

# City Style Today Is 'Charming'

## Shops Are Blend Of Old and New

BY MARY BAHN  
Staff Writer

The oft-heard remark in downtown Birmingham—"we don't come here merely to shop; we also enjoy just looking at the stores"—can be considered a tribute to the city's business establishments.

From the quaint and colonial shops on Pierce street to the sleek, modern look of Hamilton Row, Birmingham can definitely boast of style.

The early American charm of Pierce street owes much to the remodeling of the old Edison substation some years ago. The old structure was purchased by J. H. McBride who then had the building jacked up and rebuilt to its present two stories.

**THE FINISHED** job was named the Williamsburg Building and is composed of three units, housing the Glassford Shop, the Eldon E. Generous Custom Tailor shop and Village Travel Service.

The facade on the east side of Woodward at the Hamilton intersection in the early 1930's was drab and uninspiring in design. The now-inviting front of Bodine's, for example, was formerly framed with awning and cardboard signs loudly proclaiming the establishment as a newstand.

**BIRMINGHAM'S** main intersection at Maple and Woodward has

also kept pace with the rest of the city in its growth. The area was formerly dominated by a huge brick building housing the library, jail and fire departments. It completely dwarfed the small-and-drab shops clustered around the oversized building.

Today, the unpretentious but sleek Briggs Building houses several retail outlets, doctors' offices and attorneys' suites.

Constructed in 1929 by the late Walter O. Briggs, the building has 42,000 square feet of floor space. In 1950 the building was modernized and the second floor finished. The building is now owned by Bernard F. Powell of Bloomfield Hills.

The attractive appearance of downtown Birmingham is enhanced by its tastefully-designed stores, but its public facilities must have eye-appeal as well.

**THE LIBRARY** was moved from its original location at Maple and Woodward in 1927. Work on the addition began in October, 1959, and was completed a year later.

The parking lot, located on Woodward a few hundred feet north of Willits, has been pleasingly landscaped with rail fences and shrubbery. It was opened in late summer, 1961. At a cost of \$590,000, the lot holds 390 cars.

It was in 1922 that The Birmingham Eccentric and Averil Press moved into the building at 220 N. Woodward.

The two businesses remained there for 38 years. Then, in May,



**HARDLY RECOGNIZABLE TODAY** is the Woodward-Hamilton intersection of the 1930's. Lacking style and a pleasant exterior, the facade was renovated in its now-famous Early American charm through the interests

of the owners. The refurbishing that began here soon spread to other parts of the business district as well as the central Birmingham area.

1960, they moved into a modern plant at 1225 Bowers.

In April, 1961, Demery's opened its new, streamlined modernistic department store on the old site of The Eccentric.

**FROM THE** first handful of business establishments to settle in town at the turn of the century, the number has grown till now nearly 300 stores and companies call Birmingham "home."

Although large department stores, such as Jacobson's which

first opened its doors on Nov. 16, 1950, and Demery's, enjoy a goodly percentage of business, the city takes great pride in its specialty shops.

Birmingham certainly has its share of drug stores, banks, advertising agencies, insurance companies, men's and ladies' clothing shops and real estate firms but Woodward Avenue's nickname—"Auto Alley"—shows the versatility of the town's business enterprises. Eight automotive dealers—all keeping within Birmingham's

tradition of attractive exteriors—form a two-block community of its own on Woodward Ave.

**AGAIN AS** a contrast, three art galleries—Kenilworth, Raven and the Little Gallery—have made Birmingham their home.

The listing of business establishments in town could go on and on. One common denominator true in all local businesses is their extending pride in being a vital part of Birmingham's ever-growing civic heritage.

# 'City of the Future' Becoming Reality

By LARRY EVOE  
Staff Writer

The basis for a downtown Birmingham business district of the future is already beginning.

Using the Central Business District Development plan as a guide, the city has started to develop a Birmingham of tomorrow.

The CBDD plan, which was paid for by a committee of merchants,

was first presented to the city in June, 1961. The 28-page report was prepared by Vilican-Leman & Associates, planning consultants.

**THE PURPOSE** of the report

was to present an analysis of the central business district data of Birmingham and to suggest practical recommendations for the improvement of the CBD to the year 1980.

