

Chamber Organized In 1947

The problems facing the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce today are much the same as those that confronted the group when it was first formed in November, 1947.

Organized as a fact-finding group, interested in obtaining accurate information pertinent to the various business and community affairs, the chamber replaced the Birmingham Retail Merchants Association.

The merchants organization, in various forms, had been active since the early 1920's, when a group of 15 or 20 merchants banded together to study mutual problems.

Although preliminary meetings were held in the fall of 1947, it was not until Jan. 29, 1948, that the first board of directors met.

GENARO FLOREZ was elected president; Ralph A. Wilson, vice president; Dr. Robert J. Mason, secretary; and Foster Toothacker, treasurer. Directors included Paul N. Averill, Dr. George Marlin, John E. Marts, John K. Stevenson and George J. Thomas.

When first organized the chamber listed 166 business members and about 80 residential members. Temporary headquarters were at 772 S. Woodward.

Clarence Vliet, former superintendent of schools, was appointed acting executive secretary until a full-time man could be found to direct the chamber's activities.

ON APRIL 5, 1948, Charles Mortensen was hired as secretary-manager, a post he held until December, 1963. Mortensen was replaced by Knowles Smith.



THE 1963-64 activities of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce were guided by these five executives. From left are Richard J. Thomas, Jr., assistant treasurer; Knowles American Furniture and about a year ago switched to its present headquarters above Lake's Jewelers.

Other projects the chamber undertook included more parking facilities, better City-public relations, better business practices, post office service and other public services.

DURING THE next few years the chamber offices moved to E. Maple near Woodward, then jumped to a second-floor location above what is now Smith's Early

One of the first actions of the chamber was to secure a secretary of state branch office for the city. License plates went on sale about a month after the organization was established.

Since its conception the chamber has developed a number of programs designed to be a great benefit not only to the business area but also to the community as a whole.

One of the group's most successful affairs is the annual Halloween party and parade. Cosponsored with the schools, recreation department and the Birmingham YMCA, the event each year draws thousands of youngsters and their parents to the downtown area for

an evening of fun, food and entertainment.

THE PRIMARY purpose of the party is to cut down on vandalism on Halloween, and police department records show the chamber's effort has gone a long way in helping to achieve this mark.

In 1961 the chamber presented the City with the results of a two-year study on the central business district.

The plan, the Central Business District Development study, is serving as the basic concept for future development of Birmingham.

Another highly successful program of the chamber is the annual December Men's Night observance. Several weeks before Christmas the merchants hang out the "men only" signs, serve refreshments and display the latest in fashion for the gentlemen of the town without having the women around.

THE CHAMBER also takes an active part in the Michigan Week and Arts Festival celebrations. Its members maintain a liaison between city government and the chamber body.

The Christmas lighting and decoration in the downtown area is a chamber project. The group tries to keep a tight control on solicitation and has a standing committee studying the city's parking problems.

The 1964 Birmingham Chamber of Commerce has more than 300 members, with 282 separate businesses listed on the membership rolls.

IN ADDITION to the parent body, the organization still boasts a Retail Merchants Division which elects its own slate of officers each year.

There are 13 members on the board of directors of the main chamber. Nine members are elected for three-year terms. Of these nine, there are six who have served on the board previously. Three directors are elected for a one-year period. These three represent divisions of professional men, retailers and manufacturers. The other four are directors-at-large.

Young and Active Business-Civic Group: Jaycees

One of Birmingham's youngest—but most active—business and civic organizations is the city's Junior Chamber of Commerce, organized on April 10, 1946.

Before that time, the first five charter members decided that the town needed an organization of younger businessmen to improve the commercial life and give better service to the community in which they lived and worked.

Larry Nelson was named the group's first president, and charter members were Nelson, Jack Andrews, Ed Steele, Wayne Mortimer, and George Marlin. In keeping with their stress on youth, age limitations were made to keep membership, now numbering over 50, between the ages of 21 and 35.

