



# ROYAL OAK *Historical Society*

JULY 2025 • ROYALOAKHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM

## Royal Oak's First Drive-In Theater

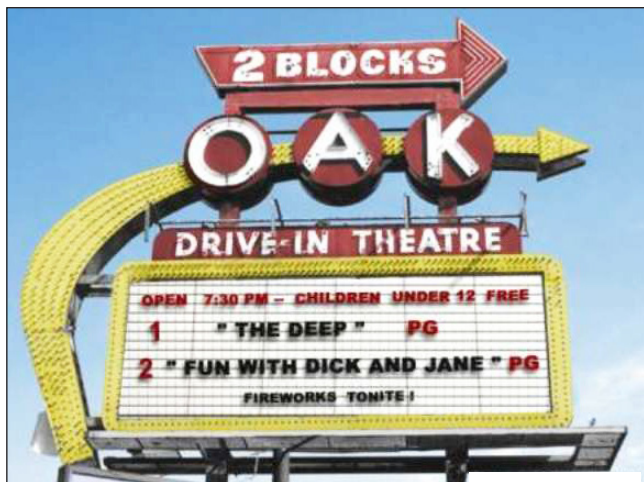
By Don Callihan

**IN THE PAST**, a popular summer attraction for families and teens on dates was going to a drive-in theater to watch movies. In Royal Oak, the Oak Drive-In — the city's first and only outdoor theater — was the place to be.

The story of the Oak and all drive-ins begins with Richard Hollingshead, who opened the first outdoor theater on June 6, 1933, in Camden, New Jersey. He called it the Drive-In Theatre. Hollingshead devised the concept of automobiles parking on an upward-sloping berm so that backseat occupants could see the screen. The idea caught on, and by 1938, more than 50 drive-ins were in operation.

Metro Detroit's first drive-in was the Eastside on Harper Avenue in Harper Woods, which opened May 26, 1938. The *Detroit Free Press* reported that Alden Smith, a manager for Midwest Drive-In Theatres Inc., announced: "Two performances will be given nightly with admission 35 cents for adults and children admitted free."

The Eastside opened before individual in-car speakers became available, and sound was transmitted through large loudspeakers mounted near the screen. This meant that nearby residents were bombarded with movie soundtracks.



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*The Oak Drive-In Theatre's dazzling lighted marquee billboard was a landmark on Woodward Avenue at Normandy Road for many years.*



Photograph courtesy of Dennis Denell

*This photo of the Oak Drive-In is from prior to 1955 as the screen had not been widened to accommodate Cinemascope films.*

Complaints were filed, and Smith found himself before local government bodies defending the theater and seeking a way to continue the operation. The solution, implemented at the start of the 1939 season, was to place individual speakers on posts three feet above the ground outside each car. This reduced the noise level in the adjoining neighborhoods but did not eliminate it. The problem was solved in 1941 when individual in-car speakers were introduced and hung on the inside of car windows.

**A LITTLE MORE THAN** a year later, in October 1939, Smith, still representing Midwest Drive-In Theatres Inc., appeared before the Oak Park village commission to seek a rezoning that would allow the construction of the area's second drive-in theater on Eight Mile Road, west of Coolidge. Smith's rezoning request was approved. The drive-in, christened the Westside, opened on October 26, 1940. *The Daily Tribune* reported: "Among the many advantages claimed by management for the Drive-In Theater are dressing as you please, complete privacy and comfort of your car, smoking, talking, and taking refreshments, all without disturbing others. The theater is ideal for invalids or shut-ins for they can be driven into the theater, where they remain undisturbed while watching the show."

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MUSCLE & MORE CAR SHOW ■ SAT. AUG. 2  
See Page 6



HONORING ROYAL OAK'S CENTENNIAL HOMES  
See Page 7

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

EXHIBITS

"Woodward Memories"  
through July 20

Automotive Designers Art  
July 26 – August 16

"Residential Genealogy:  
Beyond the Walls"  
Opening September 7

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

# President's Message

BY TOM TOGGWEILER

## Help Us Preserve Our City's History

Dear friends,

Our mission at the historical society is to preserve our city's history and to educate others of our past. Through our many fundraising events and the support of our members like you, we strive every day to maintain our focus to do just that.

**THIS SPRING INCLUDED SEVERAL COMMUNITY EVENTS** manned by our dedicated volunteers. We hosted another euchre tournament at Pronto Restaurant in April. It was well attended by many of our "regulars," and we also saw several new faces. Our next tournament will be held this fall; watch our website for details. We also held our annual **Pancake Breakfast** on Memorial Day at the Farmers Market, drawing our second largest attendance in our history. I was reminded of how this community event began more than 25 years ago in a small room above the former Mongolian Barbeque on Main Street. Now, having our breakfast event in the Farmers Market allows us more space,



and this year we served nearly 700 meals. We were sponsored by the Downtown Development Authority along with Holiday Market and Kal's Lunch Bowl, who allowed us the use of its kitchen to store and prep the food. This year, we also had several marchers representing the historical society in the parade, including member Bruce Kidder driving his 1931 Ford Roadster with veteran and member Rick Sage riding along. In addition, the staff and family of Kal's jumped in to

help serve during our peak rush. Without this, our efforts to serve the "Best Pancakes in Town" might be just a saying and not an attainable objective. We hope to continue to hold this special event for many years to serve our community and fund and preserve our museum.

We didn't have time to catch our breath because our **Granny's Attic Sale** was held the Saturday after Memorial Day. Many thanks to all who donated their gently used household items and thanks to those who found these items to now be their "treasures."

We are now planning our annual historical society car show —

**Muscle & More @ the Museum,**

to be held on Saturday, August

2, on the museum grounds and in the parking lot of our neighbor, the First Congregational Church. We hope to fill the lot with entrants this year with autos of the past and present, showing off the owner's design styles and dreams. Old muscle cars and classic cars are all invited to enter our show. Admission is free to the public. Food and beverages are available at our beautiful, quaint setting. Come and meet the people who enter their cars and get an up-close and much "quieter" look at the cars as a prelude to the Dream Cruise a couple of weeks later. Hope to see you then! See Page 6 for more information.

