



ROYAL OAK

# Historical Society

OCTOBER 2020 • ROYALOAKHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM



Photograph courtesy of Bill Sullivan  
Bill and John Sullivan are in the front of the Jeep, named the "Sullivan's Safari." Steve and Dave Jones are in the back seat.  
Steve, a lifelong friend, also served on the ROHS Board and passed away in September 2018.

## Memories of Open Fields, Cruisin' Woodward

by Bill Sullivan, ROHS Past President

Our family lived for several years in the former residence of Fr. Charles Coughlin on 12 Mile Road east of Woodward. There were open fields near us, home to an occasional pheasant. Webster Woods, now the site of Jane Addams School, had mud puppies and other critters.



My brother, sisters, and I all attended Shrine School, a short walk down 12 Mile. After school, I delivered *The Daily Tribune*. Our papers were dropped off at McPeek's Standard gas station at 12 Mile and Woodward. Mr. McPeek let us fold our papers inside the station on cold days. Midweek, the papers were 36-38 pages. Fortunately, the candy machine sold Payday candy bars for a nickel. On Saturdays, I rode my two-tone green Schwinn bike to the Tribune Building at Third and Troy streets to pay my bill for the papers, followed by a stop at Johnny's Coney Island, which is now The Rock on 3rd.

Weekends, we watched matinees at the Washington Theatre. Kresge's (now Lily's Seafood) was next door, where 15 cents bought a bag of popcorn for the movie. At the southwest corner of Washington and Fourth was the Montgomery

*Continued on Page 2*

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**Current Special Exhibit**

South Oakland Art Association  
Show and Sale  
through Oct. 24

*President's Message*  
**The Museum is Open, Come Visit**

*By Bob Muller*

Our museum has reopened! Check our website for our Covid-19 protocols and hours. Call to make sure we will be open on the day you would like to visit. As is typical right now, you need to wear a mask, and we are limiting the amount of people that can be in the museum at any one time. The most people we have had in the museum during one day has been 17, so this is a safe place if you need to get out and want to avoid crowds.

Normally, we have our Annual Dinner each October, but this year we were forced to cancel until the world returns to normal. The dinner is an important fundraiser for us and we are working on ideas for a virtual gathering instead, but at this time we're not sure when and how we will do it. As our plans develop, we'll keep you posted. In the meantime, we continue to ask for community support to keep the museum going strong.

Before the former Royal Oak City Hall closed, we were contacted about items that may have historical significance for the museum. Board treasurer Mike Frentz, volunteer Randy Burean, and I spent some time walking through the building and tagging pertinent artifacts. Many city workers deserve our thanks, as they kept their eyes open for items that had historic value but that might otherwise have been discarded.

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**Open Fields, Cruisin' Woodward • Continued from Page 1**

Ward store. Across Fourth Street in the Washington Square Building was Royal Oak General Hospital (Beaumont was not yet built). My brother John was born in the building and I had my tonsils out there.

In 1953, I entered Shrine High School on 13 Mile Road west of Woodward Avenue and across the street from Northwood Shopping Center and JC Penney. My future wife Cathy worked after school in the five-and-dime store. Getting to school meant hitching a ride up Woodward. Eventually, I drove the Jeep our funeral home maintained for snow plowing. I earned extra money plowing an occasional motel or restaurant parking lot. My brother and sisters, Meg and Marty, also drove the Jeep, complete with canvas top.

On weekends, my friends and I cruised the Woodward Avenue drive-in restaurants, including the Totem Pole north of 10 Mile Road and Ted's at the corner of Square Lake Road and Woodward. Who would have thought the Woodward Dream Cruise was coming 60 years later!

In about 1956 some friends and I, with permission from our parents, took the Jeep on a trip to the Upper Peninsula. I was the only one old enough to have a driver's license at age 16. We visited Tahquamenon Falls and other sites. The Mackinac Bridge was still under construction, so we took a car ferry across. Our gear was in the box at the rear of the Jeep, titled the "Sullivan's Safari."

