

# THE HOMESTEAD FAMILY

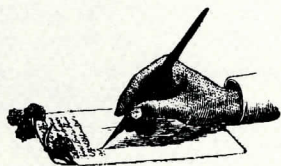
## GAZETTE

Vol. XXII, No.3

JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC., DECATUR, ILLINOIS

March 1998

### A Note From Your President...



Dear Homestead Members,

We will kick off our new year with Mr. and Mrs. Millikin Days which is scheduled for May 4th to May 7th. Marilyn Shroyer and Mary Hill will be co-chairs for our annual event. Also in May, the Homestead will receive an award from the Decatur City Historical and Architectural Sites Commission (HASC) at their annual awards presentation.

On June 27th we will have our annual Doll Tea. Anne Hostetler, Jeanette Bradley and Lou Snelson will be chairing this special event.

As most of you know, being a part of the Millikin Homestead family means we need to roll up our sleeves and pitch in with the work which needs to be done. Many of you will be receiving postcards regarding our volunteer needs for the events mentioned above. It is important that non-board members be involved.

Please plan to attend our annual meeting in April. Spring will soon be here!

Sincerely,  
Jim Williams, President



### Dice and Vice at the Homestead A Wickedly Pretty Picture



*The 1998 Annual Meeting*

*Will Be Held*

*Thursday, April 23, 1998*

*at 6:30 p.m.*

*James Millikin Homestead*

*125 North Pine*


*Decatur, Illinois*

*Light Refreshments will be Served*

*Preceding the Business Meeting*

*All Members are*

*Encouraged to Attend*



S ometime ago, but most likely the other side of 1900, Anna Aston Millikin proved her esthetic mettle by embarking upon her era's ultimate voyage of cultural validation - the European Grand Tour. Whether James was packed along for artistic retrofitting remains unclear. There is; however, an intriguing travel photo of 1895 taken in posterior focus showing three ladies, Mrs. A.T. Hill, Mrs. J.M. Clokey and Mrs. R.L. Walston, clutching their carpet bags in awesome full bustle. Were they off for Liverpool or a buggy lark to Lithia Springs? I toss any conjecture with a wink and nod to Marilyn Loofbourrow, our truth sleuth par excellence. Let her tidy the tale and give veracity to the doings of these continental fellow travelers. To follow my article you must only trust that the Millikin party did precisely what all season tourists do. - They acquired souvenirs.

**Tessarei, Pedulli, Martinetti,  
and Reni: 4 for Decor**

A modest body of work by living Italian watercolorists and several copies after original oil paintings by Guido Reni and Bartolome Esteban Murillo were purchased. Of the watercolors, a charming female portrait, signed Tessari and possibly painted in Venice, is now hanging just outside the "Snowball" room in the upper hallway of the Homestead. Just across from it is an imposing gouache (opaque watercolor) of a monastic interior with figure, signed F. Pedulli. A full length study of Saracen with sword graces the east wall of the south parlor. Signed Maria Martinetti, Roma 1904, it is a grand recital of the painter's craft. Hopefully a certain decorative logic prevails in their placement as we have no idea where they originally were hung. Other watercolors and small oils associated with the Millikins or their time will eventually

be arranged about the house to bolster our quota of period clutter.

Now to Reni and Murillo. The Italian master Guido Reni created his "Aurora" fresco in 1613-1614 for Cardinal Borghese's casino Pallaucini-Rospigliosi in Rome. The Millikin's oil copy of this celebrated artifact currently enhances the dining room's north wall. It is proportionally ideal for the spot, but surprisingly, does not appear there in a photo of 1900 picturing Mrs. Millikin and her Art Class at the table. Over the decades since Anna's death in 1913 it has resided mostly in the "Snowball" room. "Aurora" depicts the deity Apollo at the reins of his celestial chariot surrounded by sun nymphs intent upon lighting the sky. Except for a short stint in the 70's when the Homestead lay vacant, it has stayed with the house as Anna intended. - Whereas, the Murillo has been around!

