# THE HOMESTEAD FAMILY



# GAZETTE



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JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC., DECATUR, ILLINOIS

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March 1994

## A Note From Your President...

Do you remember, as I do, when many of the Homestead windows were broken and boarded up, the paint on the trim was cracked and peeling, the gutters leaked, boards on the porch were rotting - and, I won't even mention the inside that had been covered over to keep its original elegance from distracting from the art objects and paintings displayed when the Homestead was used as an Art Center. This was the scene my family viewed from our front windows when we moved into the neighborhood in 1969. My children used the Homestead lawn to play baseball (no need to worry about windows, they were already broken); they peeked into the basement windows at dusk and whispered about dead bodies as they raced for home to safety. My children could not be impressed with the "beauty" of this falling-down brick

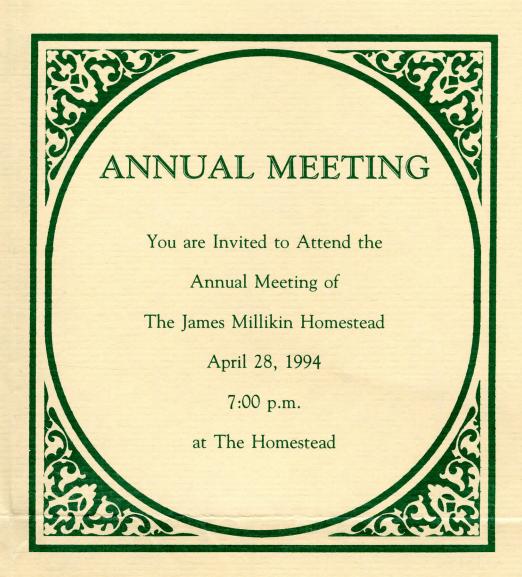
Now — 25 years later — my grandchildren definitely are impressed with this beautiful brick mansion. Instead of being spooked by its dingy somewhat foreboding appearance as my own children were, this new generation enjoys familiarity with it — like the carriage house where they have taken various art and craft classes. They tell me tales about the spacious dining room where the Millikins entertained, and how Mr. Millikin himself talked to them when they toured the Homestead during Mr. and Mrs. Millikin Days. They remember where we sat on the lawn when we heard the Park Singers, a picnic on the 4th of July, and the list goes on.

Please don't take the Homestead for granted. It hasn't always been the stately landmark that you know today. If the walls could talk, you would hear not only of glorious days but of many dismal days as well. Right now it is hard to imagine the Homestead falling again into disrepair, but remember without the hard work and cooperation of Millikin, the Board of Directors and an interested membership—it could happen.

Please send us your dues today!

— Lynn Potter





# History — Anna Millikin Had a What?

From memorabilia of a descendant, we've had a look inside the Hill house which stood next-door to the Jame Millikin Homestead, and now we are actually going to meet the Millikin's neighbors, Hugh and Eliza Hill.

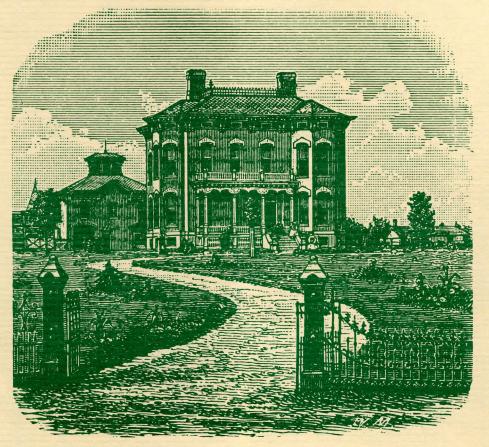
Among the papers preserved by the Hills' great great granddaughter, Cynthia (Mills) Cote, is a letter from a granddaughter, Gussie (Bone) Johnson, acquainting us with Hugh and Eliza and recounting family stories, several of which tell us more about the Millikins, too.

Describing the Hills for another descendant in 1954, Mrs. Johnson spoke of the couple with insight, humor and great affection. As might be supposed, "Hog Ringer" Hill, inventor and manufacturer of the hog ring that made his fortune, appeared as a man of action, not given to bandying words.

