Library Founded 95 Years Ago

Miss Baldwin Was Pioneer Of Association

BY ETHEL SIMMONS

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 a noted worker in many community activities.

And when a "permanent" home for the collection was found in 1874 in an old Methodist church on Merritt St., books were distributed only on Saturdays and limited one to a patron.

Contrast this with the present-day Baldwin Public Library used by 12,287 library-card holders in Birmingham; 2,800 in Beverly Hills and 676 in Bloomfield Hills, plus 2,756 Bloomfield Township and 464 Troy "non-resident" who pay for library cards, borrowing a total of 387,606 books within the last 12 months.

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

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

BIRMINGHAM was a town of 460 residents on November 1, 1839, when men and women who were longed to a disband Good Templar lodge and said that they would build a lodge treasury into a book fund to start a small library.

Miss Baldwin was the pioneer of the Association which was organized in 1869.

Nineteen more members joined the society a short time later. At the first annual meeting, the treasurer's report showed that $80.47 on hand $49.75 had been spent for the first book collection.

MRS. B. M. Baldwin was selected as the speaker as a librarian during the meeting in her mother's home where the books were gathered. In 1869, the Ladies Library Society was as it was called, moved into the first library in the old Methodist Church.

As the book collection grew, the Library Society sponsored parties, cake sales, socials, talks, 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 hope that township and village authorities would utilize the structure for a community center housing a li- brary.

THE EFFORT did not meet with success. However, the town ship bought the old church for $250. The town, in return, provided the group was able to lease one room and continue the library.

On a lot on the corner of Woodward and Maple, a church was completed in 1870. On October 2, 1870, the library moved into the church. Mrs. Kate A. Alger was librarian and there were 1,200 books in the collection.

In the WINTER of 1896 the library society tackled a variety of activities, including publishing The Eclectic for one week as a fundraising promotion.

The library society had supported the library for 12 years when in 1877 it turned over the property to the village to be supported by a half mill tax.

Miss Baldwin gave a number of small donations and sold her horse to help the library.

As Birmingham's population increased, police, fire and other city departments gradually moved into the building. The library remained in these cramped quarters until 1907 when the cornerstone was laid for the present Library on Martin, between Bates and Chester. Daisy Duckworth was the first librarian, and two of the board were Mrs. Ritta G. Barr, Clarence Viett. Mrs. Arthur Harwell, Mrs. J. H. Marlette, J. B. Haworth and Mrs. H. D. Murray.

A hard task for $175,000 was passed in July, 1928, and Russell & Eastin, Architects, were engaged for the job, with ground breaking for the library was completed at the first important post in the construction of Birmingham's civic center.

JENNIE KEYS was the only survivor of the original Library Society present at ceremonies opening the new building.

The new building was completed for the library in October, 1900. Reoused here are the circulation department and technical processing of books including ordering and cataloging.

Post Office Finds Home in 1940

By DAVE PHILO

ARMS CITY WINTER

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 raised so many gardens and flower beds that the law was brought in. Samuel C. Mill, Birmingham's merchant in 1878, had to do something about it. And he did!

A warning was published in The Eclectic "enforcing" those of this town who have cows that cows must not be allowed to run nights or they will be found impounded in the morning.

In 1879, when Birmingham was beginning to get travelers moving from Detroit to Pontiac, A. A. Trail, now Wood- ward Ave., mail was brought from Detroit to the Railroad Station, the public post office.

Those desiring postal service as early as 1870 had to hitch a horse to a buggy, addle the family wases, or walk to the corner of Lime PIone and Woodward. For it was here, on March 24, 1870, that the village, then known as "Fifty Hills," established its first post office.

Since Birmingham did not receive its charter until late 1893, the village did not have city limits and the first post master, Mrs. John H. Whitehead, was the postmaster of the first post office.

The office was located in a small building south of the street making it possible for the postmaster to buy groceries, hardware and stamps under the same roof.

IT WAS LATER moved around 1905, to a store built by J. E. Al- lie Scott on Maple Avenue where the present location on the corner of Lake and Main was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Mitchell, the origin- izers of the Birmingham Eclectic library. Postmaster was at this time.

The post office was in a store owned by J. E. Scott and Al- lie Whitehead "where every body came and knew everybody else."

Before the term of the century, the service moved to its third location. This time only a short distance had to be covered in moving the service across Perry.

In 1877 it was again moved into a building which E. C. Burtan had built next to his hardware store. At this time, Mitchell was serving his second term as postmaster.

In 1924 this building became inadequate and a house was built on the north side of the town.

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

So, while the civic organiza- tions were moving into their new offices in the municipal building, the post office moved from its first building constructed by John R. Williams to the site of the present bank. This was in 1926 and James W. Scott, postmaster.

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

Roland Reese, who was named acting postmaster in 1934, is the 15th postmaster in service to this community since the early days of Birmingham.