



# ROYAL OAK *Historical Society*

FEBRUARY 2022 • ROYALOAKHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM

## The Story of How Crooks Road Got Its Name

*By Don Drife and John S. Schultz, ROHS Newsletter Contributors*

During the spring of 1926, many of the property owners along Crooks Road in Royal Oak signed a petition requesting that the city commission rename this well-traveled Royal Oak street that begins at downtown at Main Street, north of Catalpa, and runs north through Troy to Rochester Hills.

The reason given was the embarrassment some Royal Oak residents had when giving out their address, feeling that the word "Crooks" applied to them. One petitioner asserted, "If you had to shop downtown all day and be snickered at several times when you told clerks where you lived, you would feel different about it."



*This early photo looks north on Crooks Road toward the curve at the Almon Starr house and property. The smaller road curving to the left was the driveway and access to the brick-making kilns behind the house. Present-day Essex Street is approximately where the driveway was.*

The petitioners proposed the new name of Greenwood Drive. Another suggestion was Wendland Avenue to honor Frank Wendland, a young Royal Oak man killed in action during World War I.

To make the decision on the name more challenging, the city commission received a second petition, opposing the change. The petition had signatures of 57 residents along Crooks Road, but only two of the signers of the second petition resided in the city.

Among those

objecting to the name change was Fred A. Cowen, one of the largest owners of property on the street. He told the Royal Oak commissioners that he had not been approached by the petitioners and was opposed to the name change.

"I have lived on Crooks Road for 10 years and I have never had occasion to feel ashamed of the name," Cowen said. "I don't think it would be a good thing for the community to change it. If we go back to the time the road was named, we will find the family it was named after was well worthwhile, and they still are."

*Continued on Page 8*

### UPCOMING EXHIBITS

Royal Oak Woman's Club: A History of Service to the Community  
March 7 – April 2

Homes of Royal Oak  
(A crowd-pleaser!)  
April 30 – July 16

ROYAL OAK  
*Historical Society*

**President:** Bob Muller

**Vice President:** Jay Dunstan

**2nd Vice President:** Deb Anderson

**Secretary:** Kelly Muller

**Treasurer:** Mike Frentz

**Directors:**

Pat Burean, Chuck Button, Aaron Dorn, Marcy Dwyer, Gloria Moran Harper, Phil Lewan, Mike Matthews-Pennanen, Trish Oliver, John S. Schultz, Bill Sullivan, Sherry Toggweiler, Tom Toggweiler

**Museum Curator**

Muriel Versagi

**Webmaster**

Mike Frentz

**Newsletter Staff**

Editor: Trish Oliver

Associate Editor: John S. Schultz

Designer: Ellen Kehoe

**Then and Now, Facebook Editor**

John Maurice

**Photo Game, Contributor**

Don Drife

ROYAL OAK  
*Historical Museum*

1411 West Webster Road  
Royal Oak, MI 48073  
royaloakhistoricalsociety.com  
(248) 439-1501

**Hours:** Tues., Thurs., Sat., 1–4 p.m.

See our Covid-19 protocols at  
royaloakhistoricalsociety.com/  
covid-safety-rules

**UPCOMING EXHIBITS**

Royal Oak Woman's Club History  
March 7–April 2

Royal Oak Homes  
April 30–July 16

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

# President's Message

BY BOB MULLER

## Sharing Royal Oak History at the "Celebration of the Century"

*By Bob Muller, ROHS President*

Royal Oak celebrated its first century as a city on December 2 and 3, 2021. Because a centennial celebration can draw large crowds, the city's pandemic response caused postponements to this event. Slating these December dates to commemorate our city's inception placed the celebration in the last possible days of our 100th year.

In honor of the occasion, Santa Claus put in a showing at the new police station — but apparently he was not under arrest as he did get his work done on Christmas Eve.

Centennial Commons, Royal Oak's new downtown park adjacent to the south side of the

library, was dedicated; the Farmers Market tree lighting brightened the night sky; and food trucks fed visitors as they enjoyed historical activities at the library and other locations. In the Farmers Market, vendors sold Christmas items at the annual holiday market and musicians performed numbers from the Jazz Age.

At the Historical Society booth at the market, volunteers Don Drife, John Schultz and I displayed photo panels depicting the 1800s, 1930s, 1940s,

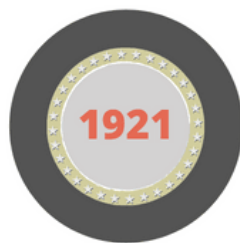
1950s and 1960s. We also had our new booklet, printed by the city and entitled *The Royal Oak: Three Oak Stories*, which tells how Royal Oak got its name. We fielded lots of questions and enjoyed interaction with those who crowded around our tables and shared their memories sparked by the photos of times gone by.

The Royal Oak Public Schools also had a display pertaining to its history. Representatives from the booth came over to us looking for someone who remembered Clara Barton school and could answer some questions about the building. I was the only one who remembered the building before it was torn down; I even went to school there. I guess that makes me historical. This event was a good way to get the Historical Society and our museum before a generous segment of the local population.



Photograph by Don Drife

**Royal Oak Historical Society booth at the "Celebration of the Century"**



# 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. While we typically feature homes from the book *Royal Oak Images, Yesterday's Charm Today's Treasures* (Roundtable of Royal Oak Historical Organizations, 2006), in this issue we showcase the Von Eberstein home.

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).

## Von Eberstein Home

321 Virginia Avenue

Craftsman House Built in 1917

*By J. Kurt Von Eberstein*

*Reflecting on my 70 years as part of a family that moved to the Royal Oak community in 1915*

My great-great-grandfather came to America in 1832. The family traveled via the Erie Canal to Detroit and then traveled further west to an area around Battle Creek to farm and raise eight children, with a ninth on the way.