With a reference to Mr. Hill's early life as a poor farmer, Mrs. Johnson wrote, "He was a man with ideas and a mind of his own. Sitting on the top rail of his fence watching the hogs rooting up the ground in their pen . . . he got very mad, so he took a pice of wire and put it through the gristle of the hog's nose; he figured out the hog ring and the little pincher to faster (it). He came to town to find some man who would put up the money to get him started. It took only \$500, but money was scarce ... and all but one man turned him down. In years to come, how many of those men wished they had listened to him! . . . He was, I was told, one of the first men to advertise in other countries and soon the orders were pouring in.

In those days," she continued, "Some then wore plug hats. They wore them because of their wealth or social position or their interests in politics. As Grandfather was not interested in the last two, I guess his money made it proper for him to wear one. One story about him — I guess he was a little self-satisfied — he went to church for a business meeting. They were trying to get the church debt paid off. They talked and talked. Finally, Grandfather said, 'Why don't you go down in your pockets and pay it off and quit doing so much talking?' With that, he pulled a check from his pocket, threw it on the table and walked out . . .

"Another story I was told — Grover Cleveland came to town (between his two terms of being President) on an early train. He left town on a late train and no one knew he was here but Grandfather. When Grandmother learned he was coming, she took the table cloth off the beautiful mahogany center table, told Grandfather to keep his feet off if it and be careful about spitting in the spittoon. When she came in to tell them about the noon meal both



A lithograph from Hugh Hill's stationery provides detail of his home and grounds, including iron fence and winding lane, not seen in previous photographs.

of them had their feet on the table and both were using the same spittoon place between them."

What led the U.S. Presdient to the Hill home is not known. Cleveland, however, did have two non-consecutive terms as President, 1885-89 and 1893-97, with his Vice President in the second term being Adlai E. Stevenson, former Illinois Congressman, of Bloomington. According to Cynthia Coté, there may have been a family connection between Adlai Stevenson and Eliza (Stevenson) Hill, based on a mention of Adlai in family papers of the Stevenson line. We can only guess that perhaps Cleveland was in Central Illinois for a quiet pre-campaign talk with his potential running mate. No doubt, he traveled by train; maybe he was to have a lay-over in Decatur, and Adlai arranged for Cleveland to spend the time with his own possible relatives, the Hills.

Mrs. Johnson's letter went on: "Another story about Grandfather - Mr. James Millikin, owner and president of the Millikin bank . . . was a neighbor. Their houses were just alike and each was in the center of an entire city block. They each had a yard man or hired man. Mr. Millikin's man was always borrowing from Grandfather's mans tools of all kinds and never returning them. One day Grandfather went to the bank, into Mr. Millikin's private office. Their voices could be heard all over the bank; there were quite some heated arguments, and for a few minutes there was not much business done in the bank. Finally Grandfather came strutting out with a check for the full amount."

The letter then turned to the writer's grandmother, Eliza Hill: "I remember her a quiet, gentle but, I realize now, a sad per-

(continued)

#### History — Continued

son. In the winter she sat in her chair by the fire place in the sitting room. In the spring and fall she sat by the window in the parlor under the beautiful painting, and in the summer she sat on the porch and watched the people going by on the street, only it was too far away to give her much satisfaction. She did not want the big house in the first place. She said that in the small house down on the street the neighbors would drop in any time to pass the time of day, but in the big house it would be only a formal call and she was correct."

Among family papers are Eliza's own formal calling cards. The Hills had previously lived near by on West William. More about Eliza is explained in her obituary: "One by one with the exception of a son she . . . suffered the loss of her own children, and the love she so richly bestowed on them was transferred to her grandchildren, to who she has been much more than a grandmother . . . Her gentle, generous, neighborly interest in the welfare of her friends earned for her not only the respect but the love and esteem of all with whom she came in contact."

Her granddaughter's letter continued, "They had nice things in their house but I guess it took some strategy sometimes to get the things Grandmother and Anna (granddaughter living with the Hills) thought they should, like the lovely velvet carpet and beautiful lace curtains. I had many good times up there, took my friends up to play croquet and other games. I loved to watch Mrs. Millikin's peacock strutting around. We soon learned that we could not step one foot on their property or even eat the pears that dropped from their tree and rolled over on Grandfather's side.

"Grandfather had an orchard on the northwest corner of his yard. He had apples, plums, peaches, etc., and the boys from the neighborhood, as all boys do, would climb

the iron fence and get the fruit. So one morning out of the clear sky, Grandfather told old George to cut down the trees. Word got to Uncle John in time and he persuaded Grandfather to change his mind.

