

THE HOMESTEAD FAMILY



GAZETTE



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JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC., DECATUR, ILLINOIS

November 1991

A Note From Your President

Dear Homestead Members:

It's time once again for us to be preparing for Christmas at the Homestead. We'll be decorating immediately after Thanksgiving (it's so late!) and look forward to seeing you on Sunday, December 8 for our annual Victorian Christmas Reception. Like last year, we'll be entertaining members from 1:00 p.m. until 3:00 and then throwing the doors open to the public so that the entire community can enjoy Christmas at the Homestead. Our theme this year is "Sweet Memories" . . . of the past and in the making!

The board was so happy in October to meet new Millikin University President John Miltner, who took time out of his busy schedule to become acquainted with the house and the board. He brought his lovely wife, Carol, and his mother-in-law, who was celebrating her birthday, along with board member Lois Wells (such a coincidence), so we sang!

A few people have asked if they missed something — such as the High Brow Faire rummage sale and Mr. and Mrs. Millikin Days. The answer is "no" on both counts. The board decided in September to postpone the sale until spring — we're still happy to accept your contributions — look for it in conjunction with one of our monthly Sunday open houses. You'll have two good reasons to visit the Homestead. Mr. and Mrs. Millikin Days, our annual living history tour for third graders, has moved back to the spring due to the wishes of the Decatur



New Step News

New front steps for the Homestead have been a topic of conversation on our board for at least the past six years. We have plenty else to talk about, so it is with great satisfaction and relief that we report the completion of this project. Over one hundred years of wind and weather and traffic had rendered the original Homestead front steps pretty close to hazardous, we decided. Finding the appropriate stone contractor, finding the appropriate limestone quarry, working our need into

and other walkway projects) it became apparent that a new foundation would be needed for the new steps. In excavating for the new footings, the water line was cut; in repairing the water line (replacing, actually, as the old one was found to be lead, not legal) the gas line was cut; before this could be repaired, KA-BOOM: the fire department was involved. Luckily there was no major damage to anything or anyone though Bill McGaughey did require a trip to the emergency room -

Sweet Memories

Our annual Victorian Christmas Tea will be held on Sunday, December 8 from 1 p.m. until 3 for members and their guests. We will have open house for the public from 3 to 5. A long day, but always lots of fun and holiday good cheer! As in the past, there will be abundant punch and goodies, Christmas music, beautiful decorations. We hope everyone will come.

Mrs. Millikin's Christmas Trunk will again be open at the tea with unique gifts, decorations and, this year, a selection of baked goodies (Mrs. Millikin cooks!!). We invite any of our members to help us out by donating home made items or baked goods - please call Wilma Sanner at 422-7326 or Wyllene Griffy at 422-8417.



Easter Seals Ornament



for third graders, has moved back to the spring due to the wishes of the Decatur school district. If you've played a part in this project in the past, you'll be getting a call, and if you haven't, but would like to, chairman Wyllene Griffy would love to have you call.

Best wishes, friends and members, for a happy holiday season! Hope to see you December 8th.

— Nancy Eichenauer
President

stone contractor, finding the appropriate limestone quarry, working our need into Millikin's maintenance budget, scheduling (and re-scheduling) all took time and patience - little did we know we'd be in for plenty of excitement once the work was underway!

For Grounds chairman Bill McGaughey and Landscaping chairman Ann Yackel, this was a project which "blew up in their faces", literally! Once the new stone was delivered, and the old steps lifted off (to be saved for side door

anything or anyone though Bill McGaughey did require a trip to the emergency room - clearly this man goes above and beyond the call to duty! We really appreciate it, Bill.

As you might guess, with all this digging and people tramping around, some of our new landscaping was damaged, but Ann Yackel and Bill are working to put everything back together. We hope you'll all soon have the opportunity to try out our latest home improvement.



Second in a series of Decatur landmark Christmas ornaments is the 1991 Easter Seals Annual Ornament which is a brass likeness of the Millikin Homestead from a sketch by Alice Flint. We are happy to announce that this will also be the 1991 Homestead annual ornament and will be available in Mrs. Millikin's Trunk, our boutique at the Christmas Tea. The ornament sells for \$14.00 with all proceeds going to Easter Seals.

