

PART ONE

# Letters of Congratulation and Reminiscence Arrive on Sixtieth Birthday

## TELEPHONE LINKS PAST WITH STORY OF THE ECCENTRIC

**By Tom Starr**

The advent of the newspaper preceded that of the telephone in Birmingham by five years. The Eccentric being founded in 1878, and the telephone exchange in 1883. In 1878, Almeron Whitehead and George H. Mitchell were young men employed in two general stores across the street from each other. Mr. Whitehead's employer was J. Allen Bigelow, who was postmaster as well as storekeeper. During their spare time the two young men ran a small print shop, located in Mr. Whitehead's bedroom. Believing that Birmingham needed a newspaper, and that its publication would furnish them a novel experience, they bought a little equipment, and, forthwith, presented the first issue of the Eccentric. The venture was a success and to this date not a week has passed without an issue of the paper. Incidentally, the peculiar title of the sheet was given it by a group of young men who were members of a club, one of the solemn purposes of which was to refrain from matrimony. It was known as the Eccentric club.

Five years passed, the paper continued, and Whitehead and Mitchell kept their respective jobs in the general stores. In the meantime they had rigged up a tin can and bladder telephone contrivance, with a line connecting the two stores, and passed away square time shouting back and forth, one to the other.

One day a stranger called at the post office, announcing himself as L. A. Sherman, of Port Huron, and said he wanted to interview Bigelow in a proposition. Bigelow wasn't interested, and didn't care to hear about the proposition.

**First Telephone Installed**

Just then, the crude telephone saved the day. Mitchell wanted to know Whitehead and to attract his attention, he crawled like a rooster. Their crude telephone was not well. Seeing the home-made instrument in operation, and using it as an example, Sherman explained his proposition to Bigelow, saying that he represented a telephone company and that it wanted Whitehead and Mitchell to contract with him as the first manager. Three subscribers, the total number for many years, were furnished service from a small switchboard that was installed later in the Bigelow store.

Several years afterwards, Whitehead and Mitchell, still the owners and publishers of the Eccentric, went to the telephone exchange, which was still later, Volney Nixon, another storekeeper, became the manager, and the apparatus was moved to his store. Then back it went to the Whitehead and Mitchell store, with Mitchell the manager. He increased the number of subscribers from 12 to more than 80, before turning over the exchange to J. M. Kelley, who was made manager for the Birmingham and Royal Oak exchanges. At about the same time Whitehead and Mitchell began to devote the major portion of their time to the newspaper, and the telephone operating room and the newspaper plant occupied the same building.

**FAKE 'AUCTION' SIGNS USED AS INVITATIONS**

**Fifty Years Ago**

The wedding tour of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Ford will no doubt be remembered by that worthy couple for some time if not longer. Frank had been so afraid of catching the measles that he hadn't been home for a week on account of his sister being sick with that dread disease, and was married in Pontiac where they didn't have any measles. Grim fate was after him like a hawk after a hen as it were, and when the bride party was in the midst of a hilarious honeymoon in Chicago, a Partridge sold a steambath to the devoted bridegroom and clamed him for its own. The bride of a week had her hands full with the patient, too. And that is the reason Frank's friends are all smiling over the new style tour.

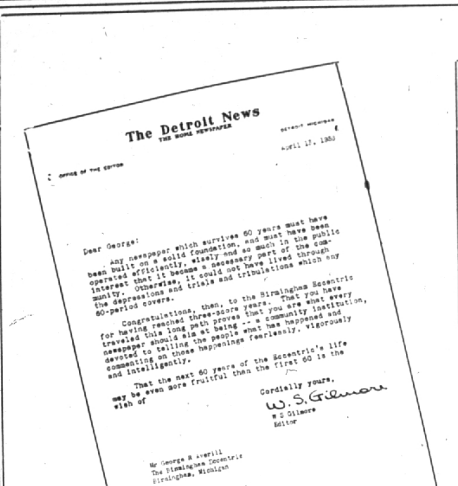
A Partridge sold a steambath last week and now has his sea legs well under him and can roll like an old salt, but he can't use their language with the proper gusto yet.

