

The Birmingham Eccentric

1878

Section
May 1953

H

Public Utilities Which Serve
the Birmingham Area

1953

Practical Joker Brought 1st Railroad Here

Many interesting and humorous tales are told about the first Birmingham-Detroit railroad service and its operation. Sault Williams, whose experiences in the combined capacity of promoter, engineer, manager and conductor, provided the humor, for he was an inveterate practical joker and fun lover.

Because of the growing commercial importance of Pontiac and Detroit, the Detroit and Pontiac Railroad was chartered by the legislature of 1830. Although this immediate enterprise failed, it was followed in 1834 by the incorporation of the company which actually built and operated the road.

The Detroit and Pontiac Railroad was one of the pioneers of its kind in Michigan although it was not completed to Birmingham until 1839. Principal stockholders and managers were Alfred (Sault) Williams and Sherman Stevens of Pontiac who controlled the railroad until 1840.

While the northern extremity of the Pontiac and Detroit road still was under construction, trains were propelled as far as Royal Oak by horse power.

But in 1839, when the track was completed to Birmingham, (which at that time was a busy little industrial city), Williams decided the time had come to replace horses with a locomotive which would be in keeping with the progressive spirit of the community and furnish the type of service the increasing volume of business seemed to require.

ACCORDINGLY, Williams advertised in the papers that two steam trains a day would be operated between Detroit and Birmingham after June 1, 1839.

On the appointed day a sure enough steam train made its first run to Birmingham. To many standing with wide eyes and open mouths, it was an awe inspiring sight. To a few others, it was only another progressive step in the right direction of a greater tomorrow.

Freight and passenger service was greatly improved but still there were no coaches, no cushions, not even benches in the box cars that carried the prominent citizens of Birmingham and Detroit.

"Standing room only" was the

prevailing mode. The road bed had been hurriedly built and passengers were obliged to stand, some undignified, as the engine puffed violently and the cars swayed from side to side.

ANOTHER ANNOYANCE to railroad men at this time and a source of danger to passengers was that sections of the strap iron covering of the wooden rails (to protect them against wear) would frequently come loose.

The ends would fly up, lash the train as it passed, make a great noise, sometimes break through the bottom of a car and otherwise damage the rolling stock and threaten the lives of passengers.

This was one of the dangers incident to travel by rail that was most feared, although some people thought that the speed at which this monster traveled, especially down grade, was terrific and fraught with many hazards.

The thing might, for example, get out of control and jump the track, the engineer might not be able to stop it, or the engine, they thought, might even explode.

SAULT WILLIAMS conceived the idea of building the Birmingham station over the tracks with large swinging doors at either end



UNIDENTIFIED STATION AGENT POSES ALONG SIDE OLD DEPOT
It used to be just north of E. Maple, about where the Hunter Blvd island is now.

to admit the trains. These doors ordinarily were closed at night and opened at train time.

On one particular night when Williams was at the throttle, someone forgot to open the doors. Williams either failed to see them or thought the locomotive which he had begun to look upon as human, would have "sense enough" to stop to be admitted—but it didn't.

Instead, it ran clear through both doors, smashed them to pieces

and wrecked the whole building.

There were no set time schedules for the train which picked up or discharged passengers anywhere along the way. Consequently, passengers never were certain what time they would arrive at their destinations.

ONE STORY has come down through the years which indicates the laxity of time schedules and the slowness of the train. A young

man, it was said, boarded the train at Detroit and by the time he reached Pontiac he was old and feeble.

Another time, the train hit and killed a horse whose owner sued the railroad for damages.

In court, Williams directed his own defense and maintained that it was "pure negligence" on the part of the horse, for "if the horse had not stopped to look back, the
(Continued on Page 13)

Village Council 1st to Order Electric Lights

The Birmingham Eccentric and the incandescent light were born within a year of one another—some three quarters of a century ago.

Yet for thirty years following these twin events—right through the Cleveland Era, the Spanish-American War and the Theodore Roosevelt Administration—local news subscribers went on reading their papers by the dim glow of the coal-oil lamp.

Though the electric light was a reality, the development of systems to distribute electricity first in cities, then in outlying communities like Birmingham, was a long and difficult task.

By 1908, pressed forward by the late Alex Dow, electrification of Detroit was well under way. It was in this same year that one of Detroit Edison's predecessors here—The St. Clair Edison Company—set about bringing Birmingham out of the dark. Dow, a vice-president of St. Clair Edison as well as general manager of Detroit Edison, took a leading part.

Beginnings were modest. In the first franchise ordinance, as passed by the Birmingham village council July 13, 1908, the company agreed to "furnish . . . current and lamps for the Village council-room and jail . . . the public library . . . the water works (lights only) and the hose-house of the fire-station."

THIS COMMITMENT had some teeth in it, specifying that "said current shall not be used in such manner as to cause wanton waste of light."

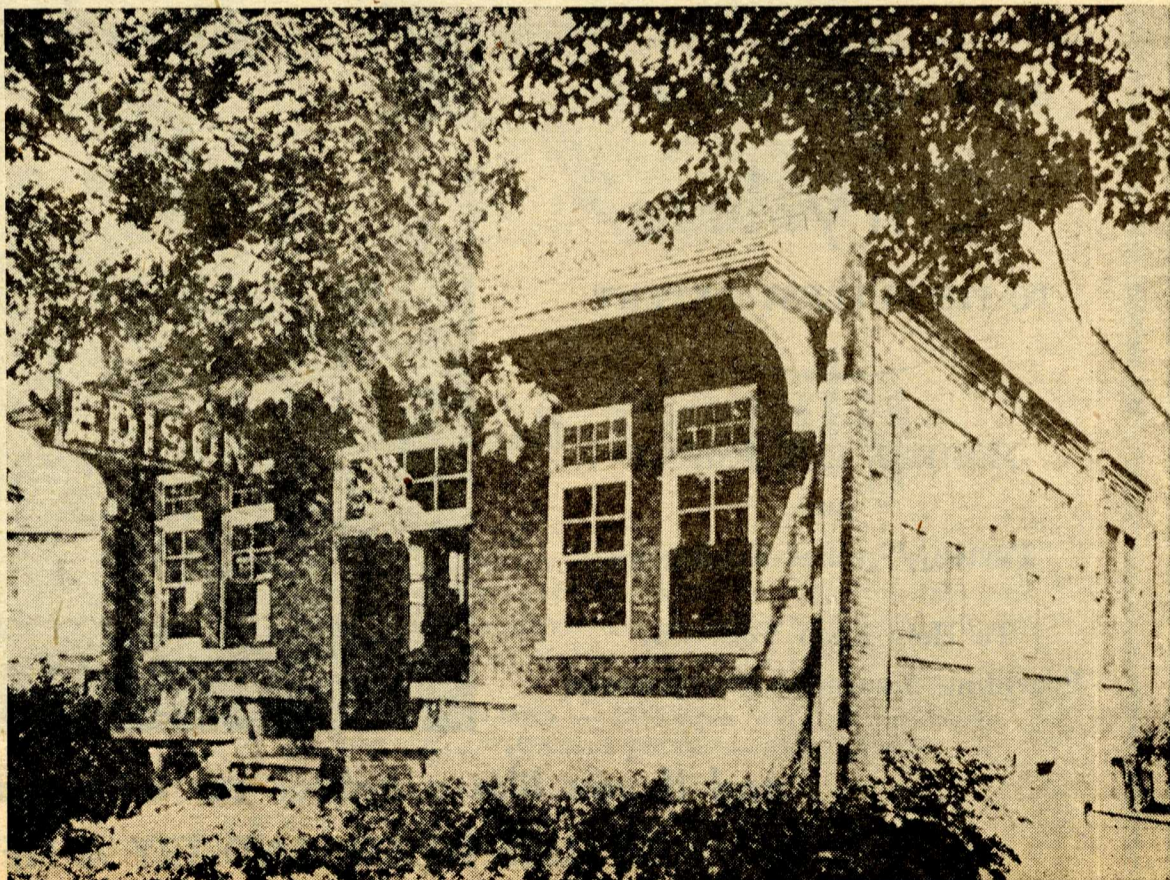
The deal provided for free replacement of the approximately 40 electric light bulbs involved.

At the time of the agreement, three of the municipal establishments to be lighted—the public library, the council-room and the jail (which was manned by a single constable)—were all located in the Town Hall at the southeast corner of Woodward and Maple.

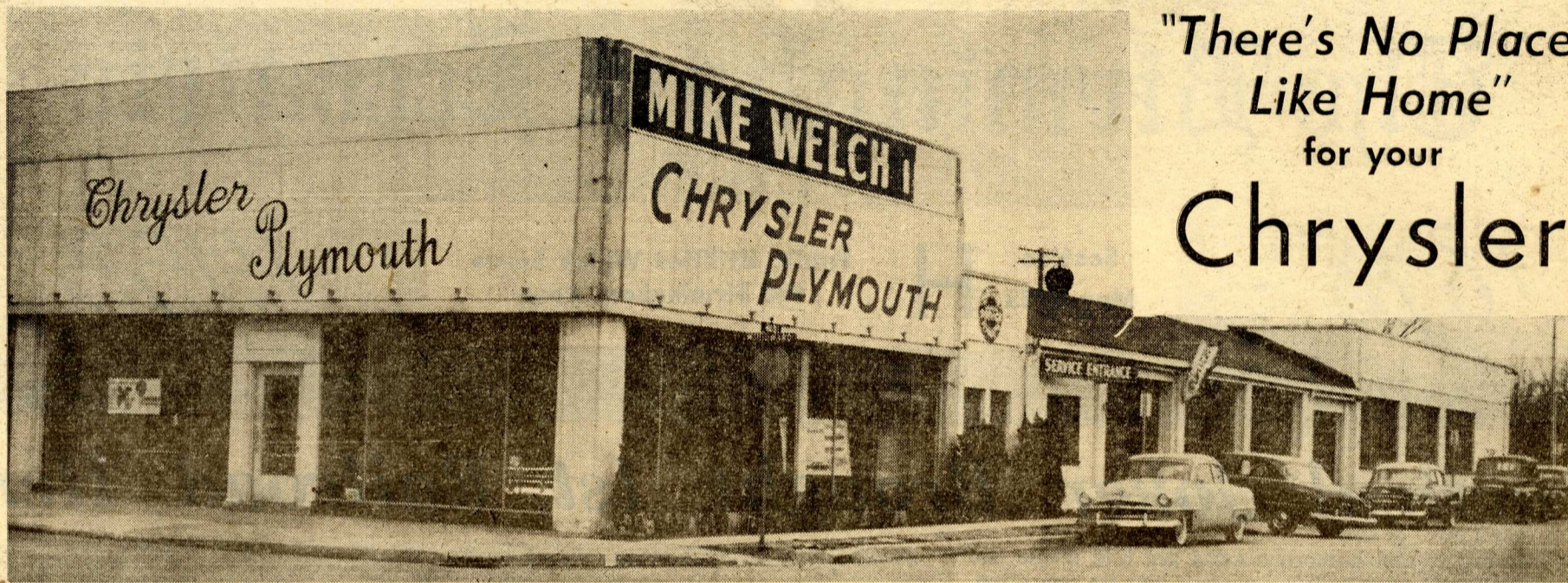
Action to extend service throughout the village began immediately. A substation was built on the east side of Pierce street, about 160 feet south of Maple, and included space, up front, for a two-desk sales office. This was staffed by Neil Rosso, now of Rochester, and another sales assistant. Current, obtained directly from Detroit Edison's Delray Plant, began to flow in January 1909.

