



ROYAL OAK Historical Society

OCTOBER 2021 • ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY.COM

ROYAL OAK CENTENNIAL 1921-2021

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS AS A CITY



FIRST MAYOR AND NEW CITY COMMISSION TAKE OFFICE

Mgr. Beauvais and Treas. Brons Reappointed; R. Bruce Fleming Named Clerk, Howarth Attorney and Scott Assessor

VOLUNTEER FIREMEN GIVE DONDERO GAVEL

Editor's note: This is the first news story of the first new government meeting when Royal Oak became a city held Monday, December 12, 1921 as reported in the Royal Oak Tribune on December 16.

The first government of the new city of Royal Oak was ushered into office on Monday evening (Dec. 12) with ceremonies amply fitting the occasion.

Forbidding specters of pavements that will demand laying, taxes that must be levied and numberless still unborn complaints were shooed roughly from the room where a large number of citizens watched and applauded the various steps as the new officers slipped into their seats and became accustomed to them.

At the head of the table sat Mayor George A. Dondero. On his left were Commissioners William J. Mulholland, J.L. Heckerd and James E. Lawson. On his right were Commissioners Gustavus Dondero, J. Frank Codling and J.S. Morrison. P.H. Beauvais, city manager; W.O. Hullinger, clerk; W. Brons, treasurer; and George J. Scott; and holdover officers and employes [sic] of the former village also were present.



Royal Oak's first city leaders included: Mayor George A. Dondero, center; Commissioners, clockwise from bottom: Dr. J.S. Morrison; Gustavus Dondero, the mayor's brother; J.L. Heckerd; James E. Lawson; William J. Mulholland; and J. Frank Codling.

The lead in welcoming the new administration was taken by the Volunteer Fire Department, whose members swarmed to the scene as to a three-alarm fire with refreshments. Judge Glenn C. Gillespie, of the Oakland county circuit court, appeared on behalf of the firemen and presented Mayor Dondero with a handsome gavel; a suitable symbol of authority and a testimonial of good wishes.

Gillespie spoke of the recent rapid growth of Royal Oak and of the months of hard work which had wrought a new city charter and brought into being a city government to function under its provisions.

"Nothing was made in a day," Gillespie said. "Perfection takes time as well as effort. As we have learned in Pontiac, some misstakes [sic] are inevitable. But we learn and profit by them and see that they do not occur

Continued on Page 4



Museum Extends Hours

Starting Tuesday, November 16, the museum will stay open later — until 8 p.m. — and will continue late hours on the third Tuesday of each month through February.

ROYAL OAK
Historical Society

President: Bob Muller

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Muriel Versagi

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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.

Third Tues., 1–8 p.m. (Nov.–Feb.)

See our Covid-19 protocols at
royaloakhistoricalsociety.com/
covid-safety-rules

UPCOMING EXHIBITS

South Oakland Art Association
Show and Sale, Oct. 17–30

It's Christmas in Royal Oak,
Nov. 20–mid-Jan.

All photographs courtesy of the Royal Oak
Historical Society unless otherwise noted.

President's Message

BY BOB MULLER

Volunteers Needed to Preserve Royal Oak History

When the Royal Oak Historical Society was founded in 1939, it was simply a group of residents with an interest in our history. Once we opened the current museum in 2007, things changed. Now we need people to volunteer when the museum is open, catalog the growing collection of items, work on creating and building the four displays per year we exhibit and answer the questions that come in from across the country about Royal Oak.

Our curator, Muriel Versagi, is also a volunteer. A small group of workers she refers to as her "angels" do behind-the-scenes work. Because of their efforts, the museum has grown, developed and become a remarkable place. Part of what makes us special are our exhibits that change several times a year.

We need help to maintain our present programs, as well as people with additional talents. So this is an appeal to our members and to the community — think about your talents. Could you help us grow? Could you help us be better? If you are retired, volunteering with us is fun. If you are still working, we do need people in the evenings and on weekends.

We need people to work the floor when the museum is open. You would talk with our visitors, answer questions and help them find things. We need more volunteers to work behind the scenes — helping take care of our collections, create our new exhibits and maintain our library, as well as handling correspondence and doing data-entry work that keeps the museum humming. These volunteers now are at the museum two afternoons each week, but schedules are very flexible.

