



ROYAL OAK

Historical Society

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The Washington Theatre, circa 1966. Photo courtesy of The Daily Tribune

Recollections from an Older 'Kid'

by Bob Muller, ROHS President

The most personally annoying thing about the COVID-19 pandemic is that I now seem to be referred to as "elderly." I am older than I was a minute ago, but to be elderly you need to be much older than me. Although I'm in my 70s, I guess I'm not a kid anymore. Last issue I wrote about those who lived during the first 100 years of Royal Oak's history, asking others to write about their memories of the second 100 years. Well, I am old enough to remember Royal Oak in the mid-20th century, so maybe I should be the one to start.

What was Royal Oak like in the eyes of a 10 year old in the late 1950s? Royal Oak then was the northern edge of the suburbs. Today, we are almost the dead center of metro Detroit's population — a big change in 60 years. There were many folks in my neighborhood who hunted. Many times after work, they grabbed their dog and older sons and drove just north of 15 Mile to hunt pheasants. They would be back in under an hour with several birds, and we always got some tail feathers as



Our annual Memorial Day Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser has been postponed due to the Coronavirus. We hope to hold this important event later this year. Check our website or watch your e-mail for future updates.

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Recollections from an Older 'Kid' *Continued from Page 1*

they cleaned them. My neighborhood was by Whittier School, roughly 11 Mile to Gardenia, Main Street to Campbell. Whittier has now been torn down and replaced by houses.

Our house was on the corner of Blair and University — a perfect location. First, it was walking distance to downtown Royal Oak and its three movie theaters: the Main, Royal Oak, and Washington, where Stagecrafters is today. For 25 cents, I could get a ticket — two movies, the trailers, and a cartoon. To put 25 cents in perspective, our next-door neighbor once gave me a quarter for shoveling her walk; however, my mother made me give 15 cents back. Almost every week, several of my friends and I would go and spend the afternoon being entertained. I'm still a fan of movies — better in theaters than on my TV.

The second advantage to my location was especially important to me; there were still small areas of undeveloped land — and getting into the woods was what I wanted to do. At 10 years old, a vacant lot full of trees was big enough to seem like a wilderness. I could catch small animals like frogs, toads, salamanders, crawfish, pollywogs, dragonfly nymphs, land snails, and snakes to bring home and keep in a jar to study. Very near downtown there was a vacant lot at Fairgrove and Chambers that now has a small apartment complex on it. We captured land snails there; dozens could be picked in just a few minutes.

The woods at the back of Oakview Cemetery were a great place. The workers would chase us away if we walked in the entrance, so we ran through someone's yard on Gardenia and climbed the fence. The big draw there was that under every log on the forest floor, there were five or six red-backed salamanders. Occasionally, we would try to get to the lily pond. It had painted turtles in it, although we never were able to catch them. The large reservoir in the cemetery's northeast corner had 10-inch-long goldfish in it. I remember attempting to catch one, but I never succeeded.

The best place was what we called Campbell Woods, an area between Campbell and Stephenson, north of Gardenia. What I thought as a boy was a massive area was actually only about five acres. We caught crawfish, garter snakes, leopard frogs, and American toads. I would come home with wet, muddy shoes, not making my mother very happy. In the winter the area flooded, and we could ice skate through the trees. When they were building St. Dennis Catholic Church, where the Kroger superstore is today, they bulldozed the area. It is on one of the post-glacial beach ridges in our city — pure sand. The area flooded and the water was two to three feet deep — crystal clear with a clean sand bottom. We went swimming, of course, walking in with our clothes and shoes on.

These small pieces of "wilderness" were gone by the time I was out of high school in 1966. But even their demise was used by my friends and me. When a new house was being built, after the workers went home, it became a playground. The framing was better than the monkey bars on the playground. Today, every time I drive by a new house with the area fenced to keep people out, I recall my world as a 10 year old who lived near downtown Royal Oak in the late 1950s.



The empty streets of downtown Royal Oak during the COVID-19 pandemic. Washington and Fourth streets. Photo by Bob Muller

Social distancing and stay-at-home directives are something that the American people have been through before. Because the last time occurred 102 years ago during the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918, there are a few people still alive today that were there then, but they wouldn't have been old enough at that time to remember it and tell us. Instead, we rely on what people wrote down about their experiences. Please take a moment during this stressful time and write down what you are going through. We could keep these remembrances on the computers at the museum to put this in context for people 100 years from now. Stay safe.

