By Ethel Simmons

Staff Writer

The two homes of the Bloomfield Art Association, which was born Oct. 19, 1929, have been colorful—for different reasons. The site of the first "home" of this community's art center was, indeed, a piano, originally a private home, two-story frame with a widow's walk atop the roof. This was about 150 years old and located at 261 N. Woodward Ave. The group of eight local citizens who first met at the home of Ruby Williams to establish an association met on the third floor of the building, which was planned to house a suitable dwelling.

Harry Deveaux and Morgan Douglas, Jr., had charge of locating real estate which the group had specified they should be able to "rent, buy, build or accept as a gift." Almost immediately they found the property, which was one of Bloomfield's few remaining stately old homes, offered for rent. Clarence Paterson wrote the first check for $175 and set off a series of pledges at $25 each. Paul N. Avrett arranged the bank account, and Denyes went ahead and rented the property.

The Bloomfield School System supported its art, hoping that the art association could provide the stimulus for the schools' art training program. Superintendents Dwight Ireland and Eugene Johnson (of Bloomfield Hills) pledged their cooperation.

Under the direction of Mae Avrett, president of the Bloomfield Women Painters, the membership committee gathered 125 members, along with $4,000 for the bank account.

Establishing "drinks" in the teaching staff were Kathleen Birch, who headed the educational department, and Mary Jane Bigler, who was the first instructor.

Clifford West took direction of the program committee which would schedule a variety of exhibits, lectures and films.

The house was not the BAA until Ruby Williams and Max Tunnicliff co-chairman of the house committee, and their crews of volunteers went to work.

Contributing their supplies and skills were Fred Wood of Bloomfield-Mason Paint Company, who gave paint; design Peter Lawson, who transformed the building interior into a contemporary studio-gallerie; and Randy Clark, who created 18 adjustable easel-bench seats.

These "captains" and their crews were finished in time for the BAA to open its first classes March 6, 1930, two water color classes, a life class and a men's painting course.

The first exhibit was by Dean Cornwall, muralist and illustrator, who also gave a lecture. The Michigan Academy of Arts and Science provided the second show.

On the BAA was established its first classes, William McGonagle of the Detroit Institute of Arts Extension Service informed the BAA that he had read of their efforts through an article in the Birmingham Eccentric.

He explained that the extension service had been established to help just such suburban art movements, and from then on the BAA was pleased to receive the institute's cooperation and assistance.

A first-ever, first-served policy had to be established when membership applications reached 206, but by September, 1937, when Volume 1, No. 1, of the BAA's magazine "Skeath" was published, there were 243 founding members.

A Children's Workshop was one of the first, proudly established activities at the Association. By Sept. 25, 1937, a full schedule of classes for all age groups had been organized.

THE FIRST Annual Birmingham Festival of Art was slated for May 17-25 the following year. There was art at the BAA, in the public schools, in several musical programs, and in street dances, puppet shows, plays and open house.

By July, 1960, a three-man group called the Land-Range Planning Committee was established to appraise future needs of the BAA. Committee members Robert Them, future housing; Robert Van Sare, future zoning; and Paul Avrett, future programming, were checking out possible sites for the association's next and bigger home.

Shortly, the BAA received notice that its present quarters would be razed to make way for the City of Birmingham's north-west parking lot. Efforts were redoubled to find a new home, and when no property within Birmingham met the qualifications—and the limitations—of the BAA, a private residence in Bloomfield Hills finally was selected.

But before the purchase, which was estimated to be $50,000 on a land contract basis, plus an additional sum for any alterations, the BAA board considered moving outside the city and discussed the possibility of converting the Birmingham Sewage Treatment Plant.

The city, it turned out, had been searching for a suitable use for what had been de-activated in 1969 when the Evergreen intermediate school was completed.

From artist's renderings by Bob They, classroom and gallery areas were visualized. The BAA was to remodel the interior and the city to provide some changes for the grounds.

The rent was set at only $1. a year, accorded to the lease for the next 25 years. Linn Smith Associates designed and supervised the remodeling of the building which was to be called the Birmingham Art Center, originally open for art in the fall of 1961.

Spacious and Well-Designed Gallery Highlights BAA

Completed remodeled, it was originally the city's sewage treatment plant.

"On Stage" Cues Village Players

Behind a row of footlights made from 10-cent store displays with holes punched in them, the Birmingham Village Players gave its first production in the early 1920's.

Sunday School rooms of St. James Episcopal Church in the old Community House served as the theatre. The stage was without a raised area, and the curtain that went up was a simple black one.

Audiences sat through the performances, the first two eyes on the floor, the second two on kindergarten chairs. Then last two rows stood.

Premiere production was "The Maker of Dreams," a one-act farce fantasy by Ethel Down, presented in the fall of 1922. Ralph C. Splhoff, Carol McRae, and Fred H. Heschell comprised the three-member cast.

Mary Martin, who was Community House director, is credited with organizing the Village Players. Reports also indicate that John W. Geddis, a high school student in the fall of 1922, originally proposed the formation of a community theater group.

The Birmingham Village Players continue in being in February, 1932, as a private amateur theatrical club. Eighteen charter members soon were joined by other players, and just what's needed!

In the opinion of some people, John Stacey is 20 years too late in bringing to this town just what it needed for so long, a fine, large, community and machine shop. The jewelry was located on Troy Street, (just East Maple) on the south side of the street.

PLAYHOUSE 1965 PROJECT WAS A REMODELING JOB

Face-lifting and expansion work modernized the Chestnut Street building.

"Strike Up Band" Rings True

In Franklin

Music has become the common denominator in Franklin that brings together engineer, salesman, housewife, surgeon, dentist, sexton, preacher and teacher—forming the Franklin Village Band.

Sponsored by the Franklin Community Association, under the direction of Dr. Conrad Lann, made its debut about seven years ago.

They Meet Monday nights, blowing out a cloud of music while sitting in the band, straight-backed chairs for a time. Envolved in harmony, they buff and they puff.

Forbes S. Hascall

One of the first acts.

Wardman, whom he taught basketball, became a college coach, and is now a successful basketball commentator.