



**The RHODE  
ISLANDER**  
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*Pawtucket's*  
**Mister  
Main  
Street**

Providence College campus  
as viewed from air Page 12

The record-makers offer  
art-music sandwich Page 17



THIRTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, the Salisbury Building, right background, stood where the present City Hall now stands. It was then occupied by the Adam Sutcliffe Company. In the foreground is the historic Slater Mill. Behind it may be seen the old police station, covered by Martin as reporter.

# Martin Knows Main Street

As a newspaperman and realtor, he has helped to record thoroughfare's history and to make it

BY ROBERT L. WHEELER

*One day through the primeval wood,  
A calf walked home, as good calves should,  
But made a trail all bent askew,  
A crooked trail, as all calves do.*

**T**RADITIONALLY, the main street of the typical American town was originally a cowpath. This happens to be literally true of Main Street in Pawtucket, R.I., which lies in a trough between two hills and faithfully pursues the windings of a cowpath which meandered of old from Bayley's Farm westwardly to the Pawtucket River.

Today no city in America does more of its business on a single street than Pawtucket does on both sides of the path traveled by Main Street's ancestral bossy. In fact, it enjoys, and always has enjoyed, a concentration of commercial enterprise which amounts to a congestion and was being viewed with concern as long ago as 1920, the year in which a young man named Frank A. Martin quit the newspaper business to sell real estate.

Perhaps no two occupations afford more knowledge of a city than logging the good and evil deeds of its inhabitants and selling their homes and places of business. Mr. Martin, now a hale 68, was the *Providence Journal's* Pawtucket representative for 14 years. First as sports-editor-reporter-circulation-manager of the

Pawtucket office and later as a free-wheeling realtor, he has spent half a century on the roundhouse curve which runs from opposite 46 Walcott St. to 577 Pawtucket Ave. If any Pawtucket citizen deserves to be called Mr. Main Street, it is Frank A. Martin.

A large-scale street map in the office of Frank A. Martin & Son at 188 Main St. is speckled with 100 stickers representing the sales and leases he has handled in the past 34 years. Approximately one-quarter of these deals involved Main Street properties. Looking from his window on the third floor of the Read building, Mr. Martin can see a goodish bit of the Pawtucket story which he and others have written in terms of real estate transactions, and can reminisce about a lot that he can't see.

Many of the deals he remembers are interwoven with strands of Pawtucket history that go back a long way. There was, for instance, the sale of an estate at Main, Garden and Church Streets on which stood the cottage occupied for more than 50 years by Squire Z. Phinney, pioneer cigar manufacturer of Rhode Island. It was also, before his day, the site of the North Providence town pound.

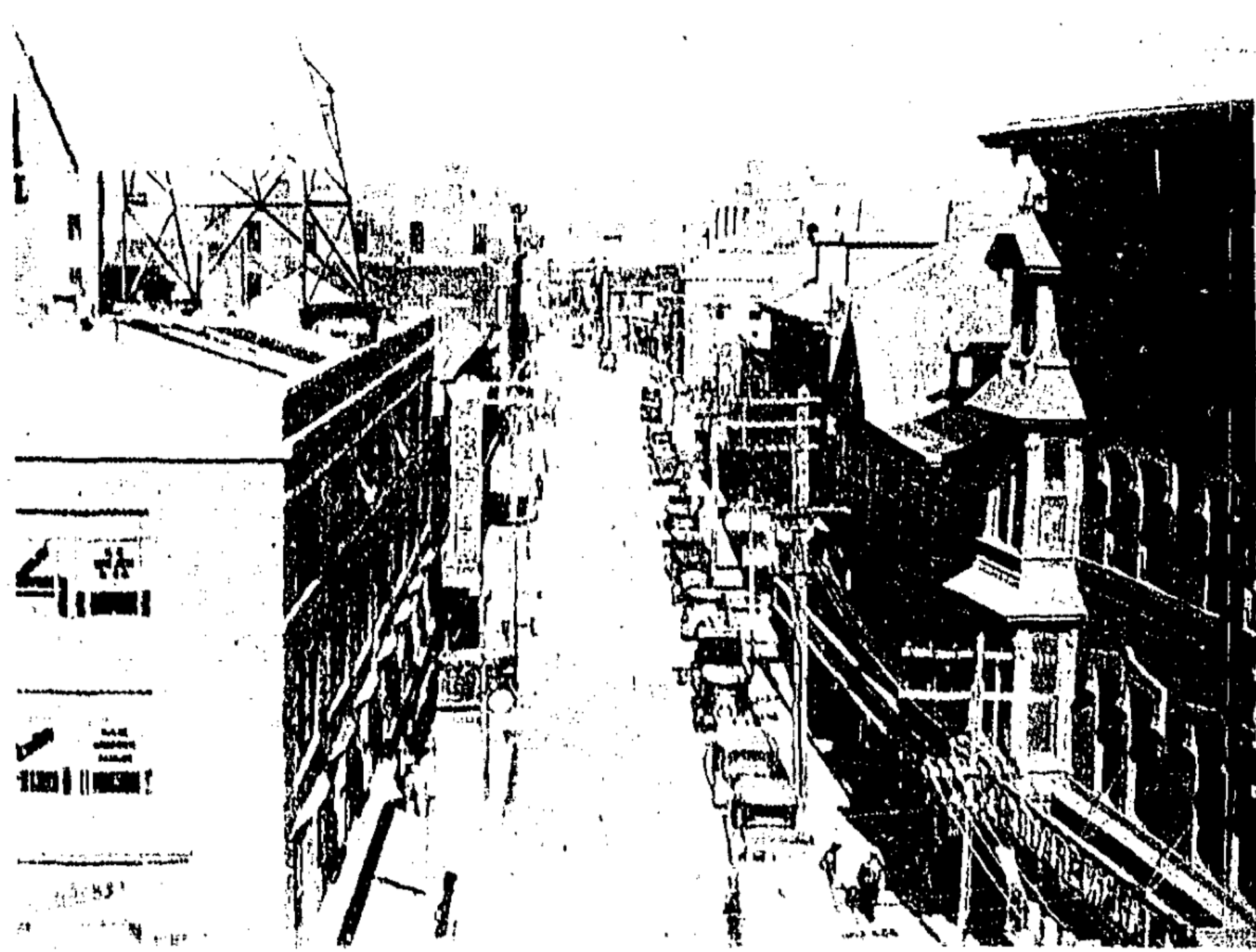
When the Standard Oil Company purchased the Phinney estate in 1923 and graced the street intersection with the second gasoline station established in Pawtucket, the owners, Mr. Martin, recalls with



