



# ROYAL OAK Historical Society

MAY 2023 • ROYALOAKHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM

## Opening Day at the Zoo — A Spring Tradition

By Ellen Kehoe

**THE DETROIT ZOO HAS BEEN OPEN YEAR-ROUND SINCE 1969**, but in the years from its founding in 1928 until 1969 “opening day” in the spring was a much-anticipated occasion for metro Detroiters. That first year in 1928, the zoo was open for just four months — from August 1 to winter closing on December 3, yet a whopping 1.5 million guests visited, a record unequaled by any zoo in the world at that time. For reference, the zoo now is the largest paid attraction in Michigan with 1.3 million yearly visitors. (But remember there is so much more to do now).



Before the Detroit Zoo’s Arctic Ring of Life habitat opened in October 2001, polar bears lived in a man-made environment surrounded by a moat. In this 1950s photograph, they seem eager to greet their adoring fans — or eat their fish dinner.

So congested was parking around the zoo the first year that on March 27, 1929, *The Daily Tribune* reported that for the upcoming zoo season “automobiles will be parked within the Detroit zoological grounds instead of along the outside of the fence to relieve the traffic congestion” along Ten Mile Road and on Pleasant Ridge neighborhood streets — which at that time was adjacent to the zoo since this predated I-696.

It wasn’t surprising — given the zoo’s location in Royal Oak — that spring opening dates, holiday

attendance figures and new animals were typically front-page news in *The Daily Tribune* from the Detroit Zoological Park’s earliest days. On June 27, 1935, the arrival of two train cars carrying 58 crates of about 100 new animals from Africa and South America was the top story as it was the largest influx of animals since the first five crates of animals in 1928. Among the most interesting specimens were tapirs, ostriches, vultures and a half dozen turtles, which were “in a gunny sack.” While it is distressing to think of the methods that may have been employed to obtain these early zoo

residents, we can now appreciate that the Detroit Zoo is among the world’s renowned zoos in humane education, wildlife conservation, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability.

Back in 1883, Detroiters demonstrated their abiding love of animals by rescuing the abandoned animals when a visiting circus went defunct.



*The Daily Tribune*, June 27, 1935

### IN MEMORIAM

William J. “Bill” Sullivan  
November 1, 1940 – April 4, 2023  
Read our remembrance on Page 6.

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

Speaker Series • Pancake Breakfast  
See President’s Message on Page 2.

*Continued on Page 4*

ROYAL OAK  
*Historical Society*

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(248) 439-1501

Hours: Tues., Thurs., Sat., 1–4 p.m.  
and by appointment

UPCOMING EXHIBITS

*Art Show and Sale*

Johanna Schurrer, artist

June 16 – July 1

*Woodward Memories*

August and September

*All photographs courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society unless otherwise noted.*

# President's Message

BY BOB MULLER

**THE MUSEUM'S SPEAKER PROGRAM** is starting up again after a long break due to the pandemic. We can create an open space for 40 attendees by rolling the exhibit display panels out of the way on their newly installed casters. Before, we could only accommodate 25, so this is a nifty solution for bringing in more people to hear our speakers. We gave a program on the interurban recently to test out our new setup and really liked the new arrangement. So starting in May, we will have a speaker at 7 p.m. on the second Friday of every month. See the upcoming topics and further details in the box at the bottom of this page.

**THE COMMUNITY MEMORIAL DAY** Pancake Breakfast will be held from 7 a.m. to noon on Monday, May 29, at the Farmers Market. \$8 for adults and \$3 for age 10 and under. Come before or after the parade, rain or shine. Thank you to our sponsors — the Royal Oak Downtown Development Authority and Holiday Market.



We will have our annual Car Show on Saturday, August 5, a Granny's Attic yard sale sometime this summer and the board is brainstorming other activities as well.

Grateful thanks to the many generous donors who supported the elevator repair campaign. The elevator is now "up and running" in fine shape.

\* \* \*

My childhood was very different than the world children live in today — in which activities planned and run by adults keep them busy all the time. Now sports are organized youth league teams in which everyone can play. In the

*Continued on Page 6*

## SAVE THE DATES!

### Royal Oak Historical Museum Speaker Series

**Friday, May 12, 7 p.m.**

"Women Lighthouse Keepers on the Great Lakes," presenter Ellen Kehoe

**\$10 per person**

Pre-register for this program at:  
[royaloakhistoricalsociety.com](http://royaloakhistoricalsociety.com),  
scan the QR code below or  
stop in at the Museum.  
Attendance is limited to 40.



