Library Has Thrilling History

With a present annual circulation of 37,940 books and 7,273 books on the shelves, the Martha Baldwin Library bears little resemblance to the Ladies' Library Society, which had its humble origin more than 50 years ago when a band of 12 men and women met in the home of a disbanded Good Templar Lodge, voted themselves a fund, and started a library. Birmingham was then a village of about 600 and did not need a library and the members of the society met with little encouragement.

The 12 charter members who started Birmingham's first library were: Misses Allen, Josephine Bailey, Martha Baldwin, C. Damk, M. Castle, Elverton Jenkins, Mrs. Griffin, T. Hastings, Julia Hughes, Mr. Elderkin, Jennie Keyser, F. Partridge, M. M. Randall, Rob. Scheierman, Anna Wilson, Sarah White and Lizzie Thayer. Not long afterward 12 others joined, the first annual report showed $89.47 in the treasury. Of this amount $49.75 was spent for 23 books, which comprised the first library collection. Mrs. Griffin was the first society with Elverton Jenkins, vice-president, Lizzie Irving, treasurer and Miss Keyser, secretary and librarian. The first social held was in the home of Mrs. Edwin Baldwin but a short time afterward it was moved to the home of Mr. Russell Wells.

The first building to house the library was the old Methodist Church on Merrick Street, which was erected there in 1833. The building was there in 1873 when volunteer librarians had charge of them. Books could be taken out on Saturdays or Sundays from 8 a.m. to noon only. By the constant effort of the society the building was finally paid for and more space was possible. Everything from posters shows, portraying advertisements of various businesses to shows staged to raise money for this organization. Library Hall became the social center of the community. Theatricals were staged and dances were held.

Meeting with success in their efforts to raise money, the society purchased a lot at Woodward and Maple avenues, thinking 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 Merrick Street. They sold this to the township, receiving a lease on one room. But the women of the society made an agreement upon erecting a building 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 cooperate. Individuals contributed bricks for the building and bonds were sold. Mrs. Martha Baldwin loaned $250 on a mortgage. The building was sold for $400 and the lot for $500 December 1, 1895. The cornerstone of the new building with a banquet. This event came to the library as a means for raising money for the new building.

Miss 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 18,920 books in the collection. A room on the ground floor was given over to the library and the building was rented or used for library benefactions and other affairs. During this time the women of the society took over the publication of Birmingham Encyclopedia 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 the proviso that the library was to be maintained in the building and supported by a half mill tax, the village office to have their headquarters there also, the triangular space in the front of the lot to be forever reserved as a 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. The village owned the Library Hall and the second floor, the library being given over to village office. 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 7 to 8 p.m. with Miss Daisy Durkee as librarian. She was engaged as librarian at a salary of $5 a week. By the time the library was open six afternoons a week, Miss Durkee's salary had increased to $15 a month. Since Miss Durkee's death, Miss Alice Jarvis, Miss Esther Hitchcock, Miss Margery Allen (Mrs. Hugh Park), Miss Marian Patch, and Miss Blanche Kerns have served successively as librarians. Mrs. Nancy Thompson is the present librarian.

Last Thanksgiving day marked the formal opening of Birmingham's new Baldwin library on the corner of Martin and Gladwin streets. The building cost the city $175,000. The library is now open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and 7:30 to 9 p.m. six days a week and Sundays during the winter season. The library is governed by a board of directors composed of six members. A. C. Crawford, Frank Banker and E. B. Clement are.

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?

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 was a sea of mud? That who in the early part of the century (B. P.)—meaning, of course, before pavement.

GEORGE TOMS