My grandfather, Harle H. Von Eberstein, was born in 1888 in Scotts, Michigan, near Kalamazoo. He grew up farming and building homes in and around Scotts. As Harle soured on the farming life, he took employment in downtown Detroit selling dry goods, traveling by train throughout Michigan to sell to stores from Ann Arbor to Traverse City and any community in between. In 1915, he married Ruth Lovejoy Gearing in Detroit, and they settled in the village of Royal Oak. Ruth helped Harle start a real estate and insurance

*Continued on Page 10*



Photograph by the author's grandmother, Ruth L. Von Eberstein

# Curator's Corner

BY MURIEL VERSAGI

## 2004: The Dream of a Museum Realized

On March 4, 2022, our museum will celebrate its 18th anniversary, and I will celebrate my 18th anniversary as your curator, so I feel inspired to look back on how far we've come.

What started out as a dream for several of us on the Historical Society board in the 1980s became a reality in 2004 when the Royal Oak Public Schools offered us an unused classroom at Churchill Continuing Education Center on Girard Avenue. It was ours to use at no cost if we would maintain the school district's history. What an opportunity!



*Participating in the museum ribbon cutting in April 2010 were, from left, the late Yvonne (Bonnie) Linehan, Grace Perkins, Gloria Moran Harper, Mayor Jim Ellison, Muriel Versagi, Beecher Eaves, the late Blanche Meyerhoven Roth and the late Agnes Buhalski.*

My husband Frank and I had just shut down our Royal Oak business and retired. My new volunteer job became museum curator; Frank was the computer guru, entering thousands of the Rasmussen artifacts into our Past Perfect database program. The first three amazingly qualified volunteers materialized: museum archivist Susan Wolfrum, artist Johanna Schurrer and Joanna Becker with her degree in archeology and photo archiving skills. Johanna and Joanna are still volunteering. Susan had to step away in 2019 but may rejoin us at a later date. My title is still curator, but I really don't curate anything anymore. Now I'm more of a director of operations, resource person, email correspondent and general all-around "memory bank."

The museum was based at Churchill for six years. During the last three years of that time, the former Northwood fire station was readied to be the new location for our museum. We had begun looking at the fire station in 1984-85 when it closed. There were several conditions that had to be worked out over the years. But eventually, with the help of board member and attorney Steve Jones, we finalized a lease with the city for one dollar a year, renewable every five years. The neighboring First Congregational Church graciously allows use of its parking lot.

During the three years it took to get the fire station building ready, local architect Frank Arvan drew up at no fee the plans for the handicapped

Several board members at that time — Bill Sullivan, Tom Wurdock, Owen Perkins, Barry Schulman, Blanche Roth and Pete Mancour — knew former Royal Oak police officer Bill Rasmussen. When Rasmussen retired from the police force, he opened a collectibles shop and bought and sold Royal Oak memorabilia and other historical artifacts. By 2004, Rasmussen had retired to Holly, Michigan, and moved all of his artifacts. The group of board members set about negotiating for literally thousands of items from Royal Oak. Rasmussen agreed to sell the collection for \$5,000, and five women on the board — Blanche Meyerhoven Roth, Pat Eaves, Bonnie Linehan, Agnes Buhalski and me — each donated \$1,000 to seal the deal.

On a brisk day in early March 2004, board members Pete Mancour, Bill Sullivan, Barry Schulman and Phil Smith drove to Holly in vans and trucks, loaded up the artifacts and drove back to Churchill and unloaded. It took about 15 years to finish cataloging Rasmussen's large collection, which is the foundation of the museum's holdings.



*Muriel and the late Frank Versagi enjoying the grand opening festivities.*

*Continued on Page 5*



**A large crowd on a warm April 2010 evening toasted the museum's grand opening.**

boxes and brought them upstairs. We had one donated computer when we started — now we have six.

The grand opening on April 30, 2010, was a formal affair with champagne served and guests attired in tuxedos and fancy dresses. Our volunteer bartenders didn't know the champagne needed to be poured soon after the corks were loosened, so the sounds of popping corks punctuated the evening and provided some unexpected surprises.

The first exhibit in the new museum was on World War II and opened on Veterans Day in November 2010. More than 80 families loaned or donated photos, uniforms, a Jeep and a Norden bombsight. Thirteen World War II veterans and their families attended opening night. A couple of the men had been at Pearl Harbor when it was attacked on December 7, 1941. One, Berkley resident Bill Barr, was a Navy photographer, and he loaned us his display boards with his photos. You can view past exhibits on the visitor's computer in the museum library as Joanna Becker has photographed all of our approximately 40 exhibits in the past 11 years. We usually do three to four exhibits a year.

Happy 18th Anniversary to the museum! Come visit and share your story with us. We have so much to show you.



**In fine fashion were (L to R) David Richards, Janet Richards, James Carnegie, Karol Sprague and Kathleen Schneider.**

restroom and the elevator installation in the former firehose drying tower. The historical society president at the time, Jay Dunstan, worked closely with the city to obtain block grant funds to pay for all of the updates. Before we moved in, board member Chuck Button of Button's Rent It sanded and varnished the floor upstairs in the workroom at no charge. Board member and treasurer Mike Frentz donated and installed metal shelving units from Frentz & Sons Hardware.

In January 2010, our volunteers packed up the artifacts at Churchill for the move. Andrew Androff and his team from Professional Movers.com, along with three trucks, donated their services. When we arrived at the fire station, 40 members unloaded tables and then all the



**Long-time local historian the late Lois Lance was an honored guest at the festivities.**



**Long-time Historical Society members on hand to celebrate included (L to R) John Sullivan, the late Cathy Sullivan, the late Steve Jones, Karen Jones and Bill Sullivan.**

# Royal Oak Then & Now

BY JOHN MAURICE, ROHS FACEBOOK EDITOR



Aerial photo circa autumn 1926

In the early 1900s, subdivision builders in Royal Oak commonly planted poplar and soft maple trees to line the streets due to their quick rate of growth, potential as shade trees and their stately beauty. Soft maples would generally include silver, red, box elder and big leaf. Many of these trees were planted long before construction started on the houses that they were meant to eventually shade.

