

THE HOMESTEAD FAMILY



GAZETTE



Vol. XV, No. 2

XVI / 1

JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC., DECATUR, ILLINOIS

August 1991

A Note From Your President

Dear Homestead Members:

We are happy to announce two new board members joining the board: Betty Ploeger, known to many through her community leadership and musical contributions over the years; Lucien Kapp, husband of Brigitta and resident architectural advisor to the Homestead over the years. We are delighted with their elections to the board and look forward to years of continued improvements at JMH.

I hope you didn't miss our 4th of July party! We served lots of lemonade and ice cream, watched fire-works and Uncle Sam (our own Bill McGaughey) and even saluted the new Liberty Tree, a gift from Illinois Power Company. A shower ended the celebration or we would probably still be there! The Lions Club helped us by serving and sharing hot dogs and soda pop. We felt it was a nice way to spend the 4th and many people have told us how much it was enjoyed!

We received a request from the MacArthur Club following our 4th of July party. Would we let them have dinner some evening? We are happy with the request and happier with the response! Mrs. Virginia Snell worked with the sponsors and prepared, served and taught etiquette to the young people as they enjoyed dinner in a victorian atmosphere, discovering a special way of living.

Did victorians work on home projects? I asked my husband this question recently, and



Uncle Sam, alias Board Member Bill McGaughey, greets guests, including occupants of this flag-bearing vintage automobile, at Homestead's colorful Fourth of July lawn social.

The Millikin Homestead grounds came alive on the 4th of July as the Vinegar Hill Brass Band provided lively music for our guests.

Board members were decked out in red, white, and blue as they served hand-squeezed (just ask Lois and Nancy!) lemonade and ice cream (donated by Prairie Farms). Tim and Tony Shonkwiler, coached by Bill McGaughey, hawked peanuts and flags — Tony even sold the straw hat right off of his head ("I'm going to give it to my kid").

there was a run on hot dogs! Business was brisk as several hundred people supported the Homestead and enjoyed our old fashioned picnic on the lawn. We felt we accomplished our goal of doing something for the community and also making a little profit for the restoration and upkeep of the Homestead.

Around 2 p.m., the rain came and we closed a little early, but that was okay, as all the lemonade was gone and we were tired!



We're having a rummage sale . . . but one with a creative bent.

The High-Brow Faire will feature only items of fine cultural interest: books, unusual periodicals, art prints and/or frames, sheet music tapes, LPs, musical instruments (excluding pipe organs), perhaps that pair of old ballet shoes . . .

Items may be new or old or in between, so long as the condition is good and sale-worthy.

Please save and donate your unique contributions to the Faire and help make the sale a fun event for buyer and seller alike, netting funds for Homestead operations. We greatly appreciate your support and hope you will enjoy this project with us.

High-Brow Faire date: Saturday, October 5, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. James Millikin Homestead. Donation drop-off sites and questions call, Ann Yackel 1-692-2926 or Wylene Griffy 422-8417. We will accept items now through October 1.



Did Victorians work on home projects? I asked my husband this question recently, and he ASKED, "did they have tool boxes?" We then discussed the Victorian way of life versus ours and ended with more questions! We are learning and asking more about the Millikin's life at 125 N. Pine. You can ask, or contribute answers if you would like! Please call me or Sid Shonkwiler and maybe we can share thoughts on the subject through this Gazette.

Thank you for supporting our projects! We have more coming in the Future! Don't miss the fun!
—Nancy Eichenauer
JMH, Inc.
1991-1992 President

Lucien Kapp Receives Art Ploeger Award

Lucien Kapp has been honored as the first recipient of the Arthur Ploeger Award for outstanding effort in historic preservation. The award is a memorial to the late Arthur W. Ploeger, first chairman of the Decatur Historical and Architectural Sites Commission (HASC). A ceremony May 15, Co-sponsored by HASC and the Heritage Network of Decatur and Macon County, was held to announce the award.

The names of both Kapp and Ploeger have been placed on a plaque which will hang permanently in the Decatur Civic Center. The names of future recipients will be added annually. Each year HASC will select one individual whose work has contributed significantly to the preservation of the architectural and historical heritage of Decatur. Art Ploeger was a charter member of HASC when he became its first president. He served on the commission 1976-78 when the Federal Register Decatur Historic District was formed. With his wife Betty, he was active in neighborhood preservation efforts while residing in Millikin Place.

