



The JOURNAL of the Birmingham Historical Society

BIRMINGHAM REMEMBERED:

The history of the City of Birmingham is more than the founder's vision of an industrial workshop in Jones Valley, or the tragedies of 1873—the cholera epidemic and the Jay Cooke panic. It is more than the real estate boom of the mid-1880's and the bank closings in 1893. In fact, the city's history is more than all of the so-called "major events" perennially cited by historians. The photograph which appears on the cover of this issue of *The JOURNAL* of the Birmingham Historical Society focuses upon one of the many facets of Birmingham's history heretofore largely neglected: the role of private charitable institutions in the care of the sick, the poor, the orphan, the aged, and the infirm. Pictured on the cover and below is the second Mercy Home, located on the northwest corner of Eleventh Avenue, North, and Twenty-second Street, which served, after its construction in 1898, as a center for the care of girls, young women, and other youths whose personal circumstances rendered them unable to care for themselves.

THE EARLY AND MIDDLE YEARS



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FOREWORD

The observation of the biblical writer regarding "seasons" is as applicable to the history of cities as it is to individuals. In the development of both, there appear to be times appropriate to particular types of growth or change: seasons for birth and for death, for rapid growth and for sluggish idling, for love and for hate.

In the history of the City of Birmingham, the decade of the 1880's was clearly a "season" of rapid growth, a boom time in which a rich harvest of profits was to be derived from the recently established pig iron industry and from the real estate, mining, and manufacturing enterprises associated with it. What, in 1880, was little more than a village of 3,000 souls, struggling to preserve its existence, was, by 1890, a fledgling city of more than 26,000 inhabitants, to most appearances confident that its future would bring continued prosperity.

The 1880's was, however, more than just a "season" of population increase, of industrial expansion and economic prosperity. It was also a decade of cultural and social advance, highlighted by the formal organization of a city school system and the creation of a library which, in the 1890's, would be opened to use by the general public.

In the published histories of Birmingham, the tendency which has prevailed in regard to the 1880's has been to emphasize the "season" in just such terms: to highlight the growth of the city by almost exclusive reference to positive achievements. But this decade and the ones which followed may just as well be characterized in negative terms. The rapid expansion of the economy concentrated wealth and power in the hands of a relative few persons, some of whom were residents neither of the city nor the state. Economic class lines were more definitively drawn, and with them came the consequent distinctions between rich and poor, management and labor, the cultured and the not-so-cultured.

With rapid industrial development and the burgeoning of a working class, there also came the problems so characteristic of an urban industrial center: work-related disease, physical violence, parentless children, and a host of other social ills.

In this issue of *The JOURNAL* of the Birmingham Historical Society, the "seasons" of the 1880's and the several decades which followed are examined, both in positive and negative terms. Edward S. LaMonte's

feature article on private charitable institutions in Birmingham from 1871 through 1921 focuses upon the social ills which prompted charitable activity and upon the community resources which were marshalled, largely by representatives of the wealthier class, to deal with such ills. Jeff Northrup's examination of the famous Hawes's murders concentrates not only on one instance in which physical violence took an appalling personal toll but also upon the character of the responses of the press and the public to such violence. Finally, and distinctly on the positive side, Virginia Pounds Brown and Mabel Thuston Turner offer the first two installments of their history of the Birmingham Public Library. Taken together, the three articles in this issue of *The JOURNAL* present a more balanced approach to the crucial decade of the 1880's and the decades immediately following: an approach which emphasizes both the positive and the negative aspects of these "seasons" of urban development.

Once again, as with the third issue of Volume 5, the publication of *The JOURNAL* is made possible through a grant from the Greater Birmingham Foundation. For this beneficence, the Editorial Advisory Board and the officers and trustees of the Birmingham Historical Society express their gratitude.

The Editorial Advisory Board solicits reader interest in and support of *The JOURNAL*. Suggestions for material to be included in future issues are welcomed and should be addressed to the Editor, *The JOURNAL* of the Birmingham Historical Society, 2020 Park Place, Birmingham, Alabama 35203.

In closing, the members of the Editorial Advisory Board wish to correct an error which appeared in the January, 1978 issue. On page 4, in the cut-line under the photograph of Pattie Ruffner Jacobs, the statement was made that Mrs. Jacobs was the "first Democratic National Committeewoman from Alabama." That statement is incorrect. The files of the Democratic National Committee indicate that Mrs. John D. McNeel of Birmingham served as the first National Committeewoman from Alabama, during the years 1920-1924. Mrs. Jacobs earlier served as the first Alabamian on the Woman's Advisory Committee of the Democratic National Committee.

July, 1978

The Editorial Advisory Board
The JOURNAL of the Birmingham
Historical Society



Mrs. C. B. Spencer, President of the Mercy Home Board of Managers, from the creation of the Board in 1892 until her death in 1942. Photograph courtesy of the *Birmingham News*.

THE MERCY HOME AND PRIVATE CHARITY IN EARLY BIRMINGHAM

EDWARD S. LAMONTE

"One of the problems of the day is: How shall a city provide for its ever-present poor?"¹ Mrs. C. B. Spencer, president of the Board of Managers of the Mercy Home, posed this question to the Birmingham City Council in the fall of 1905 in a petition asking that body to exempt the Home from a street repair levy. The Council agreed that the Board of Managers should not have to pay for street improvements in front of the Mercy Home, but it did not try to answer the fundamental question which she had raised: who is responsible for addressing the problem of poverty in an urban-industrial community? The fact that this question has not yet been answered does not reflect a lack of thought or effort on the part of those local citizens who addressed the issue. Numerous private organizations wrestled with the needs of the poor in Birmingham during the city's early years, trying to develop effective programs, to understand the causes of poverty, and to decide who was responsible for responding to the poor and who deserved aid. Among these local private charitable institutions, the Mercy Home stood at the forefront.

During the latter years of the Nineteenth Century, Birmingham was truly the "Magic City" for many of its residents. Speculators had opened huge coal mines in the district; the city's first blast furnace had been operating for over a decade; northern money was flowing into the area to establish additional furnaces; and, by 1890, the population of Birmingham had grown to over 26,000 citizens attracted by the vibrant local economy.² But for others, the Magic City proved to be a cruel deception — most notably for women and children whose circumstances prevented them from gaining a foothold in the general prosperity of the city.

Local government provided little relief to those who could not care for themselves. The basic poor law of Alabama, written in 1807, placed upon county governments the responsibility of caring for the poor. The first recorded instance of this law's application in Jefferson County was in 1883, when the Court of County Commissioners "let out" paupers for care to the "lowest and most responsible bidder."³ The Commissioners

thus provided only minimal protection to the totally helpless, while the bidder sought to profit from his contract. By 1884 the county had built an almshouse, a wooden structure with six wards: two for white men, two for white women, one for black men, and one for black women. In addition, there were eight rooms for tuberculosis patients and a separate building for the insane.⁴ The practice of contracting with private bidders to care for indigents ended in 1897; thereafter, all adults were assigned to the almshouse.⁵

The city had no legal obligation to aid the poor, but it, too, allocated funds to private agencies. Indigents from the city could apply directly to the Mayor and Board of Aldermen for aid, especially in the form of charity transportation from Birmingham to their hometown. And toward the end of the period, from 1916-1921, the city played a larger role in the area of welfare, experimenting alternately with regulation of subsidized private agencies and direct provision of public services. But the combined efforts of city and county were recognized by all to be totally inadequate for the needs of the area's population.

The idea of establishing the Mercy Home originated in 1891 with a group of women active in the Woman's Christian Temperance Movement. While the women of Birmingham were largely responsible for addressing this unmet welfare need, they did not regard this role as appropriately belonging to them alone. The Mercy Home's Mrs. Spencer commented in 1907: "Strange to say, the men of our city and State are indifferent to this question of the care of the dependent and defective, and most of them seem to consider all efforts of this class a kind of woman's 'fad,' instead of an important social obligation."⁶

Twelve women who met in February, 1892, proclaimed their willingness to meet this important social obligation, and they accordingly drafted a constitution for the new Mercy Home. "The object of this institution shall be the protection and assistance of friendless women and children."⁷ Twelve active members of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union constituted the Board of Managers, which included committees on ad-

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶"Fifteenth Annual Report of the Mercy Home under the Auspices of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Birmingham, Alabama, for the Year Ending December 31, 1906," p. 7. The records of the Mercy Home are on indefinite loan to the Department of Archives and Manuscripts of the Birmingham Public Library.

⁷"First Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending February 1, 1893," p. 9.

¹*Birmingham Age-Herald*, November 4, 1905.

²Martha Carolyn Mitchell Bigelow, "Birmingham: Biography of a City of the New South," Ph. D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1946, pp. 28 and 35.

³Anita Van de Voort, "Public Welfare Administration in Jefferson County, Alabama," M. A. thesis, Tulane University, 1933, p. 7.

mission, house and purchasing, religious instruction, and auditing. The Admission Committee had the responsibility to "examine each applicant for admission to the Home and decide as to their retention, subject to the decision of the board in any doubtful case."⁸ The entire board assumed responsibility for the most critical task of all, raising funds necessary to operate the institution. At the second meeting of the board, the city was "carefully divided into districts and ladies appointed to solicit in their district for money, or useful articles for the home."⁹ The Home opened March 1, 1892, in an eight-room house at 812 Nineteenth Street, South.

The Mercy Home was a place of refuge for children and women of all ages from the city and surrounding territory. To it came victims of tuberculosis who had no families, women who worked and could not care for their children, children whose parents were in the hospital, pregnant girls, transients awaiting charity transportation from the city, orphans, delinquents, and defectives. The Home began with an annual budget of

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Mercy Home, Spring, 1892, n. p.

just under \$700. In 1893 it admitted 59 persons and had an average of 13 inmates in residence. By 1921 its operating budget approached \$15,000, and its average daily attendance was 88 inmates.¹⁰

The Board of Managers was intimately involved with the operations of the Mercy Home. It met monthly at the Home, and the minutes of its sessions reveal a personal awareness of each of the cases which came before the Admission Committee. Each individual seeking entrance to the Home was reviewed by the Admission Committee, often through personal interview. Members of this committee could report with pride, "We have carefully and conscientiously investigated all homes into which children are placed, an essential requisite in every case being a common school education as well as a christian (*sic*) influence."¹¹ In late 1893, board members visited the city jail to interview two girls arrested for vagrancy.¹² The minutes for

¹⁰Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Mercy Home, January 24, 1893, n. p.; "Thirtieth Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1921," p. 7.

¹¹"Second Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending February 1, 1894," p. 6.

¹²Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Mercy Home, December 26, 1893, n. p.



A view of the Mercy Home at Eleventh Avenue, North, and Twenty-second Street, showing the main building and the infirmary to the rear. From the *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Mercy Home, Year Ending December 31, 1909* (Birmingham, Alabama: Dispatch Printing Company, 1909).



The officers and members of the Board of Managers of the Mercy Home, ca. 1898-1899. First row, from left to right: Mrs. A. B. Wheeler and Mrs. W. L. Murdoch; second row, from left to right: Mrs. G. L. Thomas, Mrs. T. A. Hamilton, Mrs. C. B. Spencer, Mrs. John White, and Mrs. L. F. Stratton; third row, from left to right: Mrs. William Redd, Mrs. W. H. Jeffries, Mrs. A. N. Ballard, Mrs. A. L. Billheimer, and Dr. Dicia Baker. Photograph from the Mercy Home Papers on loan to the Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library.

February 27, 1894, report that "a sad case of a child 13 years had been reported to Mrs. Jeffries and Mrs. Ballard and they had visited her, hoping to reclaim her."¹³ Throughout the period, the women knew the inmates of the Home, were personally acquainted with the circumstances of their lives, rejoiced in the child successfully adopted or the young girl turned from "a life of shame," and grieved at each death or former inmate whose life took a road other than that of Christian morality.

In addition to this highly personal attention bestowed upon the residents of the Home, the Board of Managers engaged in two difficult and time-consuming tasks: raising resources to operate the Home and defining the appropriate role for the institution in the changing intellectual and institutional environment of early Birmingham.

The core of the Mercy Home's support was a group of private citizens who responded to the solicitations of the Board of Managers with contributions of money or necessary goods. Each annual report lists the individuals, churches, and businesses that gave support to the Home. Merchants and industrialists donated ice, fish, bread, drugs, milk, meat, and coal to the Home;

¹³Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Mercy Home, February 27, 1894, n. p.

housewives and schoolgirls gave clothes and mended torn garments. The Water Works Company provided free water to the Home, and the Birmingham Telephone Company installed phones at half the usual rate.¹⁴ In 1893, the county began paying the Home to care for indigents, who by law were the responsibility of public authority; and the city of Birmingham began granting monthly appropriations for the same purpose in 1894.¹⁵

In some years, such as 1897, allocations of the city and county accounted for more than half of the Home's budget; in others, such as 1915, economic depression forced reductions of public funding and put additional burdens on board members to gain private support in the midst of financial distress. But throughout, the Home not only remained open but expanded its facilities. April, 1899, saw the Home move to larger quarters at Eleventh Avenue, North, and Twenty-second Street.¹⁶ A successful fund-raising drive supported by local newspapers allowed the board to build a separate isolation ward on the grounds, thus permitting treat-

¹⁴"Fourth Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1895," p. 10.