**Saludos Senor Murillo**

It is barely legible on the south wall of the dining room in the 1900 photo. The artist chose as his subject the lifestyle of street children in Seville, Spain, and gave them a sweetness and gentility that all but perfumed their poverty. As the mansion was transformed into the Decatur Art Institute in 1920 the family's furnishings were placed into storage both on and off the premises. From that moment on until my phone rang in 1961, the Murillo was A.W.O.L. (absent without a lead). Russell Housman, the newest chairman of the Millikin Art Department was on the line with a breathless report of an Old Master look alike in the Homestead attic. During inventory he had come upon a seemingly blank soot-coated canvas. A superficial cleansing with turpentine wads slowly revealed a finely rendered figurative

# Dice and Vice (Continued)

composition of three winsome streeturchins, two of whom are shooting craps or its 17th century equivalent. The third gnaws on a crust of bread as his mutt awaits crumbs. A basket of fruit and a broken pitcher are at the left foreground while the background is a nebulous mix of sky and stone outcrop. The hairband of one youth is ivy twined suggesting playful innocence, but coins at their fingertips are for serious wager. The palette consists of warm earth colors with subtle admixtures of gray, green and blue. Two of the boys and their fruit are strongly emphasized in a chiaroscuro worthy of Caravaggio.

## The Boys from Bavaria Bogus Beggars All

We would in time deduce that our "Old Master" was in fact a genuine 19th century copy of Bartolome Esteban Murillo's "Beggar Boys Playing Dice". The original is in the collection of the Alte Pinakothek (old gallery) of Munich, Germany, and was acquired in 1698 by the Elector Max Emanuel from Gisbert Van Ceulen. Substantive proof was found by driving the little beggars to the office of Dr. Allen Weller, Dean of Fine Arts at the University of Illinois. From there a paper trail led to Dr. Sorrea at Michigan State who had recently authored a definitive Murillo monograph. He conferred repro status upon our find, but nonetheless urged us to display it proudly. Contact with the Alte Pinakothek triggered a request for us to send detailed photos to Munich where they maintain an archive chronicling copies from their treasure. The Pinakothek's Murillo has been "in house" for 263 years. - its provenance is unassailable. With attribution thus fixed, our juvenile rollers were left

to their gaming for the next 37 years with in a storage area on Millikin's campus. This past fall through the auspices of the university and with the special aid of Jim Schietinger and Ed Walker of its art faculty, James and Anna's painted trio re-entered 125 N. Pine in time for the Victorian Christmas Tea.

## Viva Virtuous Fruit

It is an almost mirror image of the original which I have savored at the Alte Pinakothek in 1973 and again last August. Pending renovation of the structure, it is presently hung at the Neue Pinakothek in suite with two other works by the Spanish Master. If you can't get to Munich for art or beer just check out a stunning Murillo masterpiece, "Christ after the Flagellation," owned by the Krannert Art Museum in nearby Champaign.

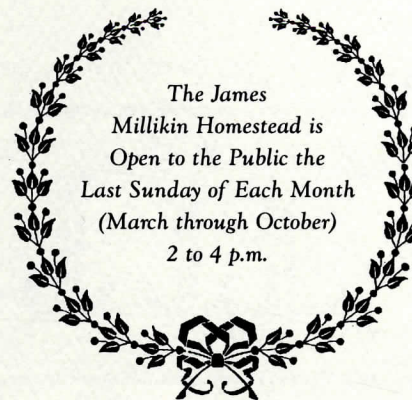
Our Murillo is reticent to tell us much. The canvas is unsigned and the strainer has no marks. Teased by baiting silence, we await an Anna-gram or some such para-normal notation. Did she watch her painting in progress on a copyist's easel at the Pinakothek or did she simply admire Murillo's product and order its replication elsewhere? Was it show room ready in a studio or gallery and at what cost? Did it steam home with her and does it reflect a joint Millikin esthesia or the taste of an artistically dominant spouse? Tradition tells us that Anna gets credit for the Homestead's finery while James receives kudos for the mounted deer head that once crowned the dining room entry. Really heavy hearsay tells us that Anna Millikin referred to her Murillo as "Beggar-Boys with Melons" thus purging the premise of dicey depravity.

