



ROYAL OAK

# Historical Society

FEBRUARY 2019 • ROYALOAKHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM

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## Save The Future of Our Memories

*By Mike Frenz, ROHS Treasurer*

I have been involved in a business in Royal Oak since I was a toddler — yep, I was running and zooming up and down the old wood floors on display tricycles that were supposed to be for sale in our family store, Frenz Hardware. My sibling and I would be at the store on Sunday afternoons — back when the store was closed on Sundays — while our father did the chores that he didn't have time to do during the week.

There are a lot of memories I have from those days, not just of the store my father owned but everything we did as kids in downtown Royal Oak; like picking up submarine sandwiches at the snack counter in the front of Kresge's on Washington Avenue, bringing them home and eating them in front of the TV watching Monty Hall on *Let's Make A Deal* or watching Santa Claus flying in a helicopter at Fourth and Washington on the Friday after Thanksgiving.

I also remember riding our bikes to the small ice cream store at Fourth Street near the railroad tracks, ordering a coffee-flavored ice cream cone and waiting for a long freight train to go by. Great times!

As a board member, the many historical items and displays I see at the Museum often spark these memories. Not just going through the displays our talented volunteers put together, but by talking to all of the interesting people who show up to the exhibit openings; by attending history talks by fellow board member Bob Mueller and attending the now famous Concept Art – Woodward Memories exhibit and Car Show in August, that draws hundreds of car enthusiasts.

*Continued on page 3*

# Homes & Buildings In Royal Oak

*Edited by John S. Schultz*

Each newsletter, the Royal Oak Historical Society will focus on historic homes and buildings in our city. The selections come from the book, "Royal Oak Images, Yesterday's Charm Today's Treasures," published by the Roundtable of Royal Oak Historical Organizations, a standing committee of the Royal Oak Historical Commission of the City of Royal Oak. The book was published in 2006, and a second edition is in the works.

We encourage other Royal Oak residents to share the history of their home for possible publication. For more information, contact: *John S. Schultz at johnsschultz@sbcglobal.net.*

## Springsteen Cobblestone House 728 West Twelve Mile Road

*Built in 1924*

The original owners of this cobblestone house were Frank E. and Mary "Mayme" V. (Erb) Springsteen. It took three years to build the residence with completion in 1924. Frank was the owner of the Royal Oak Dairy on North Main Street.

In 1945, Mrs. Elizabeth Gadue, a teacher in the Detroit Public School System, resided there. She was followed by Stephen Shotwell and then by the current owners (as of 2006) Robert and Marian Risebrough.

The property has always attracted the attention of passerby with the black iron fence surrounding the yard and the cobblestone house. The school children attending nearby Northwood School always seem intrigued by this home as they pass by on their way to and from the school.

Originally there were as least two wells on the property at the point where Cherry Avenue and West Twelve Mile Road intersect. One of the wells was for water; Royal Oak water from the well just northwest of the property on the east side of Crooks Road. The water was of the type that contained natural gas, such that one usually filled a "water bottle" with tap water and set it in the icebox or refrigerator to let the gas bubble off before drinking it.

The other well was for natural gas that, in this case, provided the energy for the five cobblestone fireplaces in the home. Each room had a fireplace where natural gas from the on site well was used for many years to provide the source for heating the home. The one in the kitchen has since been removed.

*continued on page 5*



## Curator's Corner

by Muriel Versagi

The Museum's crew of amazing volunteers who put together four interesting exhibits for your historical viewing pleasure every year are busy at work getting our next exhibit ready for you. Our next exhibit will open from 2-4 p.m. on Sunday, February 17.

### **A Woman's Work is Never Done** *The work week and how it changed for women and a continuation of women's fashions 1860s-1960s*

Discover all the hard domestic chores women have performed through the decades to keep a household running and how this work – and its expectations – changed as new technology was developed.