**WE ARE ALSO PLANNING OUR CELEBRATION OF HOMES** that are 100 years old and older for our exhibit in September. (See Page 7).

Your support of our mission is appreciated along with your donations and participation at our fundraising events. 🍷

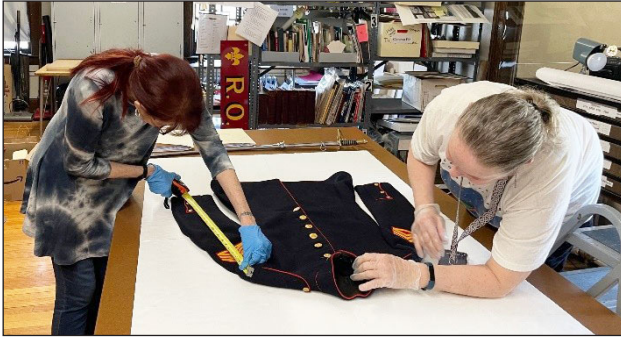




# Curator's Corner

BY JOHANNA SCHURRER

**AFTER A BUSY FIRST HALF OF THE YEAR**, the museum is ready for summer programs and exhibits. First, I would like to thank those who have contributed to the Museum Management Fund. The donations have been generous and will help us fulfill our collections management goals and our mission to "promote understanding of Royal Oak's historical and cultural legacy through the preservation and interpretation of its ongoing story." Your kindness is what keeps the museum going.



As some of you may know, we began a collections management pilot project, and volunteers have been making steady progress on inventorying, photographing, measuring, and researching the military uniforms that have been donated to the museum. The uniforms and accessories — ribbons, medals, pins, and stripes — belonged to Royal Oak men who served during wars from WWI to Vietnam. To date, we have new and more detailed information on 18 uniforms and related accessories.

Our summer exhibits are underway. In June, Shakespeare Royal Oak presented "Let's Make History," an art opening gala and fundraising event along with an exhibit of backstage art — from banners and costumes to photos and graphics from 25 summers of Shakespeare

in the Park. Through the month of July, Woodward Memories will be back on display by popular demand. This is a great lead-up to August with the car show and the Woodward Dream Cruise. And once again automotive designers will have a display in the museum from July 26 to August 16.

**FINALLY, THE GRAND OPENING** for our major fall exhibit, "Residential Genealogy: Beyond the Walls," will be on Sunday, September 7. Residents who applied for a Centennial Home Certificate signifying that their house is 100 years old or older can pick up their certificate during the opening. (See Page 7 for more information on how to apply.)

We also have two new displays in our cases — one on Michigan Bell Telephone and one on the Royal Oak store Noir Leather. We have items on loan from Keith Howarth, the owner of Noir Leather, including photographs, posters, ephemera, and artifacts. We hope you will find time this summer to stop in and visit all our displays and exhibits.

If you would like to donate to the Museum Management Fund, please send your check to the Royal Oak Historical Society, 1411 West Webster Road, Royal Oak, MI 48073. Be sure to put the fund name on your memo line. Remember, your donation is a tax deduction. 🍀



## From Our Collections

Sparkle House restaurant opened in 1961 at 218 N. Main St. and was a family restaurant open 24 hours a day. In April 1962, they opened a second location in Hazel Park. The Royal Oak store was short-lived, remaining

open only a couple of years. But who wouldn't want to try a "sparkle burger"?



## SPEAKER SERIES

For details and to purchase tickets go to:  
[royaloakhistoricalsociety.com](http://royaloakhistoricalsociety.com)