**Friday, June 9, 7 p.m.**

"Walking the Indian Trail"

We will meet at St. Mary's Church and walk a section of the Indian Trail.  
Guide Bob Muller.

**Friday, July 14, 7 p.m.**

"Indian Trails Through Royal Oak," presenter Bob Muller

# Homes & Buildings in Royal Oak

EDITED BY JOHN S. SCHULTZ

In each newsletter, the Royal Oak Historical Society features stories on historic homes and buildings in our city. The selections come from the book *Royal Oak Images, Yesterday's Charm Today's Treasures* (Roundtable of Royal Oak Historical Organizations, 2006). A second edition of this book 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).

Westerly breezes as well as sunsets can be enjoyed from the deck on that side of the house.

As with many houses of that vintage, the interior ceilings were lower; this house is no exception, with ceilings being only seven feet in height. Other qualities of the house are its wonderful old flooring with wide random-width boards. During major remodeling in 1990, spaces were opened up and modern amenities added so that now there are four bedrooms but also two full and two half baths. It is a truly remarkable house and has been well preserved and refurbished by its owners, the David L. Dursum family.

## Dursum House

2517 North Main Street

Farm Style House Built Circa 1850

**DRIVING NORTH ON** North Main Street, there is a rise of land behind which is concealed one of Royal Oak's treasures. On the acre of land at the top of and beyond the rise is a mid-1800s farm-style house. Built originally of wood but more recently clad in vinyl, the house maintains the appearance of the 19th century with the pristine whiteness of wide clapboards and the long open porch. Ten timbers (probably of cedar) support the house above the Michigan basement, part of which has a supporting wall of fieldstone.

The front entry, centered on the sheltered east side of the long open porch, has sidelights of leaded glass affording a peek into the charming interior.

A single driveway rises to the top of the ridge to the north side of the house and then divides for access to the house in one direction and in the other direction toward a shed. A rolling lawn looks down an incline westerly toward the Red Run that parallels the property on that side. The view is beautiful with uninterrupted scenery of treetops and other vegetation.



## Opening Day at the Zoo • Continued from Page 1

A zoo of sorts was established across from what became Tiger Stadium and was eventually moved to Belle Isle. There an elephant house became a main attraction, featuring Sheba, an elephant purchased with pennies donated by Detroit schoolchildren. At the start of World War I, prominent Detroiters formed the Detroit Zoological Society and purchased 100 acres on Woodward Avenue, 10 miles north of Detroit with plans for a zoo laid out as a natural park. The zoo now comprises 125 acres in Royal Oak and Huntington Woods.

At its opening on August 1, 1928, the zoo had a primate house, bird house, lions and tigers, six Michigan black bears and soon boasted of the first captive birth of a wolverine anywhere in the world. There was a snake pit, trout stream and guinea pig exhibit. Given that the first talking movie was debuting at a Detroit movie house and the Detroit Tigers were playing at home that day, officials expected only about 10,000 guests. Instead, the extraordinary number of 150,000 showed up.

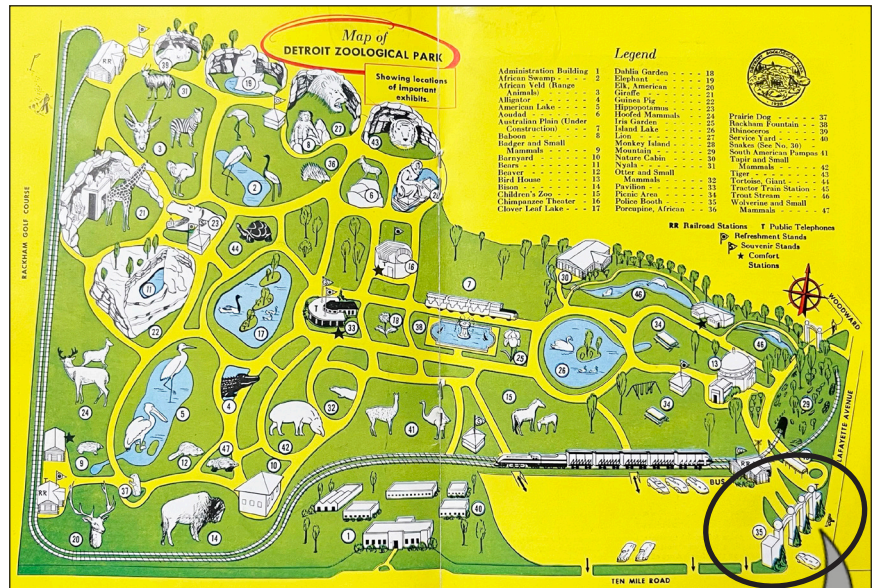
A June 1, 1932, Page 1 article in the *Tribune* noted "more than 200,000 persons visited the Detroit Zoo yesterday, spending \$4,300, which doesn't look to Director John T. Millen and his staff as if Old Man Depression was anywhere around." On May 23, 1935, a report said "more than 100,000 persons visited on opening day last Sunday. The temperature, in the high 70's, probably helped to account for the crowd."

