

Library Has Thrilling History

With a present annual circulation of 37,540 books and 7,773 books on its shelves the Martha Baldwin library bears little resemblance to the Ladies' Library Society which had its humble origin more than 50 years years ago when a band of 19 men and women, members of a disbanded Good Templar Lodge, voted to turn the treasury into a book fund to start a library. Birmingham was then a village of about 600 whose people felt little need for a library and the members of the society met with little encouragement.

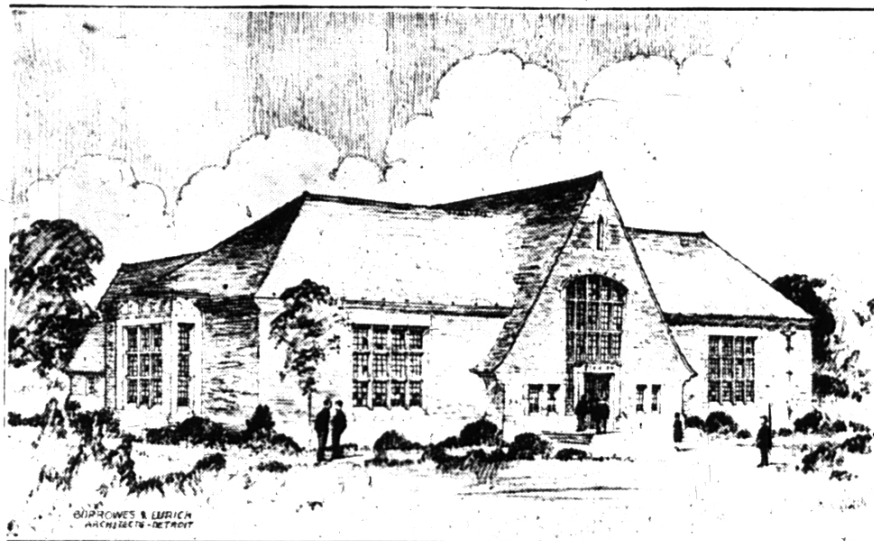
The 19 charter members who started Birmingham's first library were Frank Allen, Josephine Bailey, Martha Baldwin, G. Daniels, M. Castle, Elverton T. Jenks, Mrs. Griffin, T. Hastings, Julia Hughes, Busey Elderkin, Jennie Keyes, E. Partridge, M. M. Randall, Rolin Scheyler, Anna Wilson, Sarah Wiley and Libbie Tenny. Not long afterward 19 others joined. The first annual report showed \$68.47 in the treasury. Of this amount \$49.75 was spent for 48 books which comprised the first library collection. Mrs. Griffin was president of the first society with Elverton Jenks, vice-president; Libbie Irving, treasurer and Martha Baldwin, secretary and librarian. The first so-called library was in the home of Mrs. Edwin Baldwin but a short time afterward it was moved to the home of Mrs. John Baldwin.

The first building to ever house the library was the old Methodist Church on Merrill street, which was erected there in 1893. The books were moved there in 1875 where volunteer librarians had charge of them. Books could be taken out on Saturday afternoons only. By the constant effort of the women of the society the building was finally paid for and made as attractive as possible. Everything from Soap shows, portraying advertisements of various brands of soap, to shoe sales were staged to raise money for this organization. The Library Hall became the social center of the community. Theatricals were staged there and dances were held.

Meeting with success in their efforts to raise money, the society purchased a lot at Woodward and Maple avenues thinking that they might interest the village authorities in building a civic building which would house the library as well as other village institutions. Nothing came of the plan for a long time but the township did offer to buy their hall on Merrill street. They sold this to the township, reserving a lease on one room. But the women of the society were intent upon erecting a library on their newly purchased lot. As a last resort they threatened to put up a sheet iron building. This produced results and the men finally agreed to co-operate. Individuals contributed bricks for the building and bonds were sold. Miss Martha Baldwin loaned \$2500 on a mortgage. The building cost about \$4500 and the lot \$1500. December 1, 1895 marked the opening of the new building with a banquet. Closely following this event came the affairs to raise money for the new building.

Mrs. Kate Alger was librarian in this new building and under her the library was kept open every Saturday afternoon from 2 until 5 p. m. and from 7 to 8. At this time there were 1820 books in the collection. A room on the ground floor was given over to the library and the rest of the building was rented or used for library benefits and other social affairs. During this winter of 1896 the women of the society took over the publication of the Birmingham Eccentric for one week among their projects for raising money.

Not until 1907 was the library turned over to the village and



then not without a great deal of controversy. At this time the library was moved up to the second floor, and Miss Baldwin cancelled the mortgage which she held and donated her equity. A deed was finally given to the village with a proviso that a library was to be maintained in the building and supported by a half mill tax, the village offices to have their headquarters there also, the triangular space in the front of the lot to be forever reserved as park space and the property to be forfeited to the University of Michigan for library purposes if the terms of the deed were not carried out. As the village grew the library had only the large room on the second floor, the other rooms being given over to village offices. The library remained there until the completion of the new Baldwin library.

At that time the library was kept open three afternoons a week from 3 to 8 p. m., with Miss

Daisy Durkee as librarian. She was engaged as librarian at a salary of \$3 a week. By the time the library was open six afternoons a week, Miss Durkee's salary had increased to \$35 a month. Since Miss Durkee's death, Miss Clare Jarvis, Miss Esther Hitchcock, Miss Margery Allen (Mrs. Hugh Purdy), Miss Marian Patch, and Miss Blanche Kerns have served successively as librarians. Mrs. Nancy Thomas is the present librarian.

Last Thanksgiving day marked the formal opening of Birmingham's new Baldwin library on the corner of Martin and Chester streets, built at a cost of approximately \$175,000. The library is now open from 10 a. m. until 9 p. m., six days a week and Sundays during the winter season. The library is governed by a board composed of six members: Retta Barr, president; Clarence Vliet, vice-president; Earl G. Potter, treasurer; J. B. Howarth, secre-

tary; Mrs. Arthur Hartwell and Mrs. John H. Marlotte, members of the board.

Miss Martha Baldwin was the first chairman of the board and Mrs. Bigelow, Mr. E. R. Griggs and Mrs. Retta Barr have followed her. Among those who have been members of the library board since 1907 are: Mrs. J. A. Bigelow, Mrs. Addie Stearns, Miss Verona Post, Almeron Whitehead, K. D. M. Johnson, Mrs. Mary Cooper, Mrs. Emma Snow, Mrs. A. Cassius Crawford, Dr. Charles Raynale, Dr. John Kainey, George Mitchell, Mrs. Wilson, E. R. Griggs, Mrs. Bowers, Mrs. Emma Hupp, Cassius Crawford, Frank Blakeslee and H. B. Clement.

The lot which marked the site of the old Baldwin library at Woodward and Maple avenues, has been sold to a Detroit development company and in the near future a business block will go up there.

Remember?



GEORGE TOMS

Appreciation

GRATITUDE should be expressed here to persons of Birmingham who have aided in making the supplement as sound as possible from the historical point of view; to others who have loaned valuable pictures which are reproduced on these pages, and in particular to the Arnold Studio of Birmingham which has co-operated in making the art work of an outstanding quality.

Before The Pavement



Do you remember when Woodward Avenue each spring was a sea of mud? That was in the early part of the century (B. P.)—meaning, of course, before pavement.