*For more memories of Royal Oak in the 1950s, go to Page 8.*

# Curator's Corner

BY MURIEL VERSAGI

## In Praise of Volunteers

We really need to thank the regular guys and gals who contribute their time and talent so generously to the museum on a weekly basis all year and through this pandemic. Our “custodian” Tom Gasser has gone above and beyond every week – from emptying the dehumidifier every other day and taking home the trash to be picked up with his own, to regularly cleaning the bathrooms and the refrigerators and dusting and vacuuming the floors. He also stepped up to work with the League of Retired Automotive Designers for the 2020 Automotive Concept Art exhibit in Randy Burean’s absence. Not only that, but Tom picks me up and drives me home on Saturdays. I personally cannot thank him enough. Sorry, Tom – don’t mean to embarrass you!

Our computer team – Libby Walker, Ellen Kehoe, and Lindsay Zaremski – have been busy. Libby is our expert for the Past Perfect for Small Museums database for all things historical and also enters our financial data. Ellen not only works in Past Perfect, but she sends out all the membership cards, thank you notes, and 501 (c)(3) letters. She also takes care of our Royal Oak schools artifacts and display after Rita Simons passed away in 2019.

Lindsay does research for the exhibits and writes the quarterly article for the city’s *Royal Oak Magazine* as well as creates labels for the exhibits. Johanna Schurrer and Lee Potter have completely reorganized and cleared out a lot of duplicates in the objects and photos archival area. Joanna Becker has been working in the evenings to clean up the photo folders on the computer, where we have more than 20,000 stored in the cloud. All are accessible on the visitor’s computer in the museum library to view when you visit.

Since reopening the museum, we have been pleased with our visitor traffic. Most days, we have three to six or eight visitors; occasionally we have none, but the phone keeps ringing, people bring in family treasures for us to add to our collection, and they email questions for us to research.

With the “Woodward Memories” exhibit put to bed again until next year, we’ll close for teardown and setup for the South Oakland Art Association (SOAA) art show and sale. This will be the sixth year the group has held its event at the museum. Opening day is Sunday, Oct. 4, time to be announced. This show and sale will run through Oct. 24. Stop by to appreciate the talents of SOAA members and perhaps purchase a beautiful work.

For Christmas 2020, we will display different styles of Christmas trees from 1865 onward. Our 1920s tree will commemorate the 100th anniversary of women’s right to vote. Our 1940s tree will remember the 75th anniversary of WWII ending in 1945. The 1950s-’60s tree will still be there, along with our fabulous silver aluminum tree (complete with multicolored rotating light disk!) and the children’s tree in the library, but no Santa this year due to the virus.



Our signs of the times!



# Homes & Buildings in Royal Oak

EDITED BY JOHN S. SCHULTZ

In each issue, this feature focuses on historic homes and buildings in our city. The selections come from the book "Royal Oak Images, Yesterday's Charm Today's Treasures," published by the Roundtable of Royal Oak Historical Organizations, a standing committee of the Royal Oak Historical Commission of the City of Royal Oak. The book was published in 2006, and a second edition is in the works.

We encourage other Royal Oak residents to share the history of their home for possible publication. For more information, contact John S. Schultz at [jsschultz11@gmail.com](mailto:jsschultz11@gmail.com).

## Brinkey Farm House and Barn

2454 East Lincoln Avenue

Red Brick Foursquare Built About 1908

A black dot on the map of Royal Oak Township in the 1908 *Illustrated Atlas of Oakland County, Michigan* on the road now called East Lincoln Avenue, just west of Stephenson Highway, verifies that this house was built in 1908 or shortly before.

Those early maps showed the names of the owners of large parcels of land, and the name on this 40-acre piece was August Brinkey, age 77, born in Germany, with his wife, Helen, age 76, also born in Germany. His occupation was listed as farmer. He immigrated to the United States in 1862, as did Helen in 1865.

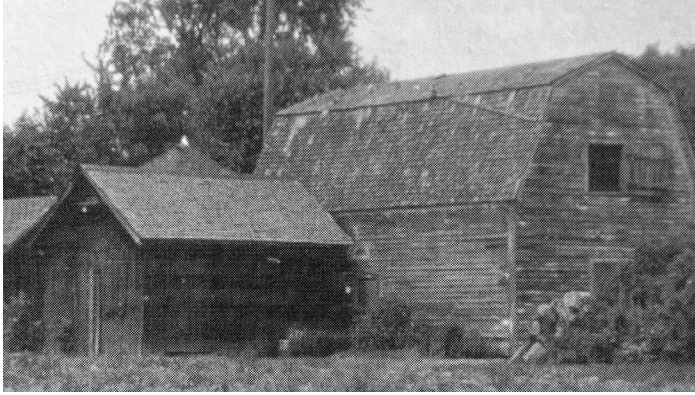
August and Helen had three sons: Albert, Henry, and John, who between them gave their parents 16 grandchildren. Albert and wife Mary had seven children:

