

THE HOMESTEAD FAMILY

GAZETTE

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JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC., DECATUR, ILLINOIS

December 1990

A Note From Your President . . .

Dear Members,

I have just returned from California, where I stayed at the 'Del' on Coronado, which is one of our oldest and most gracious hotels. Built in 1888, the Victorian atmosphere was everywhere! Most of my time was spent imagining families enjoying relaxation in a most lavish way one hundred years ago!

The holiday season is almost upon us and I am imagining the beauty of a Victorian Christmas spent in the James Millikin Homestead. The annual tea for our members will be held on December 9th from one o'clock until three. Jane Welch is general chairperson, Lois Wells and Wilma Sanner will set a table worthy of praise and glory, Wyllene Griffy will find special music to fill the halls and Ann Yackel and Jane Lawson will see that Mrs. Millikin's Trunk is full of Christmas gifts! Our theme of sleighs should pique your interest; something new as we decorate the old! Please join us for a sleighful celebration!

Mr. and Mrs. Millikin Days filled one week in October. All the men and women who volunteered time and talent for this occasion can be complimented because it was an outstanding 'period play' for third graders in Decatur. Wilma and Wyllene made lots of nice things happen that week!

We no longer have Commodore Stephen Decatur on our front lawn but our new gardens are alive and well. Enhancement of the Homestead property will progress into 1991

Mrs. Millikin's Trunk

This year as in the past, the Millikin Homestead will host a boutique in conjunc-

*The pleasure of your company
is requested
at our annual
Victorian Christmas Party
on Sunday, December 9, 1990
from 1:00 until 3:00 p.m.*



We no longer have Commodore Stephen Decatur on our front lawn but our new gardens are alive and well. Enhancement of the Homestead property will progress into 1991 as we continue improvements. We would love our windows on West Main to shine a little brighter.

The James Millikin Homestead board of directors welcomes your membership and your many contributions throughout the year. Please help us also be participating in the Christmas Tea with your appearance at our holiday party. We will remain open on Dec. 9th for the public following the tea for members.

Best holiday regards to our families and friends,
Nancy Eichenauer

Mr. and Mrs. Millikin Days

Once again this fall the Homestead came alive as we portrayed life as it was 100 years ago. Forty-four volunteers, dressed in period costumes, played the part of Mr. and Mrs. Millikin, Sophie, the ever popular kitchen maid, Betsy, the dining room maid, the organist (who encourages the children to participate by singing and helping pump the organ), and the inside and outside maids. We so appreciate the willingness of all these people who help out each year. I sometimes get the feeling they are having more fun than the children!

The first week in October we took 41 third grade classes, (1026 students) through the Homestead. This represented 22 schools. Twenty-five classes wrote "thank you" letters to Mrs. Millikin. All letters were read by the co-chairmen and 25 letters were passed on to a 3 member committee of the board to make the final selection of the three winners. Probably the most fun of this whole project was reading the letters, but it was also the most difficult in choosing the best ones!

This year's award winners were:

Natasha Johnson — French Academy

Julia Moore — Durfee

Jason Taylor — Washington

These students will be honored at a short awards ceremony at the November 27th meeting of the School Board which is televised on the local cable channel. Please watch.

A special thanks to Nabisco Brands, Inc. for providing Sophie's "home baked" cookies!

To close, we want to thank all our volunteers once again. You are just great!

Mrs. Millikin's Trunk

This year as in the past, the Millikin Homestead will host a boutique in conjunction with the Annual Victorian Tea. Board members are already working on their own special projects. In the Library we plan to display many unique and beautiful ornaments, small trees, various counted cross-stitch pieces, and Christmas stockings made of ribbons and lace. There will be some delicious delicacies from the pantry, a table of dried flowers, and Mrs. Millikin's trunk will reveal hand sewn and crocheted items such as aprons, doilies, and small sachets. In keeping with our "Santa's Sleigh" theme, we will have miniature sleighs decorated with small sprigs of dried flowers.



We are seeking donations of handmade items from any of you who love to create something special. Please phone Jane Lawson (767-2761) or Ann Yackel (692-2926) in regard to donating items to expand our boutique and increase our funds for the James Millikin Homestead.



History—

Anna Millikin Aids Civil War Soldiers

Fresh from the poignant stories and haunting still pictures of this fall's Civil War documentary, I was led to wonder about the lives of James and Anna Millikin during the history-making years of 1861-65.

Of course, the Millikin Homestead itself did not figure in the Civil War, for it was not built until ten years later. But James and Anna married in 1857 and took up residence in Decatur. In 1860, at the urging of associates, James used his capital gained from the buying and selling of livestock to open a bank on Merchant Street, in the quarters and with the equipment of the old Railroad Bank which had just failed.