Once the houses were built and the sewer systems were run under the ground, the problem with these trees quickly became apparent. Along with their fast growth came root systems that were growing out of control and clogging and, in some cases, destroying the sewer systems that lay anywhere from 12 to 20 feet under the surface of the ground.

This became a huge problem in the city during the 1920s and '30s. A June 1930 *Daily Tribune* article reported that in one root abatement project, two tons of poplar roots were pulled out of a one-thousand-foot section of sewer crack. That's two pounds of tree root per foot!

In that same *Tribune* article, city inspector Herbert Schettler warned residents to refrain from planting these types of trees, although a formal ban wasn't issued at that time. In an effort to resolve the issues

with the sewer systems, poplars and soft maples were cut down throughout the city.

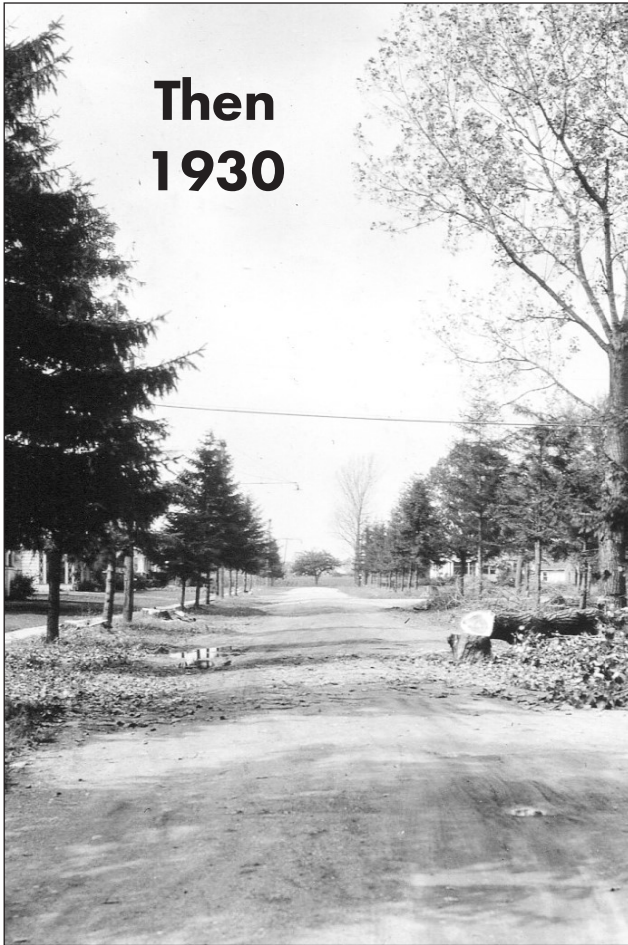
During the year 1930 alone, more than 400 poplars were removed from the streets of the various Northwood subdivisions. These trees were no saplings either — they averaged 55 feet in height and nearly five feet in trunk circumference. You can see the poplars with their distinctive shape lining Lloyd Avenue (#13 in the aerial photo), Linwood Avenue (#8) and among the pines on Clawson Avenue (#7) in the 1926 aerial photo.



The *Then* photo shows Clawson Avenue just north of Northwood Boulevard in September 1930 after the poplars were cut down. In that photo, north of where the photo was taken, Elmhurst can be seen branching off to the right. North on Clawson, past where it would intersect with Lloyd, there's no development, just the fields of the Benjamin farm.

The *Now* photo shows that same view of Clawson, with some of the same pines from the 1930 photo having matured over the last 90 years and many having been cut down. In perusing some of the older aerial photos of this area, many have wondered what happened to all those towering poplars that defined this area in the early days of Royal Oak's history as a city — and now we know the answer.

*Continued on Page 7*



Photograph by John Maurice

*THEN* photo (above left) shows Clawson Avenue from Northwood Boulevard after the poplar trees were cut down in September 1930. *NOW* photo (right) is Clawson Avenue north of Northwood Boulevard on January 6, 2022.



## PHOTO GAME

*By Don Drife, Photo Game Editor  
and Contributor*

This issue's Photo Game features photos from a well-known Royal Oak institution.

Can you guess which one?

Answer on Page 12

## Crooks Road • Continued from Page 1

### Changing Name of Crooks Road Brings Objections To Proposal

Gen. Crooks Took Up Land  
Century Ago and Built  
First North Road

The Daily Tribune,  
March 10, 1926

Cowen was referring to the family of David and Eunice Crooks from Massachusetts. David died in 1813 in New York; however, Eunice and the children moved to Michigan and settled on 160 acres of land west of Crooks Road between Big Beaver and Wattles roads in Troy Township in 1823. The daughter, Zada, married William Poppleton, and members of the Crooks and Poppleton families were very prominent in the activities of the township for many years.

Crooks Road itself was developed through the efforts of these two families and from a mere trail became the first good road leading north in that direction from Royal Oak. The Crooks Road cemetery, at Crooks Road near 17 Mile Road (Wattles Road), was set aside for public use (where Boulan Park is now) by the family, many of whose members are buried there.

According to the late Royal Oak historian Lois Lance, David and Eunice's son, Riley Crooks, hosted the first township meeting and election at his house on May 28, 1827, and was elected township clerk. At that time, Troy Township included the area that afterward became Royal Oak Township. Tragically, in April 27, 1830, at the age of 35, Riley Crooks was cutting down a limb off a tree, and it struck and killed him.

