



ROYAL OAK *Historical Society*

MAY 2026 • ROYALOAKHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM



The 1926 original wooden Shrine after it was moved east in 1929 from the corner of Twelve Mile Road and Woodward Avenue for construction of the Charity Crucifixion Tower and main church.
Right: The Charity Tower nearing completion in 1932.



SHRINE OF THE LITTLE FLOWER CELEBRATES 100 YEARS

BY JOHN S. SCHULTZ AND JUDY MATEN

IN 1925, ROYAL OAK was among the fastest-growing cities in the region, having become a city just four years earlier. Driven by Detroit's thriving automobile industry, Royal Oak was no longer a "sleepy stop" along the road from Detroit to Pontiac. The city was emerging as an ideal place for workers to settle — a close commute to factories while offering a quieter, suburban lifestyle.

And as automobiles became the primary mode of transportation, the need for paved roads increased. In 1925, Woodward Avenue was fully paved through Royal Oak, transforming it into a smooth, modern roadway. With easier access to Detroit, commuting became more convenient, making Royal Oak even more attractive to homebuyers. By the end of 1925, a milestone of 548 houses had been built, compared to a few hundred the year before. Additionally, new businesses began springing up to serve the growing population, which more than tripled from 6,007 in 1920 to 22,904 by 1930.

Churches, which began appearing in the area in the early 1830s, helped bring the faithful together as a spiritual community. By 1836, Catholic Masses were held in Royal Oak farmhouses. Shortly afterward, other parishes started constructing buildings throughout what was then the Village of Royal Oak, including the First Baptist Church, First United Methodist Church, First Congregational Church, and St. Mary's Catholic Church.

If churches helped sustain families, one pastor put Royal Oak on the national map with his fiery, controversial sermons, transforming a small parish into a thriving community of worshippers. His church became a pilgrimage site for the faithful as the city grew into a major suburb.

THE PRIEST WAS the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, and the church was the Shrine of the Little Flower.

In the book *The Radio Priest* by Donald Warren, Father Coughlin's journey to Royal Oak began when he and Bishop Michael J. Gallagher, the aging bishop of the Detroit diocese, were both train passengers returning to Detroit from North Branch, a small farming community in Lapeer County, where Coughlin pastored a rural parish. According to Coughlin, they immediately became friends. It was obvious that the older bishop developed a strong, fatherly liking for the outspoken

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ROYAL OAK
Historical Society

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ROYAL OAK
Historical Museum

1411 West Webster Road
Royal Oak, MI 48073

royaloakhistoricalsociety.com

248-439-1501

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

EXHIBITS

"Where They Lie: Stories that
Royal Oak Cemeteries Tell"

*All photographs, artifacts, and archival
materials are from the collections of the
Royal Oak Historical Society unless noted.*

President's Message

BY TOM TOGGWEILER

HAPPY SPRING to all our members! We hope everyone is doing well and shedding the effects of a long, tough winter. The coming months will be busy for us at the museum, and we look forward to you joining us for our upcoming events to promote and showcase the museum.

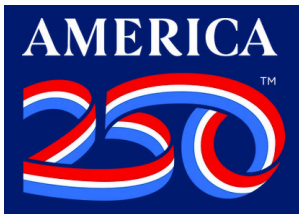
We jump right in with another **Euchre Tournament** at 7 p.m. on May 1 at Pronto restaurant in Royal Oak. Our euchre nights are always fun and a great opportunity to meet new and old friends and show off your card-playing skills. Sign up on our website or on Facebook. Cost is \$25 per person. Prizes will be awarded, and light refreshments will be served.



Plans are coming together for our annual **Pancake Breakfast fundraiser** from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. on Memorial Day, Monday, May 25, at the Farmers Market. You won't find any better pancakes in town. The all-you-can-eat event costs \$10 for adults and \$5 for kids 12 and under. Please join us before the city's Memorial Day parade, honoring our nation's heroes and those lost in defending our country.

THIS IS THE TIME for spring cleaning, and you can donate household items you no longer need (excluding clothes and bedding) to our **Granny's Attic sale**, which will be from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, May 30. Items can be dropped off at our museum after May 12 during museum hours: 1–4 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, as well as 6–8 p.m. on May 22 and May 28. Come find a treasure you just must have.

Join us from 10–11:30 a.m. on Saturday, June 20, for a **hands-on art class** focused on painting local buildings landmarks in Royal Oak. This workshop will use watercolor techniques, with training and assistance from real-life artists. The program is for beginners as well as those experienced with watercolor painting. Cost is \$15 per person and includes supplies. The program is limited to 25 persons and will be held outdoors — weather permitting. We will move indoors if inclement weather occurs. Register on our website.



The Royal Oak Historical Society has been designated as an official sponsor of our nation's 250th celebration in partnership with the State of Michigan. The festivities kick off over the Fourth of July weekend at Taco Fest, which takes place downtown and in Centennial Commons. In addition to other non-profit groups, we will host a **Taco Fest Tea Party** from 9:30–11 a.m. on Friday,

July 3, at Centennial Commons. Guests who purchase or renew a membership to the Historical Society at this event will receive a free ticket to Taco Fest. Memberships for 2026 start at \$17.76 for an individual and \$20.26 for a family. (See back page for details). Memberships can also be purchased at our museum on Webster or online through our website.



All of us at the Historical Society and museum appreciate your support in preserving and teaching about Royal Oak's history. Don't forget our hours of operation from 1 to 4 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Drop by, and we'll be there to greet you and assist with your history searches. 🍷

SPEAKER SERIES

2nd Friday of the month — 7 p.m. at the museum

Tickets: \$15. Go to royaloakhistoricalsociety.com and look under Events.

May 15 — Bob Muller with "How the glaciers formed Royal Oak"

June 12 — 250th Committee with "How to celebrate our nation's 250th anniversary"

Curator's Corner

BY JOHANNA SCHURRER

I WOULD like to thank all of you who attend the exhibits and our monthly speaker events. In 2025, our exhibits were very successful; in fact, we had 700 more visitors in 2025 than in 2024. We appreciate your support and hope that you learn something new along the way!

The popular Centennial Home Certificates program will now be available annually. This year's certificates are for homes built in 1926 or earlier. Keep an eye on our website and newsletter for program details. As a reminder, 140 people who signed up last year for a certificate have not yet picked them up. You can visit during the museum's open hours, 1–4 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, to collect your certificate and also explore the museum.

THE PLANNING AND INSTALLATION of an exhibit takes an incredible amount of time and energy and begins six to nine months in advance. How do we put an exhibit together? What is it going to be about? First, an exhibit committee is formed, and we have a conversation about our initial ideas, a potential title, and what the parameters are going to be. Do we have enough information in our archives and/or objects in our museum to support the idea?



Museum visitors enjoy opening day of the current exhibit, "Where They Lie: Stories That Royal Oak Cemeteries Tell."

Once we have narrowed down a topic and a tentative scope, each committee member takes a section to research. At our next meeting, we talk about where everyone is at and whether they are ready to write the drafts of their sections. As the process continues, we work on the following: drafting text panels, locating images, and formatting captions, headings, and title panels.

Then we lay out the design — both in terms of text size and colors, and whether the text panels will be vertical or horizontal, and also how the entire exhibit will be arranged in the museum on the exhibit boards and display cases. We proofread and edit continually before we send the panels to the printer. Once they come back from the printer, we proofread them again for grammatical errors (and there are always some!) Finally, we install the exhibit.

ANOTHER COMPONENT of an exhibit is marketing it on our website and Facebook and in our newsletter. We send mailings to libraries and historical organizations. We plan for the opening — staffing, refreshments, setup, and takedown. I also work with the Speaker Series coordinator to plan presentations that relate to the exhibits in some way.

I want to thank the members of the exhibits committee who worked on our current exhibit (more than 400 hours of volunteer time!), as well as the volunteers who worked the opening and proofread the text panels. It is a team effort!

