

# THE HOMESTEAD FAMILY

## GAZETTE

Vol. XXI, No.2

JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC., DECATUR, ILLINOIS

November 1996

### A Note From Your President...



Dear Members:

The leaves are literally raining off the trees and the Homestead is busily preparing for the Holiday Season. Please mark your calendars for the Christmas Tea, which will be on the second Sunday in December this year. We decided that the first Sunday was too close to Thanksgiving for our board members to bake, decorate and staff the tea. We look forward to seeing all of you on December 8, 1996 from 1 to 5 in the afternoon.

We have had many people using the Homestead this year for various events. Millikin University has used the home for parties, classes, receptions and conferences. Our scheduling chair, Donna Meinhold, has been kept busy showing the home to potential renters for their receptions, parties and even weddings. All this use nets the Homestead funding but is also hard on the infrastructure. We have had to block off Mr. and Mrs. Millikin's bedroom because of the disintegrating carpet. This next year will be one for re-doing some of the interior in order to combat wear and tear.

The next time you are at the Homestead, take a look around the grounds. Bill McGaughey had been busy planting trees and bushes from our own nursery in back of the Carriage House. There are new trees planted along Millikin Place and a new planting where the old maple tree stood.

We hope all of our readers have a safe and warm Holiday Season.

Sincerely,  
Anne Hostetler, President

### History – Decatur's Colorful Pioneer Clothier

When James and Anna Millikin moved in 1858 to their first actual home in Decatur, a cottage at the corner of William and Edward streets, their next-door neighbors to the east were John R. Race and his wife Maggie. The Races lived out their lives in Decatur and held a place as early acquaintances and even, perhaps, as friends of the Millikins. Race, like Millikin, was considered instrumental in the growth of Decatur in its early days.

The two couples were closely parallel in starting their married lives. All four partners been born further east and were newcomers, more or less, to this area. The Millikins married on New Year's Day, 1857; the Races, a few years earlier, on March 10, 1854, in Springfield. Both took up residence in Decatur and came to live side-by-side on West William for more than ten years, until the Races opted for a larger home - much larger, indeed - in 1871. The Millikins, of course, moved to their newly-constructed home, the Homestead, in 1876.

manufacturers, engineers and contractors and their families." With new people came "new homes and more gaiety," and John Race and his wife were listed among those newcomers "who all kept open house." Surely, Their next-door neighbors, the Millikins, were among the Races' guests!

The 1860's saw the Millikins and Races caught up together in frenetic community activity to support the Northern cause in the Civil War. Anna Millikin helped to start the Hospital Aid Society for the benefit of soldiers and their families and was active as an officer, and otherwise, from start to finish of the war. Mrs. Race's participation in the society is not so clearly delineated, but one anecdote reveals her personal effort at a time of great need.

At the fall of Ft. Donelson, the Northern wounded were more than the immediate area could accommodate. Cars of the injured were attached to trains going north, and those bound for Decatur had a regular stop here. Women of the community were asked to meet the trains and provide what-





1996

## Victorian Christmas Tea

The 1996 Christmas Tea will be held on December 8. Members are invited to attend from 1 to 3 in the afternoon, with the Homestead open to the public from 3 to 5. If you are unable to attend the early shift, please come later, we would love to see you.

We will have the usual refreshments made by our wonderful board members as well as tea, coffee and punch. The entertainment is still being scheduled, but we'll try to have some uplifting Holiday music for you to enjoy.

## Eye-Catching J. R. Race Store



Photographic work, Paragon Graphics

Clothier J. R. Race (at left) stands with business associates in doorway of early Decatur store that made him a fortune. Location is downtown Decatur but otherwise uncertain. Note huge store windows of curved glass and hanging light marked "Race." Photo is from a give-away card designed to advertise store.

Millikins, of course, moved to their newly-

constructed home, the Homestead, in 1876. Race had arrived in Decatur ca. 1854 and became a highly successful clothier, Decatur's first, and, later, a clothing manufacturer. He gained a reputation in Decatur as the man who refused credit to General U. S. Grant in the Civil War. As the story goes, the little-known general came into Race's store early in the war, didn't pass master with Race for his nondescript appearance, and was turned down. The truth of the encounter is shrouded in the past, but another version boasts that Race did take Grant's measurements and provide him with the very first uniform the general would wear in the War of the Rebellion.

In 1858 both the Races and the Millikins were attracted to the 300 block West William. The Millikins bought a cottage there, which already seemed to have been in existence. Record shows the Races bought a lot - with a house on it, too, to judge from the price paid - from their neighbor to the east, E. O. Smith. Smith was a carpenter credited with building much of early Decatur. He divided his lot and probably erected the house adjoining his own, either as a speculative venture or by contract for the Races.

The 1860 federal census for Macon County shows the Races dwelling in the only house located between the Smiths and the Millikins. Here they started their family, and, when they sold in 1870, it was to another prominent man, cattle dealer Uli Ulery. Various records combine to suggest that this first home of the Races, dating from at least 1860 and perhaps as early as 1858, still stands today, with additions, as 332 West William.