Lucien Kapp was also a charter member of HASC and served on the commission for 13 years. He has advised or participated in numerous preservation projects, including the preservation and restoration of the James Millikin Homestead. He was a part of the group which saved the Powers-Jarvis Mansion from demolition. He is frequently called upon to guide out-of-town study groups touring Decatur's architectural landmarks, including the Homestead.

...Tony even sold the straw hat right off of his head (for a nice profit, I might add!)

The Lions Club brought their concession trailer from which they sold hot dogs, snow cones, popcorn and soda. As the crowd grew,

History — Vision, Cooperation Rescue Homestead

With the Millikin Homestead brightly decked out in patriotic bunting for this year's Fourth of July lawn social, memories of other colorful Homestead celebrations suddenly came streaming back. Even though our time as a house-museum is short—just 15 years in 1991—we are already making history on our own.

Two of the Homestead spectaculars will surely remain unforgettable: the 1975 opening of the house for the first time six years after it closed as an art museum, and the 1976 100th anniversary celebration of the home's construction.

Both events drew thousands to the Homestead. Bands played, flags flew, and visitors spilled over from house to lawn, eager in October, 1975, to see the old house once more after its long vacancy, and, in October, 1976, to view the progress of beginning restoration. The 1975 opening also incorporated the preliminary ceremony for the Nation's Bicentennial, which would, co-incidentally, start a few months later. An estimated 2500 persons came to the Homestead opening in 1975, and 1500 in 1976. But it was not the pageantry or the size of the crowds that made these two events unique. It was, of course, the dramatic story surrounding them.

Today it is hard to imagine what an arduous road led to the preservation and restoration of the home of James and Anna Millikin. A newcomer now could easily suppose the home came down to us intact from the Millikins. Homestead boosters in the 1970's, however, could testify that it was a step-by-step effort, alternately suspenseful and discouraging, to find a plan to save the house, and, then, concrete solutions to restoration and funding.

...lemonade early, but that was okay, as the lemonade was gone and we were tired!

—Wilma Sanner
Chairman



In fact, as it developed, there are so many milestones in Homestead history it is difficult to know which to celebrate. First of all, the house was constructed in 1875-76. Either year could be the basis for celebration, of either the beginning of completion of construction, and, as it happens, both have! There was the 100th anniversary celebration, already described, in 1976, and the 110th anniversary gala in 1985.

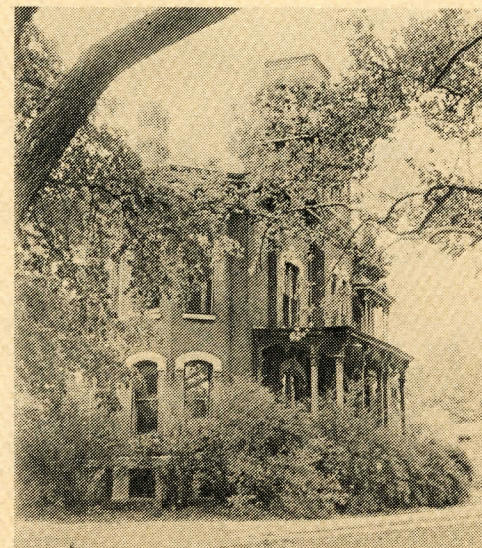
Another date worthy of note is the beginning of the Homestead's role as house-museum. It was in June, 1975, when Junior Welfare Association and Millikin University entered into their history-making agreement to restore the home for this use, Junior Welfare taking major responsibility for the interior, and Millikin, the exterior. Work—and plenty of

it—began as Junior Welfare members cleaned the vacant house and joined with the university in engaging an architectural historian to prepare a restoration plan and in seeking grants and other funding. Jeannine Schaub became the Junior Welfare restoration chairman. And, in October, 1975, the first public open house was held, with the gratifying attendance already noted.

Then, in April, 1976, the James Millikin Homestead, Inc., was formed to take over from Junior Welfare the work of restoring and operating the home. Jeannine Schaub changed her role somewhat to become its first president. The new organization was phased in over a period of ten years, when it became independent of official Junior Welfare representation on its board. Not only can the organization observe a birthday but an "independence day" as well. In 1991 the Homestead has chalked up 115 years of existence and over 15 years as a house-museum. The James Millikin Homestead, Inc., has been in operation 15 years, with five years of independent responsibility.

