

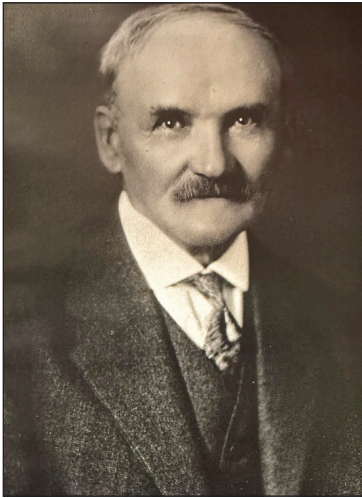


ROYAL OAK Historical Society

JULY 2026 • ROYALOAKHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM

WILLIAM HILZINGER: ROYAL OAK PIONEER, ENTREPRENEUR

BY SUSAN WOLFRUM AND JOHN S. SCHULTZ



William Hilzinger

BEFORE HILZINGER'S HARDWARE opened on Main Street in 1926 and became an integral part of Royal Oak's early commercial growth, William Hilzinger, the patriarch of the family, had already made his mark on the city through numerous contributions as an industrial and business pioneer. (See Page 5 for the store's history.)

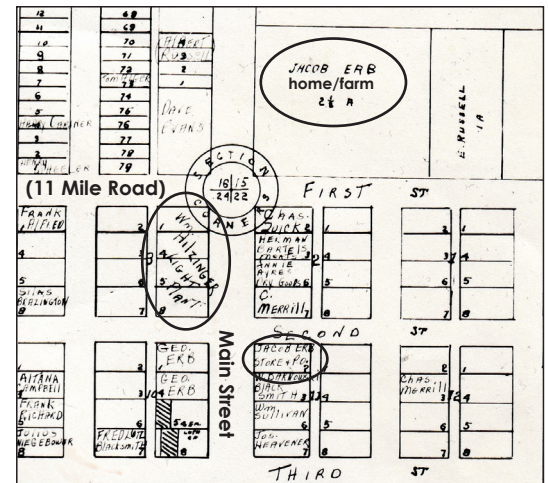
Hilzinger, an immigrant born in Tuttlingen, Württemberg, Germany, on August 20, 1854, settled in the village of Royal Oak in 1881. Among his first endeavors was building an electric power plant next to his house at Main and First (now Eleven Mile) on property owned by Philip Storz, who also emigrated from the same German town as Hilzinger and whose daughter he would later wed.

William was educated in the schools of Tuttlingen and lived with his parents, John George Hilzinger and Annie Marie Rubelman, until age 14. He apprenticed as a shoemaker and worked various laborer jobs until 1870. At age 16, he decided to emigrate from his birthplace to avoid Germany's mandatory military service.

TRAVELING ALONE, he left for America and, upon arrival, headed to Michigan, where friends and other relatives had settled in Detroit. He remained there until 1872, then moved to Royal Oak, where he worked as a cobbler for another two years. In 1874, he moved to Warren and opened his own shoe shop. After two years, he sold the shoe business and became a store clerk. He wandered west, stayed in Dubuque, Iowa, for about three months, and then returned to Michigan in 1876. He spent summers in Benton Harbor and Grand Rapids before returning to Detroit, where he lived for about a year.

In 1881, William settled permanently in Royal Oak. He worked as a mail carrier for four years and as a postal clerk for two more years at the Royal Oak post office, located inside the Jacob Erb general store at Second and Main Street. While employed by the post office, William met and married Mary Storz, daughter of Philip and Dorthea Storz, in 1884. William and Mary lived with Silas Finn on his farm just off Main Street at Baldwin Avenue, north of First Street. A year later, they moved into her parents' home (Philip and Dorthea Storz's house) on Main at First Street. Philip died in 1894, and Dorthea in 1899. William and Mary lived in the Storz homestead for nearly 40 years, raising their nine children: Anna M., Lillie O., George J., William H., Louisa, Carl, Clara, Freda, and Albert H.

WILLIAM HILZINGER BOUGHT the Erb general store building (see map) and moved it to the Storz property, where he converted it into a butter-and-milk station. Local farmers arrived at the station and dumped their milk cans into a large tank, where the milk



An 1881 map of the Village of Royal Oak, showing the First Street (now Eleven Mile) and Main Street intersection. The Hilzinger Block (formerly the Storz Block) is circled on the left. Jacob Erb's home/farm is circled at the top, and the Erb store at the bottom. In the late 1890s, William Hilzinger bought and moved Erb's store to his property for a milk transfer station.



William Hilzinger (circled) at the milk transfer station.

Continued on Page 4

AMERICA 250 EVENTS, July 4-5, Centennial Commons ■ MUSCLE & MORE @ THE MUSEUM Car Show, Sat. Aug. 1

ROYAL OAK
Historical Society

President: Tom Toggweiler

Vice President: Jay Dunstan

2nd Vice President: Deb Anderson

Secretary: Patty Dunstan

Treasurer: Mike Frenz

Directors:

Pat Burean, Carol Card, Al Carter,
Judy Davids, Aaron Dorn, Marcy
Dwyer, Jim Ellison, Phil Lewan,
Mike Matthews-Pennanen,
Bob Muller, Kelly Muller,
John S. Schultz, Sherry Toggweiler

Museum Curator

Johanna Schurrer

Curator Emeritus

Muriel Versagi

Newsletter Staff

Editor: John S. Schultz

Designer: Ellen Kehoe

Contributors: Don Callihan, Judy
Davids, Don Drife, John Maurice,
Susan Wolfrum

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”
through July 25

“Muscle & More @ the Museum”
Annual Car Show exhibit
begins August 1

*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 SUMMERTIME, MEMBERS!