Holiday Entertaining

We have some good dates left for Christmas parties at the Homestead. Please call Scheduling chairman Lois Wells at 428-0805 if you would like to rent the Homestead for your group of 50 or fewer.

Membership Update

Here is a listing of members not included in August's Gazette (so sorry!) or new since then:

Life

Frances M. Yocum
& Laura T. May

Patron

Dr. & Mrs. James L. Fisher

Family

Tom & Cathy Bilyeu
Marilyn & Jack Tallman
Dr. & Mrs. James Wade III

Individual

Eunice Dansby
Mrs. Jean Foran
Janet Carrothers Lashly
Mrs. W. F. Morrison
Mrs. Lee Pigott
Betty Ploeger
Mrs. Thomas Protzman
Mr. Robert E. Vicars

— Jane Welch
Membership

History — "Sweet Memories" Return Of Christmas Past

At the Homestead we have a joyous set of traditions, all wrapped up in a package called the Victorian Christmas Tea, with its corollary, the Christmas Open House. Both events date to 1977, two years after beginning of Homestead restoration. The first Christmas party was planned as a thank you to members. To share the Homestead in its first holiday finery, a public Christmas open house was planned that same year.

As with most young households, the new Homestead organization was high in spirits but low in financial resources. A tree was to be procured, but the committee would use its ingenuity to decorate it. A study was made of appropriate Victorian decorations and, then, of what among these the members could make themselves. In this, the committee also followed in Victorian footsteps; in the early years of the era most trees in this country were decorated with handmade ornaments. It was later in the period when European glass figural ornaments became available and popular.

To whet anticipation for the first Christmas party, *The Homestead Family Gazette* reported, "Greenery and pine will give the rooms a Christmas scent and candles will illuminate them. Original decorations, copied from the era, will be used in the rooms and on the tree. Glass ornaments, decorated cookie shapes and cornucopias filled with candy and nuts will be some of the ornaments which have been fashioned for the party which we hope will be an annual event. The crocheted snowflakes which will be on our tree are featured in the current issues of *The Smithsonian* magazine and *Gourmet*, as traditional decorations of America."

Today we know that the Victorian Christmas Tea did, indeed, become an annual event. The paper cornucopias on the first tree have passed into memory, but the snowflakes, crocheted by the Homestead's own members, are still a part of our Christmas scene. From time to time they are refurbished — washed and restiffened — to hang once again on the tree — or perhaps elsewhere.



According to the Herald & Review, the first Homestead tree was also decked in "doll figures, folded paper fans, and ribbon-tied bells, among the popcorn garlands." The doll figures, still in use, were a Victorian boy and girl of heavy paper, attired in real fabric clothing, reputed to have been obtained and dressed by Claudia Curry, first tea chairman. Her assistants in arranging the tea were Ruth Prust and Marilynn Madden.

A large group gathered to make the snowflakes and other ornaments: Ellen Sheffer, Debbie Hennelly, Ruth Prust, Mary Hartley, Nancy Shoop, Lou Snelson, Ann Seidman, Lu White, Ruth Murphy, Sally Moore and Helen Crawford.

(continued)

← Victorian girl from 1977 still a Homestead favorite.

History — Continued

The chairman and assistants searched not only for traditional ornaments, but traditional refreshments as well. This search led to the compilation and publication of the Homestead's own dessert cookbook, *Visions of Sugar Plums*. It contained recipes culled from out-of-print cookbooks and members' files, including the recipe for the hot punch served ever since at the annual party. Other recipes included were prepared for this first party.

In keeping with the era, the committee decided to send formal invitations to members. A costumed butler and aproned maid greeted guests at the door. A white hobby horse was proudly displayed beside the Christmas tree after being found stored on the premises. (While the Millikins did not have children, it may be that the horse was kept for visiting nieces and nephews who lived in the area.)

Does it all sound familiar? It seems that most or all of the elements of the first tea are still with us today.

Also originating with the first party was the tradition of the annual boutique, "Mrs. Millikin's Trunk," offering handmade Christmas ornaments and gift items. Occasionally, edible "goodies" were added, too.

