

THE HOMESTEAD FAMILY

GAZETTE

Vol. XV, No. 1 XV/3

JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC., DECATUR, ILLINOIS

April 1991

A Note From Your President . . .

Dear Members,

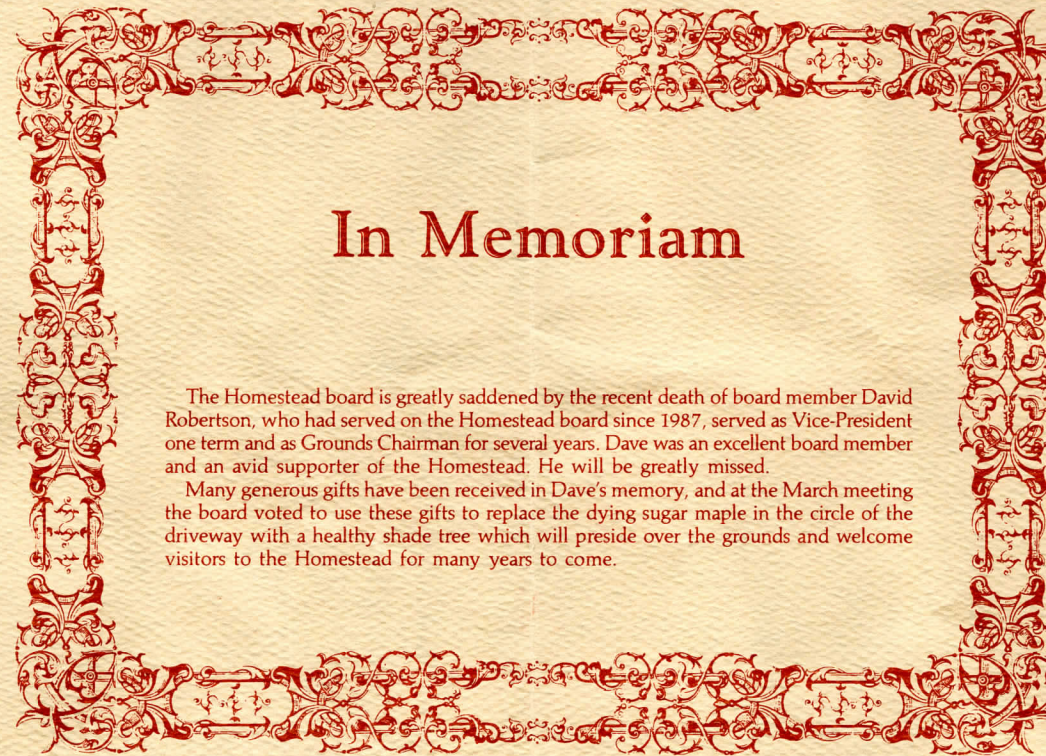
We have had a cold, snowy and icy winter! We yearn for spring! We can watch the first blooming right outside the Homestead doors as the plantings burst into color! Carefully nurtured through summer, fall and winter, we are anxious to witness the awakening.

The Annual Meeting, April 25, held in the Homestead, will offer a musical program before reports are presented. New officers will be announced, new board members introduced, and time allowed for a visit and a tour of the house. We encourage your attendance! Something new has been added since your last visit, probably!

In March our board members had the fun of setting a Victorian table for the Macon County Medical Auxiliary's "Tabletops". We had a lot of fun with this and give special thanks to The Strawflower for loaning us the china we needed to set a really special table.

Tours increase, wedding plans are fulfilled and outdoor parties surface as our doors open to the community. Don't miss the next Art on Main Street this June. Planned and presented by extremely talented people, they give a remarkable show!

My appreciation of board members efforts is heartfelt and sincere. Thank you for each considerate act you contributed, whether given for the Homestead itself or especially as an expression of your own. My year was enhanced by your participation.



In Memoriam

The Homestead board is greatly saddened by the recent death of board member David Robertson, who had served on the Homestead board since 1987, served as Vice-President one term and as Grounds Chairman for several years. Dave was an excellent board member and an avid supporter of the Homestead. He will be greatly missed.

Many generous gifts have been received in Dave's memory, and at the March meeting the board voted to use these gifts to replace the dying sugar maple in the circle of the driveway with a healthy shade tree which will preside over the grounds and welcome visitors to the Homestead for many years to come.

