families to come see the decorations and be part

History – Banker, Builder, Humanitarian

As we work and socialize around James Millikin's home, his life does not seem far removed from our own; he seems to belong to the immediate past.

It is something of a shock, then, to leaf through Homestead files and find an article from 1927 celebrating the *centenary* of James' birth which took place in 1827. And, now, we are in 1997, 170 years later!

To put his life in perspective, there is hardly a better framework than the colorful sketch of July 31, 1927, published in the Decatur Herald. It will be obvious that Decatur has changed more than a little since then, but that the value of James Millikin's contributions has not diminished. Under the title, "James Millikin: Banker, Builder, Humanitarian," the sketch unfolds:

"Eighteen hundred and twenty-seven was a breathing space in history. Europe was resting and recovering after Napoleonic wars, whose author for six years had been sleeping in the lonely grave on St. Helena.

"England, nominally ruled by William

institution. He thought once of becoming a doctor and after he had entered upon his business career he went to Wabash college for Latin. He bred and fed stock and drove it on the hoof to the market, once making the 500-mile journey over land to New York. In the early 50's he came to Illinois and settled in Danville. His cattle won him medals in the shows. With the money that he made as a drover he bought land in the roadless prairies of Illinois and Iowa, and in 1856 a rugged, bearded young man of 29 he came to Decatur where he was destined to live 53 years.

"It was a raw little prairie town in which he settled; it had two railroads, and the usual group of optimists. One of them had built a depot at Edward and West Main streets, confident that it would serve its purpose even though the tracks were a mile away. Cows grazed where the brick court house stood in the southeast corner of Lincoln square.

"James Millikin, the new comer, was about the richest man in town. He was



... to come see the decorations and be part of the festivities. Their letters are very special, as many of our board members found out this year when we took the time at the end of a board meeting to read all of them. It will be a delight for me to present their awards.

Today I spent some time looking through some of our old newsletters and found pictures of Ryan Stoa and Chris Hazelhurst, students who won the awards many years ago. Now these young men are a part of my drama production group at Stephen Decatur High School.

As I perused the newsletters I also discovered many of your names when you were active leaders at the Homestead. When I was membership chairman, I often wondered how all these people become interested in the Homestead. Now I know.

Homestead Board members soon realize it's a working Board. Not just another meeting to attend. I wish to extend my thanks to all Board members, past and present, for being so willing to work so diligently to maintain the Homestead.

Season greetings to all of you. Do attend the tea and enjoy!

Sincerely,
Jim Williams, President



*You are cordially invited to the annual
Victorian Christmas Tea
of the
James Millikin Homestead
Sunday, December 7, 1997
1:00 - 3:00 p.m. - Membership
3:00 - 5:00 p.m. - Public
125 North Pine Street*

"England, nominally, ruled by William, while Victoria, a child of eight, was playing with her dolls. A number of princelets on the continent were meeting to discuss the chaos which was Germany. A Bourbon was again on the throne of France. John Quincy Adams, a scientist, a little out of place in statecraft, was president of a North American union made up of 24 states, and some partially unexplored territories.

"A car drawn by horses and running over logs covered with iron strips, was hauling granite from a Massachusetts quarry, while capitalists were contemplating bringing from Europe a thing called a locomotive engine. Tiny steamboats were beginning to run on the Ohio, the great roadway to what was then the far West. Samuel F. B. Morse, who was to invent the telegraph eight years later, had just heard of the electromagnet.

"Illinois had a total population about equal to Decatur today [in 1927]. Chicago was an insignificant trading post. An eighteen-year-old boy in Spencer Co., Ind., known to his friends as Abe Lincoln, was living in the sordidness of a squatter's cabin.

"In that year on August 2, James Millikin was born in Clarkstown, now Ten-Mile, Washington County, Pennsylvania.

"It seems long ago, and the century through 82 years of which he lived, measured in scientific progress, was longer than any three centuries that preceded it. But such was his span of life . . .

"He came of Scotch farming folks, who had a reverence for education, religion and thrift. They gave their son what they could of the first, and implanted an abounding respect for the second, and the third was in his blood. He was by inheritance a natural saver and trader.

"His early years were uneventful. His great adventure came near the close of life. He was a student for two years in Washington college, a little Presbyterian

about the richest man in town. He was worth about \$75,000. The emigrating settlers were beginning to buy his land. He continued to buy and sell cattle. Wealth in those days was largely in land and cattle. It was six years before the National Banking act was due to be passed and money was largely script issued by banks, none too secure. The Railroad bank failed and James Millikin in 1860 went into the banking business as J. Millikin & Co. . . . Mr. Millikin knew from his farming and drover experience what men it was safe to lend to. He was ideally equipped for a country banker.

"Mr. Millikin . . . had thoroughly established himself as one of the growing town's leading men. He had been married to Anna B. Aston, whose father was a Presbyterian minister in Mt. Zion, and they had started housekeeping at the northeast corner of William and Edward street in a little frame structure, later removed to College and William . . . Mrs. Millikin is remembered by her friends as a stately woman. In her youth she was strikingly handsome. Her formal education exceeded that of her husband. She had no little artistic and literary taster.