EARLY IN 1910, assets of The St. Clair Edison Company were transferred to Eastern Michigan Edison, most of the stock of which was owned by Detroit Edison.

Also in this year, the company entered into an agreement to furnish Birmingham with its first electric street lighting. At least 15 arc-type lights were specified, with the understanding that they would be turned on from a half-hour after sundown until a half-hour
(Continued on Page 7)



ELECTRIC COMPANY'S FIRST OFFICE, SUBSTATION ON PIERCE STREET
Remodelled, made into 2-story building, it now has stores in it.



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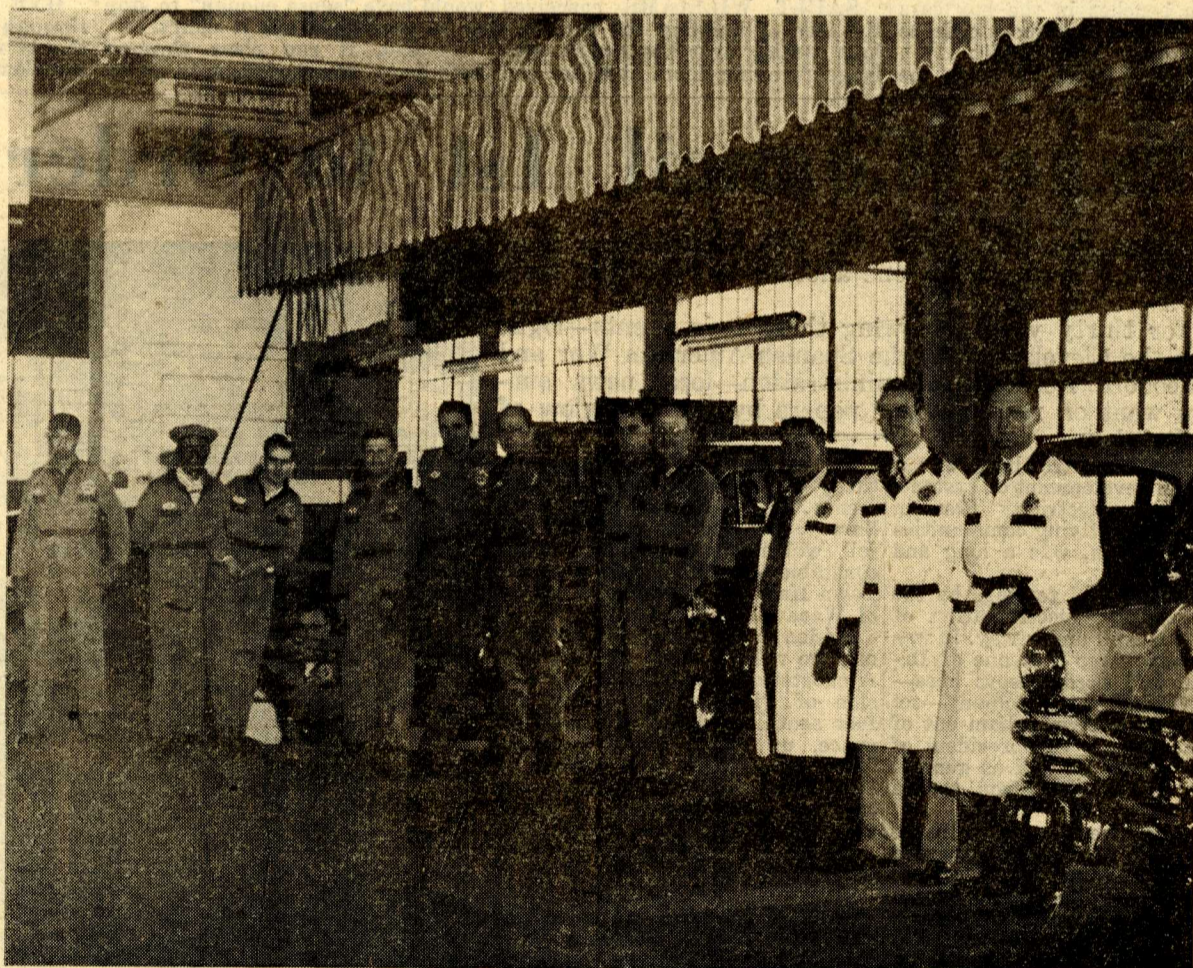
Chrysler

TO ITS FULLEST EXTENT

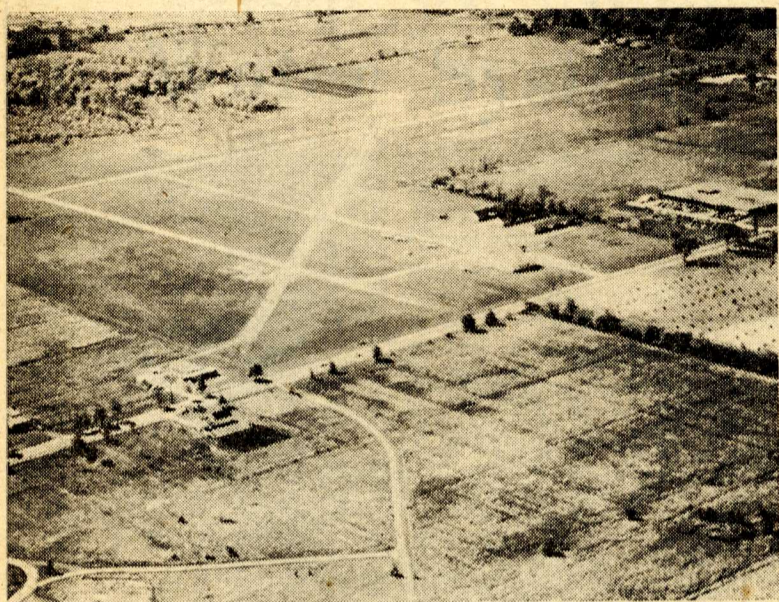
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To Help Keep Your Car
Providing Maximum Performance



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BE SURE TO SEE AND TRY A NEW PLYMOUTH



FAMILIAR LANDMARK ON EAST MAPLE AVE.
Has one of longest airport runways in Michigan

Operation of Airport Is A Family Affair

"Berz Airport in the beginning was purely for fun, and we still think it's fun," said Milton H. Berz, Jr., manager of the airport and flying service. The airport, located just east of Birmingham at 2045 E. Maple in Troy Township, is owned jointly by Mr. and Mrs. Milton H. Berz, Sr., and is operated by their son "Milt."

The early days of the airport date back to 1943 when the elder Berz purchased the land as an investment. That same year an interest in flying was aroused in young "Milt." He became a student of aviation at the Pontiac airfield. Berz, Sr., who had previously flown with Harry Brooks, (a pioneer in aviation in this area in the days when Henry Ford was building the Ford Tri-Motor), joined his son. Mrs. Berz, not to be outdone, also began to take flying lessons. This led to the first family airplane.

SINCE THE three Berz' were student pilots, it was impossible for them to fly together. A second and third plane were bought. With three airplanes in the family, the land where the airport now is located proved to be an ideal parking lot for the aircraft.

A former flight instructor, Charlie Baker of Pontiac, became interested in the Berz family enterprise. He often flew there and helped maintain the field.

A passerby stopped one day at

the field and inquired as to whether lessons were given there. Berz, Sr., after a moment's hesitation, replied "yes." Thus, the Berz Airport was begun.

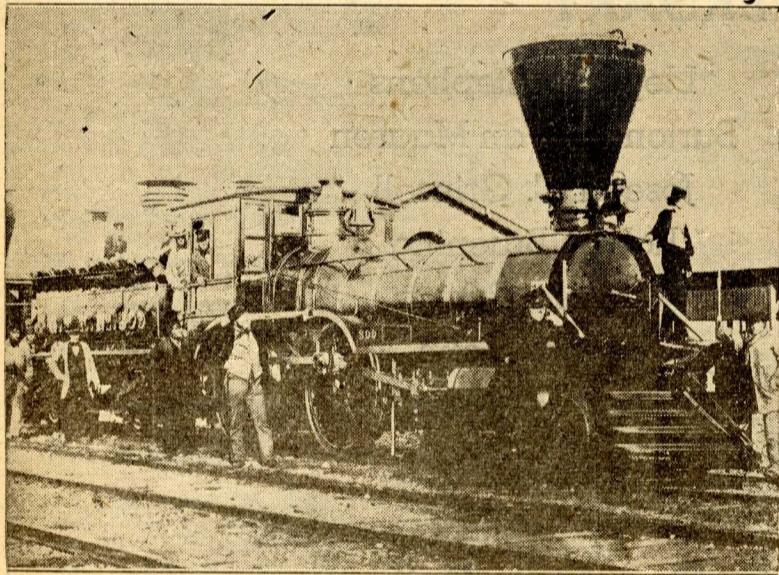
IN 1945, the airport was officially founded. There were no hangars and only one runway. Today, there are four hangars with a total capacity of 30 planes, three runways and five or six planes stored on the field.

It is believed that one of the Berz runways is the longest in Oakland County.

The airport now conducts a flying school, rents and sells planes, sells gasoline, oil, etc. and operates air taxi and aerial photography services.

Berz, Jr. was appointed airport manager in 1950 and last summer leased the business from his father.

Plans for further development of the airport are being developed. A repair shop for aircraft now is under construction. Last November, the east-west runway was lengthened from 3400 to 4000 feet.



TYPICAL OF EARLY TRAINS SEEN HERE

1st Engine Was Whistleless

In 1880, William Martin, a Birmingham resident who once served on the village board as trustee in 1877, reminisced about the railroad of his boyhood days.

"The first engine on the iron horse did not have a whistle," Martin wrote. "I well remember in the summer of 1839 starting out with my father, mother and sister, with a tub of butter and a dry calf skin in a one horse wagon for Royal Oak to trade and see the cars."

"Simpson and Fish kept a store in the Royal Oak depot then, and when the cars came in sight, Mr. Fish said to me 'See the wagons coming without horses!'"

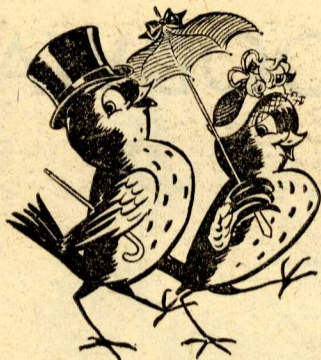
"ON THE fourth of July 1840, there was a celebration in Birmingham and I went there with Mart Toms, Amazia Barber and Cyrus

Robinson. Mart carried his old rifle as usual.