"The north side of Grandfather's home at the time he built was just an open field. Later William Street was put along there and nine houses built on the north side of the street, overlooking Grandfather's place. There was a pasture north and west of his barn which was about 100 feet west of his house, and over on the west side of this pasture and on what was later William Street, he built a house for George, the colored man and his wife and children. When the street was opened and the nice houses built (some of) the people owning them came to Grandfather and asked him to move George away. Grandfather said, 'You knew he was there when you built your houses,' and that was the end of that."

Mrs. Johnson's letter tells something of her own family. Her mother, the Hills' only surviving daughter Catherine, with her husband, Thomas Bone, had joined in a land rush to Kansas, where they then farmed. After losing their third adult daughter, the Hills wished their only remaining daughter closer to home, so she and her



H. W. Hill & Co. factory, Main and Church

husband bought a farm north of Decatur. Very soon Mrs. Hill found "in that horse and buggy age, that her daughter might as well be in Kansas," so the Bones moved again to Decatur, where Mr. Bone went into the grain business.

His newspaper obituary gives information about the Hills' only son John. Characterized as one of the largest land-owners in Macon County, he was a farmer, particularly engaged in stock-raising. He was also president of the Decatur Coal Co., in which his father had been involved. He married Lucretia Nye of near Warrensburg and had five children: Charles, Hugh, Edgar, Edith and Grace. Upon the death of his father, John and his wife occupied the Hill mansion until he decided to sell it in 1909. His wife died in 1910.

In the same clipping, under the headline, "Evolution of the Hill Place," appeared one more story about Hugh Hill. It disclosed that when he bought the land for his home from James Millikin, people thought he paid "an exhorbitant price" and "censured him for being foolish enough to pay" it, supposedly an amount of \$7,500.

The warrenty deed, found among family papers, was dated May 14, 1878, a date helping to establish when the house was constructed. One more item in the papers is singular, a poem written by Hugh Hill to the granddaughter he and his wife raised, and revealing a religious and tender side to his personality.

Other papers pertain to his business and inventions and show that the original hog ring patent was granted August 27, 1872. Hill applied for a patent for an improved pincer as late as 1892. His products included an implement for marking stock, steel names stamps, a calf and cow weaner and a hand-held corn husker. He was not the only inventor in his company. His partner, Charles Housum, received a patent in 1878 "for improvements for holding and driving barbs into fences."



The novel advertising of the Hill company would make a story of its own. Early among those to advertise abroad, Hill and Housum had their own printing company and understood the advantage of a trade mark, theirs, a triangle enclosing two hands reaching out with a pincers to a hog's nose. Their hog ring was called "Hill's Triangular" and a huge triangle topped their factory building. One large, humorous poster, still existing, but with all the animals being hogs. The 1876 Decatur City Directory remarked, "The reputation of Decatur as a manufacturing city and railroad center has been largely increased through the extensive advertising done by the firm, H. W. Hill & Co.," a strong statement of the company's impact just four years after its beginning.

Thanks goes to Cynthia (Mills) Coté, of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, for sharing family papers that provide us with more knowledge of this colorful chapter of Decatur history. Inadvertently, the names of two descendants of Hugh W. Hill were omitted from a pervious article about the family. They are great great great grand-daughters, Rebecca and Kimber, daughters of Mrs. Robert (Nancy) Riley of Urbana, Illinois, a sister of Cynthia Coté.

Marilyn Loofbourr
 Histor

# History — "It Isn't Over Til It's Over"

"It isn't over til it's over" is a phrase proving as applicable to historical research as it is to sports. We thought we has exhausted any new sources of information concerning "Hog Ringer" Hill and his house, at least for the present, when suddenly a new one materialized.

Your Homestead historian lives on a corner of the original Hill land, and, as a last moment thought, decided to look at the abstract of her family property to see if it gave any special details of the Hill estate.

It was a great surprise to find in the abstract a complete copy of Hugh W. Hill's will, which offered further insight into the furnishings and types of room in the house as well as a little more knowledge of the character and values of Mr. Hill.

