

THE HOMESTEAD FAMILY

GAZETTE

Vol. XXIII, No.1

JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC., DECATUR, ILLINOIS

July 1998

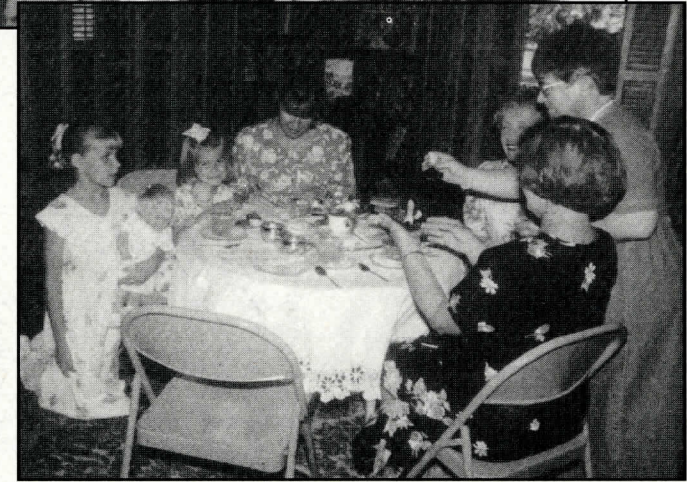
Fourth Victorian Doll Tea

The James Millikin Homestead held its Fourth Annual Victorian Doll Tea on June 27, 1998. Although the weather outside was hot and steamy, the 112 attendees enjoyed a wonderful tea in the cool confines of the Homestead. Susan Phillips was once again available to provide knowledge about her dolls on display as well as the dolls brought to the tea by our patrons. Marny Elliot enjoyed showing her doll house and collection to the young children who attended with their parents and grandparents, the young guests were enthralled with the hollyhock dolls Bill McGaughey and helpers provided to all children. The Tea for Twenty raffle this year was won by Ann Seidman. She will enjoy her own tea party at the Homestead with food donated by Paula Dunlap of A Catered Affair. We would like to thank all the people who helped make this year's event a success. Haines and Essick, The Red Geranium, JBJ and Jane Jurgens donated...

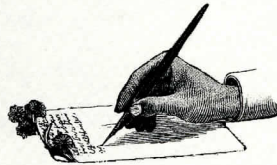


Red Geranium, JBJ and Jane Jurgens donated the door prizes this year. The Garden Club of Decatur made the exquisite tea cup floral arrangements that were on each table. Our wonderful board members and other members of the community provided the food and staffed the event. Without the support of our community, we would not be able to do such a successful event! Thank you all.

Anne Hostetler
Lou Snelson
Jeannette Bradley
Co-Chairmen



A Note From Your President...



Dear Homestead Members,

Our summer news includes the fact we will begin work on our oriel window this fall. The repair work will continue well into next year. We have agreed to have the Melotte-Morse-Leonatti firm do the work.

Recently we were informed that the will of the late Mr. Leiby Hall included the following statement: "I give, devise, and bequeath all of my antiques on loan to the James Millikin Homestead, located in Decatur, Illinois; and any other antiques which I might possess that they would use at the afore mentioned homestead, to the James Millikin Homestead."

Last week several board members visited Mr. Hall's home and removed several items. We will soon have all items catalogued and them appraised for the estate.

We are certainly grateful Mr. Hall had the foresight to share his wishes regarding the items on loan and, of course, he was most gracious to invite us into his home and allow us to bring additional items to the Homestead.

I'm hopeful you are enjoying a joyful and productive summer.

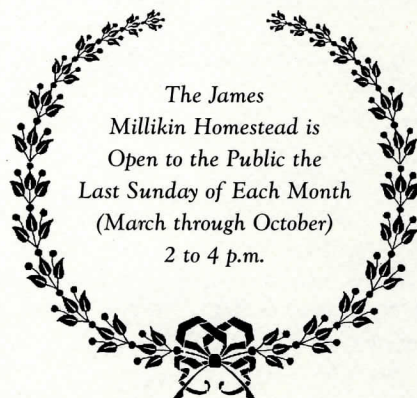
Sincerely,
Jim Williams, President



Exhibit Displays Tea Set Given by Anna



Betsy Ross, right, discusses Doll Tea exhibit with Homestead historian Marilyn Loofbourrow. Significant in display are child's tea set given to her grandmother by Anna Millikin and hobby horse on which her grandmother possibly played as child.