¹⁵Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Mercy Home, August 1, 1893, n. p.; March 13, 1894, n. p.

¹⁶"Ninth Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1900," p. 1.

ment of sick children during the periodic epidemics that struck the Home.¹⁷ The Board of Managers celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Mercy Home by opening the Mercy Home Industrial School, a state-supported institution, owned by the board, that offered industrial education "for white girls in Alabama" between the ages of 13 and 18.¹⁸

The records of the Mercy Home are both interesting and impressive as they reveal the activities of a dedicated board and staff who were trying to care for a family of increasing size and diverse needs. There were occasional times of real drama, as when the house was quarantined twice, for periods of six and eight weeks during a scarlet fever epidemic in 1902. The board members could communicate with the resident matron only by telephone, and the matron could talk with the staff only by "speaking tubes" in the children's wards.¹⁹

The needs of the residents were increasingly met. School age children were enrolled in the neighboring Powell School, and a kindergarten was opened in the Home for younger children. The board and staff found employment for older girls and adoptive homes for infants. Terminally ill women received loving care in their final days, and delinquent children received moral instruction in their formative years. As board president Mrs. Spencer noted in 1905, "We must prove our ability to keep pace with the need."²⁰

The Mercy Home's Board of Managers not only tried to keep pace with need, but they also continually tried to define the needs to which they should respond, as well as the causes of those needs. The annual reports of the Home, and especially the messages of President Spencer, provide striking insight into the changing nature of poverty and the changing attitudes toward it in early Birmingham.

In the early years, the Mercy Home was open to anyone in distress, regardless of the cause. At the turn of the century Mrs. Spencer wrote that "... the 'open sesame' to the Mercy Home must always be *need*, not *merit* (her emphasis)."²¹ In answer to the question, "Is it a needed institution?", Mrs. Spencer found the causes of need to lie largely outside the person in distress:

So long as ignorance and want of family discipline in homes prevails (sic), so long as we have inadequate laws for the protection of children and girls, so long as the liquor bill of this county is ten times

*as much as we spend for public schools, just so long will there be need of organized Christian charities.*²²

Within a decade, however, the Board of Managers substantially redefined the cause of much poverty and sharply restricted the scope of appropriate charity. Increasingly, the problems with which the Home dealt, especially as related to children, were seen to be the result of moral irresponsibility. In discussing babies placed in the Home, Mrs. Spencer wrote in 1903: "... we wonder and speculate on the conditions — on the law that makes the innocent suffer instead of the guilty — and on the absolute lack of moral responsibility among the lower and poorer classes."²³ Expanding significantly upon these observations, she continued in her message of the following year:

*Mothers wish to be relieved of the care of their children during the years of helplessness on the slightest pretext — only claiming them again when they can earn money, and there seems to be absolutely no (her emphasis) repugnance to asking alms. The utmost care and diligence is (sic) necessary to discriminate between the worthy and the worthless. Indiscriminate giving is the curse of the beggar. I believe if there could be more cooperation between the charitable organizations of the city a healthier moral sentiment might be attained. In a community where there is usually work for all who are willing to work, to give in a wholesale way is almost like rewarding idleness and poverty.*²⁴

Thus was issued a call for reform on two fronts, within the home and without. First, the Mercy Home itself should modify its program; again, Mrs. Spencer's words are illuminating:

When the Mercy Home was founded our endeavor to make it an asylum for all cases was well intentioned and at that time justifiable, but thirteen years have brought many changes in the demands made upon us by the increasingly complex conditions of our growing city, and by the progress of what has been called 'charitable knowledge,' and the time seems to have come when a change in our policy is expedient.

She recommended "that our work for immoral women and girls be discontinued" and that the Home focus on "respectable girls and women, who will learn (in the Home or elsewhere) a trade or business whereby they may become self-supporting." The Mercy Home should now respond to "the great need of industrial education for the poor white girls of our State, and of its value from a moral, economic and Christian stand-

¹⁷Birmingham News, June 21, 1905.

¹⁸"Twenty-second Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1913," p. 29.

¹⁹"Eleventh Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1902," p. 5.

²⁰"Thirteenth Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1904," p. 8.

²¹"Ninth Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1900," p. 6.

²²"First Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending February 1, 1893," p. 2.

²³"Eleventh Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1902," p. 6.

²⁴"Twelfth Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1903," p. 6.

point." The Home should diminish its role as a rehabilitative institution for the warped products of immoral environments and should turn to "the preventive work that marks the maturity of 'philanthropic effort'."²⁵

Thus, after 1906, the Mercy Home became almost exclusively a children's home, and the board mounted its ultimately successful effort to establish a girls' industrial school on land donated by Jefferson County. Supported by annual appropriations from the state, the purpose of the school was "to assist those who are dependent *only* (her emphasis) for lack of opportunity, and to place within their reach such advantages as will make them independent and self-supporting."²⁶ Here girls were taught housekeeping, laundry work, and sewing along with the equivalent of an elementary school education.

But reform in the program of the Mercy Home was not the only change sought by Mrs. Spencer and the board; they also wanted to modify both public and private institutions, and indeed the conditions of urban industrial life itself. The finger of blame was pointed not only at the immoral individual but also at the inadequate society of the times. The president wrote in late 1914:

*May we never get a plan that will more actively engage the causes instead of continually working with the effects that must have a wrong beginning somewhere? Better housing, better living, more schools, industrial training, Child Labor Laws, Juvenile Courts — this is the solution, and these are all projected, but the way is very long and progress is slow; and great economic questions and monopolies sometimes hinder instead of help; and so we come back to the present day conditions, and our part in them.*²⁷

The role of the Mercy Home, then, was not only to deliver services as it deemed appropriate but also to seek reform.

The Mercy Home Board believed that the city, county, and state were all deficient in their responses to the social welfare needs of their citizens. Board members pressed public officials to assume greater responsibility by personal visits to officeholders, through public statements, and through limited political activity to gain reform through legislation. Throughout the period the board pleaded with city and county officials to increase their annual appropriations to the Home; the women viewed the support of the county as being "painfully small, for we are doing work much of which

is required by them by law, and, as our reports show, doing it more economically."²⁸

The city did not have legal responsibility for caring for the needy, but the board thought it had a greater responsibility to monitor the activities of private charities which received municipal funds. As the city expanded in the early years of the century, so too did both the need for assistance and the number of organizations which provided aid. By 1915 these agencies turned to the city for funding, and the city fathers generally granted support without investigating the merit of the petition. As early as 1906, Mrs. Spencer called upon the city to appoint a commission for the inspection of charities: "I take this opportunity to urge public inspection of all charities receiving public money, *not on stated days by officeholders* (her emphasis), but by a commission appointed by the honorable Mayor, and composed of practical men and women of some experience."²⁹ Such a commission would both safeguard the public funds allocated to the charities and certify to the public those organizations which truly deserved the private support of the citizenry. The city did create a five-member Advisory Board of Public Welfare in 1914, but its members resigned as a group the following year when they discovered that neither the city nor the private charities were willing to follow their recommendations for the consolidation of similar agencies and fund drives. Not until the creation of the Community Chest in 1923 did the community have a central review of programs and a rationalization of fund-raising on a permanent basis.³⁰

The Board called upon the city, county, and state to establish new public institutions for the care of specific classes of inmates whom the women did not believe were the responsibility of the Home or any other private agency. After reviewing model legislation relating to the treatment of juvenile offenders, the board called upon the state to enact such legislation and pressed the city to establish a detention center for youthful lawbreakers.³¹ In the absence of such a facility, the Mercy Home reluctantly accepted delinquents. In addition, the women repeatedly petitioned the Jefferson County Board of Revenue to establish a hospital for incurably ill and dependent children as part of its constitutional responsibility to care for the indigent of the county.³² Once again, there was no favorable response, and the Home cared for such cases until 1911, when the privately established Children's Hospital opened its doors.

²⁵"Tenth Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1901," p. 7.

²⁶"Fourteenth Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1905," p. 7.

²⁷Edward Shannon LaMonte, "Politics and Welfare in Birmingham, Alabama: 1900-75" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1976), p. 174.

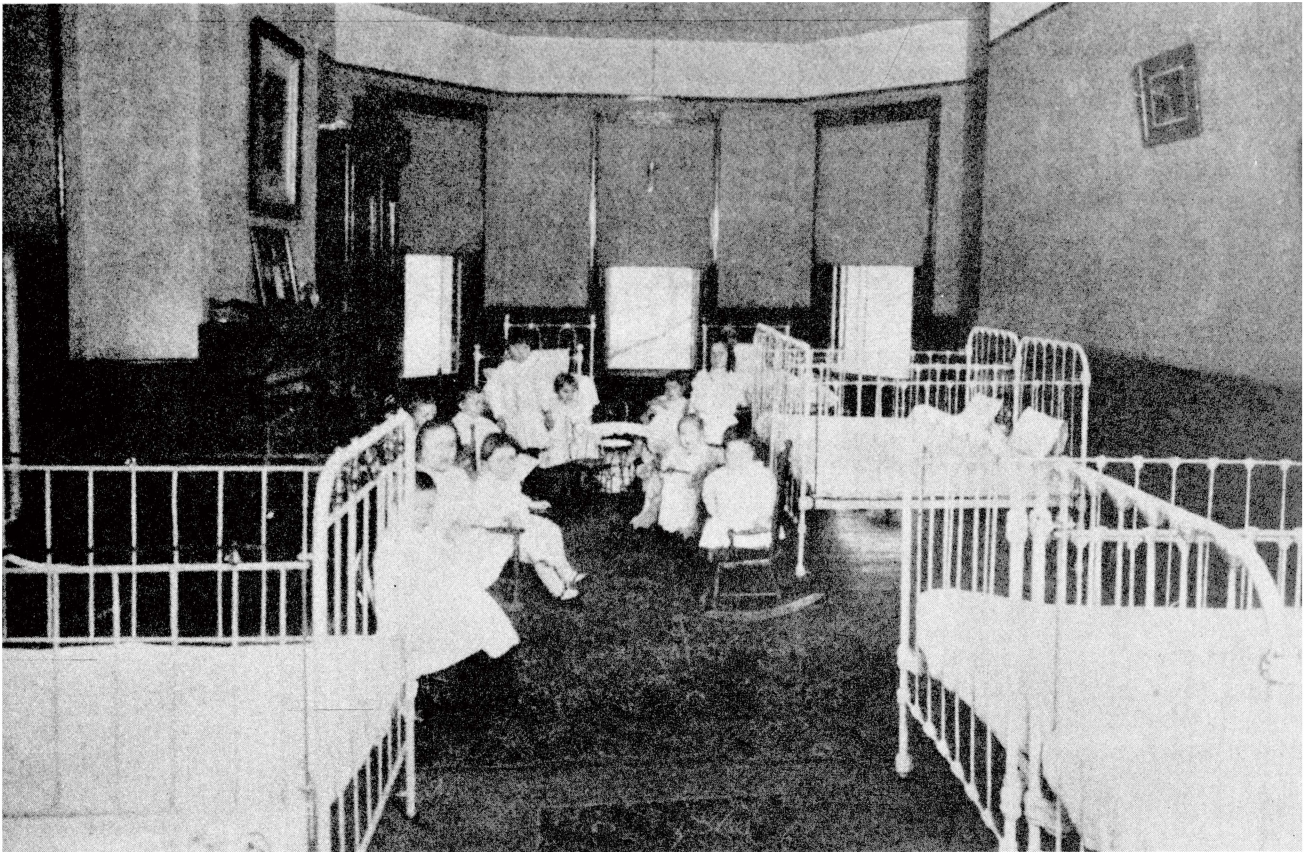
²⁸"Eighteenth Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1909," p. 5.

²⁹"Fifteenth Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1906," p. 6.

²⁵"Thirteenth Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1904," pp. 6-7.

²⁶"Nineteenth Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1910," p. 23.

²⁷"Twenty-third Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1914," p. 5.



A view of one of the children's wards in the Mercy Home, Eleventh Avenue, North, and Twenty-second Street, ca. 1909. From the *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Mercy Home, Year Ending December 31, 1909* (Birmingham, Alabama: Dispatch Printing Company, 1909).