For its 12th season opening on May 27, 1939, the Detroit Zoo unveiled the new Horace H. Rackham Memorial fountain (the beloved polar bear fountain), a paved parking lot with ornamental gates and walls and the Log Cabin station for the miniature railroad. But for the first time in a number of years, per the *Tribune*, there were "no frolicking cubs to fascinate the spectators. This was no great loss to [zoo director] Mr. Millen whose perennial headache has been ... the overpopulation of the lion den." Closing day November 17, 1939, was noted as well, with "an estimated 1,500 persons, only a handful in the eyes of Zoo attendants, ... to bid the animals goodbye [sic] for the winter."

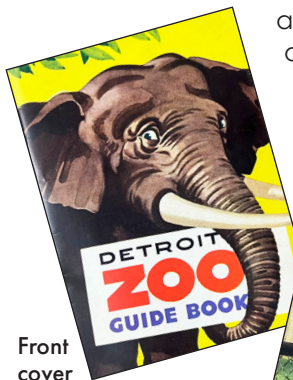
Rain and cold spoiled the May 16, 1945, opening and kept the crowds away. However, according to the *Tribune*, "the otter exhibit will especially please people who believe that only other people can wear frowns. Here mother otter, Undine, and her four sleek, flat-tailed babies peer out at their interested public and wonder who looks crosser. ... The babies amuse themselves by swimming in a shallow pool of water after they have tired of being amused by human beings."

Also in May 1945, two young giraffes arrived from east Africa. As reported on Page 1 of the *Tribune* on June 21, 1945, two of the first monkeys to come to the zoo since World War II, from India, tried an escape from their new Monkey Island home and bounded into the shallow moat surrounding their enclosure where "they clung frightened to a water pipe. They occasionally darted a wary glance at Director Frank McInnis, who stood at the top of the enclosure to block their escape." Attendants soon corralled the pair.

On May 18, 1948 — again a Page 1 story — another monkey made a getaway and was reportedly seen in 12 different sections of Royal Oak. "They're awfully hard to catch and very tricky, one employee said wearily." June 23, 1950, gave the account of 11 escapee baboons that



**Before Interstate 696, the Detroit Zoo entrance and large gate structure were located at the corner of Ten Mile Road and Lafayette (1952 map).**



Front cover



Back cover

**This guidebook from the 1950s is one of several in the Royal Oak Historical Society collection.**

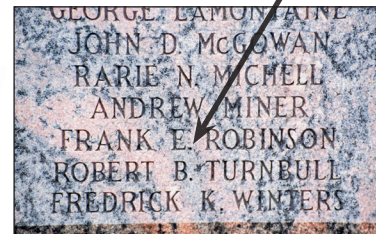
**Continued on Page 5**

# Who is Frank Robinson?

By Don Drife

**THE CITY OF ROYAL OAK** has compiled a database of all the names on the War Memorial located in Centennial Commons. All of the names are identified except for a World War II casualty, Frank E. Robinson. Do you know who he was?

There is an interactive map on the city's website at [romi.gov/1682/Royal-Oak-War-Memorial-Database](http://romi.gov/1682/Royal-Oak-War-Memorial-Database). It shows the name, rank, war served, military branch, date of birth, date of death, burial place and the service person's last address. Photographs and additional details are given for many of the personnel. You can call the city at 248-246-3201 if you have information about Frank Robinson or additional information regarding any of the men or women on the memorial. The city would like to know who the surviving families are.



