

THE HOMESTEAD FAMILY



GAZETTE



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JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC., DECATUR, ILLINOIS

November 1987

Christmas Comes to the Homestead

As you conjure up the image of Christmas at the Homestead, be sure to include the sounds of horns, strings, woodwinds and piano playing the beautiful Christmas music we all love. Imagine also the smell of spiced cider, the aroma of fresh greenery and beauty of carefully decorated rooms. Magically the Homestead will be transformed to a special place where Christmas is celebrated in the joyful Victorian manner. The Homestead always looks the most beautiful for this special season.

Tucked away in the library, the treasures of Mrs. Millikin's trunk eagerly await your approval. Ribbons and dried flowers, bits of fabric and scraps of wood all combine for the prettiest ornaments ever. The highlight of the 1987 Boutique will be the filigree brass rendition of the Homestead . . . our annual ornament for 1987. This year we proudly present an ornament designed by Lee Ross. Lee grew up in the neighborhood and is daughter of board member Carolyn Travis. Her delicate art work is being transformed into ornaments by The Glass House. In the past The Glass House has leaded ornaments and provided cut glass for others. This will be the first time the annual ornament is commercially manufactured. The result? Stunning. We are sure many of you will want more than one!

Nancy Eichenauer is the chairman of the 1987 Victorian Tea. If you want to participate in the tea—

Victorian Christmas Boutique

This year as in past, the Millikin Homestead will host a boutique in conjunction with the Annual Victorian Tea. There will be many beautiful, unique Christmas decorations, delicious delicacies; our traditional annual ornament for you collectors and the silent auction table. Also in keeping with the tea's theme of "Sounds of Christmas" some special musical selections. Hope you can attend on December 6th. (We will also be open for public open house on December 13th.)

We are seeking donations for our silent auction table. If you have items of china, crystal, linens or silver no longer useful to you we would gladly accept them. Anyone who loves to create, new items for our boutique would also be appreciated. Please call Laura Faber (422-5207) with your ideas and donations.

they would have selected. The piano was judged to be in outstanding condition, needing only tuning and minor repair. The board voted to accept the loan of this piano, and assume responsibility for repair and tuning. The piano will be placed in its new home in time for December's Victorian Christmas Tea.

Volunteers Needed

Do you have a free afternoon in your busy schedule? The Homestead is seeking volunteer tour guides. If you would like to be actively involved in supporting the Homestead, this is your chance. After attending an afternoon training session you will be ready to expertly guide our guests through the Homestead. Please call Laura Faber (422-5207) or Bettyrose Leader (428-1130).

Mr. & Mrs. Millikin Days

On October 19th, 20th, 22nd, and 23rd, James Millikin Homestead came alive as 1200 third grade students of the Decatur Public & Parochial Schools enjoyed Mr. & Mrs. Millikin Days.

On request of the Decatur School District the date was changed from Spring to Fall.

One is never quite sure who enjoys these visits more, the children or our many volunteers acting out their roles as Mr. & Mrs. Millikin, guides, or maids. We wish to thank these gracious and dedicated volunteers whose superb acting make this annual event a success.

The highlight of each child's visit is receiving a cookie from Sophie "the kitchen maid." A special thank you goes to Mr. John Eckert and Nabisco Brands, Inc. who this year supplied all of the cookies.



Demolition to Dream House

Neighbors helping neighbors . . . not such a unique concept, although one that isn't often practiced. What makes this situation unique, is that about 30 neighbors have joined together to help a two block neighborhood. Driven to improve the living conditions for everyone in this two block area and wanting to preserve the atmosphere original to the area, the group has purchased and renovated a victorian

the project would have been doomed. In need of additional skilled volunteers, the group approached the Firefighter's Local 505, and asked them to join the project to provide carpentry, plumbing, electrical and assorted skills. Meanwhile a landscaping company decided to donate their products. Once completed, the foundation plans were to have the house appraised and sell it below appraised value to a

orian tea. If you want to participate in the tea—decorating the Homestead, serving food, baking, greeting, playing your instrument—she would be delighted to receive your call! This is a fun time of year to be involved at the Homestead, and the more the merrier!