The most fundamental reform urged by the board was the creation of a state Board of Charities and Corrections with a paid secretary. After reviewing youth programs in the United States, Mrs. Spencer wrote:

*The best plan and the method adopted by the most progressive states is a state board of charities that shall care for the delinquent and defective in state institutions, under inspection of state commissioners. Until this is practicable the Mercy Home serves the city in this capacity, standing between the homeless child and the street.*³³

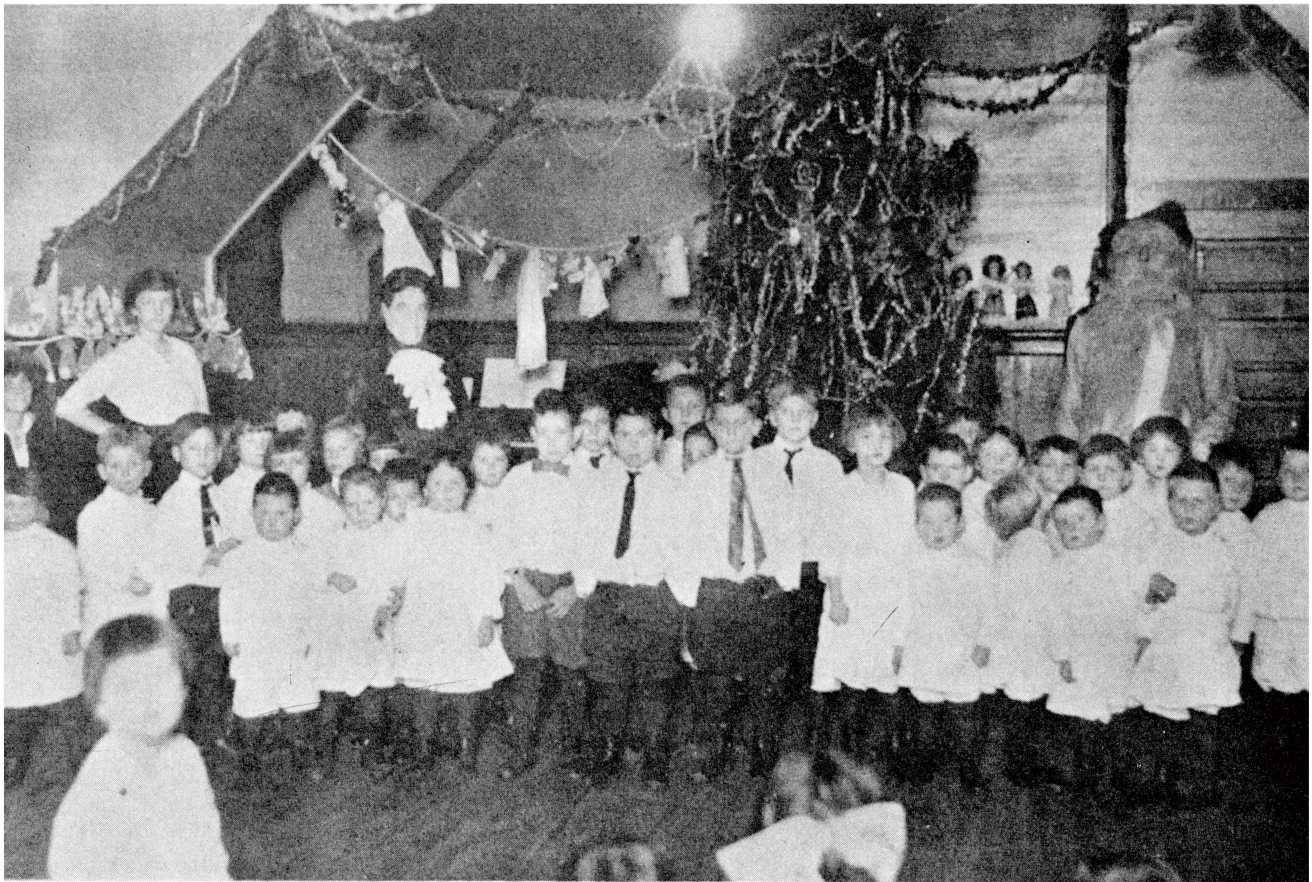
The state never developed a comprehensive youth services policy, but the legislature did provide annual appropriations to the Mercy Home Industrial School for girls and to the Alabama Industrial School for Wayward Boys.

The Mercy Home was certainly not alone in its efforts to serve the needy of the Birmingham area; the inventory of private charities presented below attests to the growing number of groups which meet some portion of the need of the expanding industrial center. Nor can one claim that the Home was superior to other

organizations in either the quality of its leadership or the quality of its services. What can be claimed is that the board and staff of the Home sensitively served the varying needs of women and children in a rapidly developing urban society while at the same time thinking carefully about the right relationships among individual citizens, private agencies, and public authorities. The women in Birmingham were grappling with precisely the same issues concerning social welfare that occupied the attention of contemporary academics in their writings and professional practitioners in their annual meetings.³⁴ While Mrs. Spencer and her colleagues were undoubtedly aware of some of the literature of the day and some of the discussions held in national meetings, their sense of direction came from other sources. Mrs. Spencer wrote of the Home:

³⁴For discussions of the roles of private and public agencies in social welfare, see Leah Hannah Feder, *Unemployment Relief in Periods of Depression: A Study of Measures Adopted in Certain American Cities, 1857 through 1922* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1936); Elizabeth Wisner, *Social Welfare in the South from Colonial Times to World War I* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970); Josephine Chapin Brown, *Public Relief 1929-1939* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1940); and Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Protestants Against Poverty: Boston's Charities, 1870-1900* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Corp., 1971).

³³*Birmingham Age-Herald*, November 14, 1905.



Children of the Mercy Home gathered about their Christmas tree during the holiday season of 1915. From the *Twenty-fourth Annual Report of the Mercy Home, Year Ending December 31st, 1915* ([Birmingham, Alabama: Dispatch Printing Company, 1915]).

"... its methods are not machine made, its policy has been developed year by year — not by legislators nor county boards, but by earnest loving mothers whose homes have been blessed by little children, who have learned by varied experience the needs and wants of the child."³⁵ The Mercy Home bears witness to the potency of voluntary action taken by informed lay persons who address themselves to the dilemmas of their time.

Inventory of Private Agencies in Birmingham: 1871-1921

The following review of private agencies is based upon newspaper reports of agency activity. Unfortunately, most records from this time have long since been lost or destroyed. The collection of the Mercy Home papers on indefinite loan to the Department of Archives and Manuscripts of the Birmingham Public Library is a happy exception, and soon the papers of the Children's Aid Society will also be available in the Department. Readers who have additional information

³⁵"Seventeenth Annual Report of the Mercy Home for the Year Ending December 31, 1908," p. 8.

about any of the early private charities would perform a great service by notifying the editor of *The Journal*.

The agencies listed below are treated in the order of their founding to give a sense of the elaboration of private services as the city matured.

Jewish Charity Organizations (1883)

The first recorded organized relief by a private charitable agency in Birmingham was offered by the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Association to Jewish immigrants in 1883; in the 1890's the Birmingham Hebrew Relief Society was organized by leading Jewish men. These two groups merged in 1904 to form the United Hebrew Charities, which that year offered cash relief to some, extended credit to others, and found work for over one hundred needy Jews.

The Daughters of Israel and Hebrew Aid Society were both established in the 1890's; the former was particularly active in assisting east European Jews, mainly those from Russia. During the depression of 1914, the Birmingham Hebrew Sheltering and Free Loan Association was incorporated for the purpose of giving interest free loans as well as temporary shelter and meals to the needy. The various Jewish charities established the Federation of Jewish Charities in 1915

to coordinate their fund-raising and relief-giving activities.³⁶

Relative to its population size and to other charities, the Birmingham Jewish community sponsored a large number of agencies characterized by comprehensive services and progressive administration of programs; the Federation of Jewish Charities anticipated by eight years a similar rationalization of programs by the community's non-Jewish agencies achieved through the Community Chest.

United Charities (1886) and Associated Charities (1909)

No private agency better reflects the changes within private social work during this period than the United Charities, established by leading white women and supported from its inception by city funds. The organization functioned virtually as an official department of the city in serving the poor. Thus, it became the agent of the city in determining who would receive charity transportation tickets. The hallmark of the organization was personal investigation of each applicant to determine merit. The city was divided into nine districts, each supervised by a district chairman aided by a committee of visitors; meritorious poor were aided from funds raised from the membership dues of interested women, combined with the city's monthly appropriation.³⁷

In early 1909, a conference was convened to review the inadequacies of the United Charities and to discuss reorganization into an agency staffed with a paid executive and agents to make investigations. Various other private agency officers, as well as several businessmen, attended the session. This conference was followed by visits by a field representative of the Russell Sage Foundation, which had established a department to encourage charity reorganization in cities across the country. In April, 1909, the Associated Charities of Birmingham was formally organized as the successor of the United Charities. Men now moved to the forefront of organized charity in Birmingham, as the vice president of the United States Steel plant headed a sixteen-member board composed of leading business and professional men.

At the time of the founding of the Associated Charities, sixteen agencies, including the Mercy Home, were accepted as members and granted representation on a central council of charities, along with representatives of the Mayor's office and the County Board of Revenue.³⁸ The function of this council was to advise the board of directors, who were responsible for financing

the work of the new organization. The stated purpose of the Associated Charities was to maintain a central registration bureau to which applicants for charity could be directed for investigation by skilled paid workers. Relief would be given only when the staff determined that aid was necessary; the businessmen who directed it felt that well intentioned volunteers were likely to engage in "mere dollar giving" which encouraged idleness.³⁹

In the summer of 1916, the city officially assumed responsibility for the activities of the financially troubled Associated Charities through its recently established department of relief and correction, inaugurating a new era of public responsibility for an heretofore private activity.⁴⁰

Hillman Hospital (1888)

Although Hillman Hospital was officially incorporated by its Board of Lady Managers in 1897, its origins date back to 1888. At that time T. T. Hillman, a prominent executive of the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railway Company, donated \$20,000 worth of bonds for the purpose of establishing a charity hospital with the stipulation that the gift be equally divided between black and white patients. That original requirement governed Hillman's delivery of services thereafter. The income from these bonds, plus monthly grants from the city and county, constituted the Hospital's initial operating fund. When the city and county were unable to maintain these payments in 1894, the Hospital was forced to close for several weeks; it closed for two years after a fire destroyed the buildings at the end of that same year. After being briefly operated by two local physicians, the Hospital was incorporated under its Board of Lady Managers, who raised \$40,000 for a new building that was opened in 1903 with facilities for one hundred patients, including private as well as charity cases. Separate wards were constructed for black and white patients. The county accepted the facility as a gift in 1907 and continued to operate it as a charity hospital serving both races.⁴¹

Alabama Industrial School for Wayward Boys (1898)

The Boys' Industrial School was a state institution chartered by the legislature and supported by both public and private funds. It was regarded by contemporaries as one of the city's most worthy charities and is, therefore, included in this discussion. Built on land purchased with funds raised by the Birmingham Commercial Club, it operated under a board of directors of leading women who were appointed by the governor. The School began a new building in 1907 for 250 boys

³⁶Mark H. Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie: The Birmingham Experience* (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1974), pp. 45, 58, 85, 104, 111 and 112; and *Birmingham News*, October 21, 1905.

³⁷Bigelow, "Birmingham," p. 145.

³⁸*Birmingham News*, April 28, 1909.

³⁹*Ibid.*, March 15, 1914.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, July 30, 1916.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, May 26, 1902, p. 69; May 4, 1903; February 5, 1904; February 15, 1904; February 18, 1904; February 22, 1904; and Bigelow, "Birmingham," pp. 145-148.

with a state appropriation of \$50,000, and continuing support from both city and county.⁴²

The public and private concern for delinquent white boys and girls was not matched by an equal concern for black youngsters. There was no industrial school for blacks during this period. Wayward black youth were placed in a special school class supported solely by funds collected by black ministers. The black community also raised funds to support a youth officer for blacks who worked with the police department in disposing of juvenile cases.⁴³

**Birmingham Free Kindergarten Association (1899)
and Birmingham Social Settlement Association (1912)**

The Association was formed by a group of prominent women and was supported entirely by private donations. Though its funding was precarious, the Association ran three centers for 113 white children in 1901; three years later nearly four hundred attended six locations. The work of the Association reached its peak in 1911 when fifteen centers were supported, offering both child care and teacher training. The work of the Association ended when the public schools assumed responsibility for the free kindergarten program in 1912.⁴⁴

The women involved with the Kindergarten Association expanded their board in 1912 and formed the Birmingham Social Settlement Association. Their motivation had come from a talk delivered by Jane Addams before the National Child Labor Conference, which met in Birmingham in 1911. After this speech, interested women established a milk station and day nursery for the children of working mothers. These women soon merged their activities with those of the Kindergarten Association to form the Settlement Association. Under the direction of the Association, this project was expanded into a settlement house serving two hundred children; five additional settlements were begun by the Association. The County Board of Revenue supported the organization from its founding in 1912 until 1917.⁴⁵

**Alabama Colored Orphans and Old Folks Home
(1900)**

This facility was founded amidst high praise from Mayor W. H. Drennen and Superintendent of Schools J. H. Phillips, but financial crises plagued it throughout its history. A black board of directors comprised of businessmen, ministers, and physicians was headed by Dr. W. R. Pettiford, President of the Alabama Penny Savings Bank. Regular financial support came from black ministers and secret societies. Three spe-

⁴²*Birmingham News*, April 23, 1900; June 8, 1900; August 1, 1900; August 9, 1900; October 18, 1900; January 2, 1906; October 5, 1907.

⁴³*Ibid.*, November 28, 1903.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, April 23, 1900; May 22, 1900; May 29, 1901; February 18, 1911; January 26, 1913.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, May 17, 1914, sec. C, p. 9; November 15, 1914; June 6, 1917.

cial appeals for funds had to be conducted during the period to meet outstanding debts or mortgage notes, but creditors took control of the property in 1912 when the directors defaulted on mortgage payments. Black women organized a temporary civic league to redeem the property, and sought white support by means of a newly established advisory board composed of prominent white women, several of whom were active in other charity work. The permanent Federation of Colored Women's Clubs assumed responsibility for directing the facility, aided by a monthly subsidy of twenty-five dollars from the city.

