

THE HOMESTEAD FAMILY

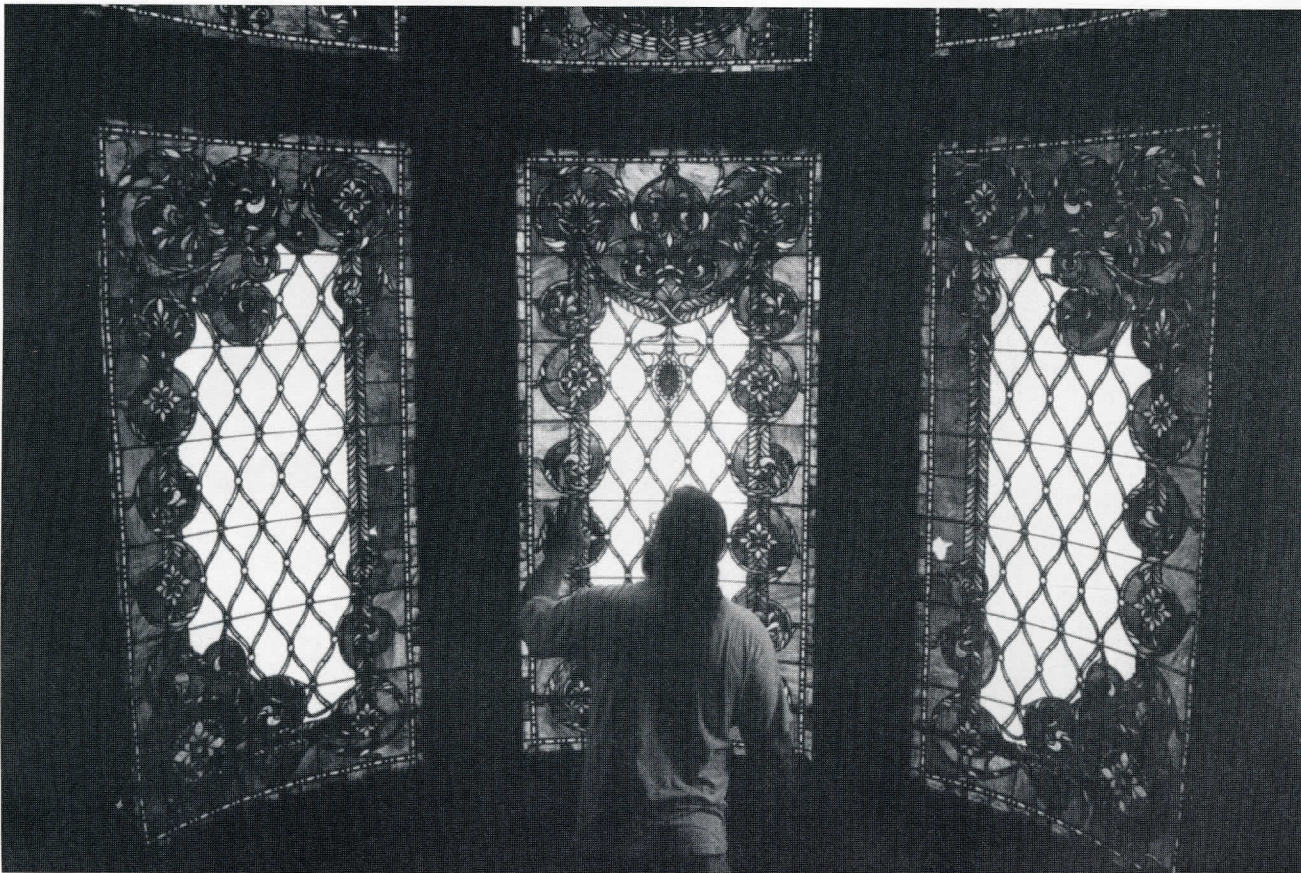
GAZETTE

Vol. XXIV, No.2

JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC., DECATUR, ILLINOIS

November 1999

The Oriel Window Restoration is Under Way!!



In late September the first of three panels of the oriel window was removed for restoration. The excellent news coverage of this initial step of the project got us off to a “running” start! Already several people have made donations to the oriel window restoration fund. We thank them most sincerely and hope others might follow their lead!

Melotte-Morse-Leonatti, Stained Glass, Inc. from Springfield, is the firm we selected. Currently, they are also doing the glass restoration work on the first United Methodist Church here in Decatur. With their busy schedule we cannot predict an exact date for finishing our oriel window, but we hope that “visible” results can be shown at our annual meeting in April 2000. With great anticipation and excitement we work toward this goal!

Photo Courtesy of Herald & Review
Dennis Magee, Photographer



Season's Greetings



A Note From Your President...

Fall colors on the trees, crisp days and cool nights, jack-o-lanterns...all signs of the approaching winter. At the Homestead we have started preparations for our Christmas Tea. Again, Tim Valentine, florist from Monticello, has volunteered to add his decorating magic to help us ready the house for the holiday season. We plan a special display of antique Christmas tree ornaments which were given to the Homestead by the executor of a local estate. The age and fragility of most of these ornaments keep us from using them on our tree, and, since we don't have enough suitable display space, the ornaments will just be shown the day of the Christmas Tea. We will date them as accurately as possible and provide additional information on antique ornaments.