The current new exhibit, "Where They Lie: Stories That Royal Oak Cemeteries Tell," will continue until July 25. More than the hallowed grounds of burial plots, cemeteries are a treasure trove of stories about people, events, landscape architecture, and more. The City of Royal Oak is home to three cemeteries — Royal Oak Cemetery, St. Mary Cemetery, and Oakview Cemetery, each with its own distinguishing characteristics.

There is a lot of history in the three cemeteries. I recently talked with sisters who were visiting, and they told me that the cemetery was on part of their grandparents' farm, right where the "V" in the roads meet at Main and Rochester. I'm sure there are many more stories to be told. 🌱

From Our Collections

The American Pinker

"Pinking" is producing scalloped or zig-zag edges on cloth for decorative purposes or to prevent fraying. The American Pinker is a mechanical cutting machine that trims fabric edges into a zigzag pattern; this particular machine can be clamped to a table or screwed down. These machines were most common in the late 1800s to early 1900s before the invention of sergers/overlock machines, which do the same job more efficiently. Today, most pinking is done with pinking shears or sewing machines with overlock stitches.



Among the dedicated volunteers who work with curator Johanna Schurrer (third from left) to plan, install, and publicize our exhibits are, at left, Sharon McMurray and Leslie S. Edwards, and, at right, Lish Dorset.

Who was Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower?

By Judy Maten

Marie-Françoise-Thérèse Martin, known to the world as Thérèse of Lisieux, was born on Jan. 2, 1873, in Alençon, France, to Louis and Zélie Martin. She was the youngest of nine children, five of whom survived to adulthood and entered convents.

A sensitive and spiritually attuned child, Thérèse long felt called to become a saint. The death of her mother when she was only age 3 left a deep emotional impact, and she struggled for years with anxiety and scrupulosity. At age 13, she experienced a profound interior conversion, realizing that only through God's grace could she find the strength to meet life's challenges.

Growing up in post-revolutionary France, Thérèse encountered a religious climate shaped by humanism, modernism, and the rise of Jansenistic tendencies — a spirituality emphasizing God's justice over His mercy. This often produced a rigid, fear-based practice of faith. Thérèse perceived that many people feared God rather than loved Him, a realization that shaped her own spiritual mission.

At 15, she entered the Carmelite cloister in Lisieux after receiving special permission due to her young age. She joined her sisters Marie and Pauline there; later, her sister Céline entered as well, and another sister, Leonie, entered the Visitation Convent in Caen. Céline, an avid photographer, left behind invaluable images of life inside the cloister and of the future saint.

Within Carmel, Thérèse developed her hallmark spirituality: the "Little Way of Spiritual Childhood." This path emphasizes a childlike trust in God, surrender of self-will, humility of heart, and love as the foundation of every action. She saw herself as a little flower among a field of wildflowers, all giving glory to God each in their own way.

Recognizing her spiritual maturity, her superiors asked her to write her autobiography, which she titled *Story of a Soul*. Thérèse died of tuberculosis at age 24.

Published in 1898, *Story of a Soul* quickly spread throughout the world. Pilgrims flocked to Lisieux, and reports of miracles attributed to her intercession multiplied. Her cause for canonization opened in 1915, and she was canonized in 1925. Today, *Story of a Soul* remains one of the most widely read spiritual classics, translated into more than 55 languages.

In recognition of her profound spiritual insight and global impact, Pope John Paul II declared her a Doctor of the Church in 1997. 🌸



Society of the Little Flower

Thérèse in early 1889 shortly after entering the Carmelite cloister in Lisieux, France.

Canadian, not only because of his powerful oratory but also because of his fundraising abilities. Coughlin, who had entered St. Basil's Seminary in Toronto, was ordained in 1916. He taught at Assumption College in Windsor. In 1918, when the Basilian Order began a new policy requiring priests to become full members of the Order or join another community, Coughlin left the order to become a priest of the Diocese of Detroit, and he left the college in 1923.

FOR HIS PART, resourceful Gallagher was responsible for assigning priests within the diocese. He had a specific plan for guiding his ambitious young protégé. The bishop had traveled to Europe and, during his visit, attended the canonization of St. Thérèse of Lisieux at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. St. Thérèse of Lisieux was a French Carmelite nun whose practical approach to the spiritual life and devotion to Christ, as outlined in her spiritual autobiography *Story of a Soul*, led to her canonization on May 17, 1925. Gallagher saw a divine purpose in naming a church in her honor in the growing communities north of Detroit.

Just after New Year's Day in 1926, Bishop Gallagher authorized Father Coughlin to establish the Shrine of the Little Flower. It was one of the first parishes in the United States to be founded in St. Thérèse's name. After surveying numerous sites, Father Coughlin chose an unlikely muddy acre at in Royal Oak at Twelve Mile and Woodward, then a narrow, broken roadway beside the Grand Trunk railroad tracks. He believed St. Thérèse, also known as the 'Little Flower,' had chosen the spot.

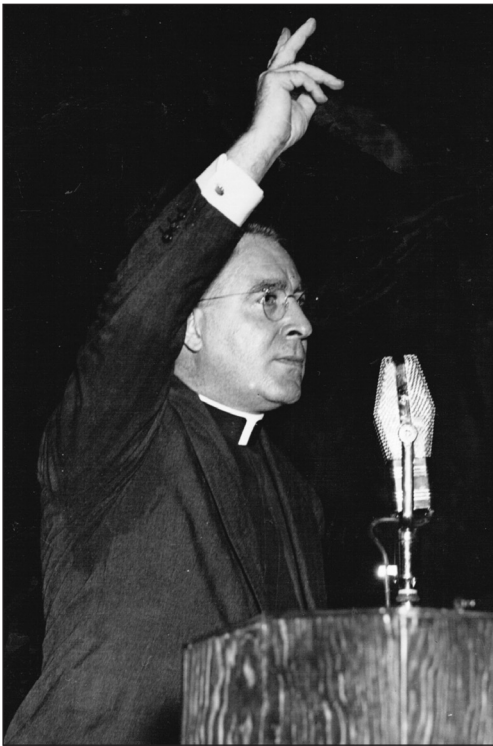
Funds were loaned to the priest to purchase the land, with the amount ranging from \$79,000 to \$100,000. On February 27, the Cox, Taylor, and Romer families transferred the land to Father Coughlin, and construction of the original wooden church started in March.

A front-page story in *The Daily Tribune* on April 12, 1926, reported the establishment of the new parish and the "founding of a national magazine, *The Shower of Roses*, to deal particularly with the devotion to the Little Flower of Jesus and related subjects." Father Coughlin would edit the magazine.

OVER THE YEARS, Coughlin had multiple encounters with the Ku Klux Klan, which had a stronghold in nearby Berkley, according to Grant Howell, a longtime editor of *The Daily Tribune*. The first incident involved the Klan's attempt to stop the construction of the church by challenging it in court. As Coughlin described it:

"Soon after we started building, I learned the Ku Klux Klan was about to get a court injunction (because of a deed flaw) to stop construction. Michigan had one of those odd laws to the effect that no injunctions could be issued once the roof was on. It was to start a three-day holiday, so I rounded up a good bunch of carpenters, and we worked around the clock, by torchlight at night, and when the court opened on Tuesday morning, the church was topped off."

In just over a month, a wooden church with brown shingles was done. As described in *The Radio Priest*: "As with all of Coughlin's career initiatives, this one was boldly sketched and theatrical to the core. With only a modest parish about two dozen families, the priest built a church with a seating capacity of 600. The seats were folding chairs until the pews were installed."



Father Coughlin took to the airwaves in October 1926. His "Golden Hour" broadcast grew into a nationally syndicated show, and at its peak in the 1930s was carried by 40 radio stations and eventually reached 30–40 million listeners.