"About noon a procession marched down Mill Street with each state represented by a lady dressed in white, and crossed Saginaw street to the north end of the National Hotel (then called Birmingham House), where dinner was prepared in a bower of spruce."

"Uncle Jerry Chase and Stoddard kept a tavern in the building now occupied by H. Irving & Son as a hardware store."

"In the afternoon I saw the cars and the engine was decorated with evergreens and flowers which I thought was a grand sight. The day passed pleasantly for me and I am not mistaken in the year for Barber worked at our place that summer and 'Hurrah for Old Tip' was shouted throughout the country."



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All-Day Celebration Welcomed New Service

A giant-all-day celebration was staged by southern Oakland county communities on Saturday, August 1, 1931 celebrating the Grand Trunk's new commuter service over its new \$8,000,000 right of way and the new \$125,000 station in Birmingham.

The commuter service was the first of its kind ever established by a "steam" railroad in the state of Michigan and brought the Woodward avenue communities closer to Detroit than ever before.

The demonstration of welcome was centered in Birmingham but several other cities and villages along the line joined in to make the celebration one that will be long remembered by participants.

Opening the day's festivities, a band concert was held at 9 a.m. at the depot.

Then a Kiddies Parade at 10 o'clock was held in the center of town with nearly 150 entrants all vying for prizes for the best costume, the funniest costume, the best animal entry and the best decorated bicycle. Each young marcher received a piece of cake donated by a local bakery and a frost bite donated by Wilson Drug store.

THE BIRMINGHAM Fire Department put on a fire fighting exhibition after which every one went out to watch the ball game between Birmingham and Pontiac and enjoyed a picnic lunch.

In the afternoon the parade "Pageant of Progress" was held with 60 gaily bedecked floats designed to represent the progress of a century in business and industry.

The parade was divided into six sections with a band at the head of each. Hundreds of autos—only decorated ones were allowed in the parade—swelled the procession.

A QUEEN of the pageant had been chosen by ballot several days previously (she was Elizabeth Pollock, daughter of Howard Pollock of Ruffner street). The queen rode in a specially fitted float surrounded

ed by her nine maids of honor.

The Pageant of Progress, starting from the center of the city, ended at the new railway station. There an air show and fire works exhibition entertained the crowd until two special trains, one northbound from Detroit and the other southbound from Pontiac, met and discharged their loads of honored guests, picked up at various stops along the way.

Governor Wilber M. Brucker was the principal speaker at the dedication ceremonies which took place at four p.m.

Other speakers were Grand Trunk officials and Harry Allen, Birmingham's village president, with David H. Ladd, who was general chairman of the day's program, acting as master of ceremonies.

FOLLOWING a sight seeing tour around Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills, the honored guests went to the Community House for a banquet held in their honor.

Grand opening of a street carnival on the pavements surrounding the Municipal building was scheduled at 7 p.m. with a temporary halt at 8 for a beauty contest and awarding of prizes in all competitions.

A merry-go-round, whip and other carnival equipment including concession booths were open for celebration visitors.

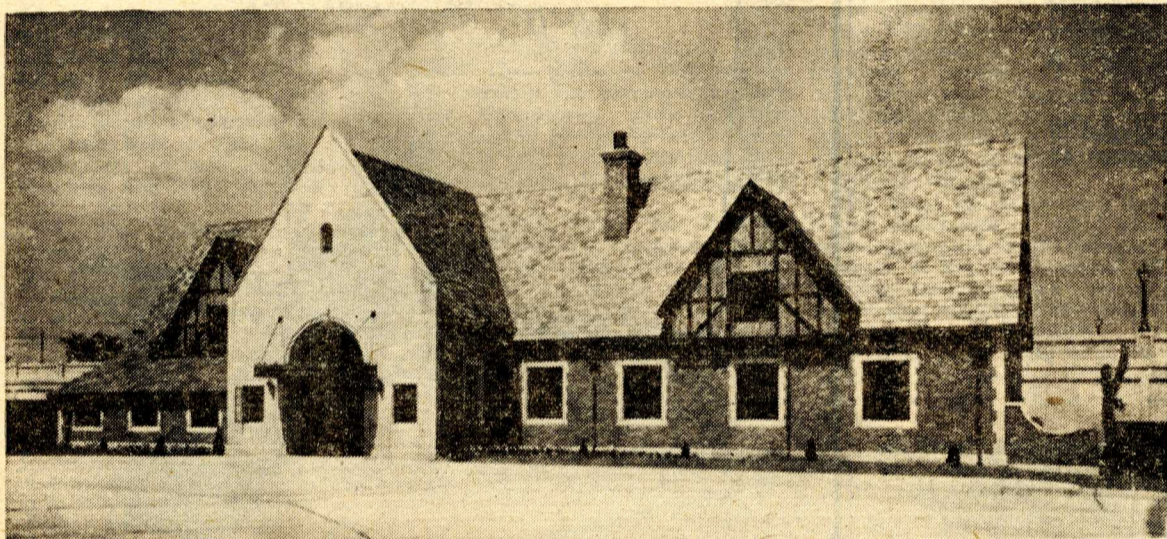
The last scheduled event on the program was a carillon recital by Anton Brees from the Christ Church Cranbrook singing tower at 8:30 p.m.

At midnight the celebration ended. It was the end of a perfect day for most participants—a day that really ushered in the good wishes and good will of the community to its friend—the Grand Trunk Railroad.



ABOVE: 'WELCOMING COMMITTEE' AWAITING FIRST TRAIN'S ARRIVAL

Below: Main entrance to Birmingham depot.



Bus Transportation Replaced Interurbans

Like that of the progressive, fast-growing Birmingham area it serves, the history of Greyhound reveals steady growth from meager, uncertain beginnings to the efficient, well-regulated public service organization of today.

From its struggling, early days Greyhound has purposefully progressed to more efficiently link Birmingham with other Greater North Woodward communities and nearby Detroit, and thence via a nationwide network of routes, with all parts of America.

In Birmingham, as throughout Michigan and much of the nation, the motorbus industry is, to quite a degree, the replacement of an outmoded type of transportation—the electric railway.

During the early 1900's, much public transportation from southeastern Michigan cities to Detroit travelled over the interurban electric railway system of the Detroit United Railways. One such line linked Birmingham with Detroit to the south, and Pontiac to the north, and for several years provided the only public transportation between these points.

IN 1922, the city of Detroit purchased all electric railway lines within its corporate limits and instituted high charges against the interurban lines for the use of its rails between the city limits and downtown Detroit.

To maintain economical fares in the face of these tactics, Detroit United Railways built interurban terminals at the edge of Detroit and established a bus transfer system, known as Peoples Motor Coach Company, which operated from the terminals to the heart of Detroit.

Meanwhile, several independently-organized bus companies began to provide service throughout the North Woodward area, resulting in a highly competitive and confusing condition.

FIRST STEP toward unified bus service, as rendered by Greyhound today, came with the purchase of the Pye Bus Company and Berkeley Motor Bus Company by the Star Motor Coach Lines in 1924. The Star Motor Coach Company, owned by William McCallum, was the principal bus operator in Birmingham and also manufactured many of its own coaches.

But the high cost of terminals the transfer system to downtown Detroit, and the acquisition of several bus companies forced the Detroit United Railways into receivership early in 1925.

Under jurisdiction of the United States District Court, however, the DUR continued to expand its unified network of routes which extended to areas outside of Detroit including Birmingham. Thus, in September, 1925, it assimilated the Star Motor Coach Line.

BY 1928, through additional acquisitions, the DUR found itself with a well-integrated system of inter-urban and bus routes in the Birmingham-Detroit area and throughout southeastern Michigan.

From a reorganization of Detroit United Railways were born several new companies. Notable among these were Eastern Michigan Railways which continued inter-urban service, and its subsidiary Eastern Michigan Motorbuses which operated the motorbus phase of the company's activities.

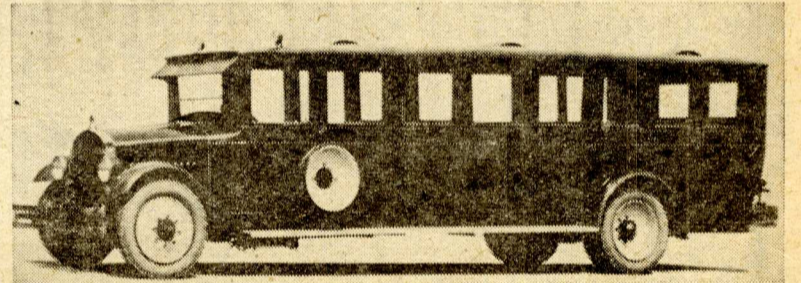
All bus companies acquired by the DUR while in receivership, had retained their original corporate identities, but they were now consolidated into a single corporate unit.

WITH THE beginning of the depression it was evident that efficient, economical bus transportation would be the surviving mode of suburban travel and by early 1931 all of the inter-urban rail lines operated by Eastern Michigan Railways, including those through Birmingham, were discontinued and scrapped.

Despite stringent economies, the Eastern Michigan concerns again experienced receivership in late 1931. Prudent management saw the concern through the depression's worst years and Eastern Michigan Motorbuses emerged from this receivership in 1934.

IN 1939 the reorganization of the parent Eastern Michigan Railways

CONSIDERED an outstanding motorbus achievement in its era, this 1927 Mack 22-passenger bus (at right) was one of the fleet which provided Birmingham residents with commuter service to Detroit at that time. Two rows of seats flanked one side of a narrow aisle, while a single row occupied the other side. This coach was referred to as the "deluxe" model.



was achieved with the Eastern Michigan Transportation Corporation becoming the successor organization. This new firm also held full control over the subsidiary Eastern Michigan Motorbuses.

Meanwhile, the Greyhound Corporation had acquired a substantial interest in Eastern Michigan Railways through purchases of its first and second mortgage bonds and formulating an acceptable plan for reorganization.

Under the terms of this plan for reorganization, Greyhound received complete control of Eastern Michigan Motorbuses through an exchange of stock, and after final approval by the Interstate Commerce Commission and the Michigan Public Service Commission, the change in ownership became effective on

April 1, 1941. At this same time the corporate name was changed to Great Lakes Greyhound Lines.

WORLD WAR II all but halted further expansion, but at its conclusion, Great Lakes Greyhound Lines began to build its service in earnest.

New, improved Silversides Super Coaches have replaced outmoded inter-city buses. Many new-type suburban buses have been added to the Greyhound fleet which serves Birmingham and other communities near Detroit.