*Continued on Page 5*





## Brinkey Farm House • Continued from Page 4



*The original barn — no longer there — back when the land was farmed.*



*The barn around 2006.*

Willie, Emma, Albert, Mary, Edward, Margaret, and Agnes. John and wife Christina had seven children: Clarence, Herman, Lawrence, Ella, Dora, Olga, and Grace. Henry and wife Elvira (Grubb) had two children: Cora and Henry.

In 1945, John and Christina, with daughters Ella and Grace, were living nearby at 2440 East Lincoln, which was later removed to allow for Stephenson Highway to be built through the property.

The house at 2454 is red brick, Foursquare in style, and had a barn just west of the house. In the 1980s, Edward M. and Helen M. Maddock owned the house. The farmland is now part of a small city park named after them.

The current owners as of 2006, William Kelly and Nancy Sly, say people still stop by and tell them they remember buying corn when it was an active farm.

### *We Get Letters*

April 30, 2020

Dear Editor,

I'm writing to you because of the interesting article in the May 2020 newsletter about 160 Hendrie Boulevard. I grew up on the next street at 210 Oakdale, and I had a *Detroit News* paper route (around 1943) that included Hendrie Boulevard. Although 160 was not a customer, I would pass that beautiful house every day and wish that I could know more about it. So it was very interesting to read the article about the house and to finally learn more about it. By the way, I looked up that address in the 1940 census and found that the residents were John Bridge, his wife, and children, plus servants and a cook. His occupation is listed but it's too unclear for me to read.

I left Royal Oak in 1951, when I graduated from (then) Royal Oak High School and went to college. I have visited Royal Oak many times since then and have seen that the house I grew up in (210 Oakdale) is in very good shape, although I don't know who lives there. I have lived in southern California, near Los Angeles, since 1960.

I enjoy receiving the emails and newsletters from the Royal Oak Historical Society from which I learn about the history of my old stamping grounds.

By the way, I noticed somewhere that there is a Hessel Tenhave woods near the [new] Royal Oak High School. Mr. Tenhave was my biology teacher in high school.

Hans Kuehl  
Los Angeles, Calif.

# Royal Oak Then & Now

BY JOHN MAURICE, ROHS FACEBOOK EDITOR

## Then



Photograph courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society Museum, circa 1930s

The Great Depression was a nightmare for the United States, particularly for the banks; Royal Oak's were no exception. The grand First State Bank building stood at the southeast corner of Fourth Street and Washington. Electrical wires for the streetcars can be seen suspended above the intersection. The clock at the corner of the building was a meeting place for downtown visitors.

The bank opened for business to great fanfare in 1922. In January 1931, the bank merged with the Royal Oak State Trust & Savings Bank, but the merged entity would be shut down before the end of June that same year. The building endured for at least 10 more years, housing a clothing store and some offices, but eventually fell victim to the wrecking ball before the 1940s had ended.

That corner eventually housed the popular Kinsel's Drugstore in the 1950s and '60s before Klebba's Stationers moved in from a bit further down Washington in the 1970s. Winkleman's was just to the south and shared a storefront with both of these stores for years. Today the building is occupied by Broadway Salon Studios & Alchemy Color Lab.

The building to the north still stands and has managed to maintain much of its character from the 1930s incarnation. The former Royal Oak train depot was just east of this building.



