



ROYAL OAK Historical Society

MAY 2021 • ROYALOAKHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM

ROYAL OAK CENTENNIAL EDITION

100 Years Ago: When Royal Oak Became a City

By Bob Muller, John S. Schultz and John Maurice

A century ago, the world had gone through the first World War, the Spanish flu pandemic was over but not before it had killed 50 million people worldwide and 675,000 in the U.S., and Prohibition, banning the manufacture, sale, or distribution of alcoholic beverages, was now the law of the land.

On the positive side, women had gained the right to vote, America had become a world power, and the nation was moving into a period of economic prosperity — it was the “Roaring 20s.”

The 1920s was a decade of change, when many Americans owned cars, radios, and telephones for the first time. The cars brought the need for more and better roads. The radio brought the world closer to home. The telephone connected families and friends.

On March 4, 1921, Warren G. Harding was sworn in as the 29th president of the United States and Calvin Coolidge as vice president.

In the spring of 1921, the first radio baseball game was broadcast between the Pirates and Phillies from Forbes Field over Westinghouse KDKA in Pittsburgh.

In June, the nation was all abuzz with Babe Ruth, who had hit his 138th career home run, breaking the record that was held by Roger Connor for 23 years.

In late June, 100 years ago, Royal Oak residents voted on a proposal to turn the village into an incorporated city. Prior to the official vote on June 27, the *Royal Oak Tribune* published a front-page editorial on June 24 in favor of the proposal, headlined: “Royal Oak, a City or Country Town.”



Top photograph courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society. Bottom photograph by John Maurice.



North side of Fourth Street looking toward Main Street in 1921 (top) and 2021 (bottom). See the *Then & Now* article on Page 7 for more about this block.



Are we flippin' or not?
See Page 2 for news
about the Memorial Day
Pancake Breakfast.

Continued on Page 4

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 Hours: Tues., Thurs., Sat., 1-4 p.m.

See our Covid-19 protocols at
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CURRENT EXHIBIT
 Royal Oak's Centennial
 March 6 through July 17

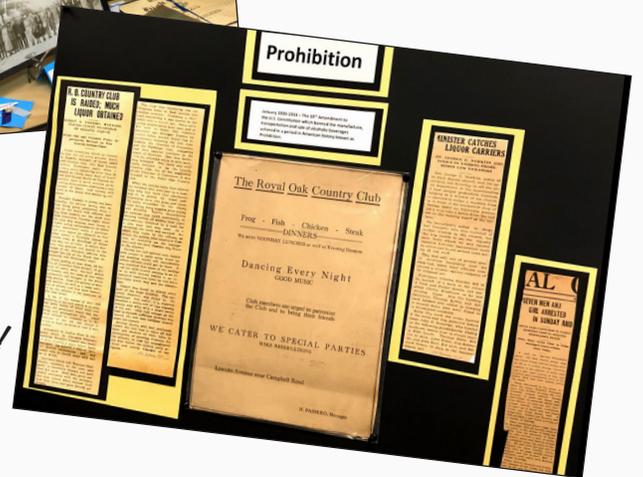
Royal Oak's 100th Birthday is June 21, 2021!



Don't miss our exhibit
**Royal Oak Becomes a City:
 The First 40 Years of Growth**

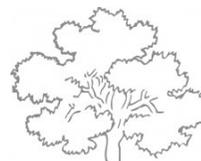
now open at the Museum.
 It's a wonderful display of images, objects, and memories from Royal Oak's early days through the 1940s and 50s.

*Happy Birthday
 to the
 City of Royal Oak!*



Pancake Man is Sad!

Our annual Memorial Day Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser has been postponed again this year due to the Coronavirus. This is an important event for the Historical Society that generates revenue to operate the Historical Museum, so any financial support is much appreciated. Check our website (royaloakhistoricalsociety.com) for future updates on holding this event at another time as well as plans for future events.



Acknowledgments

Thank you to the Royal Oak Historical Society board members and volunteers who compiled facts for the "By the Numbers" timeline, including: Deb Anderson, Pat Burean, Ellen Kehoe, Mike Matthews-Pennanen, Trish Oliver, John S. Schultz, Johanna Schurrer, Bill Sullivan, Tom Toggweiler, and Libby Walker. A special thank you to Judy Davids, community engagement specialist at the City of Royal Oak, for her research. We'll share more interesting number facts in the next issue.