"In the early 70's they planned and built as their home the large brick house that now serves as the Art Institute. Twenty years ago the Hugh Hill resident of the same general type of architecture stood beside it in what is now Millikin Place . . .

"It is difficult to separate Mr. Millikin, the banker, from Mr. Millikin, the man, but a personal sketch demands something regarding the characteristics of the Pennsylvania farm boy who was born a hundred years ago and was destined to make something besides banking history before he died.

"From his office he looked out into the heart of a rapidly growing little city . . . Motors replaced horses on the street cars.

History – Continued

A chugging thing looking like a carriage turned the corner—Hieronymous Mueller's automobile.

"When noon came he would walk out West Main street to his suburban home off Pine, if the weather was pleasant. If it was stormy, he would drive. Sometimes when business was light he would drop over and join the St. Nick crowd, a group that used to gather in the lobby or sidewalk to discuss crops, weather and politics . . . There would be Jason Rogers, so good a friend that Mr. Millikin did not have to talk to him. There were often long intervals of silence when they merely sat and enjoyed each other's presence. There would be Charley Laux, Mike Troutman, and Martin P. Murphey.

"After death began breaking up the little circle, Mr. Millikin was more frequently at the Decatur club after banking hours, sometimes joining in a game of pool, often patiently playing solitaire. Evenings generally would find him in his library, now the director's room of the Art Institute, with book or magazine. He was not a great reader, but he kept informed.

"Once he tried to golf, drove into the rough, lost his ball and never went back. He served . . . on the board of supervisors, but in politics he had the usual banker's luck . . . an Oakley farmer, beat him for state senator. He was once proposed for Congress,

but never allowed his name to be presented. With Mrs. Millikin he traveled extensively. They passed a part of a year in Europe. He saw a good deal of America.

"When [anyone] who might be interested, dropped in for a chat, Mr. Millikin would present a rather hazy idea for a school of higher education. The story that as a boy . . . noting the poverty of his school-mates, Mr. Millikin had taken a vow that he would some day give boys and girls a chance, seems to be rather well attested . . .

"The old banker . . . began thinking seriously about an industrial school. There is little doubt that that was his first interest . . . The decade from 1890-1900 saw technical and trade schools started in many states. He wanted to train boys to make a living with their hands . . . girls to be taught how to cook and prepare a meal. Later he modified his idea, and when he was ready to present his plan it was for a literary and classical college with a coordinate industrial branch.

Mr. Millikin prepared to give his Oakland

park and \$200,000 if citizens would raise \$100,000 and the Presbyterian church, \$100,000-\$150,000. It was 1900. "Colleges could be started on that sum . . .

"How such citizens and church responded, how the Tudor towers rose in Oakland park . . . how President Roosevelt came to dedicate the building . . . and how in 1903, the donor, with tears in his eyes, saw 500 students apply for enrollment is a story made familiar by repeated tellings.

"It was not all happiness for Mr. Millikin. Sometimes he paced the floor of nights wondering if he had made a mistake." A trip that he, Dr. Taylor and Peter Loeb "made through the East, visiting Cornell, Harvard, Massachusetts Institute and Pennsylvania, most of them richly endowed, had convinced the prudent banker that the Millikin

University would be far beyond his fortune to supply." He worried about endowment, tried to gain further support from the church but failed.

"He was now an old man . . . But in those last years he rose to epic heights." The

college board of the church had made the ruling that it could not help Millikin because the college had not followed the requirement that Bible should be a compulsory study.

"Mr. Millikin had once heard Robert Ingersoll [19th century writer] say that compulsory Bible reading had made him an agnostic, and while Mr. Millikin wanted the Bible studied, he would not require it in a school for young people of all religions or none. And so a sharp correspondence passed between Mr. Millikin and the clerically-minded . . . in New York. A country banker in the Corn Belt fought for religious freedom, and finally won his fight.

"Mr. Millikin died March 2, 1909 in Orlando, Fla., where, as usual he was passing the winter. . .

"It has long since been agreed that the university was Decatur's greatest single asset."

So ends the 1927 assessment of this banker, builder, humanitarian.

— Marilyn Loofbourrow
Historian



Mr. Millikin at 35



Scheduling

The Millikin Homestead continues to be an attraction for various groups of people. There have been tours, showers, receptions, weddings and dinners. Millikin University held several dinners and orientations meetings at the beginning of this school year.

The Homestead was also used by Shemamo Girl Scout Council, a reception for Dr. Nancy Snyderman by DMH Foundation as well as a PEO State Convention. Brochures are available at the Homestead as to the costs involved in renting the Homestead.

– Dorothy Coutant
Donna Meinhold
Co-Chairman



Shari Frazier and Tom Sweet were married at the Homestead in June. One of their wedding pictures was taken in front of the Oriel window on the landing of the staircase



The South Parlor provides an interesting background for a bridal photograph taken by Woods Photography.





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 Mr. and Mrs. Tom Dickes
 Mr. Leonard Edwards
 Mr. and Mrs. William Eichenauer
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 Mr. Leiby Hall
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