Our volunteers have been especially busy over the past few weeks, and our connection to Royal Oakers has been strengthened through these efforts.

We hosted another euchre tournament on May 1, and as always, the competition was keen and the evening was fun-filled. Our next tournament is at 7 p.m. on July 24 at Pronto restaurant in Royal Oak. Sign up on our website or on Facebook. The cost is \$25 per person. Prizes will be awarded, and light refreshments will be served.

Prior to the annual Royal Oak Memorial Day Parade, which honored our fallen heroes and was held on Main Street, we served a community pancake breakfast, raising funds to preserve our city's history and maintain our museum. Many thanks to everyone who supported this 25-year annual tradition.

WE IMMEDIATELY turned our focus to an event on May 27 at the 44th District Courthouse and City Hall to dedicate a memorial wall to the late Honorable Judge Jamie Wittenberg. Our organization has never been more proud to partner with the Honorable Judges Derek Meinecke and Andrew Kowalkowski and their staff, as well as the City of Royal Oak, to make this a success. We welcomed dozens of judiciary members, family, and residents

who knew “Jamie” as dad, husband, son, and friend. I want to send heartfelt thanks to Valerie Meinecke and Mollie Wittenberg for the outstanding cookies and brownies served at the reception. We at the Historical Society also want to send a special thank-you to those who donated and supported funding for this memorial, and to those who have provided the resources to kick off the scholarship fund in the names of Judges Jamie Wittenberg and Keith Leenhouts. (See Page 8 for more information on this meaningful project.)

Next, we jumped into finishing preparations for our Granny's Attic Sale, held at the museum on May 30. Thank you to everyone who donated their items and to those who found their new treasures. All receipts we receive will help us maintain our museum and preserve our city's history.

LOOKING FOR a fun day at the museum? Come see us at our 14th annual car show from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on August 1. This event precedes the Dream Cruise and offers a great opportunity to see several classic cars up close and enjoy food and beverages prepared by Rick and Maureen Sage. The event is free and open to the public. Our DJ, Jim Hunter, will keep us all entertained with classic hits from old and new. Come early to see the cars arrive with the full sound of roaring engines.

For decades, the Historical Museum has been a vital resource for preserving our city's history. Thanks to the support of dedicated residents like you, we have maintained exhibits, hosted educational programs, and kept our doors open to all who wish to explore our city's past. Looking ahead, we recognize that long-term planning is essential to our continued success. One way to help safeguard our mission for generations to come is to include the Royal Oak Historical Society in your estate planning. Whether through a bequest in your will, a charitable trust, or a retirement account or life insurance policy, your support will have a lasting impact. Thank you for considering a gift that will benefit our community for years to come. For more information, visit our website or call the museum.

WE ARE GRATEFUL to the museum for its involvement with our community. Check out our summertime programs at the museum or on our website. Come and visit from 1–4 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays to learn about our city's past as we look to the future. 🌱



Photograph courtesy of the City of Royal Oak

Curator's Corner

BY JOHANNA SCHURRER

I'M PLEASED to announce that, thanks to two grants from the America 250 MI History Grant Program, we can offer two new services. First, visitors can now enjoy background music as they peruse the museum exhibits. Second, the public can now visit our website to research photographs in our archives and order copies for a small fee. We are in the process of setting up the program. Stay tuned for details.

In July and August, the museum will host **three free events for students** (suitable for all ages, must be accompanied by a parent):

- Tour Royal Oak's Two Historic Cemeteries (Royal Oak Cemetery and St. Mary Cemetery), July 9, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.
- Document Your Grandparents' History, July 14, noon – 1 p.m.
- Visit the Annual Car Show, August 1, 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Register at royaloakhistoricalsociety.com/programs.

OUR CURRENT EXHIBIT, "Where They Lie: Stories That Royal Oak Cemeteries Tell," continues to draw visitors. Our city is home to three cemeteries: Royal Oak Cemetery, St. Mary Cemetery, and Oakview Cemetery, and they are a treasure trove of stories about people, events, and landscape architecture. The exhibit runs until July 25, so if you haven't seen it yet, please come by.

The "Muscle & More @ The Museum" exhibit opens on August 1, during our annual car show.

I RECENTLY RECEIVED a call from a woman asking if I would be interested in her grandfather's collection. He was a Royal Oak resident, an architectural engineer who worked on buildings at the Ford Rouge and Detroit Edison facilities, and served in World War I. I'm in the process of reviewing the collection, which is very robust and tells his full life history.

We're always interested in hearing about what you have! Some guidelines are that donations must relate to Royal Oak, and because we have a diverse collection, we don't accept duplicate items or clothing. Feel free to give me a call at 248-439-1501, or refer to the box "How to Donate Items to the Museum" at right for more information.

FINALLY, I hope you enjoy the "From Our Collections" items we share. Fittingly, the chainmail dish cloth featured here belonged to Anna C. Hilzinger, whose husband was a son of William Hilzinger, the subject of this issue's cover story. 🍂

How to Donate Items to the Museum

The Royal Oak Historical Society welcomes inquiries from individuals who may have artifacts, photographs, documents, archives, or other historical materials related to Royal Oak. Go to our website and access the Artifact Donation Inquiry form: <https://royaloakhistoricalsociety.com/artifact-donation-inquiry>.