Then, 100 years ago, on Sunday, June 27, 1926, the Shrine of the Little Flower was officially consecrated by Bishop Gallagher, and the first Mass was held at 8 a.m., followed by another at 11 a.m. In Father Coughlin's words:

"At that time the Grand Trunk freight trains thundered not more than 100 feet distant from the front of the church ... Surrounding the church was an acre of mud ... Much to my chagrin, I discovered that there were less than 28 families who planned to attend the Shrine regularly. It was rather dreary to stand facing the small congregation and what appeared to be an endless multitude of empty chairs." However, Father Coughlin also noted, "While families struggled to pay for their homes and educate their children, they had a spirit about them that saw the potential in the newly established parish."

THE ANTI-CATHOLIC Ku Klux Klan was not done trying to stop the growth of the church. As Bishop Gallagher acknowledged, the Klan decided to try to run "those Catholics" out of town. One evening, while Father Coughlin was walking around the parish, he was horrified to see a KKK burning cross placed just 20 yards in front of the church. Not to be intimidated, tradition says that Father Coughlin, undaunted, vowed to "build a cross no one will be able to burn." The result was the inspiration for the eventual creation of the Charity Crucifixion Tower, built entirely of stone.

While Bishop Gallagher had loaned money to build the wooden church, Father Coughlin was told he needed to raise the funds needed for the new Shrine. By early fall of 1926, Coughlin was exploring the idea of religious broadcasts to raise money for the church. He felt the broadcasts were a creative way to extend far beyond the two dozen families that attended the church. Commercial broadcasting was in its infancy then, but he was not the first priest to use the radio; beginning in the early 1920s, Paulist Fathers, the first community of Catholic priests founded in the United States, had begun using it, yet Coughlin was the first to use it regularly.

At 2 p.m. on Sunday, October 17, 1926, less than four months after he started offering masses at the Shrine of the Little Flower, Father Coughlin made his first radio broadcast, carried by WJR in Detroit. His earliest broadcasts were catechism classes for children; the radio program was called "The Children's Hour."

In January 1927, according to the book *The Radio Priest*, Coughlin took another pioneering step in religious broadcasting: he broadcast the first Catholic religious services over the radio. Although some believed it was sacrilegious, the response to the program was exceptional. He later said he started the radio show in response to the Ku Klux Klan burning a cross at the Shrine and wanted to support local Catholics. However, the broadcast also helped the church gain extra funding.

IN 1929, GOODWILL STATIONS' radio network acquired WJR, and the owner, George A. Richards, recognized Coughlin's talent for reaching the masses. He encouraged Coughlin to focus more on politics than religion. Coughlin began criticizing income inequality and blaming the American banking system and the Jews for the poverty of American workers. Word of mouth quickly boosted the success of his broadcasts, as Coughlin invited listeners to join his new "radio congregation," which was soon called "The Radio League of the Little Flower." The name was later changed to "The Golden Hour of the Little Flower," simply known as "The Golden Hour."

Membership in the league required a one-dollar contribution per person, per broadcast. After one broadcast, an astounding one million letters were received, according to the 1936 Shrine of the Little Flower souvenir book by Reverend A.M. Hutting. A longtime member of the Shrine congregation recalled "the dollars flooded in and were carried in gunnysacks over to the bank."

Ultimately, the volume of mail arriving at the Royal Oak Post Office required it to open a sub-station in the basement of the current Shrine. The mail slots are still visible on the Northwood side of the building. Vaults were installed in the basement, and staff worked around the clock to open mail and write thank-you notes for donations. The increased attention to the services also led to new hotels and restaurants opening along Woodward Avenue to accommodate the crowds. [See *Then & Now* on Page 11 about one of the motels.]

ALTHOUGH THE POPULAR BROADCASTS generated funds, Bishop Gallagher knew that repaying the Detroit diocesan loan would require all the fundraising creativity Father Coughlin could muster. Coughlin was up to the challenge. To draw more attention to his services, Coughlin asked his friend Wish Egan, a baseball scout for the Detroit Tigers, to invite players to the Shrine. Egan not only agreed but also arranged for visiting teams to stop at the church. Among the players was Babe Ruth of the New York Yankees, who came on April 15, 1927. It was said that "The Babe" told parishioners that morning he didn't want to hear coins hitting the collection plate, meaning he wanted only cash donations. That year, Ruth set a season record



A couple listens to Father Coughlin's Sunday-afternoon "Golden Hour" broadcasts that became a ritual for many Catholics.

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Royal Oak Community Memorial Day Pancake Breakfast

hosted by the

Royal Oak Historical Society

Monday, May 25th from 7AM until 11AM

Royal Oak Farmers Market

Benefiting the Royal Oak Historical Museum



*****ALL YOU CAN EAT*****

Adults \$10•Kids 10 and Under \$5

Come Join Us Before Or After The Parade

Rain Or Shine!!



**Sponsored by The Holiday Market Royal Oak, Kal's Lunch Bowl
and The Royal Oak Downtown Development Authority**

Shrine of the Little Flower • Continued from Page 5



Legendary baseball player, Babe Ruth, visits with Father Coughlin at the Shrine on April 15, 1927. He was among many ballplayers from other teams, as well as players from the Detroit Tigers, who came to visit the church.

construction of the 104-foot Charity Tower and Narthex, featuring a 23-foot-tall figure of the crucified Christ by sculptor Rene Paul Chambellan. Father Coughlin would later preach his radio sermons from a studio in the tower. Carved just below the feet of Christ are the "Seven Last Words from the Cross." The four archangels are carved at the base of the tower, with St. Michael's face being that of Bishop Michael Gallagher.

Incidentally, the Charity Tower faces in the direction of what was the heart of the KKK in Berkley, with the figure of Christ crucified extending his right hand in the gesture of peace from the cross.

ONCE THE TOWER AND NARTHEX were completed in October 1932, work began on the main sanctuary. Chicago artist Beatrice Wilczynski was hired to design and paint the artwork inside the church. It was her first professional project. She used parishioners and employees as models for portraits of the different saints. Detroit artist Corrado Parducci was assigned to design the metalwork, including the altar rail, pulpits, and Stations of the Cross. Parducci contributed to more than 600 buildings in the Detroit area over the years, including the Masonic Temple, Meadow Brook Hall, and the Penobscot, Buhl, and Guardian buildings.

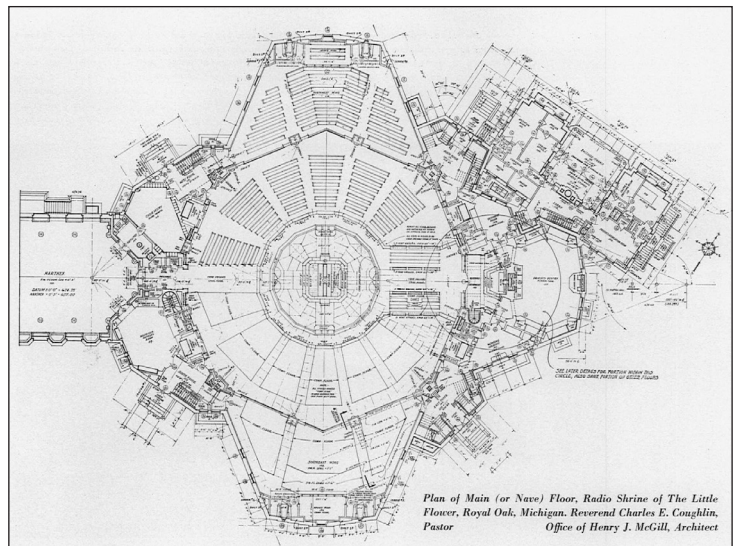
The 18½-ton main altar is carved from a single block of Carrara marble from Italy, quarried at the same quarries from which Michelangelo sourced his marble. The first altar cracked when being rolled on logs from the Royal Oak train station to the installation site and had to be

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by hitting 60 home runs. Besides Ruth, other notable visitors included Joseph Kennedy and his young son John. Years later, on Sept. 5, 1960, presidential candidate John F. Kennedy's motorcade, which drove along Woodward Avenue from downtown Detroit to Pontiac, passed by the Shrine, the route crowded with throngs of well-wishers.

