

# The History Of Birmingham

**(Editor's Note: This article was written by Iva Mariotte, of Pierce street, Birmingham, at the request of the publishers of the Eccentric. Much of this article was gleaned from old files of the Eccentric, as well as other miscellaneous documents kept in the Baldwin Public Library.)**

**EARLY** in the spring of 1819 John Hunter, the first white man to break the soil of Bloomfield Township, built his cabin and made his small clearing on land which is now the home of the Methodist Episcopal church. Much of this article was gleaned from old files of the Eccentric, as well as other miscellaneous documents kept in the Baldwin Public Library.

**Accompanied** by his brother, Rufus, he had travelled across Canada the year before from the Hunter home in Auburn, New York, crossing the Detroit River by sleigh over the ice. After a year of looking over the forest land around Detroit which had been made available to homesteaders by a governmental survey in 1815, they finally located on the brow of a hill by the Detroit marshlands stretching away on the south and a succession of hills rolling toward the north. A stream trickled through the valley and on the opposite hill was a cleared space where once the wigwags of an Indian village had stood.

According to the tale of an old French trapper who lived along Birmingham as a main thoroughfare. After the Fox tribe, and the bodies of the victims left bleeding on the hillside, under the more strict and conservative territorial government established while Louis Case was governor, local trouble with the Indians had subsided and pioneers no longer confined themselves to an area stretching up and down the Detroit River under the protection of the fort as they had for almost one hundred years.

**Came From Mt. Clemens** By Sleigh  
The men came from Mt. Clemens by sleigh, the only direct pathway from Detroit being the old, narrow Saginaw trail over which adventurous traffic with the Indians had flowed long ago. Many years before the great chief, Pontiac, had led his men over that trail to his summer lodge on the island in Orchard Lake.

A little later Elijah Willets and John Hamilton came and before summer three cabins had been closed together with their small clearings planted to corn and potatoes. Families and relatives joined the men as warm weather opened up the rivers and roads, and the pooled resources of the Hunter family bought them a yoke of oxen, a cow and a pig. Seed potatoes and a team of oxen had been borrowed for the first planting from a homesteader over on Paint Creek. Apple seeds were planted for the bushes along Birmingham and a main thoroughfare. In 1820 five more large, fire proof grade schools accommodate 1,800 pupils for whom over field had continued intermittently ever since.

The winter following the first meager harvest was a test of courage and endurance and there were many times when larders were bare of everything but cornmeal. Shad came down the streams each spring and the first running of shad was a joyous event of these early days after a winter of cornmeal and pork, bread or venison.

The Indians were curious, a little inclined to beg or steal, but were friendly enough and very grateful for favors of food or shelter and an occasional welcome to a family gathering. Within fifteen years after the first settlement they had all been removed to reservations.

**Taverns Welcomed Settlers**  
For several years the homes of the first three settlers offered lodging and refreshment to the wayfarer "man and beast" and this point on the map became known as "Hunter's", or "Hamilton's", or "Willets'", according to which one of the taverns had been patronized. No one knows who the name of Piety Hill came to be applied to the settlement which developed.

The men and women who had the courage to wrest food, clothing and shelter from the wilderness were men and women of more than ordinary ability, with conservative blood and training which prompted them to the early establishment of American institutions. Religious services were held here as early as 1821 by an itinerant Methodist preacher in the log barn of Elijah Willets. No doubt some gay spirit seized such an excuse to dab the town Piety Hill.

Slowly the land was cleared, crops were raised and the business of spinning, weaving, sewing and raising for the market. Each year the ox teams carried larger loads of grain and wool to the nearest market to be exchanged for shoes, baskets, tools and cloth. Frank Durkee, one of the early settlers, cut and burned over one hundred trees one winter and sold the ashes, receiving in payment one pair of boots, one bushel basket, some groceries and six yards of calico. Another man cut hoop poles all day for twenty-five cents with which he retrieved a letter from the postoffice.