The form asks you to provide any known history or provenance. Submitting the form does not guarantee that the item will be accepted. Our curator will review the information and contact you.

Helpful information includes who owned the item, how it was used, where it came from, approximate dates, and how it is connected to Royal Oak. We do not accept furniture, appliances, dishes, clothing, or holiday decorations.

Please do not drop off items at the museum without first contacting the curator, Johanna Schurrer, at 248-439-1501.

From Our Collections

Chainmail Dish Cloth

This scouring item was used to clean graniteware (actually, enameled stainless steel or enameled cast iron), which was much in use in the early 1900s.

Today, using such a metal scouring cloth is not recommended, as it can chip, rust, and ruin glass-like enameled surfaces. However, this type of scrubber is suitable for traditional cast iron cookware.

Mrs. George J. (Anna C. Nielsen) Hilzinger
Collection, Royal Oak Historical Society



SPEAKER SERIES

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

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

July 10 — "History of the Royal Oak Historical Society," by Society president Tom Toggweiler

August 14 — "History of the Woodward Dream Cruise," by Historical Society board member and former Royal Oak mayor Jim Ellison

September 11 — "Michigan World War II Legacy Memorial"

Members of the Legacy Memorial organization will provide updates on continuing projects at the permanent memorial at 13 Mile and Woodward that tells Michigan's unique story in WWII.

William Hilzinger • Continued from Page 1

was weighed. The milk was then poured back into the cans and loaded onto wagons. Two teams of wagons hauled milk to Detroit every day; the trip down the Saginaw Trail took an entire day. Hilzinger's wholesale butter-and-milk business survived for about 15 years until the electric streetcar came through Royal Oak, which put him out of business. Farmers could now sell directly to the Detroit creameries, with their milk conveniently picked up at milk stations along the streetcar route.

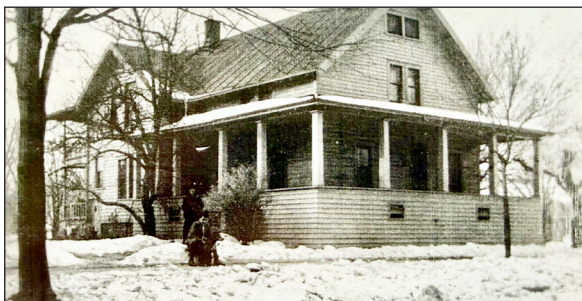
IN THE 1890s, Hilzinger acquired 32 acres between Main Street and Rochester Road, just north of Twelve Mile and North Main Street. The property was crossed by the Red Run and contained a pond where local cattle were watered and where he cut and harvested ice blocks in winter for iceboxes, the precursor to refrigerators. The lake formed a watershed between Aqua Court Creek and the Red Run. In 1916, a dam was built across one end to create the current 30,000-square-foot lake, and a windmill was built around the pump. In the 1920s, M.A. Dondero, the nephew of Royal Oak's first mayor, George Dondero, acquired the property, which the Gabler family later owned for many years. The windmill remains on the property today.

In the early 1900s, electricity was generated by gasoline engines driving electric generators, and in 1901, Hilzinger decided to build a power plant next to their house. These early engines were imperfect, and Hilzinger's first attempt met with disappointment when the engine he purchased failed to perform. He later acquired two larger engines and successfully began electric service to 16 city streetlamps, five homes, three businesses, and one hotel. Operating until midnight, William would blink the lights as a five-minute warning before shut-off time.

ROYAL OAK'S VILLAGE leadership deemed the streetlamps unnecessary on moonlit nights and refused to have them turned on or to pay for the additional hours. After five years in his modest enterprise, the plant was losing money, and Hilzinger decided to dismantle the equipment, sell it, and turn his attention to more profitable, less troublesome ventures.

While still living at the Storz homestead, William decided to dig a deeper well to get fresher water. While digging, he struck an underground mineral spring. After having the water from the well tested, he and his son, George J., realized its commercial value. The well was 100 feet deep, and William pumped the water with his favorite device, a gasoline engine, later switching to a windmill.

Hilzinger hired John Benjamin to print a booklet titled "Tuttlinger Mineral Water," extolling the virtues of their bottled water. The water was marketed under the name of William's birthplace in Germany (spelling the city's name, Tuttlingen, with an "r" for reasons unknown.) Advertisements for Hilzinger's miracle beverage proclaimed the "medical qualities that constitute it a valuable tonic and render it invigorating to city folk, who are in need of a restorative after a strenuous business life... persons of delicate physique should not wait until laid low by an insidious malady before making some attempt to replenish their diminished vitality." The water sold well, mainly to Detroit residents.



In 1924, the Storz-Hilzinger family home at Main and First was moved to a more residential location at 405 East Third Street on a lot that was part of the farm originally owned by Philip Storz.

he had his gravel shipped to Royal Oak on the Grand Trunk Railroad from a supplier in Pontiac. Hilzinger's timing couldn't have been better. Royal Oak was in the midst of a large building boom. New homes and businesses requiring concrete and construction were going up everywhere. He contracted with the city to pave many of the early sidewalks in Royal Oak. Water for the concrete mixtures was drawn from shallow point wells drilled along the path of the new sidewalk pavement.