Landscaping

We have received awards and many compliments on our recent landscaping projects thanks to the work of board members Ann Yackel and Bill McGaughey. At the March board meeting they brought us plans for further work which was eagerly approved for this Spring. Their goals remain to make the

developed and so were not there in the Millikins' time, they also restrict visibility for drivers), moving the four crab apple trees from along the drive to a cluster at the south side of the parking area, removing sick and/or damaged trees and shrubs, and removing the large blue spruce from the north east corner

Annual Meeting

The Board of Directors is happy to announce the Annual Meeting of the James Millikin Homestead, Inc. Thursday, April 25, 7:30 p.m. at the Homestead.

—Sid Shonkwiler
Secretary

Nominating Committee 1991 Report

The 1991 Nominating Committee submits the following slate of officers and board members for your approval:

President - Nancy Eichenauer
Vice-President — Ann Yackel
Secretary — Sid Shonkwiler
Treasurer — Jane Lawson

First board term:

Jo Ann Noland
Lynn Shimp
Brigitta Kapp
Bill Osborne

Second three year board term:

Charlotte Dipper
Bill McGaughey
Lois Wells

— Marilyn Loofbourrow,
Nominating Chairman
Jane Lawson
Sid Shonkwiler
Jane Welch

considerate act you contributed, whether given for the Homestead itself or especially as an expression of your own. My year was enhanced by your participation.

Please, remember to review or renew your membership!

Loyally,
Nancy Eichenauer
President

Christmas Tea

Beautiful, mild weather brought a record number of members and friends to the Homestead for the annual Victorian Christmas Tea the first Sunday in December. As always, the board enjoyed this opportunity to entertain you and we were delighted that Mrs. Millikin's Trunk, our boutique, was a money-maker this year. A special thank you goes to the Betsy Empen, who cross stitched the darling seasonal wall hanging which was won by Jean Foran. Congratulations, too, to Ann Haab, winner of the door prize - a free rental of the Homestead.

Pictures Found

Lucien Kapp, Gerry Redford and Shirley Johnson spent a recent afternoon in the Millikin University attic searching out paintings belonging to the Homestead that were in storage there. Some of the paintings were in poor condition but they selected two - a Victorian portrait of Mrs. Robert Forsythe painted by George Peter Healy Alexander and an impressionistic oil painting entitled "A Rainy Day in New York" by Paul Cornoyer. The frame of the latter painting is being touched up and the backing repaired, while the painting of Mrs. Forsythe is now hanging in the south parlor.

— Shirley Johnson
Restoration

Yackel and Bill McGaughey. At the March board meeting they brought us plans for further work which was eagerly approved for this Spring. Their goals remain to make the grounds as pleasing as possible while keeping them relatively easy to maintain, and to have them reflect the character and appearance of the grounds as they were when James and Anna Millikin were here.

The plans for this Spring include the planting of several large shade trees replacing ones lost in recent years, removing the buff brick pillars at the West Main Street entrance (these were added when Millikin Place was

along the drive to a cluster at the south side of the parking area, removing sick and/or damaged trees and shrubs, and removing the large blue spruce from the north east corner of the house.

Other projects we hope to discuss in the near future include improving the exterior lighting, removing the sidewalk from and widening the south drive and replacing our sign on West Main Street with a newly designed one. We hope you will be as excited about seeing these projects unfold as we are. Any board member would be happy to hear any questions or comments you may have.

Board Plans Field Trip

The Homestead board is planning to visit the Dana-Thomas House in Springfield on April 13 since we are interested in seeing their renovations and to compare and contrast our operations. A group from the Dana-Thomas House visited the Homestead last year.

History — Jane M. Johns: Civil War Frees Women

When Jane Martin Johns—lively compatriot of Anna Millikin—wrote her chronicle of pioneer and Civil War days in Decatur, *Personal Recollections 1849-1865*, she left not only a vivid history but an outspoken, underlying commentary on how the Civil War changed the role of women.

Her interpretation was based on deeply felt experience, with the perspective gained in writing nearly 50 years after the war. But history has proved her right. It is generally recognized that the Civil War contributed to significant and permanent change on the lives of women.

During the decisive four years of war, Mrs. Johns and Anna Millikin joined together in leadership of the Decatur Soldiers' Aid Society, Mrs. Johns the first president, Anna, the last. Undoubtedly, both women were affected by the roles they were given before the war and during, but only Mrs. Johns has left us a substantial body of writing to judge the impact.