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.

McCormick–Collins House

303 East Bloomfield Avenue

Arts and Crafts Style Bungalow Built Circa 1920

On February 23, 1916, Joseph P. McCormick, president, and James E. Lawrence, secretary, of the EMLO Park Land Company of Michigan Corp., presented a proposed plat map to Oakland County for approval. This surveyed tract comprised an area within Royal Oak Township. The map boundaries were Starr Road (now 13 Mile Road) south to LaSalle Avenue, and North Main Street to Rochester Road. McCormick kept one of the lots on Bloomfield Avenue for his own use.

Sometime in 1919, McCormick contracted with Syd Block to design his Arts and Crafts bungalow, and building started between 1920 and 1924. McCormick, the "M" in EMLO, and his wife, Maude, only lived there a few years. With the stock market crash of 1929, he lost his ability to maintain the residence, and Orland C. "Mike" and Ora Collins purchased it. Collins was

Continued on Page 8



100 Years Ago • Continued from Page 1

"The Tribune, after careful study and investigation of the proposal for city incorporation, is convinced the plan is both desirable and necessary for the best interests of Royal Oak.

The sum of nearly \$50,000 that it is estimated Royal Oak will save will pay for many local improvements. It is a third of the entire year's budget.

Highland Park tried for years to become a city and was blocked only by the selfish interests of Detroit. It finally succeeded when the citizens arose and refused to be shackled any longer.

Let Royal Oak remain the leader in this township, not take second place.

Royal Oak showed the second largest rate of growth in Michigan in the last census. Muskegon Heights, which led us, has not hesitated to grasp the advantages of city incorporation. Let's not lag behind.

We cannot stand still. We must progress steadily and sanely or fall behind.

Royal Oak, let's go!"

On July 1, 1921, after the vote, the headline on the front page of the *Royal Oak Tribune* was, "Royal Oak City Succeeds Village." And the article stated:

"The City of Royal Oak will replace the village of Royal Oak as a result of the special election Monday, June 27, 1921, when the proposition to incorporate the village as a city was carried by a vote of 279 to 84. Twenty years ago, the village had a population of 468; in 1910, the figures were 1,071; and in 1920, the census bureau reported a total population of 6,007."

From its early beginnings, Royal Oak grew slowly, but by 1920 horses began to disappear as farms made way for houses as thousands of people continued to move into the region seeking jobs in the automobile industry.

In 1900, the village of Royal Oak was a long distance from Detroit; there were miles of farms before getting to Royal Oak. A 1914 booklet entitled "A Problem Solved" was distributed to convince those in the region to buy a house in rural Royal Oak instead of the big city of Detroit. It told of the fields, woodlands, and streams surrounding the homes being built as a great place for your kids, with space to run and explore. You could have a garden and keep chickens.

"Beautiful natural groves of forest trees, magnificent oaks, maple and elms are in and around the village and there is an abundance of fresh air and sunshine," the booklet touted. It went on to say: "We have all the advantages of the city's theaters, stores, parks, river and lake rides. We are nearer to Palmer Park than most Detroit people, and only a few minutes longer to other centers of attraction. Electric lights and telephones in addition to all the other

Continued on Page 5



Photograph courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society
Prospective residents could ride the Frank F. Vilas Bus Line from the big city of Detroit to explore the charms of Royal Oak, circa 1923.

BY THE NUMBERS		Population	Registered Voters	Schools		Students
	1921	6,007	1,088	2 (within village boundaries)	 Union School (built 1902), Washington and Eighth and Eighth (Lincoln)	2,701 (1924)
2021	59,277 Highest: 86,238 (1970 census)	45,928	8 Highest: 24 (1970)	 Royal Oak High (1913), later Clara Barton, Main at University	5,000 Highest: 20,000 (1970)	

advantages mentioned, give one all the city's physical conveniences."

"Among the other desirable features of living in Royal Oak over living in Detroit, is that in Royal Oak you have elbow room — a chance to breathe. Here you have room to stretch yourself and talk and let children romp and play the piano and phonograph without fear of disturbing your neighbors, or them overhearing what you say."

