

LAND INCREASE

While Birmingham has in the last decade marched ahead toward progress at a great rate of speed, property values also leaped and many persons have become wealthy by investments in real estate. In few places in Michigan have the values continued to increase at so rapid a pace.

Older residents who have left Birmingham are amazed at the reports of the great amount of money involved in the purchase of property which a few years ago seemed to have but an uncertain value.

Birmingham is strictly a residential community and does not have a single factory. The sales are made for home sites and for business buildings. Today in downtown Birmingham three buildings are under construction with a valuation of almost a half million dollars. Others are contemplated and it is expected that next fall will see an entirely different sky line in a community where small frame structures not so many years ago housed all the merchant's wares.

From the books of Village treasurer Charles Plumstead come many an interesting story of increase in valuation. Assessed valuations of land becomes increasingly greater as the months go by.

The total assessed valuation in the past 10 years has increased \$18,000,000 or 10 times its figure in 1917. New assessments are contemplated as many of the present ones are considered low.

The total valuation as listed in 1917 was \$2,900,000; in 1918, \$3,125,000; 1920, \$4,800,000; 1923, \$5,600,000; 1927, \$20,400,000. Mr. Plumstead, believes there will be an increase of at least \$1,000,000 in property valuation annually and, if conditions continue, as in the past five years, the increase will be greater still.

Property on Woodward, avenue as well as other locations in the business area, has taken an amazing rise in value. The First State bank, at Woodward and East Maple avenues was assessed at \$17,000 in 1917, and at \$100,000 in 1927. Business sites, off Woodward have more than tripled in value, according to tax reports. One store assessed at \$12,000 in 1917 is now assessed at \$30,000.

Residential property near the center of the village has risen in value accordingly. A residence on Woodward two blocks north of Maple was assessed in 1917 at \$4,000 and is now assessed at \$24,000. Property on Southfield road has about doubled in value, a certain piece assessed in 1917 for \$2,200 is now assessed at \$5,500.

The past 25 years have shown a rapid increase in population. The 1920 census showed 3,600 but it is estimated that the present population is 12,000 while in 1903 Birmingham was a village of only 1,200 inhabitants. The annexation of subdivisions is responsible for the great increase. Mr. Plumstead estimated that in five years the population would be increased by 5,000 persons.

The cost of maintaining the government here is naturally increasing yearly as the village grows. However taxes are kept within reason and as a general rule improvements which call for special assessments are supported by the people. The 1928 village budget shows \$319,444 as compared with the \$37,581 budget of 1917. The items as listed are: general expense, 1928, \$141,450; general expense 1917, \$17,204; highways 1928, \$78,830, highways 1917, \$6,652; interest and sinking fund 1928, \$85,964; interest and sinking fund 1917, \$6,315; library 1928, \$4,200; library 1917, \$1,445 and water 1928, \$9,000; 1917, \$5,959.

Woodward in the Gay Nineties



Heavy rains in the spring of 1898 caused a flood near Roseland Park cemetery on Woodward avenue about three miles south of Birmingham. The water backed up in the hollow north of the

cemetery, settling there, and remained in a flood condition for two days. In spite of the deep water trolleys ran according to schedule, although passengers were forced to walk for about 15

feet along the railroad, the embankment for the steam tracks being so high that the water did not cover it. A similar flood occurred several years later before the modern sewerage system provided adequate drainage.

WHEN THE FIRST CAR ARRIVED

"All kinds of people—10,000 of them—from all over Oakland County gathered in the streets of Pontiac on that memorable day in 1897 to see the first electric street car."

It is Noble Gravlin speaking. Mr. Gravlin is the oldest motorman in the Detroit United Lines in point of service. He has been driving street cars on the Detroit Pontiac line for 31 years, through the time when traffic was unheard of and the traveler between the two cities met practically no one. Today when the roads are jammed with hurrying, heated motorists Mr. Gravlin still is a motorman on the line. In all the time he has served, he has not had an accident. He lives at 215 Merrill street, Birmingham.