## Opening Day at the Zoo • Continued from Page 4

startled residents in nearby neighborhoods. Ten of the baboons were quickly located. Zoo employees, "with a confidence born of experience," expected the 11th back soon. Sure enough, "free lunch did the trick. Monkeying around stops when stomachs start clamoring."



Royal Oak Historical Society collection

**Green felt hats were a popular zoo souvenir in the 50s.**

Two young Ceylonese elephants, Mona and Mary, joined the zoo in July 1947. They were unloaded from their train cars "at the Harrison avenue sidetracks of the Grand Trunk railway" and "brought a crowd of youngsters and as many adults," reported the *Tribune*. Elephants at the Detroit Zoo has had a long history – beginning with the Belle Isle elephant Sheba to Paulina who first helped as bulk transport during the zoo's construction and then gave more than 500,000 rides to zoo visitors before retiring in 1940.

In 2005, due to lack of sufficient space in their zoo habitat and the cold climate that exacerbated their arthritis, the last two elephants, Wanda and Winky, were moved to the Performing Animal Welfare Society sanctuary in California to live out their days. With that decision, the Detroit Zoo was the first major zoo in the United States to decide on ethical grounds to no longer keep elephants. Likewise, on humane and ethical grounds, elephant shows were ended, and the chimp show popular since 1932 was discontinued in 1982.

As spring and warmer weather inspire thoughts of trekking to the Detroit Zoo — our gem in Royal Oak — with your family and friends, we hope these snippets of early zoo history and past zoo openings bring back fond memories.

One last front-page item: Many of us still relive our childhoods today when taking a ride on the miniature railroad that opened in 1931. Page 1 of the June 30, 1933, issue of *The Daily Tribune* reported a fire in the railroad engine that "spoiled the ride for 50 passengers and made them get their nickels back." Yes, nickels! By the way, the crisis was averted when the Royal Oak fire department extinguished the flames bursting from a leaking gasoline line under the locomotive hood.

As you use this KEY you will learn more about the Zoo. Animal and Reptile House. In these areas and elsewhere about the Zoo. If you see FATTY FALLING STAIRS. Animal Kingdom. Learn more about the Zoo.



Royal Oak Historical Society collection

**For many years, young visitors could insert their beloved zoo storybook keys in small learning kiosks located throughout both the Detroit Zoo and Belle Isle Children's Zoo.**

*Author's Note: Information for this article was obtained from the archives of The Daily Tribune; the film "The Detroit Zoo: The Keeper of Our Future" (Detroit Zoological Society and Sue Marx Films, Inc. 1995); the book Images of America: Royal Oak by Maureen McDonald and board member John S. Schultz; and the Detroit Zoo website.*

# Remembering Longtime Board Member and Historian Bill Sullivan

By Mike Frentz

**WILLIAM J. SULLIVAN** left an indelible mark on the community of Royal Oak. Born in 1940, Bill spent most of his life living and working in the city. He was a true champion of local history and spent countless hours researching and documenting the past of his beloved hometown.



Photograph courtesy of  
Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Directors

**William J. "Bill" Sullivan**

Bill passed away on April 4, 2023, at the age of 82, and his contributions to the Royal Oak Historical Society will never be forgotten. His dedication and work serve as a reminder of the importance of preserving our local history, and his passion for the subject inspires others today.

His grandfather, William Sullivan, founded the funeral home that bears his name in 1906, and his son James carried on the business in 1932. James' sons Bill and John joined their father in the 1960s. The 100-year-plus family-owned business is one of the oldest operating businesses in Royal Oak. The firm now has fourth-generation members with Bill's nephews Michael Lope and Jim Sullivan working there.

Bill's interest in history was sparked at a young age. As a child, he loved exploring the city and learning about its past. He often spent hours reviewing old photographs and documents at the Royal Oak Historical Society. His passion only grew as he got older, and he became a dedicated member of the organization.

Over the years, Bill contributed in countless ways to the Royal Oak Historical Society. He served on the board for more than 20 years until his death in April. He wrote articles for the Society's newsletter and helped organize special events and the museum's exhibits. But perhaps his most outstanding contribution was the research he conducted into the history of Royal Oak.

Bill was particularly fascinated by the city's early years. He spent countless hours combing through archives and interviewing older residents to learn about how life was in Royal Oak in the 19th and 20th century.