BY 1929, COUGHLIN DECIDED to follow through with his promise to "build a cross no one will be able to burn." The original wooden church was moved from the Woodward corner further east along Twelve Mile, and architect Henry J. McGill of New York was hired to design a stone tower and ultimately a new church. The Archdiocese of Detroit loaned the parish \$5,000 to begin construction, and later, funds raised from the Radio League helped pay for the tower.

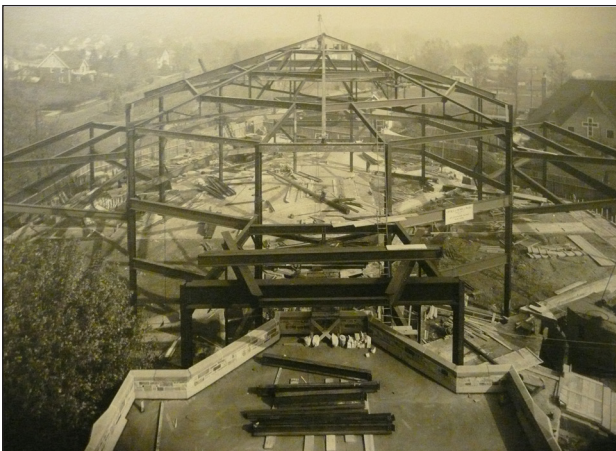
The architectural plan was not the traditional European cathedral style with flying buttresses; instead, it featured a church-in-the-round, a model that was decades ahead of its time. Father Coughlin loved the plan because he believed that, as we should keep "Christ as the center of our lives, the Holy Eucharist should be at the center of Mass." In May, Detroit builder Cooper Little began



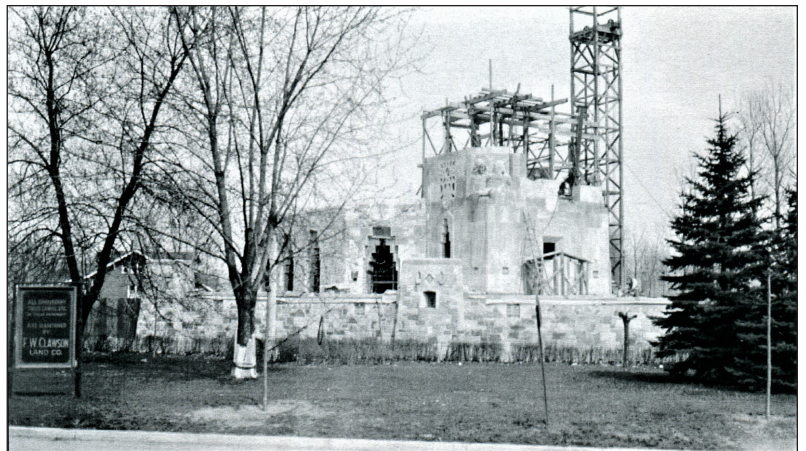
*Plan of Main (or Nave) Floor, Radio Shrine of The Little Flower, Royal Oak, Michigan, Reverend Charles E. Coughlin, Pastor
Office of Henry J. McGill, Architect*

DrivingforDeco.com

Shrine of the Little Flower main floor plan. (Pencil Points, September 1935, page 464)



Beams of the main church.



Construction of the Charity Crucifixion Tower and narthex.

Shrine of the Little Flower • Continued from Page 7

replaced. It was estimated that the tower and narthex cost approximately \$200,000, with the church costing about \$1 million. In today's dollars, the total cost is estimated to be more than \$27 million.

GEORGE A. KILGEN AND SONS of St. Louis was hired to build the double-console Opus 5180 organ, the largest of its kind when installed in 1936, and believed to be the largest tonally unaltered Kilgen organ remaining in existence. The original installation took 70 workers and nearly a year to complete. The instrument features two consoles and over 96 ranks of pipes for a total of 6,575 pipes ranging from 32 feet tall to smaller than a pencil. The main bank of pipes is located behind the grille work in the choir loft. The antiphonal pipes are in the basement, under the floor console. The main console is in the balcony of the church, with the chancel organ on the main floor. The consoles can be played separately or simultaneously with an organist seated at each console. There have been several refurbishments of the historic organ over the years.

As a result of its popularity, donations came in from every state. Coughlin invited the governors of each state and the U.S. territories to send state stones carved with their state flower to be placed on the church's exterior walls in thanks to all who contributed. The dedication of Ohio's stone attracted a crowd of 40,000. Built of Indiana limestone, Massachusetts granite, and Ohio sandstone, with interior decoration of multiple types of marble and other stone from around the world, the Shrine soon became a national pilgrimage site.

In 1931, CBS received complaints from several affiliate stations about Coughlin's political views and demanded that his scripts be reviewed before broadcast, a demand the pastor refused. When Coughlin's contract with CBS ended, it was not renewed. Undeterred, Coughlin and Goodwill Stations' owner, Richards, started an independently financed radio network, and, beyond his sermons, his Sunday-afternoon "Golden Hour" broadcasts became a ritual for many Catholics. The political commentary became the topic of conversation for many listeners the next day. The "Golden Hour" grew into a nationally syndicated show, carried by 40 radio stations and eventually reaching 30-40 million listeners.

In 1933, during the depths of the Great Depression, Father Coughlin lectured that "There is starvation because what little gold there is in the hands of a few who mumble about the sacredness of man-made contracts in defiance of God-made obligations." He said capitalism was doomed and not worth saving. Social justice, he believed, was the answer.



A police officer stands guard in March 1933 to protect Father Coughlin's home after a black-powder bomb exploded in the basement, waking the pastor.

IN MARCH 1933, Coughlin launched a radio attack on bankers and the banking system, blaming them for the Great Depression. One early morning soon after, a black-powder bomb exploded in the basement of his home, damaging a pile of canned goods and waking Father Coughlin. A police guard was assigned to protect the priest at his home, which was next to the church.

Father Coughlin originally supported President Roosevelt, although he disliked the pay scales set by the National Relief Act codes and did not agree with the principles behind the Agricultural Adjustment Act. He only saw crops being reduced, destroyed, or fed to pigs, which were then destroyed, while the American people went hungry.

Coughlin later became convinced that Jews controlled the White House and believed Roosevelt, whom he called "Rosenfeld," was secretly Jewish. He started speaking out against the New Deal and proposed a set of controls he called "Social Justice." To promote his views, he launched a monthly magazine named *Social Justice*, which eventually sold over a million copies.

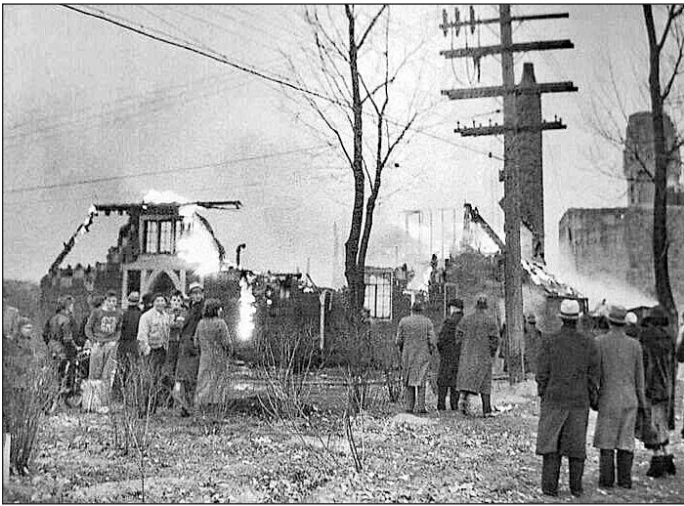
In the spring of 1934, Father Coughlin had another clash with the Roosevelt Administration. The Secretary of the Treasury tried to block a silver bill that could cause inflation by releasing a list of all those with silver interests. The Radio League of the Little Flower was prominent, with holdings of 500,000 ounces of silver bought by Father Coughlin's personal secretary. The radio priest denied any knowledge of the holdings. Nonetheless, his reputation took a hit. Still, Father Coughlin received support from his listeners. Letters kept pouring in by the thousands.

