

THE HOMESTEAD FAMILY

GAZETTE

Vol. XVII, No.2 (XIX|1)

JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC., DECATUR, ILLINOIS

August 1994

A Note From Your President . . .

Take a minute to look at the cover of your latest Ameritech phone book. There we are - right in the middle between a picture of Lake Decatur and an area farm. I believe the designer of this book cover selected institutions or scenes that would symbolize the city and all that is good in it.

Lake Decatur represents the recreational advantages of the area and the farm scene shows the industrial opportunities. What do you think our Homestead depicts? I conducted my own small survey and found if you asked ten people what the James Millikin Homestead symbolizes, you would get ten different answers. One saw it as showing the architectural scope of the area. One said our cultural heritage is being touted. One reflected that it represents superiority in education. Community involvement, charitable efforts and historical significance were mentioned by others. I certainly agree with them - all of them. The

Homestead is one of the most significant and meaningful institutions in Decatur. Aren't you proud to be a part of it?

Even more varied community memories are being fashioned for our patrons and visitors this summer with a busy and exciting schedule. We've had another successful Art-on-Main; the Park Singers entertained on the lawn at the annual NWRAPS picnic; the DAR has chosen the Homestead for a Regent's Tea to be attended by 250 members from all over the state on July 14, and we have an above normal compliment of wedding receptions and dinners. Also, Millikin University seems to be utilizing the facility more often than in the past.

I hope you too will come to the Homestead this summer so you can add to your personal memories of our important institution.

- Lynn Potter



History: "Ruth Goes to the Roots"

by Ruth Prust

Editor's Note: In vacation time it seems appropriate to reprint the story, delightful and informative, of a summer trip taken in 1982 by Homestead supporter Ruth Prust of Decatur to discover the boyhood home of James Millikin in southwestern Pennsylvania. Thanks go to Ruth for this excellent historical precedent and for her permission to reprint it.

- Marilyn Loofbourrow, historian



James Millikin's birthplace - Ten Mile, Pennsylvania

Mr. and Mrs. Millikin Days



Mr. & Mrs. Millikin Day Winners: (l to r) Sheena Freeman, Megan Mowrey and Katie Payne

Three Decatur third-grade students were honored at the James Millikin Homestead on Sunday, June 5, for saying "thanks" after visiting the homestead early in May. They were among 950 third-grade students from 33 classes in 18 different schools who toured the homestead during Mr. and Mrs. Millikin Days, and wrote "thank you" notes to Mrs. Millikin.

The three winners received copies of Richard Peck's book, *Ghosts We Have Been*. They are:

Megan Mowrey, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Eric Mowrey, student at French Academy. Her teacher is Suzie Miller.

Katie Payne, daughter of Annette Payne, student at Parsons School. Her teacher is Nelda Williams.

Sheena Freeman, daughter of Erwin and

Doretta Freeman, student at Garfield School. Her teacher is Karen Krows.

The letters are fun to read and all the children say a special "thank you" to Sophie, the kitchen maid, for giving them a cookie. They make cute comments in their letters such as:

"Mrs. Millikin, I didn't think you seemed angry, I thought you were very nice."

"I'd like to order some maids to help my Mother."

"I'm glad Sophie burned the biscuits and not the cookies!"

Very special "thank you's" go to our dedicated volunteers whose superb acting make this event a meaningful experience for Decatur school children.

Co-chairmen of the event were Jane Lawson and Anne Hostetler.

Little did I realize, almost 30 years ago as I crossed the threshold of the Decatur Art Institute, that his old home and its original owner would become a source of many volunteer hours in my life, and that a search for facts regarding Millikin (man and home) would take me to southwestern Pennsylvania!

That first night in the old Art Institute, as babysitter for the Jarold Talbot family who lived on the second floor, was anything but pleasant. Wind rattled the old windows and sent chills through the high-ceilinged rooms. Dim lights failed to more than outline the modernistic furniture in their living room - the modernity so foreign to the long narrow windows, ceiling moldings, antique fireplace, and other appointments of the former master bedroom. I was truly convinced that ghosts inhabited the dark halls! Would anyone blame a poor college freshman for pleading previous plans when asked to babysit again?

With maturity I became interested in architecture and preservation, and I came to realize what a marvelous structure Decatur had at 125 North Pine Street. I was delighted that Junior Welfare undertook the challenges of restoration and most pleased to be asked to served on the Board of Directors of the James Millikin Homestead many years later. As Chairman of Volunteers for the Homestead, I have searched dusty books, squinted at micro-filmed newspapers, and talked with knowledgeable Decaturites, always in search of more information about the retiring James and Anna Millikin. Albert Taylor's book, *The Life of James Millikin*, has been read and re-read to the point that when I found myself studying a U.S. map for a trip to Washington, D.C. this summer, my eye caught the name of Ten Mile, Pennsylvania,

and I was delighted it was so close to my route!