There was an occasional merry making snatched from the weeks of toil when one of the farmers, seized with the holiday spirit, would harness his ox team, bundle his family into a sleigh and, stopping along the road, gather his neighbors for a jaunt to one of the hospitable village homes. The surprised and delighted hostess would make doughnuts and coffee. For the crowd or cook an immense corn cake on a pan in front of the fireplace. If times were prosperous, a chicken was beheaded and a pot of dumplings made.

**First Industries Here In 1827**  
Out of the increase in worldly goods Elijah Willets started a tannery in 1827, John Hunter built his foundry and blacksmith shop in 1828 and in the same year John Hamilton erected a frame tavern which later formed the north wing of the National Hotel, an old landmark which stood for many years on the present National Bank. Day after day the settlement had grown and in 1833 the opening of the first stores by Sullivan Kelsey and a Mr. Dennis made a social and financial rallying point for the surrounding farmers. In 1836 the postoffice was moved to Piety Hill and Sullivan Kelsey was made postmaster.

The first road which connected the town with Detroit was the Ball Lane Road, surveyed in 1819, which gave a mile east of the settlement as no satisfactory time or a dismal order. The Saginaw Road, forerunner of the World's Greatest Highway, was authorized and built a few years later but was not much better. In 1833 two more state roads connecting with Piety Hill were laid out and then town line roads were made one after another.

slower and the town began to take on more settled characteristics. Schools and churches grew and flourished.

**First School Opened In 1825**  
The first school in Bloomfield township opened in 1822 in a log school house near the home of Ziba Swan about a mile north of Birmingham to what was known as Swan's Plains, with Hervey Parke as the first teacher. Dr. Swan built the lovely home known as Larkspur in the forties on land he had received from the government in 1825.

**District School Opened In 1824**  
A district school was opened at Piety Hill in 1824 in John Hamilton's log house which was built back from the road when his new frame tavern was built. Afterward the red brick schoolhouse to which the sentiment of the schoolboys and girls of 1860 still clings, was built on Mill Road (West Maple Avenue) at the Southfield intersection. The old red schoolhouse became a dwelling when the fine new Hill School was proudly erected in 1861. In 1865 the principal and four assistants taught the elementary, grammar and high schools in the new school.

**History of Local Churches**  
The Methodist Church was first formally organized in 1827 with Rev. William Pattee as the first minister and in 1840 their first church was built. It still stands on the corner of Merrill and Bates Streets after its years of service as church, library and town hall. In 1872 the present Methodist Church, now built on Maple Avenue.

The Presbyterian Church was organized in 1824 with Elijah S. Fish as the first pastor. The first church building was erected in 1844, a later one in 1860 and the present brick edifice on Woodward Avenue in 1916.

St. James Episcopal Church organized in 1894 and held services in Library Hall until their present church was built eighteen months later.

A Baptist Church was organized in 1833 but disbanded in 1840. The congregation was reorganized in 1870 when their present church on Bates and Willets Streets was erected.

The United Presbyterian Church was founded and their building on Woodward Avenue erected in 1895.

In 1916 a group of local citizens founded the Christian Science Society of Birmingham, and held services in a large remodelled residence at 148 South Wood Avenue. This Society was incorporated in 1924 as The First Church of Christ, Scientist, of Birmingham, Michigan. At the present time plans are under way for the construction of a new church on its property at Chester and Willets streets.

A Lutheran congregation was organized in 1924 by their present pastor, Rev. L. A. Schuessler, and the temporary chapel of the Redeemer Evangelical Lutheran Church was dedicated last year.

The Holy Name Catholic Church was founded in 1921 with Rev. W. W. Ryan as its first clergyman and one year later their chapel on Harmon Avenue was dedicated.

Other denominations and faiths have flourished here from time to time without establishing themselves in a permanent building.

**Village Incorporated in 1864**  
The village was first incorporated in 1864 with J. C. K. Crooks as president of the first board of trustees. It comprised a territory one mile square. A new charter was granted in 1885 providing for six commissioners, and the present charter, creating a commission of three members and providing for the employment of a village manager, was passed in October, 1917, going into effect in February, 1918. Recent annexations have brought nearly four square miles within its boundaries, including the city of Woodbury, Michigan.

At the present time plans are under way for the construction of a new church on its property at Chester and Willets streets.