William Hilzinger retired from business in the mid-1920s. In 1924, it was thought that the location of the Storz home on Main, where the family lived, was no longer desirable due to the commercial development that surrounded it, so he had it moved to 405 East Third Street on a lot that was still part of the farm originally owned by Philip Storz, his father-in-law. Mary and William lived at this location for the remainder of their lives. In retirement, he was a vice president of the First State Bank and, after two institutions merged, of the State Savings Bank. He engaged in local real estate development and maintained an interest in the Lawson, Baldwin, and Hilzinger subdivisions, which encompassed the former Silas Finn farm on Main Street.



Hilzinger in the power plant he built in 1901 after the milk station closed. Gasoline engines generated the electricity.

When public interest in his mineral water waned, Hilzinger decided to return to the utilities business and drilled a gas well on the Storz farm. He sold the gas to Royal Oak residents and pumped it into the village for a short time, but the pressure was too low to sustain a steady, usable flow.

AFTER SHUTTING DOWN his milk station, gas well, and mineral water business, and disposing of the previously mentioned electric plant, William's next venture was in the concrete block business. With experience in gasoline-powered engines, he used one to power a mixer that churned the concrete. There were no local gravel pits, so

William Hilzinger article concludes on Page 6



Hilzinger Brothers Hardware as it looked in the 1940s. The store occupied one, and eventually all three, ground-floor storefronts of the two-story building.

HILZINGER’S HARDWARE HELPED SPUR ROYAL OAK’S EARLY GROWTH

BY JOHN S. SCHULTZ

THE CONSTRUCTION of the Hilzinger Block in 1925 and the opening of Hilzinger Brothers Hardware were symbolic of Royal Oak’s rapid commercial expansion in the 1920s, driven by Detroit’s economic boom and outward growth along the Woodward Avenue corridor.

As Detroit’s automotive industry fueled massive population growth and suburbanization, Royal Oak’s village population surged from more than 6,000 in 1920 to 22,805 by 1930, prompting widespread redevelopment of Royal Oak’s downtown core.

Hilzinger Opening Draws Large Crowd

Many visitors attended the opening of Hilzinger Bros. new hardware store last Saturday. The firm is located in the new Hilzinger block, 108 North Main street, and carries one of the most complete stocks of general hardware in the city.

The Hilzinger brothers who comprise this new business firm have grown to manhood in Royal Oak, and their host of friends are more than pleased to greet them in a business capacity.

*Royal Oak Tribune,
August 13, 1925*

Contractors Henry J. Mouw and Harry Van Essen, local businessmen also involved with the Royal Oak Tool & Machine Co., secured the building permit and completed the two-story commercial block at 106–110 South Main Street for a projected cost of \$24,000, with most of the work finished by early August 1925. The structure featured three ground-floor retail storefronts topped by a second story intended for offices or assembly spaces, reflecting the era’s emphasis on mixed-use commercial architecture. The development stood on property that had been owned by the Storz-Hilzinger family since 1859, marking the culmination of their commercial legacy at the southwest corner of Main Street and Eleven Mile Road.

FROM ITS OPENING, the Hilzinger Block had key tenants that underscored its role in the community’s early commerce. The central storefront was occupied by Hilzinger Brothers Hardware, founded by Albert and Carl Hilzinger, sons of William Hilzinger, who had previously operated various businesses on the site, including a wholesale milk operation and the village’s first electric power plant. The north section of the building became Maison’s Sandwich Shop and Chop House, while the south space hosted dry goods and clothing retailers.

Upstairs, the second floor was designated as John K. Westerburger’s Main Ball Room, serving as a venue for social gatherings and later accommodating fraternal groups such as the Eagles and Masonic organizations. In the 1950s, it housed the offices of Minoru Yamasaki, the Japanese American architect best known for designing the World Trade Center in New York City. (See article on Page 6.)

After Hilzinger Hardware’s initial occupancy in the 1920s, the business remained a cornerstone tenant in the Hilzinger Block for decades under family management. When Albert and Carl retired, Albert’s sons, Raymond and Franklin, assumed control in the 1950s and operated the store as Hilzinger’s ACE Hardware until 2000. Franklin Hilzinger co-managed the store with his brother until retiring in 1998, after which Raymond continued operations with assistance from family members.

IN THE 1950S AND ’60s, the hardware store expanded several times within the building. These modifications reflected the business’s success and its adaptation to post-war commercial demands in downtown Royal Oak. Alterations to modernize the exterior were made in 1963. The facade was sheathed in sheet metal, and a large illuminated vertical metal sign was installed to improve visibility.

Hilzinger’s ACE Hardware closed after Raymond Hilzinger’s death in 2002. Inventory was liquidated that year, resulting in a period of vacancy and general decline in the building. The site was later redeveloped, but the closure marked the end of more than 75 years of continuous hardware-retail presence by the Hilzinger family.

Now in the space are Leo’s Coney Island, Bean & Leaf coffee shop, and a yoga studio. The City of Royal Oak designated the Hilzinger Block Building as a Historic District in June 2004. In May 2006, the building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Hilzinger’s ACE Hardware in the early 1970s, with the familiar vertical sign and contemporary awning. Leo’s Coney Island retains the distinctive sign to this day.

Minoru Yamasaki: From Royal Oak to the World Trade Center

By Judy Davids

MINORU YAMASAKI, the Japanese American architect best known for designing the World Trade Center in New York City, modestly began his career as a visionary architect in Royal Oak.