MISTER MAIN STREET takes a gander down Memory Lane. Frank A. Martin Sr. with some pictorial Pawtuckiana.



HIGH STREET IN 1925. Looking north from Main Street. A busy street then, as now, with a developing parking problem for people shopping by auto.



ROOSEVELT AVENUE from Main Street, looking north and showing the old police station and now Pawtucket Senior High School. Photo taken about 1920.



NORTHEASTERLY CORNER of Sumner and Exchange Streets some 35 to 40 years ago. Things haven't changed much except that winters have been milder.



HIGH STREET looking in a northerly direction after passing Main Street. This picture was taken by Frank A. Martin just before start of World War I.

*Mister Main Street continued*

## The tunnel to the river never did go through

a mile, demanded a certified check. Pawtucket Main Streeters keep their fingers crossed.

Another footnote to Pawtucket history was written by Mr. Martin when he sold the Main Street property of Abraham Wilkinson Harris of Providence, whose grandfather, William Wilkinson, financed Samuel Slater's start in the textile business and married his sister to Samuel. And there was the deal in 1926 which brought the Phillips-Jones Corporation, makers of collars, to Pawtucket. By this transaction the company acquired a third of the plant at Main, Elm and River Streets where Darius Goff established the city's first braid mill in 1861, and which was later occupied by D. Goff and Sons.

More Pawtucket history passed through Martin's hands in 1921 when he sold the Merry homestead on East Avenue. Barney Merry built it in 1805—13 years after Sam Slater started his cotton-spinning mill—

and operated Pawtucket's first dyeing and, bleaching concern in the rear of the house.

The Pawtucket story, which is largely an industrial chronicle, has few or no overtones of glamour. The city lacks the romantic-religious background of Providence, the lush and lavender colonial and social traditions of Newport. Yet industrialists sometimes have romantic imaginations and in the early 1900's there was a Pawtucket man, Frank A. Sayles, who dreamed up a project which was recalled in 1926 when the Moshassuck Valley Railroad sold 34,500 square feet of land on the westerly side of Main Street to the Fisk Drug Company.

This land was the largest parcel of a big swatch of Main Street property which Sayles, who controlled the Moshassuck Railroad, bought with the intention of putting a tunnel under the street from the railroad to the Pawtucket River, where he proposed to establish a shipping concern to carry the products of his

mills to the outside world. The project came to nothing and the land was sold off parcel by parcel, the sale to the drug company being engineered by Martin and Lawrence F. Crotty.

In 1920, when Mr. Martin was starting his career as a realtor, Pawtucket business was showing a tendency to break out of Main Street, which had been filling up with establishments for some 40 years, ever since the commercial center of the Blackstone Valley began to shift from Central Falls to Pawtucket.

Newspaper editorials of the day noted this expansion trend with approval as meeting a need to relieve the business congestion of Main Street. I thought it would be interesting to ask Mr. Martin how far this need had been met in the 34 years he has been selling Pawtucket real estate. His answer indicated that there has been a certain amount of expansion but that the facts of topography were again it.