7 p.m. at the museum • Space limited to 50

**Friday, July 11 —**

**The Royal Oak Post Office:**

**200 Years of Community and Service**

by John Dick, retired Royal Oak letter carrier

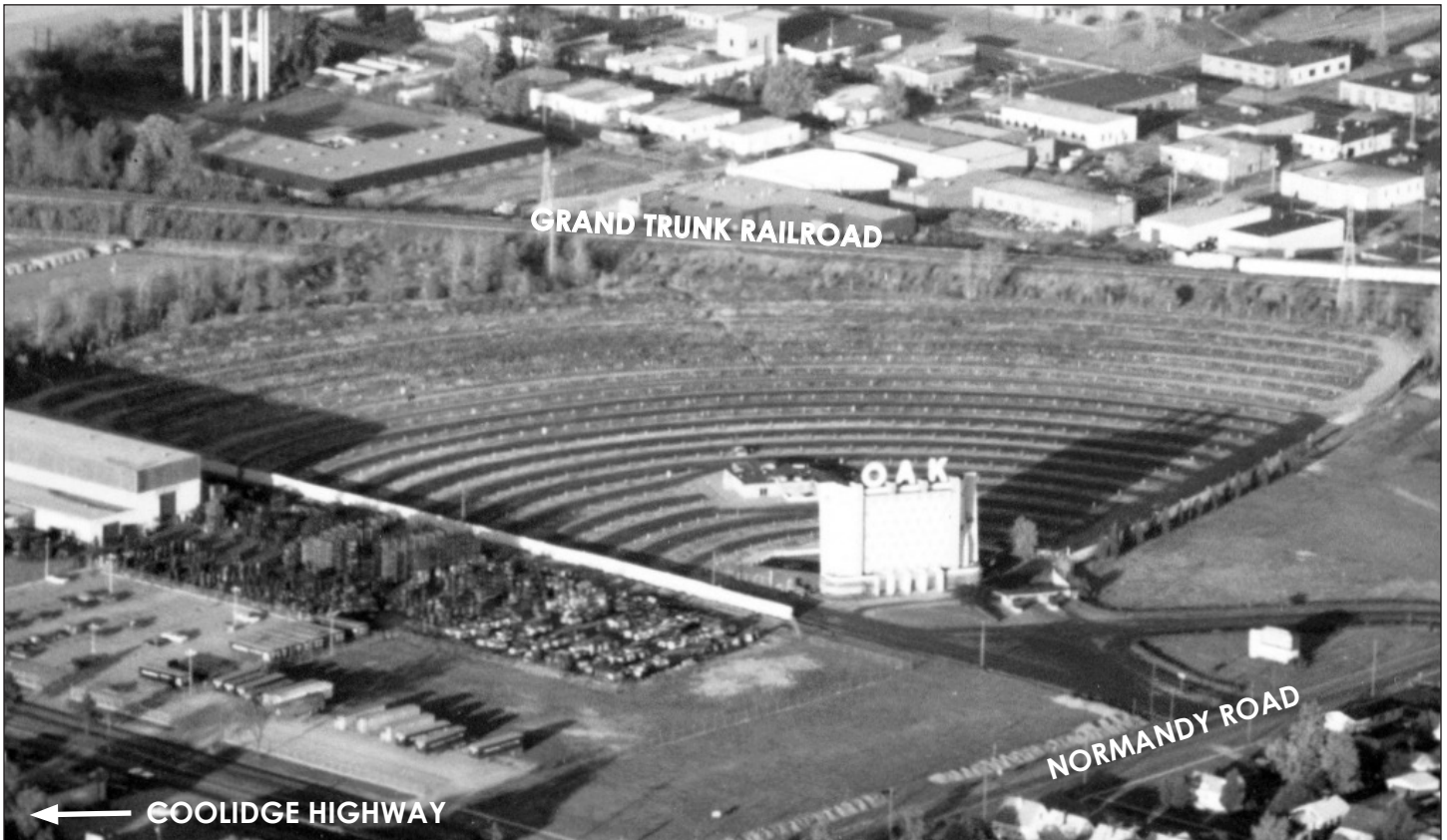
**Friday, August 8 —**

to be announced

**Friday, September 12 —**

**Storytelling Through Maps**

by Leslie S. Edwards, archivist and historical museum volunteer



Photograph courtesy of Helen Kochanski

*An aerial view of the Oak Drive-In. Ground was broken for the outdoor theater on April 18, 1949.*

Eight years later, in February 1948, Smith again found himself in front of a local commission, this time in the city of Royal Oak. He sought the rezoning of 41 acres of property on the north side of Fourteen Mile between Delemere Avenue and Coolidge Highway, near the present-day Tubby's, from residential to industrial. A drive-in theater could not be built in an area zoned residential. This time, Smith was representing himself and a partner, Joseph Miskinis.

**THE COMMISSION INITIALLY APPROVED** his request. However, with news of the approval appearing in *The Daily Tribune*, the city commission meeting a week later told a different story. Ministers and PTA members attended and voiced their concerns about the drive-in's impact on the morals of the community's youth. The *Tribune* reported, "Tempers flared as the dispute over moral influence of drive-in theaters reached its climax..." When a vote was taken, the rezoning request was defeated.

Smith persisted and a year later discovered property on the north side of Normandy Road, on the west side of the railroad tracks. This property was already zoned "industrial," which meant there were no restrictions on what could be built there. Smith applied for a building permit on April 5, 1949, and it was granted.

When news of the permit was reported in the *Tribune*, the furor began again. Leading the opposition was Royal Oak mayor William Hayward. He aimed to ban drive-in theaters in Royal Oak but failed to get commission support. Hayward then suggested that residents circulate petitions to get the matter on the ballot.

**A GROUP OF LOYAL SUPPORTERS** took the mayor's suggestion and began circulating petitions for an ordinance reading, "...it shall be unlawful to maintain, operate, or establish within the Royal Oak city limits any open-air drive-in motion picture theater, and that no license for its operation shall be issued; any license for a drive-in theater issued before the ordinance is adopted shall not be renewed."

While the question of prohibiting drive-in theaters was still pending, Smith broke ground for the drive-in on April 18, 1949. On the same day, petitions with an adequate number of signatures were presented to the city commission, allowing the question to be placed on the November ballot.

Construction was completed on October 14, and Smith expected to receive approval for a license at the October 17 city commission



*From the Royal Oak Historical Society collections, an in-car speaker and keychain from the Oak Drive-In.*

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meeting. With the theater ready for operation, Smith hedged his bet and invited city officials, civic leaders, and their families to a free Sunday screening of the movie *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, starring Frank Sinatra, Esther Williams, and Gene Kelly.

The next night, the Royal Oak City Commission voted 6 to 1 to grant a conditional license, good to the end of the year. The lone dissenting vote was that of Mayor Hayward. The Oak Drive-In opened to the public on Wednesday, October 19, 1949, with *Take Me Out to the Ballgame*.

Three weeks later, on November 8, Royal Oak voters went to the polls to vote on the proposition to ban open-air drive-in theaters. The proposition failed, 4,924 to 2,333. Soon afterward, with winter weather on the way, the drive-in closed for the season; however, a regular operating license was granted shortly thereafter.

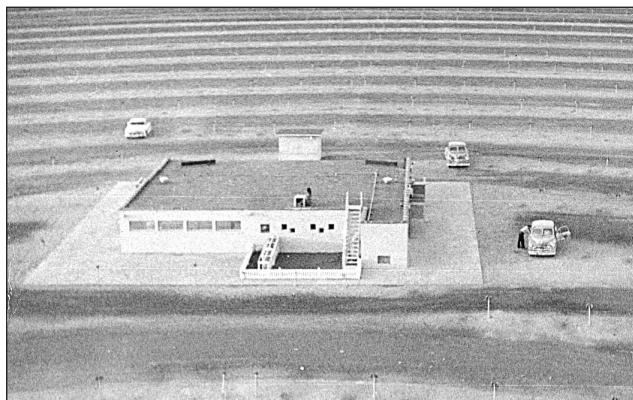
**THE OAK DRIVE-IN REOPENED** on Friday, April 14, 1950, for its first full season, featuring *12-O'Clock High* starring Gregory Peck and Dean Jagger, with an emphasis on catering to families. This became clear as temperatures warmed. Children flocked to the playground just below the screen, which included swings and a carousel. Ponies were brought in periodically for rides. A fire engine made of a Jeep and trailer combination, painted fire engine red, provided kiddie rides — the trailer had seats to accommodate about 40 kids. Once loaded, the fire engine traveled up and down the aisles with the siren wailing, much to the delight of its happy passengers before the show.