While living as neighbors, the Races and Millikins shared the close-knit but burgeoning social life of the small town of Decatur, population then estimated at between 2,000 and 3,000. In the 1850's Decatur was growing, and according to chronicler Jane Martin Johns, "The old settlers welcomed the newly-imported bankers, speculators,

women of the community were asked to meet the trains and provide whatever food and succor they could to the wounded.

When the very first such train arrived, Maggie Race was among the number who responded with provisions from their own homes. There being 50 wounded aboard, Mrs. Race brought 50 sandwiches she had made; another gave out the last 50 apples from her own winter store: a third offered a jar of pickled peaches "big enough to go round twice," and so on. Every woman insisted upon passing around her own basket, wrote Mrs. Johns, despite the fact that the condition of the emaciated, half-starved wounded was sufficient to cause tears as the women left the train. With the extent of her involvement in the Aid Society, it seems highly probable that Anna Millikin was a comrade in this oft-repeated activity.

In addition to their wives, Mrs. Johns also singled out both James Millikin and John Race for their contributions, financial and otherwise, to various relief causes. When members of the Aid Society met to sew for soldiers, and there was an especially heavy workload, Race would send in sewing machines from his business and a man to help. There were few sewing machines in Decatur otherwise. Mrs. Race likely, was among the seamstresses.

The closeness of the relationship between the Races and Millikins is not truly known, but a late-life photograph of James Millikin had a notation that it had been taken at the "golden wedding" of Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Race, i.e., in 1904. By then the two couples could have known each other for 47 years.

When the Races moved from West William, leaving the Millikins behind, it was for a very impressive new home. Race's clothing business had so prospered in less than 15 years that by 1871 he had been able to erect an elegant mansion, ahead of the Millikins', at 418 N. Water, where the J. C. Penney store later stood. Constructed of brick, the house contained 25 rooms "fitted



# History – Decatur's Colorful Pioneer Clothier

## (continued)

in palatial style." The fine grounds had a frontage of 160 feet.

This huge home was proclaimed "probably the most spacious dwelling in Decatur." and also was called "for years the most pretentious residence property in the city," Millikin Homestead notwithstanding. The Race home became the setting for many more social events hosted by the hospitable Mrs. Race.

Race and his family occupied the house for over 40 years, and it was said to have been kept in excellent repair. The house was torn down ca. 1915, only after the deaths of John and Maggie Race, and as Decatur continued to grow. Guy Scovill and H. Warnecke purchased the property in 1915 after the plot, sans house, was cut into 11 lots. They built a one-story business building, later razed for the Penney store constructed in 1948.

While the Millikins had no children, the Races had a total of six, but two daughters died in infancy. A son, Arthur C., lived for at least a time in Wichita, Kansas, and a daughter, Edith (Mrs. J. Gibson Vance) Eventually resided in Los Angeles, California. One daughter, Mrs. Flora Bashort, died as a young woman, and another, Ella, remained at home, said to be an invalid at the time of her mother's death on August 5, 1906, in the family home. After the death of his wife, Maggie, Raced married Mrs. Virginia Wolgamot, possibly a family connection, who apparently survived him. Race died November 10, 1910.

Maggie Race was born Margaret Ann Wolgamot on April 18, 1838, at Hagerstown, Maryland. She came with her parents to Springfield to live, where her father was said to have been a prominent money lender. After her passing, Decatur

newspapers told something of her place in society and personal character. One said, "Mrs. Race was prominent in the city and for years was a leader in social circles and entertained extensively in her handsome home. She has many friends in Decatur, especially among the older people.

In the words of the rival newspaper, she "was known and widely admired as a sincere and pleasant woman who made little pretensions and attempted nothing she did not carry out. She had a wide circle of friends and has been known here as a hospitable and delightful entertainer. The beautiful Race home has been the scene of many brilliant social gatherings of past years." For the record, the Races were members of St. John's Episcopal Church.

John Race was recognized both for his long-standing success in business and his forceful personality. He apparently was a man larger than life in stature, girth, accomplishments and personal impact. His obituary described him, inadvertently or otherwise, as "one of the big figures of the city for years." It went on to say that "he was a huge man, picturesque, blunt in his language, thoroughly honest, and a good citizen." A note found with the photo accompanying this article pointed him out in the picture as "the portly gentleman at left." Another writer said, "Plain spoken and brusque in his manner, Mr. Race often was misjudged by persons who were not acquainted with his mannerisms."

Curiously, Race was known everywhere as "Judge" Race, although he never sat on the bench. How he got the title is not known. Perhaps it was an effect of his personality, but there were different opinions on the reason. One explanation was that he gained the title when once he was called

upon as reference to settle a dispute between two men. Another idea was that "in the early 70's when the Macon County Fair was held...Mr. Race was always chosen a judge. From this experience and also from the fact he was recognized as an authority on business law, he was given the title." Be as it may, his obituary began with the appellation, "Judge John R. Race..."