In her book, *Pathways of History Through Troy* (published by the Troy Bicentennial Committee, 1976), Lance also notes another source that says the road was so named because the original road meandered, so it was crooked.

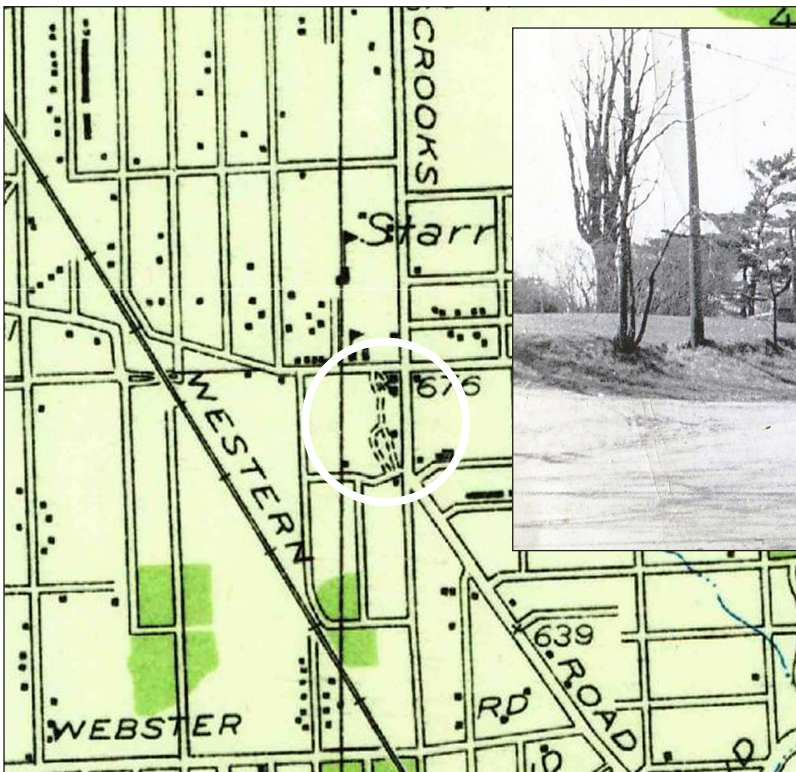
The city commission considered the issue at its meeting on April 7, 1926.

"We believe that a distinctive name that has been in use for 100 years should not be changed," said the opposing petition, "for it would cause much confusion in many ways. It would affect land descriptions and interfere with business. Furthermore, we do not like to change the name that we have come to respect and revere."

Some commissioners contended that if the city changed the name, and the townships didn't, the same road would have two different names. Others recognized the historical character of the Crooks name and that the road was named long before the present owners purchased their land.

Several landowners along Crooks Road likewise supported the current name. Obviously, the Crooks name was retained.

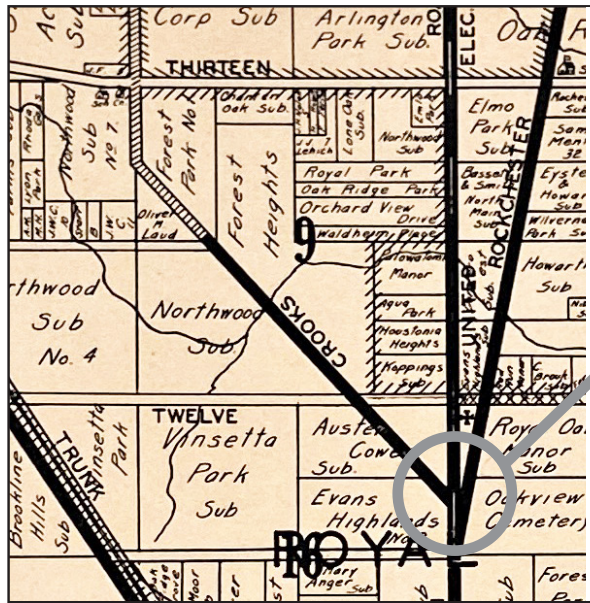
*Continued on Page 9*



*In a later, undated photograph of the Crooks Road curve at the Almon Starr property, the road appears to be paved and the driveway is still present. The sign posted by the driveway says "For Sale Plants." At left is a 1936 topological map where the dashed lines (area circled in white) indicate the roads on the property.*

Birmingham Michigan Quadrangle, 1936. Courtesy of the U.S. Geological Survey





Many Royal Oakers will remember this directional sign that stood at the intersection of Crooks Road and Main Street. When the sign was taken down, it was donated to the Royal Oak Historical Museum.



Crooks Road looking south at Webster Road. The photograph appears to have been taken from inside a house due to the sheer curtain across the corner of the image. The house shown is no longer there. The grocery store name "National," partially visible on the far left, was the 1950s predecessor to several later supermarkets on the site, the last being Oak Ridge Market.

## The Starrs — One of Royal Oak's Pioneer Families

Almon Starr's property is shown in several photographs accompanying this issue's Crooks Road article. Almon was the son of Orson Starr, whose home located at 3123 North Main Street, one block south of Thirteen Mile Road, is owned by the city of Royal Oak. The house was occupied by the Starr family for nearly 100 years. As the maker of well-respected cowbells and other animal bells, Orson Starr was Royal Oak's first manufacturer; his son Almon made bricks and tile.

Open houses and tours are provided by volunteers of the Orson Starr House Guild. The next open houses are from 1–4 p.m. on Sunday, March 13 and Sunday, April 10. Admission is free to all events; however, donations are always welcome.



Orson Starr house

## Von Eberstein Home • Continued from Page 3

business. In 1916, the Acorn Agency opened with Harle as president and Ruth helping keep the books as secretary throughout the 1920s.

