City Style Today Is ‘Charming’

BY MARY BARN Staff Writer

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

From the quaint colonial shops on Fierce street to the wide range of stores on the outskirts of Hamilton Row, Birmingham can definitely boast of style.

The early American charm of Fierce street owes much to the remodeling of the old Edison station some years ago. The old structure was purchased by J. H. McBride who then had the building knocked down 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 Elder & General Custom Tailor shop and Village Travel Service.

The facade on the east side of Woodward at the Hamilton intersection in the early 1950's was drab and uninviting in design. The iron-bound front of Bodine, for example, was formerly framed with awning and cardboard signs loudly proclaiming the establishment.

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-darling shops clustered around the over-sized 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 22,000 square feet of space. In 1956 the building was modernized and the second floor added. 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 1937. Work on the addition begins in October, 1959, and was completed a year later.

The parking lot, located on Woodward a few hundred feet north of Willis, has been pleasingly landscaped with rail fences and shrubbery donated by a local nursery. It was opened in late summer, 1951. At a cost of $15,000 it holds 200 cars.

In 1959, they moved into a modern plant at 1225 Hoover.

In April, 1961, Demery's opened its new, streamlined modernized 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 to nearly 200 stores and companies located in Birmingham "home.

Although large department stores, such as Jacobson's which was first opened its doors on Nov. 14, 1850, 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 interests.

Eight automotive dealers are engaged in selling within Birmingham's tradition of attractive exterior — a form-a-block community of its own on Woodward Ave.

AGAIN as a contrast, three art galleries — Keswick, Raven and the Little Gallery — have made Birmingham their home.

The influx of business establishments in town could go on and on and on as Birmingham is a small business town in all local businesses is its extending pride in being a vital part of Birmingham's ever-growing city heritage.

'CITY of the Future' Becoming Reality

By LARRY EYRE Staff Writer

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

| PROPOSED PLAN FOR THE 1929 \-- 1960 PLAN |

The report was first presented to the city in June, 1961. The 28-page report was prepared by Vilter-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 1960.

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 was congested streets, inefficient and inconvenient parking, vertical and horizontal conflicts and pedestrian movements.

Birmingham's downtown area also had pleasant qualities such as lack of conflicting industrial uses, effective 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 solutions 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 funding 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: business and parking areas north of Willis, Chester, Brown and the business areas south of Brown and Forest.

The most critical improvements included: peripheral road 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 Park in order to help solve the parking problem in the southwest quadrant of the CBD and is expected to build the remaining space for the 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.

In addition, negotiations are under way for the purchase of land for rest stops in the widening of Chester and Oakland.

The estimated cost of the peripheral route has been set at $800,000 and $1,800,000 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, Board of Public Library, Park and The Community House.

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

The final plans for the construction of courthouses and malls throughout the business district.