Despite his many accomplishments, Bill remained humble and always prioritized the community's needs. His dedication to preserving the past has impacted the city of Royal Oak, and his legacy will continue to inspire generations.

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## President's Message • Continued from Page 2

1950s when I attended Whittier Elementary, there were very few Little League baseball teams and kids had to try out and be a good player. So if we weren't on a team, we kids had to figure out what to do with our free time.



**Top: Whittier Elementary School in the 1950s.**  
**Bottom: This 1950s photograph from our archives is titled "Whittier Pool." Perhaps it is the school's flooded parking lot after a big rain.**

After breakfast, our mothers sent us outside until lunch, then out again until dinner, and after dinner we had to be home by the time the street lights were on. The baby boom was in full force, and every city block had 10 to 20 kids. We had pickup baseball, football or hockey games — you just had to find enough other kids to form two teams; you never had to go off your block to get enough for a team. Two kids became captains and, after a coin toss, the captains picked their teams from the group. I was terrible at sports and therefore was always the last picked.

We never walked the four blocks to play in Whittier Park — we just played in the street. Few people had two cars, so our dads were at work and the street was clear of cars. They didn't plow residential streets in winter, and the car traffic packed down the snow to become ice. We even played hockey in the streets with skates on, although sometimes we played just in our shoes. If a car came, you just got out of the way and let it pass. We even used hard balls in these street games, and I don't remember ever having a ball break a window. By the early 1960s, many families began getting a second car, but the streets were usually still clear enough to provide room for our games. It was always up to the us to find our own activities, very different from the world kids live in today.

# Royal Oak Then & Now

BY JOHN MAURICE, ROHS FACEBOOK EDITOR

Then  
1970s



Then  
1988



**THE BUILDING AT** 931 North Main Street has a long history in our city. From its construction in 1924, when it was considered to be in the “North End” of the city, to its current use as a beloved bakery, it has been a popular place for Royal Oakers to eat, drink and shop for almost 100 years.

In its earliest incarnation, the building housed Carpenter Drugs which at the time had the claim to fame of being the only Rexall store in Royal Oak. In those early days, you could call the drugstore on your telephone by simply dialing 2101. Ralph Carpenter, who used to mix his own cough syrup, was the pharmacist from its opening in the 1930s until he sold the business in 1971. Throughout its heyday in the 1950s through the '70s, kids of all ages would come to Carpenter's for their ice cream, comic books, Matchbox cars, plastic army guys and baseball cards. Rumor had it that Ralph Carpenter could mix up a mean chocolate soda back in the day.

After Ralph retired and sold the business, the signature front floor-to-ceiling windows were bricked over, and the building served as a Perry Drugs for a short time until Perry's moved up to Catalpa. It eventually transitioned into PVH and then VCA Animal Hospital in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Since 2016, Crispelli's Bakery has occupied the location, and the building has undergone a rebirth with the iconic front windows restored and the entire exterior and interior receiving a major facelift.

Now  
2023



Photograph by John Maurice



## Elijah Drake — Revolutionary War Soldier

By Don Drife

*Editor's Note: Stories Behind the Gravestone is a new series highlighting people buried in one of Royal Oak's three cemeteries. We intend to collect these notes into a booklet for the bicentennial of the founding of Royal Oak Cemetery in 2026. If readers know of other information on the featured person, please send it to [editor@royaloakhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:editor@royaloakhistoricalsociety.org).*

**TWO REVOLUTIONARY WAR SOLDIERS** are buried in Royal Oak Cemetery. One is Ezra Parker, and a local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution is named after him. The other is Elijah Drake. He was born July 4, 1759, in Smithfield Township, Northampton County, Pennsylvania. According to Pennsylvania state records, he enlisted in 1776 as a private and served a six-month term and later a three-month term. However, he was active on and off for four years. After the war, in 1790, Elijah married Abigail Stoddard. They lived in Pennsylvania, then in New York and came to Michigan in 1835 with five of their six sons. Living with various sons, first in Oakland County and later in Ann Arbor, they came to Royal Oak in 1844 and lived with another son, Dr. Flemon Drake and his first wife Electra Depue Drake. Elijah died April 8, 1847, and Abigail died February 20, 1860.