We could use someone with graphic art skills to help with exhibit signage and our project to republish the book, *Royal Oak Images, Yesterday's Charm Today's Treasures*. We need those with social media experience to



In 2007, the Northwood Fire Station was ready for the Royal Oak Historical Society to open its doors as a museum.



The 2012 Christmas exhibit is one of many created by the many dedicated volunteers at the museum. The ROHS is in need of community members to donate time for future exhibits and other volunteer efforts.

Continued on Page 4

Homes & Buildings in Royal Oak

EDITED BY JOHN S. SCHULTZ

In each issue, this feature focuses 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 jsschultz11@gmail.com.

Stock House

2806 Bamlet Road

French Country Revival House Built in 1927

In 1927, the closest version of a castle was built as a showcase home on Bamlet Road. The lot on which this two-story yellow brick house was situated was 65-feet wide preventing it from an appearance of being crowded by the neighboring houses.

The double hipped roof, rising higher on one side than the other, allows for the front entrance to be angled and topped by a spire with a finial on the tip, hence giving the structure a medieval castle-like appearance.

The elegance of the interior is no less impressive with special features such as arched doorways between several of the rooms. Hardwired wall sconces amplify the simple grace of the dining room with its decorative cove molding surrounding the space between the upper walls and ceiling. Centered in the room is a central medallion set into the plaster from which a suspended chandelier of colored stained glass hangs.

Continued on Page 14



First Mayor and City Commission • Continued from Page 1

again,” he said. “So I would urge the people of Royal Oak to be patient with these men who are giving generously of their time and effort for the general good. The city is very fortunate to have men of this calibre willing to undertake this heavy load, and without remuneration.”

The gavel, a handsome wooden piece, bears about its head a silver band with the words, “Presented to George A. Dondero, first mayor of the city of Royal Oak, by the Royal Oak Volunteer Firemen, Dec. 12, 1921.”

Mayor Dondero spoke feelingly in response.

“The commission and myself accept this token of confidence and good will,” he said, “with a full knowledge of the responsibilities and duties of office. We are deeply sensible to the fact that on our shoulders rests a greater burden than has ever been entrusted to public officials of this community. We intend to meet these responsibilities to the best of our abilities.

“In doing this we have a right to expect full co-operation from you and all citizens. Knocking, destructive criticism will be of no help to us. Kindly suggestions, offered at the proper points, will be of great assistance.

“We have before us some momentous issues. It is my belief that within 90 days you will have before you a proposition to vote a bond issue of \$250,000 for the construction of an adequate sanitary sewer system. We may also have to ask for \$100,000 to provide the west side of the city with a large drain, covered, to protect the health of that section. With that in mind I have just asked the county drain commissioner to hold up the proposal to tube the Allen drain and complete other work for which he would levy an assessment on the city of over \$100,000.

“We may even be called on by the city to expend more money. If so, you will have to raise more money. If we call also for a reasonable, adequate city hall, we ask your co-operation.

“I believe that this latter step may be advisable because here in this city we must establish a spot which shall be



City Manager Raymond J. Whitney works at his desk in the Storz house, which served as Royal Oak’s city hall for a brief time around 1923.

a center and a magnet for all the surrounding territory. I hope to see an end to the creation of numerous small villages which yield to a fever for incorporation and then, like the nubs of the potatoes, find that there is not sufficient nourishment to sustain them as separate corporate beings. I hope that here we may establish a central government of which this surrounding territory shall ask to become a part.”

President’s Message • Continued from Page 2



ROHS President Bob Muller, left to right, along with members Chuck Button and Tom Toggweiler, serve up breakfast at the annual Memorial Day pancake breakfast fundraiser at the Farmers Market.

enlarge our virtual presence beyond Facebook and our website. We need people to scan and photograph our collections.

Help is needed to staff our fundraisers. Our Memorial Day pancake breakfast requires many volunteers, and our annual dinner needs coordination. Other fundraisers also need volunteer involvement. I hope you will consider this. We are a volunteer organization and need help if we are to maintain our high standards.

In addition to our Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday 1–4 p.m. schedule, starting Tuesday, November 16, the museum will stay open later — until 8 p.m., giving those who can’t visit during the day a chance to see our exhibits or do research in the late afternoon and evening. The 8 p.m. closing time will then continue on the third Tuesday of each month through February.

As a final note, we will forego our Annual Historical Society Dinner for a second year this October, because we can’t predict what will be happening with the pandemic. The dinner is an important fundraiser, so in the meantime we continue to ask for community financial support to keep the museum operating. Consider becoming a member by filling out the form on the back of this newsletter.