The Interurban could easily get you to a job at the Ford Motor plant, and Royal Oak was closer to it than Detroit was. We have a reference to families riding the Interurban out of Detroit and getting off at Woodward and Catalpa to camp for the summer along Red Run, fishing for trout and swimming at this location.

In 1900, the village of Royal Oak was a small community of 468 people, but by 1920, there were more than 6,000 residents. The booming auto industry lured people from across the country for the jobs. There were stories of people living in tents while their house was being built. Farms were being subdivided into lots for homes, and houses couldn't be built fast enough.



Photograph courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society
On May 9, 1923, George Weitzel, Charlie Crampton, and J.M. Beddow stand in a snowstorm outside the Royal Oak Savings Bank at the northwest corner of Fourth and Main streets. As the hanging sign notes, the Royal Oak Township Library was located in Room 12 on the second floor of the bank.



Royal Oak in the 1920s was a boomtown, with street after street filling with homes on small lots. A *Detroit Free Press* article from 1925 featured an interview with Arthur Bassett, who related that Red Run was on his parents' farm, which was just north of Royal Oak. He fished and swam in it many times, but now it was a health hazard. 1921 Royal Oak surface drains were the sewers of the day and were polluted. The roads were dirt. If they were clay, it was impossible to drive through the mud in the spring. If sandy, you could get your car stuck in the dry summer as if in snow. Paving the roads and developing

Photograph courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society
J.F. Codling Co., haberdashers and jewelers, at the northeast corner of Main and Fourth.

Continued on Page 6

BY THE NUMBERS	Hospitals		Doctors	 Royal Oak doctor
	Year	Count		
1921	0	Royal Oak General Hospital was open from 1928 to 1954 on the fourth floor of the Washington Square Building at Washington and Fourth.	8	
2021	1	William Beaumont Hospital at 13 Mile and Woodward opened in January 1955.	+1,000 (family medicine) +1000 (internal medicine)	



Packing up to move the nursery to Beaumont in December 1954.

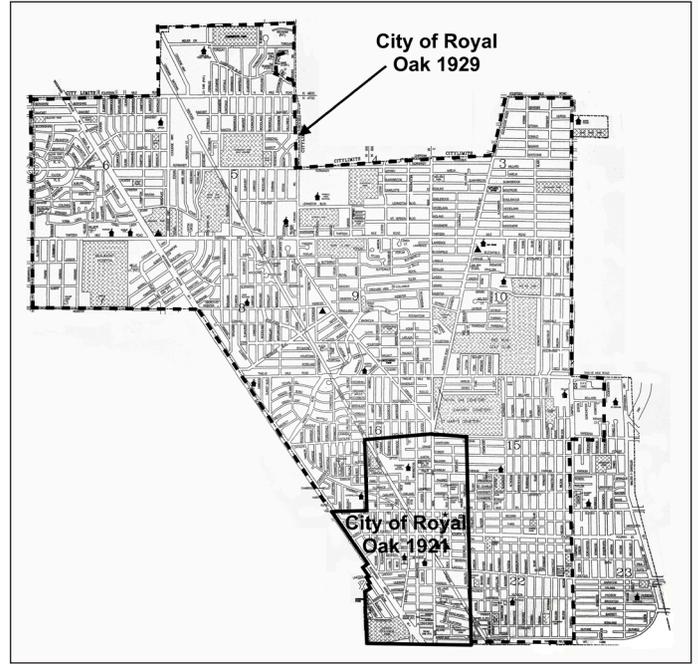


The Sharpe farm made way for Beaumont in the early 1950s.

100 Years Ago • Continued from Page 5

sewer systems were the priorities to develop the area. Bassett, along with a man named Vinton, developed the Vinsetta area, named from a combination of their names. By the end of the 1920s, the city had grown exponentially.