It's been at least 78 years and perhaps as

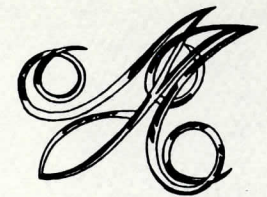
many as 85 since "Beggar-Boys Playing Dice" or rather "Beggar-Boys with Melons" has hung on the Homestead's wall. By contrast, Bartolme Esteban Murillo, who was born in 1618, hasn't painted a thing to speak of since 1682. Nonetheless we hope that you will welcome home the re-creation of his work and celebrate with us a beguiling memento of the Grand Tour and its timely addition to the Homestead's visual worth.

A search is now underway at Millikin for our Murillo's original frame. It was joined to surround a picture size of 37" by 48". Should you know of an available period frame that could be modified to these dimensions, please contact our restoration co-chairmen Lucien & Brigitta Kapp at 428-9527.

-Lucien Kapp  
Restoration



The James  
Millikin Homestead is  
Open to the Public the  
Last Sunday of Each Month  
(March through October)  
2 to 4 p.m.



# Mr. and Mrs. Millikin Days

## Spring is Just Around the Corner!

A sure sign that Spring has arrived is our annual event, Mrs. and Mrs. Millikin Days, which will be held May 4th through 7th this year. All 3rd graders in Decatur and Macon County schools are cordially invited to tour the Homestead and learn of the "good old days". They also view the architecture, furniture, and photographs of the late 1880's.

Our volunteers will convincingly portray the Millikins and their friends and household staff as they prepare for an important dinner Party.

Mr. Millikin tells them about his early life and why he came to the midwest. After that, they have a rousing sing-along with the pump organ; visit with Mrs. Millikin in the dining room; and conclude their visit in the kitchen with Sophie, the kitchen maid. She tells about taking care of the household—then sends them on their way with a big sugar cookie!

The children write a thank-you letter, and the top three responses are awarded a special book at the Victorian Tea.

-Marilyn Shroyer  
Mary Hill  
Co-Chairmen

# History: Doing the "Continental" – Solo or Duo

When did James and Anna Millikin travel to Europe? Inquiring minds want to know. Restoration chairman Lucien Kapp wants to know. Now that our curiosity is aroused about the Murillo painting recently acquired, so do we.

That the Millikins did travel extensively and bring back many art treasures for their home has been common knowledge handed down, but documentation for their journeys leaves something to be desired. Newspapers covered their activities only sporadically.

They tell us that the Millikins were in Mexico in 1889. They speak of jaunts to Chicago, New York, Indiana, or even Blue Mound, but nothing about any sojourns in Europe. A book mentions Anna wintering in Cuba, but we do not know if the couple made the customary Grand Tour of Europe together, whether they traveled there numerous times, or if Anna made trips separately with friends. There are a few tantalizing hints, nevertheless, in Millikin Homestead files.

## Great Livers...Great Travelers

It may be worth remembering, first of all, that in 1876 the Millikins had just moved from a small cottage, to a lavish new mansion. The home itself bore the marks of European influence, inspired perhaps by even earlier travel of the Millikins, and certainly, once built, it would have motivated its owners to look abroad for suitable objects d'art to furnish it. In his biography of James Millikin, the first president of Millikin University, Dr. Albert Taylor, called the couple "great livers. . . and great travelers," but with no travel particulars.

It is very possible that the Millikins, or Anna with friends, might have packed their bags for Europe, even more than once, prior to 1880. At least, a 1980 newspaper feature

on the Decatur Art Class, published for its centenary, reported that when Anna organized the class in 1880 from a group of friends to study various of the arts, four of this group had already toured Europe.

The four were not named, nor was it made clear whether the quartet had included Anna. Neither was it divulged in what combinations they might have traveled or whether any of them might have made the trip more than once. It was explained, however, that in 1880 the four had "recently returned from trips abroad during which they had visited the leading art centers of Europe. They were very interested in art and wanted to learn the historical inspiration for some of the great paintings and study the events which these paintings were intended to chronicle."