In addition to providing homes for the elderly and orphans, the Home at various times also managed a hospital unit served by black physicians who treated at least one hundred patients a year, a nurses training school with a maximum enrollment of forty-three, and a school for domestic workers. Admitting that the hospital was being run "at a very low rate," the board president unsuccessfully sought to have public authorities operate it as a charity hospital. Built for a capacity of two to three hundred in 1900, the Home clung precariously to life, serving a resident population of only nineteen in 1916.⁴⁶

St. Vincent's Hospital (1900)

St. Vincent's was built at a cost of \$250,000, most of which was provided by the Catholic order which managed it. One-third of its two hundred beds were reserved for free patients of both races; the city maintained five at public expense. Each year until 1908 the Hospital served about 1,250-1,400 patients, of whom 550 to 700 each year were charity cases. The Hospital also operated a free clinic which served an additional 650 each year. A \$50,000 drive led by businessmen and physicians permitted an expansion of services in 1908, including the distribution of food and clothing to needy families.⁴⁷

Salvation Army (1902)

The Army began its Birmingham program with a small residence for men that could house fifteen at one time with provision for additional care for the sick; in its first four months of operation fourteen hundred lodged there. Within the year a Workingmen's Hotel for seventy opened, followed by a Rescue Home for "unfortunate women" that opened in 1905 after a successful five thousand dollar drive. In 1907 the Army opened a free employment bureau for men and women that seems to have been maintained for only a few months. Both the city and county supported the

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, March 24, 1900; February 16, 1903; January 24, 1906; February 20, 1907; December 14, 1910; November 24, 1912; March 16, 1913.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, September 27, 1900; November 24, 1900; November 8, 1902; November 25, 1905; July 23, 1907; February 20, 1908; December 9, 1910.

Army's work. The Salvation Army had no formal lay leadership in Birmingham but rather was governed from southern district headquarters.⁴⁸

Boys' Club (1903) and Children's Aid Society (1911)

The Boys' Club was founded by an all-female board of managers who, by annually selling tags on downtown streets, raised enough funds to hire a male manager to supervise their program. The Club was housed in a room in City Hall, where both a school and recreation center were available for working boys, especially newsboys. Later, the Club operated a dormitory, an employment bureau, a playground for working boys in the downtown district, a summer camp, and a Big Brother program for orphans. In cooperation with the police court, the Club sought foster homes for "neglected and dependent white boys." The Club also funded a black probation officer who worked with black youth appearing before local courts. The women's board of managers received support from an advisory board of leading men, especially in preparing for the annual tag days.

When a separate juvenile court was established in Jefferson County in 1911, the leadership of the Boys' Club played a central role in establishing a Children's Aid Society, which served as a clearinghouse for placing dependent and neglected white children under the supervision of the court. Prominent men and women served on the Society's board, but their only function seems to have been to raise funds. Actual placements were made by field workers employed by the court. In 1913 the city employed two black probation officers, and hope was expressed that a Negro Juvenile Aid Society could be established in the near future. However, none is mentioned in the press by the close of the period.⁴⁹

Sisters of Charity Home (1903)

A Catholic priest raised the \$11,000 needed to purchase the building and nine acres for this home, which was managed by the Sisters of Charity and opened to children of all creeds and both races between three and fourteen years of age. The Sisters established fund-raising committees from each ward and suburban community to raise nearly \$3,000 each year, which was supplemented by the county and later by the city. By 1912, both Protestant and Catholic congregations aided the Home, which consistently served more non-Catholic than Catholic children and often turned residents away because its limit of one hundred twenty was reached. At the same time, the Sisters transferred business and fund-raising responsibilities to a lay board of managers

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, May 26, 1902, p. 79; September 28, 1904; November 28, 1904; January 28, 1905; April 12, 1907; May 23, 1912; June 6, 1917.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, May 3, 1905; October 12, 1905; August 17, 1907; March 25, 1909; January 12, 1911; April 24, 1911; September 20, 1912; May 4, 1913; June 29, 1913; August 10, 1913.

and an orphans' home association of over two hundred women.⁵⁰

Carrie Tuggle Institute (1908)

Four black fraternal organizations established the Institute as both an orphanage and a school with the active help of two local judges and leading white merchant, Louis Pizitz. A white advisory board of prominent men and women, including Hugo Black and Rev. James A. (Brother) Bryan, continued to work with the Institute, leading Dr. A. G. Gaston, its most famous alumnus, to recall with affection the "devoted and efficient inter-racial action of concerned adults."⁵¹ With an enrollment of two hundred it was the only institution in the state which educated black orphans. A mass meeting in 1915 was held to raise money to meet a seven thousand dollar debt. Prominent black and white citizens, including City Commissioner Arlie K. Barber, addressed the audience. The Institute closed in 1933 because of insurmountable financial difficulties; furthermore, some of its functions had been made unnecessary with the rise of public secondary schools for blacks.⁵²

Anti-Tuberculosis Society (1910)

The twenty-four member board of directors of the Society included leading members of the business community who joined with ministers, physicians, and women civic leaders to combat this disease by establishing a mountaintop non-residential camp for its victims. From the beginning, the incidence of tuberculosis among blacks was a concern to the Society, whose executive director expressed the hope that more would take advantage of the camp and the concern shown for their welfare by the Society's other programs. In 1912 the Society opened a fresh air school for poor anemic black children as a preventive measure and also a sanatorium for blacks as a supplement to the mountain camp. These additions reflected the board's awareness that of an estimated four thousand cases of tuberculosis in Birmingham, three quarters were among blacks. Responding to the absence of treatment facilities for advanced cases, the society opened a residential hospital on land donated by the city, but this served only whites.⁵³

All together twelve hundred persons were reached by the Society's various programs in 1916. The organization was commended at that time by the city health

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, September 10, 1904; November 5, 1904; December 22, 1912.

⁵¹A. G. Gaston, *Green Power* (Birmingham: Birmingham Publishing Co., 1968), p. 22.

⁵²*Birmingham News*, November 14, 1915; Brown, Charles Allen, *The Origin and Development of Secondary Education for Negroes in the Metropolitan Area of Birmingham, Alabama* (Birmingham: Commercial Printing Co., 1959), pp. 15 and 17; and Gaston, *Green Power*, p. 1.

⁵³*Birmingham News*, June 16, 1910; April 7, 1911; July 4, 1912; October 6, 1912; April 5, 1914, sec. D., p. 5; June 4, 1916.

officer, who said that the Society was responsible for a reduction of the tuberculosis death rate during the past five and one-half years of from 108 per 100,000 among whites to 74 per 100,000 and from 519 per 100,000 among blacks to 360 per 100,000. Still, Birmingham had the second highest death rate in the nation from the disease.⁵⁴

Holy Innocents's Hospital (Children's Hospital) (1911)

The Hospital was founded by the Episcopal Church with five leading men serving as trustees and prominent women serving as officers with responsibility for fund-raising. The women sought a large number of small monthly private subscriptions, which were supplemented by a subsidy from the county. With a capacity of twenty-five, the Hospital provided free care to children under fourteen years of age referred by social agencies or approved by an admissions committee; Birmingham physicians volunteered medical services to the Hospital.⁵⁵

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, June 23, 1916.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, September 18, 1911; March 20, 1912; June 27, 1914; October 11, 1917; and E. M. Henderson, Sr., "Relief in Jefferson County: A Brief Survey," typescript (Birmingham: n. p., 1934), p. 76.

Octavia White Home for Aged and Infirm Old Ladies (1911)

The Daughters of the Confederacy opened and managed the Home, which received support from local churches and the city and county. The Home could accommodate only nine residents.⁵⁶

Pisgah Home (1911)

This Home was established as a rescue agency for men by the Pisgah Evangelists, a secretarian organization which operated similar facilities elsewhere in the United States. Originally supported solely by voluntary contributions, the Home offered food, clothing, and lodging to a maximum of twenty-five men and boys. Subsidies were soon received from both the city and county, enabling the Home to open a center for women and girls. Criticizing the investigations conducted by other agencies, the Home proudly claimed to offer "immediate relief without red tape or delay."⁵⁷

⁵⁶*Birmingham News*, February 9, 1911; December 15, 1912; June 6, 1917.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, March 29, 1911; November 4, 1911; December 19, 1911; February 3, 1912; June 19, 1912; October 20, 1912; March 8, 1913; June 27, 1916.

THE HAWES RIOT: All the News Unfit to Print *

JEFF NORTHRUP

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us . . .

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*.

The spectacle of Birmingham at the *fin de siècle* was indeed just that: a pageant that lacked none of the primary ingredients of bygone melodramas. Unscrupulous land speculators, romantic heroines, dapper leading men, virulent disease, a goodly supply of tawdry subplots: they were all elements of what was in effect a frontier town. While the above quotation from Dickens is in no way meant to imply an identification of the historical processes in the Birmingham of the 1880's and 1890's to that of France during the Reign of Terror, there was most certainly in Birmingham an abundance of lawlessness, turbulence, and indecision, and a confusion over which direction the burgeoning city should or would take. Regardless of the efficacy of Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis,¹ that historian could hardly have found a better laboratory than Birmingham to study the effects of the frontier on the social fabric.

Despite the tendency of some writers to over-dramatize the last two decades of the nineteenth century, this is hardly possible in recounting the events that occurred in Jefferson County during that period of time. O'Brien's Opera House was in full swing, Asbury Thompson was the seventh mayor of Birmingham, a new courthouse was being built on Twenty-first Street and Third Avenue, North, telephone calls could be made by dialing only two digits, and Thomas Seay was Governor of Alabama. What had been a sleepy hamlet of some 1,200 souls in 1872 had become a tumultuous metropolitan hubbub of some 20,000 in the space of but sixteen years. On weekends this number was swollen two times over, as denizens of nearby suburbs made their weekly trip to town. Many of these men were coalminers and ironworkers who labored in the mines, furnaces, and rolling mills in the vicinity. What amusements existed for these hard toiling men were simple and predictable: saloons and bars of various descrip-

tion did a land-office business, especially on Saturday nights.²

Ordinarily, murders did not cause much commotion among the good citizens of Birmingham. In fact, such crimes were rather commonplace, the city being not untypical of other frontier towns. There was great wealth to be had if one were a shrewd businessman, and passions often ran high. But in December of 1888, murder was committed which shocked even the more callous of the populace. As the mystery became more intricate and the rumors more lurid, an unhappy amalgam of intemperate drinking, mob psychology, and a healthy dose of self-righteous anger, all of which was held together by the mortar of "yellow journalism," produced what has since become known as the Hawes Riot.³

On Wednesday morning, December 5, 1888, citizens of the Birmingham area were informed that the body of a small child had been found floating on the surface of a lake in the suburb of East Lake the previous day. Despite the statements of two doctors that there were no marks on the body to indicate foul play, the *Age-Herald* headlined on page three of the morning edition: "IS IT FIEND OR FATE? The Dead Body of an Unknown Little Girl is Found Floating on the Waters of East Lake—Suspicious of Foul Play."⁴ In what can only be described as a maudlin display of emotion, the paper then described the unclaimed body thusly:

After the good ladies had wiped the water away from the cold little face and brushed the hair back from the child's forehead, it was seen that the little one was unusually pretty. She had large blue eyes, light wavy brown hair, was dressed in a neat brown or

²For a listing of saloons in the Birmingham area, see *Birmingham City Directory, 1888* (Birmingham, Alabama: R. L. Polk and Co., 1888), pp. 590-91.

³Historians must rely, to a large extent, on the reports given in local newspapers for an account of the riot and the incidents leading up to it. The single monograph devoted to the subject is Goldsmith B. West's *The Hawes Horror and Bloody Riot at Birmingham: A Truthful Story of What Happened* (Birmingham, Alabama: The Caldwell Printing Co., 1888). Except for details of the riot itself, the bulk of the information in West's book is lifted directly from the pages of the *Age-Herald*. James Sulzby's *Birmingham Sketches, From 1871 Through 1921* (Birmingham, Alabama: Birmingham Printing Co., 1945) is largely a faithful word by word transcription of Goldsmith's work. A. B. Garland's *Biennial Report of the Adjutant-General of Alabama to Thomas Seay, Governor and Commander in Chief, 1889 and 1890* (Montgomery, Alabama: Brown Printing Co., 1890) does not deal with either the murder or the riot but instead is concerned in large part with the demeanor of the militia and the townspeople in the days following the riot.

⁴"Is It Fiend or Fate," *The Daily Age-Herald*, December 5, 1888.

*This article is the first of two which will deal with the Hawes murder case. The second, which will also be authored by Jeff Northrup, will appear in a subsequent issue.

¹Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1920).



REDINGTON PHOTO.

Richard R. Hawes, accused and convicted of the murder of his wife, Emma, and two of their three children, May and Irene. From Goldsmith B. West, *The Hawes Horror and Bloody Riot at Birmingham: A Truthful Story of What Happened* (Birmingham, Alabama: The Caldwell Printing Co., 1888).



A view of East Lake, East Lake, Alabama, taken a number of years after the body of May Hawes was found floating in its waters. Photograph from the Collections of the Birmingham Public Library.