John Baldwin, having had three troubles on his mind begins to "breeze free." The trouble: two law suits and the selection of a new spring carpet, are being overcome in that beautiful and discreet style of Jack's which is one of the seven wonders of the world.

**Twenty-Five Years Ago**

Mrs. Francis Quirk Pearce and Master Frederick Marshall Pearce, all the way from Boston town, visited many old Birmingham friends on Wednesday last. Master Pearce is an ice cream fiend, like Mitchell, and like the unfortunate man has taken the cure several times but cannot break the habit.

J. A. Bigelow is our authority for news that F. Blakeless and Samuel C. Mills have left for

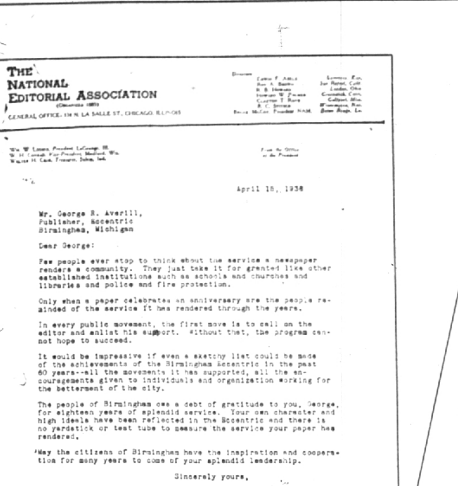


Dear George:

Any newspaper which survives 60 years must have been built on a solid foundation, and must have had a staff of men who have put their hearts and souls into it. I am sure that the Birmingham Eccentric has been built on such a foundation, and that its staff has been made up of men who have put their hearts and souls into it.

Congratulations, then, to the Birmingham Eccentric for its 60th anniversary. I am sure that you have had a very successful and happy 60 years. I am sure that you have done a great deal of good for your community, and that you have been a great asset to the Birmingham Eccentric.

Very truly yours,  
W. S. Gilmore  
Editor

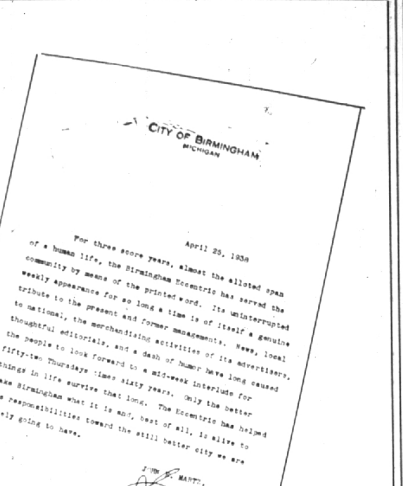


Mr. George R. Averill,  
Publisher, Eccentric  
Birmingham, Michigan.

Dear George:

For many years we have had a keen interest in the Birmingham Eccentric, and we are glad to see that it has survived for 60 years. We are sure that you have done a great deal of good for your community, and that you have been a great asset to the Birmingham Eccentric.

Very truly yours,  
National Editorial Association



For three score years, across the widest span of human life, the Birmingham Eccentric has carried the community by means of the printed word, its untaken weekly appearance for as long a time as it is a national, the present and former management, a few, loyal thoughtful associates, and a host of other like minded people to look forward to its appearance. Fifty-five thousand copies have been printed for the Birmingham Eccentric since its first issue. It has been a great asset to the Birmingham Eccentric. It has been a great asset to the Birmingham Eccentric.

Very truly yours,  
City of Birmingham

## THE DAILY TRIBUNE

Dear George:

It is pleasant to learn that THE BIRMINGHAM ECCENTRIC has reached a sixty-year anniversary. You have received a letter which expresses admiration for your paper and your community. It is a great pleasure to hear that you are still in the same building, and that you are still in the same business. I am sure that you have done a great deal of good for your community, and that you have been a great asset to the Birmingham Eccentric.

Very truly yours,  
The Daily Tribune

## THE BIRMINGHAM ECCENTRIC

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Very truly yours,  
The Birmingham Eccentric

## LETTERS OF CONGRATULATION

In the upper row, from left to right, the letters are from W. S. Gilmore, Editor, The Detroit News; William W. Loomis, President, National Editorial Association; and Mayor John E. Martz; lower left, Floyd J. Miller, General Manager, The Royal Oak Tribune; and Chase S. Osborn, former Michigan Governor.