As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of Royal Oak as a city, it's fascinating to look into our past and imagine what life was like in those days. A simpler time to be sure, but also a time of tremendous growth as the entire southeast Michigan area, pulled along by the burgeoning automotive industry, grew throughout the years from a generally rural economy in the early 1900s to the expansive, modern metropolitan area we live in today. If you stop to take a look at some of our historic structures, you may hear whispers from that bygone era. I'm sure that more than a few of us would like to go back to that time, when you might be apt to hear the sound of a Model T or even horse hooves on Main Street. Ours is a beautiful city and has been for 100 years. With all the new that we see being built around us, we still have a lot of the old to appreciate and cherish.



Map by Bob Muller

Growth of the city of Royal Oak from 1921 to 1929.



See Royal Oak's Growth Online

For a presentation on how Royal Oak became a city, see Bob Muller's video entitled "The Growth of the Village and City of Royal Oak." Available on our website at royalokhistoricalsociety.com and on our Facebook page.

Photograph courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society
Woodward Avenue, looking south from Ten Mile Road, circa 1930.

BY THE NUMBERS	Police Officers		 First police station, Williams Street south of Third (roughly where Lockhart's is), 1926-1953.	Firefighters		 Fire hall 1915-1953, NW corner Main and Sixth. Police shared some rooms.	Fire Stations	
	1921	8 (1925)		5 (plus volunteers)	1			
2021	79 Highest: approx. 93 (2011)	61 Highest: 91 (1978)	3 Highest: 4 (1980)					



Circa 1930s



Circa 1930s

Royal Oak Then & Now

BY JOHN MAURICE, ROHS FACEBOOK EDITOR



How much has Royal Oak changed in the last 100 years? To look at our downtown in 1921, one would see stores run by some of the founders of our city. Hardware stores, drug stores, law offices, and general stores would have been common at that time. But also there would have been private residences still on our downtown streets, some converted to retail space as the need arose, later to be demolished and replaced by more modern storefronts.

Our first "Then" photo shows West Fourth Street between Center and Main streets. Smith-Crampton Hardware, which stood at the northeast corner of Center and Fourth for many years, is in the foreground. That store first opened in 1916, when Royal Oak was still a village. It would stand at this location until 1946, when it was demolished for a more



modern facility. Between Smith-Crampton and the alley was a recreation or pool hall. This location housed many businesses throughout the years but would also fall victim to the wrecking ball in 1946. The building on the far end, at the northwest corner of Fourth and Main streets, still exists today and is one of the signature buildings of downtown Royal Oak. You can also see the "railway crossing" sign in the lower left-hand corner. In 1921, the railroad tracks occupied the same space downtown as they do today, but back then, just north of downtown, they would swing out to the west toward Woodward Avenue along the path of where Sherman Drive runs today.

Continued on Page 8

BY THE NUMBERS	Churches		
	1921	10	 <p>1911 – First Congregational Church was at NE corner of Third and Center.</p>
2021	29	 <p>1913 – The German Evangelical Lutheran Church building still exists at the NE corner of Lafayette and Sixth.</p>  <p>1915 – First Methodist Church built its third building at the current site on Seventh Street.</p>	



The second “Then” photo shows the intersection of Main and Fourth streets looking north. At the left edge, the south end of the photo, you can see the former public library, bowling alley, Maison’s Restaurant, and Royal Oak Department Store housed in the Masonic Lodge building. Eagle-eyed viewers may notice the pillars of the former Royal Oak Savings Bank building just past the department store. North of Fourth Street, still on the west side of Main, you’ll see the Waldorf Restaurant and the Royal Theater. Our city had traffic signals back then, too, although they were a little different than what we’re used to these days. The trolley used to run right down the middle of Main Street before turning west on Fourth — the tracks are visible in this photo.



Moving across to the east side of Main at the northeast corner of Fourth, you can see one of those old residential conversions, which housed the Royal Oak Bargain Store in the 1920s. For years, this building housed the J.F. Codling clothing and jewelry store. Following Main Street to the north, we see a candy store, bakery, bank, and dry goods store. If you look very closely under the bakery sign, you may be able to spot the familiar arched doorway that served as the entryway to Hermann’s Bakery for many years. This same arch is visible in many historic photos of downtown Royal Oak and can be useful to help find your bearings within these old photos. Thankfully, many of these structures on the block between Fourth and Third streets still exist today.