*blue worsted skirt, underneath which was a warm, plaid underskirt. She was 3 feet tall, 11½ inches in height, and appeared to be about 12 years of age. Her hair was neatly plaited and her general appearance gave evidence of refined and cultured association.*⁵

Unfortunately, the paper's suppositions as to the girl's genteel upbringing proved not only unfounded but untrue. On the afternoon of December 5, the body was finally identified as being the daughter of Richard R. and Emma P. Hawes, residents of Birmingham. He was a thirty-two-year-old railroad engineer in the employ of the Georgia Pacific Railway Co. His wife, about twenty-seven years of age, was from Atlanta. She suffered from alcoholism and a roving eye for good-looking men, both of which had, over the years, made for an unpleasant marital union.⁶ This was hardly what could be defined as a "refined and cultured association." But the whereabouts of both remained a mystery. There were three children of which the deceased, May, was the eldest. But neither parent had reported her missing, and indeed, neither parent had been seen the last two days. Why this was so remained, for the moment, a mystery.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶West, *The Hawes Horror*, pp. 32-33.

The Jefferson County Coroner, Alfred S. Babbitt, convened a six-man coroner's jury and began holding an inquest the day after the child's body was found. By the end of the first day's testimony, on Wednesday evening, one witness had been held in default of bond, a mulatto woman named Fanny Bryant. According to the Thursday morning *Age-Herald*, this was due to the fact that Miss Bryant "had appeared to know more than she cared to tell of the case."⁷ Further explanations were not forthcoming.

The disappearance of the Hawes family was partially solved late Wednesday evening. A telegram arrived at the *Age-Herald* around 9 p.m. which read as follows:

*Columbus, Miss., Dec. 5 — Mr. R. R. Hawes, one of the most popular employees of the Georgia Pacific railway, and Miss Mayes Story, daughter of Mr. J. D. Story, of this place, were married this evening at 3 o'clock at the residence of the bride's father, the Rev. J. W. Price officiating. They left at once for a visit to his relatives in Augusta, Ga., and a bridal tour through the East. There were no cards, and only a few friends were present.*⁸

⁷"The Mystery Solved," *The Daily Age-Herald*, December 6, 1888.

⁸*Ibid.*

This rather amazing coincidence, made no less amazing by the contents of the wedding announcement, was followed by another. The train which had left Columbus was due into Birmingham at 9:40. The local constabulary barely had time to draw up a warrant and hurry to the train station. Once there, three officers tactfully escorted Hawes off the train, without subjecting the new bride to the trauma and mystery of the unfolding story. There was no look, according to eye-witness accounts, of either guilt or remorse. Hawes' only statement was to ask which of his children he was accused of murdering. The arrest of Hawes was at this time mainly a precautionary measure, due to the complete mystification of the authorities as to the exact nature of his marital status and the whereabouts of the rest of the Hawes family. The *Age-Herald*, however, headlined the events of the previous night in the Thursday morning edition as: "THE MYSTERY SOLVED: The Murdered Girl Has Been Fully Identified, and Her Father is Now in the County Jail Charged With the Terrible Crime of Killing His Child."⁹ The accused was taken to the new jail on the corner of Twenty-first Street and Fourth Avenue, North.

Despite the lurid headlines, Hawes did receive some sympathetic press, but to much less an extent after Friday morning. Testimony was given at the inquest,

⁹*Ibid.*



May Hawes, the eldest daughter of Richard and Emma Hawes, whose body was found floating on the waters of East Lake, East Lake, Alabama, December 4, 1888. From Goldsmith B. West, *The Hawes Horror and Bloody Riot at Birmingham: A Truthful Story of What Happened* (Birmingham, Alabama: The Caldwell Printing Co., 1888).

and printed in the paper, that showed him to be a man devoted to his children. One witness indicated that they were the only reason he allowed Emma Hawes to stay with him, as she was often intoxicated and had been an unfaithful lover. Hawes himself maintained that he had been secretly divorced from his wife in Atlanta some years before, and had only lived with her and the children since their arrival in Birmingham. The *Age-Herald* described Hawes as a handsome bridegroom when his train reached town Wednesday night, and the paper reported that the accused steadfastly maintained his innocence.¹⁰

By Friday morning, December 7, however, most news releases concerning Richard Hawes were of the most damning nature. His guilt was assumed by the press, and, in succession, by the populace at large. On that morning, the *Age-Herald* devoted its entire front page to the inquest and items of related interest. While the paper complained that its reporters grew tired of running down sensational and groundless rumors, its headlines encouraged their spread. "DEEPER MYSTERY Gathering Around the Death of May Hawes. The Mother of the Girl is Still Missing And it is Believed That She, Too, is Dead. A Search to be Made For Her Body. Hawes Has Never Secured a Divorce From Her. How he Deceived a Trusting and Loving Young Lady."¹¹ Nor was the sensational language used by the paper guaranteed to cool the more hot-headed elements of the populace. The lead paragraph of Friday morning's story read:

*The body of little May Hawes still lies at Lockwood and Miller's undertaking rooms on Second Avenue. The pale, cold lips will never open to speak the name of the fiend in human form, who cut short the young life. The little form is shrouded by a terrible crime, the author of which need hope for no mercy from outraged law and justice.*¹²

Or an outraged citizenry?

In truth, and unfortunately for Hawes, there was much circumstantial evidence in the case aligned against him. Fanny Bryant (his supposed accomplice), various businessmen about town, and the new Mrs. Hawes had all been told varying stories by the accused concerning the whereabouts of his family. To his recent bride he had admitted the existence of only one child by his previous marriage, a five-year-old son named Willie (this unhappily turned out to be the truth, as Willie was alive and living with relatives in Georgia). Hawes told some his first wife had been deceased for two years; others that he had been divorced the same length of time. A search of court records in Atlanta revealed that the accused had indeed

¹⁰The *Daily Age-Herald*, December 6 and 7, 1888.

¹¹"Deeper Mystery," *The Daily Age-Herald*, December 7, 1888.

¹²*Ibid.*



Emma P. Hawes, the wife of Richard Hawes, whose body was recovered from the lake at Lakeview Park, Highlands, Alabama, along with that of her younger daughter Irene. From Goldsmith B. West, *The Hawes Horror and Bloody Riot at Birmingham: A Truthful Story of What Happened* (Birmingham, Alabama: The Caldwell Printing Co., 1888).

filed for a divorce, but that legal action had never been completed. Hawes' explanations as to the supposed whereabouts of his first wife produced nothing except the confirmation that he and the truth seemed to be strangers. Emma Hawes and Irene, the second daughter, remained missing.¹³

Despite mounting evidence to the contrary, the accused maintained his innocence. On the morning of the seventh, the coroner's jury questioned the distraught and bewildered bride, and she disclosed the contents of a note Hawes had sent her. The following is the only private record of the accused during his period of incarceration at the Twenty-first Street jail:

My Darling Mayes:

What can I say to you for the terrible trouble I have got into. I know how independent you are and only blame myself for not telling you all. For God's sake do not think I am guilty of this terrible thing;

¹³*The Daily Age-Herald*, December 6, 7, and 8, 1888.

try and judge me as light as you can. I loved you so I was afraid to tell you about her. I knew you would not have to be troubled with her as she would be in a convent. Don't believe anything you see in the papers, as not one-half is true. Let me know what you are going to do to me, this eve. This terrible suspense is just killing me. I don't think I can stand it much longer. Oh, my darling, if you only knew you could not censure me too severe, for it will prove out all right. Your broken hearted and most miserable one,

Richard¹⁴

This, and the rest of the inquest testimony was published in the *Age-Herald* on the morning of the 8th, which, as on the 7th, devoted all six front page columns to the "terrible mystery."

The possibility of mob action by the more aroused citizens of the Jefferson County area grew in proportion to the acceptance of rumor as fact. A militia officer and amateur historian of the day, Major Goldsmith B. West, produced a popular account of the entire incident by summarizing the *Age-Herald's* day-to-day reporting of that December's events. In his account, entitled *The Hawes Horror and Bloody Riot at Birmingham: A Truthful Story of What Happened* (*Age-Herald* editorials on the murder were also entitled "The Hawes Horror"), West was of the opinion that even citizens of a usually quiet demeanor were seen clustering about the sidewalks on Friday evening. The main topic of conversation seemed to be the location of the bodies of Emma Hawes and Irene, both of whom were supposed dead by the general populace. "There seemed to be a consensus of opinion uniting all classes that such a discovery would settle the matter, and . . . there were suggestions that certain elements of society were only waiting for some such final conclusive development to take the law in their own hands, or at any rate, make an attempt of that kind."¹⁵

Political circumstance in Birmingham that December afforded the town little likelihood that it would be prepared to handle mob violence. Perhaps the two most important officials, the mayor and the sheriff, were men who had held those positions only since the previous August. Thus each man brought four months experience to the task at hand. Mayor Thompson, perhaps because of his inexperience, oftentimes hesitated during the more critical moments of this explosive week. He failed to follow the advice of professional militiamen in the city until events forced him to do so. The Sheriff of Jefferson County, Joseph S. Smith, was but thirty-five years of age. He had "the reputation of being a man of determination, mettle, and nerve."¹⁶ All his attributes were put to the severest test.

¹⁴"The End is Near," *The Daily Age-Herald*, December 8, 1888.

¹⁵West, *The Hawes Horror*, p. 75.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 101.

The *Age-Herald* exhibited an almost schizoid editorial position in regards to the accused and the excited elements of the population in the days leading up to the riot. The paper, as well as concerned businessmen of the city, were worried about Birmingham's image. All were fearful that the news that mob violence had occurred on their city's streets would adversely affect the rosy economic outlook for themselves in particular and Birmingham in general. But the paper was also concerned that Birmingham could number among its inhabitants a figure capable of committing the ghoulish crimes of which Dick Hawes stood accused. In an editorial short, the Friday morning edition of the *Age-Herald* decreed that lynching was beyond the pale of the law, and should any community feel forced to resort to violence, the reputation of that place would be irreparably damaged. This was the first mention in print of any possibility of a threat to the legal process. But in the next column, the newspaper opined that "infanticide, under any condition, is among the most revolting, as it is the most unnatural of crimes, but when carried out deliberately and in cold

blood for a selfish purpose, it becomes shocking in the highest degree."¹⁷

The same dichotomy of interest was indicated in the Saturday morning edition. In the lead editorial, entitled "Abide by the Law," the *Age-Herald* editors concluded that "there has been no serious talk or even thought of mob violence." Even though the deed was nevarious, the paper again counseled against lynching, favoring instead a just, albeit speedy trial. The editors concluded: "There have as yet been no demonstrations that would justify the belief that any violence is contemplated and we hope there will be none."¹⁸ Yet on the same page, presumably the same editors indulged themselves in the kind of rumor-mongering and loose talk that raged unchecked in the streets. Under the heading "The Hawes Horror," the accused's guilt was assumed: "If R. R. Hawes is guilty to the full extent that he is suspected . . . his crime has hardly ever been equalled for cold blooded atrocity." Hawes was de-

¹⁷"The Hawes Horror," *The Daily Age-Herald*, December 7, 1888.

¹⁸"Abide by the Law," *The Daily Age-Herald*, December 8, 1888.



A view of the lake at Lakeview Park, Highlands, Alabama, taken approximately three years after the discovery of the bodies of Emma Hawes and her daughter Irene there late in 1888. Photograph from the Collections of the Birmingham Public Library.

scribed as seemingly intelligent and of good character, which made it still harder — as so the editors concluded — to imagine how he could have “in the most deliberate and cold blooded manner [made] way with his wife and children in order that he [might] enjoy without annoyance the pleasure of a second marriage.”¹⁹ No jury had as yet tried Hawes, nor had the coroner’s inquest as yet found reason to condemn the man. The same cannot be said of the informal juries on the newspaper and in the streets.

Saturday morning dawned with the promise of fateful events. Crowds filled the streets at an early hour, and eyewitnesses recorded that there was a sense of expectancy among the restless multitudes.²⁰ At about half-past noon, even the worst suspicions seemed to be confirmed. The lake at Lakeview, the center of one of the most fashionable suburbs of the young city, was thought by many, including Coroner Babbitt, to be the final resting place of the missing members of the Hawes family, due to certain clues (a blood stained axe and oat sack) unearthed in the vicinity by detectives and its proximity to the Hawes’ house. On that morning, Babbitt ordered the lake dragged, and operations there soon yielded the beaten and bruised body of Emma Hawes (the body of Irene was found over a week later when the same lake was drained). The frustrated, self-righteous anger of the citizenry, an ember fanned for days by the grim accounts and hyperbolic speculations of the press, was about to burst into flames.