In the will, dated November 7, 1906, Mr. Hill referred to three deeds which covered his home property, left to his son John, and stated that "for brevity hereinafter," this property would be designated as 'The Homestead," (Now we find two estates styled as "The Homestead" side by side!) Pertinent items from the read read as

"Item second: I hereby give and bequeath to my said son . . . the following personal



property: all carpets, oil clothes, and mattings now on the floors, or at the time of my decease may be on the floors of the rooms in the dwelling house occupied by me, situated on 'The Homestead' aforesaid. Also all the following personal property in the said house: all floor and other rugs; all window and other curtains; all pictures whether handing on the wall or otherwise, including all oil and water color paintings I now own or may own at the time of my death; my book case amd all the books contained therein, and all other books owned by me including the family Bible and record; two clocks, one kept in the dining room, the other in the library; two hat

racks; all mirrors, one side board, and or walnut extension dining room table; all walnut dining room chairs, and all other chairs; one kitchen range or stove with its attachments for hot water and other purposes, and all kitchen utensils.

"Item Third: I give and bequeath to my said son . . . a small old tin box which came to me from my father, and the contents of said box, consisting of old papers, documents and printed matter relating to the 'Hill Family' and tracing back my ancestry.

"Item Fourth: I give and bequeath to my said son . . . all my personal property kept at the barn on "The Homestead" aforesaid, including garden and other rakes, lawn mower and tools of various kinds. Also the desk I used in my hog ringer business, at this time in the office of L. A. Mills and all the books and papers and any and all other property owned by me at the time of my decease . . ."

> Marilyn Loofbourrow Historian

#### Mr. and Mrs. Millikin Days at the Homestead

It has become a tradition for the Homestead to offer Mr. and Mrs. Millikin days to third graders of the Decatur schools. This program was started in the late 1970's by Adele Glenn who was a board member at that time. Adele is (and always has been) an advocate for children's developmental enrichment and creating this program must have been "natural" to her.

What is the program? Once a year, traditionally in spring, the Homestead invites all third graders of our area to come and visit the Millikins at the Homestead. With the help of Mrs. Eve Shade at the Keil building, letters of invitation are sent out, and the individual school classes are scheduled to come to the Homestead for a half hour visit. Homestead volunteers dress up in period clothing and enact the lifestyle of the late 1880's. The children meet the Millikins and their staff; they listen to their stories, ask questions; they sing old fashioned songs accompanied by a pump organ; they are "appalled" at the lack of modern household machines (no electrical gadgets), and finally they are sent off with a cookie from the kitchen maid. Depending on the schedule, this half hour "show" is repeaded 5-9 times daily for 4 days! Is it fun? You bet! Is it exhausting? You bet! Is it a rewarding experience for the volunteers? All those smiling and intrigued little faces are worth it.

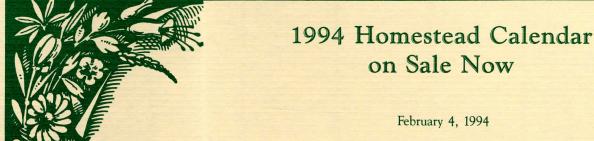
If you are interested to offer your theatrical talents, your pump organ expertise, or your tour guiding abilities, come join us for this program. This year it is scheduled for May 2, 3, 5, 6 (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday) at the Homestead. For more information call one of the co-chairmen: Jane Lawson (1-767-2761) or Anne Hostetler (422-7587).

### Homestead Gets Magazine Publicity

A photograph and description of the James Millikin Homestead can be found in the March/April issue of the travel magazine, Home & Away, a publication of the AAA-Chicago Motor Club.

The picture and material are included in an article entitled "There Is More Than Corn in East-Central Illinois," which explores attractions in the Decatur, Champaign-Urbana, Monticello, Shelbyville and the Arthur-Arcola area.

The article also pays tribute to Decatur's Gov. Oglesby mansion with a picture of and interview with its 25-year historian and activist, Jane Lee.



Dear Homestead Members,

By now, we hope you've heard or read about the Millikin Homestead Historic Calendar. The calendar contains early photographs of the Homestead, the Millikins, their early home and activities.

The calendar measures 8 1/2 x 11" and is printed on heavy, ivory paper. The squares are large enough to easily write your activities in them and in the back is a page for telephone numbers of friends and organizations.

This calendar is a fund raiser to benefit the restoration of the Homestead's dining room ceiling. If you haven't purchased one, we hope that you will buy one for yourself or several as gifts for friends and family.

The calendars are available at the Farmer's Wife, Frannie's on Merchant Street and Haines and Essick. If you prefer to order by mail, please use the tear off order form below and we will personally deliver your order.