Don't miss the chance to enjoy these seasonal treasures!
We hope to see you at the Tea!

Sincerely,
Brigitta Kapp
President



The pleasure of your company

is requested at

our annual

Victorian Christmas Tea

on

Sunday, December 5, 1999

from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

at the

James Millikin Homestead

125 North Pine Street

History: Millikins—Through a Child's Eyes

Ethel Mayflower Machan was perhaps five years old when she began to spend time apart from her family on weekends and in summers with James and Anna Millikin. She called them appropriately "Uncle James" and "Aunt Anna," because they were, indeed, her step-uncle and aunt.

As previously indicated, Ethel's father Robert M. Machan and James Millikin were step-brothers and also actual kin. James was Robert's second cousin once removed. Robert and James both descended from a Scottish family named McFarland which had long intermarried with Millikins to create a complex relationship between the two men, and between James and Ethel. James was the grandson of Dolly (McFarland) Millikin. Robert was the son of Dolly's niece, Joanna (McFarland) Machan.

These family ties were, naturally, the initial factor in causing the Millikins to take an interest in Ethel. The story of Ethel and the Millikins was first mentioned to the newly formed Millikin Homestead in the mid-1970's by Ethel's son, the late Kermit Spera. Only in 1997 did the story arise again in more detail when Kermit's niece and Ethel's granddaughter, Eleanora (Betsy) Ross of Coralville, Iowa, visited the Homestead in tracing family history.

Why Ethel became the particular focus of the Millikins is not truly known. They would have been acquainted with all of the six children of Robert Machan and his wife Sarah from close after their births since the family lived near Argenta, Illinois. Timing for the relationship must have been just right. Ethel, born May 29,

1882, was the youngest in a busy farm family. At some point also her mother's health began to decline. It might have helped to have the young Ethel away from home part of the time. The Millikins were childless and well-established in their spacious mansion on N. Pine Street, built 1875-76. Old

Machan family letters indicate their other daughters spent time with the Millikins, but it was Ethel who was most often with them over the years, probably into her teens.

Unfortunately, Ethel's childhood memories were not recorded in her time. They come to us now via her granddaughter, who wishes, as many do about their families, that she had asked and recorded more. The recollections passed along are few but valued in adding to the limited number of anecdotes about the Millikins.

As a little girl staying overnight at the Homestead, Ethel remembered climbing into a high bed with steps going up to it, helped by a maid who also aided her in undressing and dressing. Ethel was probably given the north bedroom. She put her bed slippers in a little drawer. She recalled

standing on a drawer at floor level to look into the mirror over the fireplace and also measuring herself against the fireplace to see how tall she had grown.

Her memories included playing on a hobby horse which Aunt Anna would bring forth. It seemed to be special and

Anna would caution her to be careful with it. The hobby horse now in the Homestead was found in the Carriage House when restoration began. Its origin was a puzzle, but perhaps it was the one on which Ethel played. In visiting the Homestead now, Ethel's granddaughter wondered if the horse might appear to be of an older vintage than Ethel's time, which, if true, could suggest that it might even have been Anna's own childhood toy, brought to the Homestead by

Anna's mother who came to live with the Millikins from her farm near Mt. Zion. We can only fantasize.

Uncle James ordered a small pony trap and pony for Ethel's own use to drive around the grounds. She remembered riding in something like a "surrey with the fringe on top." If Aunt Anna wanted to

get Ethel out of the house, she would send her to the Millikin bank with James, who seemed to enjoy taking her there. If he had a meeting, he would call to the elevator boy to look after her. She would be entertained by riding up and down in the elevator. At least once the boy was given instructions, maybe with a wink, to take Ethel down to the vault and see if she could lift a bag of money. If so, James announced that she could have it. Of course, she could not lift any (obviously containing coins), so she never got a bag, but what a tantalizing thought!

Aunt Anna schooled her in deportment. She was taught to sit quietly, with straight back, hands in her lap and feet on the floor. She learned to set the table just right. Anna gave Ethel a child-sized bone china tea set, bought clothes for her and also gave her a large doll. Most of these gifts, it seemed, she was allowed to take home with her. The bone china tea set may have remained at the Homestead for play, but it did pass down in the family of granddaughter Betsy Ross, who has generously placed it on loan to the Millikin Homestead.

Ethel seemed to have been taught many social niceties. Of course, she may have learned such things in her own home, but it was, as mentioned, a farm household, with a number of children and all the hubbub. Betsy always thought her grandmother particularly gracious and proper and others would comment so. Ethel never left on errands without hat and gloves. She carried herself well and spoke well. Betsy believes that at least some of

Ethel Machan



Note on back of picture identifies Ethel as being age four-and-a-half.

(Continued)

History: Millikins—Through a Child's Eyes (continued)

these attributes were from the tutelage of Anna Millikin.