Thus, on a lovely summer day in late August this year, I pulled off Interstate 70 into Washington, Pennsylvania to find Washington & Jefferson College, which James Millikin had attended so many years ago. The College Public Relations Office was most gracious and was well aware of their former student and the university he had founded in the midwest.

From here I drove through the beautiful rolling hills and across the quiet streams of southwestern Pennsylvania to the quaint village of Ten Mile, some 15 miles from the college. Nestled on the bank of Ten Mile Creek, the town has no doubt changed greatly in the past hundred years, for now there are no stores, no businesses, and possibly no more than 50 homes. As I drove along the one main street, I noted that all the homes were far too new to have been here when James Millikin walked these streets. However, at the edge of town, on the narrow country road leading from Ten Mile to Marianna, I discovered a beautiful old red brick home that was surely well over 150 years old. Passing this home, about a mile further, I came to a small country church with a keystone reading "Pleasant Hill". Again, this was a name I remembered from Albert Taylor's book. (Unfortunately, the present building is a replacement for the original church, as its cornerstone is dated 1882.) A search of the adjoining graveyard yielded two Millikin names, William I. Millikin and Ruth Millikin, "consort of Wm. I. Millikin".

Driving back toward the village of Ten Mile, I saw a lady walking out of the old red brick house, so I stopped my car, got out, introduced myself, and explained why I was in Ten Mile . . . i.e. looking for the birth-

History – Continued

place of Decatur, Illinois' largest philanthropist. Jane Dineen was most friendly and kind; she invited me in to her home, gave me a complete tour of their beautiful restored and furnished residence, prepared lunch and let me look through some papers she had on the history of Ten Mile and the Pleasant Hill Church. When her husband, Hayward, arrived, he kindly called some people who had lived in the area longer than the twelve or so years that they had resided in the area.

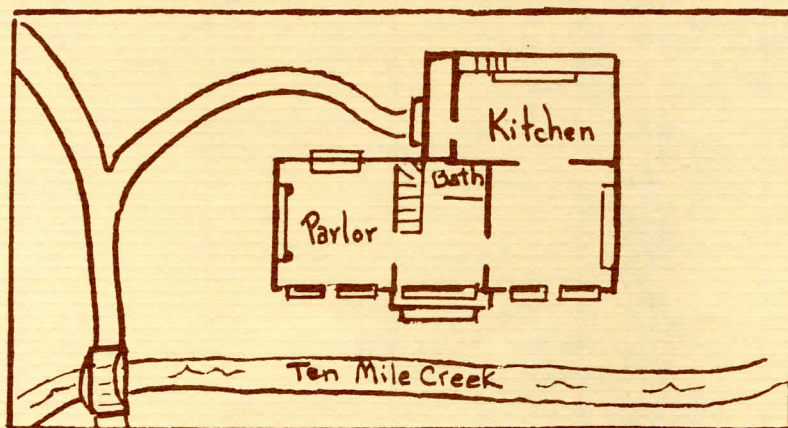
The local history buffs confirmed that I was in the house described on page 19 of Albert Taylor's book, the same home Taylor himself had visited on first searching for the Millikin birthplace. And he, too, had found the occupants of the red brick house gracious and friendly.

I was informed the actual Millikin home was on an adjoining farm, just across Ten Mile Creek. Its original red brick is now covered with white stucco.

Armed now with the name of the current tenants, I approached the Millikin home from the back (barnyard) driveway and found the family sitting in rockers on the rear porch. Again my explanation of who I was and why I was calling (plus handing out brochures of the Decatur Millikin Homestead) was sufficient for me to be invited in the house. Since this has been rental property for many years, it is not in the exquisite condition of the Dineen home, but I feel that little has been changed in the years since James sat beside the fireplace at his grandmother's knee.

The front door has been nailed closed, that the lovely fanlight window above is still intact. Paint now covers all the woodwork, and the fireplaces have been boarded over

with heating stoves set in front of each and vented into their chimneys. Of particular interest was the fireplace Taylor described (page 20) as being in the south parlor. Here were the columns that Taylor said reminded him of the Hallway fireplace in the Decatur Homestead, which James built so many decades after leaving Pennsylvania. The columns were approximately three inches in diameter, with a single rather than double support as JMH has, on each side of the mantel. These, too, have been painted over, so I have no idea whether they were the burl wood such as is used in "our" fire-



place.