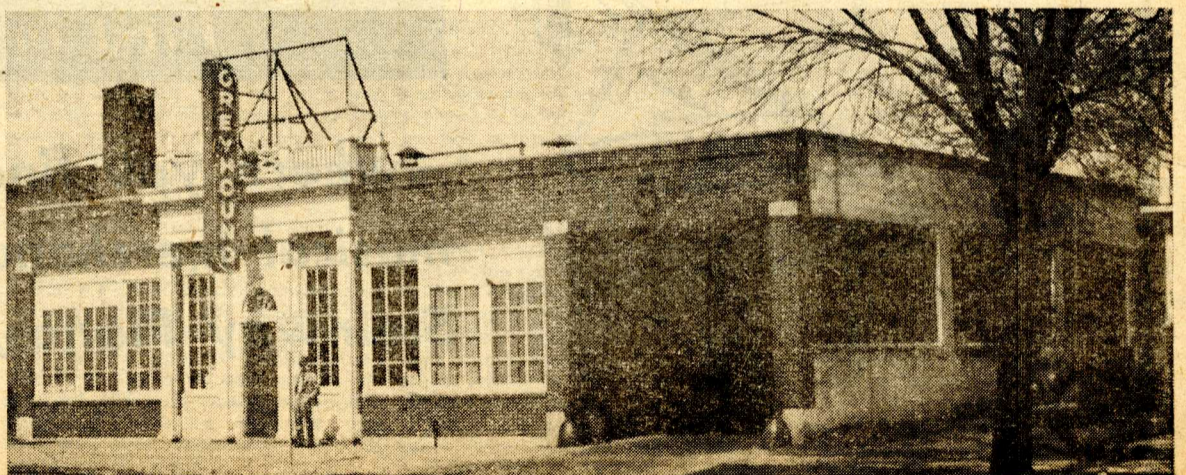
Like other cities along Greyhound's routes, Birmingham has been a focal point for much of this improvement. In 1946 the Birmingham Greyhound Terminal was ex-

tensively remodelled. Garage and maintenance facilities were improved and enlarged, and have since been increased again.

THE GARAGE, which houses 76 suburban-type buses, contains the most modern equipment for both light and heavy bus maintenance and repair work.

An annual average of 170 persons are employed in the Greyhound Birmingham division, the most of whom are residents of Birmingham or adjacent communities.

Eighty-eight suburban schedules operate daily between Birmingham and Detroit, in addition to 16 inter-city Greyhound schedules which pass through Birmingham every 24 hours.



GREYHOUND'S WAITING ROOM—GARAGE ON S. WOODWARD
Main terminal on Detroit-Pontiac suburban route.



*This was Sanders when
the Eccentric was Born*

When the Birmingham Eccentric was established in 1878, Detroit's single Sanders store occupied the Fisher Block at what was then 131 Woodward Avenue. That was just a year after Detroit's first telephone was installed; the streets were lighted with gas; horse-drawn street cars were still a novelty; the trip to Birmingham and back was an all-day junket.

As a fellow old-timer, Sanders feels particularly privileged to congratulate the Eccentric on its three-quarters of a century of service to the community.

Sanders
SINCE
1875

CANDIES

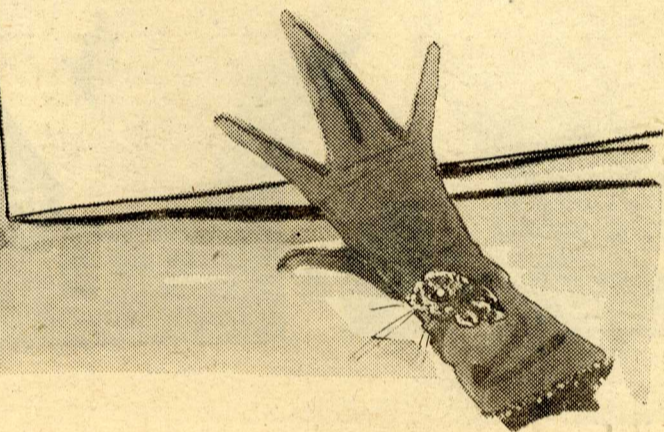
BAKERY

ICE CREAM

HIMELHOCH'S

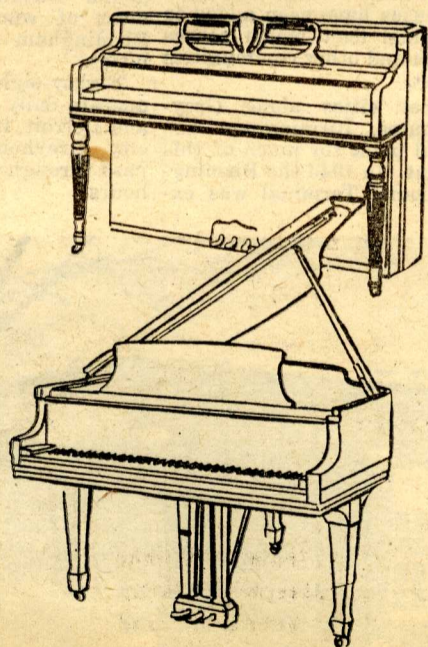
where
fashion-alert suburbanites
know they'll find
newest fashions in
dresses, suits, coats,
sportswear, casuals
and accessories.

168 W. Maple, Birmingham



Just 1 year older than we are!

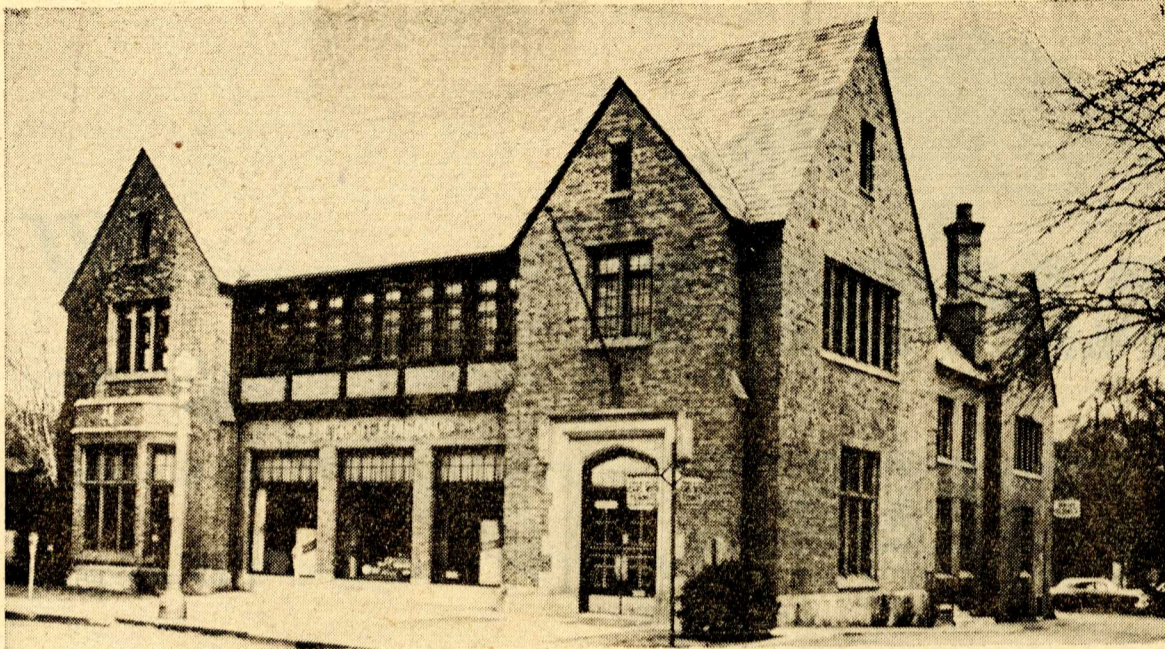
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PRESENT BUILDING WAS MOVED INTO 21 YEARS AGO
Today it services more than 7,000 customers in Birmingham-Bloomfield area.

Detroit Edison's Growth

Continued from Page 1

before sunrise the year around.

In 1914, about one year before Detroit Edison bought out its Eastern Michigan subsidiary, Birmingham's Pierce street substation was hit by lightning and knocked out of commission.

Linemen quickly connected Birmingham with a Royal Oak supply line so that sleeping local residents were deprived of service less than an hour, and few of them even knew there had been any trouble.

BUT THE SALES offices at the front of the substation were badly damaged and this started off a series of sales department moves.

The company set up new sales quarters in space rented from the late S. O. Wylie Bell. This second office was on North Woodward, just north of the present Wilson drug store.

Sales was moved about 1916 to still another location—the old Adam Gray house now occupied by the D. A. Green decorators' supply shop at 240 S. Woodward—before the fourth and present office at 220 E. Merrill was built.

THE BUILDING on Merrill street was begun in the spring of 1932 and cost approximately \$100,000.

Following the company's policy of designing offices to conform to the architectural standards of the community, an English design for the building was approved.

Before the design was decided upon, the company's architects studied the Municipal building and Baldwin Public Library in order to achieve a design in harmony with those buildings.

Birmingham, forty-odd years ago, was a town of small business proprietors, retired farmers, and also some unretired farmers whose fields were well within the village limits. These were canny and conservative people—and some of them at first looked with a fishy eye on the new magic of electricity.

ONE RURAL retiree from the Clawson neighborhood arranged to have his house equipped with a single 16-candlepower light bulb—suspended on a drop cord over the center of his dining-room table. He kept books on the expense of this modern luxury for several months before consenting to have the rest of his home wired.

Wylie E. Groves, veteran Birmingham resident and school board member, remembers a thrifty housewife who demanded instruction in meter-reading. From the moment she learned how, she "read her own"—and kept a careful, long-range check on her billings until she had satisfied herself no mistakes were being made.

Neil Rosso, previously mentioned, also has many memories of the early days of electricity in Birmingham. He recalls that there were mixed feelings when Edison began furnishing him and some other district servicemen with motorcycles. Rosso was enthusiastic.

HE OFFERED a lineman—strictly a horse-and-buggy man—a ride to a repair job. The passenger clambered on behind. Rosso started up, and hit a bump.

The lineman bit the dust, picked himself up without a word, and headed for Ed Parks' Maple Street Livery Stable and the relative comfort of horse-powered transportation.

Both Rosso and Groves recollect a peculiar pay practice followed in the earlier days of the local Edison Company. George Slaymaker, then a district manager, used to drive around his area on payday distributing the wages of Edison employees.

To protect the payroll, he always took an armed escort along with him in his car. The escort was a cautious man, and valued general safety far higher than the quick draw—he always kept his loaded six-shooter tied up securely inside the bag of cash he was guarding.

SUCH ANECDOTES are a part of the story of Detroit Edison in Birmingham. But a more significant story, reflecting Birmingham's growth and community development through the years, can be gleaned from some Edison business records of 1910—forty-three years ago.

Comparative figures for 1952 are from Harold J. Hall, Edison's Bloomfield district manager, and Paul Grant, his assistant:

—Birmingham's population in 1910 was 1,607. Now, more than 20,000 people live here.

—Electrical customers then numbered 184. Now there are nearly 7,000.

—Some 15 arc-type street lights were in use in 1910. Today Birmingham's streets and alleys are lighted with 440 modern incandescent lamps.

—Kilowatt-hours sales here in 1910 were 67,370. Last year they were 34,355,634, five hundred times that amount.

