

# THE NATIONAL HOUSE---Where Nights Were Nights

"Just think what a trip it must have been from Pontiac to Detroit before the advent of the street car and the automobile," a thoughtful citizen of Birmingham was heard to remark recently.

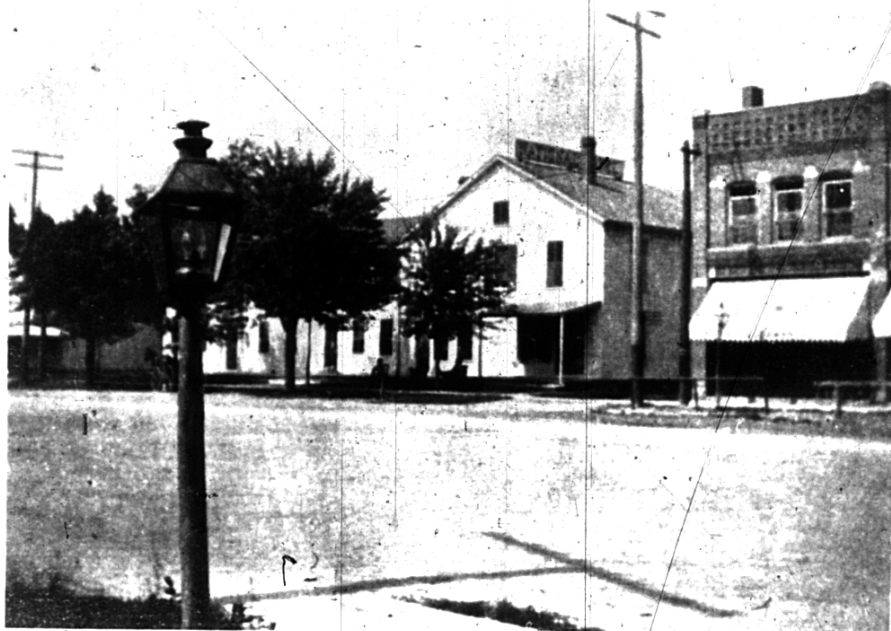
The citizen would have been justified in such sympathy had it not been for the existence of the famous old National Hotel en route. No travelers of old ever went by the National on the way to Detroit. Its cool white porch beckoned to the weary surrey driver. The creaking of swinging hinges might have been a lure, as well. No alternative but to tie up for a few minutes and chat with the boys.

Known over a country wide area, the old National Hotel was a destination for all people 50 years ago. Its pretentious white front reared itself proudly where the stone portals of the First National Bank now stand. Its utility was unlimited.

In a back room of the hotel an iron pipe supported the ceiling, its lower end imbedded firmly in the floor. This room became a species of "rogue's" gallery. Tramps, vagrant-thieves and other varieties of undesirables were placed on exhibit in this room. Jim Beatty onetime town marshal, discovered that a handcuff manacle would fit nicely around the iron pipe, while the other manacle fitted nicely around any given wrist. Thus leashed, the peace disturbers would sit, while the populace, in orderly fashion, passed the window to view the victim.

About the second floor the social activities of the village were centered. All dances were given on its smooth oak floor, which had a certain sinuous sinking movement when a hundred pairs of feet were rhythmically whirling upon it, which caused

much apprehension in fear that the supports might collapse, a disaster which ever threatened but never culminated. On New Year's Eve, according to eye witnesses, some 250 couples would congregate in the room bedecked in holiday array. A negro band, which testifies a former Beau Brummel, "would make a modern dance orchestra sound like a funeral dirge" was the popular urge for tired feet. The old floor would weave and dip under its burden, until, well, until hours which we have been unable to ascertain.



The floor housed the bar well designed and conveniently arranged in the original plans. It is rumored that no finer bar existed for miles around than at the old "National."