As managers of the home, women often set strict schedules for what work was to be done and when. Follow "Betty," our archetypal woman, through her work week and learn just how busy she was and why these jobs were so important. Betty could be your grandmother, your mother, or maybe you. From Monday (wash day) to Saturday (cleaning), she is hard at work running her household and perhaps working outside the home, too. Sunday is her day of rest and along with leisure activities; you can see some of the different clothing styles she might have worn for fun events over time. *continued on page 4*



House maid ironing a lace doily with  
GE Electric iron, December 26, 1908 –  
Photo courtesy of Library of Congress,  
copyrighted by GE Electric

## Save The Future of Our Memories *continued from front page*

Maintaining the Museum, cataloguing hundreds of donated items, assembling quarterly displays and planning events, all take extensive amounts of time, talent, and funds provided by our generous donors and volunteers.

To assist us in preserving our memories, our history, the Royal Oak Historical Society has joined the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan to help provide us with a reliable ongoing source of financial support to an endowment fund in our name. By utilizing their expertise and financial oversight, they help build the endowment fund with a steady distribution or grant that can be used to continue the operation of the Museum now and when the time comes that we need to hire paid staff.

Your donation to this fund can be of all types of gifts including cash (this can be done through us directly or by going to the Community Foundation website at <https://cfsem.org/give/give-online/agency-endowments/>, marketable securities, real estate, insurance or other non-cash funds. Be sure to use the pull down menu to the Royal Oak Historical Society.

We opened this endowment fund in April 2017 with a \$10,000 investment that has now grown to more than \$40,000 including over \$1,500 in interest grants that have been rolled back into the fund. We are on our way to saving the future of our memories.

Help us preserve our memories for generations to come.



## Curators Corner *continued from page 3*

From beating rugs outdoors to vacuuming; from drying and canning food to purchasing frozen dinners; from ordering food at a counter in a general store to shopping at a supermarket, and how Betty “did it all” changes through time. What doesn’t change, though, is that a woman’s work is never done.

### **One of the many other things our volunteers do is find artifacts and research history for the Royal Oak community:**

This past August, the daughter of Royal Oak resident June Lamm, who was turning 100 that month came in to the museum looking for a copy of a high school yearbook from January 1937, when her mom graduated. The yearbook was filled with handwritten notes from the graduates as well as photographs.

Daughter Cindy Lamm sent us this story about her mom going through the yearbook: “June was overwhelmed with joy. She couldn’t imagine this book still existed over 83 years later. And even more exciting was Mom remembered each classmate and reminisced over each picture and event in the yearbook. I saw her looking at it over and over again, for several days after her birthday. “Not only did my Mom sign this fellow classmate’s yearbook, my sister-in-law looked at the signatures in the back of the yearbook and found her father’s signature, Ollie Schroeder.”

One of the stories Cindy’s mom told her about growing up in Royal Oak was when she was around 10 or 12 years old, she and her best friend played “secretary.” The girlfriend’s dad made a small table for them in the attic, added two chairs and even wired a lamp. The girls would sit at the table and take turns being the boss and the secretary, even wearing her mom’s high-heeled shoes and crossing their legs while holding a steno pad and pencil. The girls would play for hours.

### **Other memories from June include:**

Walking home from school and using her 5 cents for her bus fare to buy a candy bar instead.

Her father gave her a new jacket during the Great Depression days; she was so happy to have it she wore it every day for two years.

Also, the Big Brothers Big Sisters Organization of America giving her \$50, so she could attend beauty school in Detroit in 1937.

June died on December 27, 2018. As her daughter Cindy said, she had an incredible 100 years on this earth. And Cindy will be returning the 1937 Royal Oak High School yearbook to the Museum. We are so glad we had it on hand to share with Cindy and June for her to revisit her high school years in her memories.



100-year-old June Lamm looking at her 1937 Royal Oak High School yearbook –  
*Photograph courtesy of Cindy Lamm*

# Painting On Walls or Doors

by Bob Muller, ROHS Board President

Can you identify  
which Royal Oak buildings  
are pictured here?  
(Answers on page 6)



Photo Credits: Bob Muller

## What's Going On At The Orson Starr House?

*The Orson Starr House is a Michigan farmhouse that was originally constructed about 1845. Located at 3123 N. Main St., one block south of Thirteen Mile Road, the house is owned by the City of Royal Oak and is open to the public from 1-4 p.m. on the second Sunday of each month or by prior arrangement. Additional parking is available two doors to the south at the Salvation Army Citadel.*

*The house was occupied by the Starr Family for nearly 100 years and was home to one of Royal Oak's pioneering families. Open houses and tours are provided by the members of the Orson Starr House Guild, a volunteer committee that organizes special events at the monthly sessions.*

*Admission is free, however, donations are always welcome.*

### Donations to the Royal Oak Historical Society Are Gratefully Accepted

Send checks payable to:

The Royal Oak Historical Society • 1411 West Webster Rd.  
Royal Oak, MI 48073

Donations are tax-deductible. Thank you in advance.

