

Library Founded 95 Years Ago

Miss Baldwin Was Pioneer Of Association

By ETHEL SIMMONS
Staff Writer

Forty-eight volumes made up the collection of Birmingham's Library Association which was pioneered in 1869 by Martha "Mattie" Baldwin, a school teacher, woman suffragist and leader in many community activities.

And when a "permanent" home for the collection was found in 1875 in an old Methodist church on Merrill St., books were distributed only on Saturdays and limited one to a patron.

Contrast this with the present-day Baldwin Public Library used by 12,327 library-card holders in Birmingham; 2,630 in Beverly Hills and 675 in Bloomfield Hills, plus 2,795 Bloomfield Township and 446 Troy "non-residents" who pay for library cards, borrowing a total of 387,656 books within the last 12 months.

SAYS JEANNE Lloyd, head librarian, "With a staff of 15 full-time members and 26 part-time members, Birmingham's busy public library of today is a far cry from the little library started by the Ladies Library Society almost 100 years ago.

"It was the vision and action of these library pioneers that gave Birmingham a head start in the 19th century over many other villages and cities of the state."

BIRMINGHAM WAS a town of 600 residents on November 1, 1869, when 19 men and women who belonged to a disbanded Good Templar lodge voted to turn their share of the lodge treasury into a book fund to start a small library.

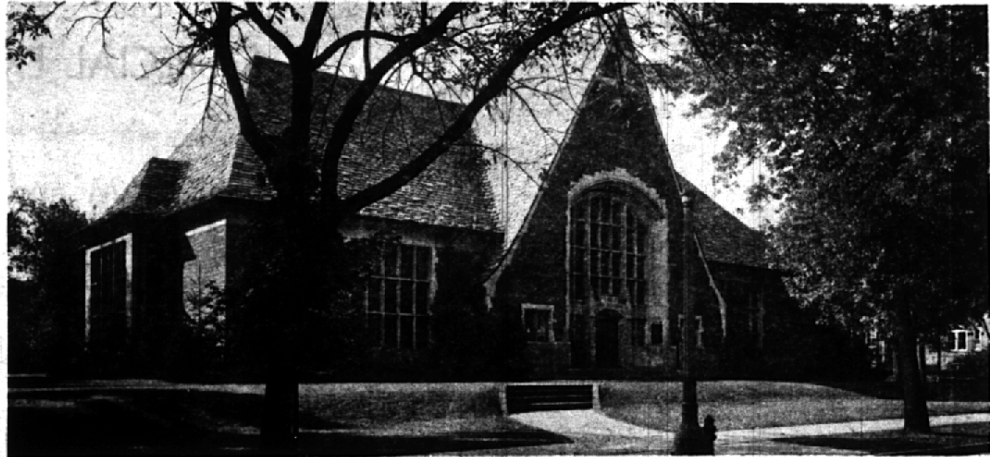


MARTHA BALDWIN

Cows on the Loose Spur Crack Down

In the days when Birmingham was a small village, most everyone kept a cow on his premises, as well as a horse and the usual number of chickens. When allowed to roam, the cows ruined so many gardens and flower beds that the law was brought in. Samuel C. Mill, Birmingham's marshal in 1878, had to do something about it. And he did!

A warning was published in The Eccentric "informing those of this town who keep cows, that said cows must not be allowed to run nights or they will be found impounded in the morning".



THIS IS THE BALDWIN Public Library as it was built in 1927; an addition of 5,200 square feet was made to the structure in October, 1960, to house circulation and technical processing departments. The Ladies Library Society had died in 1907, and a \$40

Nineteen more members joined the society a short time later. At the first annual meeting, the treasurer's report showed that from \$68.47 on hand \$49.75 had been spent for the first book collection.

MISS BALDWIN was selected as secretary and librarian during a meeting in her mother's home where the books were gathered. In 1875 the Ladies Library Society, as it was called then, moved into quarters in the old Methodist Church.

As the book collection grew, the Library Society sponsored parties, cake sales, socials, fairs, minstrel shows, plays, baby shows, lawn parties and dances to support its work.

The society purchased a lot on the southeast corner of Woodward and Maple Aves. with the hopes that township and village authorities would utilize the structure for

a community center housing a library.

THIS EFFORT did not meet with success. However, the township bought the old church from the society with the stipulation that the group be allowed to lease one room and continue the library there.

A lot on the corner of Woodward and Maple was chosen as the site for the next library home. Bricks to be used in the library were sold to town donors; Miss Baldwin loaned \$2,500 on a mortgage.

The building, which cost \$4,500 and was situated on a lot valued at \$4,500 opened on Dec. 1, 1895, but benefit projects continued to be held to pay for the library.

Mrs. Kate Alger was librarian, and there were 1,820 books in the collection.

IN THE WINTER of 1896 the library society tackled a variety of activities, including publishing The

turned over to the board of the Birmingham Public Library. In 1912, the library was renamed Baldwin Public Library in honor of Martha Baldwin, library pioneer and community leader.