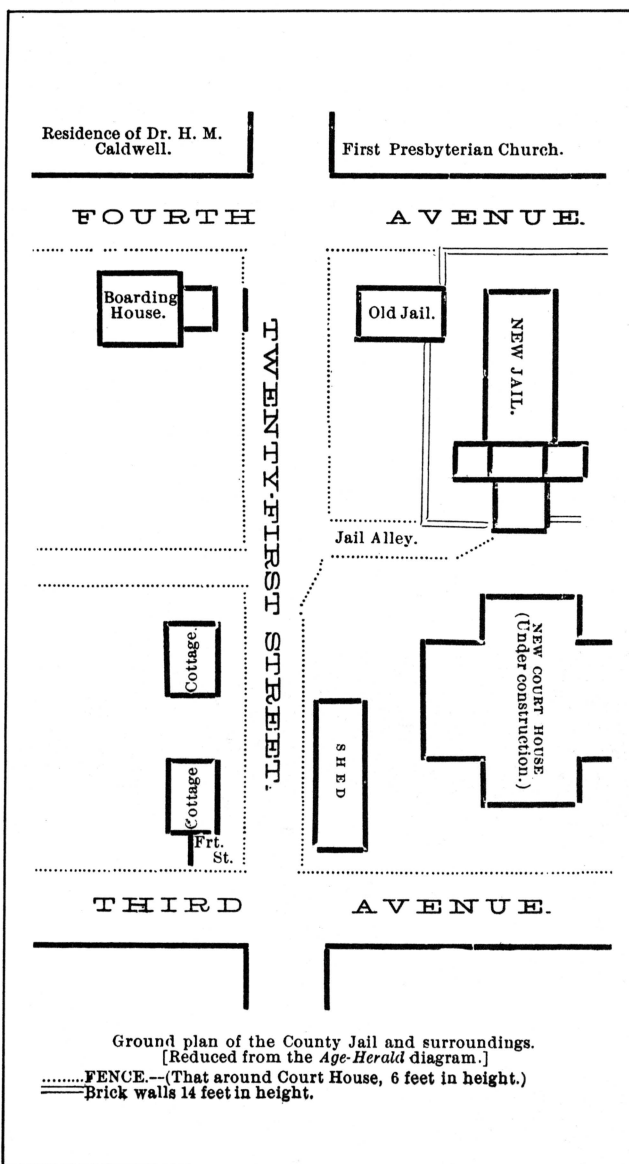
The only local account of the preparations in Birmingham that Saturday to meet the threat of violence must be viewed with a somewhat jaundiced eye. Goldsmith B. West, already mentioned as the author of *The Hawes Horror*, served as his own apologist in the matter. He explains why, despite urgent and repeated requests on his part, the state militia was not called into action sooner. West was an officer in the militia and one of its highest ranking members continually present at Birmingham during the week. He saw his role that Saturday as that of a prophet scorned in his own land:

*Notwithstanding the censure, both locally and from his military superiors, which had been visited upon Major West for his insistence upon the mobilization of the Birmingham military on Thursday night, Dec. 6, that officer again busied himself throughout the entire day of Saturday to impress the authorities and the officers of the troops stationed here of the importance of being ready, and available and thoroughly ready, in case of an emergency.*²¹

According to West, he telegraphed the governor and Colonel Jones,²² who was in command of the militia (Second Regiment, Alabama State Militia) in the Bir-

mingham district, warning them of the impending crisis. Neither of these telegrams is mentioned in Jones’ reports following the riot.²³ West also claimed that he warned Mayor Thompson at 3:00 p. m. and again at 5:00 p. m. that the military should be called to clear the streets of increasingly large and restive crowds. The mayor declined to do so, supposedly for the reason that he feared the effect such an action would have might be the contrary of what was intended; that is, to excite the mob even more. Although West disavowed any motive on his part to discredit

²³Garland, *Biennial Report of the Attorney General, 1889 and 1890*, pp. 33-54.



A ground plan of the area surrounding the Jefferson County Courthouse, the area in which the Hawes Riot took place on Saturday, December 8, 1888. From Goldsmith B. West, *The Hawes Horror and Bloody Riot at Birmingham: A Truthful Story of What Happened* (Birmingham, Alabama: The Caldwell Printing Co., 1888).

¹⁹“The Hawes Horror,” *The Daily Age-Herald*, December 8, 1888.

²⁰West, *The Hawes Horror*, pp. 90-91.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 93.

²²Colonel Thomas G. Jones was himself appointed Adjutant General in 1889, and in 1890 was elected Governor of Alabama.

the mayor for his reluctance to act, that is exactly what he did: "It does not matter that in the opinion of the narrator and other officers and citizens, bloodshed would have been certainly avoided by a course different to that which was adopted. The Sheriff and the Mayor were the responsible persons in the matter."²⁴

Entrance to the new jail on Twenty-first Street between Third and Fourth Avenues, North could be had only by passing up a blind alley that extended from Twenty-first Street. For his part, Sheriff Smith had also chosen to forego a call to the militia, instead swearing in several additional special deputies, until the number of armed guards at the jail that Saturday night numbered about forty. They were placed in the alley near the street end, in the windows of both the old and new jail which commanded the alley, in the half-constructed courthouse, and on the roof of the jail.

The genesis of the mob that finally attacked the jail cannot be pinpointed. There were knots and crowds of people on most corners, in saloons, and at every meeting place. A crowd of 150 to 200 people had assembled at the gas works (Thirteenth Street and Third Avenue, North) and another of equal size at the Florence Hotel and the public fountain (Nineteenth Street and Second Avenue, North). Every rolling mill was credited as the source of rumors of a dynamite cache. By 10 o'clock in the evening, a mass of humanity, filled more by alcohol than by thoughts of revenge,²⁵ surged down Second Avenue, North in the direction of the jail, engulfing smaller crowds as it passed and swelling its size ever larger. Others pressed down Nineteenth and Twentieth Streets and up Third Avenue, North, with all the disparate groups joining at the corner of Twenty-first Street and Fourth Avenue, North, a crowd of some 2,000 located directly in front of the jail. The mayor, prominent members of the local militia, and a few peaceful-minded citizens mingled with the rabble and tried to allay their collective fury. But they were few in number, and the tumult swarmed around them and carried them with it.

As the crowd began pressing itself into the narrow passageway leading to the jail, Sheriff Smith, standing at the back of the alley, gave two counted warnings to cease and desist, or else he would shoot. When the second order went unheeded, the order to "Fire" was given, and a fusillade of forty guns rang out, and then another. There were a few answering shots from the mob, but most stood immobilized for a moment of stunned silence, and then retreated madly down the narrow confines of the alley in order to escape further bloodshed. Left behind were the bodies of eleven dead or dying men, with some twenty to twenty-five wounded. The popular anger against Dick Hawes was momentarily forgotten, and replaced with cries of "Hang Smith." At this point, the sheriff finally called



A pencil sketch of Joseph S. Smith, Sheriff of Jefferson County, Alabama. From *The Weekly Age-Herald*, March 5, 1890, p. 1.

for the local units of the militia. Three units, the Jefferson Volunteers, the Rifles, and the Guards, answered the call. All were badly undermanned, but with bayonets in place, the streets were quickly cleared. These units remained on duty until Sunday morning, when details from other areas of the state relieved them.

Under the Sunday morning headline "Blood and Death," the *Age-Herald* recorded "the most terrible tragedy which has ever occurred in the city of Birmingham."²⁶ Yet even the painful series of events which were recorded on the front page did not leaven the terrible justice meted out to Hawes on the editorial page. The guilt of the accused was even more firmly fixed in the eyes of these amateur magistrates following the discovery of the body of Emma Hawes. Various scenarios of what could or might have happened regarding the death of Mrs. Hawes and her two daughters were recounted as what "must" have happened. The conclusion of the editors that "he and no other is the man who did this murderous work" was based on totally circumstantial evidence, the admissibility of which had as yet not been determined by any legal process. Hawes was defined as a "fiend compared to whom Iago was a saint and Mephistopheles an angel of light."²⁷ The newspaper had tried, convicted, and

²⁴West, *The Hawes Horror*, p. 107.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 105-112.

²⁶"Blood and Death," *The Daily Age-Herald*, December 9, 1888.

²⁷"The Hawes Horror," *The Daily Age-Herald*, December 9, 1888.

sentenced Richard Hawes, and the local populace had attempted to carry out that sentence.

Although both Mayor Thompson and Sheriff Smith were roundly criticized for their failure to act other than in the manner they did, both survived politically. Sheriff Smith was the recipient of several warrants for his own arrest on charges of murder, but quickly posted bail and was soon back on duty. Charges against him were soon dropped. Martial law was never declared, the military always remaining under the orders of the civil authorities. The various militia detachments began to leave the city on Wednesday, December 12, having seen no action.

As for Richard Hawes, the future was bleak. The coroner's jury found him culpable of murder on December 12, along with two accomplices, Fanny Bryant and Albert Patterson (a relative of Fanny's). At his trial, on July 12, 1889, Hawes was convicted of first degree murder and sentenced to be hanged. After an unsuccessful appeal to the Alabama Supreme Court and a thwarted attempt at suicide in his cell, Richard Hawes was hanged on February 28, 1890. Fanny Bryant received a life sentence but was killed in a fight soon after entering prison at Wetumpka. Albert Patterson received a reduced sentence for turning state's witness.



The Jefferson Volunteers of the Alabama State Militia pictured before the as-yet-incomplete Jefferson County Courthouse on December 8, 1888, the day of the Hawes Riot. Jefferson County Sheriff Joseph S. Smith is shown standing to the rear of the line of militiamen. Only a few of the Volunteers pictured above have been positively identified. Photograph from the Collections of the Birmingham Public Library.

These convictions and sentences were not, however, the only results of the Hawes affair. The citizenry of Birmingham perhaps gained a new respect for the consequences of civil disorder, which they seemed not to have possessed before. But the price of this education — whatever its context — was dear. Among the dead was M. B. Throckmorton, Birmingham postmaster and militiaman, who had attempted to serve as a peacemaker the night of the riot. Deputies guarding the jail did not recognize him in the mob, and thinking he was carrying dynamite, shot and killed him.²⁸

If the results for Birmingham's citizenry were uncertain, such was not the case for the *Age-Herald*. The paper clearly profited from the incident. By its own reckoning, more copies were sold during the week beginning Friday, December 7, than had been sold before in the history of Alabama journalism. The following table and commentary was provided by the paper in its lead editorial on Saturday, December 15:

²⁸"Guns Blazed, 11 Men Feared Dead — 51 Years Ago Today," *Birmingham Post*, December 8, 1939.

<i>Friday, December 7</i>	7,600
<i>Saturday, December 8</i>	9,000
<i>Sunday, December 9</i>	19,524
<i>Monday, December 10</i>	12,856
<i>Tuesday, December 11</i>	10,000
<i>Wednesday, December 12</i>	8,500
<i>Thursday, December 13</i>	7,650

That the interests of advertisers will be well subserved by making use of the columns of the daily and weekly Age-Herald, is made patent by the foregoing figures and statements.

*The Sunday edition will be unusually large, and the demand for advertising space will be heavy. Advertisers should call at the office on Saturday, to insure insertion.*²⁹

In retrospect, one can only hope that the advertisers got their money's worth.

²⁹"How It Sold," *The Daily Age-Herald*, December 15, 1888.

THE BIRMINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY From Its Beginning until 1927 Chapters I and II

VIRGINIA POUNDS BROWN AND
MABEL THUSTON TURNER

PREFACE

The idea for the writing of this history originated in 1972 with an exhibit on the history of the Birmingham Public Library, in connection with Birmingham's centennial celebration. Elizabeth Webb Cooper, exhibit librarian, created the outstanding displays which appeared on all floors of the library. They traced the history of the library from its beginning in the public schools to the present. Mrs. Cooper used photographs, documents, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, and other memorabilia.

In this history we have undertaken to put into written form what was started with Mrs. Cooper's exhibit. We are indebted to her for making her sources available to us; we found them an invaluable aid. We are also indebted to other staff members, particularly Mary Bess Kirksey and Richardena Ramsay, for their assistance and encouragement.

In view of plans for a new library, it seemed appropriate to end our history with the opening of the present library building in 1927. That event marked the culmination of a long, hard effort by the people of Birmingham to secure a permanent library home. When the library moves into another, much larger building, the present building will house the Department of Archives and Manuscripts, the Archives of the City of Birmingham, of the Tenth Judicial Circuit Court of the State of Alabama, of the Southern Women's Archives, and, perhaps, those of Jefferson County.

Chapter I

THE JOURNEY OF MONSIEUR MOTTE

The Beginning to 1886

One day in the course of our search for this history, Mary Bess Kirksey, the Head of the Tutwiler Collection of Southern History and Literature, put in our hands a book from the collection entitled *Monsieur Motte*, published in 1888.

"It must have come through the library fire of 1925," she said, opening to the water-stained endpapers. "I

think the first library rules are pasted inside the front cover."

"How did you find it?" we asked, reaching for this link with the past.

"Miss Ham* had made a subject card under 'Birmingham Public Library' with a note about the rules."

Saying hallelujahs to Miss Ham, we opened the green-back book with the typical nineteenth-century gold stamping on the cover. There were the rules for Birmingham's first public library. We turned to the half-title page looking for further clues. Tucked in the gutter of the page where librarians hide such things were the initials "L. C." and the date "May 11, '09".

This book must be one of the many uncataloged or re-cataloged volumes which dated from the fateful year of 1909 when the Birmingham Library Association hired its first professional librarian, Lila May Chapman, for six months to put the then existing library in order.¹

Interestingly, however, the first rule in *Monsieur Motte* stated that a fee of \$2.50 was charged per year for the use of the library. This rule indicated that the book was in the library when it was the responsibility of the Board of Education, since Birmingham did not have a free public library until 1909. *Monsieur Motte*, then, must have been one of those hundreds of books that Miss Chapman and her one assistant reworked that first summer on the noisy fourth floor of the City Hall, the fire station on one side and the jail below.