Fireworks were another way to attract families. Starting in 1957, the Oak launched fireworks for Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Labor Day. This tradition continued into the 1960s, eventually being limited to just Independence Day. The last Independence Day fireworks took place in 1977.



Photograph courtesy of Marie Barron

*Joseph and Albina Missel, with their daughter Marie, are shown in the concession stand, which they operated.*



Photograph courtesy of Dennis Denell

*Moviegoers enjoyed the tasty food, snacks, and soft drinks available at the concession building.*

that time. Fortunately, when the Oak opened, Michigan wasn't observing daylight saving time. However, in 1972, voters approved its implementation, beginning in the spring of 1973. The one hour later start times significantly reduced audiences.

One of the Oak Drive-In's first employees was Mort Denell. Mort was a decorated World War II veteran. He had a full-time job during the day and worked evenings at the drive-in. He worked in various roles until its closure in 1980. He even filmed

**THE CONCESSION STAND**, with an almost endless selection of goodies, was another unique phenomenon of the drive-in. James and Albina Missel operated the concession stand at the Oak. Albina was the sister-in-law of Joseph Miskinis, the drive-in's majority owner. In addition to the traditional movie theater fare, it offered a variety of food options, including hamburgers, hot dogs, pizza, ice cream, coffee, hot chocolate, and a range of soft drinks. Potato chips, typically unavailable in indoor theaters due to the noise of the bag and the sound from chomping moviegoers, were also on the menu.

To stimulate sales, the Oak had a 10-minute intermission at the end of the first feature. To keep track of the intermission time and facilitate the flow of saliva to hungry moviegoers, an intermission film was played on the screen, featuring a countdown clock that ticked off the minutes with dancing hot dogs, jumping candy bars, and acrobatic ice cream bars filling the time between minute announcements.

Despite all the pluses of viewing a movie at the drive-in, there were also challenges, including winter weather, summer mosquitoes, and longer daylight in the summer, delaying the start of the films.

Winter weather became less disadvantageous in October 1959, when the Oak announced it would install in-car heaters and operate year-round. Jerry W. Smith, the theater's manager and Alden's son, joked the "greatest advantage with this new heater is that the windows won't fog."

**MOSQUITOES WERE A PROBLEM** in the early history of the drive-in, and the Oak was no exception. The solution was a truck-mounted fogging machine that traveled up and down every other aisle before the show, creating a fog of DDT that killed mosquitoes and other insects in the area. No one was warned about the toxicity, and both adults and children walked through the fog without giving it a second thought. DDT was banned in 1972. From that point on, the Oak sold PIC mosquito coils at the refreshment stand which, when left to smolder in their metal tray, repelled mosquitoes.

Long summer days were also challenging, as the first show couldn't start until dusk because the movie wasn't visible on the screen until

*Continued on Page 6*



## Annual Historical Society Car Show Set for August 2

The Royal Oak Historical Society's 13th annual car show is planned at the Historical Museum from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, August 2.

Last year, more than 100 car enthusiasts and others gathered to enjoy vintage cars, muscle cars, hot rods, and more along with music, food, and camaraderie, and this year's **Muscle & More @ the Museum** is anticipated to be bigger than ever.

There will be dash plaques, awards, \$100 cash prize, and more. Those wishing to display their cars can pre-register online for \$20 at [royaloakhistoricalsociety.com](http://royaloakhistoricalsociety.com) or at the Museum, 1411 W. Webster Road from 1-4 p.m. Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Registration the day of the event is \$25. Admission is free to the public. Food and beverages will be available.

In addition to the outdoor festivities, visitors are welcome to come inside the historic museum to view artwork from automotive designers and concept art from the past to the present.

All proceeds benefit the Royal Oak Historical Museum. For more information, visit [royaloakhistoricalsociety.com](http://royaloakhistoricalsociety.com) or call (248) 439-1501. 🍷

## Tree Quiz

Royal Oak is nationally recognized as a "Tree City U.S.A." and many of its residential streets are named after trees. Which of the following are Royal Oak street names?

1. Oak Street
2. Ash Lane
3. Linden Avenue
4. Hickory Avenue
5. Aspen Avenue
6. Elmhurst Avenue
7. Pinehurst Avenue
8. Willow Way



**Answers on Page 8**

## Oak Drive-In • Continued from Page 5

its demolition. During his first 15 years working at the drive-in, he became the father of nine children. When they reached their teenage years, Mort got them five of them part-time jobs at the drive-in.

Dennis, Mort's fourth child, recalled his time working at the ticket booth at the Oak. A lone individual purchasing a ticket was always met with suspicion, as they could be concealing others in the trunk. Dennis looked for sagging rear springs or fingerprints on the trunk lid. If any telltale signs appeared, he noted the car's license plate number and then walked the aisles to find it after the show began. If he discovered more than one occupant, he requested the extra passengers to either pay the admission fee or leave the premises. Fortunately, all the guilty parties complied.

In the slang of the day, all drive-ins, including the Oak, were referred to as "passion pits." There is substantial circumstantial evidence suggesting they lived up to this term. The Four Lads, in their 1955 45-rpm hit single "Moments to Remember,"

added credibility to the term. After singing the song once through, the Lads pause, and a sultry female voice says, "The drive-in movie ... where we'd go ... and somehow ... never watch the show," followed by the refrain: "We will have these moments to remember."

Starting in the 1970s, drive-ins like the Oak fought for survival but ultimately lost the battle. One key factor was the introduction of daylight saving time in 1973, which pushed movie start times later. The Arab oil embargo that same year also created a gas shortage, making people less likely to go out. Even after the embargo ended in 1974, gas prices remained high, leading many Americans to stay home to save money. Additionally, rising land costs posed another challenge. As surrounding areas developed, property values soared, prompting owners to consider selling their land for a substantial one-time payout instead of continuing to operate the theater.