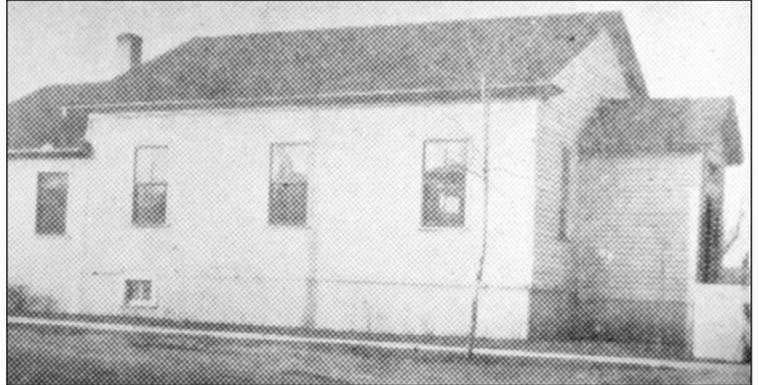


Early Town Halls Serving Township, Village and City

By Ellen Kehoe, ROHS newsletter designer

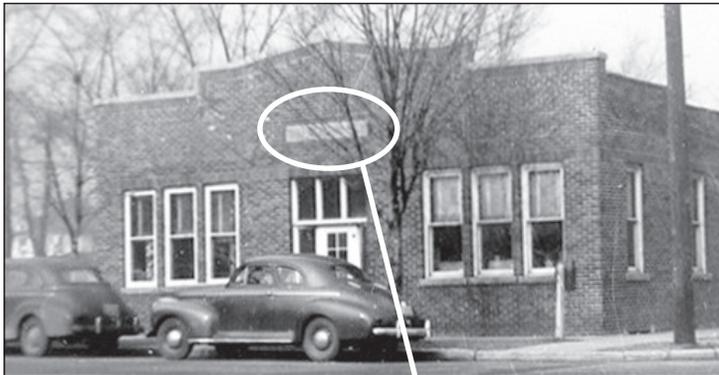
1870

The first town hall was built at the northwest corner of Main and Fourth streets. It would serve the township together with the village until 1915. The structure was sold, moved to South Center and Seventh streets and later became home to St. John's Episcopal Church Mission and the Salvation Army.



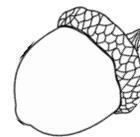
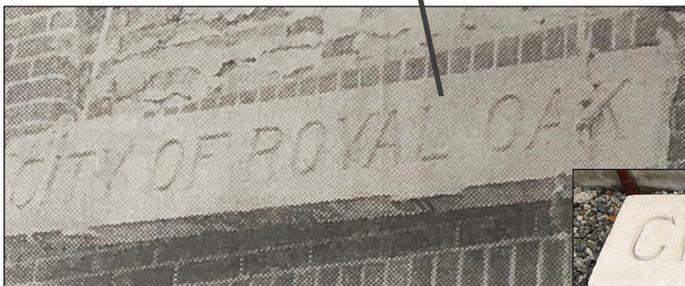
1915

The township and village purchased this 1839 building from the German Evangelical Lutheran Church. The township vacated the building when Royal Oak incorporated in 1921, and the city remained there until 1923. By 1928, the building had been moved twice and now survives — looking much different — as the Royal Oak Woman's Club house at Fourth and Pleasant streets.



1925

After temporarily occupying the Storz house on Main Street, in 1925 the city moved into the first building built as a city hall. Located at the northwest corner of Third and Troy streets, this building was city hall until 1955 and then police headquarters until 1964, when the building was demolished and a new police building was erected on the site.

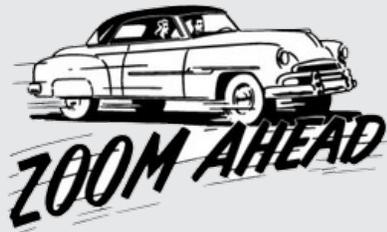


Photograph courtesy of The Daily Tribune

Left: On October 21, 1964, the 200-pound limestone carving over the doorway of the soon-to-be-razed 1925 city hall (and by then, police) building was removed by William Rasmussen with the assistance of city workers. Rasmussen, then a city police patrolman, was an avid local history collector. The sign and his extensive assortment of artifacts were purchased by a group of Royal Oak Historical Society members and became the foundation of the museum's holdings. Right: Current condition of the carving at the museum.