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.

Herrold House

160 Hendrie Boulevard, Tudor Revival Built in 1925

This remarkably large Tudor Revival house is perfectly positioned on a curving lot that showcases its rich architectural style. Originally situated on two and half acres, it now consists of less than an acre. The steeply pitched roof is clad in slate shingles. Half timbering exists on the front vertical walls, topped by a section at the end of one eave that is done in a checkerboard pattern, alternating from brick to masonry squares. The remaining construction is brick. All of the windows are in a small rectangular paned style from the first through the third floor — that was designed as servants' quarters.

A patio of slate slabs leads up to the front door. A sheltered entry is surrounded by large timbers, and beyond that is the heavy front door with its leaded glass portion at the top.

The house has 6,936 square feet of living space with 15 rooms, of which eight are bedrooms; there are five full baths, one half bath, and five fireplaces. A separate two-car garage is in back. In addition, there is another

secondary structure on the property. It is a single-family dwelling of 920 square feet, a half-story structure with four rooms and one and half baths. It, too, is built of brick and was originally referred to as a carriage house.

Norman A. Starr, a well-known developer in the area, built the house in 1925. Among his projects was the original Royal Oak High School on Main Street, later to become Royal Oak Junior High when the new Royal Oak High School was built on Washington Street.

Amenities were included that we take for granted today but were innovative then, such as air conditioning, central vacuums,



sprinkler and security systems. A novel feature was a phone booth just inside the front door. Throughout the house, Starr employed a variety of hardwood flooring for both utility and beauty.

Some of the original and unique highlights of the interior are the stained glass front door and the circular wrought iron stairway at the top of which is a skylight of leaded glass, featuring night-lights. The floor of the music room is of wood

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Curator's Corner

by Muriel Versagi

Have you visited the Museum's website lately? Our "Renaissance Man" Mike Frentz (you know he can do anything!) set up a new computer system, keeps our website current, and installs new fluorescent lights wherever we may need them. Well, he has posted several new items for your viewing pleasure.

Did you know you are able to go shopping for Royal Oak history and books by local authors in our gift shop? We have several new local history booklets as well as one written in 1914, by a local men's group encouraging folks to come and "live in the country" here in Royal Oak. There are also postcards, etchings, prints, and maps, including a reprinted 1872 map. All these items make great gifts for your family historian.

Did you know you can listen to short stories about local history and watch a couple of videos on our website? And read stories about growing up in Royal Oak as well as articles in *The Daily Tribune*?

You are also able read about our upcoming Friday speaker series and purchase tickets. You can pore over the 1817 maps, courtesy of the patience and handiwork of Bob Muller, our current Historical Society president.

On our website we have photos of Royal Oak kit houses with floor plans, and you can take a virtual tour of one of the exhibits in the museum. The Royal Oak Historical Society newsletters from 2016 to today are there, too. The history of the Society and of the Museum is also posted. We have a page that tells you how and what you might volunteer for at the Museum. I'm so pleased that one of our new volunteers, a young woman named Lillian Jacobs-Yager, researched and wrote the article on page 7.

And lastly, there is the listing with the links to all the wonderful Royal Oak businesses that have supported us for the last 10 years at our location in the former fire station on Webster. Please show your support and patronize them after life returns back to "normal."



(a)

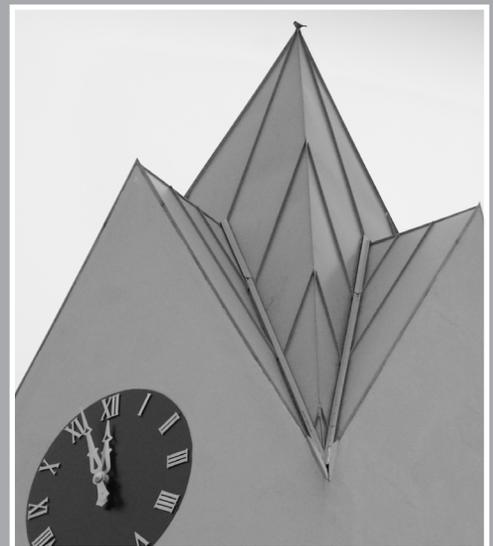


For this issue's Photo Game, here are some Royal Oak buildings that previously had different uses than they do now.