All sources agreed, that Race was a phenomenal business figure in Decatur. At his death at age 82, he had been active here to the last, for 56 years. He accumulated a fortune in his day estimated at between \$400,000 and \$500,000, including many land holdings, especially early Decatur business properties. (Among the properties was the building at 211 N. Water then housing the Folrath Shoe Store which continued for over a hundred years in that location to the present. Autumn, 1996, saw the closing of the store and the demolition of the building with its business block.)

Above all, Race was honored in his time as a pioneer who made a significant contribution to the development of Decatur. The wealth of detail recorded concerning his career is sufficient to merit another article on its own.

Note: The photograph accompanying this article was graciously given to me some years ago by Duane and Lynn Potter after I admired it in their store. Neither Lynn nor I were then involved with the Millikin Homestead as we are now and little did we know that at long last, the picture would come to serve a common purpose. Thanks, Lynn and Duane.

– Marilyn Loofbourrow  
Historian



### Thank You!

Again our thanks to Emmy Lou Moore (Mrs. James Moore) for another donation. We received a charming antique doll buggy of wood and wicker construction. The Millikins had no children, but this buggy "compliments" other period toys we own, several dolls and an antique rocking horse.

## Interested in Volunteering?



ew volunteers are always needed to lead guided tours and answer questions. Your commitment is approximately 2 to 3 tours a year. If you are interested, please contact Lou Snelson, volunteer coordinator, at 429-1750.

Our next training session will be scheduled in the early spring.



# Magazine Features Millikin Homestead

Mary Turner of Decatur is the author of an excellent article about the James Millikin Homestead which appeared in the August issue of *Historic Illinois* magazine, under the title, "Grande Dame of the Prairie: The Millikin Homestead."

Mrs. Turner is coordinator of the Illinois Association of Museums in Springfield and is former director of the Birks Museum at Millikin University.

A collage of Homestead photographs - exterior and interior - form the cover of the issue. The five-page inside article contains additional pictures, including a work-in-progress shot of the grapevine ceiling in the dining room.

Mrs. Turner became particularly well-acquainted with the Homestead while working on a master's thesis on preservation through Eastern Illinois University several years ago. Focus of the thesis was the first floor of the Homestead, with emphasis on its furnishings against the background of how the home was preserved. She did studies of the period and also worked with Homestead board members for a thorough knowledge of the house. Suggestions in her thesis concerning historically-appropriate use of furnishings were put to good advantage by the Homestead restoration committee.

As director of the Birks Museum, Mrs. Turner was aware that some of the Millikins' original furnishings had been in storage at the university, but in conjunction with gifts from other estates. She helped to identify and restore to the Homestead some

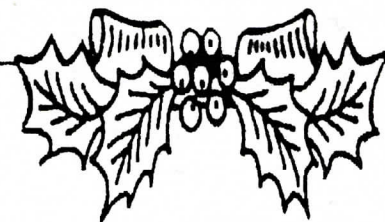
original and welcome small artifacts, especially needed to further evoke the atmosphere of the Homestead's era.

Her work with the Illinois Association of Museums can carry her around the state, although her home remains in Decatur. The IAM was organized in 1994 and is affiliated with the Illinois Preservation Agency. It is composed of museums, large and small, historical societies, genealogical societies and other cultural and educational agencies. The association provides a framework for networking, with a newsletter, conferences, etc., as well as educational material to assist with the operation of a museum or related organization and its collections and educational programs.

*Historic Illinois*, in which Mrs. Turner's article about the Homestead appeared, is published bi-monthly by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. A limited number of copies of the August issue are available. For information, write: Mary Turner, Illinois Association of Museums, 1 Old State Capitol Plaza, Springfield, IL 62701.

The magazine regularly offers well-written-and-researched articles on Illinois historic sites. It is available to the public by subscription at \$10 per year. For further subscription information, write: *Historic Illinois*, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, 1 Old State Capitol Plaza, Springfield, 62701.

- Marilyn Loofbourrow



## Thank You!

Our thanks to Mrs. Royce Boaz for giving the Homestead a beautiful antique damask table cloth that had been in her family since around 1875. The cloth is in excellent condition and big enough for the dining table. We shall use it for special occasions.

We very much appreciate the fact that people choose the Homestead as a trustworthy recipient for Victorian family heirlooms.



WRAPS (Near Westside Restoration and Preservation Society) is including the Millikin Homestead on their annual Heritage and Holly Tour, November 29 and 30. Other homes on the tour this year, include #2, #3, #4 Millikin Place as well as 919 and 905 West William. NWRAPS is excited to have the Millikin Place homes on the tour as these are the Frank Lloyd Wright studio homes that are rarely open. Watch the newspaper and poster for ticket information. The proceeds benefit the Near Westside neighborhood and their efforts to restore, refurbish and enhance this historic area of Decatur. We are proud to be a part of Heritage and Holly.