LATER IN 1934, Coughlin founded The National Union for Social Justice on November 11. "The purpose of this organization," Father Coughlin explained, "is to tell the President and Congress what laws you want passed and to give the laborer, the agriculturist, and the forgotten man just as much influence as is possessed by the vested powers of wealth."

On Nov. 17, 1935, he outlined the principles of social justice and declared Roosevelt's New Deal "unalterably opposed." He stated that he had become "acutely conscious of the government's failure to act for the common welfare of the people. I was aware that democracy in America had so degenerated that Congress had become the protector and supporter of the social crimes committed by capitalism in the name of law and good government."

In February 1936, he championed the Frazier-Lemke Bill, a piece of legislation that would have transferred all farm mortgages to the federal government. Farmers would have paid only a minimal 1½ percent interest on their mortgages. The bill never became law, and Coughlin used his weekly broadcast to criticize Roosevelt for failing to support it. In an article in *The New York Times* on March 15, Coughlin, during a speech, called on American laborers to unite and organize into trade or vertical unions, to fight for a living annual wage, "a just share in the profits," and "a voice to determine the maximum hours" of work.

IN THE EARLY MORNING of Tuesday, March 17, 1936, St. Patrick's Day, *The Daily Tribune* reported that a fire of uncertain origin destroyed the original wooden church, home of Father Coughlin's weekly radio broadcasts for the last 10 years. "I'd rather



Fire destroyed the original wooden church early on March 17, 1936. Faulty wiring was later determined to be the cause.

see that burn than this," declared the radio priest as he stood in the rear of the burning structure and pointed to the beautiful new \$750,000 Shrine, begun in 1929 and not yet completed.

Destroyed in the fire were many relics of sentimental and religious value, including a safe said by Father Coughlin to contain a relic of the bone from the arm of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, "The Little Flower of Jesus," and a piece of the true cross. Numerous articles of the sanctuary were saved from the inferno before flames descended to the first floor. The church organ in the rear of the building was a charred mass of wreckage, the newspaper reported. There were speculations that the fire was started by the Ku Klux Klan; however, it was later ruled to be faulty electrical wiring. (See Page 15.)

After the fire, services were held in the St. Thérèse Chapel, part of the Charity Tower, and later in the round, 3,000-seat, two-story church completed and officially dedicated on October 3, 1936.

On June 19, 1936, Father Coughlin announced on his radio show that he had formed his own Union Party, with William Lemke, a congressman from North Dakota, as its presidential candidate to run against Roosevelt. Coughlin predicted Lemke

would garner at least nine million votes, and if he didn't, he would consider it a personal rebuke and go off the air forever. Lemke received only about a million votes, and Roosevelt defeated Alfred M. Landon by a landslide. Father Coughlin kept his promise to go off the air. "Forever" lasted about seven weeks.

SOON AFTER COUGHLIN RETURNED to the airwaves, Bishop Michael J. Gallagher died and was succeeded by Archbishop (later Cardinal) Edward A. Mooney, who criticized the priest for his attack on the New Deal and his antisemitic rhetoric. Rome issued a statement: "The Holy See regards as just and timely the correction which the Archbishop of Detroit made in reference to the remarks of Father Coughlin."

On May 1, 1942, Archbishop Mooney ordered Father Coughlin to cease all radio programs, which in wartime had become clearly divisive. Coughlin obeyed. *Social Justice* was never published again. The priest dropped from public view but continued as pastor of the Shrine until his retirement in 1966.

A few months before his retirement on Aug. 15, 1966, Coughlin commented at a press conference on how the years had changed him.

"I find that I'm not so impetuous, not concerned with matters effected through politics as with ecumenical action; I understand a lot more about clarity than 40 years ago."

Father Coughlin passed away on October 27, 1979, at age 88.

DESPITE THE TURBULENCE of the parish's early decades, the Shrine of the Little Flower grew significantly and is one of the largest parishes in the Archdiocese of Detroit. The site is a destination for pilgrims from around the world seeking the intercession of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, who Pope Pius XII declared "the most important saint of modern times."

In 1998, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops declared the Shrine Parish a National Shrine, one of only five in the country at the time, and, in 2014, Pope Francis elevated it to a Minor Basilica. Touted as one of the finest examples of Art Deco architecture in the world, Shrine remains a place for people from all over the world to visit, worship, and pray. The Shrine has hosted the relics of St. Thérèse in 1999 and again in 2025, when more than 65,000 came to venerate her Patroness.

Today, the National Shrine of the Little Flower Basilica anchors the surrounding residential neighborhoods, and the parish serves more than 4,500 families, with several schools, including the Shrine Grade School, Academy, and High School, active ministries, and a tradition of faith and community outreach. 🌿



Priests gather around the 18½-ton main altar, carved from a single block of Carrara marble from Italy. Note that presiders now stand on the opposite side of the altar than in this photograph.



The Shrine in 1949, with cars parked along Twelve Mile Road.

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs and artwork are courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society and the National Shrine of the Little Flower Basilica.

1926 BUNGALOW A TYPICAL WORKER HOUSE



Editor's note: Last year, the Royal Oak Historical Society honored the record 548 houses built in Royal Oak in 1925, a milestone in home construction that wasn't matched on that scale until the 1950s. In 1926, an additional 312 houses were built in the city, among them this house at 117 Knowles Street. This excerpt is from the book, "Royal Oak Images, Yesterday's Charm Today's Treasures." The revised edition of the book will be on sale at the museum this summer, with proceeds benefiting the museum.

This small bungalow-style home at 117 Knowles Street, built in 1926, is a so-called "worker house" typical of the residences for the many factory workers who commuted daily from Royal Oak to Highland Park and Detroit for their livelihood. Others went "downtown" to Detroit to work at the J.L. Hudson, Kern's, and Crowley Milner department stores, among other employers.

The earliest Polk City Directory listing for the home is in 1930, when Truman H. and Cassandra S. O'Brien lived there. Two years prior,

the O'Briens were living at 235 East Harrison. Truman was a salesman for the Gabel-Risdon Creamery.

There is no other listing until 1938, when the occupants were shown to be Herbert and Mabel Orr. Herbert was a driver for Forging and Casting, Inc. He continued to reside in this house at least through 1955, when he was again shown in the Polk directory. At that time, his wife was listed as Lech, and he was a shipping clerk for Allegheny-Ludlum Steel Corporation.

The house faces the Farmers Market to the west and is currently owned by the City of Royal Oak. 🌱

Celebrate Your 100-Year-Old Home

Is your home turning 100 years old this year, or is it older? You may request a Centennial Home Certificate to designate it as an official Centennial Home.

In 2025 and early 2026, nearly 300 homeowners requested the certificates. While many were picked up at the Royal Oak Historical Museum, nearly 150 remain unclaimed. If you haven't picked yours up, please visit the Museum to retrieve it.

If you would like to order a free certificate, email your name and address to curatorrohs@gmail.com. Certificates will take about a month to print and may be picked up at the Museum on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays from 14 p.m. Please call before coming to ensure it is ready.