Sharing the era, the two women led rather different lives. Mrs. Johns had a large family; Anna, no children. Dr. Johns, physician and farmer, was away in the Union Army two years and Mrs. Johns was left to manage their farm and care for their children alone. James Millikin, banker, remained to serve as a civilian on the homefront. Little is known of Mrs. Johns' earlier life, but Anna had been given an education uncommon for her time. The only surviving child of her parents, she had their full attention and support. Dr. Albert Taylor, biographer of James Millikin, said of Anna that "in graduating from the Seminary at



Rare photograph shows 1857 home of Jane Martin Johns, built by her father, William Martin, on Johns Hill. Abraham Lincoln was a friend of the Johns and visited here several or more times. The house was torn down in 1925 to make way for Washington and Johns Hill Schools.

Washington, Pennsylvania," she "was an unusually well equipped woman for the middle of the last century." When her minister father accepted a pastorate at Mt. Zion, she was engaged to teach school there. At the time women did not ordinarily work outside the home, but teaching was one of the few acceptable occupations for them. As a minister's daughter, Anna must have been steeped in the most conventional behavior, but, eleven years the younger, she may never have known quite

the restrictions imposed on women's activities experienced by Mrs. Johns. Certainly in teaching, Anna learned to appear before a group; an experience unknown to most women of the period.

As Mrs. Johns would make it clear in her book, in pioneer days a woman's place was in the home and the focus of life was work. No labor-saving devices afforded leisure time.

(continued on back page)

History — Continued

Woman's work was clearly laid out in dawn-to-dusk duties. Besides her household chores, she milked the cows, tended the chickens, kept the garden, rendered the lard—Mrs. John's list was virtually endless. "The one and only alleviation was mutual helpfulness," said Mrs. Johns. "Almost all social functions assumed an industrial aspect." For social life, families pooled their labor in sewing bees and barn raisings.

Men were generally home-based, too, either as farmers or in one of the few occupations existing—doctors, lawyer, shopkeeper, craftman—which were usually carried on from the home or adjoining workshop. The Industrial Revolution brought change, including inventions to ease life. Men left home to work, but it seemed all the more important that a wife should remain the "heart" of her home, a pure, devoted center to contrast with the crass outside world. In Decatur in the 1850's (when the Millikins arrived), Mrs. Johns noted that "new business enterprises and new people soon created a new social standard." Parties flourished, but they revolved around married couples. There were no ladies' luncheons or afternoon teas and certainly no women's organizations. Men and their wives went out together. "It would have been almost an insult to invite the wife without her husband," Mrs. Johns said.

All at once the guns of war blasted away the well-ordered pattern. In 1861 the women of Decatur were summoned from their homes to take the helm of the Soldiers' Aid Society. The new organization, planned by men, was to have women officers only, to free men for other crucial tasks. Mrs. Johns described the society's first meeting for women:

"To a person accustomed to the orderly manner in which women in these days conduct public meetings, strictly observing parliamentary rules and without loss of modesty or self respect speaking in public places, the first meeting of the Aid Society would appear almost a roaring farce. Women only had been invited to attend the afternoon meeting at the Baptist church, and it is probable that not one of the two hundred who were present had ever 'stood up and talked' to an audience. . . A very few, who were fortunate enough to have been

educated under Mary Lyons' advanced system, had received some lesson in parliamentary law, but conventional modesty kept them from making a practical use of their knowledge.

"Each woman . . . quietly took her seat in the pews and reverently whispered to her neighbor, but not one ventured to 'open the meeting.' After about an hour of this waiting some one exclaimed aloud: 'Hadn't we better send for Dr. Barnes to tell us what to do?' (Dr. Barnes had presided at the initiatory meeting.) A babel of objections came from all quarters . . . The women had found their voices and all talked together, each urging some one else to 'go up and begin.' One woman finally ventured to go to the front and, pounding on the table with a hymn book, called for order, and asked, 'Won't some one nominate a chairman for this meeting?' Dead silence fell . . . and the question was repeated. After more whispering and some giggling at the inconsistency of having a chair"man" for a woman's meeting, some one called out, "Oh, Mrs. Johns—you do it." Insisting upon a proper nomination and second, Mrs. Johns did.

It is not certain, although likely, that Anna Millikin was present at this first meeting. Something of the past surely echoed through, however, in 1890, when, in her mid-year report as secretary of the Decatur Art Class, Anna was impelled to write, "May the zeal of our ladies never grow less, and may the time soon arrive when it shall be said of a lady, not that she conducts a meeting as well as a man but that she conducts a meeting better than a man—and, not that she knows as much as a man, but that she knows more than a man."