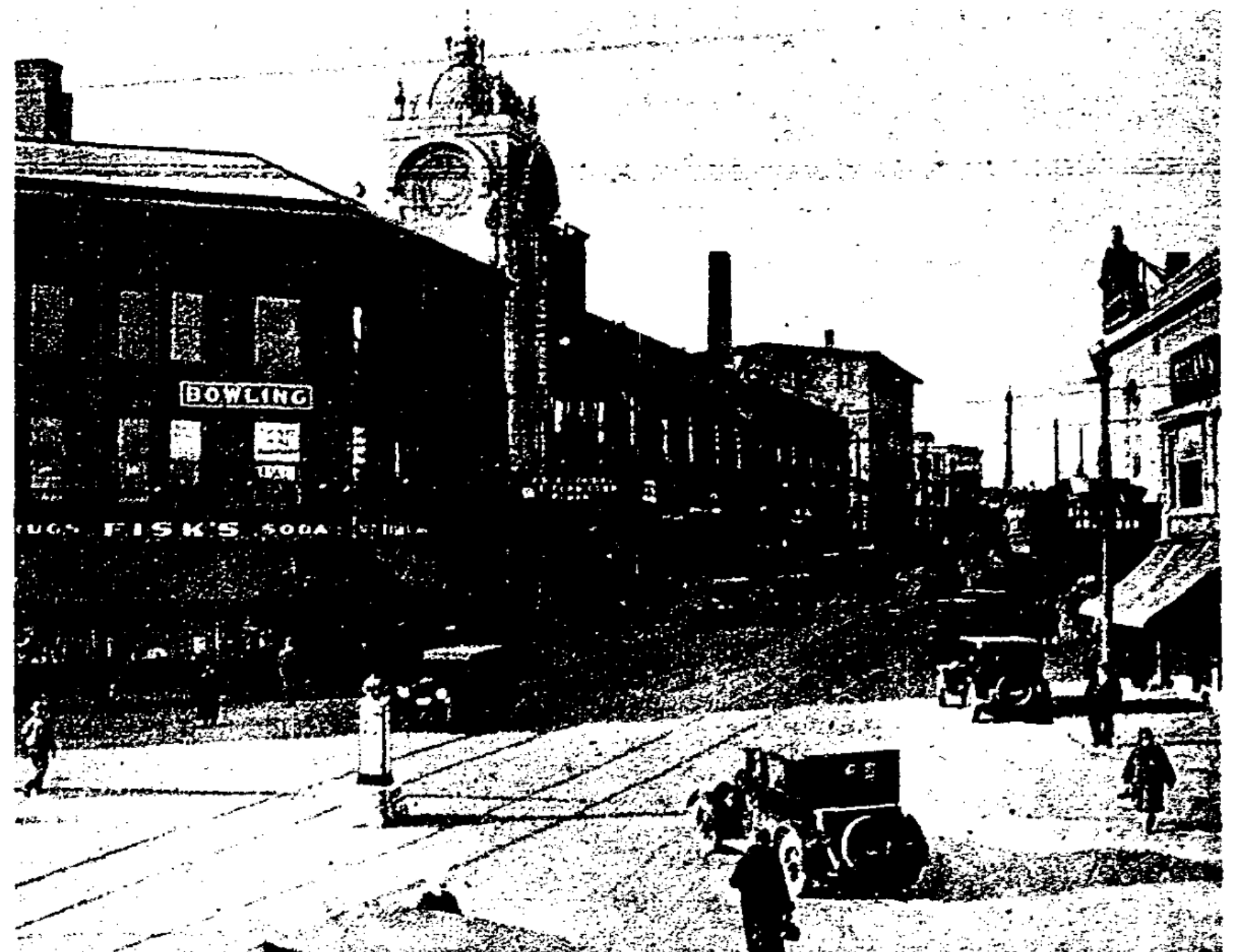
"Main Street's trouble," said Mr. Main Street,



HE WAS ALSO MR. BASEBALL. Picture taken during celebration of 250th anniversary of city of Pawtucket shows Mr. Martin and other officials with Pitcher Shocker of St. Louis Browns, First Baseman Stuffie McInnis of Boston Red Sox at game played on Coates Field attended by 10,000.



IN THE NINETEEN-TEENS. Easterly view toward Pawtucket's Broadway, showing the Pawtucket Armory just east of the new Pawtucket Senior High School.



THIS VIEW is from Goff Street, looking north on Broad Street a few years less than half a century ago, when Martin was starting career as realtor.

*Mister Main Street* continued

# Thoughtless cow

"In that it has no parallel streets into which business can be siphoned. I think this is the only city of any size in America in which this condition prevails.

"The business section on East Avenue and Roosevelt Avenue has improved and the same is true of Broad Street up to Heatty. One store on Broad Street now does as much business per square foot as any store in New England.

"But because of Pawtucket's topography, business cannot expand either north or south, for High Street, Park Place and Maple Street are on hills."

It's probably the cow's fault. She should have given more thought to the business future of Pawtucket and chosen another freeway route to the river.

**COVER PICTURE** shows 'Mr. Main Street,' Pawtucket's Frank A. Martin Sr., looking from window of his & Son's office at the Main Street that he knows so well. Photo by John P. Callahan of Journal-Bulletin staff. Old photos lent by Mr. Martin.



IN OR AROUND 1910 a westerly view from the Exchange Street bridge showed such remembered landmarks as the old gasomotor, lower left, and beyond it the Bijou Theater on Broad Street.