You may also purchase a forged metal plaque that designates your home's centennial status and features the Royal Oak Historical Society seal. Each plaque costs \$180 and is available at the Museum and at Frenz Hardware. Proceeds support the society's preservation efforts and the Historical Society's Museum.



Historical Society Joins Scholarship Fund

The Royal Oak Historical Society, in cooperation with the Berkley Historical Committee and with the support of the Wittenberg and Leenhouts families, and 44th District Court Judges Derek Meinecke and Andrew Kowalkowski, has created the Wittenberg-Leenhouts Scholarship to honor two pioneering 44th District Court judges.



The scholarship will be available to students from Royal Oak and Berkley who demonstrate academic promise, community involvement, and an interest in public service, law, government, history, or civic engagement.

Judge Jamie Wittenberg, a graduate of Berkley High School, was first elected to the bench in 2008 and became judge of the 45-A District Court for the City of Berkley. In 2014, he was re-elected and, in 2015, became a judge of the newly consolidated 44th District Court, serving both Berkley and Royal Oak. Judge Wittenberg expanded the sobriety court program to assist more people struggling with addiction and established a Teen Court program aimed at reaching at-risk youth. Diagnosed with glioblastoma in 2019, Judge Wittenberg faced his illness with remarkable courage and resilience, continuing to serve with a full docket until his passing on November 20, 2022.

Judge Keith Leenhouts, a graduate of Royal Oak High School, was a pioneering 44th District Court Judge (1959–1969) who created the innovative "Volunteers in Probation" program that put Royal Oak on the map and served as the forerunner of today's modern system of problem-solving probation departments. His work was recognized by six U.S. presidents, and the 44th District Court Probation Department is named in his honor.

To help turn this meaningful project into reality, visit our website at royaloakhistoricalsociety.com or call 248-439-1501 for more information about how you can help honor these judges and support future leaders. 🌱

Thank You!

NEW MEMBERS

Nancy Allmen
David Barnett
Mary and Mark Benvenuto
Barbara and Mitch Blum-Alexander
Pam Byrnes
Dylan Davids
Cynthia DeMan
Mary Lynn Farrell
Josh Hailer
Josh Hautamaki
Dena Kolodziejski
Zenon Kuszczak
Patricia Layman
Deborah Lee

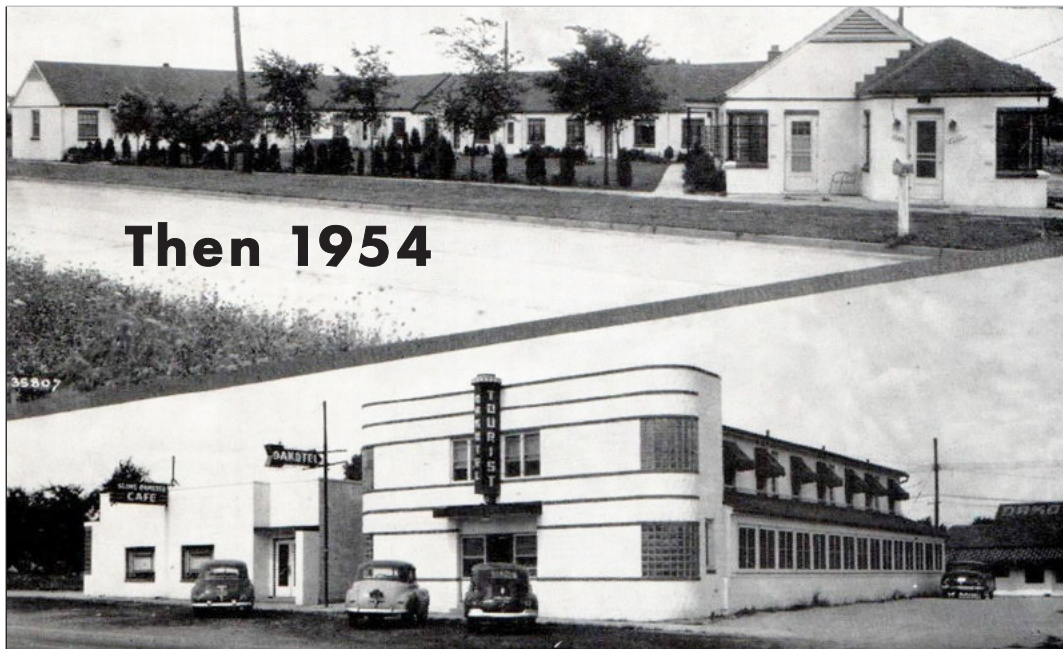
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Royal Oak Then & Now

BY JOHN MAURICE



Then 1954

A YEAR AGO, we published an article focused on the tourist homes and cabins built in Royal Oak in the 1930s and '40s to accommodate visitors to our city, specifically to the Shrine of the Little Flower and the Detroit Zoo. One of the original successors to those former tourist homes was the Oak Motel. Of the eight motels and motor lodges that once existed on Woodward Avenue between Catalpa and Coolidge Highway, the Oak was the first to be built.

Originally known as the Oakotel Tourist Terraces, the Oak was built in 1940 just south of West Webster Road, about 2/3 of a mile north of the Shrine. Before the Oak's construction, the area was

sparsely populated, and the motel was among the first commercial properties built along this stretch of Woodward. With its two-story facade facing Woodward (lower half of **Then** photo) and the one-story bungalows to the east along Webster (upper half of **Then** photo), the Oak offered a quiet resting place for travelers in those early years.

An article in *The Daily Tribune* in 1951 described the Oak's rooms as "a delight to the jaded eye of the average traveler." In a 1954 ad, the Oak boasted "52 modern units." After the Oak established a successful venture in the early 1940s, seven

more motels were built in rapid succession in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The growing popularity of families traveling by automobile in the postwar years made these motels very popular among visitors to our city through the 1950s and '60s. But with progress comes changing tastes. By the time the 1970s arrived, these quaint little units had outlived their usefulness. Larger chain hotels had become the preferred destinations for travelers staying in southern Oakland County.

THE OAK TRIED to fight back, offering weekly rates and becoming more like an apartment building than a motel, but it didn't take long for the reduced rates to attract undesirable tenants, crime, and drugs. A 1983 homicide at the motel was the last straw for the city administration. In December 1984, the Oak was purchased by the city, and by March of the following year, the Oak was no more. The property remained vacant for a couple of years, but in 1987 the replacement buildings were finally constructed. Most of the other motels that once lined this stretch of Woodward have since been torn down and replaced — relics of a different time when Royal Oak was a popular tourist destination. 🍷



Now

Today's Woodward Avenue businesses.



Today's Webster Road businesses.

THEN photo courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society.

NOW photos by John Maurice.

MEMBERSHIP SALE AND AMERICA 250 CELEBRATION

AS AMERICA APPROACHES its 250th birthday, the Royal Oak Historical Society and Museum is on a mission to welcome 250 new members this year. We've introduced a membership sale that offers real value, real fun, and a way to help preserve our city's history.

Memberships start at just \$17.76 and come with meaningful perks and community impact.

WHY JOIN?

When you become a member, you:

- Help fund our historical exhibits
- Support archival preservation
- Invest in education and community programming
- Play a direct role in preserving Royal Oak's history
- Become part of America's 250-year story

MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES – MEMBERS ENJOY:

- Our Quarterly Newsletter with stories of the people and events that shaped our city, as well as updates on exhibits, speakers, and special events to support the museum. Additionally, your name will be listed as a supporter in the newsletter.
- Invitations to special events, including members-only programs, previews, and celebrations.
- Support for exhibits and archives, ensuring our shared history stays alive — not boxed up in storage.
- FREE Admission to Bonus Member-Only Experiences.

MEMBERSHIP SALE PRICING

- Individual Membership: **\$17.76 (40% off the regular \$30 price)**
- Family Membership: **\$20.26 (59.5% off the regular \$50 price)**

JOIN TODAY!