Eccentric for one week as a fund-raising promotion.

The library society had supported the library for 38 years when in 1907 it turned over the property to the village to be supported by a half mill tax. Miss Baldwin canceled the mortgage and donated her equity.

Stipulations in the deed asked that the library be maintained in a building and supported by a half mill tax and that the village offices should have their quarters there.

AS BIRMINGHAM'S population increased, police, fire and other city departments gradually moved into the building. The library remained in these cramped quarters until 1927 when the cornerstone was laid for the present library on Martin, between Bates and Chester.

Daisy Durkee was the first librarian, and members of the board were Mrs. Retta Barr, Clarence Vliet, Mrs. Arthur Hartwell, Mrs.

J. H. Marlotte, J. B. Howarth and Earl Potter.

A bond issue for \$175,000 was passed in July, 1926, and Burrows and Eurich, Architects, were engaged for the job. The groundbreaking for the library was considered the first important step in construction of Birmingham's civic center.

JENNIE KEYES was the only survivor of the original Library Society present at cornerstone-laying ceremonies. She presented the library with a clock that was hung over the main desk.

In 1932, a lack of funds prompted organization of the Friends of the Library who helped raise \$100 for new books and received support through rental fees.

An addition of 5,200 square feet was completed for the library in October, 1960. Housed here are the circulation department and technical processing of books including ordering and cataloging.

Post Office Finds Home in 1940

By DAVE PHILPO
Staff Writer

Birmingham waited over 100 years for its first permanent post office.

And, during the early years the post office was moved from pillar to post, and was located on eight different sites.

It is little wonder that residents recall Saturday, May 18, 1940, as a milestone in Birmingham's long history.

On that day, over 2,000 spectators packed the streets and lawns surrounding the Martin, Bates and W. Maple area to hear and witness the official dedication of the city's present post office.

THE CEREMONY, which included a luncheon and parade, climaxed many years of hopeful dreaming and intensive planning by the original founders of Birmingham to establish a suitable civic center to fill the many needs of the growing community.

Joseph A. Byrne, postmaster at the opening of the \$155,000 building, described the addition as one "that was built to last 100 years" because of its exceptional modern Georgian architecture as compared to the Old English design of the neighboring library and municipal buildings.

The postal service that was to follow was a far cry from the service available when Birmingham was a one-horse village in its earlier stages.

IN 1819, when Birmingham was just beginning to attract travelers going from Detroit to Pontiac along Saginaw Trail, now Woodward Ave., mail was brought from Detroit by horseback.

Those desiring postal service as early as 1821 had to hitch a horse to a buggy, saddle the family mare, or walk to the corner of Lone Pine and Woodward. For it was here on March 24, 1821, that the village, then known as "Piety Hill," established its first post office.

Since Birmingham did not receive its city charter until late 1833, the village did not have city limits and the first post office was known as the Bloomfield Post Office.

Sidney Dole was the town's first postmaster.

HE WAS appointed in 1821 by President James Monroe and served until April 2, 1825. According to old records, Dale was the lone post office custodian.

In 1826 Ezra S. Parke took over as the second head of the Bloomfield office.

The name was changed to Birmingham on April 5, 1838, and the post office began the first of eight re-locations until it became situated in its present quarters on Martin.

It was on this fifth day of April that the office pulled up stakes and moved to a group of stores on Woodward near Maple. Sullivan R. Kelsey was postmaster in the first Birmingham post office.

The office was located in a small village retail store making it possible for the townfolk to buy groceries, hardware and stamps under the same roof.

IT WAS LATER moved around 1895, to a store built by J. A. Allen Bigelow on Maple Avenue on the location now occupied by Shain's. George H. Mitchell, a co-owner of The Birmingham Eccentric, was postmaster at this time.

The second post office was in a store owned by Mitchell and Almeron Whitehead "where every-

body came and knew everybody else."

Before the turn of the century, the home of the postal service moved to its third location. This time only a short distance had to be covered in moving the office across Pierce.

In 1917 it was again moved into a building which E. C. Huston had built next to his hardware store. At this time, Mitchell was serving his second term as postmaster.

In 1924 this building became inadequate so Huston built a larger building on the north side of the store.

AS BIRMINGHAM grew, so did the need for a larger post office.

So, while the other civic organizations were moving into their new offices in the municipal building, the post office moved into a building constructed by John B. Williams on the present site of Beck Cleaners. This was in 1928 and James W. Cobb was postmaster.

It wasn't long before the post office also found these quarters too cramped. With the civic building program well underway, the city commission planned for the construction of the present Birmingham post office building to house the postal activities alone.

Roland Reese, who was named acting postmaster in 1954, is the 15th postmaster to guide service in this community since the early days of Birmingham.



JOHN A. BIGELOW
His store housed post office