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

Further to the north, at the northeast corner of Third and Main, the Sullivan Block building can be seen. For the time being, our old city hall currently stands to the east of this building. You’ll notice that back in the early days of our city, there were many trees lining Main Street, mainly north of 11 Mile Road. At the very top of the photo in the center, you will see the flagpole that stood in front of the original Royal Oak High School, known by many of us as Clara Barton Junior High, which was located at University and Main streets until the 1970s.

McCormick–Collins House • Continued from Page 3

the superintendent of the Royal Oak Water Department. The couple lived there for several decades, and in 1994 the estate sold the property to Alan Kaniarz and Susan Ash. Kaniarz is a cabinetmaker and does historic restoration work.

With the characteristic long, sweeping, gabled roof, a central dormer and a centered front door, the deeply incised front porch extends from one side of the house to the other. In the middle, there are wooden porch columns that were replaced by Kaniarz in 1995. Massive and imposing cobblestone piers support the porch corners, and the house is constructed of brick, cobblestone and lap siding. A side porch was added in 1997. New front, side and back doors were designed and built by Kaniarz that same year. The wooden windows, however, are original to the house.

In keeping with the Craftsman concept of a connection between the building and the earth, the property in front of this house is terraced, gently rising to meet the structure. In the corner of the front yard is a tapered, square lamp that Mr. Kaniarz built. It is constructed from old brick pavers that he obtained from St. Aubin Street in Detroit.



A square stone lamp sits in the front yard.

Looking Back

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

What was Happening in Royal Oak in 1921

January 1921

Curfew Ordinance Commission Plan

Royal Oak is to have a new curfew ordinance and is to enforce it. This was decided by the village commission at its meeting Monday night at which time it conferred with representatives of the Parent Teacher Association, the Royal Oak Woman's Club and the League of Catholic Women.

George A. Dondero, village attorney, was instructed to draw up an ordinance which shall replace the one now on the books which shall fit conditions as they are today. The old ordinance was passed in 1912, when there were few means of carrying it out.

The curfew ordinance, however, is only one part of the program of the scores of men and women interested in the development of better community conditions for Royal Oak boys and girls.

February 1921

W. 12 Mile Talks Separate Village

Much enthusiasm was expressed at the mass meeting of 500 residents of West Twelve Mile road community held in Loone's theatre Thursday night, when it was voted to take steps toward incorporating a separate Village.

Passengers Cut in Derailment

Several passengers on a Woodward-Royal Oak car were cut about the face by flying glass at 4:40 Saturday afternoon when the car left the rails and crashed into the curb at Fourth street and Washington avenue. The automobile of J.R. Sparks was partially wrecked when the streetcar struck its plow into the "innards" of the sturdy little auto as it immediately rested by the curb at the side of the Sparks Brunswick Shop.

Royal Oak police, who investigated the accident and decided it unavoidable, said that the Grand Trunk operator located at the Fourth avenue tower, believing the switch engine was backing down the yard toward Fourth avenue, threw the derail which caused the streetcar and trailer to leave the track.

Fined for Selling Liquor

Joe Levine, Royal Oak township farmer, was found guilty of illegally selling liquor. Levine was fined \$100 and costs with a jail sentence up to 30 days as an alternative. Levine paid the fine.

March 1921

Predicts Bright Future for Royal Oak

That Royal Oak has a wonderful future in store for the home builder and will be the hub of a great industrial district a few years hence was the prophesy made by J. Lee Baker, vice president of the Detroit Real Estate board, to its board at its first weekly noonday luncheon held Monday.

"Royal Oak's growth will be even more tremendous."

Mr. Baker predicted for Royal Oak the greatest growth of any Detroit suburb, save Dearborn, which he believes will experience a growth unequalled anywhere if the plans for development made by Henry Ford are carried out.