## Springsteen Cobblestone House *continued from page 2*

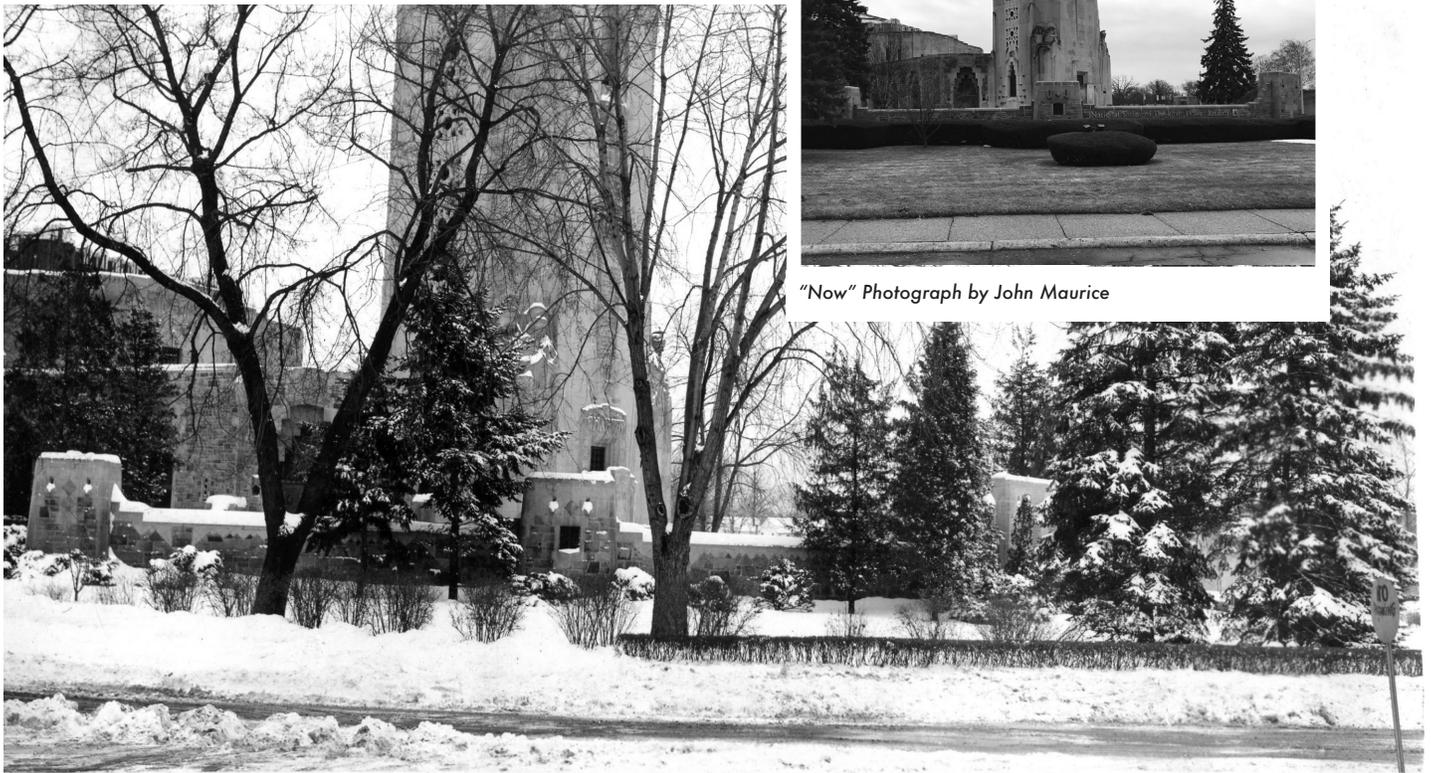
The home was later heated by hot water radiators using oil for the source of heat and later converted to natural gas.