2021 Car Show Memories



The Car Show was back at full throttle this summer! The Royal Oak Historical Society held its annual automotive classics event on August 7 in the museum parking lot.

More than 100 guests came to view dozens of classic cars outside and walk through the Automotive Concept Art Show and Woodward Memories exhibit inside the museum. Dash plates were given out to the first 100 visitors and a \$100 prize was awarded in a drawing.

The event is one of the Historical Society's fundraising efforts to keep the museum operating. For more photos from the event, visit royaloakhistoricalsociety.com.



Photographs by Ryan Gertner

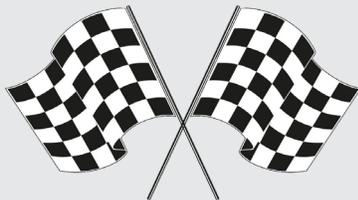


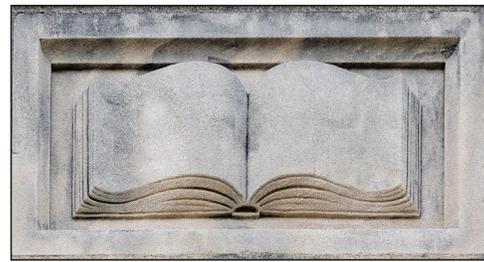
PHOTO GAME

By Don Drife, ROHS volunteer



This issue's Photo Game features photos from a well-known Royal Oak educational institution.

Can you guess which one?



Answers on Page 13
Photographs by Don Drife

Editor's Note: We want to thank ROHS President Bob Muller, who contributed to the Photo Game for the Royal Oak Historical Society newsletter since January 2007. He contributed at least three Photo Game photos per issue for 14 years for a total of approximately 150 photos! Thanks to Bob for faithfully sharing his unique view of Royal Oak. Bob's frequent collaborator, Don Drife, will be taking over the Photo Game. We look forward to what he will see in Royal Oak.



The Starr Pine

By Don Drife, ROHS volunteer



Photograph by Don Drife

"Ollie's Childhood" is a fascinating reminiscence of Oliver Green's childhood. It can be found on the ROHS website: royaloakhistoricalsociety.com/oлие-greens-childhood. Oliver Green, who passed away in 2016, was the grandson of Edwin Starr and the great-grandson of Almon Starr. In the narrative, while telling about the Almon Starr house on Crooks Road, he mentions, "Where the parking lot is now on the north side of the house was an area where my great-grandfather Almon had experimented with growing different kinds of trees."

One of these trees, a black pine, still thrives on the edge of the parking lot. Black pines have needles that are longer than three inches with two needles per cluster. They are similar to the native red pine but have gray bark and a spreading crown. A second black pine on the property died and was cut down last year. ROHS President Bob Muller and I counted 134 growth rings on the stump — meaning this tree was planted around the year 1886. Almon Starr died in 1895.

The remaining black pine might be the only surviving tree planted by a Royal Oak pioneer. It appears healthy, and I wish it an extended long life.

Royal Oak Then & Now

BY JOHN MAURICE, ROHS FACEBOOK EDITOR

The building at the southeast corner of Third Street and Williams has occupied that corner since 1928. For many years, it was the home of the Consumers Power Company (now Consumers Energy), and then it was shared by Consumers and Detroit Edison. Its brick and limestone facade stood across the street from our old city hall, then our "new" city hall until it was demolished earlier this year.



As the home of Consumers Power, it was a regular stop for many Royal Oakers to pay their gas bills. As the building aged, and the idea of what a modern structure should look like changed, the building underwent a major facelift, beginning in 1968. Porcelain and stone panels covered up the stately brick, and the building became an example of the 1970s-era construction style.

Consumers Power used to sell gas-powered appliances right out of this location. An ad in *The Daily Tribune* on February 14, 1963,



boasted that "the merchandise is like new, all top A-1 values!" Consumers eventually shared the space with Detroit Edison when Edison moved from the building just to the south. I'm sure many of us remember bringing our dead light bulbs to Edison to trade them in for free new ones.

When the building was vacated by Consumers and Edison, the building sat vacant for many years with many residents unaware of the beautiful original building beneath the '70s facade. It wasn't until the building was transformed into Lockhart's BBQ in 2010 that we were able to see the building remodeled into a new version of former self. Over the past 11 years, Lockhart's has become a go-to destination in our downtown.