If you're itching to make some ornaments for our boutique, or have some interesting items to offer for the silent auction, Laura Faber is the one to call. Laura is this year's boutique chairman. If you have questions about what is suitable, or how many to make, give Laura a call.

Christmas will be calling you soon!

Our Annual Christmas Tea for members will be held December 6th, 1:30 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. We will celebrate with "Sounds of Christmas" - on the grounds, through the halls, into the parlours, up and down the stairs of the Millikin Homestead! When your invitation arrives, please add your footsteps and voices to our "Sounds of Christmas" for a Victorian tea that will charm you!

A Note From Your President . . .

As the leaves begin to change colors and drift to the ground, I reflect on the changes all around me. Besides the glorious fall slowly turning into winter, there are changes both inside and outside the Homestead. Our new roof, the completed painting, repair and restoration of the 2nd floor rooms previously damaged by the leaking roof . . . just a few changes. We have changed Mr. & Mrs. Millikin Days from spring to fall. We have elected a new secretary (Nancy Eichenauer) and welcomed a new board member (Jane Welch). It's been a good summer and fall for the Homestead, and we now look forward to the Holiday season.

● Victorian Christmas Tea is scheduled for Sunday, December 6th. Chairman Nancy Eichenauer has announced that this year's theme will be "The Sounds of Christmas." Decorations and entertainment promise to be



1987 Homestead Ornament

Want ads answered

In the last issue of the Homestead Gazette there was a want ad requesting a period piano for the Homestead. Although the pump organ is a nice period piece, it was felt that a piano would be a more functional instrument, especially at Christmas time and for special occasions that add music to the Homestead. As a result of the want ad, we were contacted by the estate of Leorra Womeldorf. They offered us a 1914 Krakauer Brothers upright piano possibly made of rosewood. This piano was made during the later years of the Millikins, but certainly might have been an instrument

a visual and aural treat! From the annual ornament to homemade treats, the Tea will have something special for everyone. Hope to see you all then!

As one of the people who worked on "Demolition to Dream House" (the neighborhood project at 815 West North Street), I'd like to thank the Homestead and all of you for your support of this project. The members of the West North Street Foundation were allowed to meet in the Homestead as planning progressed for the project. The Homestead is a wonderful place for neighbors to meet, and we appreciate the generosity of the Homestead board for this privilege.

Hope you have a wonderful holiday season and happiest of new years!

Barbara Hackel, President

the atmosphere. Original to the area, the group has purchased and renovated a victorian cottage.

Although renovations are being done all over the country, both privately and publicly, by individuals and by organizations, we know of no other renovation quite like ours. The West North Street Foundation, is comprised of neighbors and friends who are concerned about a two block area on West North Street. This area is in the historic district, and contains a variety of architectural styles. The majority of houses in the two block area have been made into multi-family dwellings, several containing five or more units. Little sensitivity has been used when structures were readapted to accommodate the increased number of people per structure. The result is an overcrowded situation of transient tenants compounded by absentee landlords. West North Street Foundation wants to improve the quality of life for the residents on West North Street as well as in the surrounding area. This is what lead them to purchase the small cottage that sits near the entrance of the two block area. Built around the turn of the century on land purchased from James Millikin, the single story structure has been on the city demolition list since 1983. Structurally sound but cosmetically flawed, West North Street Foundation rescued the property by purchasing it for \$250. An adjacent lot was donated to the group, and the city released all liens against both lots and the house. Although this inner city group includes doctors, lawyers and other professionals, there are many older neighbors who live on fixed incomes. The sad fact is, there were no resident millionaires willing to finance the project. Titled "Demolition to Dream House," the group planned to open the house to the public in it's "before" or Demolition condition, renovate it, and then open it to the public again in it's "after" or Dream House state. Foundation members were willing to adopt various rooms or areas of the house, but the major problem of funding remained. The foundation decided to approach local business to see if they would be interested in joining the project. A nearby paint store, Decatur Paint and Varnish along with their paint supplier MAB Paints, decided to adopt the house. They furnished exterior and interior materials. Craftmasters, Inc. agreed to put a new roof on the house. This was the one severe problem with the house. The roof leaked badly in two areas, and without a new roof,

foundation plans were to have the house appraised and sell it below appraised value to a family who wants to locate in the area. The foundation has incumbered the land so that it can not be developed in the next 25 years, and plan to sell the property only as a owner-occupied dwelling. Profits from the sale will be used to rescue another abandoned or abused building further down the block.