Do you know what these buildings used to serve as?



(b)



(c)

Answers on Page 7
 Photos by Bob Muller

Remembering Norman A. Starr, Royal Oak Builder

by his grandson, Michael D. Harveth

Editor's note: The N.A. Starr Construction Co. was the premier contractor for many Royal Oak landmark buildings, such as: Wayne Oakland Bank on the southwest corner of Fourth and Main (now jewelry store Metals in Time), the Washington Square Building, the original section of the former Michigan Bell building at Sixth and Williams, Royal Oak Middle School (formerly Dondero High School), and Longfellow, Oak Ridge, Parker, and (original) Northwood schools, among others. Norman Starr frequently worked with Royal Oak architect Frederick D. Madison. Starr was not related to Orson Starr (the bell maker) family, according to local historian and author Owen A. Perkins. Michael D. Harveth's memories of his grandfather were originally published in the historical society newsletter in fall 2008. The article is edited here for space.



Norman A. and Margaret E. Starr, c. 1925.
Photos courtesy of Michael D. Harveth

In the 1890s, when he was about 14, my grandfather, Norman A. Starr, came to America from Germany via Canada. He started a construction company in 1913 and married Margaret Ellen Griffin of Grand Ledge, Michigan. She taught at St. Mary's School along with her sister Rose. My grandfather built the school (now Payroll One), so perhaps that is how they met. Norman and Margaret Ellen had two daughters — my mother, Margaret Alice (she went by Alice), and Dorothy Rose. The Al-Dor Manor at Sixth and Washington (now Urbane Apartments) was named for the girls.

In 1925, he built the home at 160 Hendrie. At the time, the nearly 7,000-square-foot home was the largest in Royal Oak. It had central air conditioning, central vacuums, security and sprinkler system, phone booth, and an indoor fountain, along with nine bedrooms, six bathrooms, and seven fireplaces. Frederick D. Madison designed the home. Tapestries from Germany adorned the walls, and German craftsmen carved the oak doors. The "S" that is still on the chimney stood for "Starr."

The family lived quite lavishly on Hendrie. My mother said a chauffeur drove them to St. Mary's School every day, and there were cooks and a butler. My mother and her sister later went to Catholic Central in Detroit for high school and to the University of Detroit. Great Aunt Rose never married and lived with Norman and Margaret Ellen. She lived to about age 90.

My grandfather Norman was on the board of directors of the Wayne Oakland Bank (which he built). The Great Depression was really tough on him. As a bank officer, he was one of a few not to pull out his money when there was a run on the bank, believing that this would help keep the bank solvent; however, he thereby lost it all. There was no FDIC then, and bank officers had to use their own money as collateral.

Later, he went into commercial real estate with an office in the Penobscot Building in Detroit. He moved to the Boston-Edison district, probably to be nearer to his office. He built a large home on Boston Boulevard, and I remember walking from there to the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament for Mass as a boy when I visited him. When Norman died in 1951 at age 66, he was laid out in the 600-square-foot foyer of his home. My grandfather only had a ninth-grade education but worked very hard and was a good man.



The "S" for "Starr" on the chimney.

Herrold House *Continued from Page 3*

parquet; Pewabic tile was used for the fountain built into the sunroom. The house was designed to display large wall hangings or paintings, and wall sconces are hardwired into many rooms as well as lights for pictures. There are also many secret compartments located throughout the house, which was common in larger homes built in that era.

The name "Garland" was well known throughout the Detroit area, and an eight-burner stove by that manufacturer still exists in the kitchen. Large houses like this were equipped with "butler pantries;" this one still has its original sink as well as linen storage drawers, counters, and cabinets for dishes and flatware.

The house was later owned by Mary Louise Herrold.

Royal Oak Then & Now

by John Maurice, ROHS Facebook Editor

If you've lived in Royal Oak for any period of time, you are familiar with the many viaducts that carry the trains through the middle of our city. The tracks actually pass over roads at no fewer than 11 locations in the city from 11 Mile to 14 Mile.