Born in Seattle in 1912, Yamasaki later found his professional home in the Detroit area in the mid-1940s. His journey to prominence began with the establishment of his own architecture firm in Royal Oak in 1955. There, he began designing the United States Science Pavilion for the 1962 World's Fair in an office above the former Hilzinger Hardware store (now Leo's Coney Island) on Main Street. The success and acclaim Yamasaki garnered from the Science Pavilion undoubtedly influenced decision-makers who would later commission him for the World Trade Center and other large-scale projects.

In Metro Detroit, Yamasaki's transformative designs include the McGregor Memorial Conference Center at Wayne State University, the Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. building in Detroit, and the serene Birmingham Unitarian Church in Bloomfield Hills.

IN 1959, the Royal Oak City Commission enlisted Yamasaki and Associates to craft plans for a new library. His one-story, highly sculpted design featured 12 glass arches. Its modern appearance drew divided opinions among residents and commissioners alike.

"The first time it was shown, people sort of jumped back," said Commissioner Grant Maudlin at a city commission meeting in January 1959. The Rev. Charles Jatho, rector of St. John's Episcopal Church and member of the library board at the time, urged residents to be open-minded.

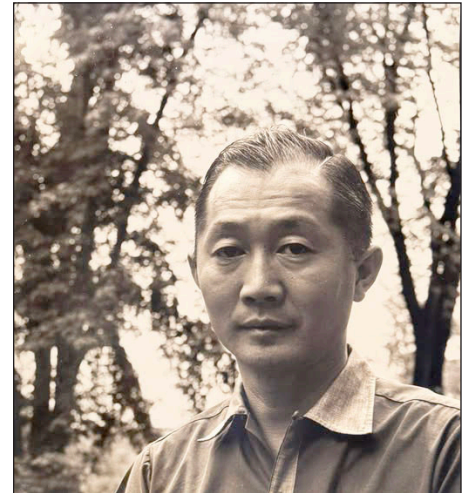
"We're in a new age," Jatho told *The Daily Tribune*. "An age where we need vision and courage. Let's have something outstanding."

THE PROJECT, if approved by voters, was expected to cost Royal Oak homeowners \$3.20 per year in additional taxes. Despite a spirited campaign, the proposed \$1.1 million project fell short in a decisive ballot vote in April 1959 — yes's 3,044; no's 6,755.

Voters would go on to approve plans for the current library a few years later. It opened in 1962 and was designed by Smith & Smith Architects for \$850,000.

Although Yamasaki's ambitious vision was never built, his firm designed one building in Royal Oak. It's Land's Pharmacy (most recently the home of Know Advertising) at 422 West Eleven Mile and Sherman Drive. The innovative 750-square-foot, two-story triangular pharmacy introduced the concept of a drive-up prescription center to this area.

Yamasaki died in Detroit on February 6, 1986. He was 73 years old. You can view the famous architect's library plans in the history room at the Royal Oak Public Library. 📍



This photograph of Minoru Yamasaki was taken by celebrated architectural photographer Balthazar Korab during the height of Yamasaki's national prominence. The photograph comes from the collection of architect Kent Johnson and will be donated to the Royal Oak Historical Society.

William Hilzinger • Continued from Page 4

The original Storz homestead on Main and Eleven Mile encompassed lots one through four of block three in the original Royal Oak downtown (refer to map on Page 1). In 1925, the houses on the property were torn down to make way for a new two-story masonry building with a red-brick veneer, constructed above a full basement that incorporated a section of the former Hilzinger electric powerhouse. It became known as the Hilzinger Block.

When the building was completed in 1926, William convinced his two sons, Albert and Carl, to open a paint-and-hardware store in the building's center storefront, which became a longtime fixture in the city's downtown. (See article on Page 5).

PROGRESSIVE IN BUSINESS affairs, a member of the Church of Christ Scientist, and an uncompromising Republican, William Hilzinger was "considered a man of unusual merit and dealings of the most honorable, straightforward nature," as written in the *History of Oakland County, Michigan: A Narrative Account of Its Historical Progress, Its People, and Its Principal Interest*, by DeWitt Thaddeus Seeley.

Hilzinger had a particular interest in education and served as a long-time member of the Royal Oak school board. He was a justice of the peace, village council member, and board of review member. He was an active promoter of Oakview Cemetery, which opened in 1911, and served as president of the cemetery association for three years.

When William Hilzinger began subdividing the Storz farm, he gave each of his children a lot, along Third Street and Phillips Place, a street named for their grandfather, though it is spelled with two L's. William died at his home on Third Street at Knowles on October 28, 1934, at age 80. He is buried in the cemetery he had long championed. Mary Storz Hilzinger died at home in June 1944, at age 84. She is also buried in Oakview Cemetery.

ONE OF WILLIAM AND MARY'S children, George J., married Anna Christine Nielsen, and they initially resided at 126 Phillips Place. In 1946, George purchased and moved an older house onto his own lot at 211 South Knowles near Third Street. The home was originally on the future site of the Tribune Building at 310 Third and Troy streets. Anna C. Hilzinger was a historian and much involved in recording and preserving the history of Royal Oak. She was the second woman president of the Royal Oak Historical Society in 1963 and also served as the secretary for many years. George and Anna died in 1970 and 1991, respectively, and are buried at Oakview Cemetery. 📍

Royal Oak Then & Now

BY JOHN MAURICE

Then 1937



Standard Red Crown service station at Eleven Mile and Main Street in 1937.