I remember my grandfather talking about a mortgage from those days costing only \$600 a year. In 1917, Harle worked with his in-laws, the Gearings, to build the home at 321 Virginia Avenue. My grandparents conducted their business from there until they opened a small office near the railroad tracks at 317 South Washington Avenue.

This two-story Craftsman-style home had a back staircase for housekeeping help as well as a call button installed in the kitchen floor to summon them from their attic quarters. In later years, the attic served as storage and as a fun indoor playground for the children. Formal dining for meals with coat and tie was a regular occurrence. The small kitchen with the screened porch served as a prep area. It had a small table to serve breakfast and lunch. Dinner was served in the dining room along with conversation.

This grand home had wood trim throughout the dining and living rooms. The living room featured a fireplace and comfortable furniture adorned with family pictures. One table held my grandmother's 1893 Chicago World's Fair lamp that was converted from oil to electric. This heirloom remains operational today in my own home.

The lovely staircase to the four bedrooms and full bath upstairs provided "modern" comfort for the four kids, including my aunts Josephine (born in 1915) and Georgine (1918), my uncle Leslie (1921) and my father John "Jack" (1924). My dad and his brother were responsible for the chicken coop, while his sisters collected the eggs and helped prepare the birds for dinner.



Photograph by Ruth L. Von Eberstein

**The author's grandfather Harle Von Eberstein (left) with his daughter Josephine's husband, Bob Lowry, on July 28, 1952.**



Photograph by Ruth L. Von Eberstein

**This 1956 photo shows the warm wood trim on the window frames, casements and stairway that was typical of this house style. At left is the author's father, John "Jack" Von Eberstein, with other members of the family. Circled is the author, Kurt Von Eberstein.**



Image from Oakland County property records, courtesy of Chris Kaska

**321 Virginia Avenue in August 2018**

In those days, an alley to Troy Street served as the driveway, but in the mid-1950s it was closed off. My grandfather sold the home after the 1958 deaths of his oldest daughter and his wife.

As the family grew, so had the business. My Uncle Les and my father Jack took over the primary insurance business. In the 1950s, the newly named Von Eberstein Insurance Agency moved to 1200 West Eleven Mile Road. Another move in the late 1960s was to the remodeled three floors of the bank building (keeping the vault) at 225 South Main Street. Soon, though, the business was sold to a larger insurance firm in Detroit.

*Editor's Note: J. Kurt Von Eberstein was born in 1952 in the Washington Square building's fourth-floor hospital; a large clock visible in the nearby window of his family's Acorn Realty/Insurance business provided the accurate time for the hospital staff. The family lived at 1106 Cherokee Avenue and later in the Woodwardside subdivision at 2642 Bembridge Avenue. By 1959, they moved into a new custom-built home at 3102 Clawson Avenue. Kurt and his siblings attended Jane Addams Elementary/Junior High and then Kimball High School. Kurt graduated from Kimball in 1970. He then learned a trade from the Electronics Institute and Radio Electronics & Television Institute and earned an associate's degree in electronic technology in 1972. He worked in the air monitoring field in Royal Oak and in the Custom Electronic and Integrated Home Systems industry (CEDIA) until his retirement in 2008.*

# Looking Back

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

## What was happening in Royal Oak...

### 50 years ago — 1972

**ROYAL OAK NATIVE** and Army Major Peter M. Dawkins, all-around athlete at Cranbrook, West Point and Oxford before he began his Army career, will be the keynote speaker at the annual banquet of the Greater Royal Oak Chamber of Commerce. Dawkins was an All-American halfback and Heisman Trophy winner at West Point. He is the son of Dr. and Mrs. Henry Dawkins, who live on Greenleaf.

\*\*\*

**OFFICIALS AT THE DETROIT ZOO**, which has no entrance fee, are considering the possibility of seeking "donations" from the two million visitors who pass through the gates each year. The plan reportedly is being considered as an alternative to a drastic cutback in operations because of Detroit's financial crisis.



Wikipedia

Peter M. Dawkins

### 70 years ago — 1952

**FINAL PLANS** for additions to Parker and Starr elementary schools were approved Wednesday night by the Royal Oak School Board.

The board authorized architect Lowell M. Price to advertise for construction bids to be due at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 13. Each school will get a two-story addition, including two kindergartens, principal's office and clinic and multi-purpose room on the first floor and two classrooms on the second floor.

The expansion will give Starr school 10 rooms and Parker, 14 rooms, plus the new multi-purpose room. These are designed with a stage and an adjoining kitchen facility.

Additionally, the board set next Wednesday for the opening of construction bids for a four-room addition to Lockman school and a gymnasium-band room addition to Mary Lyon Junior High.

\*\*\*

**MEMBERS OF THE RED RUN** Home Owners association Thursday (Jan. 11) voiced objections to having the garbage and rubbish incinerator installed at Twelve-Mile and Campbell in Royal Oak.

Petitions will be circulated Saturday in protest of the proposed site. The site, second choice of three proposed by the South Oakland County Garbage and Rubbish Authority, actually lies in Royal Oak Township but is adjacent to the homes in the Red Run subdivision. The authority prefers a site at Ten-Mile and Greenfield but that, too, has drawn objections.

Members objected on the grounds that the incinerator would be detrimental to property values in the area, and they also claimed that ashes would be strewn over the area and smoke would be a nuisance.



Alfred H. Upton

### 80 years ago — 1942

**A TWO ALARM FIRE** of undetermined origin last night caused several thousand dollars damage to a four-family flat at 200 North Center and drove the occupants out into the streets for two hours in 10-degree above zero weather.

Dense smoke, which obscured visibility a block east on Main Street hampered firemen until they were able to grope their way to windows, smash them and ventilate the building.