IT IS MORE important, perhaps, that in 1910 the average electrical customer in Birmingham used only 366 kilowatt-hours of current—to operate a few light bulbs.

While today, the typical Birmingham resident uses a dozen times that amount—at one-fifth the cost per unit—in enjoying the fullest benefits of modern electrical living.

Congratulations

to

The Birmingham Eccentric

on Its

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by Ethel M. Pollock

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Herbert D. Hunter

DIAMOND JUBILEE

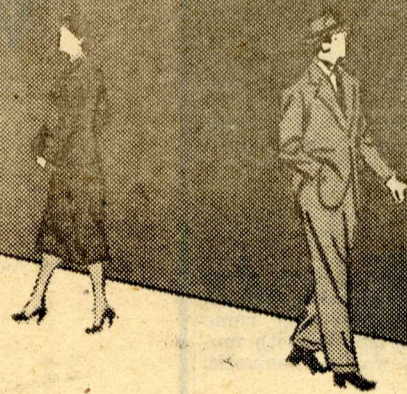
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Splendid Service

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We want to thank the people of Birmingham for the wonderfully warm welcome you have given the new Kroger Store. Your shopping is more modern, more pleasant, and more profitable. We planned it that way, and we are glad you approve it.



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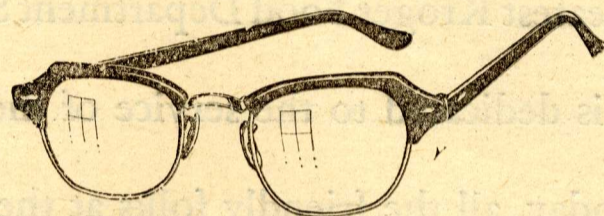
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1st B'ham Phone Exchange Was in Bigelow's Grocery

Two people took their telephones more or less seriously when the talking machines were introduced in Birmingham. And they were the ones who rigged the system by stretching skins tautly over two tin cans and connecting them with a waxed cord.

These solitary telephone tycoons were Almeron Whitehead, a clerk in Bigelow's grocery store, and George Mitchell, a clerk in the store across the way from Bigelow's. Later they founded and owned The Birmingham Eccentric for many years.

It was strictly not a "Bell" telephone in more ways than one. To signal each other, the two-party-telephone-company boys imitated a rooster's crow.

This was the telephone situation in 1883 when L. A. Sherman of Port Huron arrived here to promote a Birmingham exchange as part of the Michigan State Telephone Company, as Michigan Bell Telephone Company was then known.

IN THIS PART of the state, a telephone line from Detroit to Port Huron was working out very well. Another line through Royal Oak, Birmingham, Pontiac, Holly, Owosso and way to Grand Rapids was in the planning stage.

J. Allen Bigelow, grocer and postmaster, became interested as Sherman proposed that people of Birmingham buy either stock in the company or coupon books which could be redeemed in trade after the exchange was established. Bigelow had been a spectator to the make-shift system of Whitehead, his clerk, and Mitchell, on the other end of the line.

The first switchboard went into operation in Bigelow's grocery with Ira Slade, commission merchant, G. A. Watkins, life insurance broker and owner of a 300-acre Shetland Pony Farm, and Cooper Stock Farm as the first telephone subscribers.

LATER, WHITEHEAD and Mitchell bought the store and assumed the management of the telephone exchange. Responsibilities of the system were turned over to Austin R. Ranks, another grocer, after several years when Whitehead grew tired of the venture.

A competitor appeared. The New State Telephone Company, an independent organization, enlisted 12 subscribers but retired from the field, finding that it could not operate as efficiently as the first exchange here.

Volney Nixon, dry-goods merchant, next ran the exchange, followed by Mitchell, who moved it back to his and Whitehead's store on W. Maple, a block off Woodward.

In those days a telephone cost approximately \$50 a year. Calls to Detroit cost 25 cents. Loud noises on the line like fish frying, steam hissing, and explosions taking place, easily discouraged potential customers.

MITCHELL HAD difficulty selling businesses on the telephone un-

til out-of-towners arrived, set up a butcher shop, and began taking orders over the telephone. Other firms quickly followed suit and the real growth of the telephone was under way.

Florence King (Mrs. Thomas H. Cobb), was Birmingham's first woman operator, handling the completion of calls, the keeping of records, and the billing of customers while she clerked intermittently in the store.

By 1904, the telephone company was offering 24-hour-a-day service at and between its Royal Oak and Birmingham offices. By then there was no charge for calls between the cities and orders for service poured in faster than telephone instruments could be obtained and installed.

UNIFORM RATES were established then also and they ran approximately \$18 per year for farm line subscribers, one party-line service, and two-party-line business service, with a cash discount of \$3 if paid within 10 days after being billed.

In March, 1909, the Michigan State Telephone Company leased most of the second floor of a new office building which the firm of Whitehead and Mitchell had erected on the west side of Pierce street, immediately south of their store on the corner of Maple. Once again, Whitehead and Mitchell figured in the history of Birmingham's tele-

phone exchange.

Prospects were good for increasing demand for telephone service as the office moved into its first real "home." In making adequate preparations for the expected growth in the next 20 years, the company spent thousands of dollars.

THE UTILITY bought the building in 1922.

In 1910, there were 310 telephones in operation in Birmingham, in 1926 the figure climbed to 2,855, in 1935 to around 3,300, in 1940 to well above 5,000, in 1945 to nearly 7,000.

Approximately 1,220 telephone calls, including both local and long-distance, originated here during an average business day in 1928, over 15,000 in 1935, some 23,000 in 1940, nearly 30,000 in 1945, over 42,000 in 1948 and 75,000 today.

Birmingham marked another historic step and celebrated its 67th year of service with the inauguration of a dial system in June, 1950. A completely new telephone building housed the new system, building and equipment running to \$2½-million.

THE COMING of dial service allowed Birminghamites to dial calls directly to Detroit, Centerline, Mt. Clemens, Pontiac, Royal Oak, Southfield and Mayfair. Since 1950, the dialing area has been enlarged to include the telephone exchanges listed in the Birmingham telephone directory.

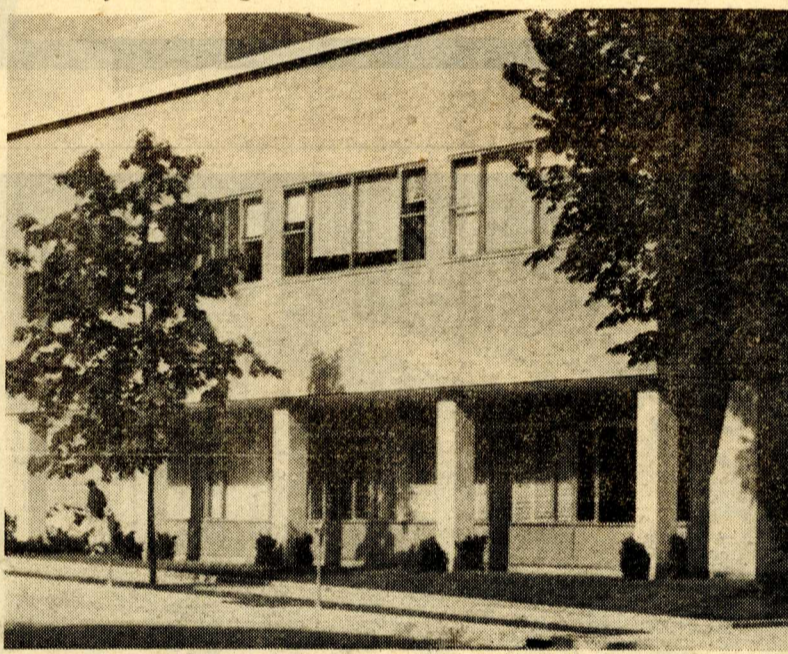
The local exchange now boasts 10,492 customers, a rapid growth which prompted the building of an addition to the local central office building and facilities. These expansions of Michigan Bell here represent a cost of \$500,000.

Seventy years have brought an increase in the number of telephone customers from three to over 10,000.



ABOVE: FORMER EXCHANGE ON PIERCE ST.

Below: New \$2½ million facilities on Martin st.



Whole Town Was Out to Welcome First Electric Interurban Cars

The whole village was out, flags waved, the crowd yelled and everyone was wild with enthusiasm that Monday afternoon, June 18, 1896 when the four new cars of the 'lectric interurban came into the village of Birmingham for the first time.

George Hendrie, the father of George T. Hendrie now living on Willits street, was the man of the hour and according to The Birmingham Eccentric account of the day, was, "on the front vestibule of the first car, acting in the capacity of motorman."

Folks from Birmingham had ridden down to Royal Oak in their carriages, boarded the new cars which had been run out from Detroit with power from the Citizen's Railway, and then rode back to Birmingham for the historic "first run."

A merry clip of about 40 miles an hour was kept up for a mile or more on that first trip, when the current slackened up. The cars were stopped for only a minute, however, and the trip was resumed.

George Hendrie and his brother Strathearn of Royal Oak were directly responsible for the first trolley service from Detroit to Birmingham.

They, together with Frank Springsteen, had full charge of laying the tracks for the old Oakland line, as well as for erecting the power house in Birmingham. George T. Hendrie served under his father and uncle as time keep-

er on the construction job.

THE HISTORY of those early days when the Oakland Railway was in its infancy, is contained in the characteristic notes and reflections of editors Whitehead and Mitchell of The Eccentric of 1895 and 1896.

In their enthusiastic reporting, they record the weekly progress of the new line and power house as they grew from possibilities into realities, and they praised the leaders behind the project—the Hendries and Mr. Springsteen.

The issue of Dec. 19, 1895 shows that construction of the line generated its share of communal animosity:

"It is said that our Royal Oak friends are 'red-headed' over the fact that the power house of the new Oakland Railway is to be located in this place.

"WELL, IT IS the best place for it anyhow, and we are not disposed to find fault, especially when we are creditably informed that the new power will be a 'dandy' and will cost in the neighborhood of \$5000 exclusive of machinery."

On Dec. 26, the editors lament that the condition of Saginaw street (now Woodward avenue) is "deplorable" because of the excavation for laying the tracks, but reflect that the advantages accruing from completion of the line will more than offset the-inconvenience.

A plan for booming business on the new line is reported in the edition of Jan. 19: "An ice rink will be built on the flats adjoining the power house to make traffic good in the winter and skating parties from 50 to 500 are expected to come out to skate on our ice and breathe our healthy country air and have a happy merry time."

NO ATTRACTION was deemed necessary during the summer because "The public will come our way by the tens of thousands to ride over the most thoroughly organized and best equipped electric suburban railroad through the prettiest and sightliest part of southern Michigan."

On Jan. 23: "The power house is the talk of the town. Mr. Hendrie is doing all that a man can do to give the residents of Birming-

ham and vicinity all the work and the boys are grabbing on with active avidity."

"The new cars are commodious, easy and very fast. One feature is especially noticeable—the absence of gaudy decoration. There are no green cows, blue sheep and impossible shepherdesses, but a beautiful finish in natural woods" . . . so said the editors of The Eccentric covering the first run of the new line.