STANDARD RED CROWN service stations were established by the Standard Oil Company in the 1910s and 1920s to market their signature "Red Crown" gasoline brand. Known for distinctive "castle-style" architecture and iconic red-and-white branding, they played a vital role in popularizing roadside fueling across the Midwest and West.

These stations featured glazed brick, attached garage bays, and peaked red roofs designed to look friendly and residential rather than purely industrial.

In the early years of Royal Oak, Main Street and Washington Avenue were lined with residential houses, but over time they were replaced by businesses seeking more visible locations.

Then 1970



The Nugget restaurant shortly after it was built in 1970.

HOMES WERE demolished to make way for new retail buildings, often with retail or office space on the first floor and housing on the second floor. Others retained the original buildings but converted them for commercial use. On the prominent southeast corner of Main Street and First Street (now Eleven Mile Road) stood one of these former houses, which was converted into a Standard Red Crown service station while preserving living space above.

The first **Then** photo, taken in 1937, shows the Standard Red Crown service station with living space on the second floor and a garage attached at the south end of the building.

The station advertises "Standard Service" and "Main Radiator Service," which is "Open All Night!" At the time of this photo, the city was having issues with some homes being converted to commercial use. In this case, the family of eight who had been occupying the second floor was ordered to vacate the premises because the structure lacked a firewall between the service station and the living area, a violation of the city's building code.

NO INFORMATION was found on when the original building was demolished or when a restaurant was first built at this site, but it remains an eatery today. Many patrons who frequented downtown Royal Oak in the 1960s and '70s will tell stories of late-night meetings at the 24-hour diners that sat at 105 South Main Street, such as The Clock and, probably more famously, The Nugget.

At one point in the 1970s, there were more than 27 Nugget restaurants across metro Detroit. The second **Then** photo shows a snowy view of The Nugget from the Eleven Mile side after it opened in 1970. Looking west across Main Street, we can see the Rathskeller and Hilzinger's Hardware. Currently, the building houses Boukie's Grill, which serves Lebanese, American, and Greek food.

In the mid-20th century, the parent company, Standard Oil of Indiana, acquired the American Oil Company (Amoco). Over time, the retro Red Crown pumps and castle-style stations were either torn down or modernized to standardize with Amoco's branding. And in Royal Oak, the Amoco station was subsequently located directly across Eleven Mile from the original site of the Standard Red Crown station and was operated for decades by the Kevorkian brothers, including Andy and Buzz Kevorkian. 🍷

Now



Boukie's Grill at Eleven Mile and Main today.

THEN photos courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society.
NOW photo by John Maurice.

UPCOMING EVENTS

America 250 Events at Taco Fest in Downtown Royal Oak Centennial Commons, 221 East Third Street

The Royal Oak Historical Society has been designated as an official sponsor of our nation's 250th celebration in partnership with America 250 MI. The festivities kick off over the Fourth of July weekend at Taco Fest.

July 4 and 5



1 p.m. — George and Martha Washington will read a letter George wrote to Martha during the Revolutionary War. Kids will be invited to write letters at the Historical Society's table to send to veterans at the John Dingell VA hospital.

2 p.m. — Betsy Ross will be on stage to explain how the first flag was made. Kids will then be invited to make their own flag at our table.

3 p.m. — Ben Franklin will be talking about what life was like during that period. He will talk about his work as a scientist and inventor, and his position as the first Postmaster General.

4 p.m. — We will have members of the audience help read the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States.

July 8

5 p.m. – 7 p.m.



Thirteen speakers will lead attendees in reading the Declaration of Independence, joining a nationwide observance of this historic event. The Declaration of Independence was adopted by Continental Congress on July 4 and then distributed across the then-13 colonies. The first public reading was on July 8, 1776, in Philadelphia.

This event is free, and registration is not required, but we would love to know if you plan to attend. Please register on the Royal Oak Historical Society website at royaloakhistoricalsociety.com, then click on Events.

Annual Historical Society Car Show — August 1

The Royal Oak Historical Society's 14th annual car show is planned at the Historical Museum from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on **Saturday, August 1.**

This year, show attendees will witness our first-ever exciting Car Limbo Competition, and the Canadian Model T Assembly Team will demonstrate how a Model T is put together.

Visitors to the show will be able to talk with car owners and take a closer look at the special maintenance and preservation their cars receive. The show is a juried event that will feature award winners in numerous other categories, including Crowd Favorite Award, determined by show attendees.



Saturday, August 1st, 2026 10am-3pm
Royal Oak Historical Museum 1411 W. Webster, Royal Oak, MI

Come share the day with emcee Murray Pfaff and enjoy the music of DJ Jim Hunter. There will also be food vendors, including doughnuts and coffee in the morning and at lunch, as well as grilled burgers, hot dogs, chips, ice cream, and more.

In addition to the outdoor festivities, visitors are welcome to enter the historic museum to view the Automotive Concept Art Exhibit along with a new display from the College for Creative Studies Student Auto Design group.

Those wishing to display their cars can pre-register online for \$20 at royaloakhistoricalsociety.com or at the Museum, 1411 West 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.

All proceeds benefit the Royal Oak Historical Museum.

Scholarship Honors Late Judges

The Royal Oak Historical Society, in cooperation with the Berkley Historical Committee and 44th District Court Judges Derek Meinecke and Andrew Kowalkowski, has created a 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, served as judge of the 45-A District Court for Berkley and then in the consolidated 44th District Court serving Berkley and Royal Oak. He 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 nationally and served as the forerunner of today's modern system of problem-solving probation departments. The 44th District Court Probation Department is named in his honor.