To fully appreciate the Homestead as it exists today, it helps to take a quick glance back over its early history to the day when its future became open to serious question. The end of the mansion's first era as a family residence, came, of course, with the death of Anna Millikin in 1913. Although her will provided that the home become an art museum, it took some years before her wish was fulfilled. For a time, then, the house sat empty.

In 1920 the new Decatur Art Institute formed and leased the mansion for the intended art museum; the house served this purpose for nearly 50 years. It was deeded to Millikin University in 1942. In 1969 Millikin University
(continued on back page)



Homestead serves as Art Institute ca. 1934.

History — Continued

sity built Kirkland Fine Arts Center, and its modern gallery space supplanted the Homestead. Suddenly, the house sat vacant once more. This time there was no ready provision for its next use. The university faced a problem: What to do with the antiquated home-turned-museum, now needing substantial repair?

First thought was to convert it to a university conference center, but cost estimates brought second thoughts. It seemed the amount could better serve a more direct academic purpose. In 1972 the University's Board of Trustees turned to the community to seek an answer for the house. Letters asking for suggestions were sent to a number of interested organizations and individuals, including the Homestead's neighbors in adjoining Millikin Place. With sentiment for the beloved landmark running high, the community put on its thinking cap.

The Chamber of Commerce studied at length the possibility of acquiring the mansion for its quarters. Later, an informal group proposed that the house become the home of the University president. Whatever the proposal, cost always reared its ugly head. As suggestions for the house petered out, the site was even briefly considered for the location of a new grade school. With the Homestead's deserted windows staring out on the community like forlorn and brooding eyes, neighborhood children began to conjure up ghost stories about the uninhabited structure.

In 1974, Lucien Kapp, as a concerned neighbor, nominated the home to the National Register of Historic Places. With the Homestead's exceptional credentials, it easily won listing. This action served to underline the historical and architectural significance of the house to the community and inspire further consideration of a possible use. It also paved the way for restoration grants, available only to sites of National Register caliber, which the Homestead later received.

Finally, in 1975, with member Jeannine Schaub as a catalyst, Junior Welfare proposed a plan for the Homestead which resulted in the agreement with Millikin University. It was next a challenge to pursue the funds for

restoration, but grants were found and the community backed up sentiment with serious financial support. It appears that the first grant was for \$700 from a Walpole, Mass. company, Bird & Son, Inc., producers of building materials.

Among major contributors, Zonta Club of Decatur provided \$10,000 toward restoration. The first \$5000 of it went to the South Parlor, named the Zonta Room in appreciation. With this gift, the Homestead was entitled to a matching grant of \$5000 from the Illinois Bicentennial Commission, which sum was allocated to the North Parlor, dubbed the Bicentennial Room. The Breakfast Room was renovated through a gift of Robert and Jeannine Schaub.

Both Junior Welfare and the new Homestead organization launched a variety of money-making projects, large and small, to continue the work. Junior Welfare opened "The Bell Pull" needlepoint shop in the Homestead Library. Its profits went to restoration, and, when the shop closed after six years, its inventory brought \$10,000 to restore the Library. Junior Welfare, or course, took responsibility to convert and operate the manion's Carriage House as a children's learning center.



Balloons and banners decorate Homestead side porch in 1985 to celebrate 110th anniversary.



Decatur Municipal Band plays in 1975 at Homestead's re-opening festivities. Visitors stand in line to see house.

Some of the original Millikin furniture was found at the university and provided for use in the Homestead. Other suitable furnishings gradually were donated. Bit by bit the house was transformed to resemble the home it had been. Projection was that restoration would take ten years. But, with hard work and good financial support, the job was considered substantially done in 1981, within five years instead of ten.

Nevertheless, projects continue to surface. By the 1980's, it was obvious that the century-old slate roof demanded to be replaced. Homestead volunteers undertook a special fund-raising campaign; amazingly, identical slate was located; and the task was completed in 1986.

At least one major dream remains to be fulfilled; to restore the stencilled walls and ceilings original to most rooms of the home. The stencilling probably was floral in design; one bedroom is still known as the "Snowball Room". Restorers found that the existing stencilled canvas coverings were not salvageable. Faced with an avalanche of other expenses, they reluctantly opted for wallpaper and paint, in the knowledge and hope that someday the house could be returned to its correct, period ornamentation. Meanwhile, paper and paint did no harm and were a reversible alternative.