We're sure you will want to own a calendar and support the restoration of the dining room ceiling

were sure you will want to own a carefular and support the restolation of the drining foom centing.
We're counting on you!
Tear Off Below
1994 James Millikin Homestead Calendar Order Form
Name:
Address:
Phone Number:
Number of Calendars:
Check/Money Order Enclosed for (No. of Calendars x \$7.50):
Directions for Delivery:
— Mail Order Forms To —
Marilyn Loofbourrow

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Decatur, Illinois 62522

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U.S. Postage Paid
Decatur, IL 62521
Permit 226

Hb/H

JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC. Pox 1501

Decatur, Illinois 62525

#### Trees, Trees, Trees

James Millikin was so proud of his trees, we are justified and perhaps duty bound to replace trees which have died and continue to add plantings in an effort to frame the view of the Homestead. Outdoor activities, such as Art on Main, civic meetings and increased use of the grounds by Millikin University, dictate that great care be used in the future placement of plantings. This makes selection of tree species particularly important. Trees with a vertical or conical configuration are proper in certain places; specimen trees, which may be small or large at maturity, may be proper in other places. Mr. Millikin's comments on his selections show that he obviously liked the unusual as well as the common. Old standards, such as the Red Oak or diseases resistant American Elm, or new specimen trees, such as the Japanese Maple or northern Bald Cypress, may someday all have a place on the IMH grounds.

There are a number of options, so to guide our selections we have consulted Jim Keefer (MU groundskeeper and State of Illinois arborist), Roger Wenberg (Richland Community College instructor of landscape design and horticulture studies) and Jim Kramer (superintendent of the Decatur Park District).

class has asked to do design work as a class project with the understanding that JMH landscaping plans are limited by the constraints of money and upkeep costs. We look forward to their suggestions.

To provide for the continous maintenance and upkeep of the JMH landscape, particularly the trees so important to Mr. Millikin, a memorial planting program will be instituted in the near future. Those interested can honor an individual with a donation applied toward the purchase and planting of a specific tree. We feel the offering of a specific tree planting as a memorial will be an interesting project in keeping with the landscaping traditions of the Homestead. Watch the newsletter for further details as this project develops.

#### Summer Slendor

The Garden Club of Decatur will present their 1994 Standard Flower Show on June 10th, 1:30 to 6 and June 11th, 10 to 4, at Our Lady of Lourdes Gymnasium, 3950 Lourdes Drive 62526. The \$2.00 donation will admit you to award winning designs, horticulture displays, tasty samples of herb cookery, (Cook Books newly published are available) and outstanding values in their Plant and Craft Shop which will feature the popular Garden Rocks, (decorative rocks with painted pictures and verse). Don't miss this educational and pleasurable event. For further information call 428-4581.

Submitted by Rosemary Harvey





Harilee Armstrong Joanne Baird Mary Baker Mr. & Mrs. Hugh Baker Charlotte Ballance Mr. & Mrs. Stephen Ballance Mr. & Mrs. Robert Bangert Mrs. William Barnes Virginia Barnes Mr. & Mrs. Ritchie Barnett Frank Beaman Helen Beeson Mrs. David Behnke Mr. & Mrs. Paul Benner Mr. & Mrs. W. G. Bennett Mary Bertram Jeanne Best Paul Best Mr. & Mrs. Gilbert Bieger Mr. & Mrs. William Bliler Mr. & Mrs. Graham Bradley Mr. & Mrs. Milton Brahier Mr. & Mrs. William Braun Marjorie Bremer Mr. & Mrs. Rex Brown Mr. & Mrs. Joe Brown Mr. & Mrs. A. P. Bruckner Mrs. Harold Budde Mr. & Mrs. John Burns Mrs. Q. D. Butts Mr. & Mrs. Edward Campbell Dr. & Mrs. Robert Carney George & Carol Chiligiris Joan Chiligiris Anne Chumbley Mrs. George Cook Mrs. Harold Corwin Janet Couter Velma Cravens Margaret Crawford Larry Cunningham Family Rachel Cunningham Mr. & Mrs. H. B. Curry Eunice Dansby Marilyn S. Davis Dr. & Mrs. Paul DeBruine Mr. & Mrs. Lyle DeWitt Margaret Dick Mr. & Mrs. Tom Dickes Charlotte Dipper Dr. & Mrs. Charles Downing Mrs. Edward Eaton Mary Ann Edie Mrs. Leonard Edwards Mr. & Mrs. William Eichenauer Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Empen Ruth Ewing
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