



ROYAL OAK

# Historical Society

OCTOBER 2019 • ROYALOAKHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM

## Royal Oak Historical Society Board of Directors:

**President:** Bob Muller

**Vice President:** Jay Dunstan

**2nd Vice President:** Deb Anderson

**Secretary:** Kelly Muller

**Treasurer:** Mike Frenz

### Directors:

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

### Museum Curator:

Muriel Versagi

### Newsletter Staff

**Editor:** Trish Oliver

**Associate Editor:**  
John S. Schultz

**Designer:**  
Ellen Kehoe

### Facebook Editor:

John Maurice

### Webmaster:

Mike Frenz

### IN MEMORIAM

Rita Lesko Simons

April 11, 1921 – June 30, 2019



Photos by Bob Muller

## ROHS Auto Show Highlights Woodward Businesses

*By Bob Muller, ROHS President*

Since the month of August in Royal Oak means the Dream Cruise, the Royal Oak Historical Society Museum tags along with our own tribute and love affair with the automobile. The museum exhibit of "Concept Car Art and Woodward Memories" along with our "smaller" car show fits right in with the major event that draws more than 1.5 million people from all over the U.S. The Historical Museum exhibit walks you down Woodward; the numerous historical photos of businesses bring back memories for those of us who have also spent decades along Woodward. The addition of the concept art from the Retired Automotive Designers group graced our museum again. The fantastic designs of futuristic automobiles make us wish they had been built and maybe we could have owned one.

The car show that went along with this display was a wonder to see. We got to view some of the machines that lucky people preserve and maintain. The beautiful thing is that these automobiles still operate. If a car was only parked, it would not be as alive as it was envisioned and produced to move. Every year, we get something fantastic; this year for me, it was the Pierce Arrow —

*Continued on page 5*



# ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

---

ANNUAL DINNER

---



*Were Elegant at 80*

FRIDAY OCTOBER 25 • FARINA'S BANQUET CENTER,  
2485 COOLIDGE HIGHWAY, BERKLEY  
6PM SOCIAL HOUR • 7PM DINNER, AWARDS, TRIVIA

TICKETS: WM. SULLIVAN & SON FUNERAL HOME, FRENTZ & SON'S HARDWARE,  
THE ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL MUSEUM, FROM ANY BOARD MEMBER,  
OR PAYPAL VIA [ROYALOAKHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM](http://ROYALOAKHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM). \$40/\$50 AT THE DOOR

# 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](mailto:johnsschultz@sbcglobal.net).

## Royal Oak Township Farmhouse 603 Midland Boulevard *Farmhouse Built in 1920*

This farmhouse was built while the land was part of Royal Oak Township. The subdivision was platted in 1927.

Bartholom "Bart" Derooy (born in Holland in 1889, died in Royal Oak in 1972) and wife Antoinette H. (born in Holland in 1895, died in Royal Oak in 1972) moved into the farmhouse in 1931 as renters. Their daughter, Antoinette "Netty" Derooy (born in England about 1917) accompanied her parents when they immigrated to the U.S. in 1928.

In 1984, Netty visited her former home. She was moving out of state and wanted to show the house to her daughter, Gretchen, and son-in-law, Bob, before she moved. Netty provided information about the home as well as photographs to the current owners.

The original house had plank flooring throughout. The top floor was a dormer with an outside staircase. At one time, seven men from Belgium slept in the dormer as renters until they found better housing. The rooms had wall pegs for hanging their clothes, as there were no closets until 1969.

*Continued on page 5*



*The farmhouse in the 1930s*



# Curator's Corner

by Muriel Versagi

The Museum lost one of our "angels."

We who volunteer at the Museum were terribly saddened by the loss of Rita Lesko Simons, our in-house local historian, who passed away in June.



Rita Lesko Simons

Anyone who has visited the Museum in the last eight years will remember Rita, a welcoming smile and a "How can I help you?" on her lips. She loved helping families find a business or a family address in the Polk directories in our library. If someone called with a question, Rita was the one to look through all the old books we have and find the information for them.

Rita would be upset with me for telling her age, but she was born into the Lesko family in 1921 and graduated from St. Mary's High School in Royal Oak in 1938. She would tell about growing up in the 1930s and 40s, going to movies and dances with her older sister. Rita married Foyle Simons, who served in World War II, in 1947.

She was very artistic, and her domain at the Museum, besides the Polk directories, was the school display case. She enjoyed changing the school artifacts, of which we have thousands, to reflect whatever era we had on exhibit.