Early meetings were held at the Kingsley, then the Fox and Hounds, The Community House and finally the new YMCA, which the group helped support and build in 1951.

ALTHOUGH THEIR civic projects are numerous today, their first was perhaps their most publicly outstanding and gained nationwide attention. This was their "Friendship Food Caravan" in 1947, in which more than 24,000 pounds of foodstuffs were collected in Birmingham to be sent to European war victims, particularly in France.

The Jaycees were also local sponsors of the Teenage Road-E-O, a nationwide driving contest which selected the best "all-around" young driver.

The Jaycees golf tournament for youngsters 18 through 18 was a popular event beginning in 1946. In an event supported by most of the leading golf associations in the United States, the local winner was given the opportunity to

compete in state and national tournaments.

MORE RECENT activities of the Jaycees are as varied as they are popular.

They have included their "old-fashioned toy sale" (proceeds going to charity), helping with instructional voting machines before the 1962 election, providing a free jitney service to give residents a ride to the polls in 1960, a car "safety check" in 1961 to prevent accidents and the annual pumpkin sale, aiding a scholarship fund.

Keeping the Jaycees busy this year is the Michigan Week parade and a community development study, both of which they are organizing.

THE CULMINATION of the year for the Jaycees, however, is the presentation of the Distinguished Service Award for outstanding community service by any Birmingham young man.

Since its initial presentation in 1952, awards have been given to William Roberts, Edward Wilson, Arthur Blakeslee, Dick Wilson, James Couzens, Jack Roberts, Harold Kalbfleish, Arthur Lake, James Willoughby, Charles F. Adams, Henry M. Hogan, Jr., and this year's winner, F. Ward Ouradnik.

Past presidents of the organization, beginning with Larry Nelson in 1946, are Mike Quinn (living in the south), Jim McCoy (deceased), Dr. Edson Pool, Jim Cole, Harry Smart, Jim Couzens, Jim Edwards, Claude Kidd, Jr., Bud Carrigan, Al Firth, Dick Ernst, Dick Benson (living in the East), Bob Wilson, Jr., Donald Morris, Jim Willoughby, Patrick Deighan and E. Gerry Dudley, current president.



THE EXECUTIVE BOARD of the 1964 Birmingham Junior Chamber of Commerce includes (from left, standing) F. Ward Ouradnik; Durwood Allen, Pat Deighan, Bob Thorson, Roger Crimmins, Gerry Dudley and Al Marshall. The organization, composed of area businessmen aged 21 to 35,

plans activities throughout the year for the benefit of the youths of Birmingham. Current projects include the teen golf tournament, part of a state-wide event sponsored by the Jaycees, and a special project for the Michigan Week celebration.

PTA Council: A Guiding Hand

The starting date of Birmingham's PTA Council is vaguely reported at 1920, since early records have been destroyed. Hill, Adams and Baldwin school were the original three member units.

Some of the first projects undertaken were the serving of milk during recess and petitioning for playground equipment.

In 1926 an extensive campaign for free textbooks was carried on, with the board of education agreeing to provide them in 1927.

THE PRESENT PTA Council reflects the growth of the school population of the area with 21

member units. Membership includes an executive committee of PTA presidents, together with delegates from each member unit, school principals and the superintendent.

The Council was formed to give member associations an opportunity for conference and cooperation. In addition to providing programs of general interest, the Council undertakes to keep the public informed on school needs and programs.

The Council made headlines in the fall of 1963 by passing resolutions condemning the sale of liquor or tobacco to minors.

Roadoiling Programs Date Back to 1912

Birmingham's streets and roads have long been under discussion or criticism as an item in The Birmingham Eccentric of 1912 proves.

At that time an appeal was made to the president of the village "to please give our streets another dose of oil, especially on Woodward avenue."

On one September afternoon, it was stated, during a four-hour period, by actual count, "400 autos and 38 street cars passed over Woodward avenue, rolling up clouds of dust oil right."