The house is constructed, as most homes in the 1920s, with dark stained woodwork as well as stained doors and, in this case, large wood beams stained dark. The hardware is of ornate brass. The leaded glass windows on the east and west sides of the building allow a prism of light to enter the living room during both the early morning and late afternoon. A garage was constructed under the house with a driveway entrance from Cherry Avenue.

# Royal Oak Then & Now

by John Maurice, ROHS Facebook Editor

The National Shrine of the Little Flower Basilica is a regional landmark standing at the northeast intersection of 12 Mile Road and Woodward Avenue, which is also the gateway to the original Northwood Subdivision. The "Then" photograph is from January 19, 1943. In the foreground is Northwood Boulevard as it originally ran, intersecting with Woodward and 12 Mile. To the right of the photograph, you can see a "No Parking" sign. Northwood was later rerouted to its current location, and the old path became parking lots, which still remain. The church structure was completed in two stages between 1930 and 1936. The tower portion along with the chapel was actually constructed first with the main church building following. Construction of the tower commenced in early 1930. Many of the original trees were removed over the years, but a few of the stately pines remain in the "Now" photograph. Construction of the church was funded by the proceeds of the radio ministry of Father Charles Coughlin who broadcast from the tower during the 1930s.



"Now" Photograph by John Maurice

"Then" Photograph, courtesy of Royal Oak Historical Society Museum

PHOTO GAME ANSWERS:  
 • Photo A: Detroit Dog Co. at 200 Fifth Street on the railroad side of the building  
 • Photo B: LIFT Designer Toys & Gallery at 228 W. Fourth Street on the railroad side of building  
 • Photo C: Tokyo Sushi and Grill at 315 S. Center Street on their door

## Looking Back

Taken from the pages of *The Daily Tribune*. Collected by John S. Schultz

### What Was Happening in Royal Oak:



#### 60 Years Ago – 1959

In six weeks, the new city hall in Royal Oak will open. Tile now laid on three floors and the interior is being painted. The new building is on the northwest corner of Williams and Third. Construction began in 1951 and took longer than expected due mostly to a strike last year. The old hall will become the police station.

The cost of a new public library in Royal Oak was pegged today at \$1,115,000 —about one-third more than previously estimated. City Commissioners are scheduled to act today on a proposal to ask voters in the April 6 election to approve borrowing money to build the new public library on the block bounded by Eleven Mile, Troy, Second and Williams, north of the new city hall.

#### 70 Years Ago – 1949

The Rev. Rudolph G. Riemann is formally installed as pastor of the First Presbyterian church of Royal Oak.

#### 80 Years Ago – 1939

Nearly 1,000 Rotarians attend the 23rd District reunion, sponsored by the Royal Oak Club, with dinner at the Northwood Inn and Hedge's Wigwam, and boxing bouts at Royal Oak High School. Dr. Robert B. Hasner is general chairman.

#### 85 Years Ago – 1934

Charles A. Allem, the "Father of Royal Oak," dies at the age of 83. He was the leader in incorporating the Village of Royal Oak in 1891, a township and village official and later postmaster.

#### 90 Years Ago – 1929

John Uberhorst, age 61, 402 East Seventh Street, will be arraigned this afternoon on a charge of violation of the prohibition laws following his arrest last night by a squad of officers headed by Chief of Police William T. Lorimer who raided his home.

In the raid officers confiscated 27 pints of bonded liquor, eight quarts of Gordon gin and three gallons of moonshine whiskey which they found in the house.

#### 100 Years Ago – 1919

The question of providing a second pavement from Pontiac to Detroit to relieve traffic on Woodward Avenue is still the big topic for discussion in Royal Oak as well as in other sections interested. Many are opposed to improving the Rochester Road with pavement, for it would mean tearing out the good gravel road that was built at big expense.

The double pavement on Woodward Avenue is the best solution [the city officials] have heard recommended. It is the shortest way to Detroit, and is the popular way.



THE ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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ROYAL OAK

*Historical Society*

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

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