Elijah Drake's gravestone is damaged; only the upper half remains, and it is set deep into the ground, burying the birth and death dates. "A Revolutionary Soldier" is inscribed in an arc at the top of the stone. A weeping willow, the symbol of death and mourning, decorates the stone. This was a common symbol in Victorian times, and many examples are scattered through the Royal Oak Cemetery. It originated as a symbol of resurrection with the ancient Greeks when the master musician Orpheus took a willow branch with him as he rescued his love Eurydice from the Underworld. A small marker erected by the Ezra Parker Chapter of the DAR also marks the grave. The birth and death dates on the marker are off by one year.



Abigail Drake's gravestone is simpler than her husband's. It reads, "ABIGAIL STODDARD WIFE OF ELIJAH DRAKE 1770—1860" and has no ornamentation. A small bronze marker placed by the DAR also marks her grave. It lists her birth year as 1772, but all sources I found give her birth as 1770.

The two graves are side-by-side in section "K" in the northern part of the cemetery. They are on the west side of the center road at the north bend.

## Groovy: Library Celebrates 1963 Dedication

By Ellen Kehoe

The Royal Oak Public Library recently marked the 60th anniversary of its dedication with a 1960s-themed dance party for kids, card catalog scavenger hunt, displays of memorabilia and midcentury snacks.



On Saturday, April 20, 1963, nearly 1,000 people attended an afternoon ceremony and toured the new library. Michigan's governor at the time, George W. Romney, gave the dedication address, with remarks from Mayor William Hayward and former Congressman George A. Dondero.



Early 1960s concept drawing of the new library.

The library's approximately 20,000 volumes were moved from cramped quarters in the former Royal Oak Savings Bank building on the southwest corner of Main and Third Streets. (Starbucks now occupies this building.)

Did you grow up going to the new library? Do you have memories of the former library building? Send an email to: [editor@royaloakhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:editor@royaloakhistoricalsociety.org). An upcoming newsletter will "open the book" on more about our library's history. Until then, Happy "60 Years on East Eleven Mile" to the Royal Oak Public Library!



# Looking Back

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

## What was happening in Royal Oak in May and June...

### 50 years ago — 1973

**ROYAL OAK CITY COMMISSION** decided Monday (June 4) to take a longer look at a plan to assess residents for tree replacements. City Commissioner W. Peter Kramer, who proposed the tree replacement project, said he supports the plan put together by City Manager Bruce W. Love and Parks Director John Lindell. But Mayor James P. Cline was hesitant about the projected cost of "\$70 to \$125 and up." Commissioner Enoch L. Nelson said, "We're always telling people what to do. We might find some who don't like or want a tree." City Attorney Daniel Sawicki was to investigate the legality of assessing residents or planting on city right-of-way and to arrange a public hearing to get resident sentiment. Royal Oak currently removes diseased elm trees and stumps from private property for about \$120 per tree and stump. Since 1952, more than 5,600 trees have been removed from streets because of Dutch Elm disease. The worst year was 1967 when 688 trees were lost.

### 60 Years Ago — 1963

**THUNDERSTORMS AND TORNADO-LIKE WINDS** ripped a million-dollar swath of damage across Lower Michigan on Sunday (June 9). South Oakland was left bubbling in wake of 2.55 inches of rain in separate brief storms that welled to three-foot floods inundating street, basements and isolating entire blocks in some sections. At least three tornadoes touched down in Kent and Allegan counties where 14 persons were injured. Seven-tenths of an inch of rain was dumped on South Oakland in a half-hour storm at 2:10 a.m. Sunday. Many major arteries, including Woodward Avenue and those with underpasses under the Grand Trunk railroad in Royal Oak, were flooded. Drainage officials were unable to tabulate the harshness of the downfall, but a spokesman said it was "severe."



Cab driver Stanley J. Knight Jr. stands in deep rainwater at the Webster Road underpass of the Grand Trunk. His fare calmly paid her fare, raised her umbrella and strolled off — through the three-foot deep pool of water. (Tribune Staff Photo)

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**ROYAL OAK PROPERTY OWNERS** will receive a slight tax rate cut for the seventh consecutive year under a proposed 1972-74 fiscal budget of nearly \$9.2 million presented to City Commissioners Monday night (May 3). Despite the slight rate cut — one cent — some property owners may receive higher tax bills because of selective increases in property assessments. Tax rate cuts over the past six years have totaled 30 cents.