The bank was much needed for the stability and growth of Decatur, but success was not assured. James was just learning the banking business and it required his concentration and judgment. His earlier years in driving cattle from Pennsylvania to the Midwest speak of an adventurous spirit willing to forego comfort. But, at the outbreak of war in 1861, James was 34 years old, with others dependent on him, and he remained at the helm of his fledgling bank.

Yet his patriotism was recognized and his significance to Decatur in those trying times was attested to by Decatur's own Civil War chronicler, Jane Martin Johns. At the age of 85, Mrs. Johns, a pioneer settler, recorded her memories of Decatur's Civil War days in her remarkable book, *Personal Recollections 1849-1865*.

Mrs. Johns was enormously proud of the 3331 men, five generals and eleven surgeons—25 percent of the population—which Macon County furnished to the Union army. She pointed out, however, "There were also a few strong men, brave enough to stay at home because they could serve their country better in the field of business than in the field of war. I say 'brave enough' because it required bravery to hear the sneers and inuendoes cast upon the courage and patriotism of the men who stayed at home and resist the tide of enthusiasm . . . and attend to the humdrum work for which education and experience fitted them and which duty demanded . . ."

"It was just as essential to the success of the Union cause that trade should be carried on, manufacturers continued and offices loyally filled . . . as it was that armies should be recruited for the struggle in the field. Men like James Millikin . . . who gave their time and talent to keep the ball of business enterprise rolling and whose advice, sympathy and money were freely given to aid the soldiers' wives at home or the sick and wounded in the hospitals, deserve as much honors as the men who fought the battles of war."

Mrs. Johns was wholly familiar with Decatur's contributions to the Northern cause. Her own husband, Dr. H. C. Johns, a physician, was away in the service of the Union. She herself served as the first president of the Soldiers' Aid Society which united efforts of

Decatur citizens to help the men in the army in every possible way, including aid to their frequently destitute families, for the soldiers were often not paid for months at a time.

In April of 1861 war began. By November Decatur patriots met to form the Soldier's Aid Society. Oddly, as it seems now, the society was first organized by a committee of men; then a meeting for women followed. The constitution drafted by the men provided that the organization, for both sexes, should have women officers only, probably with the thought that the remaining men of the community were needed in other capacities.

Mrs. Johns noted that few women in those days had experience in running anything, and the question of who could lead the new organization was slow to be resolved, for none of the ladies would get up to speak at the meeting. Finally, someone called out for Mrs. Johns to chair the group and she did. She would soon be joined on the slate of officers by Anna Millikin who became secretary on the resignation of Sarah Powers.

The two officers, Mrs. Johns and Anna, appear to have had much in common, although Mrs. Johns was 11 years older than Anna. Both came to Illinois from Ohio. Anna's educational background is known and Mrs. Johns was obviously also well-schooled. They were to die a year apart, Mrs. Johns, in 1912, and Anna, in 1913. Each left her home to the communi-

(continued on back page)

History — Continued

ty; Mrs. Johns' homestead is now the site of Johns Hill Magnet School. Would that her home, where Abraham Lincoln often visited, also still existed today!

Both women were active in the Soldiers' Aid Society through its four years. In 1864 Anna was elected to the presidency. Unfortunately, no personal anecdotes about the Millikins surface in Mrs. Johns' book, but their names, Anna's especially, are sprinkled through its pages. Mrs. Johns had declared that she wrote to chronicle "the magnificent work of the women of Macon County in the war," but she focused on the Aid Society in general and not individual members. It appears, however, that while James was always in the background ready to lend a hand, Anna was at the forefront of work.

Anna's importance to the Civil War organization was later confirmed by Dr. Albert Taylor in his biography of James Millikin when he commented on Anna's ability and vision as a community leader, which he said had gained recognition from her associates, and wrote that, "in the Soldiers' Aid Society she was particularly active."

To imagine what tasks the two presidents, Mrs. Johns and Anna, might have set for themselves and their fellow workers, it is necessary to turn to Mrs. Johns' account, which she based on the secretary's book of the Aid Society as well as memory.

Amidst detailed lists of supplies for soldiers and their families, the story unfolds. The women of the organization arranged socials, festivals and theatricals to raise money. They begged donations of food and materials. They shipped provisions to the front, to hospitals, to prisoners of war. They fed sick and wounded soldiers passing through Decatur. They sewed hospital garments, picked lint and rolled bandages, canned and cooked and preserved and then tried to keep records of it all, down to: "Bundle lint, 1. Letter paper, 2 quires. Dried apples, 3 pecks. Drawers, 30 prs. Tippetts, 2. Nublas, 1." (Well may you ask, "What is a tippet or a nubla?") The combined value of money and materials contributed must have totaled in the thousands when a dollar was worth much more than today.