The number of viaducts became watery obstacles during the August 11, 2014, flooding that rendered our city impassable from east to west. Trust me, I had to hop in a canoe to get from my parents' house on the west side of the Webster viaduct to my house on the east side as the Webster viaduct was flooded to within a few feet of the top!

Most Royal Oak residents know that the railroad tracks used to run along Woodward Avenue until the early 1930s when they were moved to their current location in the downtown. What you may not have thought about is how the roads came to pass under those train railways. The east/west traveling roads existed prior to the current alignment of the railroad tracks. North of downtown Royal Oak, for all of the overpasses to be built, the existing roads had to be blasted with dynamite and further excavated in order to dip down underneath the tracks. Our "Then" photo shows the excavation process under way on Webster Road from just east of Glenview looking west toward Maplewood. Prior to this work, Webster was relatively flat from Woodward to Crooks; the excavation altered the elevation of the road between Maplewood and Oliver.

At the right side of the "Then" photo, you can see houses that still exist at 2516 and 2517 Maplewood. Although the view of those houses is now blocked by newer houses on Webster, the pine trees evident in the photo still tower high today. To the left side of the "Then" photo, four houses at 2429 through 2443 Ferncliff can be seen with no other houses blocking their view to the east in the early days of the Northwood subdivision.



THEN: Digging "the dip" on Webster Road for the Grand Trunk Railroad overpass, circa 1930.
Photo courtesy of Royal Oak Historical Society Museum



NOW: Webster and Glenview as it is today, looking west.
Photo by John Maurice

Continued on Page 7



Photo courtesy of Royal Oak Historical Museum

Father Charles E. Coughlin and Social Justice

by Lillian Jacobs-Yager, ROHS volunteer

The Royal Oak Historical Society recently received a complete collection of *Social Justice*, a weekly publication founded and published by Fr. Charles E. Coughlin, pastor of the Shrine of Little Flower Catholic Church. The periodical ran from 1936 to 1942 and was created as an extension of Coughlin's famed radio broadcasts that sought to spread his message of anti-communism, anti-capitalism, isolationism, and eventually anti-Semitism.

Coughlin was born October 25, 1891, in Hamilton, Ontario. In 1926 he was assigned to establish a parish in Royal Oak. The same year, he began a radio show, "The Golden Hour of the Little Flower," speaking about issues of the "common man." By 1930, the program was broadcast over CBS radio to 90 million listeners a week.

Coughlin was one of the most influential people of his time. The weekly editions of *Social Justice* sold out across the country. However, in July 1938, Coughlin started to publish installments of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a fabricated anti-Semitic text that described a Jewish conspiracy of world domination.

Coughlin was now supporting the views of Hitler and Mussolini, claiming that Nazism was a "defense against Communism" and a "defeat of the international bankers." These views ultimately led to his downfall. After America's entry into World War II — a move Coughlin opposed — his radio voice was silenced. He was branded as a pro-Axis sympathizer; the National Association of Broadcasters cut his radio show, and soon after, the U.S. Post Office banned the delivery of *Social Justice*.

In 1942 it all came to an end. Because of Coughlin's increasingly pro-Axis sentiments and a federal investigation, Cardinal Edward Mooney, Archbishop of Detroit, ordered Coughlin to cease writing about any political activity and return solely to his duties as a parish priest. Coughlin had no choice but to obey, later retiring his post at the Shrine in 1966. He died on October 27, 1979.

PHOTO GAME ANSWERS:
 (a) Madrid Hotel, South
 Washington and Sixth
 (b) St. Mary's High School,
 Lafayette and Seventh
 (c) Church at Lafayette and Sixth

Then & Now Continued from Page 6



Placing dynamite ready for blowing pavement to grade Glenview Avenue to new level of Webster Road, circa 1930. Photo courtesy of Royal Oak Historical Museum

All roads had to be sloped down to dip under the viaducts for the railroad tracks. That meant not only the roads that went directly under the viaducts, but also the cross streets had to be regraded. With the Grand Trunk Railroad just a huge long mound of dirt in the background of this photo, Glenview Avenue is prepared to be dynamited to the level of Webster. The dips made under viaducts are more evident on roads like Webster, 11 Mile, and Normandy, than on, say, 12 Mile or 13 Mile.





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