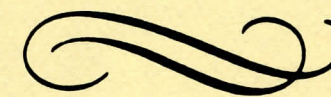


# THE HOMESTEAD FAMILY



## GAZETTE

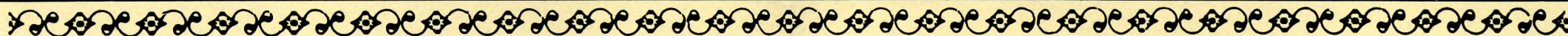


Vol. XI, No. 2

(XI/3)

JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC., DECATUR, ILLINOIS

February, 1987



### MRS. MILLIKIN'S TRUNK SNAPS SHUT FOR THE YEAR

A grateful thank you to our friends and members who made the Victorian Christmas Tea Boutique so successful again this year. Our whole-hearted appreciation goes to the many people who spent time and talent in creating and producing delightful Christmas ornaments and gifts for sale.

The very attractive annual ornament pictured in the last "Gazette" and designed by Barbara Hackel was, naturally, a very rapid sell-out. Brigitta Kapp, who has a shrewd eye for pricing and arranging, spent hours doing just that very thing for the Boutique. She strikes a nice balance between giving a fair, affordable price to our members yet bringing a reasonable return to the Homestead.

We were lucky to receive a number of treasures for our silent auction after our last request to you; these included a fine glass fruit bowl and some nice pieces of silver plate holloware. Thanks again to our staunch supporters.

And Miss Victoria H. Bear. (the H. is for Homestead, on her mother's side of the family) had her crowd of admirers. A drawing was held for Miss Bear immediately after the close of the Boutique and, out of 104 chances, Jim Williams was the lucky winner. A spy tells us that Miss Bear presently is seated in a high chair, lending her considerable presence to the Williams dining room.

The decorated slates from the roof (designed by Dorothy Smethers, construction by Dave Robertson) were the biggest single money maker and made a great souvenir for the purchasers.

The net profit from the Boutique, Pantry, Silent Auction and the drawing for Miss Bear was \$993.10 - all to go into general funds for maintaining and caring for our magnificent house. We hope you had much fun shopping in Mrs. Millikin's Trunk as we had in filling it. Again, our thanks to you.

Nancy Talbott  
Boutique Chair

Board Approves Exterior Painting

### *Who's Who of Victorian Christmas Parties*



A guest of honor

### Former board members

presided at table while these labored behind the scenes:  
Bettyrose Leader  
Marilyn Womeldorff  
Joan Cordes  
Olive Langsdorf  
Jack Langsdorf  
Carolyn Travis  
Kathy Green



### Weary Traveler Finds a Home

Did you know that every object that is purchased for, or loaned or given to, the Homestead gets its personal history written, as best as can be determined, by a member of the Homestead Accession Committee? We all are aware that our goal as Association members is to preserve and proclaim to the world the history of James' house, but it sometimes is overlooked that inside this house there are hundreds and hundreds of other histories, as each purchased or donated item is catalogued and described with as much information as we can obtain. Witness the fascinating bits of history Brigitta and Lucien Kapp have recorded on the newly-purchased and absolutely stunning dining room chandelier:

Created circa 1880 to 1885, this pot metal fixture has brass accent points and 12 glass shades. Originally gas, the chandelier was first seen in Decatur at a sale at the Powers-Jarvis mansion on West Decatur St., in 1980 or 1981. The buyer of the fixture was a Mr. Becker, who later sold the fixture at the Haynes Auction House in Bement, Ill., keeping the 18"-24" high statue which stood in the middle of the light fixture. Mr. Robert Moore bought the fixture in Bement. At that time 11 of the original 12 shades were still intact; these shades were red glass and had 6 different patterns inscribed. Mr. Moore bought the fixture for the shades, which he took off and sold separately. Since the fixture would have required extensive repair, he decided to resell it through the Macon County Auction House; he received \$37.50 for it. A Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell bought it at the auction, and later they resold it to Mr. John Ballog for \$250. Lucien Kapp had seen the fixture at the sale at the Maxwells and though it might be a possibility for the Homestead. He found out that Mr. Ballog had bought it and he contacted him regarding selling. Mr. Ballog agreed to sell the fixture to the Homestead for the price he had paid for it.