Fire Chief Charles Hemming said the fire originated in a wooden partition, which separates a furnace used to heat the two halves of the building. The first alarm was turned in at 6:08 p.m. and Northwood firemen were summoned six minutes later.

\*\*\*

**ALFRED H. UPTON**, principal of Royal Oak High School since 1933, died in his home after an illness of eight months.

Continued on Page 12

**1941 WAS BUILDING BOOM IN SOUTH OAKLAND COUNTY**

Building in South Oakland County in 1941 wiped out all previous records and doubled that of 1940, which had established the high mark of a decade, a Daily Tribune survey shows. The records list 3,103 new homes with a valuation of \$12,220,148 and a total construction program for 4,920 permits valued at \$15,297, 699.

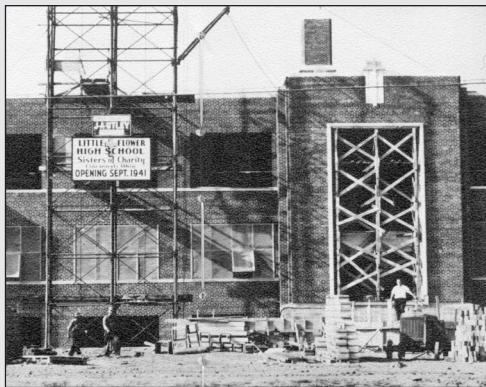
The home summaries:

	Permits	Valuation
Royal Oak	872	\$4,106,050
Ferndale	670	2,765,938
Berkley	494	2,108,775
Royal Oak Township	772	1,389,945
Huntington Woods	171	1,142,265
Pleasant Ridge	53	413,150
Clawson	29	148,500
Oak Park	42	145,525
	3,103	\$12,220,148



*New homes construction, March 25, 1942*

Royal Oak registered the largest single item in the \$360,000 Little Flower High School for girls, Thirteen Mile Road and Woodward. Other outstanding constructions were the \$54,000 Main Theater and the Elks temple costing \$35,000.



*Little Flower High School for girls*

Ferndale was easily the leader in the establishment of new factories, granting permits for 14 at a valuation of \$293,125. Twelve factory additions totaled \$105,450. Other costly constructions were the \$100,000 laboratory and office building of Reichhold Chemicals, Inc., and the \$220,000 office and warehouse of Lee and Cady in Somerset subdivision.

Royal Oak city and Royal Oak Township each issued one permit for a new church structure. Oak Baptist is building a \$46,000 church on Thirteen Mile Road at Glendale Avenue in the city and Free Will Baptist a \$6,000 structure at Stephenson highway and Vassar Avenue in the township. Ferndale issued a permit for a \$47,000 Emanuel Gospel hall located on Stratford Avenue.

Additions to schools in Royal Oak totaled \$130,500. This included an \$80,000 addition to the Shrine of the Little Flower parochial school and \$50,500 in additions to the Whittier and Northwood schools.

New theaters were built in Clawson and Berkley, the latter costing \$25,000.

**85 years ago — 1947**

**MEMBERS** of the Northwood Subdivision Improvement Association will object before the Royal Oak city commission tonight to permitting a proposed one-and one-quarter million-dollar apartment project in the northern part of the city.

**90 years ago — 1932**

**ROYAL OAK HIGH SCHOOL** opened second semester classes with 200 new pupils: 165 from junior high, 15 from Oak Ridge and several others from other cities.

\*\*\*

**POSTMASTER** Lee J. Campbell, State Senators James F. Lawson and George A. Dondero, along with architect Frederick D. Madison left for Washington to try to obtain an appropriation for immediate construction of a federal building to house the Royal Oak Post Office.

Photo Game answers: All photos are from the old Northwood fire station — now the home of the Royal Oak Historical Museum at 1411 West Webster.

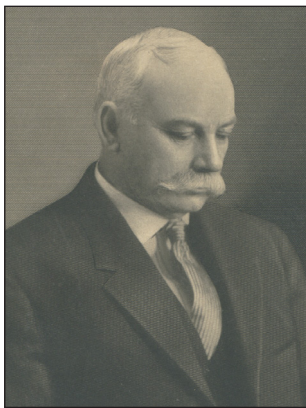
**95 years ago — 1927**

**THE PROPOSED** \$200,000 bond issue for a Royal Oak hospital will not be submitted to the voters on Feb. 8 when other issues covering Detroit water and others will come up. *Continued on Page 13*

100 years ago — 1922

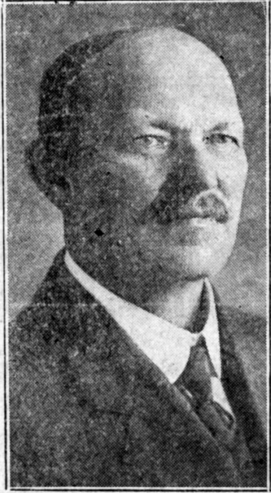
**THREE PIONEERS LOST** in 1921 were honored in the Jan. 6, 1922 edition of the *Royal Oak Tribune*. Jacob Erb, Charles G. Merrill and Louis Storz, last of a quartet of political and business leaders, died in 1921. Jacob M. Lawson, who died in 1913, was the fourth member. They all had seen Royal Oak grow from a crossroads town to a metropolitan suburb of several thousand in population.

Jacob Erb, who died April 13, was the Republican leader in Royal Oak during the last of the 19th and the first of the 20th centuries. He held the office of postmaster for 27 years during Republican administrations. The post office and general store were at Second and Main streets.