Looking back even further, had *Monsieur Motte* perhaps been one of the first volumes that John Herbert Phillips had shelved outside his superintendent of education office — a collection first for students and teachers and then, in Phillips's own words, the "nucleus of a substantial and permanent city library"?²

*Jesse Ham served as librarian of the Tutwiler Collection of Southern History and Literature from its inception in 1927 until her retirement in 1962.

¹Erna Oleson Xan, "40-Year Battle Gave City a Fine Public Library," *The Birmingham News*, October 11, 1959, Sec. A. p. 25.

²[John Herbert Phillips], *Annual Report of the Birmingham Public Schools for the Session Closing June 10th, 1887* (Birmingham, Alabama: Herald Book and Job Rooms, 1887) p. 57.

Birmingham Public Library.

No 7000 Alcove 5 Shelf 7

Donated by _____

LIBRARY RULES.

1. Any person may be entitled to membership in the library, subject to its rules and regulations, upon payment in advance of an annual fee of two dollars and fifty cents, or upon payment of twenty-five cents per month.
2. Each member shall be entitled to draw from the circulating department not more than two volumes at any one time, and may hold the same not longer than two weeks; provided, that certain books designated by the librarian as seven-day books, must be returned within one week.
3. Books may be renewed upon return of the same to the library, only in the event the same have not been called for by other members.
4. Any member who retains a book longer than the time indicated shall pay to the librarian two cents per day on each book thus retained, for the time it has been overdrawn.
5. All books lost and all damage, such as soiling, tearing or turning down leaves, or other injury must be paid for before any more books shall be issued to the member responsible for same. Books returned to the library by children or servants must be carefully wrapped to prevent accidental injury.
6. Magazines and books in the Reference Department must under no circumstances be taken from the library.
7. A membership card will be issued to each member; if lost, a charge of ten cents will be made before another is issued.

The set of seven "Library Rules" pasted on the front endpaper of *Monsieur Motte*, a novel by Grace King published in 1888 and apparently in the collections of Birmingham's High School Library before that facility finally emerged in 1909 as the Birmingham Public Library. From the Tutwiler Collection of Southern History and Literature, Birmingham Public Library.

Had the journey of *Monsieur Motte*, in fact, been the odyssey of the library itself, forty years wandering in rented quarters until it came to a building of its own on Seventh Avenue, North, and Twenty-first Street, to the promised land at last?

Where had the library been from 1887 to 1927? It is the purpose of this history to answer that question. But in so doing we must first take a look at Birmingham's beginnings and its struggle to create a public school system from which the library evolved.

The founding of Birmingham in 1871 heralded the beginning of the New South. The War between the States was still a vivid memory, but most Southerners wanted to put it behind them and make a new life. In Alabama's hill country lay the mineral wealth that could turn the South from agriculture to industry.

In its first few years Birmingham boomed; then the town struggled to survive the cholera epidemic and financial panic of 1873. When Henry DeBardeleben built the Alice Furnace in 1880, however, he proved what prior experimentation had indicated: good pig

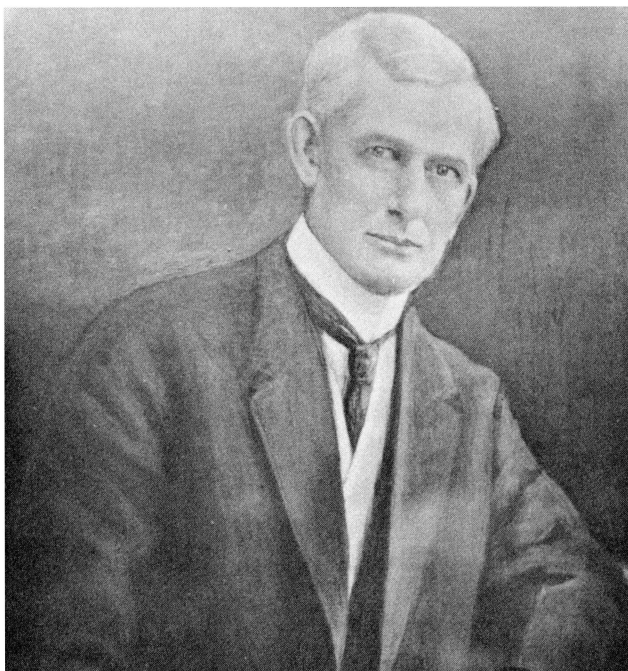
iron could be made with Alabama coal and iron ore. People started to stream into Birmingham, and the young city was launched on a decade of prosperity.

A. O. Lane, a high school teacher turned lawyer, was elected mayor in 1882, and Birmingham experienced its first progressive civic leadership. Lane gave top priority to establishing a public school system.³ (The Free School, later known as Powell, started in 1874 and was in fact a four-room "fee school".) To establish that system, he secured a tall young man of Welsh descent from Kentucky, John Herbert Phillips.

In 1871, at age nineteen, Phillips had begun his life-long career in public education. For four lean years he taught in the rugged back country of Kentucky, West Virginia, and Ohio. By 1875 he had saved enough money to enter Marietta College in Ohio. Phillips worked his way through college, graduating in 1880 as a member of Phi Beta Kappa. This earnest young educator, who combined practical experience and academic excellence, was eagerly sought as principal of the high school in Gallipolis, Ohio; just as eagerly, he accepted the position. At the same time, Phillips completed work on a master's degree from Marietta College, studying the classics during summers at the University of Chicago and the University of Edinburgh.⁴

³Elsie H. Dillon, *A Brief History of the Birmingham Public Schools, 1883-1972* ([Birmingham, Alabama]: n. p., 1972), p. 3.

⁴Hill Ferguson, comp. *Dr. and Mrs. John Herbert Phillips*, vol. 7 of his *Historical Collections of Birmingham, Jefferson County and Alabama*, 46 vols. (Birmingham, Alabama: n. p., 1952), n.p.



John Herbert Phillips, Superintendent of the Birmingham Public Schools and a principal figure in the development of the Birmingham Public Library. Photograph of the Phillips's portrait in the Collections of the Birmingham Public Library.

After coming to Birmingham in 1883, Phillips turned his efforts to providing more schools for the flourishing village, then numbering more than 3,000 people. He prepared a course of study and regulations for a school system. By 1884 a Board of Education had been created, and Phillips had successfully launched what was to become one of the outstanding public school systems of the country.

The new superintendent did not, however, concern himself solely with Birmingham's formal educational needs. The broader cultural and social development of the town was of equal concern. Consequently, Phillips entered at once into Birmingham's community life; he shone like a light in the cultural grayness of a town more concerned with mines and furnaces than with books and schools. He joined the First Presbyterian Church, where for many years he taught a Bible class. He spent part of his summers at Chautauqua, New York, and, in 1885, formed the Birmingham Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle. At an organizational meeting of the Circle, he spoke feelingly about the importance of continuing education.⁵

Phillips was not, however, the only citizen who expressed an active interest in less formal but no less significant educational activities. In June, 1885, the *Weekly Iron Age* reported on a meeting of "the Board

⁵*Ibid.*, n. p.

of Directors" of the public library. There were two major items of business on the agenda. First, "the committee on library and rooms reported that they had received from two northern dealers and Messrs. Smith & Montgomery, the prices of new and popular novels, and that the latter firm had bid lower than other competitors, and that the committee had purchased ninety volumes, at a cost of \$69.99." Second, a committee was selected to confer with civic groups "in connection with the erection of a new and handsome building" to be occupied by the association and other similar organizations.⁶ In the same year as this meeting the Library Association had 80 volumes on its shelves along with several newspapers and periodicals.

By 1886, the hopes of the Association's "Directors" to build a library building had come to naught. The operation of a library proved too difficult for the volunteer organization, and the holdings it had secured were turned over to Superintendent Phillips. The Board of Education instructed Phillips to send formal thanks to the Birmingham Library Association for its valued gift.⁷

⁶"The Public Library, Interesting Meeting of the Board of Directors—Books and a Building," *Weekly Iron Age*, June 11, 1885, p. 5.

⁷Birmingham Board of Education, "Minutes," September 13, 1886, Vol. 11 (Aug. 1884 to Sept., 1893), p. 67, in possession of Birmingham Board of Education.



The Wright Building, on the northwest corner of Third Avenue, North, and Nineteenth Street, housed Birmingham's High School Library from the Fall of 1886 until the Fall of 1890. On the second floor of this building were located the office of Superintendent John Herbert Phillips, classrooms, and the library, which by 1909 had become the Birmingham Public Library. Photograph from the Collections of the Birmingham Public Library.

At the September meeting of the Board, Phillips recommended that the library be open for the use of teachers, pupils, and the general public; and he submitted a draft of rules and regulations. At the same meeting Samuel Ullman suggested that "our representative in Congress be instructed to send to the library any valuable public documents . . . or publications of interest or instruction."⁸ By November, 1886, the library was sufficiently established to have printed labels attached to the books.

Since Birmingham's population had quickly reached 25,000 by 1885, it became imperative that the city have a high school building. For this purpose, the Board of Education leased the second floor of the Wright Building, in the middle of downtown Birmingham, on the northwest corner of Third Avenue, North, and Nineteenth Street. Adjoining Phillips's new office in the Wright Building was a reception room measuring 15 by 18 feet. This was the room which Phillips and Mayor Lane, through purchases and donations, equipped for a library. Phillips himself had accumulated over 300 books, including an encyclopedia, and he added these volumes to the Birmingham Library Association collection.⁹

The first official statement about the "city library" appears in Superintendent Phillips's *Annual Report of the Birmingham Public Schools for the Session Closing June 10, 1887*:

*Birmingham certainly needs a Public Library: the want is already seriously felt and commented upon. Books of value to the city, and important records should be conserved, and all papers and periodicals published in the city from the beginning of her history should be filed for the benefit of future generations. . . . A well furnished city library . . . controlled by your board, would in a short time be self-sustaining, and, with an annual appropriation from the city of even a small amount for the purchase of new books, it would in a few years assume respectable proportions.*¹⁰

Chapter II

THE YOUNG LIBRARY

1886-1900

In the late 1880's Birmingham moved forward like the "Magic City" it would later be called. The Tennessee Coal Iron and Railroad Company, destined to shape Birmingham's future, moved in. In an event of unprecedented importance, the DeBardeleben Coal and Iron Company consolidated twenty-three different

businesses, and the Sloss Iron and Steel Company started operation. Property changed hands as often as four or five times a day. The booming city wisely re-elected A. O. Lane as its mayor. For the first time Jefferson, always considered a poor county, put more into the state treasury than it took out.

Such a growing metropolis needed more schools and more library service. The small collection of books outside Phillips's office in the Wright Building grew even though no public funds were available. Always alert to library needs, Phillips encouraged the schools to give library benefits, and books were purchased with the proceeds. The library also received gifts from individuals and especially from women's clubs. A large gift of one hundred volumes came from Mrs. A. W. Guenandon, an early library friend.¹

In 1887, W. J. Rushton, chairman of the Board of Education's Finance Committee, recommended the hiring of a librarian who could also act as secretary to Phillips. Sophia Ungerman, later Mrs. E. G. Bruce, recalled that she "quaked in her shoes" when Phillips asked her to fill this position.²

As the city grew, both the high school and the library suffered in the increasingly cramped quarters of the Wright Building on Third Avenue, North. With nearly 2,000 books by 1890, the library could no longer be contained in the 15-by-18-foot area originally allocated to it. But the need for more space was not the only problem. Fumes from a steam laundry and noise from the Nineteenth Street dummy line (steam-powered streetcars) left no doubt that a new facility must be found for both the high school and the library.

Finding such a facility proved less than difficult. Well out of the business district, in a primarily residential area, was the Park Avenue Hotel, a three-story brick building on the southwest corner of Seventh Avenue, North (Park Avenue, as it was known at the time) and Twenty-first Street. The hotel, which was the property of Christian Enslen, was readily adaptable to the needs of the library, high school, and Board of Education.

In July, 1890, the school board leased the building from Enslen for five years at \$150 per month.³ Renamed the Enslen Building, the structure was completely remodeled, and suitable furniture was rented from the former hotel proprietor. Securing new quarters for the high school and the library was a signal achievement; but, perhaps, of parallel significance was the realization of Superintendent Phillips's desire that the use of the library be available to all citizens of Birmingham, and not just to teachers and students. A membership fee of \$2.00 a year, or 25 cents a month,

⁸*Ibid.*, October 12, 1886, p. 71.

⁹George M. Cruikshank, *History of Birmingham and Its Environs*, 2 vols. (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1920), I, 259.

¹⁰Phillips, *Annual Report, 1887*, pp. 57-58.

¹Phillips, *Annual Report, 1887*, pp. 57-58.

²Mrs. W. L. Murdoch, "Vision of Pioneers Realized as New Public Library Makes Dreams True," *The Birmingham News*, April 16, 1927, sports section, p. 8.

³Birmingham Board of Education, "Minutes," July, 1890.

was imposed, but the regulation regarding the fee was not strictly enforced.⁴ Emphasis was placed on library use, not on collecting fees. The response of the public was enthusiastic.