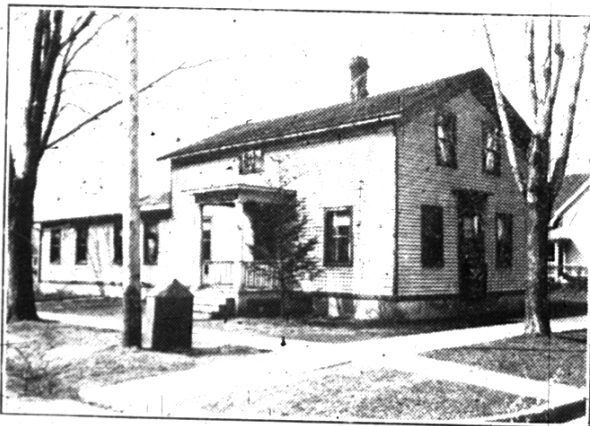
In later years the management and ownership of the hotel changed hands, and the old edifice underwent a superficial change. The exterior, facing the main street, then Saginaw, was remodeled to include a lower porch with a balcony above along the entire frontage of the building. Its magnificent Doric columns were the talk

of the countryside, and business flocked to the place.

With the advent of the street car, and train however, came a sad falling off in the register. Folks found the trip from Pontiac to Detroit facilitated greatly, and the refreshing stop at the old National was forgone.

Not many years ago its faded sign, the haughty old columns, the gleaming dance floor—all went under the wrocker's hand, and with them went happy memories of Birmingham's quaint gaiety of the '80's.

## The Community House



WHERE THOUSANDS GATHER

## THE CIRCUS GOT 'EM

Back in 1895 when the street car line was an innovation in Birmingham, the people's faith in the cars was seriously shaken by an unfortunate occurrence.

A circus came to Pontiac for a brief stay. On a warm Saturday afternoon practically everyone in Birmingham decided to go to the circus, and practically everyone decided to take the same car. Optimistically the motorman allowed them all to enter the vehicle, but when the power was applied to the motors nothing, absolutely nothing happened.

The people began to clamor and

complain for it was soon evident that unless the car sprouted wings without delay they were going to miss the circus performance. But the poor motors only groaned a bit, the springs sagged almost to the car axles and the motorman gave vent to choice epithets. But the car wouldn't move. Finally half the passengers were transferred to a second car and the procession started for Pontiac, only to arrive at 4 p. m., too late for anything but a side show.

So crowded were Pontiac hotels on this occasion that permission to sleep in the hay in livery stables was granted, at the rate of 50 cents per head.

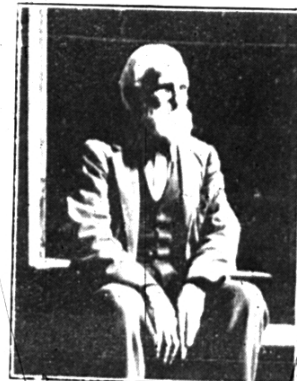
### KEY TO THE MAP ON PAGE 4

- Churches
  - A. Baptist
  - B. Methodist
  - C. Presbyterian
  - D. Advent
- 1. Public school
- 2. R. R. Depot
- 3. Library
- 4. Soldier's Monument
- 5. Post Office, Express Office, Masonic Hall, General Store, J. Allen Bigelow
- 6. Foundry
- 7. Flouring Mill
- 8. National Hotel—George E. E. Daines, prop.
- 9. Hardware Agt., Imp. & Lumber—H. Irving & Son
- 10. General Store, O. Poppleton & Son
- 12. Drugs, Groceries & Toilet Articles, F. Hagerman
- 13. Meat Market, Thorne & Converse
- 14. Harness Mfr., Edgar Lamb
- 15. Cooper Shop, S. C. Mills
- 16. Blacksmith & Wagon Shop, J. Baldwin
- 17. Wagon Shop, F. F. Richardson
- 18. Tailor Shop, John Bodine
- 19. Boot Shoe Shop, Samuel McCrumb
- 20. Contractor & Builder, Lewis Simpson
- 21. Dental Parlor, C. F. Day
- 22. Drugs, Groceries, Toilet Articles & Etc., Birmingham Eccentric, Whitehead & Mitchell, Editors
- 23. General Store, Blakeslee & Hanna.

## Remember?



HUGH IRVIN  
PREACHER MARSH



JOHN BODINE