Rita's great-grandson, Justin Christopher Moody, wrote a beautiful eulogy for her. Here are a few quotes:

"It's no secret, Rita was remarkable but not in the cliché sense of that adjective. She had a remarkable quality of transcendence, of peace. She exhibited a care for others, family and strangers alike, that was neither learned nor forced but simply a part of who she was.

"She was my looking glass into an America that no social studies book could bring to life as she did. Those years of 'Winston Golds,' Frank Sinatra, and three martini lunches; don't worry about the bomb, dear; wash up before supper; 'well, what do you think about that Elvis fellow'?"

"Her spoken memories could bring any cynical 14-year-old boy into the throes of nostalgia—Hudson's at Christmas time, Vernors and Chicken Shack after church, the heavy purr of the V-8 engines along Woodward Avenue."

Rita was who I considered the "older sister" I didn't have. I loved her so much. She knew all the words to the songs from WWII. She would dance to them as I sang, and occasionally we sang together at lunchtime for the other museum volunteers.

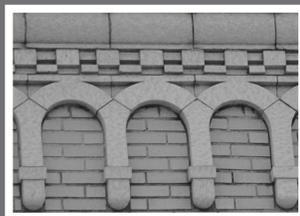
I miss her so.



L to R: Muriel Versagi, Susan Wolfrum, "dressed-up lady," Rita Simons, Johanna Schurrer, 2012

This issue's Photo Game features details that are all from one iconic Royal Oak building. Can you identify the Royal Oak building featured here?

(Answer on page 6)



Photos by Bob Muller

## ROHS Auto Show *Continued from page 1*

what an unbelievable thing of beauty! My favorite part of the car show is looking beyond the whole car and seeking out small details that in themselves are artwork. That is what I point my camera at.

### Annual Banquet Moves to Berkley

Our Annual Banquet is coming up on October 25, and this year we will be having the dinner and festivities at Farina's on Coolidge Highway in Berkley. *Ah, some of you will say, it's not in Royal Oak!* But it is, if you think historically. Before



Photos by Bob Muller

1900, where downtown Royal Oak is today was the commercial center of Royal Oak Township, which was filled with farms. After 1900, the auto industry jobs that



attracted people began the transformation of the area into the collection of the 11 cities that border the city of Royal Oak.

So buy a ticket and come to the banquet to see who will be receiving the awards this year, and find something you cannot live without at our silent auction. Hope to see you there. The event starts with a social hour and silent auction at 6 p.m. with dinner at 7 p.m., followed by our program and award presentation. Tickets are \$40 (\$50 at the door).



### Remembering Rita

The Historical Society and the Museum volunteers work tirelessly to keep it going and create its displays. No one would believe that one of those volunteers, Rita Lesko Simons, was 98. As always, when people like this pass, they will never truly be replaced. Rita will be fondly remembered by us all.

## Farmhouse *Continued from page 3*

The original owners had peach, cherry, and pear trees on the east side of the house. The Derooy's and the owners all ate a common meal at a trestle table with bench seats.

Jim and Bonnie Frith purchased the house in 1969, at which time they undertook extensive updates. The renovation included adding two and one-half bathrooms, a family room, and a deck to the back of the house. The family room has a round center-of-room gas fireplace. In the main bathroom, there is a heart-shaped bathtub. The kitchen has a breakfast nook and island stove.

A concrete front porch with three wooden columns was also added. The exterior was covered with aluminum siding and new windows were installed.

Maureen and Burgess Young purchased the house in 1974 and have made only cosmetic changes since that time.

**Donations to the Royal Oak Historical Society  
are gratefully accepted**

**Send checks payable to:**

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

**Donations are tax-deductible. Thank you in advance.**

# Royal Oak Then & Now

by John Maurice, ROHS Facebook Editor

Many of you may know that the creeks and tributaries of the Red Run (sometimes called the Red Run Creek) ran throughout the city in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Although there remains scant evidence of the creek in some places of the city, such as in Memorial Park and evidenced by the small bridges in the center of Vinsetta Boulevard, most of Red Run was encased in pipes, buried, and covered over in the 1920s and 30s.



Some photographs exist of the creek and the process of encasing and covering it. One tributary of the Red Run, known as Little Run, flowed down the center of what is now Bonnieview Drive. The “Then” photo was taken on March 26, 1927, from the middle of what is now Bonnieview just west of Glenview. Surveyors or photographers can be seen to the right setting up their equipment.



“Then” photo courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society Museum. “Now” photo by John Maurice.

