A Whistle Stop?  
Commuter Marks 33rd Year

By MARY ELLEN MEAD  
Staff Writer

Nothing really changes after all these years, that's the spirit of a town if that town changes with the times. Birmingham.

But about the 1921 celebration contingent on the opening of the Grand Trunk's new commuter service is like listening to a playback of festivities surrounding Michipicoten.

A carnival mood pervades for the community, as it did last year in August '31 when the whole town got into the act to welcome its new neighbors in the cottages.

In those days all saloon was staged by southern Oakland County communities heralding the new $3,000,000 yard of way and the new $128,000 station in Birmingham.

THE COMMUTER service was the highlight of the celebration staged by a "steam" railroad in the state of Michigan and brought Woodward Ave. communities closer to Detroit than ever before.

Festivities were centered in Birmingham, but residents of several other cities and villages joined in, setting off as early as 5 a.m. for the band concert at the depot.

This was followed at 10 a.m. by a Kewadin picnic in the center of town with nearly 150 entrants vying for prizes for the best costume, the funniest costume, the best decorated entry and the best decorated bicycle. Each young manacher received a piece of cake donated by two "brownstone houses" and a "fruit box" donated by Wilson Drug Store.

The Birmingham Fire Dept. put on a fire fighting exhibition, there was a home game between Birmingham and Pontiac and in the afternoon a program. "The Pageant of Progress," took place, floats representing the history of humanity through the centuries in business and industry.

THE PARADE was divided into two sections, the first was the head of each and each was surnamed by dozens of gaily bedizened automobiles.

Elizabeth Pollock, daughter of the Howard Pollocks of Rubol, St., had been chosen queen of the pageant several days previously.

Starting from the center of town, the parade ended at the depot, where an air show and fire works entertained the crowd until two special trains, one northbound from Detroit and one southbound from Pontiac, met and dispatched honoree passengers picked up at various stops along the way.

Gov. Wilbur M. Bruacher was the principal speaker at the dedication ceremonies, other speakers including Grand Trunk officials; Harry Allen, Birmingham village president, and David H. Ladd, general chairman of the day's program.

HONOR GUESTS were on a sightseeing tour around Birmingham and Rosedale Hills, then to the Community House for a luncheon, cocktail reception and beauty contest, took place after dinner, last scheduled event of the day. The prizes for the pageant recitals by Antoin Reese from the singing tower on Christ Church.

Since the days of its gay, colorful debut Birmingham's commuter service has kept the rails hot as some of the controversy which periodically arose over rates, schedules, safety and strikes.

In 1962 one of the problems concerned the holes and breaks in the fencing along the railroad right-of-way, caused by shortcutting commuters and school children.

THESE FENCES would permit school children to enter schoolyards, attracted by the speeding trains but unaware of the dangers, of getting too close.

In 1962, after only a day and a half of testimony, the Michigan Public Service Commission adjourned hearings on a Grand Trunk request to drop two commuter trains that pass through Birmingham.

John F. Saletzki, Birmingham administrator, presented the MPSC with a letter from city councilmen expressing concern over the possible loss of service to about 40 commuters.

The Grand Trunk was seeking to eliminate an early morning train to Detroit and one that returned from Detroit at 12:30 p.m.

They claimed they were losing $75,000 a year on the operation of the trains.

Anyone who uses the commuter knows these passengers were relieved in favor of the passengers.

URING THE SAME YEAR, an organization known as "Friends of the Grand Trunk" became worried over rumors that the daily commuter trains running from Pontiac to Detroit were headed for chisilnue because of the new Chrysler Express.

But this hasn't happened, either, and Birmingham continues to show up about 900 strong "down to the station early in the morning".

Passengers who arrived at his post for the past 10 years, and can name their Eclectic or magazine to order, can look forward to the servicios of the shiniest, prettiest stations in the whole U.S.A.

LIFELONG AREA resident Dick Baldwin (left), who has made railroadroving a hobby, and Station Master Harry J. Willsman, who is at his post for the past 10 years, and can name their Eclectic or magazine to order, can look forward to the services of the shiniest, prettiest stations in the whole U.S.A.

A GIANT, all-day celebration took place in Birmingham to honor when service was established between Pontiac and Detroit. The demonstration of welcome was centered around the old station established between Pontiac and Detroit.

Gas Service Came To Birmingham in 1913

A four-inch steel pipe from Pontiac brought gas to Birmingham in 1913 years ago. It came from the former Michigan Light Co., which two years later became a part of Consumers Power.

The company's first office in Birmingham was established in a drug store owned by W. C. Cobb on the west side of Woodward three doors south of Maple Residence said their bills and made application for service at Cobb's.

Old-timers recall that the late Henry Fortner, a company employee, was the first full-time employee reporting to the Cobb Drug Store for orders left by customers.

THE HAD A FURST part originally, later replaced by a Model T, and would leave the drug stores daily with his list of jobs. In 1914 the company had about 160 customers in this area.

In these days artificial gas was supplied from coal and manufactured on a few inches of gas pipe located within the area. Although, its only use was lighting, both street and home use, with cooking and water heating fast becoming more and more popular, several coal furnaces were set into five fireplaces each.

Today, for about 11,017 families in the Birmingham area, the company offers many vital services.

THE ADEPT of natural gas, which first reached Birmingham in 1913, these services include heating of homes, drying of clothes, browning of trash, heating water, refrigerating food and, of course, cooking meals.

In contrast to the little office in the drug store, the company now has in Birmingham one of the gas industry's most modern and beautiful customer service buildings opened in May, 1939, at the southwest corner of errs and Henry.

Sometimes service is so fast that it's not uncommon for a truck to arrive at a customer's home within a few minutes after the call for service has been received.

B'ham 'In the Dark' 'til 1908

The incandescent lamp was invented in 1879, one year after the Eclectic started. But it was the coal-oil lamp that supplied Birmingham with light until the 1900's.

The difficulty in developing systems to carry electricity to outlying areas laid up Birmingham's franchise until 1908 when the Clair Edson Co. set about bringing electric light to the vicinity.

The first franchise ordinance in July of 1908 provided for the lamps to the Village council-room, the jail, the public library, the water works and the house of the fire chief.

ACTION TO extend service to the community began immediately. A substation was built on the north side of Four corners, south of Maple and current from the Detroit Edison Delray plant began to flow in 1909.

1910 was a big year for Birmingham's electrical progress. Eastern Michigan Edison, a branch of Detroit Edison, took over the assets of the St. Clair. Subsidiary became Birmingham its first lighted street.

At least 15 arc-type lights appeared in Birmingham that year. Several of them were used on electrical signs. The Edison office and the drug store were two of the first.

EARLY GASOLINE-DRIVEN EDISON TRUCK

Edison troubleshooters looked more like cowboys. 1