## Chocolate, Wafers and Paint

Following this era, there is a long blank in newspaper records concerning the Millikins in connection with any European travel until January, 1896, when an understated headline announced, "A Delightful Reception at the Home of James Millikin Saturday Afternoon." For its details and the flavor of the period, the article is printed in entirety:

"The members of the Art Class were entertained Saturday afternoon by Mrs. James Millikin at her home on West Main Street. Monday will be the sixteenth anniversary of the organization of the Art Class and as Saturday was the day for the regular meeting the anniversary was celebrated at that time. The meeting was one of the pleasantest that the members had ever held. The presence of Mrs. Haberly, the art lecturer, added greatly to the enjoyment of the afternoon entertainment. When Ms. Haberly went abroad last summer Mrs.

Millikin had her purchase two oil paintings which she had seen in Europe and greatly admired. Besides the oil paintings, Mrs. Haberly purchased for Mrs. Millikin a number of fine water colors.

"The pictures have just been framed and hung in the Millikin mansion and were exhibited to the members of the Art Class. Mrs. Haberly, who is an authority on the subject of art, explained the pictures and commented upon them so that the ladies might better appreciate the works of art. After the interesting talk, chocolate and wafers were served."

At last, clues have materialized for a specific trip! Anna Millikin, with or without James, most likely traveled to Europe in the spring or early summer of 1895, happened upon the paintings but hesitated at purchasing them. Then the memory of them could have continued to haunt her. If Mrs. Haberly were making her trip abroad within a few months later, Anna could have seen her lost opportunity for acquiring the pictures regained and assigned the task to Mrs. Haberly. And if the 1896 newspaper had reported less of sociability and more of art, it might be known now for a certainty if the Murillo were one of the two oils mentioned!

## Art Class Exodus

It appears there was almost an exodus of Decatur citizens to Europe in 1895. Not only does it seem that Anna and Mrs. Haberly went then, but three members of the Decatur Art Class are also recorded as having toured Europe in 1895. Along with the 1980 article about the Decatur Art Class centenary, appeared a striking photograph dated 1895 of three Art Class members about to depart for Europe.

The three, valises in hand and leaning forward in great anticipation, were Mrs. A.T. Hill, Mrs. J.M. Clokey and Mrs. R.L. Walston. Although Anna might have rendezvoused with the threesome, there is nothing to indicate she traveled with them. Curiously, we learn that passage for the three was paid for by the other members of the Art Class, but what occasioned the generosity is not known.

Mrs. Haberly, incidentally, seemed to have been popular with Anna Millikin. Anna was also reported as having given a luncheon for friends at which Mrs. Haberly was the lecturer, this time on mythology, a topic that could be allied to art. Mrs. Haberly's daughter was one of the guests so perhaps the family was visiting or residing in the vicinity for awhile.

The 1896 article, suggesting a trip in 1895 for Anna, and perhaps James, is the strongest basis found thus far for associating any particular journey with the acquisition of artwork. There is, nevertheless, one more source for believing that Anna, with or without James, made a trip to England, if not to the Continent, in 1890.

## Anna's Imprisoned Ancestor

Anna's first cousin on her mother's side, Betsey (Shipman) Gates, was reputed to have spent nearly 40 years on the genealogy of their various lines of descent, including a family named Bartlett, which provided the maiden name for Anna's mother, Hettie (Barlett) Aston. Their emigrant ancestor in this line was a John Bartlett who came to America from Frampton, co. Dorset, England, about 1660. He was said to have been a non-conformist minister who in 1646 had been persecuted and imprisoned in England for his beliefs.

# History – Continued

*Ancestral Lines*, which, oddly, furnished a year, although not a date, for one of Anna's journeys. In 1890 Betsey wrote a daughter about persisting in her search for information about the ancestor, supposedly the Vicar of Yeominster. A portion of her letter was quoted:

"I am going to write to Annie (Millikin) to write to me from Dorset county, England, so that I can preserve the letters with my family history of the Barletts. I would like views from Frampton and Sherbourne and Dorchester and see with my own eyes the places our old ancestors have seen, and have her (Annie) go to the prison of my old rector or vicar or whatever he was."