NEARLY 35 YEARS of continuous trolley service between Detroit and Pontiac through Birmingham was provided by the 'lectric interurban, before the inroads made by bus competition on its passenger service, caused the abandonment of the lines.

The line was known as the Oakland Railway in 1896 and in 1897 the line was extended to Pontiac. An ordinance granting permission to the Oakland Company to lay its tracks and run its wires through the village was passed by the village commission on Dec. 2, 1895, when Almeron Whitehead was the village president.

The ordinance established the fare from Birmingham to Royal Oak at five cents and from Birmingham to Detroit at fifteen cents. The fare to Detroit in April 1931, when the service was discontinued was 30 cents.

TWELVE MILES an hour was to be the speed limit through the village streets and one car an hour was to be run each way for 18 hours.

On Nov. 19, 1909, the Commission granted a franchise to the Detroit United Railway as successor to the Oakland. The service was continued under this name until 1928, when the Eastern Michigan System took over the Detroit United lines.

When the line was abandoned in 1931, the passing was made more ironic and complete by notices by at least three communities along the route that poles, tracks, and wires of the road were to be seized in lieu of unpaid personal taxes.

HOWEVER, SINCE Birmingham was owed only \$210.60 by the Eastern Michigan Railway for unpaid personal tax, the general opinion was that the removal of the rails would put the community to more expense than the rails were worth. This opinion was shared by other communities and it was decided to cover the rails with concrete.

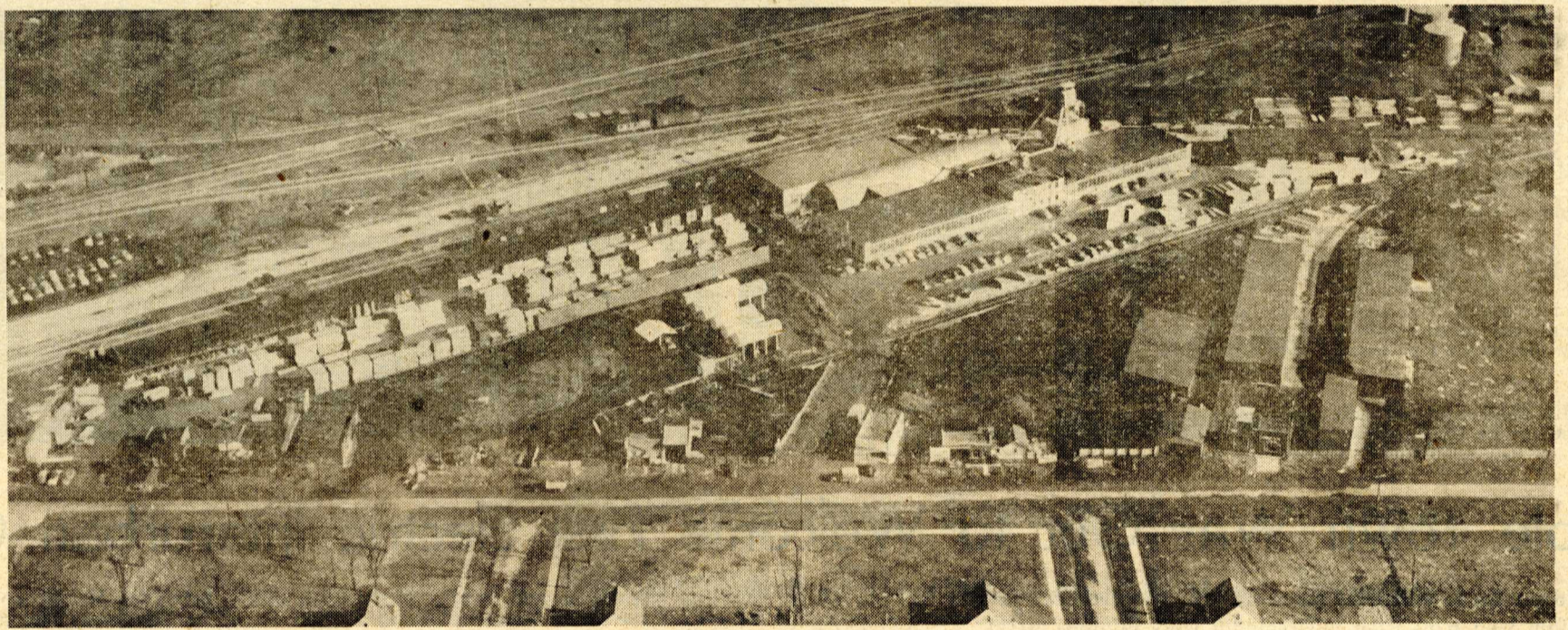
But only a month later, the Eastern Michigan Railway paid its back personal taxes owed to the several villages and townships along the line and announced the sale to a Detroit scrap iron dealer of wires and rails that had not yet been covered. It was a clean ending.

Congratulations

BIRMINGHAM ECCENTRIC

... On Your 75th Anniversary

... Another milestone passed on the never ending road to greater news coverage, integrity, and high advertising standards. May the road be ever smoother, and your progress even greater in the years to come.



Aerial View of the Birmingham Branch of the Restriction Lumber Co.

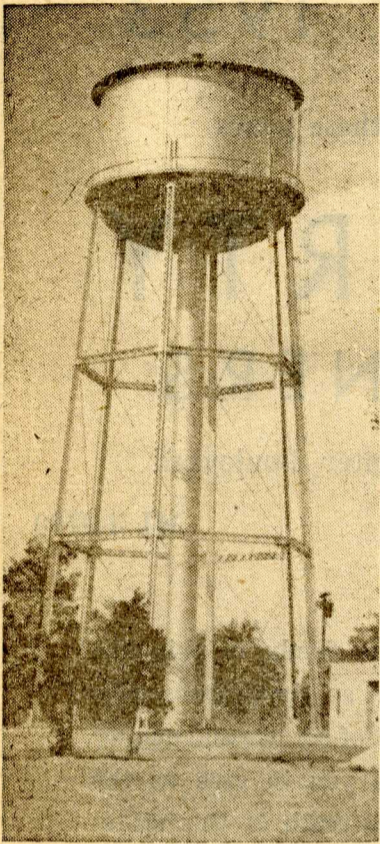
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300,000-gallon capacity.

Railroad

Continued from Page One

train never would have overtaken him and killed him."

In that suit for damages, the argument of the defense was substantiated by the fact that Mr. Williams often would assist the engineer in getting the engine started and then go to the barn, hitch up his best horse and beat the train to Detroit, often arriving in time to make provisions for unloading the freight.

IN 1840 Williams and Stevens lost control of the railroad and it was owned by various Syracuse capitalists who improved the railroad and completed the line to Pontiac in 1843.

In 1848 it came into possession of a company which was headed by H. N. Walker, who negotiated bonds for a sufficient amount to relay the tracks, and the enterprise was permanently taken out of the laughing stock class.

The Detroit and Pontiac railroad and the Oakland and Ottawa railroad (a line formed in 1848 which ran from Oakland county to Fenton in Genesee county) were consolidated in Feb. 1855 under the name of the Detroit and Milwaukee Railway company.

This afterward became a section of what was known as the Detroit, Grand Haven and Milwaukee Railway, now a division of the Grand Trunk railroad system in Michigan.

'I Remember.'

Says Mrs. James W. Cobb, 163 Oakland, "The day that a woman, who was new in Birmingham, came into my husband's drug store. 'I have found out where everything is in town,' she said, 'but can you tell me where I can find some one to stay with my baby?' Mr. Cobb put her in touch with me and I found someone who would stay with the baby.

"My husband's store was quite an information center. People would come in to ask about all kinds of things—about real estate and where to find real estate men. This was the days before radio, you know, and when any one wanted to know the outcome of baseball games, they always came into Cobb's drug store to find out. The store always had the latest baseball returns."

Says W. Knox Poppleton, 1389 Pilgrim, "The fire tower in the village that was on the north side of West Maple, a little west from the Woodward corner. It was painted red and stood about 30-40 feet high—square at the bottom and pointed at the top. This was in the days of the hook and ladder volunteer fireman days."

In its constant battle to keep up with the increasing demands on its facilities, the Birmingham city water department has to date a network of water mains buried beneath its streets, approximately 89 miles in length.

One of the most rapidly expanding facilities, the water department is among the city's younger accommodations, having been started about 1915 when a group of wells in the Maple-Baldwin street area was the main source of supply.

Operated by steam pumps, the old wells could not meet the needs of the 2,000 residents, and the backyard well was nearly as much in demand as ever. Lawn sprinkling and the like were luxuries which were denied residents in order to keep a fairly adequate supply for fire fighting.

THAT THIS plan was not wholly satisfactory was pointed out with the burning of the Field building on West Maple and the 1924 fire at the bus garage on South Woodward. "Lack of water" was responsible for considerable damage in both cases.

The program for a more adequate supply was begun in 1922, when the Baldwin well, first of the gravel wall type, was drilled.

Subsequent expansion resulted in the Lincoln well, 1926; East, 1929; West, 1937; South, 1941; Redding, 1948; Walker, 1949 and the Wakefield well which will be put into service this summer.

Under normal conditions the now active wells can produce 4,410 gallons of water per minute.

THE CITY'S first elevated storage tank of 300,000 gallon capacity was installed in 1925 at what is now the center island at Hunter and Ridgedale. This tank was moved to the DPW yards on Eton road, in 1937 to make way for the Woodward avenue by-pass, Hunter boulevard.

A second tank was installed east of Hunter and north of Maple in 1940 and a third one just south of Derby road along side the GTWRR in 1950. Both have a capacity of 500,000 gallons and are instrumental in meeting the summer's peak demands while maintaining an adequate reserve for fire protection.

The city's underground supply has furnished an average of 516,000,000 gallons a year for 20 years without showing serious lowering of the ground water level.

HOWEVER, WITH the continued growth of the city, officials are taking part in negotiations for the possible purchase of water from the Detroit water board. This organization would assure area communities that their source of supply is adequate for the next 50 years.

Newcomers to the city are frequently disturbed by an unpleasant odor and taste in the Birmingham water supply. This is due to the high iron content which also is the cause of the yellowish stain which coats surfaces of nearly all water receptacles.

Birmingham is, however, extremely fortunate in the purity of the water it uses. It is free, at all times from bacterial contamination and has a year-round temperature of 52 degrees. It is also free of any carbonic acid content.

THE ENTIRE water system is under the direction of the fire department, a unique situation, though it arose through necessity.