All these factors contributed to the demise of the Oak Drive-In, which showed its last movies on October 27, 1980: *Caddyshack* with Chevy Chase and *Up the Academy* with Ron Liebman. The Oak was torn down in the summer of 1981 to make way for an industrial park. A 30-year run had come to an end. 🍷



Photograph courtesy of Dennis Denell

**One of Mort Denell's many jobs at the Oak was changing the letters high up on the sign at Normandy and Woodward.**



# Discover Your Home's History

By Leslie S. Edwards

**MANY OF YOU MAY REMEMBER** the 1998 television show *If These Walls Could Talk*? I loved how new homeowners found hidden treasures or clues in their vintage home that shed light on the former residents. When I moved into my 1924 bungalow in Pleasant Ridge, I was hoping that my house would tell some secret stories of its own — maybe original blueprints hidden in a wall? Alas, it was not to be, though I did find remnants of the original wallpaper in a closet. And perhaps the best part was that the original toilet in my bathroom had a 1924 date stamp on the underside of the lid which helped confirm the date of construction.

Most homeowners are seeking the original date the house was built and the name of the architect or builder. Sadly, most of us never get this information. While my house has many architectural elements that represent 1920s bungalows, the variety of them suggests a builder likely cobbled together ideas from numerous projects, or even from kit homes or those designed by notable architects.

**THERE ARE TWO PATHS** you can take to research your house and usually they converge to tell a more robust and intimate story: researching the building and researching the residents. First, study your physical house — roof line, types of windows, whether you have coved ceilings, ornate moldings, or built-ins. Are your walls lath and plaster? All these original details can help you date the house. Additional clues, if they haven't been removed by contemporary remodels, might also be found on basement floor/ceiling joists or the floor boards in an attic space; sometimes you will find a date stamp on them. Saw marks, nails, or the type of materials used can also help date your house — is your foundation made of stone, concrete block, or bricks?

Continued on Page 8

Application For Building Permit  
City of Royal Oak, Michigan

Date: 12-12-1926

Request is hereby made for a permit to erect the following described building at the location as shown.

It is understood that any permit issued is subject to building restrictions on said property and is VOID unless work is started within 30 days from date.

Lot No. 603 Sub. Edgewood  
House No. 603 on the South Side  
Street Edgewood and Maple Between  
Class of building 2-car garage  
Location of Garage Estimated Cost 100.00  
Distance from front lot line 14 ft  
Distance from side lot line  
Material in wall frame  
Material in roof asphalt shingle  
Kind of chimney (Must Have Flue Lining)  
Basement Wall  
Owner's Name R. O. Edwards  
City Clerk  
House No. 603  
Fee \$ 50  
Phone 2835  
Permit No. 226  
CITY TREASURER  
N. 670  
(Customer's Copy)

Royal Oak Historical Society

The 1926 building permit for a two-car garage at 603 Edgewood.



## Celebrating Your 100-Year-Old Home

The Royal Oak Historical Society is marking the centennial milestone of the 548 houses built in 1925 with several ways for homeowners to commemorate their historic homes.

If your house is 100 years old or more, we offer:

- **A Centennial Home Certificate** issued by the Historical Society and embossed by the City of Royal Oak designating your house as an official centennial home will be available by order at the museum at no cost. If you would like a certificate in recognition of your home's 100-year-old legacy of contributing to the history of our community, please **email your request to [curatorrohs@gmail.com](mailto:curatorrohs@gmail.com) by August 4**. All requests will be verified. Details are also being sent in a letter and email to those homeowners.
- Certificates ordered by the August 4 deadline will be able to be **picked up at the museum** at the grand opening of the "Residential Genealogy: Beyond the Walls" exhibit **from 2-4 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 7** and thereafter. Any requests received and verified after August 4 will be available on September 20 and after.
- Also at the exhibit opening on September 7, **eligible homeowners will be able to purchase a forged metal plaque** designating their home's centennial status with the official Royal Oak Historical Society seal. The plaques are \$180 and sales will benefit the preservation of the museum and the work of the Historical Society.
- Homeowners of centennial homes, as well as others, who visit the museum can **research their home** and discover any permits issued for any home improvements made on the house since it was built. Information will be available on deeds, subdivision records, abstract titles, plat maps, and photographs. **"Residential Genealogy" will illuminate the wide variety of resources** you can use to help uncover not only the history of your home but also its residents. The exhibit runs through October 25.

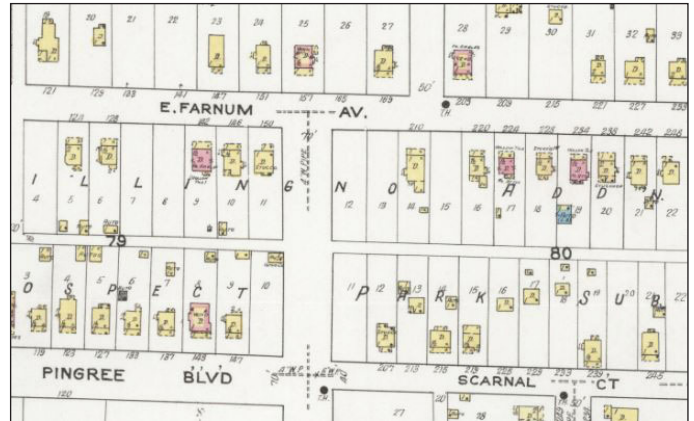
If you want to know more about the history of many of the houses and businesses in the city, a second edition of the book *Royal Oak Images, Yesterday's Charm, Today's Treasures*, homes from which have been highlighted in past newsletters, will be available for sale at the museum this summer. Check our website for updates.

## Discover Your Home's History • Continued from Page 7

**NEXT SEARCH FOR DOCUMENTATION.** A first step is to conduct a property search at the Oakland County Register of Deeds for the chain of title. You can then use these names and dates to search additional records. Property tax records/assessment rolls provide key information — even if they don't state when a house is built, you can often determine a year based on the change in the amount of taxes owed.

Additional records such as building permits track additions, renovations, and other major improvements made to the property. They may provide details about the existing structure, site plans, photographs, and dates of the changes made. If you are lucky enough to find them, fire insurance records, construction receipts, ledgers, scrapbooks, or even diaries can also yield some great information. Subdivision association records can also provide some great clues as to what was happening in your neighborhood regarding building codes, street lighting, and other restrictions.