Photograph by John Maurice



# Coming Up in 2021: Royal Oak's 100th Birthday

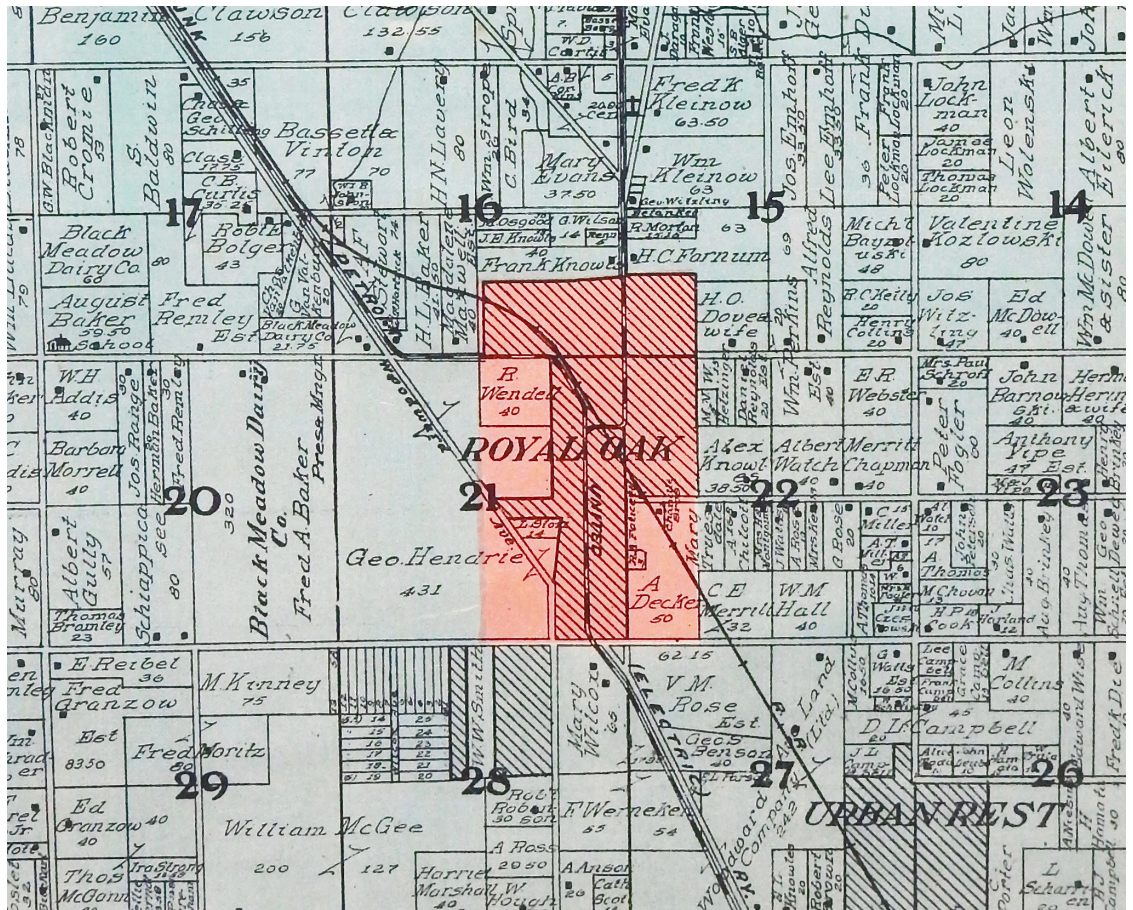
By Bob Muller, ROHS President

In musing about our history as we approach the 100th birthday of the City of Royal Oak next year, I have been delving into research of when the first European settlers arrived and where in Royal Oak Township they settled — specifically from Eight Mile to 14 Mile and from Dequindre to Greenfield.

The first settlers arrived 200 years ago, in 1820; five years later there were 25 individuals or families. Royal Oak was untouched wilderness, and great effort was required to get here from the settlement of Detroit. There is an account of a woman walking and sinking so deep in the mud that her shoes came off and she couldn't find them. That had to have made the remainder of her journey very memorable. Four of the first 25 settled near Pinecrest Street on the Saginaw Trail in what is now Ferndale; the other 21 settled in what is now the city of Royal Oak between Lincoln and 14 Mile and between Campbell and Greenfield. The original survey maps noted this northwest corner of Royal Oak as the best farmland. This area was also along the only two highways or Indian trails — Saginaw and Paint Creek.

One hundred years on, in 1920, the area had become farms surrounding the then-Village of Royal Oak (Lincoln to 11 Mile, Troy Street to West Street), which was the area's commercial center. During the second 100 years, 1920 to 2020, the area became the neighborhoods of homes on small lots that we know today. The jobs that the developing automotive industry created attracted people from across the country to the region. This was a boomtown; as the population exploded, the infrastructure strained to keep up. My grandparents came to Ferndale in 1920, drawn by my grandfather's search for work. My father told me his parents were able to buy a house, but many people around them were living in tents while waiting for their houses to be built.