At the February meeting, the board of directors approved the painting of the exterior woodwork of the Homestead. We had requested money for this project from the state Historical Sites Preservation Commission and had expected to have an answer by the end of January, but due to delays in Springfield, we have received no answer yet. However, the board decided exterior painting is a necessity and we will be publishing for bids very shortly.

Jack Langsdorf, President

### Filling in More of the Blanks

We express our gratitude once again to Ruth Prust and Charlotte Meyer for another effort in behalf of the Millikin Homestead.

Ruth has made available for the history project a large amount of material pertaining to the interconnected Leiby, Hall, and Shellabarger families of Decatur.

This information is of particular interest because many of the fine period furnishings of the Homestead, large and small, are on loan from the Hall estate.

Decatur historian Charlotte Meyer has already done considerable work in assisting Ruth to trace and document the family lines, but there is much yet to explore among the clippings, papers and pictures.

Another chapter of early Decatur life, and further insight into the Homestead, awaits us when this work can be completed.

We thank Ruth and Charlotte for preserving this material and for the amount of organization already brought to it.

Marilyn Loofbourrow, Historian



### New Year's: 1879

"Mrs. J. K. Warren, Mrs. T. T. Roberts, Miss May Rogers, Miss Mollie Barnes and Miss Dollie Millikin will be with Mrs. James Millikin and will be happy to see their lady and gentlemen friends from 3 o'clock to 9 p.m."

Decatur newspaper clipping,  
Dec. 31, 1879



**Musicians:**  
Marilyn Pearceall (shown)  
Millie Turner  
Tammy Green  
Jill Green  
Brian Kozak

### Butlers and Maids:

Mike Womeldorff  
Marc Green  
Jill Green  
Tammy Green  
Trish Striglos  
Katie Hite



**House Decoration:** Laura Faber  
**Silver:** Barb Hostetler,  
Dr. and Mrs. J. E. Jones

### Dispensers of Welcome:

Bobbie Wolfe  
Dorothy Smethers  
Shirley Kraft  
Estella Launtz  
Joan Cordes  
Marilyn Loofbourrow  
Susie Szymczak  
Paula Scott  
Mary Ann Clark  
Marty Grohne

So this fixture has changed hands many times but was never worked on until Mr. Moore agreed to restore and wire it for our dining room. He did all this time-consuming work for free; it involved many hours of tedious labor. Wiring through narrow channels just meant for gas flow was very difficult since tolerances were very close. Lucien Kapp restored the pot metal parts of the fixture with black shoe dye! Mr. Moore assembled the fixture arms and hung it, a job which took a day due to the extreme weight.

Even though this fixture is not identical to the one which hung in the dining room during the Millikin's time, it is of similar style and size and is from the same time period. Should we ever find the identical fixture, we should have no trouble selling this one for a very good price. Our total costs were \$762.90. Estimated value of same in today's antique market: \$7,000.

We are very indebted to Mr. Moore for all his free labor and expertise over the past years. As a token of our appreciation, the board voted to present him with an honorary Life membership in the Homestead Association. Mr. and Mrs. Moore were honored at a dinner at the Homestead in January. At that dinner, the board gave Mr. Moore a roof slate plaque (from our original roof) with an appropriate inscription and a picture of the Homestead.

Brigitta Kapp, Restoration Chair

### A RARE MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT

"Miss Dollie Millikin, of this city, is preparing to give a musical entertainment which will possess rare merit, she having engaged for the occasion some of the best talent in the country, both of vocal and instrumental performers. She has also engaged for the occasion a square grand Chickering Piano, of concert size, for which she sends to New York City. The time of giving the concert will be indicated in due season."

Decatur newspaper clipping,  
May 29, 1878.

### *In Memoriam*

Mary Ann Clark, former board member, deceased Monday, February 9, 1987.

True to her loyalty to the Homestead, Mary Ann designated the James Millikin Homestead for any memorium.



## To See Ourselves As Others See Us

While strolling through the park one day, in the merry merry month of maybe it was September, I was taken by surprise by a lass with laughing eyes, who was exhibiting her pen and ink drawings at the weekend Art Fair. There on her exhibit board were bold black and white renderings of some of Decatur's most famous old houses - the Ferre mansion, the Oglesby home, the Wright design, old Stephen Decatur High, and lo! the James Millikin Homestead!

