

Eccentric's 50th Birthday



GEORGE H. MITCHELL

From 1878 down to the present, from a time when Birmingham's population numbered 800 to its present estimated population of 12,000, many things have taken place in the little world encompassing this community. Little babies have been born, and have grown into mature men and women; older residents, who have lived here have passed on that peaceful and endless pathway that leads to Eternity; businesses have started, some of them have failed—but none of them, in all this time, have lived through to the present day in the city of Birmingham except The Birmingham Eccentric, whose fiftieth milestone was officially passed May 2, 1928, and which is being observed with the presentation of this special edition.

Twenty-six hundred weeks have been marked off the calendar since George H. Mitchell, of Brown street, and Almeron Whitehead, late president of the local First National Bank, first conceived and crystallized into actual being a journal which, over all these years, has never failed to appear in the community, reflecting through its columns the activities of the territory it embraces. From its first humble office in a third floor room over the present Spain drug store on West Maple avenue, when part time services of one person were used in putting it up, to its present location in a large office, employing nearly 30 people, spells something of the progress of both The Eccentric and the community which subscribes to it.

Way back in 1875, when Mr. Mitchell worked for Frank Hagerman (Mr. Hagerman is now president of the First State Savings Bank here), and when Mr. Whitehead worked for the late Capt. J. Allen Bigelow, these two young chaps decided that Birmingham needed a printing office. For the stupendous sum of \$90 they sent to Boston for a Novelty printing press and a few fonts of type. This outfit was at first kept in Mr. Whitehead's bedroom and here, during the spare hours of the two aspiring Greeleys, various kinds of small printing were turned out—including calling cards at 25 for 10 cents.

For nearly three years this duet of amateur printers worked during their spare time at job printing and, early in 1887, decided that Birmingham and vicinity needed a newspaper. They bought a little more equipment, and began to bubble over with enthu-



ALMERON WHITEHEAD

siasm regarding their new venture. "What shall we name our newspaper?" was the question that then confronted Messrs. Whitehead and Mitchell. "Call it the Birmingham Ecayune—there's a fine paper by that name in New Orleans," advised Tom Flynn, a local resident in those days. "Hub—that sounds a little too peculiar," thought the youthful publishers, "we'll have to find something different."

And they did—as many people have since found out.

At a meeting of the Eccentric club—an organization of their Birmingham youths, one of the solemn vows of which forbid matrimonial ventures—Whitehead and Mitchell told their fellow-members that they were seeking a name for Birmingham's new weekly newspaper. The result was that the club unanimously voted to name it "The Eccentric" after the very club that had already given Birmingham some advertising in other parts of Oakland County.

And so it was that Messrs. Whitehead and Mitchell, seeking a name that was not as peculiar as "Ecayune" settled upon the more odd name of The Eccentric they had the only newspaper in the world so named at that time, none other is known even today.

The Eccentric was first printed in the office of the old Pontiac Billposter; for three months Charlie Fisher got out the paper in spare time, after which the press work on it was done for many years in Detroit and later Royal Oak. From Whitehead's bedroom The Eccentric's equipment was moved to a room on the second floor of a building on the site now occupied by the Wesley Market on North Woodward avenue; from this location the office was moved to another building where the Birmingham Shoe and Parlor is located on East Maple avenue; the next move took the equipment over Lowes' store where the F. J. Mulholland company stands on North Woodward avenue was the next move; from this location the office was moved to the rear of the present Telephone building on Pierce street, erected by Whitehead and Mitchell at that time.

George K. Updike was the first subscriber to The Eccentric.

People who have been employed on The Eccentric—in the old days of hand-set type—include Charles Fisher, Ed Jarvis, Charles Hoffman, Cal Jenks, Maude Gates, Olive Dennison, Lucy Ward, and Hazel Lawler. Many others were employed during its first 40 years, some of whom have become outstanding successes in various lines of business and professional work, according to Mr. Mitchell.

In 1919, on February 14, the present publisher, George R.



GEORGE R. AVERILL

Averill purchased The Eccentric. He conducted it for two years in the Telephone building, aided at first by a staff of two persons, which was increased to five in 1921. In March, 1921, Mr. Averill purchased the property now occupied by The Eccentric, remodelled it, and moved in. Since that last move The Eccentric's staff has been increased from five to an average of 20. Additional equipment has been added so that now every single effort required to produce The Eccentric is done in its own office; a battery of job presses is also used to handle The Eccentric's growing job printing business.