Wilderness to farms and farms to lots and houses in just 200 years. Can we see anything now that would give us a feel for what the area looked like 100 and 200 years ago? If you stand on Crooks Road facing the side of Royal Oak High School, look to the east past the school. From the row of oak trees along the south side of the school property toward Normandy and to the Tenhave Woods nature park, you are looking at Samuel Goodwin's 100-acre farm from the 1800s. Take a walk in Tenhave Woods and you are traversing the remnant of Samuel's wood lot, the closest we can get today to the wilderness forest that was here when his father, Cromwell, purchased the land in 1823 from the United States.



Map courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society Museum  
Map of Royal Oak Village showing the surrounding farms in 1908.

# Memories of Working at an Animal Hospital; Escaping a Fire

*ROHS Board Member Chuck Button Remembers Royal Oak in the 1950s  
As told to ROHS volunteer Lindsay Zaremski*



Chuck Button was born in 1940 and grew up in Royal Oak. He says it was a fantastic place to spend his teenage years when in high school and when he first started working. Chuck had many different jobs that taught him a broad range of skills. He started working for a nursery that was on 10 Mile and went on to work part-time at a car repair garage. After that, he was hired by Dr. Konde, a veterinarian on Main Street, and worked there for three years. He worked there before school — arriving around 5 a.m. — and performed many different tasks, from cleaning the kennels to occasionally even helping out with a surgery. But he says the worst task, hands down, was bathing a cat!

Throughout those years, Chuck also helped out at his father's store on south Washington, Button's Rent It, which opened in 1948. He graduated from high school in 1959 and went into the Michigan National Guard for six months, then attended Highland Park Community College for a year before transferring to Ferris State College. At that point, his dad called and needed him to help at the shop. He transferred to Wayne State University and did another couple years there but never finished his degree, instead focusing on the family business.

In 1955, his dad opened a second location in Southfield. His brother ran the store and Chuck worked for him. Although Southfield developed into quite a large city, they were a bit ahead of the growth and it could be boring at the store. Business was so slow that they would drive their lawn tractor around the building and see how fast they could go; the big achievement was getting up onto just two wheels on the turns.



*Photograph courtesy of Chuck Button*

*Chuck Button in 1959 at age 19 at the Totem Pole, a popular restaurant and the southern anchor for cruising Woodward, and just one block from Button's Rent-it. This was taken as a farewell shot, as Chuck's next stop was Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri for basic training in the U.S. Army. He says, "The fun of the '50s was about to be history but not forgotten."*

Chuck will never forget one terrifying incident. They used to transport filled propane tanks in a propane-heated truck by securing the tanks to the truck rails with rope. Chuck went to take the truck for a delivery but didn't know the rope was not secure around the tanks. He turned a corner and one of the propane tanks tipped over — and turned on. He saw the flame lick along the bed and knew he had to get out. He pulled over and went to several houses before someone was home to help. The fire department came and as soon as they opened the truck door again, the incoming oxygen caused a big flare-up before it died down. The firefighters were able to turn the knob to off and stop the flames before the other propane tanks felt the heat and possibly exploded. However, because it was winter, the truck was completely frozen after being hosed down.

*Continued on Page 9*



# Photo Game



(a)

This issue's Photo Game features photos from along Woodward Avenue.

(b)



(c)

*Cupolas Galore!*



Answers on Page 11

Photographs by  
Bob Muller

## Working at an Animal Hospital; Escaping a Fire • *Continued from Page 8*

Chuck continued working at the store and later ran Button's Rent It. He weathered the "soft spot" the city went through in the 1960s when shopping malls drew customers away from downtown. His job and life experiences in 1950s Royal Oak helped shape not only his life and his business, but Royal Oak itself.

***Do you have a story about growing up in Royal Oak? What do you remember? What fond memory or event do you remember about growing up in this wonderful city? We are looking for those stories and can help you tell it as part of our history. If you have an idea, send an email to Trish Oliver at [patriciaanneoliver@gmail.com](mailto:patriciaanneoliver@gmail.com).***

# Looking Back: Royal Oak in October

COLLECTED BY JOHN S. SCHULTZ FROM THE PAGES OF THE DAILY TRIBUNE

## 65 years ago — 1955

ROYAL OAK has enjoyed a sustained rapid growth over a number of years. Had an adequate water supply been available, the growth would have been even more rapid. It now appears that 1956 will find us with an adequate water supply through the Southeastern Oakland County Water Authority.

