A Century Of Government

By LARRY EVON
Staff Writer

Birmingham has the oldest governmental body in this section of Oakland County. The county board of supervisors established Birmingham as a corporate village on January 8, 1864.

THE 1920 VILLAGE commission was composed of seven members. From left are Commissioner W. W. Henry, Lee A. White, President H. T. Ellery, Commissioner Hope F. Halgren and Scott Horsey. Standing are H. J. Echtridge (left) and Laur- ence Hubert.

THE 1964 CITY commission is also composed of seven members. From left are Commissioner William E. Roberts, Carl F. Ingram, Mayor William H. Burgum, Mayor Pro Tem Robert W. Pugs, Commissioners David F. Brock and Ralph A. Main. Commissioner Charles W. Rentfrew was out of town and unavailable for the photograph.

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Birmingham has the oldest governmental body in this section of Oakland County. The county board of supervisors established Birmingham as a corporate village on January 8, 1864.

The home of our city government almost did not become a home at one time. Between July and December of 1897, when the rapidly-expanding village of Birmingham was attempting to find a home for its increasing municipal activities, a difference of opinion existed as to the completion of the proposed new municipal building.

A portion of the village commission was in favor of the completion of the new civic project because the people had voted for the new building.

The other faction of the commission, although not believing the new office necessary at the time, objected to the proposed site for the building because the documents were not in hand in time.

The stirs continued for several months, at which time the local citizens sought to stop the entire proceedings in the Circuit Court.

The latter faction lost out in its fight when it failed to carry its case in court. Finally the village received a decree favorable to the completion of the project.

MUNICIPAL offices were formerly housed in the old Baldwin Public Library, on the southeast corner of Central and Maple.

The first Civic Center Plan, initiated in 1928, during the reign of President Charles C. Shain, conceived a separate municipal building. The best interest of the community would be served, it was said, by a public library and the village offices were separated into their own buildings.

Wrong Prescription Prompts Horrific Measures

On a day's visit to the big city, a Birmingham man bought some medicine from a druggist who sold him the wrong prescription. When the Birmingham man got home, he died of his "medicine" which turned out to be alizarine.

Charles J. Shain (1878): They've been trying to pull me under by themselves for the past week.

In fact, early records indicated at that time it was the "only village large or small" in Bloomfield Township. Although it wasn't incorporated until 1804, the town was first platted on August 25, 1850.

The community was described as being a village of "wealth and conservatism" as well as being a healthy and "most beautiful" place to live.

Residents in the newly-formed village wanted little time in setting up their own governing body. The first local election was held at the home of James Grisly on March 1, 1854.

J. C. K. Crooks was elected president of the board of seven trustees.

The other village fathers included George L. Lee, Robert J. Mitchell, N. H. Hill, Hugh Irving, John Rouse and C. W. Jenkins. Hill was named to the post of clerk.

In May of 1854 Alanson Puttridge became Birmingham's first town marshal and Robert the first treasurer.

The trustees borrowed $200 in the spring of 1864 for "village improvements" and the newly-formed government was officially in business.

In 1864 a new charter was granted which provided for six commissioners. On March 8, 1864 Frank Hagerman was elected the new president of the village.

For many years village business was carried out in homes and stores. By the early 1900's offices were opened along the business avenue of Maple and Woodward.

In October of 1917 village residents approved the adoption of a new charter calling for a city-type of government.

The charter went into effect on Feb. 15, 1918 and the new officers of the city took office on March 3. The commission was set at three members.

G. A. Abbott of Groves Pointes

Shain became Birmingham's first "business manager" at a salary of $100. The contract provided a clause for the privilege of discharging if not satisfactory.

Abbot's contract was approved by the village commission on April 3, 1918.

The first planning commission was appointed and organized on Feb. 3, 1920.

Still another charter change was made in 1927 raising the number of commissioners from six to eight and retained the village manager and provided for a village president.

With the growth of Birmingham as a city in 1933, the village became the city and John Rouse served as mayor.

The city manager was removed and the Code Commission was set up in 1949 in northern Oakland County and Birmingham became a member of the city, schools, and Community House contributed $100 to the city. In 1933 zoning board of appeals was established and 16 members were appointed to the electrical examination board.

The Hospital Authority Board was set up in 1957 in northern Oakland County and Birmingham became a member of the hospital, schools, and Community House.

The first parking study committee was appointed in 1948 and it was joined in 1951 by the newest official city board building the library and the building board of appeals.

Birmingham Woman (Objected to Horses Stamping up Ground)

A Mrs. Electra Kyes, who lived on Mill St., near the Baptist Church, complained publicly one day in August, 1933.

An announcement was inserted in the local paper informing the public of a plan to get rid of the horses that trod down the lawns of the Baptist Church.

Shain, who hired as a foreman, was immediately acquainted with the ornamental interest of Birmingham.

Charles J. Shain, another drugstore owner, was born in 1878 in London, England, and came to the United States in 1912. Shain, who was a grocer at the time, was immediately acquainted with the ornamental interest of Birmingham.

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