Fill out the form on the back page of this newsletter, or go to our website, royaloakhistoricalsociety.com, pull down the Museum tab, and click Events.

Sound engineer remembered

Dear Editor,

First, a little background... My name is Gordon R. Sparks. I was born in Dr. Ruth Wagner's clinic at the corner of Sunnybrook Drive and Rochester Road and grew up in Royal Oak.

I am writing to thank you for your recent newsletter story on Edward J. Wolfrum [February 2026]. Ed and I were longtime friends. We had similar interests, although he was brainier than me. I have a story you might want to add to the mix.

I used to fly and at the time had a v-tail Beechcraft Bonanza which I kept at Berz-Macomb airport. One day Ed called and said he had picked up a job recording a church choir in Memphis, TN. His reputation was reaching far and wide, and he asked if I wanted to fly him and his equipment to Memphis. I said yes, although we had to make sure we could.

I asked him to gather the necessary equipment so we could weigh it. This was before digital, so the analog recorders were much larger. Then I would do a weight and balance computation on the airplane. One does not want to fly an airplane that is nose heavy, tail heavy, or over weight; Ed chose carefully and it worked.

The choir was to perform at an evening service on Sunday, November 9th, 1980. It was about a 4.5 hour flight. We planned to use a smaller downtown airport and the weather was forecast to be great down and back. As I recall, we left about 1:30 p.m. When we arrived, the church sent out a van to pick us up.

Ed spent considerable time getting microphones and everything set up and we were ready to go. The choir was African American and they could really sing.

When completed, we had to reverse the whole process... take down, load the van, go to the airport, load and fuel the airplane, and head for home. I believe it was about 3 or 3:30 a.m. when we got home.

This story is one of the highlights of my aviation activity and friendship with Ed. He was a very unique and generous person and is missed.

Gordon R. Sparks
Monroe, Georgia



Letters to the editor are welcome. All writers must provide their full name, full home address, and phone numbers. Only the name and city will be published. Letters should be 150 words or fewer and are subject to editing for length, accuracy, and clarity. Submit by email to curator@royaloakhistoricalsociety.org or mail to the Royal Oak Historical Society, 1411 West Webster Road, Royal Oak, MI 48073.

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 — 1976

RAIN AND FREEZING TEMPERATURES, combined for over 48 hours, broke power lines and toppled trees, disrupting the lives of thousands of South Oakland residents. Detroit Edison estimated that 52,465 residents were still without power and waiting for restoration, which could take up to 24 hours because repair crews have been sent home to rest. Skeleton crews are responding only to emergency calls — live wires causing fires and presenting clear danger. In the last 24 hours, William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak reported treating and releasing 33 people for fractures, sprains, and bruises from falls on ice.

ALL BUT 14 ROYAL OAK SCHOOL District administrative employees will be notified of possible layoffs beginning July 1. The School Board on March 22, ordered the so-called "pink slip" notices, which cover principals, assistant principals, directors, and coordinators. Royal Oak teachers and five school psychologists have already received similar notices. Edward W. Hoot, assistant superintendent, said layoff notices are required by contract. School officials cited declining enrollments and an uncertain tax situation in approving the layoff notices.

60 years ago — 1966

SOUTH OAKLAND LEADERS and state Highway Department planners speculated in March on possible new locations for the East-West Freeway — if one is ever built — following the State Highway Commission's order for a study of the proposed alignment along Ten-Mile and Eleven-Mile. They generally agreed that there will be no freeway between Eight-Mile and 15 Mile unless it's built along the already-proposed alignment. Howard E. Hill, state Highway Department director, said he was surprised by the Commission's order but doesn't interpret it as meaning the Ten-Mile to Eleven-Mile alignment is dead. Opponents of the route — Pleasant Ridge, Southfield, Oak Park, and, recently, Hazel Park and Roseville hailed the decision. But most added that an east-west highway is needed somewhere in the area — namely, the Eleven-Mile route through South Oakland, which is the first preference of the first four.

AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM designed to encourage 90 capable but poorly motivated teenagers from South Oakland and Pontiac to pursue their education after graduating from high school was proposed by the Oakland County Anti-Poverty Commission. The program, planned to go into operation in June, was submitted for approval to Federal Economic Opportunity officials, who would provide 90 percent of the estimated \$149,416 one-year cost.

PVT. RONALD LEE REED, age 20, was killed in action in Vietnam on March 17. He would have been discharged from the Army in six months. Pvt. Reed had been in Vietnam since October. He joined the Army two years ago. Born July 6, 1945, he attended Dondero High School.

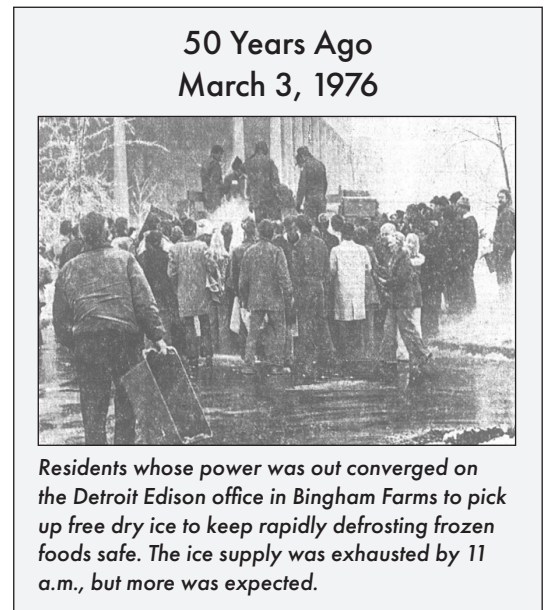
70 years ago — 1956

MINIATURE TRAIN RIDES will cost an additional nickel at the Detroit Zoological Society's Royal Oak park. Fares were boosted from five cents to 10 cents by Zoo Director Frank McInnis. Also, the Monkey Shines show will cost more, too. Adult admission to the chimp show will increase from 10 cents to 15 cents.

ROYAL OAK RESIDENTS who would like a tree or two, either on the street or in their yards, were invited to get in touch with the city's Department of Parks and Grounds. The city will plant the trees between March 15 and 30 in the area between the curb and sidewalk. Fees from \$7 to \$12 will be charged for trees planted on private property. Homeowners have the choice available for planting on their property: Norway maple, sugar maple, Schwedler maple, and Morain locust. Trees planted between the curb and sidewalk are determined by the city. They are guaranteed for one year.

ROYAL OAK'S BEAUMONT HOSPITAL has been awarded \$105,000 by the Ford Foundation. The hospital's director said the money will be used to double the emergency department's facilities.

Continued on Page 14



80 years ago — 1946

SPECIAL EXHIBITS OF HOUSES planned for "convenient living" by Richard B. Pollman, a Detroit designer, are on display in the Royal Oak Public Library during the home-building clinic. About 60 of Pollman's designs will be on display, including homes with solar heating, "store wall" closets, and no basements. A Pollman home is now under construction in Royal Oak and will be open to the public within six weeks. The house will include three bedrooms, a combined living-dining room, an automatic laundry connected to the kitchen, an activity room, and a heated hobby garage. Extended glass walls will cover an entire side. The decorative scheme will use new plastic and Celanese fabrics and Guatemalan prints.

LOTS ON FOURTH STREET NEAR KAYSER AVENUE have been selected as the site for the proposed Royal Oak Youth Center. The secretary of the Youth Center board of directors declared the site would be ideal for a community center should the city decide in a few years to erect an adult center as well. The secretary also said plans call for a \$30,000 to \$40,000 building that would serve as a center for youths of all ages, including a meeting space for Boy and Girl Scouts and other youth groups.