The development of certain areas in the city's extreme northern part has been hindered due to the lack of trunk line drainage facilities. New county drains are being planned. When all of the City is served with sewer and water facilities, it is possible that the remaining 6,000 vacant parcels of land in the city may be build up in the next five to 10 years.

## 70 years ago — 1950

SIXTEEN MICHIGAN AREAS qualify as "critical targets" under Federal civil defense descriptions of districts which would be hit in case of a bombing attack. Federal authorities sent definitions to Gov. Williams for use in setting up a civil defense organization. Targets have been divided into three categories: Type I, Industrial-Metropolitan areas where more than 50,000 laborers are concentrated. Type II, Industrial areas where more than 20,000 persons are in (Korean) war work. Type III, Metropolitan areas with more than 50,000 population.

Royal Oak, Detroit, and Pontiac are among the cities falling into these categories, but Oakland County, with 273,438 persons living outside Royal Oak and Pontiac, also would be an inviting target.

\*\*\*

A PAY INCREASE of 10 cents an hour for hourly-rated workers and 7 percent for salaried employees was approved Monday night for Royal Oak's some 300 employees. The increase was made effective retroactively to Oct. 1. City Manager E.M. Shafter recommended the pay increase as a result of the 4.74 percent increase in cost of living resulting from the defense spending which developed with the Korean War. No wage increase was granted at the time the budget was adopted in May.

\*\*\*

LANDSCAPING of the area just north of Memorial Field at Thirteen Mile and Woodward Avenue got underway this week with the planting of 250 evergreens to provide a formal entrance to a circle of living oaks. Those oaks are lineal descendants of the "Royal Oak" from which the city derives its name.

Floyd J. Miller, president of *The Daily Tribune*, arranged on a trip to England in 1937 to receive 60 acorns from the oaks at Worchester where King Charles II slept under a huge oak following the defeat at the Battle of Worchester.



Photograph courtesy of The Daily Tribune

### Tribune Carriers Meet Detroit Tiger

Two *Daily Tribune* newspaper carriers went into the Detroit Tigers dugout to meet the team on Sunday (Oct. 3) before the last game of the season at Briggs Stadium. David Fielding and Judson Cotner, both age 14, talked with baseball great George Kell, who is showing them his glove he used to make two great stops in the game. (Kell later went on to become a TV radio announcer for the Tigers.) David and Judson scored the highest in the annual summer subscription contest and were given a free trip to the game and dugout as a prize. Eight other carriers and their parents were also guests of the newspaper at the final game.

Continued on Page 11



## Looking Back • Continued from Page 10

It was that incident, recalled by Gen. Lewis Cass, governor of the Michigan territory, which gave the city its name. He named a tree that sheltered him for the night, while on a surveying trip with fellow travelers here in 1819, the "Royal Oak."

The acorns from England were tenderly nurtured at the Detroit Zoological Park, spending the first two years of their lives in pots. Last year, 20 were planted in a great circle at Memorial Park, a living memorial to those from here who died in the second great war.

### 80 years ago — 1940

CROWDS GATHERED around a 155-millimeter field piece at First (now Eleven Mile) and Main streets where the 177th Field Artillery regiment, Michigan National Guard, has a mobile recruiting station. The station is under the direction of Capt. John D. Cowan, formerly of Royal Oak.

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HENRY WALLACE, the Democratic vice presidential nominee, will stop in Ferndale and Royal Oak tomorrow (Oct. 5).