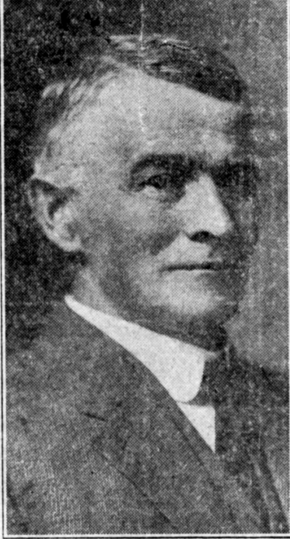


Jacob M. Lawson

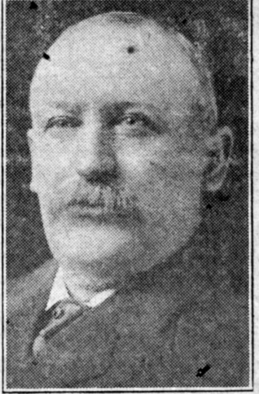
*Three Pioneers Lost in Year*



Louis Storz



Jacob Erb



Charles G. Merrill

Charles G. Merrill, veteran Grand Trunk conductor, and Louis Storz died within a few days of each other in September. Louis Storz, Democratic leader, acted as postmaster during the Democratic administrations until the election of President Wilson. His store was at Fifth and Main streets.

These three men with Mr. Lawson were organizers of the Royal Oak Savings Bank in 1907. They served as directors until the time of their deaths.

*Editor's Note: Mr. Lawson's death in September 1913 was due to a tragic accident. On September 26, 1913, the Royal Oak Tribune reported: "Last Monday night while walking through his office in the dark he stumbled over a keg of nails and the sharp edges struck him in the abdomen." He initially was recovering but relapsed and passed away at his home.*

100 YEARS AGO

CHURCH BELLS TOLL; NOISE GREETS 1922

Church bells pealed, shotguns roared, automobile horns honked, miscellaneous noise contraptions clattered as Royal Oak boisterously, but soberly, welcomed the new year.

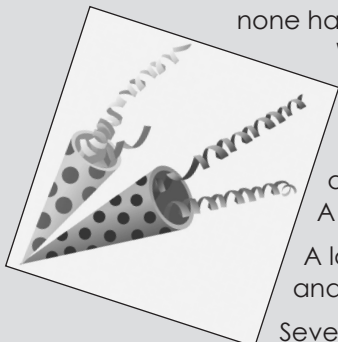
As the hour hand approached the midnight hour on New Year's Eve, automobiles parked on Washington Avenue and Main Street began loudly heralding the exodus of the old year and the entry of the new. Church bells immediately took up the refrain and soon Royal Oak was in the clutches of a din of eardrum shattering proportions.

Drunkenness was an absent feature of this year's celebration. A few were on the streets who showed they had drunk a toast to the New Year, but none had imbibed so freely that he appeared conspicuous.

With the exception of two men picked up Saturday on vagrancy charges, the city jail was unoccupied New Year's Day. But one local restaurant remained open for the celebration and by one o'clock seating accommodations were at a premium. Some remained until a late hour in the morning. A few retired early but others took their places.

A large number of Royal Oakers witnessed the New Year's entry from Detroit's hotels and cafes.

Several churches held watch night services.



## 1958: Two Sets of Sisters Reunite After Years Apart

Excerpted from *The Daily Tribune* by Ellen Kehoe, ROHS Newsletter Designer

Articles in *The Daily Tribune* on May 2, 1958, reported happy reunions in Royal Oak and Ferndale when two women welcomed their sisters from overseas for visits awaited for many years. Mrs. Bertha Szkula of 125 South Minerva Avenue, Royal Oak, met her sister Mrs. Anastazyia Wysoka at Willow Run Airport in Ypsilanti after a flight from Warsaw, Poland. Bertha came to the United States with family at age 9, but her older sister Anastazyia was married and stayed in Poland.



Photograph courtesy of *The Daily Tribune*

**Eighty-year-old Mrs. Margaret Walker (right) of Ferndale hugs her sister Mrs. Jean Macdonald, age 65, of Glasgow, Scotland. The sisters reunited after 32 years.**

Forty-five years later, it took more than a year for Anastazyia to finally obtain a travel visa from the Polish government behind the Iron Curtain. She wasted no time in arranging her flight to the U.S., where she plans to make her permanent home with Bertha.

Bertha quickly lapsed into Polish to communicate with Anastazyia, who speaks no English. "She has already learned 'okay' and 'all right,'" Bertha said. She added that her sister is amazed by appliances such as an automatic washer, electric frying pan and automatic coffee pot.

A round of welcome parties are planned to introduce Anastazyia to nieces and nephews she has never met. "It's wonderful having her here," said Bertha. "There's so much to talk about, we just never stop talking."

Thirty-two years had separated Mrs. Margaret Walker of Ferndale from her sister Mrs. Jean Macdonald of Glasgow, Scotland. As with Anastazyia from Poland, Jean also arrived at Willow Run Airport for her first visit to the United States — and after her first trip on an airplane.

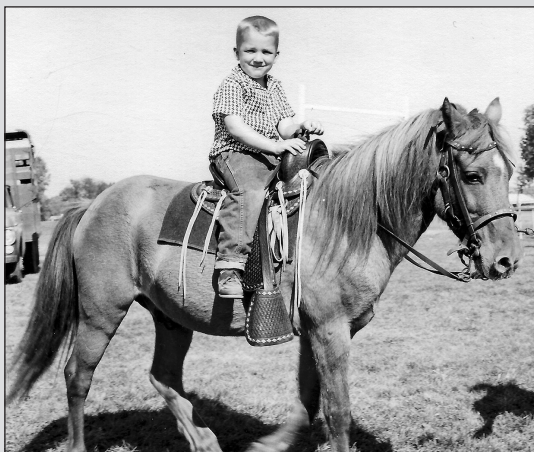
"All the way home they talked about Scotland," laughed Margaret's daughter, Mrs. George Steele. "I didn't even get a

chance to ask if she liked the country." Mrs. Steele said she expects to pick up a bit of a Scottish brogue herself during her aunt Jean's six-week visit.