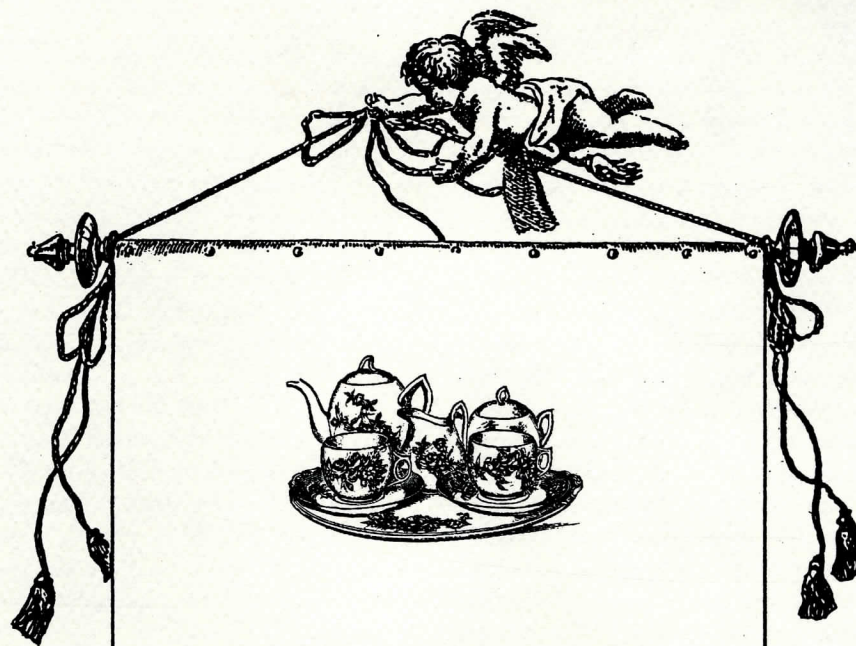
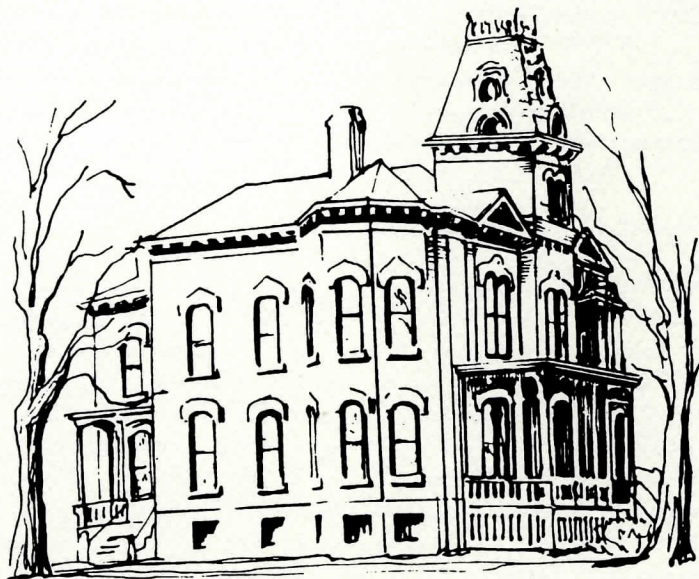
## Annie Millikin, Pen Pal

The compiler obviously felt quite certain as to the identity of "Annie" Millikin. It can be deduced from Betsey's letter that cousin Anna Millikin was then making and appre-

ciable stay in England which would allow Betsey time to write to her there before anything like airmail was known. "Views" was another word for picture postcards. Did Anna answer Betsey and send her "views," visit the prison or bring back any, more esoteric, artwork from England at this time? Alas, for an answer, to this question asked in an earlier newsletter.

Still, pieces of information about the Millikins' travels, bit by bit, begin to comprise a sketch of their own for one aspect of Anna's and James' lives. We can never hope to know the sources and timetables for all the artwork with which Anna and James chose to ornament the Homestead, but it's fun to take up the challenge issued by restoration chairman Lucien Kapp to try to learn more in this realm.

– Marilyn Loofbourrow  
Historian



## Victorian Doll Tea

The James Millikin Homestead is preparing for its' 4th Annual Victorian Doll Tea. This year's date is Saturday, June 27th. Three seatings will be available and prices are still to be determined. We have had full seatings in the past, so we recommend that you make your reservations as soon as you receive your invitation. Mark your calendars and clean those beautiful clothes-the atmosphere is wonderful and the food stupendous. We'll look forward to seeing you!