"In the early days of street cars here, John Allen used to meet the cars as they came into the village from the north and with the aid of a team of horses pull them over the hill by the power house. Later, in August 1897, the power house was put in operation and that furnished the power for the climb.

Woodward avenue today is a superhighway, one of the largest highways in the world. In 1897 when the cars were started, it was merely a road with cows and chickens and occasional horses and rigs. Where the mansions now stand there were farm houses and barns and haystacks.

"Where today we have heavy traffic to contend with, in those days our biggest problem was to keep the cows off the tracks so the cars could maintain their schedules." Mr. Gravlin said, "I remember one time a motorman killed six cows as they were being driven home from pasture.

"The biggest problem today seems to be women drivers," he smiled. "I don't know why it is, but it seems that everytime I have to stop the car in a hurry it is because a woman autoist has her car on the tracks."

In the days before prohibition M. Gravlin found many of the passengers unmanageable. He told

of one cold winter night when he was going into Royal Oak. He had just passed the 11 mile road when he noticed a man lying by the roadside with no overcoat on. Mr. Gravlin backed the car up and took the man in, but he was sober enough so that he insisted on paying his fare. They took him to the Royal Oak police station for the night. The next day the motorman was acclaimed as "Noble Noble."

"Why," said Mr. Gravlin, "they'd load on kegs of beer if you'd let them. I remember one night a fellow who was drunk fell off the back platform. We thought he was killed but we rushed him on to Dr. Shaw here in the village. Next day I met him walking on the street, but I never saw him drunk again."

"I've broken in 137 motormen in my time," said Mr. Gravlin and I broke them in all over again when they put those trailers on. Never, in the 31 years that I have been on the line, have I had an accident where anyone was hurt.

"In the old days, we had a turn table in Pontiac, which turned the car around. Before we got it around it was loaded. Those were the days when people scrambled for rides on a trolley car. People took their Sunday rides on the trolleys just the same as they ride in their automobiles now."

"No, sir, I've never hurt anyone as long as I've been a motorman," he repeated. "I remember once I saw what I thought was a rooster on the track. As I came nearer I discovered it was a small child playing in the sand between the tracks. I stopped just in time. That was the closest I ever came to hitting anyone and it was pretty close."

"A funny thing happened once. I was coming from the state fair in Pontiac. It was the first year they had ever had the fair there and the cars were crowded. I was coming along at a great speed late in the evening. It was thundering and lightning. I had to stop for some storage air. As I was going around to put the air in the

brakes, I saw on the cow catcher a little fellow about eight years old sitting there in the pouring rain and hanging on for dear life. 'I spent all my money and I didn't have any way to get home,' he explained.

Mr. Gravlin also recalled the flowing well of cold, clear water on the site of the present car barns. People used to come on the cars from Detroit and Pontiac to enjoy a long refreshing drink of this water. Many would bring containers and take large quantities of it back home with them.

"And that was before prohibition, too," he recalled.

THE DARN CARS

"That the advent of the street car was not welcomed by everybody in Birmingham is evidenced by the following anecdote which has been handed down as stark truth, and as such we repeat it here:

Judge Partridge was justice of the peace in the village at the time, and perhaps because of this incumbency was looked upon with considerable reverence by the populace. He was not strictly a modernist, and was fully satisfied with the Birmingham of the horse and buggy days? One morning he met John Rodine down at the four corners (one of the few things in Birmingham that hasn't moved) and struck up a conversation.

"There's a rumor going around about 'em putting in electric cars between here and Pontiac," quoth the Judge.

"Yup," came back John laconically. "Guess she's going through O. K."

"Replied the austere judge, 'Well, I don't see what they want to do that for. Who in h— will ride in 'em when they get 'em? I won't.'"

Friction fails to inform us as to the judge's courage in the matter of convictions.