As a little girl, Ethel was fascinated by the artwork on the ceiling of the Homestead stairwell, and said she called the figures there angels until Anna explained they were "cherubs." Ethel would lie on the floor to look at them, but Anna told her that was "not very lady-like". Ethel mentioned also Anna's live peacock or peacocks—she spoke as if there were two—that strutted the grounds [as we know, to the entertainment of grandchildren visiting next door at the home of Hugh (hog-ring inventor) Hill]. She reported James liked the peacock(s), and said they were "better than a watchdog." Ethel was chums with one of the Hill grandchildren, Grace Hill, born just a year after her. They enjoyed sneaking about the two adjoining houses listening to the adults talking. Two tin-types, identified with their names but too dark to print, show the girls together.

Ethel was amused by what she considered an on-going but friendly competition between the Millikin and Hill families. (It is suggested from another source that Hill once boasted that he could build as fine a home as James Millikin's. Ethel's own tale helps support the rumor of competition.) Alone on one occasion, she overheard a conversation between Anna Millikin and Mrs. Hill, who were at tea, about the propriety of girls riding bicycles. Anna seemed quite positive that it was not the thing to do and Mrs. Hill eventually responded that Anna had convinced her. Shortly after, Ethel reported, Uncle James beckoned her to the Carriage House where he proudly presented her with a

bicycle. "Ethel, you have the first bicycle in the neighborhood," he was quoted as saying. Ethel believed the Millikins had cooperated to outdo the Hills in obtaining the "first." Ethel always chuckled in telling this story. Her bicycle supposedly had a big wheel in front, but since this style was difficult to mount, especially for a girl, the design is open to question.

Ethel recalled attending musicales that Anna would arrange in her home for the girls from the Anna B. Millikin Home, founded by Anna and James, and which originally was organized for dependent children as well as older women. Of course, Ethel mentioned the piano lessons she and her sister Clara (perhaps sister Leora, too) received from Anna's interest and effort. Ethel continued playing the piano through life.

The Millikin's fondness for Ethel persisted, and in her early or mid-teens, James approached her father and his step-brother, Robert, with an offer. James and Anna would send Ethel to finishing school and college; they would take her to Europe; she would live in their home; in short, they wanted to adopt her. In what terms Robert's refusal was couched is not really known, but he did, however, refuse. Whether there was any strain in the step-brothers' relationship after this offer and refusal was not clear. In telling the story, Ethel never dwelt on the aftermath. It seemed there was no longstanding harm.

In 1898, Ethel's sister Leona died and her obituary mentioned a special train bearing Mr. and Mrs. James Millikin, among others, who came from Decatur for the funeral. Ethel was then 16. It is known, too, that Robert managed James'

farms for him later in life and then for Anna, until they could be sold after James' death.

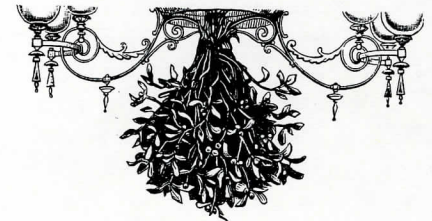
Ethel indicated that there might have been somewhat of a rivalry between Robert Machan and James, not unusual for brothers or step-brothers. Robert may not have minded telling a story or two "on" James. One was passed down concerning James and some cattle: he was at his farm talking to a potential buyer. The cattle were some distance off; the fields were muddy, and the buyer did not want to go through the mud to get a better look at the cattle, which James had been praising. The buyer purchased them; then came back a few days later to complain that they were skinnier than he thought. James gave the man a few more cattle, and the deal and reputation were intact.

It also seemed that James and Robert were good comrades. This assumption was supported by a letter quoted in Albert R. Taylor's *The Life Story of James Millikin*, from Chester Smith, son of a boyhood friend of James, John E. Smith, who also came from Pennsylvania to live in Decatur. The son, Chester, wrote, "Mr. Millikin's office was a small room at the back of the old bank building which he occupied until the present stately structure (the now demolished ornate bank at Main and Water Streets) was erected." Here James met "with other old-time friends, consisting mainly of my father (John E. Smith) and Silas Packard and occasionally James Hill and Robert Machan, who made it their rendezvous." With this special group, including his step-brother Robert, over a period of ten years, according to Smith, James would

discuss his dream for an industrial school, which gradually expanded into a university.

In regard to Ethel, not only did the Machans not want to give up their daughter, but she was becoming a young woman, with interests and friends of her own. She may also have stayed at home more in her late teens to help her mother for whom a heart condition was becoming an increasingly serious problem. Sarah Machan died in 1901; the Millikins attended her funeral. Ethel married the same year at age 19 to start a new chapter in life.

Marilyn Loofbourrow
Historian

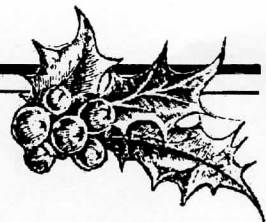


Scheduling

The James Millikin Homestead has been used by many for weddings, anniversaries, showers, teas and dinners. It is a lovely setting for any occasion.

If you are interested in using the Homestead for your next special event, please call 422-4395.

Alice Brock
Chairman



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