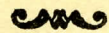
"Would you let us use your drawing in our newsletter?" we asked, explaining our recurring feature on the Homestead as depicted in various art forms.

"Of course," said she.

"And I would like to know, for our article, why you got interested in drawing old homes, ours in particular," says I.

"Because my husband is an author/historian and needed some illustrations for an article he was preparing."

To shorten this story of discovery, it is time to tell you the young lass was Leslie Guillory (Mrs. Dan), wife of one of Decatur's biggest advantages and poet laureate of the prairie! We are going to treat you here to some of the Sandbergian prose with which he framed his wife's art.

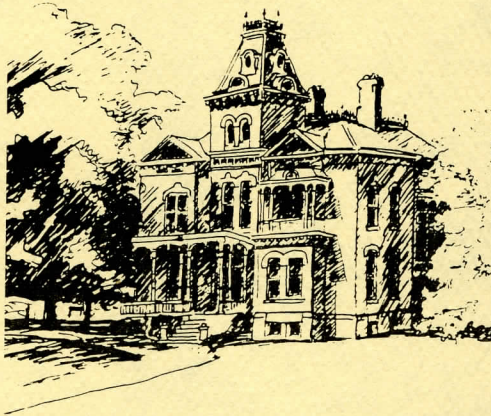


### Gone are the glory days, but history lives on in this grand old house

To the harried motorist, shuttling along the concrete ribbon of Interstate 72, the city of Decatur looms as a distraction to the south, a skyline of towering smokestacks that send up giant plumes of snow-white steam. On frigid winter days, those plumes climb into the upper atmosphere, announcing to the world that Decatur is still a major processing center for corn and soybeans, as suggested by its nickname "Soy City." But the glory days have long since passed, and like most manufacturing cities in the Midwest, Decatur has felt the bite of foreign competition and the drag of the overvalued American dollar. Brazil has flooded the market with cheap soybeans, while the Japanese and Italians have undersold American cars and earth-moving equipment, leaving local plants, like Caterpillar and Borg-Warner, in precarious positions. Hundreds of workers have been laid off—some permanently—and during one reporting period, Decatur led the entire nation in unemployment. Every morning I drive by vast industrial parking lots that once were filled with workers' cars and

now lie virtually deserted. Yet inventors and entrepreneurs once amassed great fortunes in this city (the fifth largest in Illinois), and between the time of the Civil War and the Great Depression, much of that wealth went into the construction of lavish personal residences, architectural legacies that can still be appreciated today.

When thirty-one-year-old James Millikin arrived in Decatur in 1856, there were no soybeans or automobiles, only a prosperous little community of 3,839 souls with genuine potential for economic growth. Millikin's genius lay in sensing that potential. He arrived with a fortune of \$75,000, which he had earned as a kind of eastern cowboy, driving herds of cattle (and sheep) from the hills of his



native Pennsylvania for fattening and resale on the Indiana prairie. His real estate investments in Macon County earned him so much money that in four years he put out a shingle advertising himself as "J. Millikin, Banker." During his lifetime (1825-1909) Millikin gave over a half million dollars to various charities, and at his death he left one and three-quarter million dollars for charitable and educational endowments. The most important gift established a university which opened its doors in 1903 and still bears his name. A few blocks east of Millikin University stands the Millikin Homestead (125 North Pine Street), the first structure in Decatur to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places (in June of 1974) and the only residence in Decatur to be mentioned in John Drury's classic book, *Old Illinois Houses* (University of Chicago Press, 1948). Without hyperbole, the Millikin Homestead can easily be called the most impressive building in Macon County. And during the time that Millikin lived in the mansion, he watched the nation go from horse-drawn to horseless carriages.

Begun in 1875 and finished during the Centennial Year of 1876, the Millikin Homestead was built

for \$18,000 on land that cost \$2,200. Of course, in 1875 the services of a first-rate carpenter could be obtained for as little as \$1.25 per day, and even master bricklayers were paid no more than \$2.00 per day. Today, this large Italian-Victorian mansion, dominating several acres of lovely, landscaped grounds, is priceless.