The Society's most poignant work was regularly to meet the trains bearing the sick and wounded soldiers back to the North. Twenty to 30 women would be at the depot with baskets of food of great variety, gallons of milk and pots of hot coffee and would pass through the cars to distribute the bounty.

"Pale, emaciated, half starved and dishevelled, the men met us with apologies for their appearance . . . and tried to hide the dirty rags that covered their wounds." Worse, yet was a train of exchanged prisoners of war, "big-eyed skeletons of men" who told tales of thirst,

hunger, beatings and deliberate mistreatment of wounds by their Confederate captors. No one could pass through the cars without tears, Mrs. Johns said, but there was always a list of women ready to help. "I know of no place except Decatur where any regular and systematic effort was made to relieve the condition of those, often penniless, travelers."

No lists in the book detail all of those who met the trains, but we can suppose Anna was among them. There are references to two specific committees on which she served. In 1865 a Thanksgiving Festival netted \$525 and



Jane Martin Johns
Decatur's Civil War Chronicler

a committee had been appointed "to investigate and relieve the necessities of the unfortunate. That this duty was faithfully executed, the names of the ladies afford sufficient attestation." Among those delegated was Mrs. Millikin.

Anna and Mrs. Johns were the two corresponding secretaries on the executive committee of the state Sanitary Fair held in Decatur in 1864. It was the job of a state Sanitary Commission to coordinate the contributions of all the various groups in the state comparable to the Soldiers' Aid Society. The idea was conceived to combine a Sanitary Fair with the state Agricultural Fair already scheduled here. The Fair would encourage additional contributions to soldiers' relief by stimulating competition among groups and providing an opportunity for food booths, etc., where money could be raised. It was a tremendous undertaking, and the two women kept extremely busy answering by mail the innumerable requests for information.

That Anna might have been among those who regularly plied the needle in sewing for soldiers is suggested by the fact that when the Aid Society disbanded at the close of the war, the group's remaining possessions were distributed to the poor, but its needle book was voted to the retiring president, Anna Millikin.

As so often, the work of the Aid Society often devolved on a limited corps. There was a superabundance of help in emergencies, "but the appalling work required to purchase materials, distribute and superintend work at the weekly meetings, prepare for the social entertainment once a month, visit the depot every evening and relieve the wants of the soldiers' families had been faithfully performed by the same band of willing workers, who in 1861, had assumed the responsibility. I wish it were in my power to render a proper tribute to their devotion. Their bond of sympathy was love of country, not family, not church, nor social environment. The friendships so formed lasted through life," Mrs. Johns concluded.

There is little doubt that Anna Millikin was one of that "same band of willing workers" who persisted from 1861 to 1865 in the desire to help preserve the Union and serve those so desparately in need.

—Marilyn Loofbourrow

Mr & Mrs Chuck Shonkwiler
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JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC.
P.O. Box 1501
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We welcome these members, new since the listing in the July Gazette:

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

- Mr. Jon F. Bibb
- Mrs. Beatrice R. Bond
- Barbara B. Ernst
- Mrs. John McKeown
- Mrs. W. Robert Moore
- Mrs. William F. Osborne
- Mrs. F. W. Salogga

• **Veech, Jennie**

PATRON MEMBERS

Mrs. O. F. Kuny

FAMILY MEMBERS

- Mr. and Mrs. Orval W. Diehl
- Mr. and Mrs. Ray Huenemeier
- ✓ Mr. and Mrs. Jerald E. Jackson
- Dr. and Mrs. Paul Jurgens
- Mr. and Mrs. Charles E. Pritchett
- Bob and Rita Schwanke
- Mr. and Mrs. R. D. Schwarze
- Dr. and Mrs. Wesley Tower



H.A.S.C. AWARD

The James Millikin Homestead is the recipient of an award from the Decatur Historical and Architectural Sites Commission for its period landscaping and gardens.

Board member Ann Yackel, who spearheaded the landscaping project, accepted the award for the Homestead at a ceremony Oct. 11 at the Homestead. She has been assisted over the summer by Bill McGaughey and Sid Shonkwiler in watering the extensive new

plantings.

Other area recipients of the recent HASC awards include: the Stephen Decatur Monument Project, the Near West Restoration and Preservation Society for its successful campaign to designate a Preservation District which includes the Millikin Homestead; and the West North Street Foundation, for renovation of the house at 880 W. North.