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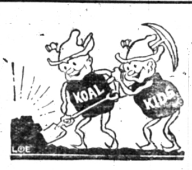
Monday, November 16th

TOWN TOPICS



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THE STORY OF MARTHA BALDWIN AND THE AWAKENING OF BIRMINGHAM'S SOUL

(Continued From Page 1) estate market than twice the area in level, level land. In any consideration of the remarkable transformation of what was a country village to an exclusive residential community—the place of refuge for investment-hungry speculators—must mark the part played by the Baldwin High School.

This handsome building—which boasted an auditorium long before there was a high school building in the community of Birmingham—had a direct influence in starting the tide of emigration from the city to Birmingham. For, if there is one thing which the city family that pulls up stakes has upon its new home, it is thoroughly adequate educational facilities for the children.

The foresight of Miss Baldwin, school teacher for many years in the Detroit Central High, anticipated by more than a decade the needs of the city-bred immigrants to Birmingham. Her will left \$13,000 for the purchase of a site for a high school which must contain an auditorium. She insisted on an auditorium. So little consideration was given in mere man carrying out a woman's wishes that she inserted a clause in her will making it possible to build a high school without an auditorium. Also, she stipulated that the building be completed through another clause, the completion of the building within a set period of years.

So a lovely but then listless village blossomed out suddenly with its high school second to none in the state. And equipped with an auditorium that today is the center for the varied social activities of a particularly active high school group, for the motion picture and other entertainments by which scholarship funds are fed a stream of dollars, and for the Parent-Teacher organization which attempts to finance and guide the more headlong young people.

Yet Miss Baldwin's money did not even buy the land on which the Baldwin High School is situated," said Charles J. Shain, president of Birmingham, commenting on this phase of Miss Baldwin's contribution. "The tremendous service she rendered in selling the idea to the town of an efficient and fully equipped high school at a time when such a plant as ours was a luxury for a community of this size."

THE BALDWIN PUBLIC LIBRARY is another monument to an eccentric, belligerent but public spirited maiden woman. Others joined with her in the beginning of this project, but it was Miss Baldwin who, when the mortgage was completed and the many thousand books were on the shelves, canceled the mortgage she held on the property.

By one way, by the way to Maple and Woodward avenues, where the traffic stands and in the very heart of the business section, Miss Baldwin—famous for her lack of confidence in mere men—provided a reversal of the usual rule of the regents of the University of Michigan which made it impossible for library purposes. She fought an arduous but winning battle to have the library a real PUBLIC library, maintained at community expense and open to everyone for all time.

ury. When she finally won her way in the old days, Mrs. Clarke, for the sake of consistency than because she felt she had no other way for the sake of the spiritual aristocracy which thinks little of personal need, but a great deal of the heart of the community.

"She was a woman of such reverence for the character," said Mr. Shain, village president, "that she has stamped her personality forever on the village of Birmingham."

THE rise of Birmingham to popularity in prominence to its blend of city sophistication and village charm. Here an older and a newer generation who were to live and live in peace. The older generation is represented by those who made Birmingham the city it is today. The wider Woodward avenue was dreamed of. Some of the old people hark back to the days when a broad band of cement shinning in the sun was a corduroy road, beset by wolves and highwaymen—a mere trail through a swamp and forest wilderness.

Records of the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society tell of a man building a house near the Eleven Mile road who was given freshly baked bread by a neighbor and was carrying it home. He was chased by the mob by a neighbor, found the scent of the warm loaves as fragrant as he did—wolves. Near Royal Oak, with the memory of one of the contributors to the volume, 20 sheep were killed one night by wolf packs, and one was particularly so active as others in getting away and home was carried in the barnyard and shot dead.

So abundant was the land and so heedless were the wolf packs, that exact limits of their holdings that Maj. John W. Hunter, according to a paper read by the county historian, built his first house on the property of Ellswood. His second log house was erected near what is now the D. U. R. in Bloomfield Manor, Miss Gay's, a supervisor of drawing in the Detroit public schools, who was given the living rooms in her charming suburban home the rafters which she reported that Mrs. Hamilton built in what was then "Fiey Hill."

It is quite possible to love Birmingham of today—embodiment of the fine spirit of the woman who is gone—as one loves a beautiful statue or a glorious picture. For Birmingham is possibly the only village of its size in the state—has less of the pride in purse and standing than the larger cities, and such a community boast its material resources. In fact, a rich family misjudged enough to carry out of Birmingham, would find out of its wealth would soon discover the odd fact that here is a town where it is fashionable for wealthy people to be courteous, agreeable—and MODEST. The truth is that there are so many families of means either in Birmingham or its immediate environs that one could hardly throw a stick on Woodward avenue on any hour of the day without hitting somebody of financial importance.