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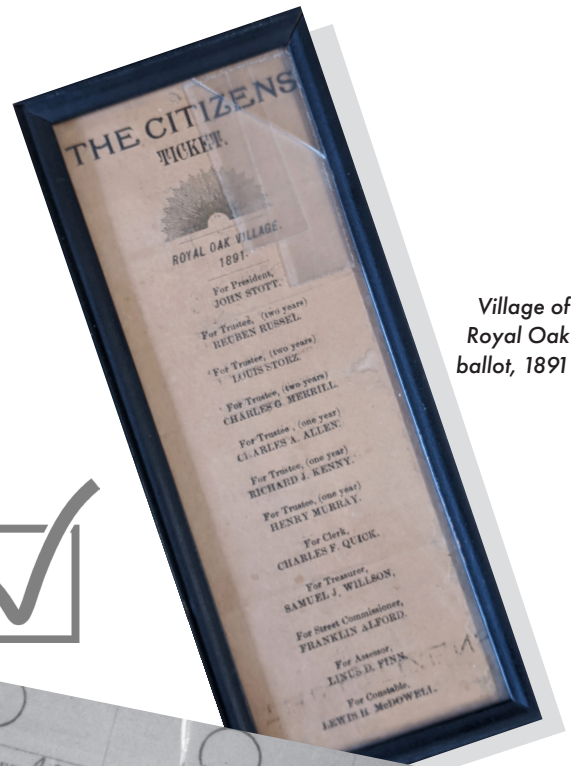
ABOUT 30 MEMBERS and friends of the Royal Oak Junior Chamber of Commerce met at Whittier Park for a wiener roast to initiate the new open fireplace built by the club.

### 90 years ago — 1930

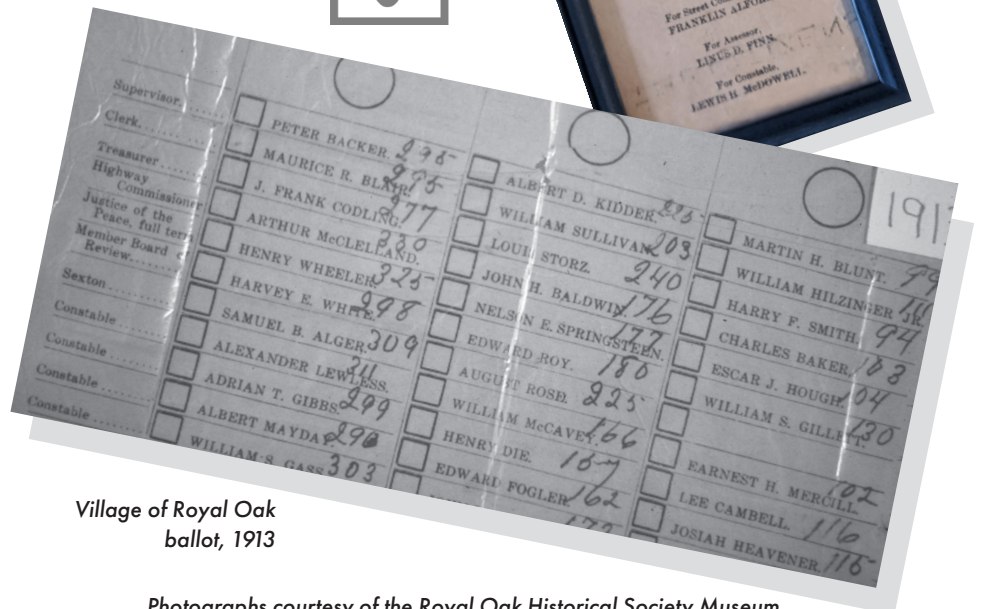
IN MOVING ITS HOME to Washington Avenue and Fifth Street, *The Daily Tribune* returns to the site, which for a number of years, was the location of the original Royal Oak Tribune Building. The newspaper is occupying only part of the "Tribune Building," which stood at this corner for more than 10 years. Until recently, this building was not owned by *The Daily Tribune*. The largest part of the new space provided for the newspaper is in a specially planned new, two-story fireproof building on Fifth Street. On part of the latter site there stood for a number of years the little one-story building which housed the weekly newspaper. So sentiment as well as business entered into the change, which has placed this newspaper in one of the most modern small daily plants in the United States.

\*\*\*

EMBANKMENT for the Grand Trunk railroad relocated right-of-way is being rapidly constructed south of Twelve Mile road with the trestlework being finished west of the high school.



Village of Royal Oak ballot, 1891



Village of Royal Oak ballot, 1913

PHOTO GAME ANSWERS:  
 (a) 32121 Woodward,  
 Woodward and Normandy  
 (b) Duggan's Irish Pub  
 (c) Fifth Third Bank, between  
 12 Mile and Webster

Photographs courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society Museum



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