The "before" open house was held on Sunday, June 28, 1987. Nearly 200 people came to see the demolition state of the house. The "after" open house was held on Sunday, October 4, 1987. Over 300 people admired the "Dream House" while listening to The Sande Hackel Nonet and eating a delectable array of goodies donated by neighbors and friends for the occasion.

While things did not always go as smoothly as anticipated, the project was a huge success for everyone involved. The good will of dozens of businesses and citizens will be remembered for a long time. The fate of 815 now rests in the hands of new owners Joe and Kristen Smith. They were the successful bidders for the property. While the other two families who bid and were turned down would have been excellent neighbors, there is a special satisfaction as we welcome the Smiths to 815. They have lived in the surrounding area for the past 6 years and really know what it's like. They have plans to continue the renovation to include the basement and further landscaping. With two preschool children, Joe and Kristen are looking towards the future at 815 and thinking how the house can grow along with their family. It sounds like a dream come true to us all—nice neighbors who are interested in the neighborhood and our group, and in continuing the work started this summer. Since most of us consider this renovation a labor of love, we are thrilled with the sale to the Smiths!

Will the project be repeated? Probably not. The foundation hopes to find a totally different project so as not to "burn out" the community and the members of the group. Any regrets or complaints? Regrets, no . . . complaints, yes. Why did so many people agree to participate and then back out? That was our biggest problem. Those who were involved did a superb job!! The biggest assets? Neighbors who are friends, businesses who are friends, excellent media coverage, community pride and satisfaction that all the hard work was definitely worth the time and energy!



Where But the Homestead for Happy Holiday Spirits?

We're building our own bright and memorable traditions of holidays at the Homestead and the friends we expect to meet there—but whom should we meet if we entered the old house alone in December, perhaps at twilight, and chanced to encounter the Ghost of Christmas Past?

Unlike Charles Dickens, for whom the story had a moral, we simply are wondering who might have shared the holiday season with James and Anna Millikin. Last Christmas we began to speculate and now is the time of year to take another look. To arrange an introduction to all the friends of the Millikins is a whole other chapter or more, so we'll focus in once again on family, without whom no Yuletide season is quite complete.

Neither James nor Anna had large immediate families nor really many known relatives in Macon County. James was one of five children, of whom several died young or childless so that he had only one nephew and two nieces, all living several states away. Anna was the only survivor of two. One ancestral line of each of the couple remains to be traced yet today. But James' father came from a family of ten and Anna's mother was one of twelve, hence the couple still had plenty of known kith and kin.

We have already met Anna's mother, Hetty (Barlett) Aston, who came to live with the couple at the Homestead until her death in 1886, and James' kinswoman, Margaret (Baird) McClelland, Millikin descendant and wife of Dr. Silas E. McClelland (who would later head the Millikin Trust). Close friends of James and Anna, the McClellands lived near the Homestead many years, on West North and West William Streets, and are among those we'd expect to find in the holiday tableau.

Who else might be among the shades of Christmas Past? One very distinctive spirit would be James Hunter Millikin, Decatur resident and first cousin of the Homestead's James. We met him briefly with his daughter Dollie in a previous Homestead Gazette. From the first Decatur City Directory it appears that James Hunter was already here in 1871.

became a journalist in Baltimore, Md. Less is known of the other two, but Samuel, as a young man, was a piano salesman, which suggests he shared a family interest in music, and Murray began his career as a traveling salesman for Mueller Co.