**MAPS ARE ALSO A KEY RESOURCE.** For rural Royal Oak Township, the earliest map that shows the location of residences, schools, and churches is the F.W. Beers 1872 *Atlas of Oakland County*. There are also a few buildings and property owner's names on the insert for Royal Oak Village. As the city grew and the boundaries expanded, maps will not show this type of detail. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps depict the commercial, industrial, and residential sections of cities and towns, but not rural areas. These maps were designed to help determine the degree of hazard associated with a particular property and have a color-coded key for the types of building materials that were used. The earliest Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Royal Oak is 1916; subsequent years depict additional neighborhoods. And subdivision plat maps will help you determine when construction may have occurred in your neighborhood.



The 1916 Sanborn Fire Insurance map for Royal Oak.

### Building Permits Issued by City of Royal Oak

<p>R. Pearson, 412 East Farnum avenue, garage, \$200, McGraw &amp; Pickett-Bran.</p> <p>R. M. Cann, 510 East Farnum avenue, frame house and garage, \$5,000.</p> <p>Sam Paquette, 1206 North Maple avenue, garage, \$200.</p> <p>J. Collins, 306 Vermont street, frame garage, \$225.</p> <p>Royal Oak Ice &amp; Coal Co., ice station, Forest avenue, \$800.</p> <p>D. Gross, 141 Cherokee avenue, garage, \$100.</p> <p>S. H. Green, 523 Oakland avenue, two car garage, \$420.</p> <p>W. Fiegried, 406 North Washington avenue, remodeling house, \$200, J. Smith.</p> <p>E. M. Rothman, 1028 Alexander avenue, frame house, \$3,500, R. Greene.</p> <p>E. M. Rothman, 1024 Alexander avenue, frame house, \$3,500, R. Greene.</p> <p>E. M. Rothman, 1018 Alexander avenue, frame house, \$3,500, R. Greene.</p> <p>George Huttering, 917 Maplegrove avenue, frame house, \$6,500.</p> <p>W. H. Barber, 123 Wilson avenue, enclosing porch, \$150.</p>	<p>William Uhler, 517 Marlin avenue, remodeling, \$180.</p> <p>Laurence Moore, 50 Cherokee avenue, garage, \$150.</p> <p>A. Welber, 930 Woodcrest drive, frame house, \$4,500, Paul Schreff.</p> <p>F. Steigo, 643 Rembrandt avenue, frame house and garage, \$4,500.</p> <p>Roy Casebier, 310 Virginia avenue, garage and house, \$4,000.</p> <p>F. Gauthier, 706 Vermont street, repair, \$100, G. Gauthier.</p> <p>E. Wildgoose, 1126 East Sixth street, frame house and garage, \$4,500, A. W. Watch.</p> <p>H. W. Usherwood, 617 Oakland avenue, addition to residence, \$1,200, D. S. Mills.</p> <p>D. Boschma, 218 Waverly avenue, frame house and garage, \$3,500.</p> <p>R. A. Kehr, Fifth street, two car garage, \$300.</p> <p>W. F. Lapham, Hudson at G. T. R. R., five coal pockets, \$4,000, Emily Interlocking Concrete Silo Company.</p> <p>W. F. Lapham, Hudson avenue, chicken coop, \$150, R. Winters.</p> <p>Robert Kampe, 1220 Wyandotte avenue, remodeling, \$500.</p> <p>E. P. Fries, Mohawk avenue at Ten-Mile road, garage, \$100.</p> <p>A Want Ad in The Tribune brings</p>
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The Daily Tribune, June 4, 1925

Residential genealogy refers to the study of the historical connections between individuals and their place of residence or ownership. It involves researching historical documents, land records, and other materials to discover the changing occupants or owners of a particular dwelling or piece of land over time.

By now you likely have the property owners' names from deeds, tax records, and property maps. New England house historian Marian Pierre-Louis explains, "The stories of families bring the history of a house alive in a personal and human way. The physical house acts as the portal between past and present." There are numerous ways to search for information about the residents to help tell the personal story of your house.

**ONLINE DATABASES LIKE** Ancestry, FamilySearch, and My Heritage will guide you to census records, city directories (which are also available in hard copy in the library at the museum), vital records, and even family trees. FamilySearch has a feature called "Experiments" that contains digitized land and probate records. And of course, you will want to delve into published community histories, historical newspaper articles, and photographs. While you might not find a photograph of your house, you might be able to view the street or neighborhood and perhaps glimpse your house in the background. Early newspapers might note when a house was built, was for sale, or even the real estate agent or builder.

The amount of information you will find on your specific house will vary. Regardless, the search is rewarding and the information you find will help you unearth the forgotten tales and hidden gems that make your house a living testament to the past. Happy hunting! 🏠

### Tree Quiz answers

At least 28 streets are named after trees or include tree names, including Beechwood Drive, Butternut Avenue, Catalpa Drive, Cedar Drive, Cedarhill Drive, Cherry Avenue, Elmhurst Avenue, Elmwood Drive, Evergreen Drive, Gardenia Avenue, Hawthorn Avenue, Hickory Avenue, Laurel Street, Linden Avenue, Magnolia Avenue, Maple Avenue, Maplegrove Avenue, Maplewood Avenue, Oak Street, Oak Run Court, Oakdale Street, Oakland Avenue, Oakmount Street, Oakridge Avenue, Pinehurst Avenue, Poplar Avenue, Sycamore Avenue, and Walnut Avenue.

An addition Royal Avenue may possibly be named for "The Royal Oak" because many of the streets in that area are named after trees. Too, there are many street names that include the words wood and forest.