"Now" photograph courtesy of Google Maps.

Looking Back

COLLECTED BY JOHN S. SCHULTZ FROM THE PAGES OF *THE DAILY TRIBUNE*

What was happening in Royal Oak...

40 years ago — 1981

MICK JAGGER MAY BE SINGING "I can't get no satisfaction," but he left more than 72,000 fans more than satisfied at the Pontiac Silverdome on Monday, Dec. 1.

It was a well-behaved crowd that greeted Jagger and the Rolling Stones, one of the few rock and roll bands that surfaced in the early '60s and survived virtually intact, into the '80s.

55 years ago — 1966

PLEASANT RIDGE AND MICHIGAN Highway Department officials apparently will get together and disagree again early next year over potential routes of the East-West Freeway (I-696).

City officials want the department to consider an earlier proposal that Detroit Zoo property be taken for the highway.



Photograph courtesy of *The Daily Tribune*

Investigation Underway for 18 Deaths at Nursing Home

State and county health officials today (Dec. 5) said they are investigating the deaths last month of 18 Royal Oak nursing home residents but are downplaying rumors that an influenza vaccine might be involved.

Robert Laraway, chief of the State's division of health care administration, said he is asking the media "to lay off" speculation that the vaccine, which was given to 13 of the 18 victims at the Oakland Care Center-Sherwood, formally Sherwood Hall, 3030 Greenfield, triggered the deaths. Officials said the deaths occurred between Nov. 4 and 22.

Officials say two to four deaths a month at the nursing home is the normal rate.

A private physician who frequently works with patients at the clinic said, "I've never seen anything like it. It was phenomenal. Patients were dying like flies. Every call was the same — another patient."

Laraway indicated that unfounded reports might scare patients away from a drug "that could do an awful lot of good for them." He said the link between the vaccine and the deaths is "pure speculation."

A four-member investigation team from the State and the Oakland County health departments began collecting data on the 150-bed facility Friday after State health officials received a complaint from an anonymous caller.

60 years ago — 1961

ELEVEN ANTI-SEGREGATION demonstrators — including a Royal Oak youth who was editor of the *Michigan Daily* — were in court today in Albany, Georgia on charges filed after an unsuccessful attempt to desegregate Albany's Union Railway Terminal waiting room.

Nine "freedom riders" — five Negroes and four white persons and two Albany [Movement] Negroes were arrested Sunday on a street outside the terminal on charges of disorderly conduct, obstructing the flow of traffic, and failure to obey an officer.

Police Chief Laurie Pritchett said between 15 and 20 officers and a crowd of nearly 150 persons were on hand when the nine demonstrators arrived aboard a train from Atlanta. The demonstrators went into the waiting room and then left.

Pritchett identified one of the white persons arrested as Thomas E. Hayden, age 22, of Royal Oak, son of Mr. and Mrs. Gene I. Hayden, 1217 East Fourth, Royal Oak. In 1960, Hayden was appointed editor of the *Michigan Daily*, student publication of the University of Michigan. He is a graduate of Dondero High School.

Editor's Note: Tom Hayden attended Dondero High School and served as the editor of The Acorn, the school paper. He graduated in June 1957 and then attended the University of Michigan, where he also served as editor of the school newspaper, and graduated with a bachelor's degree. Hayden was an active opponent to the Vietnam War and one

Continued on Page 11

Ground Broken for New Library

Ground was "officially" broken Saturday morning (Dec. 9) for Royal Oak's new public library.

City Commissioners, Library Board members and librarian Carrie S. Palmer participated in the 5-minute ceremonies a block north of city hall. Mayor William Hayward and Robert Spitler, acting chairman of the board, turned the first official spade of dirt, but the contractor had already started digging last Tuesday.

Spitler said that although the contract hasn't been signed, the West Side Construction Co. of Allen Park, wanted to get as far along as possible before bad weather set in. It is estimated it will take a year to erect the building. The contractor has a letter of intent from Smith and Smith Associates, Royal Oak, architects for the building. The signing is considered a formality.

The building will cost \$850,000 to build and equip. The library site is bounded by Eleven Mile, Second, Williams and Troy streets. Mrs. Palmer announced that \$5,000 has been given anonymously for furniture and equipment for the Children's Room.