Millikin Homestead

1998-1999

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History: Tea Time Tells Little Known Story

Among the guests at the Victorian Doll Tea was one who brought with her an echo of the Millikins' past. She was Eleanora (Betsy) Ross of Coralville, Iowa. Mrs. Ross, or Betsy as she likes to be called, carried with her a child's bone china tea set that she graciously loaned for display, one that is believed to have been given by Anna Millikin to Betsy's grandmother, the late Ethel (Machan) Spera.

The tea service became the centerpiece of an exhibit put together by Betsy Ross and Marilyn Loofbourrow and which included an antique doll and its vintage handmade wardrobe, also belonging to Betsy. Significant in the exhibit as well was the ancient hobby horse, part of the Homestead collection of artifacts, which was found in the Carriage House at the beginning of restoration. Its origin was a mystery because the Millikins, of course, had no children, but this enduring old nag is now at least suspected to have played a part in the childhood memories of Betsy's grandmother Ethel.

Ethel (Machan) Spera was born in 1880, the youngest of six children of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Machan of Argenta. Her father Robert was a step-brother to James Millikin and was also related to him through another Millikin family line. Ethel, therefore, was a step-niece of James and Anna as well as a blood relative. It is well established in history books that Robert managed a farm for James at Argenta, and the two families were naturally acquainted. According to family tradition, the Millikins became fond of Ethel as a small child and often invited her to their home. She is believed to have been at the Homestead frequently from a young age into early teens, for a large part of her summers as well as many weekends. Among Ethel's early recollections was one of playing on a hobby horse provided by the Millikins.

James and Anna so delighted in her company, it is said, that they eventually asked to adopt her, but, of course, her own parents did not want to give her up. This conflict of desires apparently created a breach for a time but was eventually healed. By then, Ethel was a young woman, and she married at age 18. She became Mrs. William Spera and went on to raise a family of her own, four children in all. To her children and grandchildren she told stories of her memorable days at the Homestead with the Millikins.

Intrigued by her grandmother's stories as the years passed, granddaughter Betsy was eventually seized with the desire to visit the Millikin Homestead. Last fall she contacted Homestead president Jim Williams, who invited her to tour the mansion and to pass along her recollections of her grandmother's experiences here. Betsy came in October and again for the Victorian Christmas Tea. Her mention of the child's tea set given by Anna Millikin to her grandmother brought about an invitation for Betsy to display the set at the Victorian Doll Tea, and so it came to pass.

Betsy's story about her grandmother and the Millikins was not totally a surprise. A note suggesting the Millikins had wished to adopt her grandmother had been found in Homestead files dating from the beginning of restoration when Junior Welfare interviewed all Millikin and Aston family members they could locate to learn more about the Millikins and their home. Among those interviewed was Decatur resident Kermit Spera, a son of Ethel (Machan) Spera, and he had briefly related this anecdote then.

By 1985 when a regular history column was established in the Homestead newsletter, Mr. Spera was deceased and there was no clear information remaining as to how to contact any other descendants. So it was a wish come true to hear from Ethel's

granddaughter, Betsy, more than 20 years after the interview with her uncle.

Now we are gathering further stories and data from Betsy to combine with material from historical sources and plan to present more of this intriguing chapter in the lives of James and Anna in the future.



Tea time figures in a favorite anecdote about Anna Millikin told earlier by a Decatur resident, Eunice McKee, who related how Anna once invited two little neighborhood girls, Eunice herself and another, to tea when they came unexpectedly to her door playing "dress-up." Now we find Anna with yet another little girl, Ethel Machan, who probably took tea with Anna in the Homestead, from a child's tea set presented to her by her hostess.

We are not necessarily superstitious, but odd threads do run through Homestead history. When the Homestead created its own murder mystery fund-raiser, the committee rather casually picked an actual name from local history to give to the detective as a realistic touch in an otherwise totally fictional story. Later, historical research into an entirely different matter turned up the fact that it was, indeed, this particular detective who was sent to investigate the real and "infamous" break-in at the Homestead when James Millikin lost his pocket watch to a burglar.

In another minor twist of fate, an amazingly large huge bundle of peacock feathers was suddenly donated to the Homestead and soon appeared in various floral arrangements around the house. It wasn't long after that, when information came, just as unexpectedly, from a descendant of Hog-Ringer Hill, long-time neighbor of the Millikins, to reveal that Anna Millikin once had a real peacock that strutted about the

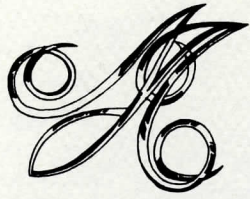
grounds of her home to the delight of children visiting next door at the Hills. No Homestead aficionado had heard this tale before, but how appropriate that the Homestead had just been bedecked conspicuously with numerous peacock feathers.