To donate to this project, visit our website at royaloakhistoricalsociety.com or use the QR code.



1926 ENGLISH COTTAGE



The Hartle house as it was originally constructed in 1926.

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 203 East Sunnybrook Drive, next to the Francis York estate. This excerpt is from the book, "Royal Oak Images, Yesterday's Charm Today's Treasures," which is being revised.

MODELED AFTER an English cottage, reminiscent of those he knew back home, Arthur Hartle built this house at 203 East Sunnybrook Drive in 1926. He and his wife, Lillian, emigrated from Sheffield, England, in 1904. Traveling through Canada, they settled in the Detroit area, first living in Highland Park from which he rode the interurban to work, and then moving to Royal Oak.



The home was renovated in the 1980s to almost double its original size.

Though Arthur was a firefighter on the steam railroad in England, he went to work as the groundskeeper for famed organist and music professor Dr. Francis York, Ph.D., at the nearby York Place estate located at 130 East Sunnybrook Drive. Interestingly, one of Arthur and Lillian Hartle's two sons became an organist and composer, much like Dr. York.

HOW AND WHERE Arthur learned about the stewardship of an estate such as this remains a mystery. He planted and nurtured beds of flowers, oversaw an apple orchard he tucked in between Main Street and York Place, and attended to the surrounding woods.

Arthur spent untold hours sitting on his screened-in porch producing hand-carved statues and a series of wooden reliefs depicting scenes from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The detailed work drew the attention of Henry Ford, who tried to entice him to work at Greenfield Village restoring and repairing wooden items.

This house was originally constructed with cedar shingles on both the frame and the roof. A one-and-a-half-story country cottage with two dormers, the roof is steeply pitched, as is the A-frame shape of the front entryway. In the 1980s, the house was expanded and almost doubled in size. Though keeping the wooden shingles throughout, with the exception of the roof, the dormers were increased to four and an attached garage was added. The stone pillars at the end of the circular drive were built by Arthur Hartle and originally sat at the end of York Place's driveway. 🍀

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.

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.



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.

Welcome New Members!

Greg Bernath	Gayne & George Mazzocco	Theresa Scherwitz
Siobhan Dotson	Susanne Monica	Walter Schirmacher
Mike & Gail Feltner	Ron Novak	Julianna Wostyn
Noah Greenia	Rose Okada	Maribeth Yamin
Jan Grudzen	Oakley Orser	Janie Yurich
Marilyn Hotaling	Lisa Ortlieb	
Elizabeth Koledo	Steven Philips	
Jonah Kubicek	Susan Reinke	
Thomas & Colleen Macleod	Marjorie Russell	

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

THE NATIONAL BANK OF ROYAL OAK is for sale, the chairman of its parent company said at the annual meeting of the NBS Financial Corp. Chairman William Henry of NBS described to the latter's stockholders a plan for raising additional capital that would, in effect, close out the holding company's principal assets, its ownership of the Royal Oak bank, the National Bank of Southfield, and the firm's new office building northwest of Twelve Mile and Telegraph. Henry said NBS believes the Royal Oak bank might be sold for more than its \$1.7 million valuation on NBS books, with the proceeds used to retire \$2.75 million of NBS securities owned by a life insurance company. Such a sale would be the fourth major change in ownership of the National Bank of Royal Oak in its 20-year history.

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

MORE THAN 120 KIMBALL HIGH SCHOOL teachers in Royal Oak have signed petitions asking Principal Charles Jackson to reconsider his resignation. Jackson, principal since 1962, announced his resignation as chief at the 3,000-pupil school Wednesday night. He said he's taking another job but didn't say where. The petitions cited Jackson's understanding of students and staff, support for advances in teaching, and leadership ability. They also said men of his superlative "intelligence, conscientiousness and moral integrity" appear "on the school scene all too infrequently." Mrs. Judy Owens, a leader in the staff's mushrooming effort to keep Mr. Jackson, said the staff was "shocked" by Jackson's resignation. She said several members were near tears when confronting the principal Thursday after his resignation. Jackson said he is "deeply touched" by the effusive staff reaction, but his decision stands.



60 Years Ago June 14, 1966 They Made It!

Robert Young (left), age 22, of Berkley, and Arthur Pireaux, age 21, of Royal Oak, will graduate in the upper quarter of the Class of 1966 from Kimball High School, despite physical handicaps. They are the first students from Royal Oak's special education program for the physically handicapped to graduate from Kimball. Both have muscular dystrophy. Each plans to continue his education.

HOMEOWNER GROUPS in Oak Park and Royal Oak and city officials in Lathrup Monday night threatened to fight a new compromise alignment for the I-696 Freeway along Ten-Mile through their cities "with whatever force we have." Oak Park protestors of the new plan had sought a City Council resolution opposing any compromise, but the Council refused by a 3-2 vote. Royal Oak foes of the plan objected at the first public presentation of the state Highway Department's compromise offer in the city.

70 Years Ago — 1956



The first Chicken Shack restaurant on Eleven Mile Road in Royal Oak.

70 years ago — 1956

JOHN AND IOLA SOBECK opened the first Chicken Shack restaurant in Royal Oak. After just 41 days of construction, their new chicken-preparation process was introduced to the city and quickly became a beloved Metro Detroit staple.