Photograph courtesy of *The Daily Tribune*

MAKING A LINE on the site of Royal Oak's new library are Robert H. Spitler, vice-chairman of the Library Board; City Manager Bruce W. Love; and librarian Carrie S. Palmer.

of the Chicago Seven who were indicted for protests conducted at the 1968 Democratic Party convention. He served on the California state legislature from 1982 to 2000. The New York Times called him the "single greatest figure of the 1960s student movement." In 1996, Tom Hayden was inducted into the Royal Oak High School Hall of Fame. Hayden was married to actress and activist Jane Fonda for 17 years. He died in October 2016.

REGULAR GASOLINE was selling four different brand and independent dealers in South Oakland as gas price-cutting continues into its second week. One independent station in Madison Heights was offering regular gas for 19.9 cents a gallon.

70 years ago — 1951

FOUR BIDS WITHIN \$5,000 of each other were opened Dec. 2 by the Royal Oak School Board for the 10-classroom addition and multi-purpose room to the Oak Ridge Elementary School. The low bid submitted on the two-story project was \$220,446.

A FOUR-TO-ONE VOTE by the Royal Oak City Commission ordered the 1952 paving of Thirteen Mile between Campbell and Rochester after a storm of protests was heard over its assessments. Carl W. Forsythe, attorney for the owners of abutting property on the north side of the road, told the commission, "My clients feel that the method of assessment is unfair."

80 years ago — 1941

THE ROW OF 52 MATCHED vase elms bordering the Detroit Zoological Park, perhaps the most perfectly matched trees in the county, has been defaced.

Twenty-five of the trees have been slashed with a hatchet or axe two or three times. While the slashes are not likely to destroy the elms, it will leave them permanently scarred.

Continued on Page 12

Looking Back • Continued from Page 11

90 years ago — 1931

HOPE FOR THE RECOVERY of Mrs. Bernice Jilbert, age 23, 112 South Laurel Street, Royal Oak, who was critically injured Saturday (Dec. 5) in a railroad crossing accident at Marne, north of Grand Rapids, was expressed today by doctors at St. Mary's hospital, Grand Rapids. Her condition was reported much improved.

Mrs. Jilbert, wife of Alfred Jilbert, teacher of manual arts at Royal Oak Junior High School, was the driver of an automobile that was struck by a Grand Trunk passenger train. Her two children, Alfred Jr., age 4, and Roderick, age 1, and her mother, Mrs. Etta Weatherbee, age 58, of Marne, were killed.

WARNING AGAINST SOLICITORS, who are working various "rackets," to dispose of questionable merchandise from door-to-door was issued today by K.G. Smith, president of the Royal Oak Merchants Co-operative association.

Royal Oak jewelers are being misrepresented by one crew, according to J.F. Codling of Codling's Inc. Sales have been reported to Mr. Codling of merchandise supposed to have come from local stores and to be offered at special low prices in order to build up mailing lists.



One woman later made inquiry of Codling's after making a purchase and learned that merchandise supposedly bought at the wholesale price had been sold her at considerably more than the regular retail price. The Royal Oak jewelers are not uniting on any plan of this kind, Mr. Codling said.

Several other schemes of doubtful value are being worked on Southern Oakland county folks, Mr. Smith added. These include shirts, ladies' merchandise and other articles.

95 years ago — 1926

FOUR BOYS PLAYING "HOOKY" from school were surprised Thursday afternoon by a patrolman as they smoked dry leaves in the former Royal Oak country club house on East Lincoln Avenue. A neighbor saw smoke coming from one of the front windows of the empty clubhouse and notified police headquarters.

When the officer entered, he found four badly scared kids trying to scurry out of a rear door. They stopped however when he ordered them to. All kinds of excuses were offered by the youngsters for being away from school. When reprimanded at the police station for smoking dry leaves at such a tender age, they all maintained that dry leaves "didn't hurt anyone."

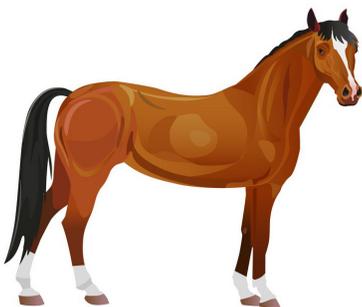
A stern sergeant booked them on the police register along with hardened criminals.

100 years ago — 1921

IN DESIGNING the new Washington school for use of the platoon system in Royal Oak, the local educators are adopting a method of education which school authorities throughout the country believe to be the most efficient ever devised for the training of children in the younger grades.

P.P. Claxton, United States commissioner of education, recommends the platoon system.