Now we wonder, did "we" really "create" the Victorian Doll Tea? As indicated previously, some devoted volunteers confess they whisper in the shadows in the Homestead to Anna Millikin for her approval when bringing about a change or new activity in her house. Did Anna and her young friends have so much fun at tea that they might have whispered back to us across time with the sub-conscious suggestion for such an event? Tea leaves were long used to foretell the future. Did the past come back to us in a tea cup, too?



At first thought, we would consider Anna Millikin childless, yet it appears that children peopled her life, after all, from her early role as teacher at the Mt. Zion school, to the neighborhood children she invited to tea, to her companionship with young Ethel Machan, to the children of the Anna B. Millikin Home (which she originally founded for dependent children as well as for women and where she spent continuing efforts in their behalf), and even to the commanding painting, a la Murillo, of young beggar boys, playing in childish innocence, that she acquired for her home, one of the largest pieces of art work she chose, for her personal satisfaction and lasting emotional nourishment. Was she thinking, in this choice, too, of her own little brother, her only sibling, whom she lost when he died at age 2?

Marilyn Loofbourrow
Historian



Millikin University Entertains



The lawn of the James Millikin Homestead was graced by 896 parents of incoming Millikin University students during the 4-day Registration and Orientation of New Students program. This event took place when the host's original accommodations proved too soggy. Lunch was served on the lawn and the Homestead was open for tours.

Thank You! Thank You!

— TO —

Ann Seidman for her generous gift to replace
crystal dishes for the Homestead.

All volunteers who contributed their time and food for
Mr. and Mrs. Millikin Days and the Victorian Doll Tea.

Mr. and Mrs. Millikin Days - 1998

In spite of El Niño, the annual visit of Decatur and Macon County third-graders took place at the James Millikin Homestead May 4-7. Forty volunteers gave their time and expertise to re-enact the roles of maids, friends, and Mr. and Mrs. Millikin themselves.

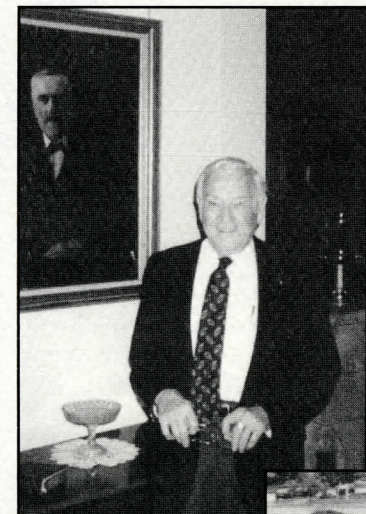
We owe a big thank-you to the priceless volunteers; Cub Foods for the cookies; and Jim Gresham for lunches provided for all volunteers who stayed for a full day shift of performing. Also, thanks to Ginger Fombelle who supplied a lovely bouquet for the history room comprised of blossoms that may well have been in the Millikin's garden years ago. Lou Snelson, Donna Meinhold, and Jim Williams gave an extra measure of assistance as needed.

Approximately 1000 children from 38 classes representing 20 schools attended, along with several enthusiastic parents and teachers. Volunteers and children alike had great fun at this traditional event!

Marilyn Shroyer
Mary Hill
Co-Chairmen



Lil Eckert as Mrs. Millikin

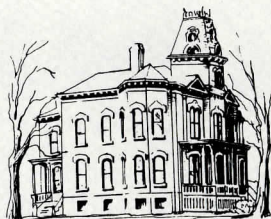


Bob Bangert
as Mr. Millikin



Betsy Empen as Betsy

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Permit 226



Membership

The Millikin Homestead membership number through June 30, 1998 are as follows:

- Life – 40
- Patron – 9
- Friend – 27
- Family – 67
- Individual – 38

for a total of 181. We thank you all for your continued support of the James Millikin Homestead. If you know of anyone who has an interest in historic homes or James Millikin, please give them the membership form attached to this newsletter and let them know about us!

Anne Hostetler
Chairman

JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC.
P.O. Box 1501
Decatur, Illinois 62525

James Millikin Homestead, Inc.

- Student Member – \$5.00
- Individual Member – \$15.00
- Family Member – \$25.00
- Friend – \$50.00
- Patron – \$100.00
- Business – \$200.00
- Life – \$1,000.00 (May be paid in four annual installments)

Make checks payable to:

James Millikin Homestead, Inc.
P.O. Box 1501
Decatur, Illinois 62525

Name _____

Address _____

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(Membership is tax deductible)