Today, stencilling is under study at the Homestead. A bequest to the home has been ear-marked for this purpose. The Dining Room is the first location to be considered. Initial cost estimates have been high—not the first such daunting experience in Homestead restoration. But stencilling can be done and is being done right now to restore the state-owned, historic David Davis mansion at Bloomington, Illinois. For us at the Homestead, it is still a dream—yet as the entire preservation effort at this old house has shown it is not impossible that dreams can be made to come true.

Today, the Homestead stands as a working monument: to the few who dared to dream as the house sat time-worn and empty; to all those who joined in support of the dream; to the very special cooperation between a university and a town, and, finally, to James and Anna Millikin who brought to reality their dreams of beauty and community benefit and inspired our own. —Marilyn Loofbourrow Historian



Membership List



Here is a listing of our kind and generous current members, published with thanks to one and all. —Jane Welch, Membership

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Continued

Landscaping: Phase II

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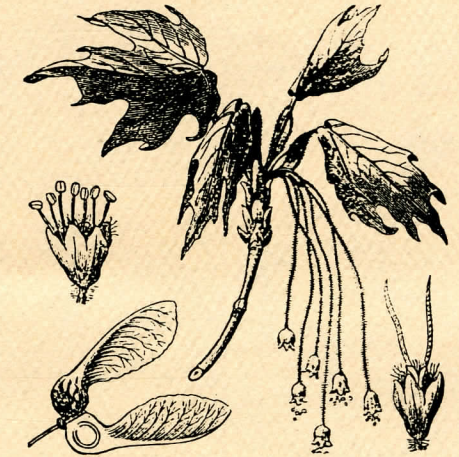
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The second phase of landscape planting has been completed, including duplication of several trees James Millikin originally planted.

Two sugar maples (*Acer saccharum*) were placed on the northeast quarter of the lawn and should provide a wealth of fall color. An American linden (*Tilia americana*) was planted on the east side of the lawn to replace the one lost to a 1990 wind storm. Three shadblows (*Amelanchier canadensis*) were placed in an arc surrounding the flagpole, to eventually soften the pole's vertical line and to provide a visual link with the white crabapples across the drive. A tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) was placed on the southwest lawn, to replace one James Millikin once planted in the same location.

We were pleased to obtain an American beech (*Fagus grandiflora*) for the circular drive bed. This tree was planted as a living memorial to former Homestead board member Dave Robertson, with plans to install a memorial plaque beneath it. The American beech is a noble tree with a stately growth pattern. The leaves become a rich bronze color in fall, and the tree's silhouette is striking in winter when the satin gray bark is visible. While the new tree is diminutive now, it will soon become a beautiful treasure to be enjoyed by all.



Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharinum*).

A third sugar maple planted at the Homestead was a special gift from the Illinois Power Company. As a salute to all American service veterans, Illinois Power selected a Liberty Tree theme for its company's float in the July 4, 1991 Decatur civic parade.

The Liberty Tree was an American tradition which became popular in pre-Revolutionary days. According to the Concise Dictionary of American History, the designated tree was a symbol before which Sons of Liberty assembled and "pledged their fortunes and their sacred honors in the cause of liberty." The original Liberty Tree (an elm) was in Boston, Mass. where the Sons of Liberty often rallied to denounce British oppression.

The 1991 Liberty Tree is a sugar maple, the official tree of Macon County, Illinois. The James Millikin Homestead board was pleased and honored to accept this tree in the spirit of Liberty cherished by all Americans.

(Liberty Tree information courtesy of Illinois Power Co.)

—Ann Yackel
 Landscaping Chairman



American Linden (*Tilia Americana*).



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 Permit 226

JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC.
 P.O. Box 1501
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The James Millikin Homestead
is open to the public
the last Sunday of each month
(March through October)
2 to 4 p.m.

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

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| _____ Student Member | _____ Friend Member |
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- Student Membership \$5.00 per year
- Individual Membership \$15.00 per year
- Family Membership \$25.00 per year
- Friend Membership \$50.00 per year
- Patron Membership \$100.00 per year
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- Life Membership \$1,000 (payable over four years)

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 City _____ State _____
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(Membership is tax deductible)