Other certain visitors to the Homestead, and surely in holidays gone by, were Porter J. Millikin and his family. Porter moved to Decatur ca. 1904 "at the suggestion of his great uncle James Millikin," according to a newspaper article. From the Millikin family history it appears, however, that Porter was actually the grandson of another cousin of James. Obviously, it was simpler to describe James as a great uncle!

Porter was born at Dana, Ind., in 1867, the son of Winfield Scott Millikin and grandson of Stephen Millikin, cousin to James. He married Cora Anne Thompson in Chicago in 1890. Because he belonged to a younger generation, Porter received only one line in the Millikin family history, so we turn to newspapers for his biography.

On arrival in Decatur, we are told, Porter immediately became associated with Union Iron Works, in which James had an interest, and rose to community prominence. In his early years a school teacher, Porter became president of Union Iron Works and served as president of several other organizations, including the Association of Commerce, the board of trustees of the Decatur Sanitary District and the Goodman Band (forerunner to the Decatur Municipal Band), in which it seems he had a particular interest. He chaired the Third Liberty Loan campaign for Macon Co. in World War I and was a delegate to Republican state conventions.

A news article about Porter's career added that "Mr. Millikin is also president of the Rotary Club and he can have as much fun at a meeting as the youngest member with no responsibilities on his shoulders."

The Porter Millikins, who lived for sometime at 839 W. North, had two daughters, Pauline M. (Mrs. Edward Haffner) of Decatur and Merle (Mrs. William H. Flen-



This is the family of Robert Machan, stepbrother of James Millikin. Other individual portraits in Homestead files help substantiate their identity. Mr. and Mrs. Machan are seated at far right and left. Son Robert is next to his father.

With the Machans, the Millikin family circle, as we now know it, is complete. And so it seems at every decade the Homestead could have been a livelier place than we might suppose, with voices of all ages chiming in to say, "Merry Christmas." If sometimes we stay quietly in the shadows, perhaps we can still hear them.

Marilyn Loofbourrow, Historian



Yesteryear's News

"Mrs. James Millikin will receive after 12n., on New Year's Day, assisted by her friends, Miss Alice Roberts, Miss Clements of Danville, (her niece) Mrs. Dr. Hanna of Indianapolis, her cousin Miss Dollie Millikin."

—Decatur newspaper clipping,
Dec. 29, 1876

The eldest son of Samuel Millikin (brother to our James' father Abel), James Hunter was born in Middletown, Ohio, in 1818. He married Emily McGinnis near Montezuma, Ind., in the 1850's. The couple had five children who survived to adulthood: Samuel, Dollie, James Hunter, Jr., Desdemona (Dessie), and Murray. The children's birthdates ranged from 1854 to 1874 so that the two youngest, Dessie, born 1870, and Murray, 1874, could have come as "children" to visit the Homestead at Christmas.

This is the graphic portrait given to us for James Hunter in the Millikin family history:

"Mr. Millikin d. Mar. 1, 1890, at Decatur, Ill., of old age and a rheumatic condition. He had not consulted a physician for over fifty years, being blessed with good health and a vigorous constitution . . . He was strictly moral; a 'teetotaler' and a model man in his family. His height was fully six feet and his weight from 250 to 260 pounds. He never used spectacles and was not gray until seventy. Walked with the erectness and precision of a military cadet until near eighty. He was passionately fond of music and a fine violinist. Was often called 'Bismarck' and 'Colonel' because of his dignified bearing and graceful carriage. Wrote a remarkably beautiful and characteristic hand and was an expert book-keeper but was in the grain business the greater part of his life. An 'old line Whig,' he developed into a staunch Republican, being an ardent admirer of James G. Blaine and William McKinley. Was fond of quoting 'Abe Lincoln.' He was a Mason and a Christian but not a church-member. His articles written for the press on various topics, mostly political, proved his great reverence for Almighty God. He contributed to the press after passing his eightieth birthday, and the valuable scrap-book left by him contains great pages of his eloquent thoughts. Mrs. Millikin was a woman of rare intelligence; a school-teacher, daughter of a prominent physician . . ."