FREE-FOR-ALL-FIGHTING between gangs of youth was quelled without any serious injury in Berkley by police from Berkley, Royal Oak, and Huntington Woods. When the first contingent of police arrived on the scene, they found about 300 youths gathered in the street fighting, throwing rocks, and wielding clubs. Many of the youths wore identifying white handkerchiefs tied about their arms. Clubs, lead pipes, and wrenches were confiscated.

90 years ago — 1936

ROYAL OAK MERCHANTS will be notified of the city's intention to drop plans for three municipal parking lots on Grand Trunk railroad property unless the merchants subscribe to the full amount needed to carry out the projects, as decided by the city commission.

Final action on the proposed lots will be taken next week. City Manager Edward M. Shafter was instructed to give notice to merchants who had indicated a willingness to cooperate with the plans that the expenses of moving fences, lighting the lots, and spreading cinders would have to be borne entirely by them. Original plans included leasing of property owned by Grand Trunk on the west side of Center Street, opposite the end of Fifth Street. Two other lots on Washington and on the west side of Washington Avenue, opposite the end of Second Street, had already been approved by the commission as sites to be leased for parking purposes. The city would be required to pay \$437 per year in city, county, and school taxes on the Center Street property, according to the lease terms. Washington Avenue businesses had given tentative approval of a plan to share the expenses of the proposed lots as a solution to the parking problem downtown.

ROYAL OAK COMMUNITY COLLEGE held its first convocation on Thursday evening (March 19) with a 6:30 o'clock dinner for the faculty and students in the cafeteria and an interesting program in the community room. Supt. N.J. Quickstad showed song slides on the screen when community singing was enjoyed to the piano accompaniment of Miss Margaret Deckebach. Slides of educational pictures were also shown. Kenneth Spiltlar, director of the college, introduced the faculty. Each member responded with a short talk. A social hour and dancing followed.

100 years ago — 1926

TELEPHONE SERVICE IN ROYAL OAK has been much improved this week—not because of a change in operating force, but because the members of the Royal Oak Exchange Club have taken to heart the many suggestions given them at their weekly luncheon by a demonstration staged by employees of the Michigan Bell Telephone company. A team of capable operators and employers gave a reproduction of the manner in which many telephone calls are made and answered. A miniature switchboard and regular telephone were used to point out things the subscriber may do to assist in getting better and more prompt service. *Editor's note: Many phone numbers in 1926 were three and four-digits. The Oldsmobile dealership at Washington and First Street (11 Mile) was 1224, and the phone number for J.J. Potts Co., a furniture and hardware store on North Main Street, was 277.*

80 Years Ago March 15, 1946



James Canfield was presented with an AAA medal for saving a classmate from being hit by a car. Shown above is Capt. Jim Strain of the Oakridge school safety patrol, G. Norman Corbett, leader of the Oakridge safety program, Canfield, Fred Boyer, AAA representative, and Supt. N.J. Quickstad.

JAMES CANFIELD, AGE 12, SAFETY patrol boy at the Oakridge school, was awarded with an Automobile Club of Michigan gold service medal and certificate by Floyd A. Webb, club safety representative, at the school assembly on March 15. Canfield was cited for meritorious service when he pulled 14-year-old Glen Brewster from the path of an oncoming car the morning of Jan. 22. Brewster was running to school. He tried to stop suddenly on the icy surface at Thirteen-Mile and Rochester roads and began to slide. Canfield, on duty at the corner, reached out and pulled him from the path of the car.

90 Years Ago

March 19, 1936

Fire Department's Work At Shrine is Commended By Shafter After Inquiry

Rumors of inefficient service by the Royal Oak fire department in handling the fire which razed the original wooden Shrine of the Little Flower early Tuesday were declared today to be entirely false by City Manager Edward M. Shafter and Fire Chief Charles Henning, following an investigation undertaken at Shafter's request.

"Several rumors have been brought to my attention stating firemen were slow in responding to the alarm, that they failed to bring proper equipment and had difficulty in getting water on the fire," declared Shafter. "I called for an immediate investigation, because if anything was wrong I wanted to know about it."

Results of the probe show that the fire department was not only prompt in responding to the first call but that everything possible was done to extinguish the flames and save the building, Shafter added.

Reports from Fire Lieutenants Frank L. Winter and George Cook, made public today by Chief Henning, reveal that the alarm was received at the Northwood fire station at 6:17 a.m., that the chemical truck left the hall followed immediately by the pumper before the fourth signal of the alarm was completed, and that a hose was in operation seven minutes after the first alarm was turned in.

The call was received from box 496 at Twelve-Mile road and Dartmouth avenue, Lieut. Cook's report states. Four minutes after the hose had been connected to a standard fire plug, water was playing on the roof of the burning structure, according to the report, which states that Chief Henning arrived on the scene shortly after the two Northwood engines, followed within four minutes by trucks from station No. 1.

Among the reports is the charge that Northwood engines failed to bring hydrant wrenches to fit the plugs. Chief Henning stated. "This rumor is utterly false," he declared. "Every fire truck in Royal Oak is equipped with an adjustable wrench to fix any hydrant in the city. Both trucks of the Northwood station carried such wrenches, and no difficulty was experienced in getting water immediately.

"The gauge showed a hydrant pressure of 45 pounds, and additional force generated in the pumper gave a pressure of 80 pounds at the nozzle, as much as can be obtained from any hydrant."



The Daily Tribune, March 18, 1936, page 1

The Rev. Charles Coughlin, second from left, looks over the remains of the Shrine of the Little Flower, destroyed by fire on March 17. Damage was estimated at \$30,000. The new \$750,000 Shrine, which is near completion, was not touched by the fire.

A report from Capt. Pepperal of the Birmingham fire department, which received a call from an unknown source at 6:33 a.m., states that when Birmingham trucks arrived a few minutes later, the two Royal Oak stations had four hoses in full operation and were doing everything possible to quell the flames.

Birmingham firemen laid 800 feet of hose and used a split line. Chief Henning said, making six hoses in all.

A total of 1350 gallons of water a minute was reached with the aid of the Birmingham split line, which operated two hoses from one hydrant, according to Chief Henning.

Construction of the building, which had no partitions, made it impossible to limit the fire to one section and save the rest, he pointed out.

Nothing is known about the origin of the fire, Chief Henning stated, although it is known to have started in the vicinity of the boiler room. "In my estimation the results of this investigation show that the fire department is to be commended for handling the situation as they did," Shafter said, adding that no complaints whatever had been received from official sources.

AWAKENED BY HER PET Persian cat, Mrs. Frank Manus, 22 Englewood Avenue, near 13 Mile Road, was enabled to turn in a fire alarm at 9:54 a.m. Thursday (March 12). Only too late to save her home from total destruction by fire. Her alarm, however, was timely enough to save the neighboring home of W.D. Avery, which would have followed suit except for the prompt work by the Royal Oak Fire Department. Mrs. Manus, who was alone in the house, was puzzled by the chaos of the car and followed him to the kitchen, which was entirely in flames. The loss is estimated at \$3,000 by Fire Chief Martin Bishop.

THE HONOR OF RAISING the first 1926 strawberries in Michigan is claimed by William F. Voebel, 910 South Main Street, who has picked some from his patch at that address, he informed *The Daily Tribune*. The unusual weather is blamed for everything and has delayed the ripening of Michigan strawberries this year. 🍓

Looking Back entries are taken directly from historical articles printed in The Daily Tribune, and, in some cases, the exact wording is used to convey the language, phrasing, and punctuation of the time.



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\$17.76 \$20.26

Membership Has Its Perks! For information about membership levels and benefits,
 please visit our website: royaloakhistoricalsociety.com

GENERAL DONATION: \$ _____

Thank You for Your Support!

Make checks payable to: Royal Oak Historical Society, 1411 W. Webster Road, Royal Oak, MI 48073

Dues also are payable online at royaloakhistoricalsociety.com. Click on the Membership link to pay or set up automatic annual dues payment. For more information about membership levels and benefits, visit the website.