Undoubtedly there are unpleasant people in Birmingham and in the beautiful rolling hills that are a part and parcel of its community being. But it is hard to discover them. One catches glimpses now and then of faces which tell the world that the soul within is imprisoned in a web of self, and that the captive spirit judges the world and fellow beings according to the limitations of which she has built about itself. Usually, though, the spirit is free, and one looks in Birmingham at clear, untroubled and friendly. It is still not uncommon to find the lovely survival of an older and a gentler day, for strangers to nod as they pass in the friendly country fashion of long ago.

BIRMINGHAM is so close to its background that it has received a definite impress from the heritage of simplicity and dignity bequeathed it by the pioneers who settled and subdued the wild land. Democracy, as men know it, has been forced on them by many centuries of war and hunting—male diversions in which common danger and common hardship melt the distinctions of caste. In Birmingham the pioneer tradition of shared tasks has touched the women. Community services performed by representatives of social groups in many places unfortunately there are few bolts of contact and better fewer opportunities to learn the essential kinship of the colonel's lady and Judith O'Grady.

streets—has been purchased for \$48,000 as the nucleus of the proposed civic center. Again Miss Baldwin's hand—controlling the destinies of a community from the grave—enters. For it is with the money derived from the sale of the present site of the Birmingham Public Library now stands that the village hopes to erect a new library in keeping with the enhanced position which the tide of immigration from Detroit has given it. Other new buildings will follow—on separate blocks of their own, if those who became Birmingham's chief asset in this its beauty have their way.

THE far-famed physical beauty of Birmingham is really a ray from the beauty of the community soul of Birmingham. Perhaps it is an embodiment in the present of the beauty and dignity of the unmarried woman whose mother heart brooded over the town. Birmingham, above all else, is kind. It minds its own business, and as a consequence city people who are notoriously resentful of the usual small town's prying manners—come to it and learn to love it.

Birmingham, like a lovely woman who has but to suggest her will to a decision before it is made, gets a great deal of unselfish service from her loyal adorers. The village commission, composed of a president and two commissioners, is a case in point. Not one is the village politician of tradition. Each is a substantial business man with interests that would amply justify him in declining to serve the community. The president, Charles J. Shain, was elected without making a campaign. In fact, he was in California when the people chose him for the place. S. O. Wylie Bell and Charles A. Bingham, his associates, are of the caliber which make political campaigns unnecessary. Whenever a party is submitted for subscription before the people, the platting of property around Birmingham is almost incessant. These three men voice to the progressive and proper breathing places for the people. Harry S. Starr, village manager, carries out the commission's will in this respect in every conceivable way.

ALL that Matty Baldwin appears to have gotten out of her single-

mailed devotion to a community ideal during her lifetime was a silver pitcher presented to her before her death in 1913 by those who believed in her and who worked with her. Many of that day criticized her for her anything but kid-glove methods in "running the town." But for every critic she had scores who—why they had time—co-operated in restoring Birmingham on foundations that give it a decided advantage today.

Intellectual interests, even in the pioneer days, were powerful in the community. Miss Baldwin, when she pressed the horse to the plow, that was then one of the familiar sights of the town, was known to latest campaign for allies in the village, and before the tired horse had won, most of those in whom she called for her cause. The man now president of the community and in a position to see the effects of her far-sighted vision, was a boy then. And boyishly fond of horses, Miss Baldwin often took him along in the plow that was unconsciously helping to mold the future of one of Detroit's pet suburbs.

Birmingham's nearness to its long-ago is exemplified in the quaint name of its weekly newspaper, a plant—superior in equipment to that of many a daily in the state. This is called the Birmingham Eccentric. It was first published in 1876 by Almoner Whitehead, now president of the First National Bank of Birmingham, and George H. Mitchell. George R. Averill acquired the property in 1919 and has modernized it in keeping with the progress of the community.

in Birmingham, left his car at the corner and fought his way on foot to the storm-swept home. And every day a clergyman who did not know the family faced the snow, carrying a basket of warm food, sent by Birmingham people who also did not know the besieged sick people.

Birmingham Spirit And that is the Birmingham spirit—practical help in immediate distress; friendliness and kindness and merciful silence where the wound is deeper, the tragedy less tangible and less remediable. It is a Friendship Village of the heart. A place where the splendor of the human spirit shines out in countless small courtesies—where it has an outer and less important reflection in stately avenues of dropping oaks, of delightful vistas just glimpsed by the passer-by.

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ing historic; of the gardens that have made the unlovely work, "backyard," an anachronism in beautiful Birmingham. Martha Baldwin's fine face can be seen on the wall in either the Baldwin Public Library or the Baldwin High school. But her spirit walks the quiet and ever-lovely village streets. It is incarnate in the shaded woods of the park she gave to her fellow townsmen. It glimmers in the shimmering of the little river she saved for—the people winds its thread of shining amethyst through the once despoiled and now priceless water front lands. Most of all, perhaps, the spirit of the unmarried woman who mothered a town lives in the kindness incarnate in the spirit of Birmingham.



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