The Homestead contains seven fireplaces, each one unique in design and featuring the use of such materials as wood, marble, and stone. In fact, first-time visitors will be overwhelmed by the sheer richness and variety of materials used in constructing both the interior and exterior of the dwelling. The interior features brass fixtures, art glass windows (etched with delicate tracery), stained glass (a delightful surprise as one mounts the staircase), and bird's-eye maple in shutters and paneling.

The exterior could well serve as an architectural textbook, since it contains examples of virtually every important style of ornamental device. The distinctive tower with its high mansard roof is influenced by the Second French Empire, and the tower is further enhanced by an elliptical (or bull's eye) window. The double gables feature pediments with modillions (decorative blocks), and the north side of the house boasts a bay window of the oriel type (cantilevered and protruding from the wall). The roof features iron cresting on its peak, and the bay window on the north side is covered with copper. Millikin spared no expense in building this mansion; it was easily the finest residence of its day, at least in Macon and surrounding counties. What matters today isn't the architectural jargon or the monetary value of the house but the poetry of its presence, the way it hangs on the horizon, sitting like a small hill in a grove of venerable oak and maple trees. The eye delights in a thousand small and subtle pleasures as it follows the mixture of straight and curved lines, the arches, triangles, and ovals that define the overall form. There is pleasure, too, in the colors and textures of the Homestead. On a recent fall visit, I found the lawns fresh and green, the overhanging trees russet and pumpkin-colored, the red brick earthy and noble-looking, and the bluish gray slate of the roof shiny and wet from the previous night's rain.

When I first visited the place in 1973, pigeons had mounted a full-scale invasion, leaving their telltale deposits everywhere. The halls were littered with rubble, the woodwork appeared weathered and cracked, and a sooty grime covered everything like the dust of ages. By that time James Millikin and his wife, Anna, were little more than memories. He had died in 1909, she in 1913. They were a childless couple, and their personal lives were simple and austere. No grand drinking parties ever took

place in the old Homestead. Occasionally, Anna held formal teas, and that kind of function nearly summed up the social activity of the place. In 1918 and 1919 the Homestead was turned into a hospital to care for the victims of an influenza epidemic. In 1920, it became the Decatur Arts Institute, a role it continued to play until 1969, when it became vacant—and the pigeons moved in.

But in 1975 the Junior Welfare Association of Decatur joined with Millikin University in a major restoration of the Homestead, with the university undertaking the maintenance of the grounds and the exterior of the building while the Junior Welfare Association began to perform a series of miracles on the interior. Many local craftsmen helped restore light fixtures, woodwork, and windows. Authentic period furniture was located, and each room was restored to its original appearance. I happened to be visiting the Homestead a few years ago when the original Millikin silverware arrived. Picking up a heavy table knife, I felt oddly and intimately connected with the pragmatic and generous man who once lived in the place.

Now one can roam through the dwelling and get a sense of life as it was lived here a hundred years ago, with heavy carpets on the floors and patchwork quilts on the beds. I especially like the breakfast nook, a tiny room on the north side of the house, which in my inevitable fantasy becomes a writer's office with desk and word processor beneath the large window. I suppose every visitor must go through a similar act of reclamation, possessing—if only in the imagination—the small library, the spacious dining room, the cozy north parlor, or the large and well-lighted south parlor. In 1976, James Millikin Homestead, Inc. was formed, and in 1981 the restoration work was completed. The Homestead Association rents the home for receptions, meetings, and conferences, and conducts special tours. Hundreds of Decatur and area schoolchildren have visited the home itself and many other children visit the premises to take special arts and crafts classes regularly offered in the building that once served as Millikin's carriage house.

(From *Illinois Times*, Dec. 1985, Author: Dr. Dan Guillory)

Dan Guillory has served as a consultant for an Illinois Humanities Council grant on preserving Decatur's architectural heritage; he has also participated in the Architects in the Schools Program sponsored by the Illinois Arts Council.



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(for when you need to know whom to call)

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(Homestead phone number, to leave a message: 422-9003)

**BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP**

- Participation in preservation of the historic heritage of Decatur.
- Advance notice of Homestead-sponsored tours and programs.
- Subscription to The Homestead Gazette.
- Invitation to the Annual Victorian Christmas party.
- A tax deduction to feel good about!

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