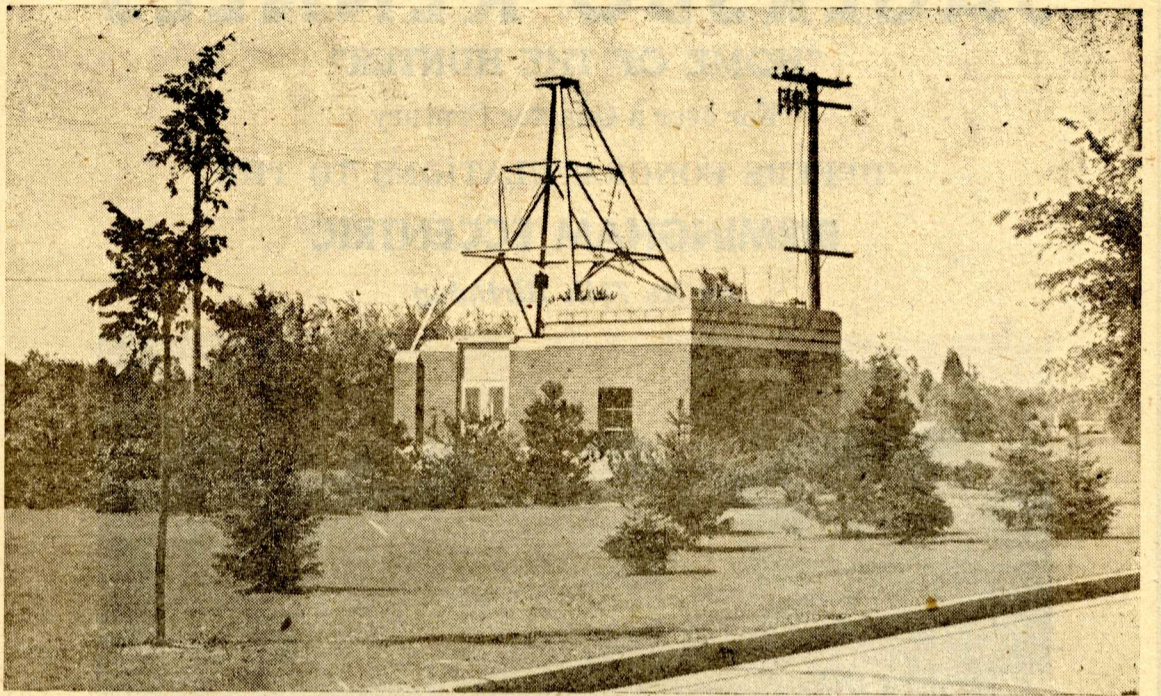
In the early days of the system, one man had the responsibility of maintaining the system, including the pumps which kept mains filled to capacity.

One day in 1924, the gentleman was nowhere to be found when a fire broke out.

The building housing the pumps was locked and firemen fought the blaze with a mere trickle of water. Almost immediately the fire depart-

More Water Was Needed

In promoting a centrally located water supply in the village, The Birmingham Eccentric in 1878 pointed out that when the old Academy was burned (in 1871) it was then thought that William Manser's house would surely go. The Eccentric urged upon its citizens the necessity of a centrally located water supply for emergencies of this kind.



THE 'WEST' WELL, ONE OF CITY'S TWO PUMPHOUSES ON LINCOLN AVE.

Entire system capable of pumping 4410 gallons of water per minute.

ment took the water department under its wing and has maintained a satisfactory relationship since that time.

DURING THOSE early days it also was customary for every

householder to suspend all operations which involved the use of water the moment he heard the fire whistle sound its first blast.

Today, with a population of approximately 21,000 persons, life continues in an even vein so far

as a water supply goes, whether fire breaks out or not.

A notable exception was last summer when residents were restricted from watering lawns and gardens for the first time in many years.

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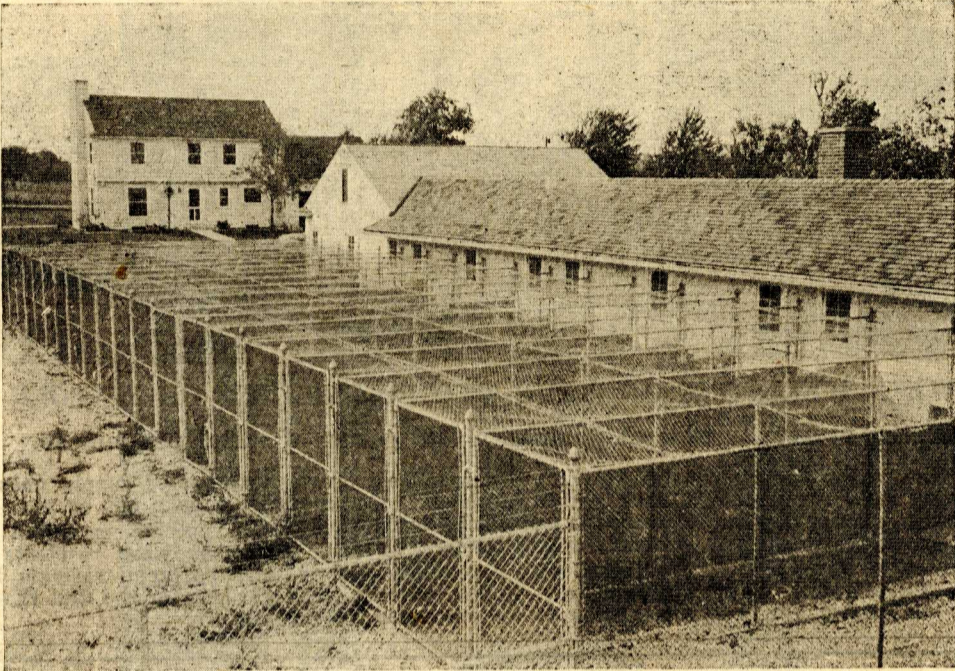
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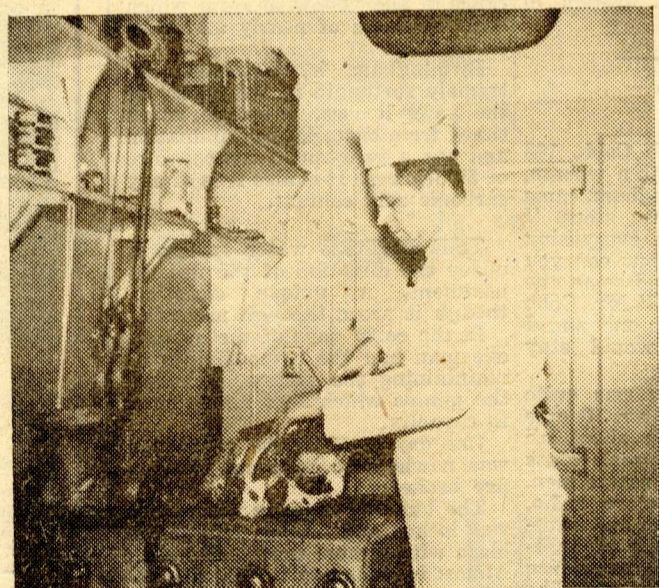
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endeavoring to serve
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Gas Service Came to Community 40 Years Ago

Forty years ago this summer—in 1913—gas first came to Birmingham. A four-inch steel pipe from the Pontiac plant of the former Michigan Light Company, which two years later became a part of Consumers Power Company, was extended to the community.

First Birmingham gas customer was J. W. Cobb, of 163 Oakland, who had a drug store on the west side of Woodward three doors south of Maple. This store, where the Craig Appliance Store now is located, was the company's first office in the city. Residents made application for services and meters and paid their bills at Cobb's.

Cobb, who well remembers his early connection with the gas industry in Birmingham, recalled recently how the late Henry Fortner, a company employee for 28 years, was the first full-time employee reporting to the Cobb Drug Store for orders left by customers.

Fortner had a push cart, later replaced with a Ford Model T, and would leave the drug store daily with his list of jobs and install service connections, meters and fuel lines to new customers. In 1914 the company had about 160 customers in the area.

IN 1915, Consumers purchased the Birmingham property of the Michigan Light Company continuing the same personnel.

It was in 1917 that the local office was moved to 317 E. Maple, and Cobb ceased to be the company's agent. This job was taken over by various clerks who were responsible to the Royal Oak office.

The year 1926 saw the office moved two doors to the west at 348 E. Maple.

First real "clerk in charge", according to Consumer's records, was Mrs. Rosalind S. Smith, who ran the office from June 1, 1932, until July 1, 1941. Mrs. Smith still is

employed by Consumers in its Royal Oak office.

SUCCEEDING HER was E. W. (Bert) Brown, who became the first local representative of the company. He retired on May 31, 1951, now lives in Adrian, Mich.

Arthur Blakeslee followed Brown as local representative.

Changes in the four decades of the company's business in Birmingham amount to a thimble history of the modern gas industry.

Forty years ago artificial gas

was supplied from coal and manufactured in several plants of the company located within the area. Almost its only use was lighting, both street and home use, with cooking and water heating fast becoming the universal fuel within the homes. Some customers used it for extra heat in small fancy heaters set into fire places.

Today, for more than 6,500 customers in the Birmingham area, the company offers many vital services.

WITH NATURAL GAS, which first reached Birmingham over Consumer lines in 1942, customers now heat their homes, dry their clothes, burn their trash, heat their water and, of course, cook their meals with a fuel that travels many

hundreds of miles to reach them—a fuel that comes humming along great pipelines from far-off Kansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Texas.

In contrast to the little office in the drug store, the company has in Birmingham one of the gas industry's most modern and beautiful customer service buildings, opened in May 1952 at the southwest corner of Merrill and Henrietta streets, in Birmingham's civic center, and across from the City Hall.

