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 data and 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 22 merchants banded together to study mutual problems.

Such preliminary meetings were held in the fall of 1947, it was announced last week, that the first board of directors met.

GENARO FLORES was elected president; Ralph A. Sisson, vice president; Dr. Robert J. Mason, secretary; and Foster Toothacker, membership chairman.

The group met regularly and was composed of Paul N. Averill, Dr. George Marlin, John E. Martin, John R. Greenfield and George J. Thomas.

When first organized the chamber listed 165 business members and about 39 residential members. Minimum assessments were set at $7.25.

Clarence Valerio, in former superintendents of schools, was appointed executive secretary until a full-time man could be found to direct the chamber activities.

The first meeting was held May 5, 1948, at the post office until December, 1949, when the first director was appointed by Knowles Smith.

THE 1945-46 activities of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce were guided by these five executives. From left are Richard J. Thomas, Jr., assistant treasurer; Knowles Smith, executive director; Ralph A. Sisson, president; Dr. Robert J. Mason, secretary; and James F. Moore, treasurer.

One of the first actions of the chamber was to secure a secretary of state branch office for the city.

The license plates went on sale about a month after the organization was announced.

Other projects the chamber undertook included more parking facilities, better city-public relations, and office service and other public relations.

DURING the first few years, the chamber moved to E. Maple near Woodward, then to a second floor location above what is now Smith’s Early American Furniture and about a year after, to its present quarters above Lake’s Jewelers.

Since its inception the chamber has developed a program 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 was the annual Halloween party and parade. Co-sponsored 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 in 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.

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

In 1964 Birmingham Chamber of Commerce has more than 500 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, which are chosen from three different commercial areas.

Three members are elected for a one-year period, 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, 1948.

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

Larry Swenson was named the group’s first president, and charter members were Nelsen, Jack Andrew, Ed Steele, Wayne Mortensen and George Marlin. In keeping with their stress on youth, age limitations were set at 18, membership now numbering over 60, between the ages of 21 and 30.

The group met regularly at the Maple Theater, then the Fox and Honda, 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 project was the most public—clearing non-publishing and giving new life to the “Friendship Food Caravan.” In 1947, in which more than 4,000 pounds of food was collected for distribution in Birmingham to be sent to Europe in support of the war effort, especially in France.

The Jaycees were also local sponsors of the “Teenage Road-E-O” which was named selected the best “all around” young person.

The Jaycee golf tournament for youngsters through 18 was a huge success, with over 120 youths in attendance.

P旅程 is still being held in the fall of 1963 by passing resolutions condemning the sale of liquor or tobacco to minors.

Roadbuilding Programs Date Back to 1912

Birmingham’s streets and roads have long been under discussion or criticism as an item in the Birmingham Chronicle of 1912 proved.

At that time an appeal was made to the people of the village “to please give our streets another coat of paint,” especially on Woodward Avenue.

On one September afternoon, it was stated, during a four-hour period, a total of 38 street cars passed over Woodward Avenue, rolling up clouds of dust all right.“