MORE THAN 40,000 SOUTH OAKLAND commuters and thousands from other Detroit-area suburbs were left stranded by an "unauthorized" walkout by 80 Great Lakes Greyhound bus drivers in Detroit. A spokesman for the bus drivers said they are seeking six paid holidays, cumulative sick leave, paid hospitalization and a 14-cent-an-hour pay raise.

70 Years Ago continued...

A 32-MAN POSSE, right out of the Old West, is riding in Oakland County and is headed by a Royal Oak man. John D. Boyd heads a group of deputized volunteers who are on call to aid in emergencies such as tornadoes, strikes, and heavy traffic jams. "We are often used to look for missing persons," said Boyd. Each man in the posse has his own horse and wears a cowboy hat and boots while on duty.

80 years ago — 1946

THE CITY OF ROYAL OAK unveiled its first World War II War Memorial in City Hall Park, honoring 102 local men who gave their lives in the conflict. It was erected by a War Council appointed by the City Commission. A crowd of nearly 400 gathered for dedication services in the park. The unveiling, after a parade, was planned by two representatives each from the women's auxiliary military organizations, Moms, Navy Mother's Club, Marine Corps League, VFW, American Legion, and Canadian Legion.

CITY MANAGER E. M. SHAFER told delegates of the AFL-State, Municipal and County workers: Royal Oak could not grant employees more than an 8-cents-an-hour wage increase unless a new source of increased revenue is found. Workers have asked for an 18.5-cent increase.

90 years ago — 1936

RESIDENTS OF SOUTHERN OAKLAND County were warned by the Better Business Bureau about a salesman offering "expensive rugs" at greatly reduced prices that turn out to be virtually worthless. Residents of the area have been victimized by salesmen selling "floor polish" that turns floors black and "fox furs" that turned out to be pelts from cats.

A DROP IN THE NUMBER of communicable diseases, from 137 in March to 129 in April, chiefly attributable to a marked decrease in whooping cough cases, is reported in the records of the Royal Oak district office of the Oakland County Health Department. Other department activities showing a decrease between March and April include the immunization clinic, tuberculin tests at the office and schools, tuberculosis clinic visits, general clinic tests, and treatments.

100 years ago — 1926

TENTATIVE PLANS FOR THE ADDITION of a large commission room to the Royal Oak City Hall, the construction of a fireproof vault for city records, and several other changes in the city hall have been approved August 25 by the commission. The cost was included in the 1925 budget. The commission room will be added to the rear of the City Hall across the width of the building. It will be approximately twice as large as the present room. The vault will be built between the assessor's office and the new inspector's office. The present commission room is to be made into the manager's office and a reception room.


P. R. WARREN, 1107 East First Street, a watchman employed by the R. D. Baker company, was severely burned on the hands and arms last night when fire destroyed two buildings containing many barrels of oil at Oakwood Boulevard, east of Rochester Road. Two horses enclosed in a building, a few feet away from those that were burned to the ground, were saved. The Royal Oak Fire Department responded at about 9:20 p.m. Oil valued at \$500, stored for use on the machines used in the construction of the Royal Oak drain through Red Run Golf Club grounds, was set on fire when a lantern the watchman was carrying inside the storehouse exploded. Several barrels of gasoline added to the flames, which shot high into the air. Chef Martin Bishop estimated the damage at \$15.

CAPTURE OF TWO MEN accused of throwing a "stink bomb" into one barber shop and the announcement that several other shops would return to the old prices were weekend developments in the barber shop situation in Royal Oak. Several barbers announced a return to the old prices, a change ordered several weeks ago by the Master Barbers Association of America. The local barbers cited a 50 percent decline since the new rates were adopted as the reason for the return to the old prices. After a wild automobile chase early Sunday morning, police arrested two Detroit men who threw the "stink bomb" into George C. Jefferson's non-union barber shop on Center near Fourth Street. Jefferson was operating at cut rates before the recent union raise on August 1. Nick's shop at North Main and Catalpa, Johnson's on Second near South Main, and Kelso's shop at 818 North Main reduced their prices to 50 cents for a haircut and 25 cents for a shave.

ALL EXCEPT \$30,000 of the money deposited in the Berkley State Bank by the Village of Berkley has been withdrawn and deposited in Royal Oak banks as a result of a commission resolution. There has been considerable controversy in Berkley over the legality of depositing more than \$30,000 in the local bank, because in this case the amount exceeds the bank's capital and surplus. While the dispute over the state law is being settled, the funds will remain in the Royal Oak institution. 🗳️

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.

**90 Years Ago —
June 4, 1936**



This ad from The Daily Tribune no doubt had June brides flocking to Hagelstein's Bakery for \$5 cakes.



ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 1411 West Webster Rd. • Royal Oak, MI 48073
 248.439.1501 • ROYALOAKHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM

NONPROFIT ORG.
 U.S. POSTAGE PAID
 CLAWSON, MI
 PERMIT NO. 71



ROYAL OAK
Historical Society

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



**Special America 250! Individual and Family
 Membership Pricing – Limited Time!**



**MEMBERSHIP AND
 DONATION FORM**

Name _____

Address _____

Phone # (cell) _____ (home) _____

Email Address _____

PLEASE INDICATE MEMBERSHIP DONATION LEVEL: New Renewal

Individual: ~~\$30~~ _____ Family: ~~\$50~~ _____ Club: \$200 _____ Sponsorship: \$300 _____ Benefactor: \$500 _____
\$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.