Birmingham's City Commission adopted the report in principle and has implemented several of its early stages.

The report indicated that Birmingham's business district problems were similar to those of other areas throughout the country. Typical of these were congested streets, insufficient and inconvenient parking, vacant stores and conflicting vehicular and pedestrian movements.

Birmingham's downtown area also had pleasant qualities such as lack of conflicting industrial uses, effectual off-street parking, relative compactness of business buildings, lack of extensive residential blight and the presence of distinctive grouping.

The CBD report was divided into two major categories: existing conditions and resolutions for improvement.

**DIVERSION OF** nonbusiness traffic was urged as a major consideration in the plan, but vehicular access into the business area was termed just as important.

Along this line the city has already signed an agreement with the Oakland County Road Commission for the opening and improvement of 14 Mile Road and is awaiting approval of the Village of Beverly Hills.

In general Birmingham's CBD area is described as being bounded by Hunter, Oakland, business and parking areas north of Willits, Chester, Brown and the business areas south of Brown and Forest. The most critical improvements

included: peripheral route right-of-way, parking area expansion and the construction of the peripheral route.

**THE CITY** has already constructed a temporary parking lot in the block south of Shain Park to help solve the parking problem in the southwest quadrant of the CBD and is expected to build the permanent lot in the near future.

Property on the corner of Forest and Woodward has been purchased by the city to straighten out the intersection as part of the peripheral route.

In addition, negotiations are under way for the purchase of right-of-way in connection with the widening of Chester and Oakland.

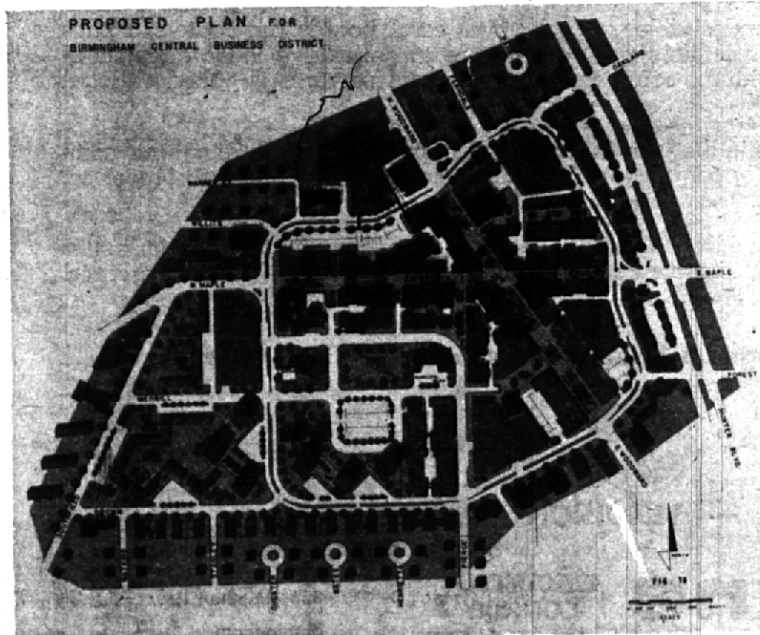
The estimated cost of the peripheral route has been set between \$865,000 and \$1,600,000 including property acquisition and construction costs.

**ANOTHER** important phase in the development of the downtown Birmingham of tomorrow is the completion of the Civic Center.

Currently the center is made up of the Municipal Building, Baldwin Public Library, Shain Park and The Community House.

A special civic design committee has been working for several months on drafting ideas for possible incorporation in the Civic Center and The Community House has announced major expansion plans including a large auditorium.

In general, the CBD plan calls for the closing of many streets in the downtown area to allow for a smoother flow of both vehicular and pedestrian traffic. The final phase calls for the construction of concourses and malls throughout the business district.



**THIS DRAWING** shows the CBDD plan for the downtown Birmingham business district of 1980. It outlines the peripheral route to carry traffic around the business area, location of stores, access routes to stores and

the possible parking and pedestrian malls. Some phases of the plan, such as the new parking lot in the block south of Shain Park, are already being put into action.