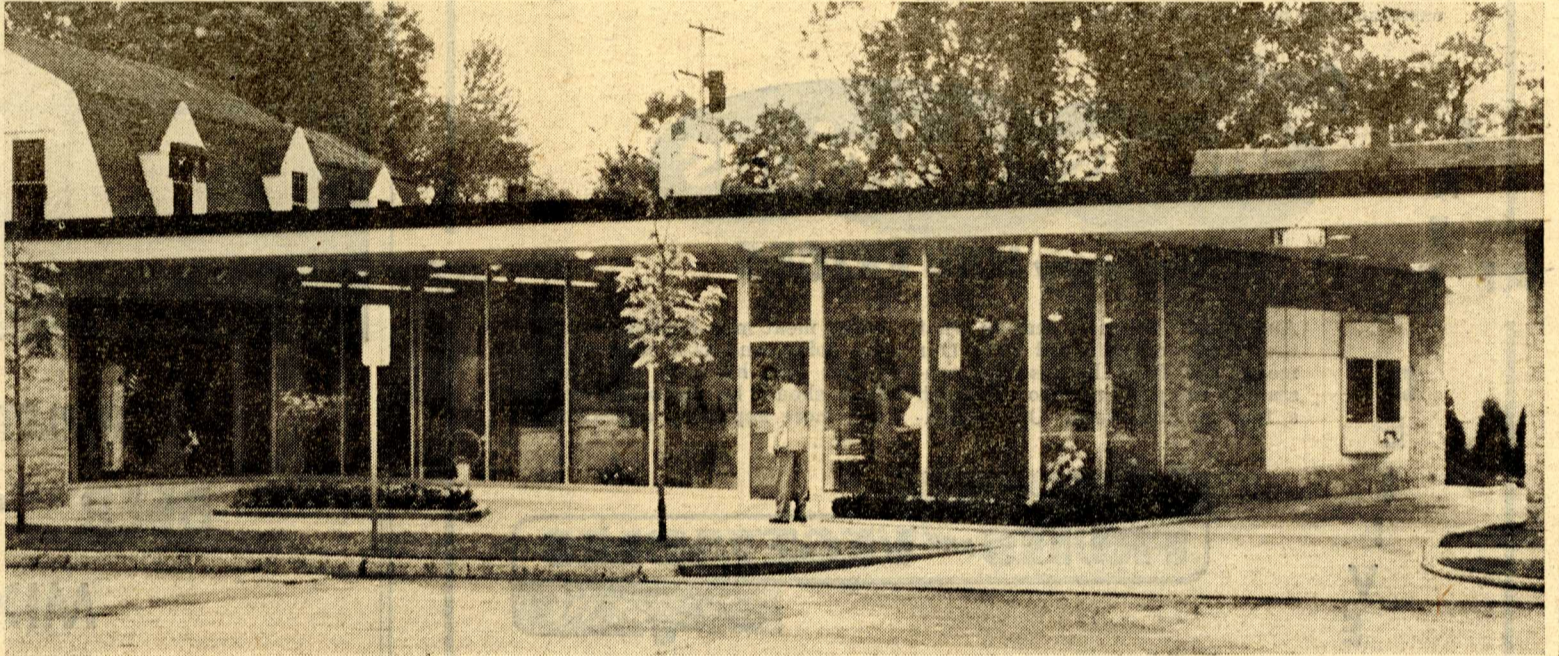
Instead of Fortner's little cart, modern service trucks, equipped with two-way radio-telephone, answer the calls of the citizens for service and assistance. Sometimes so fast it is not uncommon for a truck to arrive at a customer's

May, 1953 Page 15
BIRMINGHAM ECCENTRIC
75th Anniversary Edition

home within a few minutes after the telephone call for service is received.

A TRAINED service staff, headed by Blakeslee, is at the office and on call daily to answer the needs of the company's customers.

But Cobb still can recall the two big days of gas use in the old days—Thanksgiving and Christmas. On these holidays, when family turkey dinners were in the ovens, every employee of the gas company reported for work to meet what was then considered a terrific demand for gas.



NEW, MODERN CONSUMERS POWER OFFICE ON MERRILL STREET

First office in 1913 was in Cobb's drug store

Early Experiences On DUR Recalled

Operating the electric street cars in the early 1900's was a series of memorable adventures for Noble Gravlin, a Birmingham resident who was a motorman for the old Detroit United Railway for over 31 years.

Recounting his experiences for The Birmingham Eccentric 25 years ago, the late Mr. Gravlin recalled that in the early days of street cars in Birmingham, 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, pulled them over the hill by the power house. The power house and car barns stood on the southwest corner of Harmon and Woodward where Harmon park now is located.

Later, in August 1897, the power house was put in operation and that furnished the power for the climb up the hill.

WOODWARD AVENUE in those days when the cars were started was merely a road with cows and chickens and occasional horses and rigs. Where homes and business places now stand there were farm houses and barns and haystacks.

The biggest problem as Mr. Gravlin recalled, was to keep the cows off the tracks so the cars could maintain their schedules. One motorman, (not Mr. Gravlin who never had any kind of accident in all his years of service) killed six cows as they were being driven home from pasture.

In the early days, Mr. Gravlin found many of the "high spirited" 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 without an overcoat.

MR. GRAVLIN backed the car up and took the man in, but the man was sober enough so that he insisted on paying his fare. They took him to 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."

There was a turn table in Pontiac which turned the car around. Before the car was turned, Mr. Gravlin recalled, it was loaded with people. Those were the days when people scrambled for rides on a trolley car. They took their Sunday rides on the trolleys just as they ride in their automobiles today on a pleasant Sunday afternoon.

MR. GRAVLIN was very proud of the fact that as long as he had been a motorman, he never had hurt anyone. Once though, he remembered seeing what he thought was a rooster on the track.

As he came nearer, he discovered it was a small child playing in the sand between the tracks. He stopped just in time. That was the closest he ever came to hitting anyone and it was too close for Mr. Gravlin.

A funny incident happened to Mr. Gravlin once when a state fair was held in Pontiac. It was the first year the fair had ever been held there and the cars were crowded.

Mr. Gravlin was coming along at great speed late in the evening. It was a stormy night with thunder and lightning.

HE HAD TO STOP for some storage air and as he was going around to put the air in the brakes, he saw on the cowcatcher a little fellow about eight years old sitting there in the pouring rain and hanging on for dear life.

"I spent all my money at the fair," the little fellow explained, "and I didn't have any left to get home." Of course, Mr. Gravlin took him in.

On the site of the car barns in Birmingham was a flowing well of cold, clear water. People used to come on the cars from Detroit and Pontiac to enjoy a long refreshing drink of this water.

Many would bring containers, Mr. Gravlin recalled, and take large quantities of it back home with them.



Ageless Beauty

Jewelry is the answer . . . everyone likes, and likes to own, good jewelry and we have always taken pride in the selling of the many fine lines and items which we feature. For an expression of truest sentiment, gifts of jewelry provide eternal beauty as well as everlasting good taste.

MEN'S and LADIES' WATCHES — EXPERT WATCH REPAIR
GIFTS OF SILVER — CHINA — BRASS — FIGURINES

WALTON'S JEWELRY

154 West Maple

Phone MI 4-3140



Best Wishes
to the
**BIRMINGHAM
ECCENTRIC**
on its
75th
Anniversary

BIG FOOD VALUES

We Take This
Occasion

to reaffirm our opinion
that Birmingham meets
all tests for a fine
community in which
to live.

... big in the sense of nutrition and
competitive prices. In the sixteen
years supplying Birmingham grocery
needs we have found that to keep a
customer you have to provide the best

foods at lowest cost with friendly
service. Our faithful patrons confirm
that at Fisher's Market this is the
case.

Our Choice

Meats are delicious

at these very **LOW PRICES**

AT FREE

AT

And why? Because, that is what
the customer wants and gets. Our
meats are fresh because we con-
stantly bring in new to replenish
a fast moving stock. Our experi-

enced meat men KNOW what they
are doing, and as a result the cus-
tomer gets his cuts, cut the way
they should be for better cooking
and more appealing appearance.

DELIVERY



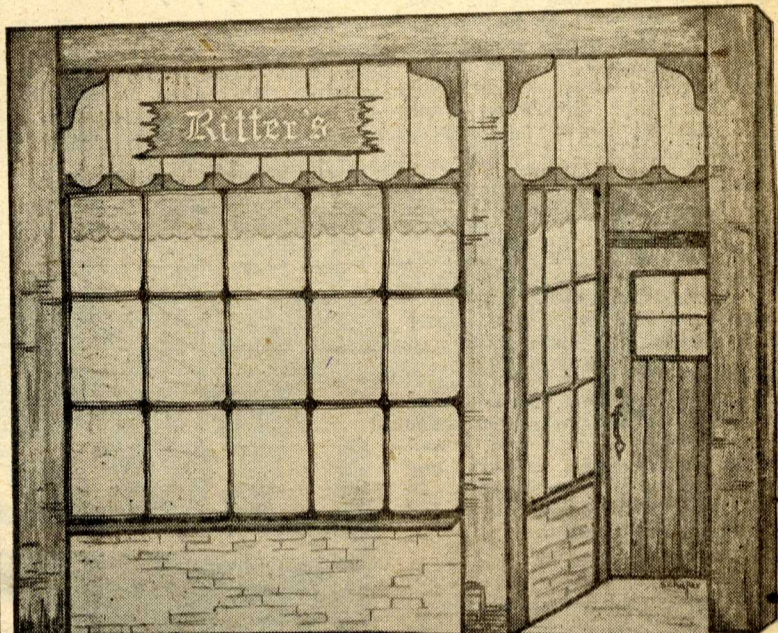
In this department we can take great satisfaction. Our
produce is garden fresh and constantly stocked with the
latest crops. Here again we provide what the customer
wants ... FRESH fruits and vegetables.

FISHER'S MARKET

1248 S. WOODWARD

MI 4-4425

Ritter's Beverages



COMPLETE LINE OF
BEER • WINE
MIXERS

— Delivery —

MIDWEST 4-3444

297 East Maple

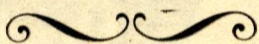
Birmingham



Clarence Clohset
Owner

Best Wishes to The Eccentric

FOR ANOTHER 75 YEARS OF PROGRESS

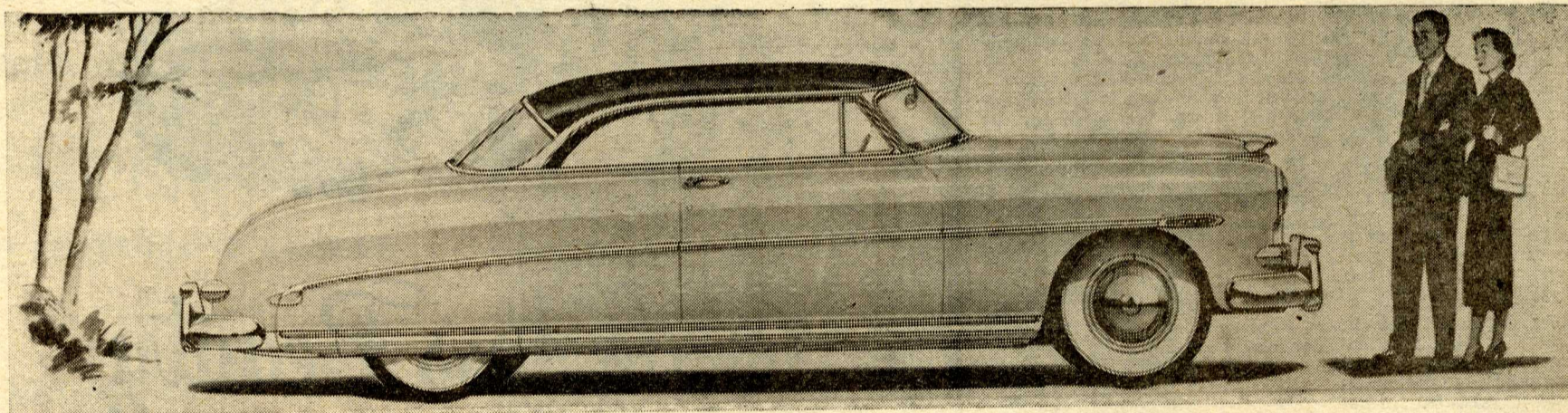


Drive Hudson



George Brown
General Manager

FOR SAFETY—FOR COMFORT—FOR MAXIMUM MOTORING PLEASURE



Bonnie Richards
Bookkeeper

CLOHSET HUDSON

SALES AND SERVICE

820 South Woodward Avenue

Phone Midwest 4-9200



Marion Thomas
Sales Manager