### 60 years ago — 1963

**REPORTED CASES OF MEASLES** in Oakland County dropped slightly last week over the previous week. Chickenpox increased slightly. County Health Department officials said this is the time of the year when reports of all communicable diseases crest and begin to decrease. A total of 284 cases of measles were reported for the week ending May 1 compared with 311 cases the previous week. Chickenpox cases increased from 16 to 60 cases. Dr. Bernard D. Berman, M.D., deputy health director, pointed out that two types of measles vaccines are available from private physicians.

### 70 years ago — 1953

**SEVEN JUVENILES** who staged a series of burglaries and break-ins in Royal Oak told police they spent \$130 in loot at a carnival. Det. Lt. Edward A. Lietzau said the Royal Oak boys, ages 13 and 14, confessed to the thefts at the Martin Bus Lines garage, 309 East Eleven Mile; a concession stand at the Detroit Zoological Park; a lunchroom at the Farmers Market, 316 East Eleven Mile; the Harris Garage, 205 North Troy; Livingston Market, 518 North Main; Neisner Bros., 421 South

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## Looking Back • Continued from Page 10

Washington; S.S. Kresge's store, 408 South Washington, and a construction office on Morris owned by J.C. Nelson company. They also admitted break-ins at Clara Barton Junior High School, 815 East Farnum, and Maudlin's Garage, Third and Williams, looting two cars and a milk truck. Three members of the gang were arrested by police when they fled from Morelli's Shoe Shop, 609 South Washington, with \$21 from the cash register. They implicated their companions.  
*Editor's Note: The Martin Bus Lines garage at 309 East Eleven Mile later housed Superior Fish and now houses Beaumont Urgent Care.*

### 80 years ago — 1943

**A SEVEN COUNTY TEST** blackout employing new air raid warning signals for the first time has been ordered for Friday night (May 2) by Donald S. Leonard, state civilian defense director. The blackout will be from 9:45 to 10:25 p.m. and will extend over Oakland, Wayne, Genesee, Macomb, Monroe, St. Clair and Washtenaw counties.

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**SINGLE RESIDENCE CONSTRUCTION** in Royal Oak more than tripled in April as compared to March, with the city building department issuing permits for 94 new homes with a construction cost of \$463,850. Most of the residences are being built in Southlawn Park subdivision. Other permits were for garages and minor buildings.

### 85 years ago — 1938

**ANOTHER PHASE OF ROYAL OAK'S** drive for trees is the removal of stumps to make room for the younger trees, of a more desirable type. The drive has been in progress for the last few weeks and is hoped to improve the landscape of the city.

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**TWO ROYAL OAK HIGH SCHOOL** boys are getting returns in their campaign to keep Royal Oak advertised. They put balloons in the air and one was returned in the mail from as far as Kawortha Lakes, 300 miles away.

### 90 years ago — 1933

**THE ADVENT OF LEGAL 3.2 BEER** was greeted last night (May 11) in Royal Oak with numerous house parties and organizations celebrating, principal of which was one sponsored in the headquarters of Union Aerie, No. 2092, Fraternal Order of Eagles, 510 South Washington Ave.

Nearly 400 guests attended the party at which Clark's orchestra provided music for modern and old time dancing. Elsewhere, Southern Oakland County celebrated its legal 3.2 beer in a sober, orderly fashion. The police noted no calls or drunkenness or drunk driving. Private parties were conducted so quietly that not one complaint of "noisy" neighbors came to a local police department.

At least one citizen was under the impression that the Eighteenth Amendment had been repealed completely. A man entered the police station shortly after 7 p.m. putting four bottles on the bar-like desk. "Have a drink, boys. The lid's off," he shouted huskily. Lt. Roy Butcher confiscated two bottles of gin, one about half full, and sent the man on his way with two bottles of 3.2 beverages.

There is no shortage of beer reported. "The difficulty was in finding a place without legal beer," one celebrant declared."

### 100 years ago — 1923

**"A CITY OF HOMES"** is the slogan adopted for Royal Oak following a contest conducted by the Chamber of Commerce. This was selected as the one befitting the city by a committee which included Mrs. W.S. McDowell, representing the Royal Oak Woman's Club; Miss Mildred Pahl, of the English Department of the High School; James B. Dunkell, vice president of the Chamber of Commerce, and Lynn S. Miller, editor of The Tribune. The slogan was submitted by Thomas B. Prickett, secretary of the Chamber, and was chosen from more than 100 entries. The prize was \$5 given by the Royal Oak Woman's Club.