When today we often take for granted the ease of visiting and communicating with relatives overseas (Covid-19 notwithstanding), these heartwarming stories tell of overcoming the barriers that existed more than 60 years ago.

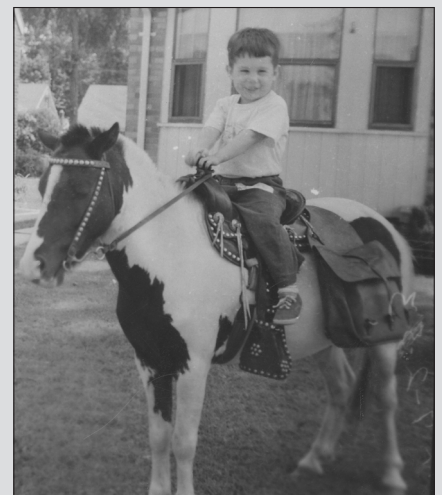
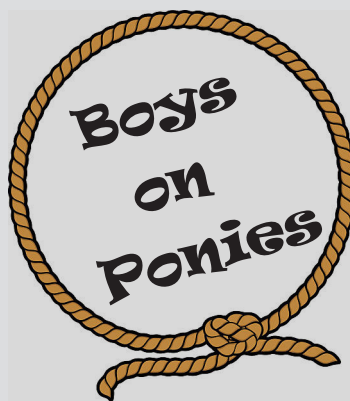


Photo Editor Don Drife fondly recalls the annual fall fundraising fair at Starr Elementary School: "As a kid, I looked forward to this diversion shortly after the school year began. There was a used book shop, white elephant room, bake shop, cake walk, handicraft sales, flower room, makeup booth, a midway with rides, pony rides, hamburgers, hot dogs, cotton candy and candied apples."



Photograph courtesy of Don Drife

**Don Drife on a pony at the Starr Elementary School fall fair, circa 1964.**



Photograph courtesy of Bob Muller

**Bob Muller on a pony in front of his childhood home on North Blair Avenue, circa 1952-53.**

ROHS President Bob Muller explains: "Photographers came through the neighborhoods with ponies trying to sell mothers on getting their kids' photo taken."

## Museum Happenings

From March 7 through April 2, the Royal Oak Woman's Club presents history, photographs and memorabilia from its 120 years of community involvement through volunteer service. The exhibit will be unveiled at a strolling afternoon tea from 2–5 p.m. on Sunday, March 6. Tickets are \$10 and are available at [rowc.org/events](http://rowc.org/events).

After the Woman's Club exhibit closes, an encore of the popular "Royal Oak Homes" display will run from April 30 to July 16. The photos below are from past exhibits. Learn more about your house style or look for your home in photographs.



Nostalgic vintage calendars from the collection of John Rastall had a short stay on the exhibit walls for two weeks in January. The calendars marked the dreary days after the holidays with a splash of beautiful color. Photographs by Don Drife



## Royal Oak History Publications and Programs



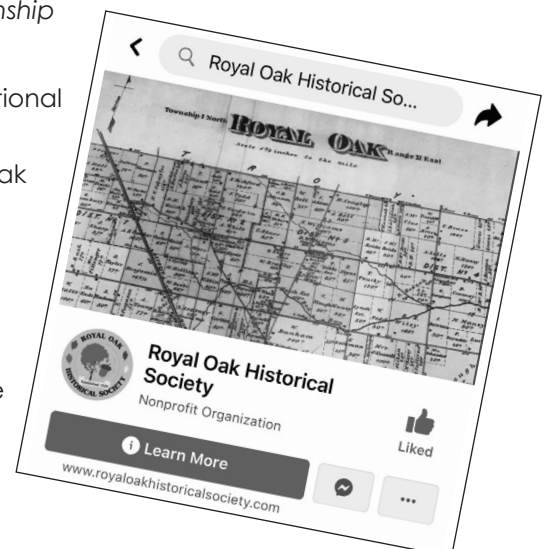
ROHS President Bob Muller and *Photo Game* editor Don Drife wrote the following booklets, which are for sale at the museum and online for \$5 each:

- *Growth of the Village and City of Royal Oak*
- *Indian Trails through Royal Oak Township*
- *The Interurban*
- *The History of a Piece of Land* (additional coauthor: Theodore G. Vickers)

Don is also the botanist for the Royal Oak Nature Society and has written a book about wildflowers.

For a presentation on how Royal Oak became a city, go to [royaloakhistoricalsociety.com](http://royaloakhistoricalsociety.com) and see Bob Muller's video entitled "The Growth of the Village and City of Royal Oak."

In the video, Bob takes us on a journey of the 13 steps of the City of Royal Oak's annexation from Royal Oak Township between 1836 to 1957.





ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1411 West Webster Rd. • Royal Oak, MI 48073

248.439.1501 • ROYALOAKHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM



ROYAL OAK  
*Historical Society*

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Individual: \$20 \_\_\_\_ Family: \$30 \_\_\_\_ Supporter: \$50 \_\_\_\_  
Century: \$100 \_\_\_\_ Club: \$200 \_\_\_\_ Premium: \$300 \_\_\_\_ Benefactor: \$500 \_\_\_\_

**Make your check payable to: Royal Oak Historical Society  
1411 W. Webster Road • Royal Oak, MI 48073**

Dues also are payable online at [royalokhistoricalsociety.com](http://royalokhistoricalsociety.com). Click on the Membership link and you may pay your dues online or subscribe and have your dues paid automatically annually. For more information about membership levels and benefits, visit the website. Thank you in advance!

IMAGE PRINTING  
1902 Crooks • Royal Oak, MI 48073  
248.585.4080