

# Millen house 'guests' varied

It would be interesting to know if young William Millen knew when he left his native South Carolina and emigrated to Indiana in the early 1830's that he would build a house that would in time be inhabited by such unusual guests as runaway slaves and a ghost.

**BUT THAT'S GETTING** ahead of ourselves in the Millen story. The earliest traces of William Millen in Monroe County are found in several places.

The *Counties of Morgan, Monroe and Brown* history reports that in 1835 he was a partner with William Fee in a steam saw mill business operated on the farm of E. H. Fee, also a South Carolinian, who came to Monroe County in 1830. The *Bloomington Area Historic Sites and Structures Survey* indicates that Millen bought a 160-acre farm in 1839. The property was roughly bounded by Third, Union, 10th streets and the Bypass in section 34 of Bloomington Township. (The 1856 plat book erroneously lists Millen as "McMillen.")

The man next appears in the 1840 census for the county — a bare entry that simply lists the heads of households by counties. By that time Millen had already built a crude cabin on the property in preparation for erecting a more pretentious house. His family consisted of his wife, Eleanor, (incorrectly listed in the 1850 census as "Elienor"), and children, Eliza, 18, James, 16, and William, 11. According to an account distributed during a 1966 American Association of University Women house tour, the Millens ran short of rations, but their prayers were answered when a stag wandered

## Looking back

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By Rose McIlveen

onto their property and wound up on their dinner table.

MILLEN HAD PAID \$1,600 for the 160 acres in 1839, and he had to make do with making his own bricks and using his own timber for building materials. The result was what the *Survey* calls an "outstanding example of the Georgian house type — out of fashion in the Eastern states in 1850, but a style quite fashionable, often elegant in Bloomington."

The *Survey* continues: "The house was built by William Millen who owned the land between 1839 and 1880 — a period of time which saw the value of the land rise from \$1,800 to \$8,500."

As for the runaway slaves, oral tradition persists that they were hidden by Millen in the recesses of the attic of the spacious two-story house. If that tradition is indeed true, Millen was a brave man, considering that Monroe County was honeycombed with transplanted southerners, who at one time formed their own armed militia and threatened the peace during the Civil War before they were forcibly squelched by a troop of cavalry armed with a cannon.

THE MILLEN FAMILY was joined in the area by Aquilla Rogers, the county sheriff, who built his house on High Street in 1866. The two houses are close enough that members of the respective families could probably see each others lamps through the windows on the winter evenings when there were no leaves on the trees.

The ghost legend connected with the Millen House has a touch of plausibility to it in that it is supposed to be the spirit of a servant woman who fell into a bubbling cauldron of home-made soap in the basement. The ghost is cited in the American Association of University Women house-tour information, but the account adds that the Stallknechts, later owners of the house never saw her, and she is supposed to haunt only the basement rooms. (After visiting the basement myself on a gloomy day, I could well imagine that she was lurking about somewhere.) However, she may be the result of a fanciful story told by one of the Millen children to impress their friends.

ONE OF THE TWO basement fireplaces has a carved inscription, which may date back to the occupancy of the Millen family. They lived in the house until 1880, when it passed into the hands of members of the Rogers family.

Later occupants were IU Dean of Women Agnes Wells and the late Professor Newton P. Stallknecht, who did some renovations to the old structure.

Today the Millen/Stallknecht House, as it is

(Back page, col. 7, this sec)