**Ladies' Library Society Organized in 1887**  
A Ladies' Library Society was organized in 1887 by nineteen women who used the money from a disbanded Grotto Temple lodge, and the dues of nineteen more members who were induced to join, to buy forty-eight books with which to start a library. Martha Baldwin, who, more than any other person, stimulated the growth and development of Birmingham, including a volunteer department organized.

**Electricity Brought to Birmingham in 1878**  
The Birmingham Eccentric, the village weekly, made its debut in May, 1878, when George Mitchell and Almeron Whitehead put out the first four page issue. Mr. Mitchell continued in active charge of its destiny until 1919 when it was purchased by F. E. Van Black who in turn sold it in 1925 to its present proprietor, George E. Averill.

**Excelsior Bank Organized in 1878**  
The Excelsior Bank which was the first Birmingham Bank, was started in 1887 by Whitehead and Mitchell in a corner of their drug and grocery store, which was also headquarters for the postoffice and the local telephone exchange. Now its successor, the First National Bank of Birmingham, handles an annual business amounting to about \$2,500,000, and their neighbor, the First State Bank, records assets of about \$3,000,000. These figures represent very hearty throbs of the lusty and active commerce of a purely residential town.

**Then The Electric Car Came**  
The Oakland Railway Company was first given the franchise for the present Detroit United Railway right of way and carried its first passengers from Pontiac to Detroit on June 16, 1896. The first car was greeted with shouts and cheers by the entire population who had assembled to watch its progress through the town. Now the street car, like the telephone, telegraph, gas, electric lights, sewers and paved streets are every day urban necessities.

The Baldwin Public Library, has over 6,000 books on its shelves and serves over one hundred people a day. Plans are being drawn for a proposed new library to be located in the center of a block of land facing Madison street which will ultimately house more than 25,000 books. Village officers will hold their regular meetings at the new library.

The splendid Birmingham High School, erected in 1918, and four large, fire proof grade schools accommodate 1,800 pupils for whom over eighty teachers will be employed next year. Sites for two more buildings are held in readiness for future building.

The present post office, erected in 1925, five clerks and eleven carriers is looking hopefully toward a new Federal building to complete Birmingham's civic center and house its increasing volume of business.

The village fire department of twenty-four men, which is still a voluntary organization, receiving small fees for services rendered, answered ninety calls last year. The equipment of two modern fire trucks and 3,000 feet of hose is kept in a part of the village office building. The village police force of ten men has its headquarters in the same building as well as the village office and the public library.

The many organizations listed in this directory indicate the quality of Birmingham's people and its still lively public conscience. The Community House which opened its doors in 1923 is a new village institution passing forward old ideas and amending the seeds of which have been sown from one generation to another.

The tremendous growth which is liberating all physical traces of the old Birmingham is calling for more and more sewers and paved streets and a better system of transportation to and from Detroit where the majority of latter day home seekers have their business and, to some extent their social interests. The horses which superseded ox teams as beasts of burden have their turn displaced except on the bridge paths and the farms of old hand farmers. Old customs and ambitious ideas of the rural suburban homes. Old customs and ambitious ideas of the rural suburban home. Old customs and ambitious ideas of the rural suburban home.

## Student Loan Fund Movie Friday Night

The Student Loan Fund is presenting at the Birmingham High School, Monday, May 10, 1926, the movie of the season in "Irene", starring Colleen Moore in a delightful comedy play.

Winter with its ice and snow—with sleighs carrying warmly wrapped lovers—brought to mind the happy days of the beautiful lassies in gorgeous furs—with skaters lightly skating on frozen ponds and lights of huge arc lamps and spotlights playing on the scene described.

Not in many months has a scene of such splendor been recorded by the flicker camera. The four stars are depicted in like manner—each one surpassing the other in magnificence—each showing the beautiful girls in richer gowns and wraps.

Colleen Moore, herself always careful in making broad statements regarding the entire picture, is free to admit and does broadcast the fact that in "Irene" she is giving the finest story and picture of her entire screen career.