Answers: 1. Yes, 2. No, 3. Yes, 4. Yes, 5. No, 6. Yes, 7. Yes, 8. No



# Royal Oak Then & Now

BY JOHN MAURICE



**CAMPBELL'S**  
**Year-Round Tourist Home**  
**Cabins and Camp**  
ON TWELVE MILE ROAD (ONE MILE EAST OF U. S. 10)  
**Royal Oak Michigan**  
(DETROIT METROPOLITAN DISTRICT)  
Only Ten Minutes from Detroit City Limits. Eight Minutes from Detroit Zoo. One Mile East of Shrine of the Little Flower  
EXCELLENT AS A QUIET TOURIST ACCOMMODATION  
(Over)

Then 1930s



Now

**FROM THE 1930s THROUGH THE '50s**, the Shrine of the Little Flower Catholic Church at 12 Mile and Woodward was a major draw for tourists visiting the city of Royal Oak. To accommodate the many visitors, nine motels were constructed along a nearly two-mile stretch of Woodward Avenue from just north of Catalpa (Saranay Motel) to Coolidge Highway (Sagamore Motor Lodge).

The motels, most of which have since been demolished, thrived through the 1950s and '60s.

Prior to the motels were being constructed, Royal Oak had another option for visitors: cabins and tourist homes, which existed at a few locations throughout the city. The largest and most successful of these was Campbell's Year-Round Tourist Home at the intersection of 12 Mile and Crooks Road. Although the home at 1808 Crooks, owned by Charles and Cora Campbell, had

stood for many years, it wasn't until the 1930s that they added cabins and became what was known as a tourist home. Over the years, it took on different forms with the addition of trailer homes to expand their operation. Many of the units eventually became occupied full time by residents. The large main house was sometimes rented for wedding receptions and other events. In the property's heyday of the 1940s, the property increased from a few cabins to ultimately 21 trailer units.

From the late 1930s to the mid '40s, the city of Royal Oak sought to enforce a trailer ordinance at the Campbells' location as well as at another camp at Fifth Street and Troy. Cora and Charles actively defended their residents' rights to occupy trailers as their full-time home. Finally, a compromise agreement was reached in April 1938 whereby the Campbells agreed to discontinue trailer parking on four residential lots fronting Cherry Street by October 1, 1940.

The Campbells' property included the corner of 12 Mile and Crooks and ran north to Cherry Avenue, occupying about half the block formed by 12 Mile, Crooks, Cherry, and Marywood. A neighboring house which once faced Crooks, but eventually adopted a 611 Cherry address, was built in 1941 and stands today. The five houses immediately east of 611 Cherry are on the Campbell property.

The business operated from around 1933 until the mid 1950s. After Charles died in 1949 and Cora a year later, the property fell into disrepair and was ultimately cleared. The Sunoco gas station that now stands at the same 1808 Crooks address took over the site in 1957.

Many long-time Royal Oak residents who grew up in the 12 Mile and Crooks area have fond memories of the tourist home, a peaceful relic from a different time. 🌿



**THEN** photographs from the Royal Oak Historical Museum archives. Aerial photo from 1949 from the Detroit Edison map archives via the Wayne State University Digital Library Collection. **NOW** photo by John Maurice.



# 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 — 1975

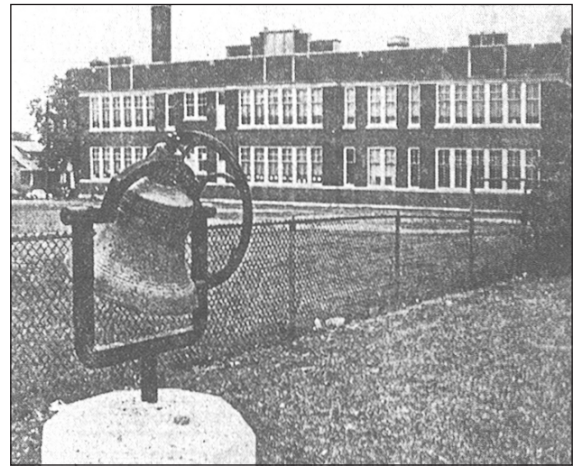


**TOM HAYDEN, RADICAL STUDENT LEADER** of the 1960s, said Monday (June 2) he will run against incumbent John Tunney in the 1976 [California] Democratic U.S. Senate primary. Hayden was graduated from Dondero High School before attending the University of Michigan. Hayden said he wanted to make banks and big corporations more accountable to the public, including "various forms of public ownership." Hayden scheduled the traditional series of hotel and airport news conferences across California with his wife, actress Jane Fonda, to announce his candidacy.

\*\*\*

**TODAY (JUNE 11) IS THE LAST DAY** of the school year in Royal Oak and the very last day for the 50-year-old Washington Elementary School, the landmark at the corner of Washington and Lincoln. The building will be closed to regular classes after this year because of declining enrollment. It is the first building to be closed in Royal Oak for that reason, but not the first in South Oakland. Almost all districts are facing the same declining enrollment problem.

There were only 170 children in kindergarten through sixth grade at Washington this year. Books and supplies were being packed in boxes marked Longfellow and Franklin, the new schools for the Washington children next year. George A. Dondero was school board president when Washington was built in 1924. The first classes began in 1925, and countless adults have memories of their Royal Oak school days at Washington. The eventual fate of the building is undecided.



### 60 years ago — 1965

**A NEW SOUTH OAKLAND COUNTY** health center — the first building in a proposed service center for the populous southeastern part of the county — today (June 20) passed what should be its last major hurdle. The Ways and Means Committee of the Oakland County Board of Supervisors recommended the full board give the go-ahead for construction next year of the new building to house county health department operations in the southern part of the county. Committee members approved a scaled-down plan estimated to cost about \$750,000 — about \$500,000 to be paid by the county, the remainder from a federal grant. The new health center will be built on a 29-acre site at Catalpa and Greenfield in Southfield and will replace the crowded county health center at Fourth and Stephenson in Royal Oak.

\*\*\*

**PARTY CRASHERS** on their way to a Royal Oak graduation party Wednesday night (June 18) terrorized a group of Girl Scouts camping out in a nearby backyard. Police said the Royal Oak gang may be the same one which hurled rocks through the front windows of three homes Wednesday. One rock narrowly missed the infant daughter of City Commissioner Grant J. Maudlin. Three youths were arrested in Oak Park Thursday night, police said, after they allegedly crashed a party at a home on Ten Mile and made off with a bottle of liquor and several bottles of beer. The Royal Oak crashers Wednesday pitched empty beer bottles at a tent with 10 young Girl Scouts and their leader, Mrs. Bernita Fenner, 4303 Buckingham, then pulled the tent down on top of the terrorized youngsters. Although shaken by the experience, none of the girls were injured.