The three houses seen to the left (north) in the distance still stand today. The house nearest to the camera was owned by H.W. McMartin in 1927. Further in the distance, the beautiful pines that lined Evergreen Drive—and still do closer to 12 Mile Road—can be seen as they existed prior to the Grand Trunk Railroad splitting Evergreen. These pines once ran continuously from 12 Mile to Webster. Sections of pipe awaiting placement lay at the side of the ditch. Next time you walk in the Northwood or Vinsetta subdivisions or drive over portions of the Rouge River as it still exists in Beverly Hills and Troy, imagine the creeks that once ran through Royal Oak and what our city might look like today if they had been retained.

For more on the Red Run, Bob Muller’s fascinating article can be found on the City of Royal Oak website at [www.romi.gov/DocumentCenter](http://www.romi.gov/DocumentCenter), click on the *History* folder on the left, then on *Red-Run-Ghost-River-of-Royal-Oak.pdf* on the right.

PHOTO GAME ANSWER:  
 The Washington Square Building at 306 South Washington

# Looking Back

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

## What Was Happening In Royal Oak In October:

### 60 Years Ago – 1959

Shortly after 1 p.m. Oct. 1, Early Wynn (of the White Sox) threw the first pitch of the World Series. While the thud of that pitch into Sherm Lollar's glove was still reverberating through the packed stands, a photograph was on its way to *The Daily Tribune* – and you. It took just 18 minutes to get that picture from the field photographer to a receiver in *The Tribune's* newsroom. Less than an hour later, that photograph was in a new Front Page.

To coin a name as short as this marvel of electronic communication – Unifax!

Facsimile itself, as a method of copying photographs, drawings or printed matter, has been in operation for some years. But, until recently, facsimile receiving machines would work only with facsimile sending machines over short distances or over circuits far different from those of the established transcontinental networks. This fastest news gathering photographic service in the world is now part of *The Tribune's* daily service, complementing its own prize-winning on-the-spot local photographs.

Note: *The Los Angeles Dodgers* won the series over the *White Sox*, 4-2.

### 70 Years Ago – 1949

Velma Austin and William Honhart take the leading roles in the Royal Oak Civic Theater club play, "John Loves Mary." The cast includes Bud Thompson, James Cline, Mortimer S. Hyde, Edith Hyde, Duane Clayton, Charles Gerwig, Patricia Malone and Ed Meyer. Director is Mrs. Carl Schmidt.

### 80 Years Ago – 1939

At nuptial mass in the Shrine of the Little Flower, the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin united in marriage Geraldine Goddard, auditorium teacher in Royal Oak Junior High School, and James W. Sullivan, son of Mr. and Mrs. William Sullivan, 402 Hawthorne.

### 90 Years Ago – 1929

Funeral services are being held for Arthur C. Codling, age 35, secretary-treasurer of Codling's Inc., an outstanding business leader who died of carbon monoxide poisoning in his home, 707 East First Street (now 11 Mile). He was active in the Royal Oak Fire Department, the Rotary Club and the Masonic Lodge.

### 100 Years Ago – 1919

E.J. Lederle, superintendent of the Royal Oak schools in 1911-1915, has returned to the village as sales manager for the real estate firm of Eyster & Howarth. After leaving Royal Oak, he was superintendent of schools in Hastings and more recently has been with the War Camp Community Service. His family has moved to a home on West Street.  
 \*\*\*

Fred Mow who lives on 12 Mile Road fell through a hole in his barn and broke both arms at the wrist, besides being bruised badly.

### 110 Years Ago – 1909

Hilzinger and Morton subdivision opened, and the lots will be sold to the highest bidder at public auction by George Dondero on Saturday, Oct. 16. After lying dormant for years, a tract of land north of First Street (now 11 Mile) on Main Street has been purchased at a low figure and been platted into 19 good-sized building lots. These lots lie on the highest elevation in the (Royal) Oak, which precludes all possibility of water getting into basements constructed upon them. They are situated at Stop 8, Flint Division, Detroit United Railway, with a 10-cent fare to any point in Detroit. Wm. Hilzinger is proprietor of this valuable addition to the village.

### What a Miserable Day!

Soggy shoes, splashed hose, and damp collars were general on **Tuesday, Oct. 12, 1959**. It could have been worse. Renso Lubbers of Royal Oak ended up with his car nosed into the hamburger restaurant (now Little Bros.) Fourth and Center after a four-car collision. Two persons were hurt slightly.



Photo courtesy of *The Daily Tribune*



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



ROYAL OAK

*Historical Society*

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

*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!*

IMAGE PRINTING

1902 Crooks • Royal Oak, MI 48073  
248.585.4080