The platoon system features the work-study-play plan. It keeps the children busy at one of these three activities during the entire six hours of the school day. (The present school day in Royal Oak schools is five hours. The hour added to the length of the day under the platoon system would be spent in the gymnasium in physical training.) The name platoon is given because the children are divided into two platoons. One of these sections remains in the homerooms — the regular classroom or headquarters of the child — while the other spends its time in the various special rooms until the "grand" change — which occurs twice a day — is made and the two groups change places.



CARL PORTER OF ROYAL OAK at Thirteen Mile Road near Woodward Avenue was brought before Justice John E. Brondige Tuesday (Dec. 27) on a charge of cruelty to animals. Neighbors complained that Porter allowed a horse to stay outside without any protection from the cold weather. Justice Brondige released him on his personal recognizance until Monday when it will be decided what disposal will be made of the horse. Porter pleaded that because of unemployment, he was unable to provide for the animal.



Photographs by Mike Frentz

By Mike Frentz, ROHS Treasurer

As you can see in the photos, our collection of Royal Oak history has grown tenfold since we acquired the Northwood Fire Station as our permanent museum. Unfortunately, due to a shortage of room in the museum, many items and any future pieces we receive have to be stored off-site. Consequently, we would like to erect a shed behind the museum to house the non-essential items such as those we use for exhibits, shows, displays and the annual car show.

We need your help.

Our goal of \$9,000 will allow us to erect a Tuff Shed storage unit. Tuff Shed makes quality sheds that are aesthetically appealing. This



project will be funded solely through your GoFundMe donations. Any amount you can donate will help us to accomplish this goal. A permanent plaque will be installed on the shed with a list of those who contributed.

Donations can be made through GoFundMe, the Royal Oak Historical Society Museum and Frentz & Sons Hardware at Main Street and Catalpa. Thank you in advance for your contribution.

Check Out Our Website and Like Us on Facebook

Keep up to date on Society and museum happenings on our website — www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.com — and by following our Facebook page.

Missed reading a newsletter? You can find past issues on the website!

Founded in 1939, the Royal Oak Historical Society is a private, non-governmental organization of volunteers. We collect, display and preserve information and objects of Royal Oak's past for current and future generations.

Throughout the year we present various special exhibits and provide a venue for other groups and individuals to display their collections.

Donations to the Royal Oak Historical Society are gratefully accepted.

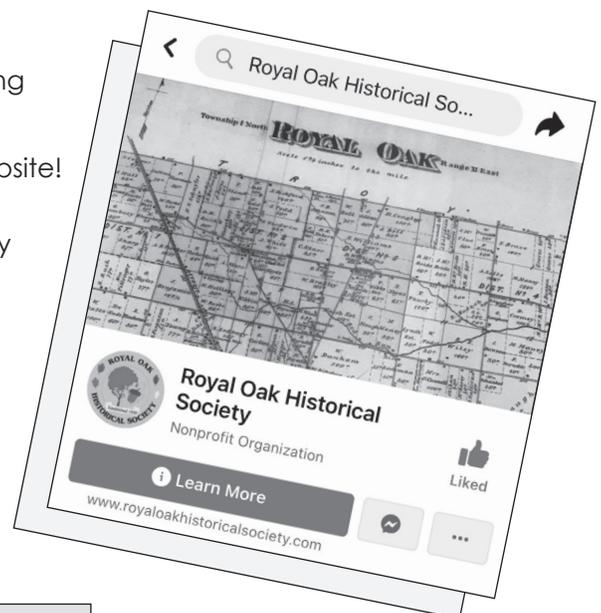


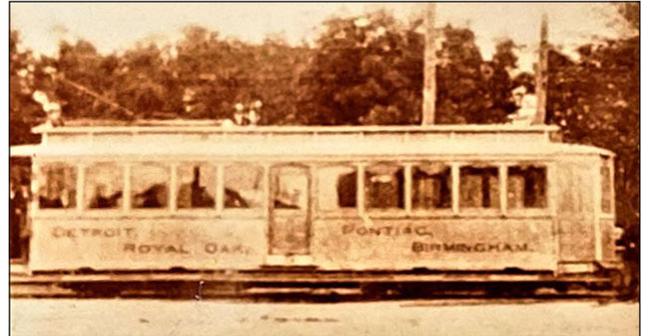
Photo Game answers: All four photos are from Royal Oak Middle School.