Just as Albert Taylor noted some 60 years ago, the panels below the windows in this same parlor are very much like the panels below the windows in the bay of the south parlor of our Decatur Millikin home. I would like to think that James remembered little things from his birthplace that he later incorporated into the only home he ever built.

A bathroom has been added at the back of the central hallway, thus eliminating direct passage to the kitchen from the entry hall. The other front room affords an opening into the rear kitchen which once had a huge

fireplace for cooking and heating. This also had been boarded over, though it is still evident. A gas range is now used for cooking and is placed against the former cooking fireplace. A small back stairway was behind a door next to the fireplace. Though I did not tour the second floor, I am sure it has the same floorplan as the first floor, with three large rooms. (The Dineen home, also built in the 1790's, has an identical floorplan and has been only slightly changed for convenience in living. It is a beautiful restoration.)

How marvelous to find that the home built by William Millikin about 1792 is still standing! Oh, how I wish that Ten Mile had a Junior Welfare group to rescue their treasure and restore it! But old homes are more abundant in the east, and James' names not so prominent there, so we can be thankful, at least that a photograph is available to give us a clue to his past.

And we can be even more thankful that Millikin University and the Junior Welfare Association undertook the herculean task of preserving a bit of Decatur history through the restoration of the 1876 Victorian home.

So here I am, no longer a college student, but rather the mother of two college students, finding myself excited and fulfilled in my quest into the past of dear James. That first impression, 30 years ago, of the house with resident ghosts was totally wrong. My apologies, James, how grateful we are to have this beautiful monument to a man who gave so much of his worldly goods to the community he adopted as his home. James, we hope you are pleased with what we have done.

– Ruth Prust

Volunteers

We are always looking for new volunteers to lead guided tours and answer questions at the Sunday Open House. Your time commitment is approximately 2 to 3 tours a year. If you would like to become a docent at the Homestead, please contact Martha Schrod, volunteer coordinator, at 877-6295. If there are enough interested people, a training session will be scheduled. Current volunteers would also be welcome at the training.

Art On Main

We had beautiful weather for Art on Main the first weekend in June. The short rain storm on Sunday did not hinder people's viewing of the wonderful art nor did it hurt our food sales. The Homestead board, for the third year, provided food and drink for the artists and viewing public. This year we raised over \$450 for the Homestead. This is one of our major fundraisers for the year, in addition we also sell notecards, calendars and have the Christmas Boutique at the Victorian Tea. Art on Main successfully shows the creative works of many local artists and creates interest in the Homestead. We look forward to seeing you again next year.

Stationary

The James Millikin Homestead fold over note cards and envelopes are once again available. Packaged 10 cards with envelopes for \$5.00, they can be used for everything from thank you's to invitations. The note cards are available at Franny's on Merchants Street. They are also in the boutique at the Homestead (library) and from any board member.

Kapp Family
5 Millikin Place
Decatur, IL 62522

Non-Profit
Organization
Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage Paid
Decatur, IL 62521
Permit 226

8/19/94

JAMES MILLIKIN HOMESTEAD, INC.
P.O. Box 1501
Decatur, Illinois 62525

Attention, Members and Friends

Did you know that your membership dues helps us with the maintenance of the Homestead? Did you know that we're counting on you? Have you just forgotten? We need your support. Please consider sending in your dues today. It would be greatly appreciated.

— Wilma Sanner
Membership Chairman

Please make checks payable to:

James Millikin Homestead, Inc.
P.O. Box 1501
Decatur, Illinois 62525

James Millikin Homestead, Inc.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student Member – \$5.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron – \$100.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual Member – \$15.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Business – \$200.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Member – \$25.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Life – \$1,000.00 (May be paid |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend – \$50.00 | in four annual installments) |

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

(Membership is tax deductible)

1994-1995 Board

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jeannette Bradley
 Dorothy Coutant
 Robert Hantel
 Anne Hostetler
 Brigitta Kapp
 Lucien Kapp
 Donna Meinhold
 Betty Ploeger
 Lynn Potter
 Carolyn Rau
 Wilma Sanner
 Martha Schrodt
 Terri Smithmeier
 Joanna Ploeger-Tsoulos
 Jim Williams

OFFICERS

PresidentLynn Potter
 Vice-PresidentAnne Hostetler
 SecretaryJoanna Ploeger-Tsoulos
 TreasurerBob Hantel