Regarding their children, we found before that daughter Dollie studied music in Leipsig, Germany, became a concert pianist and taught in Decatur. Several newspaper excerpts show Dollie assisting Anna Millikin as a hostess at the Homestead. Dollie married a grain dealer, Stephen A. McWhorter, and moved west; sister Dessie became Mrs. James L. Bevans, wife of a navy doctor, and James Hunter, Jr.,

(twe) of Aurora. So once again we find children who could have been holiday visitors to the Homestead in their young years at the turn of the century. Porter died in 1922 and his wife, in 1950.

It was, incidentally, their granddaughter, Barbara Crouch (Mrs. William L.), of La Jolla, Calif., who donated to the Homestead the gold-banded plates and pearl-handled knives now on display in the History Room.

Have we missed anyone in our vision of Christmas Past? There is one more known family, that of Robert McFarland Machan, step-brother to James Millikin, who could have shared the holiday season with James and Anna. Also mentioned in a previous Homestead Gazette, Robert was born in 1840 in Pennsylvania, a son of Abel Millikin's second wife, Joanna McFarland Machan, by a previous marriage.

Newspapers tell us that as a small boy Robert moved with his family to Ohio and ca. 1859, at age 19, he came to Macon Co. and assumed management of a farm for James, who had settled here three years earlier. Eventually, Robert purchased a farm of his own southeast of Argenta.

In 1861, he married Sarah Winthrode and they had six children: George, Walter, Leora, Clara, Ethel and Robert. Biographical data is not available for all, but it is known that son George became a physician in the east. After his death, his wife, Isabella Thompson Machan, became one of the very first faculty members engaged for Millikin University when it opened in 1903. Isabella had degrees from Wellesley and headed Millikin U.'s ancient languages department.

For a time at least, Robert's daughter Clara (Mrs. Edwards) lived in Decatur; daughter Ethel (Mrs. Spera) was last found in Washington, Ia., in the mid 1970's, her age 94. Birthdates of all the children are not known, but Leora, born in 1869, Robert, ca. 1877, and possibly others, could have been at the Homestead in childhood. Ethel is said to have spent numerous of her young summers in town with the Millikins!

An apochryphal story from very sketchy notes in Homestead history files suggests that James and Anna Millikin at one time wished to adopt one of the children of Robert and Sarah Machan, but the Machans did not feel they could agree. If so, the families appear to have remained friends. We will probably never know much more about this intriguing piece of history.

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“Sound of Our Voices” to be Heard Far and Wide

The Decatur Art Class, along with the Millikin Homestead, both play a special part in a new book published in October by Beacon Press, *The Sound of Our Own Voices*, by Theodora Penny Martin. It is expected that both will receive significant coverage and the book may include pertinent photographs.

The Sound of Our Own Voices explores how women educated themselves — before there were women’s colleges — through local clubs which met in members’ homes to devote serious study to one or more of various subjects: art, music, literature, philosophy, history, geography, and occasionally botany, foreign languages or astronomy. These clubs sprang up around the country generally after the Civil War.

In Decatur such a group was the Decatur Art Class organized in 1880; its subject: art and literature; its meeting place: very often the Millikin Homestead; predominant among its organizers: Anna B. Millikin. It would be two decades more before Millikin University would be established here - by the Millikins - for either men or women.

The fall book catalog of Harper & Row describes *The Sound of Our Own Voices* as “the first book that sets study clubs in the context that was avowedly theirs — education — and shows how the study-club movement contributed enormously to the rapid increase in the numbers of women entering college in the early 1900’s.”

Author Martin became acquainted with the Decatur Art Class and the Millikin Homestead through her friend and former colleague, Dr. Frances McClelland Mayfarth, now a Decatur resident and a life member of the Homestead. Ms. Martin visited Dr. Mayfarth in Decatur several years ago, toured the Homestead and met present Art Class members. She also had the opportunity to read a 100th-anniversary history of the Art Class written by Dr. Mayfarth’s cousin, Mrs. Vivian Barnes.

