



Child's Playhouse In Alton Retained Forever in Memory of Lucy Jane Haskell

by Ty Bechel
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Lucy's 141st Birthday Party in July Open to the Public



In 1885 John E. Hayner, wealthy financier, and philanthropist commissioned the building of a Victorian-style playhouse for his granddaughter, Lucy, for her fifth birthday. The playhouse consisted of a single room measuring fourteen by sixteen feet and featured a large front porch and a small back porch on the south side of the house. Inside a large wall cabinet with glass doors held dolls and toys. Stained glass windows and ornamental ironwork on the roof, plus gingerbread (carpenter's lace) woodwork around the windows and porches added to the elegance of the playhouse.

Lucy's mother, Florance Hayner Haskell, wife of Dr. William A. Haskell, a physician and one of the wealthiest residents of Alton, gave a lawn party in honor of Lucy's birthday and the children attending had a delightful time romping, playing, and riding a pony. They were fascinated with the beautiful playhouse and all its attractions.

Sadly, Lucy was not able to enjoy the beautiful gift for long, as she passed away on her ninth birthday in 1889 from black diphtheria. Following the death of Florence Hayner Haskell in 1932, the City of Alton learned she had bequeathed her large house, the playhouse, and 6.4 acres of ground to the city, to be used as a playground and facility for children. The playhouse is to be retained forever in the memory of Lucy Jane Haskell.

The rich history of the park and playhouse cannot be ignored while walking up to the building placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. It sits about 30 feet from Henry Street and directly behind the playful bungalow is a park with slides and swings for families to enjoy.

The playhouse isn't just another building to visit in Alton. It can be rented out for parties and special events. It has been used to throw a pirate-themed party for a family's young son. Outside of booty-filled door prizes and walking-the-plank style of birthday cake, tea parties and other themed birthday parties have been scheduled in the past. Many children who grow up want a playhouse or treehouse of their own, so to be able to visit and schedule parties at a piece of such historical significance is nothing short of amazing. Other events that have been held at the playhouse include baby showers, bridal showers, and tea parties.

Margaret Hopkins has served on the Haskell Playhouse Committee for 18 years and has dedicated her time to help raise funds for past and future renovations and maintenance needs to secure this piece of history for generations to come. She explained that there are two significant events taking place this month at the Lucy Haskell Playhouse. On July 10, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 pm. there will be an art exhibit of different artists' work of the playhouse. The event will include refreshments, meet the artists, and art

activities for children attending the free event. Hopkins said that Lucy Haskell will turn 141-years-old this year, and a birthday party in Lucy's honor, open to the public, will be held on July 29 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. There will be old fashion games like tug-o-war and free pony rides provided by the Beverly Farms Equestrian Center and made possible by the Alton-Godfrey Rotary Club. The cake will be provided by Duke's Bakery.

The Lucy Haskell Playhouse is located at 1211 Henry Street in Alton. For more information, including how to make a donation or becoming a patron member (that includes an annual newsletter and a painting of the playhouse) visit www.haskellplayhouse.org. To book your child's birthday party or other special events at the playhouse, call 618-463-2235. Follow the Lucy Haskell House on Facebook to stay updated on future events including the annual visit from Santa!