## Happenings of Long Ago

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## WITH THIS ISSUE THE ECCENTRIC CELEBRATES 60TH

(Continued from Page 1, Part 1) and is always—(Welcome News) from Home."

**Recalls Old Days**

Mr. Bell grows reminiscent in his letter, and recalls early days of the Eccentric's career. He says in his letter:

"Dear George: Years ago The Birmingham Eccentric was edited in the back end of the Telephone Building, which housed a small printing press, that served the two-fold purpose of printing The Eccentric, and caring for the commercial printing needs of the then few businesses and professional men. It was this business that George R. Averill bought out in 1920, and developed into a business that is recognized throughout the State. The Birmingham Eccentric has grown with the city both in size and in its less tangible element, termed 'Service.' The firm is fortunate in having as its head, a man of high ideals and broad vision, who through diligent work and sincere effort has built a commercial printing business that is dominant in the City and State, and a weekly paper that ranks among the highest in the nation. Sincerely yours, (Signed) Wylie"

**Then And Now**

Mr. Shan reviews the past of The Eccentric, and compares the growth of the paper with the growth and progress of Birmingham. He writes:

"The Birmingham Eccentric, during its years of existence, seems to me to typify the changes that have taken place in Birmingham in more than half a century. We were a quiet village of retired farmers and the newspaper had its office and shop in a third floor back room, connected with the ground floor by a speaking tube. The paper was printed in Detroit, using a 'patent page' to keep up the front end."

"The town grew, doubled and trebled in population and The Eccentric moved downstairs, into a first a modest building, and then a still larger one."

"Finally, we approached city status and behold! The Eccentric blossomed. Bigger presses, printing the entire paper at home and a printing shop which employed scores of persons. Linotypes—folding machines, etc., all the latest modern equipment."

"We, who are in daily contact with the ever-changing conditions of the Birmingham Eccentric still in a way of sunshine, read like time from cover to cover."

"I hasten to congratulate George R. Averill on his ability to meet the ever-changing conditions of the neighborhood he has chosen as his field, and probably disagree with him and his business associates no officer than he is critical of me and mine."

"In an environment suited more to daily than to weekly newspapers, The Eccentric still maintains a prominent place. May he continue to improve and prosper. (Signed) Charles J. Shan"

**Years Bring Change**

The story of The Eccentric's founding and growth was a familiar one to the past generation who witnessed its progress. But the Birmingham of today differs as widely from the Birmingham of yesterday, as the modern Eccentric does from the brave but scanty little sheet of 60 years ago. Many readers of the paper as it now exists under the direction of Mr. Averill, are newcomers, and are to be expected, take established institutions for granted. So to the then sensational volume of an enterprise started by two young men with the courage to

## PAPER CHANGES HANDS

In March of 1921, Mr. Averill purchased the present quarters occupied by The Eccentric. Since that time the building has been remodeled and enlarged considerably to accommodate the growth of both the newspaper and the printing business operated in conjunction. The staff has grown proportionately with the years. Sixty years ago, or two hundred to issue the paper. Today the staff includes Mr. Averill as editor and publisher, the writer as managing editor, Paul Nell Averill as business manager, Arthur N. Wingerden as advertising manager, Miss Carol Dweiley and Mrs. H. M. F. George in the society department, and Bill Averill as school and sports writer. The entire number of employees including newspaper, business office and printing departments amount to approximately 40 individuals.

Additional equipment has been added from time to time, so that the plant is now one of the most modern necessary to production of the paper may be performed in the local newspaper plant. From a four-page sheet the newspaper has grown to be one of the outstanding works of the State.

**Policy Today**

The policy of the paper established throughout his ownership, is one of open-mindedness regarding civic affairs. The Eccentric has always been sincere in its efforts to give Birmingham news of current interest. A staunch believer in the freedom of the press, Mr. Averill has never hesitated to dictate a policy for his paper that is truthful and unshorn, and that upholds the principles which this Country has been dedicated.

The Eccentric begins the sixty-first year of its existence with a feeling of gratification for the friends who have expressed their congratulations, and with the confidence that grows with the passing of each successful year.