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**THE PUZZLE OF WHAT TO DO** with the privately owned and operated water plants in Northwood and Vinsetta subdivisions, now part of Royal Oak city, was not solved at the conference Monday (May 29) evening between the city commission, Arthur F. Bassett, representing the Vinsetta Land Co., and H. Lloyd Clawson, representing the owners of Northwood. Mr. Bassett and Mr. Clawson said they would be very glad to accept the plan proposed by City Manager P.H. Beauvais. Under this, the city would take over the two water plants at a valuation agreed on by both sides and would pay for them by construction an amount of sanitary and storm sewer lines whose cost would equal the price of the two water systems.

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*Continued on Page 11*

**100 years ago — 1923** *continued*

**WHEN ABRAHAM LINCOLN** called for volunteers for service in the army, 100 young men responded from Royal Oak Township, then a small rural community. On Wednesday, Memorial Day, two of these men, R.A. Parker and W.H. Addis, now gray with years, took leading parts in the observance of the sacred day in Royal Oak, now one of Michigan's most progressive and growing cities. Captain Parker, at the mound of Oak View Cemetery, recited from memory the names of the Royal Oak men who died for their country in the War of Rebellion and who are buried in unknown graves in southern soil.

**105 years ago — 1918**

**POSTMASTER ALLEN** has been unable to secure male mail carriers for the village of Royal Oak. Now, he says, he will consider women for the job.

## City Considers New Municipal Buildings

### 100 years ago — 1923

**CONSTRUCTION OF A** two-story municipal building at Main and Sixth streets, to house city departments for two or three years and then to be changed into a business block, was proposed to the city commission Monday evening (May 4) by Mayor George Dondero. Such a move would be a wise business step, the mayor declared. The city now pays \$190 a month rent for various departments, \$75 for city hall, \$25 for justice's court, \$125 for the library and \$65 for garage space, more of which will be needed when the fire department's new pumper arrives. This represents interest on an investment of \$60,000, whereas a building such as proposed could be erected for \$30,000.

The city now owns a vacant spot, 120 feet on Main Street and 110 on Sixth Street. The fire department building occupies the rear of this lot and the front part is idle.

With an enormous program of public improvements now facing it, Mayor George Dondero pointed out, the city could not finance the building of a proper city hall, even if it could buy the site for which it has been looking this spring. He proposed that in a two-story business building, the city office, fire department and water department be housed on the first floor and the city commission chamber, justice's court, library and engineering department find satisfactory accommodations on the second floor.

The commission instructed City Manager P.H. Beauvais to consult with Frederick D. Madison, architect, and obtain a rough sketch of a building and more definite figures on it.

*Editor's Note: The proposed city hall at Main and Sixth was never built; instead in 1925 the city erected a building at the northwest corner of Third and Troy (see photo above), where offices remained until the 1953 city hall was constructed.*

### 70 years ago — 1953

From an editorial in *The Daily Tribune* on May 21, 1953.

**WE HOPE THAT** the Royal Oak City Commission is not going to kick around too long on plans for a police station.

We realize that the bids for remodeling of the old city hall into a police station were more than estimated. We also realize that the city will be building a new police station sometime in the future and does not want to invest any more than it has to in this remodeling job.

But when they talk about a new building for the police station being possible in five to 10 years, we start to get worried. We think something should be done about new

headquarters immediately — not in the next year; or in five or 10 years.

Now we have obtained a new city hall more appropriate to this community. But if this brand new city hall is to continue to have adjacent to it the tumble-down, old house which now is our police headquarters, the job is only half done. The old city hall can be made into adequate quarters for a police department. This of course will involve spending

some money — \$27,570 according to the lowest bid submitted. We think it will be a good investment.

Every day which that old house stands there, in our opinion, is a bad advertisement for the progressiveness and prosperity of Royal Oak.

Let's get rid of it [the old Merrill House] and without further delay.

*Editor's Note: Prior to 1953, city offices were in a 1925 building at the northwest corner of Third and Troy Streets (see photo above). This editorial advocates for renovation of the 1925 building for the police department. The white, wood-framed Merrill House on Williams Street south of Third Street had housed the police department since 1925.*



**Located at Third and Troy, the 1925 city hall became the police station in 1953. A new police building was constructed on the site in 1964. The site is now part of Centennial Commons.**



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