On November 22, 1890, the library formally opened with a reception. J. C. Hamberlin, who was serving as librarian at the time, described the new quarters as "elegant".⁵ A picture of the library in Phillips's report to the Board of Education for 1891 reveals a most handsome room. Shuttered windows to the floor lined one side of the long room. Bookcases which extended into the room were spaced between these windows. Other cases lined the walls at the end of the room. Opposite the windows were three decorative cabinets with glass doors for rare books. Three gas light chandeliers provided light for reading; and chairs, including a rocker, were conveniently placed for browsers. Two long library tables extended down the center of the room. Displayed on them was a selection of 33 magazines, including *Cosmopolitan*, *Educational Review*,

Leslie's Monthly, *Masonic Guide*, *Missionary*, *Yale Review*, *New York World* (weekly), *Our Dumb Animals*, *Our Little Men & Women*, *Popular Science Monthly*, and *Phonographic World*.

In 1891, at the end of its first year as a library open to the public, Hamberlin reported that the facility had been open three days a week and circulated 992 volumes. Fifty-one membership cards had been issued and 481 books added.⁶

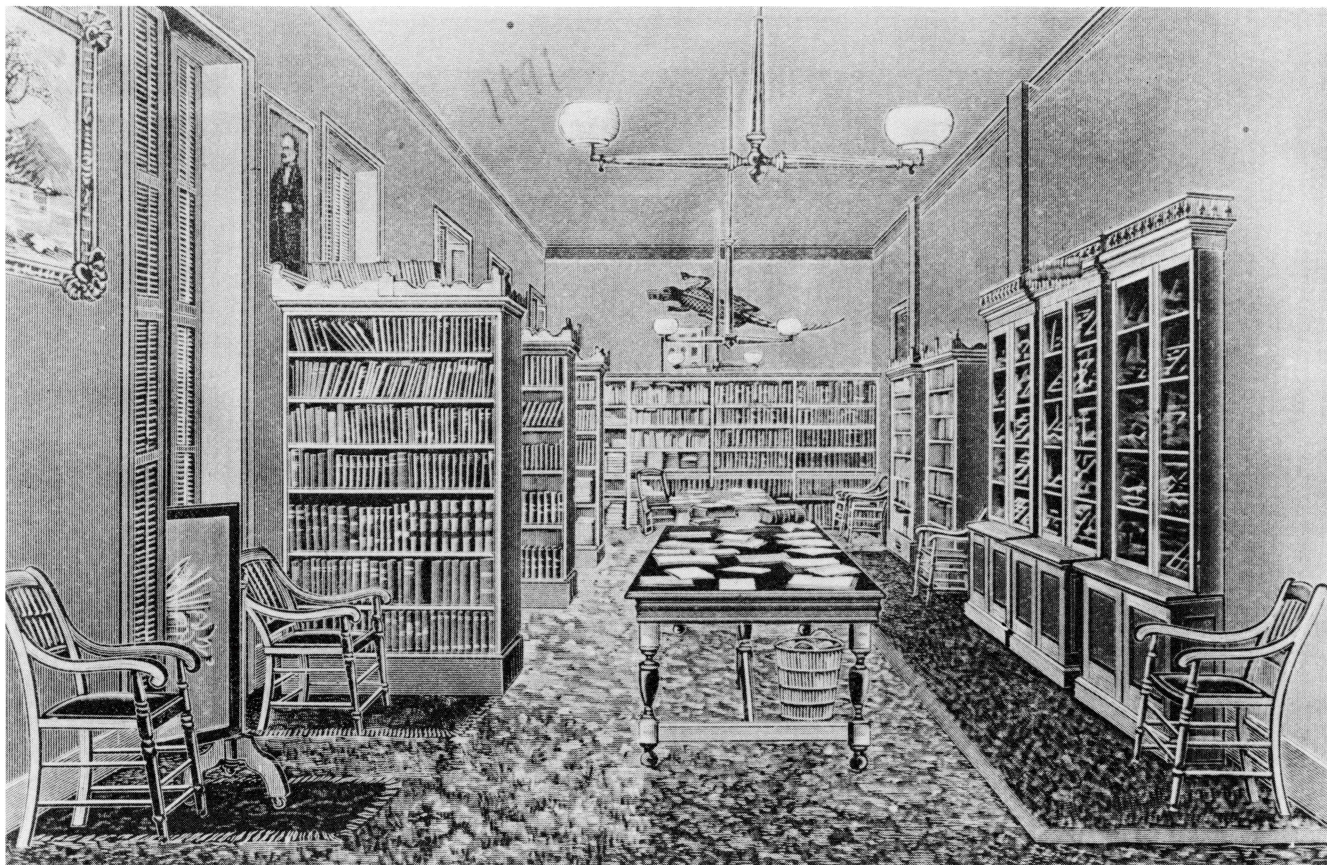
Chairman of the Library Committee, Dr. C. H. Jernigan, in his report for 1891 emphasized the importance of the library's continuing under the care of the Board of Education. He felt that its permanence and effective management would thus be assured.⁷

Only twenty years old in 1891, Birmingham had reason to be proud of its public library, the largest in the state. Local newspapers gave wide publicity to the change from a school library to a circulating library. Leading patrons were the women's clubs, who placed books in the library for the use of the general public as well as their own members.

⁴Murdoch, "Vision," *News*, April 16, 1927, sports section, p. 8.
⁵J. C. Hamberlin, "Report of the Librarian," in [John Herbert Phillips], *Annual Report of Birmingham Public Schools for the Session Ending June, 1891* ([Birmingham, Alabama]: Roberts & Son, 1891), p. 25.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷C. H. Jernigan, "Report of Library Committee Chairman," in [Phillips], *Annual Report, 1891*, pp. 26-27.



An 1891 view of the library room in Birmingham's High School, located on the second floor of the Enslen Building on the southwest corner of Seventh Avenue, North, and Twenty-first Street. Note should be made of the alligator mounted on the end wall, the rocking chair immediately beneath it, and the glass-door book cases on the right wall, which were used for the storage of rare books. Photograph from the Collections of the Birmingham Public Library.

No. 93
 Name Mrs. Finley White,
 Address Arlington Ave.
 Amount paid \$ 2.50 from Jan. 1, 1899
 to Dec. 31, 1899.

No. 94
 Name Miss Bertha Woodward
 Address Woodward Station
 Amount paid \$ 2.00 from Feb. 7, 1899
 to Feb. 8, 1899.

No. Book	When Taken	When Returned	Fines	No. Book	When Taken	When Returned	Fines	No. Book	When Taken	When Returned	Fines	No. Book	When Taken	When Returned	Fines
1078	7/7	7/20		7549	6/12	5/15		4587		7/2					
5457	7/20	7/29						4965	7/2	7/19					
4787	7/20	7/23		7508	5/15	5/24		1432	7/3	7/9					
4977	7/29	8/5		39	5/17	5/25		4572	10/13	10/22					
4781	8/5	8/8		7535	5/24	5/30		4457	10/22	11/2					
2678	8/8	8/13		39	5/24	5/30		468	11/22	12/2					
1812	9/13	9/26		4535	5/30	6/8		1863	11/27	12/3					
4856	10/4	10/13		7560	6/4	6/12		3227	12/1	1/3					
5689	10/7	10/22		7539	6/12	6/14		1778	12/3	1/7					
3066	10/13	10/19		7553	6/14	6/17		1991							
2664	10/19	10/22		6825	6/16	6/20									
4530	10/22	10/24		7552	6/17	6/21									
2664	10/24	10/24		6345	6/20	7/3									
5689	10/24	10/24		7569	6/21	6/27									
2661	11/9	11/9		3168	6/27	6/30									
3732	11/10	11/23		7042	6/30	7/7									
5692	11/18	11/23		6837	7/7	7/17									
4790	11/24	12/9		3173	7/7	7/12									
4630	12/9	12/16		7040	7/12	7/17									
6981	12/16	12/28		7041	7/17	7/22									
332	1/3	1/21		7039	7/22	7/26									
332	1/21	2/17		7089	7/26	8/9									
332	2/4	4/12		6842	7/31	8/4									
7414	2/5	2/14		3152	8/4	8/4									
7478	2/14	2/17		3145	8/4	8/12									
7567	2/17	2/29		7578	8/4	8/12									
				3	8/9	8/10									

Two years later the library had almost doubled in size, its holdings numbering 3,628 volumes. W. E. Gardner, Secretary to the Board of Education, now served as librarian on the three days a week the library was open.⁸ But it was Phillips who cataloged and labeled the books, working mostly at night. The report of June, 1893, showed 178 library members, 6,332 books circulated, and new book cases added, making sixteen cases in all which could hold 5,000 books.

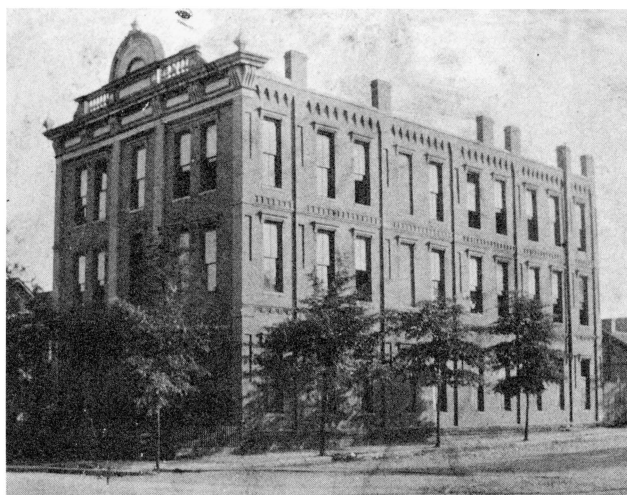
Phillips had always placed special emphasis on monthly magazines and periodicals which were later bound for permanent reference. These volumes eventually provided the Birmingham Public Library with the best periodical collection in the state. New subscriptions in 1893 included *The Chautauquan*, *Harper's*, *Judge*, *Punch*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Youth's Companion*.⁹

The public schools continued to raise money for the library, since the city still provided no funds. The children gave ice-cream parties in the summer and plays and entertainments in the winter, raising \$613 in 1893 for the purchase of books. All fines from overdue books went for supplies and rebindings.¹⁰

In June, 1893, the nation suffered a financial panic when the New York Stock Exchange crashed. The First National Bank of Birmingham closed temporarily, and the city struggled to stay solvent. In an effort to cut expenses, the Board of Education in 1894 abolished the office of secretary and librarian, and Phillips voluntarily reduced his own salary.¹¹ High school students had to pay a small fee to use the library. In spite of the gloomy conditions, the library's average daily circulation reached 58 volumes. It claimed 141 members other than students and teachers, 218 new volumes, and receipts of \$731.¹²

Hard times continued, however, and the school board considered reducing the academic term to eight months in 1897. Rent on the Enslen Building dropped to \$75.00 a month with no charge for June, July, and August, when school was out. This enabled the library to remain open for the summer months. A welcome contribution the same year came from the Congregation Emmanuel; Mr. Steiner reported to the board that a "number of valuable books" had been given to the public library.¹³

Who were the library users in the Enslen Building, and what were they reading? In the Department of Archives and Manuscripts are two once-battered but now-rebound ledgers: the circulation register of the



The Enslen Building, formerly the Park Hotel, on the southwest corner of Seventh Avenue, North, and Twenty-first Street, leased by the Birmingham Board of Education in July, 1890, for use as a high school. On the second floor of the building, the site of which is now occupied by the Ridgely Apartments, was the library, open both to high school students and faculty and to the public from 1890. Photograph from the Collections of the Birmingham Public Library.

Birmingham Public Library for 1898-1902 and the first accession record. A flowery hand — quite possibly Phillips's — recorded the books owned by the library. The books were listed in categories of "Religion," "Fiction," "History," etc.

The circulation register named 972 members between June, 1898, and August, 1902. Addresses of users revealed the expanding residential areas of Birmingham. The Park Avenue and Twenty-first Street area near the library drew the largest numbers of people, but many members lived in the newer Five Points section. One of Birmingham's early artists, Hannah Elliott, of Thirteenth Avenue and Twenty-first Street, read *Pierre*, *Vicar of Tours* in July, 1899. Many readers lived in Elyton, Avondale, and even Vanderbilt Furnace "Rural D. #1." T. O. Smith's name appears with his Smithfield address, as does Miss Alice Daly in East Lake and Miss Katherine Earle on Third Avenue. Other names include C. Comer, McLin Sloss, Louis Saks, S. L. Earle, F. Y. Anderson, W. S. Brown, S. Ullman, J. A. Going. Some businessmen gave Morris Avenue addresses. A few firemen checked out books. The message that Birmingham had a public library was spreading also to Ishkooda, West End, Fountain Heights, and Pratt City.

People's reading tastes ranged from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Dickens, Thackeray, Tolstoy, Verne, and Dumas, to local writers, Mittie Owen McDavid and Mary Johnston. Children were reading the Elsie Dinsmore books. *The Bazar Book of Decorum* was popular, along with William Garrett's *Public Men in Alabama*.

⁸Birmingham Board of Education, "Minutes," July 1, 1893.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Birmingham Board of Education, "Minutes," special session, December 15, 1894.

¹²Birmingham Board of Education, "Minutes," October 1, 1894; and library report for year ending July 1, 1894, in "Minutes."

¹³Birmingham Board of Education, "Minutes," April 5, 1897.

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