Rudolph Wendland: Popcorn Entrepreneur

By Don Drife, ROHS volunteer

Rudolph Wendland is a forgotten Royal Oak entrepreneur. In 1913, at age 13, Wendland was earning an average of \$7 a day selling popcorn to trolley car passengers traveling through Royal Oak on the Detroit United Railway, known as the DUR. This was before Henry Ford's \$5 a day wage and well above what the average adult earned.

Rudolph's dad Charles worked for the DUR as a section hand. A sister, Martha, and his three brothers, Frank, Walter and Robert (his twin), are listed in the 1910 census in which the family name is spelled "Wentland." The 1920 census lists the family name as "Wendland," with a "d" not a "t." The only children listed are Rudolph, whose occupation is given as a cook and Robert as a carpenter. Brother Frank was killed at the close of World War I, and the Royal Oak American Legion post is named in his honor. Neither Martha nor Walter are listed in the 1920 census as living in that house.



The June 20, 1913, *Royal Oak Tribune* ("On the Alert: Here is a busy lot of merchants that Royal Oak Village folks hardly realize they have") reported that Rudolph "kept his mother, sisters and all his aunts popping corn." His nickel a bag monopoly continued until he boasted to his friends about his earnings. "Presto! Change!!! Next day, nearly a dozen boys were in the business ..." Their earnings then ranged from 50

cents to \$4 a day. Trolley stops were not lengthy. The kids moved speedily, exchanging nickels for bags of popcorn. Several teams of brothers formed partnerships, allowing one of them to remain constantly on duty. They split the profits equally. Some boys also sold newspapers to add to their income.

I marvel at the spirit of these boys. This was an age when making a living involved creativity.



The Detroit, Royal Oak, Birmingham, Pontiac streetcar and its interior.



Photograph courtesy of Google

Thousands gather at an open house to view the Bamlet Avenue home as part of a promotion during the Builders, Realtors and Better Homes Show in 1927. The house was given away in a contest the final night of the show to the Stocks.

Stock House • Continued from Page 3

A broad frame of wood surrounds an inner arched entry door while the door itself features multiple panes of leaded glass. A circular stairway leads to the second floor. Its handrail is wrought iron curving gracefully at the first level, and decorative panels line the wall on the other side. Flooring throughout the house is of hardwood, and of terrazzo where appropriate.

The house has 2,248 square feet of living space with four bedrooms, two full baths and a large living room. There is a detached garage at the back of the property with such special features as central cooling and ceiling fans.

Victor Stock, the original owner, won the house at the 1927 Builders Show, by guessing the number of nails in a jar. Victor and his wife, Emily, and their daughter Marjorie Jo, resided in the house at the time of the 1930 U.S. census. Emily and Victor lived in the house until the early 1980s. In the front yard, he planted a linden tree from the seed brought over to this country by his grandfather.

Orson Starr House

This fall our ghost tours will resume and can be scheduled by contacting Into The Afterlife Paranormal or the Orson Starr House Facebook page.

The Orson Starr House is located at 3123 N. Main Street, one block south of Thirteen Mile Road. The house is owned by the city of Royal Oak. 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 pioneer 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 to all events; however, donations are always welcome.



ROHS President Bob Muller and our new Photo Game editor Don Drife wrote the following booklets, which are for sale at the museum and online for \$5 each:

- *Growth of the Village and City of Royal Oak*
- *Indian Trails through Royal Oak Township*
- *The Interurban*
- *The History of a Piece of Land* (additional coauthor: Theodore G. Vickers)

Don is also the botanist for the Royal Oak Nature Society and has written a book about wildflowers.



History at Your Fingertips

For a presentation on how Royal Oak became a city, go to royaloakhistoricalsociety.com and see Bob Muller's video entitled "The Growth of the Village and City of Royal Oak."

In it, Bob takes us on a journey of the 13 steps of the City of Royal Oak's annexation from Royal Oak Township between 1836 to 1957.

Warm Up at Fall Soccer and Football Games in a Royal Oak Commemorative Sweatshirt



The Royal Oak Historical Society Museum has reproduced a popular sweatshirt from Royal Oak's 75th anniversary.

It's available for purchase at the Museum, Frenz & Sons Hardware and online at the Royal Oak Historical Society website for \$24.





ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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ROYAL OAK
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**Make your check payable to: Royal Oak Historical Society
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Dues also are payable online at royalokhistoricalsociety.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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