### 70 years ago — 1955

**THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE EXPECTS** to release the first batch of embargoed Salk vaccine today (May 12) and resume the nation's polio vaccination program after a six-day halt. Informed sources said they expect a favorable report before nightfall from a team of federal experts who have been checking vaccine produced by Parke Davis and company in Detroit. Barring a last-minute hitch, the Health Service hopes to notify all health authorities late today that "several batches" of Parke Davis vaccine have been double-checked and are approved for immediate use in inoculations.

\*\*\*

**THERE'LL BE DANCING IN THE STREETS** Monday night in Royal Oak. It will all be part of the opening of the 32nd Big Bear supermarket on Fourth street at Knowles, east of Main. Square dancing will highlight a week-long schedule of festivities planned by the market to get Royal Oakers and their neighbors acquainted with the new business. The Monday night party will take place from 9-11 p.m. on the market's 200-car parking lot. The 17,500-square-foot store contains all the modern features of supermarkets, plus one of the largest air-conditioning installations in the South Oakland area.



## 80 years ago — 1945

**CONGRESSMAN GEORGE A. DONDERO** will leave Washington today with nine members of the House of Representatives on a fact-finding mission to the British Isles, Scandinavian, European and Middle Eastern countries. The committee will confer with the leaders of the countries visited to make the expedition one of good will as well as one of study. Each congressman will meet the servicemen from his state who are now with the Army of Occupation in Europe. The committee will give special attention to welfare of service men, food and clothing, lend lease, rehabilitation and reconstruction, civil government in occupied areas, administration of UNRRA, labor, education, manufacturing and commerce. Congressman Dondero has been designated to study in detail the war damage and effect upon the water transportation in Europe, including the Kiel canal. This will have a bearing on postwar waterborne commerce. Dondero is a member of the House Committee on rivers and harbors.

\*\*\*

**THE ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY** is sponsoring a community picnic July 4 at Whittier Park. The public is invited to join in this old-time social gathering. Those attending should pack basket lunches and be at the park at 12:30 p.m. Coffee will be provided by the committee, but those desiring it will have to bring their own sugar. In case of rain, the picnic will be held in the Whittier School house. Last year's picnic was enjoyed by a large number of the older residents; and this year's affair is expected to attract others interested in meeting and reminiscing with their friends of earlier years.

## 90 years ago — 1935

**THE NEXT THIEF WHO ATTEMPTS** to steal the Detroit Zoological Park's money hoard will be either a Daniel or a lion tamer if he succeeds, or lion food if he doesn't. Some light-fingered gentlemen with elastic morals solved the combination of the zoo's safe late Saturday night (June 1) and departed with \$1,033.94 from a cash drawer. This not only angered Director John T. Millen, but it also killed forever his confidence in safes. So, at his orders, a stout steel strong box, with any key or lock or combination of any kind, is being construct at the Zoo. Into the box will go the Zoo's money and the box itself will go into the lion cage. The lions will be let loose to sort of act as substitutes for the "combination" which wasn't much good. "There are 16 lions in the den where the money will be kept," Millen said. "If somebody goes nosing around after the money, the lions well take care of them."

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**WITH THE SEASON OF FRESH VEGETABLES** getting in full swing, the Oakland County-Royal Oak Community Market anticipates busier days. Despite a rather poor season, produce is beginning to come into the market in rapidly increasing volume, marked by exceptionally good Saturday trade. The strawberry season has been ushered in by the appearance of an abundant crop of large, delicious berries, selling for as low as two quarts for 25 cents. Eggs are on the market for 28 cents to 30 cents a dozen; farm butter for 35 cents; tasty, tender spinach for 10 cents a peck; rhubarb at three bunches for 10 cents; asparagus at two bunches for 15 cents; and crisp, tender radishes at three bunches for 10 cents. The market, at Troy and First Street (Eleven Mile) is open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., and Saturday afternoons from 1:30 to 6 p.m.

## 100 years ago — 1925

**THE ROYAL OAK CITY OFFICES** will be moved about July 1 to the new building being erected for that purpose at Third and Williams streets. The present lease expired July 1. The Chamber of Commerce, which leases the entire building, the former Storz residence, and now sub-lets a large part of the space to the city, also plans to move during the summer.

\*\*\*

**THE CITY OF ROYAL OAK HAS ORDERED** 230 new street signs which will be erected during the summer on the main streets. The cost of the signs, including concrete footings, will be about \$8 each. City employees will erect them. The new signs will be placed first along the paved streets. The signs which still remain on these streets will be gathered up and re-conditioned for use on the other streets. It is planned to add some of the new signs each year, moving the old wooden ones farther out until they are gradually abolished. 🍷

## 100 Years Ago — June 18, 1925



Opening Monday Night with fanfare of trumpets and bursting bombs, the Temple Building Circus announced the biggest and best show ever seen in Royal Oak and from the spectators' view, an aggregation of real curiosities, freaks, pink lemonade, real circus attractions and all that goes to make up a real evening's entertainment. On entering the grounds at North Main and Catalpa Drive one is greeted by an inviting parking space for an automobile into which you drive

under an attractive, well-lighted archway. Courteous attendants take care of your car while you stroll over to the head of the mammoth mid-way where myriads of dancing lights, Ferris Wheels, merry-go-rounds, concession stands, refreshments, are spread out before you. Every concession stands are clean and the various merchandise displayed looks like the real thing. No gambling is allowed at any of the stands, and all are in order for the prospective buyer.

At the lower end of the midway one's eye catches a glimpse of a high-swinging trapeze and bars on which Aerial LeVans, world's premier flying trapeze artists, give a wonderful exhibition of daring and skill in mid-air. After buying tickets at the main entrance we passed through the gate into the biggest circus tent ever erected in Royal Oak which we were informed was 100 by 250 feet in dimension. In the center of the big tent are three big platforms on which the various acts perform.

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



ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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