In 1979 came the first annual Homestead ornament, a needlepoint square hung diagonally, with a rose embroidered on one side and the year on the other, a tassel below. Early annual ornaments did not necessarily depict the Homestead as became the trend later, and were often of needlepoint. Recently there have been ornaments of ceramic, glass and brass.

With funding for restoration and operations so urgent, early boards and membership outdid themselves in laboring individually and in workshops to make the annual ornament and other enticing sales items. In 1980 the boutique netted \$1,500. Betsy Empen and Linda May were boutique chairmen, with Ann Seidman as general chairman. Among the multitude of items made were 100 counted cross-stitch ornaments.



Handmade snowflakes, cookies and fans nestle behind popcorn garlands on first Homestead Christmas tree.

Another boutique feature has been the raffle. Lucky winners have taken home some remarkable items, including a quilt, handmade by Betsy Empen and Linda May, a miniature room crafted by Dorothy Smethers, and a handmade stuffed bear, "Miss Victoria H. (for Homestead) Bear, in Victorian garb, by Maxine Talbott.

Music has been a part of the Victorian Tea as well. There have been vocal groups, bell-ringers, classic guitarist as well as hearty souls who have to pump out carols on the old parlor organ.

From the first, the public open house has been very like the tea, but with a few less formalities. The open house was not always free. In 1979, it was reported that admission was charged, "Seventy-five cents for adults, twenty-five cents for children." The two events began to be scheduled on the same day in 1989 — private party first, open house following.

Over the years we have seen a variety of beautiful and unusual Christmas decorations throughout the house. The standard was set in the first years by Marilyn Madden and her committees. One particular later memory is

of a parlor adorned in a collection of white scherenschnitte, German paper cuttings, all made by decorator Barbara Hackel. German paper folded stars, made to accompany the cuttings, still remain at the Homestead to sprinkle through greenery.

In 1989 Betsy Empen crocheted a large angel tree top to match the original snowflakes, and a giant German nutcracker from a renowned family of woodcarvers was purchased to become another Homestead tradition. (A nutcracker was placed near the tree in German homes to ward off evil spirits.) In 1990 Bill McGaughey built a Moravian Christmas pyramid, another historic Old World custom, for the dining room table, and Charlotte Dipper brought a full-sized antique sleigh, filled with Christmas packages, to the lawn.

This year our Christmas tree chairman, Brigitta Kapp, hopes to emphasize on the tree handcrafted ornaments, many of fabric and needlepoint, which have been made through the years by members especially for the Homestead. It promises to be a tree of memories as well as a memorable tree!

We look forward to Brigitta's work and also to the display of a 136-year-old tree, on loan from Board Member Betty Ploeger. This unusual tree was constructed of wood in Germany, then brought to this country by its immigrant maker, who settled in rural St. Louis Co., Missouri. Not a feather tree, it was trimmed in fringed paper loops, but has branches tipped by candleholders. It is now wrapped in greenery and will be hung with authentic ornaments. The family of the maker faithfully erected the tree each year until the last elderly kin, a daughter-in-law, entrusted it to Betty's parents, whom she felt would care for it and carry on its tradition. Betty's father, Dr. Erl Farley, was the family's physician and friend.

Both the tree and other decorations will echo the theme of the Victorian Christmas Tea, "Sweet Memories." And we hope they will evoke happy memories of Christmas 1991 and joyous recollections of Christmas Past.

—Marilyn Loofbourrow
Historian

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WHO DOES WHAT AT THE HOMESTEAD

President — Nancy Eichenauer
 Vice-President — Ann Yackel
 Secretary — Sid Shonkwiler
 Treasurer — Jane Lawson

Membership — Jane Welch
 Scheduling — Lois Wells
 House/Restoration — Brigitta & Lucien Kapp
 Grounds — Bill McGaughey
 Landscaping — Ann Yackel
 Historian — Marilyn Loofburrow
 Publicity — Lyn Shimp
 Newsletter — Sid Shonkwiler
 Procurement/Cleaning — Wilma Sanner
 Mailing — Charlotte Dipper & Betty Ploeger
 Mr. & Mrs. Millikin Days — Wyllene Griffy



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