

Newsletter

September 2011

JEMISON BOOK DEBUTS OCTOBER 9

Forward-thinking Birmingham. Sky's the limit. Growth, prosperity, promise, and innovation. A city on the rise, notable on the national scene. Vibrant and important. That's the way our city looked in 1910.

The solid reasons for that deserved optimism are detailed in *The Jemison Magazine and the Selling of Birmingham, 1910-1914*, the newest book from the Birmingham Historical Society. The core of the volume addresses the planning and development of Fairfield, then a new site for U.S. Steel's operations, and visionary Robert Jemison Jr.'s real estate dreams-turned-realities in the Birmingham area. The story is told through excerpts from *The Jemison Magazine* published by the Jemison firm from 1910 to 1914. More than 200 period photographs and drawings are included.

"This book is all about the optimism of the time," says Marjorie White, Director of the Birmingham Historical Society. "They believed that they were creating a world-class industrial region. There was so much building, so much

progress. It's the Golden Era in many ways—and what they created paved the way for the Birmingham we know today."

Among the exciting happenings during the period:

The industrial engine was expanding (mines, coal, coke, furnaces, foundries, iron, steel, pipes, rails) and the population was rising—a 10-year swell from 38,000 to 132,000—245%. Birmingham was recognized nationally as the rail and industrial capital of the South (10 trunk railroads—many more than Atlanta)

Jemison advanced civic pride by bringing world-class planners, engineers, and architects to lay out and construct new communities (Fairfield, Central Park, Forest Park, Altamont, Redmont, and real estate in the city center). Jemison raised investment capital and investors hung on.



Above: The 1909 plan for Fairfield, introducing the concept of city planning and beautification. He later put these concepts into play in creating Mountain Brook and Redmont.



Children frolicking in a Fairfield park wading pool. (Every Fairfield home was within a two-minute walk of a park or parkway).

Right: Heaviest Corner on Earth—View of Birmingham Skyline, 1913—The newly completed office buildings at First Avenue and Twentieth Streets (Woodward, Brown-Marx, Empire and American Trust buildings).



Join us for Second Saturdays



Leading volunteer efforts to restore Duncan House, our home base at Sloss Furnaces, are BHS President Wayne Hester and Trustee Brian Rushing, pictured left, who installed a new fascia board that will soon host a new seamless gutter to entrap rain water for watering the garden. Join us for **Second Saturday** from 9–Noon. There will be painting and carpentry projects galore, and fun times visiting, too. September 10, October 8, November 12, December 10.

The Jemison Magazine and The Selling of Birmingham, 1910-1914 – the 2011 Birmingham Historical Society membership publication has been edited by Julius Linn Jr., Katherine Tipton, and Marjorie White. Its 288 pages are filled with more than 200 black-and-white photographs and drawings. Members may pick up their complimentary copy at the October 9th party at the Jemison–Hamby House, 4100 Crescent Road in Forest Park from four to six. Those member copies not picked up will be mailed the week of October 10-14. Additional copies will be available for sale for \$35 postpaid. Send a check to Birmingham Historical Society, One Sloss Quarters, Birmingham, AL 35222, www.bhistorical.org.

New Exhibit to Open November 6 at the Library Gallery

From the toughest of times—The Great Depression through World War II—comes astounding and touching artwork by local artists who depicted Birmingham in daily life, in landscapes, industrial locations, rural and urban settings, and African-American life. For decades, the works have been tucked away in dark corners and private spaces of the city, protected but rarely displayed.

A collection of 60 pieces appear in the new exhibition ***The Birmingham Scene: Seldom-seen Artwork from the 1930s and 1940s***, running Nov. 6-Dec. 30 in the Birmingham Public Library's Library Gallery. "We have found watercolor landscapes, and everyday scenes with people doing regular chores," says Marjorie White, Director, Birmingham Historical Society. "There are also incredible depictions of industry—notably, a glimmering slag dump etched on aluminum—and wonderful moments from African-American life, including an award-winning woodblock cut of a Sunday supper with people passing the biscuits—it was once on display at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

"These pieces were created by Birmingham artists who had migrated home after studying in New York and abroad, and turned their talents on this city," White continues. "Birmingham had an Ash Can School painter in Martha Henderson Goings; pastel art from Roderick MacKenzie; and engravings by Ernest Henderson. Frank Hartley Anderson drew local industry and African-American life—and this is just the beginning of what you'll see in this important exhibition."

In what White calls a "read-the-labels-too" show, there's interest culled from the artist and his/her professional vitae as well as the Birmingham history portrayed in each work. The pieces have been drawn from private Birmingham collectors and from Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark, Birmingham Museum of Art, and the sponsoring organizations, Birmingham Public Library and Birmingham Historical Society.

"These pieces may never be seen in this manner again," says White, who has worked with a skilled planning committee for several years to cultivate the mix. "Collectively, the bringing together of the artwork created during this fertile period of the arts—complete with Federal support of certain projects and the use of materials from pastels to paints, aluminum to woodblock—is a testimony to the work created in the midst of difficult economic and political times.

"The work is magnificent and deserves to be seen. It's the kind of show that makes you happy," she says.

RELATED ACTIVITIES **LISTEN, LOOK & LEARN at the Library:**

The Exhibit:

The Birmingham Scene: Seldom-seen Artwork from the 1930s and 1940s, running Nov. 6-Dec. 30 in the Birmingham Public Library's Library Gallery

Preview Brown Bag Lunch Talk:

Nov. 2, Noon, Arrington Auditorium
Industrial Voices—Reflections on the Birmingham Scene During the Great Depression by Karen Utz, Curator, Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark.

Opening Lecture:

Sunday, Nov. 6, 2:15 pm, Arrington Auditorium.
The Industrial City Beautiful: Artists of the Birmingham Scene from the Great Depression Through World War II by Dr. Graham Boettcher, William Hulsey Curator of American Art, Birmingham Museum of Art

The Artists:

Birmingham's Frank Hartley Anderson, Richard Coe, Della Dryer, Hannah Elliott, Mamie Fogerty, Martha Henderson Goings, Sarah Greer, Ernest Henderson, Carrie Hill, Roderick MacKenzie, Rosalie Pettus Price, Arthur Stewart.
Auburn's Walter Swettman

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Additional copies of *The Jemison Magazine* @ \$35.00 post paid. \$ _____

BHS Membership is for the calendar year: January 1-December 31.