The Eccentric has grown from a little four-page sheet, pictures of which are printed elsewhere in this edition) to a weekly newspaper varying from 16 to 24 pages weekly; the largest single weekly edition it ever published totalled 38 pages.

"Although ownership of The Eccentric rests solely in my hands, I have never looked upon it as a private possession," said Mr. Averill. "A modern newspaper is a semi-public utility, and exists only for the rendition of service to its subscribers, and the community in which it circulates. It belongs to the people whose civic, social, and business activities are reflected in its columns each week. To me the publication of The Eccentric is but the fulfillment of a custodianship in journalism. The Eccentric is 50 years old, and I am happy to play some small part in the progressive continuation of its publication."

Schools' Growth Makes Record

Fifty Hill or what is known as Birmingham is more than one hundred years old. The first public school was in a rented log house on Woodward avenue near the First National Bank. It was organized in 1834 and Lemuel Lattridge was the first teacher. The second public school was in a frame building on the corner of Maple and Chester. The tuition for non resident students was half a cord of good wood. The third school was built in 1855 and stood on the site of Harry Allen's home at West Maple and Southfield.

In 1867 Roland Trowbridge helped to raise \$12,000 to erect a new school building which was

finished in 1869 and is now part of the Hill school.

C. R. Bemis was the first superintendent of the new school. The tuition at that time was \$5 a term and there were three terms in the year. The bell which we hear every morning has been ringing from the belfry of the Hill school since it was built 60 years ago. Chapel exercises were started in 1880. At that time all students would assemble in one room to hear a chapter from the Bible read, repeat the Lord's prayer, sing hymns and sometimes hear declamations or dialog by the students. The first class was graduated in 1880 and had one member, Edward Bodine. By 1890 the enrollment had increased to 317 of whom 94 were in the high school and six teachers were employed. W. G. Cook was superintendent and a well organized high school course was presented. In 1894 C. F. Waldo became superintendent and for the first time the school was approved by the University of Michigan which approval has been continuous, the last being in January 1928 for a three year term expiring in June 1931. Mr Waldo was superintendent for eight years or till 1902 and under his administration great gains were made in efficiency and general school reputation.

The annual school census of 1905 showed 364 pupils; 1910, 435 pupils; 1915, 616 pupils. The Hill building could no longer accommodate both grade and high school children and the Barnum building was erected for grade use. In 1915 Clarence Vliet became superintendent and in 1918 the Baldwin High School, the gift in part of Martha Baldwin, was built. By 1920 the number of pupils had reached 1065; and the Adams building was erected. In 1925, 1700 pupils called for the Pierce building and increased the census for 1928 which is estimated at 2800 will be cared for by the Quarton school now being erected for occupancy September 4, 1928.

The teaching force for 1928-29 will number 100. There will be 400 senior high school students in the Baldwin building and 500 junior high students divided between the Baldwin and Adams buildings. There will be approximately 1500 grade children in the various grade buildings.

The Board of Education of the Birmingham schools is constituted as follows:

R. J. Coryell, president; Leigh Lynch, secretary; Fred V. Quarton, treasurer; Ray A. Palmer, trustee; Guy W. Jensen, trustee.

The principal executive officers are:

Clarence Vliet, superintendent; L. M. Randall, business manager; Melyin C. Hart, principal Baldwin High School; Francis M. Cooke, principal Adams School; Mabel Brown, assistant principal; Isabel Forehand, principal Barnum School; Wynn B. Easterday, principal Hill School; Ruth Shomin, principal Pierce school; Magdalen Frederick, principal Quarton School; Annie Vincent, principal Maplecrest School.

The Birmingham schools are not only approved by the University of Michigan but by the North Central Association of Colleges. A very large percentage of graduates enter college and do very satisfactory work. An independent rating of ten high schools near Detroit made in September 1927 gave Birmingham first place. This in a large measure is due first to the superior quality of the children in the schools, second to the fine buildings and equipment furnished by the tax payers; and third to the preparation and high ideals of the teaching force.

Birmingham is truly a place where "children thrive."

The Pontiac lecture course takes many of our citizens to Pontiac every evening there are songs by the Course. Tuesday night of this week about 20 of our people listened to a company of bell ringers that was good, (25 years ago).