Beyond this, it remained for Mrs. Johns to sum up the impact of the war on the lives of women:

"In the great upheaval and readjustment of social and political conditions consequent on the Civil War, few things had more lasting consequence or greater influence on the future of the nation than the awakening of woman to a realization of her capacity and power in the conduct of affairs. Before 1860, it was the exception, not the rule, for a woman to have any influence over, partnership in, or intelligent knowledge of her husband's business. The husband was the head of the house, paid the bills and held the purse strings. Few women ever

had a dollar they could call their own or spend without special permission of the lord of the exchequer, and either cringing economy or careless waste was the almost inevitable result of such irresponsible financiering. The women who earned money were looked upon either with pity or contempt, pity if she must, or contempt if she openly desired to so debase her womanhood.

"Teaching, sewing or keeping boarders was legitimate employment for women who were compelled to support themselves, but if one had a husband, father or brother, it was a loss of both caste and self respect to openly earn money. As a rule, they were content to be merely domestic animals, giving to the family their strength and ability under the direction of some overlord, husband, brother or business agent, and receiving in return their 'keep' and affectionate care.

"The transition of the country from peace to war was appalling and swift, but the regeneration of its women kept pace with it. Confronted with responsibilities never before assumed, they cast aside timidity and put on strength. Ignorance, inexperience and false pride had made them willing slaves, but the clash of war rent their bonds. They sprang forth fully armed, brave and strong to do battle as best they might for their country . . . They sent their husbands, sons, brothers and lovers to the fearful chances of the battlefield . . . The only panacea for such anguish was the mighty power of absorbing work. The farm, the counting house and the office found them taking the places of the men who had gone forth to battle."

At the close of her wartime recollections Mrs. Johns wrote, "Thus ended the most eventful, exciting and resultful period in history. The United States has established her right to be called a Nation. Slavery was no longer a blot on the escutcheon of the land of the free. Woman had discovered herself as an important factor in the body politic, and had vindicated her right to own herself and product of her labor. The Church was more Christian and less sectarian, society was more democratic, the rites of peace had been stimulated by the necessities of war, while war itself had been made too dangerous to be entered into on slight pretext by the inventive

genius of American artisans. The world was made better and wiser by the bitter struggle."

After their stirring wartime experiences, it seemed that Mrs. Johns and Anna settled quietly back into their daily lives—but not quite as before. While nurturing her family, Mrs. Johns took time to work in organizations like the Ladies' Library Association, which provided the forerunner of a free public library to Decatur. Anna founded the Decatur Art Class, a women's study club which encouraged individual research and writing as well as speaking before the group. She spearheaded the formation of the Anna B. Millikin Home for women and dependent children and participated for years on its board. Such activities hardly seem iconoclastic now, but they would not have occurred before the Civil War.

—Marilyn Loofbourrow
Historian



Johns Descendant Visits Homestead

One of the joys of the Millikin Homestead's annual Christmas Open House is never knowing whom you may meet here!

This past December, it was a particular surprise and pleasure to make the acquaintance of a great granddaughter of Jane Martin Johns, Mrs. John (Eugenia) Oldweiler, of Decatur. Totally unaware that the December "Homestead Family Gazette" had focused on her great grandmother, Mrs. Oldweiler and her husband, like many others, had come to share in the annual Homestead event. On the other hand, the Gazette article had been published without any realization that Jane M. Johns had descendants remaining in Decatur.

Fortunately, Bill McGaughey, Homestead board member, knew the Oldweilers and put "two" and "two" together. He brought Mr. and Mrs. Oldweiler and the Gazette staff (of two) together for introductions. As a result, Mrs. Oldweiler has since furnished some genealogy of the Johns family and the rare photograph of the historic Johns home appearing in this issue.

Mr & Mrs Chuck Shonkwiler
 2226 S. Taylor Rd.
 Decatur, Illinois 62522

Non-Profit
 Organization
 Bulk Rate
 U.S. Postage Paid
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 Permit 226

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

New Membership Year

Just a note to remind you that the membership year at the Homestead begins in April. You will get your annual membership letter soon if you haven't already. If you didn't get one, or have mislaid it, use the handy membership form below or pass it on to a friend! Thank you.

Jane Welch
 Membership

Calling Volunteers

We are excited with the interest in conducted tours at the homestead. Because of the number of tours already scheduled for the spring, we are calling on our volunteers to help with the tours. We would like to add you to our list of volunteers if you are interested in telling others about the history of the Millikin Homestead. If you are willing to volunteer your time please call Charlotte Dipper — 963-2272.

We're looking forward to adding you to our list of dedicated people who graciously give many hours of their time to the Homestead.

—Charlotte Dipper
 Volunteers



Please make checks payable to

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

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
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- Student Membership \$5.00 per year
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