Impressed by the very astute papers composed by Art Class members through the years and by work of similar groups elsewhere, Ms. Martin went on to write a doctoral dissertation on the role of the study club in the lives of women in the years 1860-1910. Subsequently, Beacon Press became interested in

Ms. Martin’s manuscript and she expanded it for a book.

Members of the Art Class, Dr. Mayfarth and the Millikin Homestead historian assisted in providing photographs to supplement the part of the text concerning Decatur. At this writing, *The Sound of Our Own Voices* is not yet off the press, so Decatur contributors are looking forward to seeing what local scenes and portraits Ms. Martin has been able to use — subject to the decision of her editors. According to Harper & Row, *The Sound of Our Own Voices* runs 256 pages and includes 30 period photographs and is “a warm and personable cultural history of the extraordinary world of the nineteenth-century women’s study clubs.” The Decatur Art Class shares the spotlight with such groups as the Shakespeare Society, the Boston History Class, the Armchair Travelers and the Fortnightly Club of Chicago.

Author Martin and Dr. Mayfarth met and became friends as teachers on Cape Cod. Dr. Mayfarth, retired from the presidency of Wheelock College in Boston, was serving as chairman of the English department at Nauset Regional High School at Eastham, Mass., when Ms. Martin came from a teaching position in California — where she had been named “Teacher of the Year” — to join the school’s English faculty.

Ms. Martin is a graduate of Middlebury College in Vermont and has master’s and doctor’s degrees from Harvard University. Recently an assistant professor of education at Wellesley College, this fall she became a member of the faculty of the University of Michigan at East Lansing where she will teach writing. She is a daughter of Mrs. Theodore Martin and the late Dr. Martin of New Jersey.

In conversations with Dr. Mayfarth and others here who helped to locate pictures for her book, “Penny” Martin, as she likes to be called, has emphasized her fascination with the Decatur Art Class, the Millikin Homestead, and, in particular, with the intelligence and leadership of Anna Millikin. As she said: “I simply fell in love with Anna!” — an infatuation that others of us share.

Marilyn Loofbourrow, Historian

Remembering the Homestead as a Memorial

Several members of the Homestead have named JMH as a memorial to honor their loved ones. Thru their thoughtfulness and their friends’ generosity, the Homestead has been able to make some very special purchases. An absolutely stunning silver punch bowl, ladle and tray were purchased in memory of Mrs. Virgil (Leorra) Womeldorff. A rare four arm Eastlake brass chandelier with etched glass shades featuring griffins, purchased for the library, is a memorial of former board member Mary Ann Clark. Another chandelier, this time a three arm brass fixture with iridescent glass shades, was purchased using memorial funds for the upstairs hallway. These beautiful “extras” add so much to the character and warmth of the Homestead. We appreciate the thoughtfulness and generosity of so many people!

Homestead Enhancements

Procurement Chairman is such a dull title! It doesn’t begin to describe the joy and delight and surprise that comes with receiving beautiful things for the Homestead! Such was the joy/delight/surprise that came with the ringing of my doorbell on a gorgeous fall day and finding caring Homestead member Claudia Curry standing there with an armload of beautiful dried hydrangeas, baby’s breath, and yarrow - for the Homestead to use in its much-needed refurbishing of the mansion’s floral arrangements. Thank you, Claudia!

And thanks to those of you still cutting in your garden who may be reminded to lay aside some of your Victorian-type cuttings to be used to decorate our parlours.

Thanks to generous memorials given in honor of much-beloved Leorra Womeldorff, we have for use at Homestead functions an absolutely stunning silver punchbowl which we are so anxious for you to admire - and taste from. Hope to see you around our new Towle bowl at the Christmas tea.

Joan Cordes, Procurement Chairman

Please make checks payable to
James Millikin Homestead, Inc.
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Student Membership \$5.00 per year
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To Our 1987-1988 Homestead Members

Holiday Greetings and a Happy New Year!

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