**Style Fete In Colors**  
The latest style fete in colors in color and will be something that everybody will remember for days to come. McGeehaug has signed the three hundred gowns worn and John D. Schulze was chief art director for the massive settings that held the seasons.

This is just a part of the "Irene" program, the picture which will be a story that will long carry Colleen Moore in the minds of those who see the picture. Alfred E. Green who directed "Sally" starring Miss Moore, is responsible for "Irene."

## R. R. ALLEN & CO. OPENS MERCER-SUBDIVISION

"Pleasant Meadows," the Two Mercer subdivision at the corner of Pleasant avenue and West Maple road, and the last closed-in piece of property to be developed, according to Robert Allen of Robert R. Allen & Co., exclusive selling agents, will be opened this Saturday.

Corvill Park to the east and Quanton Lake Estates to the north of Pleasant Meadows are adjoining highly restricted developments. It is only one block away from the avenue and one-half acre school site on Chesterfield road; is near the stores to be built of Maple road; and on the bus line.

The lots are all practically 60 by 120 feet. The street will be paved, and there will be both storm and sanitary sewers. The restriction is \$9,000. Later in the spring a branch office will be erected on the property.

52 Issues of The Eccentric for \$1.50

**Hupmobile Six**  
Sixteen, five passenger, four-door, five-wheel drive, 1926 Hupmobile \$1,385. Excludes tax and license.

**Hupmobile Six**  
Sixteen, five passenger, four-door, five-wheel drive, 1926 Hupmobile \$1,385. Excludes tax and license.

**Obituary**  
The Rev. George H. Harris, former president of Margaret Hall and for many years pastor of St. John's Episcopal church in Versailles, Kentucky, died there April 20. He was 72 years old. He had been ill for two years.

Rev. Harris was born in Chicago and came to Birmingham in 1887. He entered the ministry of the Episcopal Church in Detroit and preached sermons in the local St. James Episcopal church, West Maple Avenue.

Rev. Harris is survived by his widow, Mrs. Mary A. Harris, and a daughter, Mrs. W. W. Ryan, of Royal Oak; seven grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

**Mrs. Sarah Jane Truesdell**  
Mrs. Sarah Jane Truesdell, of Big Bend, died here last Saturday afternoon in her home May 4. She was 86 years old. She had been ill for several months.

**Mrs. Mary A. Green**  
Mrs. Mary A. Green, aged 82 years, died May 4 at her home in Waterford after an illness of three days following a stroke of paralysis. Funeral services were held at the Waterford Baptist Church, May 5, at 2:30 p. m., with Rev. W. H. Rauch of Waterford officiating.

**Russell Frank Pohl**  
Russell Frank Pohl, the four-month-old son of Mr. and Mrs. John Pohl, died May 1 of convulsions. He was buried in Roseland Park Cemetery, May 4.

**SUIT IS STARTED FOR RECOVERY OF MACHINE**  
Suit was started last week in Justice Burns' court by the Walter Machine Company, Bellevue Avenue, Detroit, against the Birmingham Battery and Electric Works, for recovery of the money for a machine which the company sold through the agency of the local firm. It is alleged that the man made the sale abandoned with the check but the two employees of the Battery club have a receipt from him for the money.

It was further claimed by the Walter Machine Company that the battery Service is not registered with the County Clerk as is required by law and that its owner is a Rochester man, Milo Howell. The case was postponed until May 11 because the lawyers for the defendant pleaded lack of jurisdiction. A justice of the peace has jurisdiction in his own jurisdiction involving township and Rochester happenings to be in Troy township, the other side of Avon township.

**COUNTY ATHLETIC CLUB**  
What is said to be the best equipped gymnasium and athletic club in Michigan is located at Keego Harbor, near Orchard Lake, where many young men and athletes are in training every day. According to Fred Schneider, manager of the Lakeside Athletic club, a cordial invitation is extended to the public.

**HUPMOBILE SIX**  
Yes, unsightly roofs can be made to look new thereafter—adding new charm to the home—increasing its present valuation—providing fire safe protection for years to come

**R.C. Moulthrop Lumber Co.**  
LUMBER BUILDERS  
COAL AND SUPPLIES  
BIRMINGHAM, MICHIGAN