Zoological Society Offers 100 acres for Park Site

Detroit Zoological Society has offered to Detroit City Council its park of 100 acres at Woodward Avenue and Ten Mile Road. Support of the park by Detroit, Royal Oak, Highland Park, Hamtramck, Birmingham and Pontiac is proposed. The zoological society emphasizes the value of a zoological park as a means of public instruction

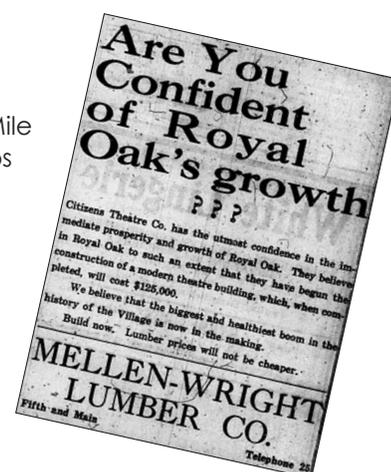


Image courtesy of The Daily Tribune digital archives at the Royal Oak Public Library



Continued on Page 10

Looking Back • Continued from Page 9

and amusement. It is creating a fund for purchase of more ground and expects within a few months to double its acreage offer.

April 1921

New Play House to Break Ground

Ground will be broken at Washington and Fifth Saturday (April 2) for the proposed theatre to be erected by the Citizens Theatre Company, a new corporation financed entirely by local capital and capitalized at \$125,000.

The theatre, which will have a seating capacity of 1,400, will be 68 feet wide and 330 feet deep. The stage will be of ample size to accommodate any road show that would possibly include Royal Oak in its itinerary. The theatre will be equipped with a pipe organ and a large orchestra pit. Directors of the company have announced an offer of \$50 to the most appropriate name for the new theatre.



Photograph courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society, circa 1930

May 1921

Installation of Gamewell System Will Start Soon

Work on the installation of Royal Oak's new police and fire telegraph signal system will be begun in a few days. Manager Beauvals has ordered the first material from the Western Electric Company and the Standard Underground Cable Company and has been empowered to draw up a contract to cover the services of a superintendent of electricity.

This superintendent of electricity will lay out and superintend the construction of the new Gamewell system and will have charge of its maintenance. He will also superintend other electrical work and assume such duties as the village manager may determine. His salary will be \$250 per month. His hours will be from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. with half an hour for lunch except for Saturday, when the hours will be from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. He will have 10 days leave with pay and will be permitted to do other electrical work, if he desires, on his own time.

June 1921

State Telephone Company Installs New Local Office

For the purpose of meeting the increasing demand for telephone service in Royal Oak and Ferndale, the Michigan State Telephone Co. has completed arrangements for the installation of additional equipment. The company has leased the entire second floor of the Mellen-Wright Lumber Co.'s block at the southwest corner of Fifth and Main streets and will move its central office into the new quarters as soon as possible.

A new switchboard, with 13 operators' positions, necessary racks and frames for carrying the cables into the building and a complete new power plant will be installed to replace equipment now in use. There are about 1,000 telephones in use in Royal Oak now.



Photograph courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society, 1921

July 1921

High School Site to Include Block

Extension of the Royal Oak High School site to include the entire block bounded by Main Street, University Avenue, Troy Street and Pingree Boulevard is the plan for School District No. 6, adopted Monday night (July 11) at the annual meeting held in the school auditorium. The board was authorized to acquire the 120 x 120 lot at Main Street and Pingree Boulevard and the 60x120 lot at Pingree and Troy, and to open negotiations for the three pieces of improved property necessary to complete the block.

August 1921

Electrical Storm Does Big Damage

Wednesday night's combination electrical and wind storm put the city into darkness and caused damage totaling several hundred dollars in Royal Oak and vicinity.

Continued on Page 11

Looking Back • Continued from Page 10

The storm broke at 7:30 o'clock, increased to cyclonic proportions and subsided shortly before 9 o'clock. During the height of its intensity, the wind was raging at the highest velocity probably ever experienced in Royal Oak. Mammoth trees were uprooted, outbuildings were completely overturned and many deposited several feet from the former locations. Main Street was strewn with merchants' sign boards, a big plate glass window was blown out of the front of the Square Deal garage. Woodward and Devonshire avenue windows were shattered in numerous homes and business places, and a touring car was carried by the wind from the parking place on West Fourth Street across Main Street and up on the sidewalk in front of the Codling store.

September 1921

5 Year Old Girl Walks to City

When Marie Drake, age 5, did not return from the Oak Ridge school at noon on Tuesday, her mother, Mrs. Lewis Drake, was worried. Mrs. Drake had tried to meet the child but missed her. Inquiries showed that the child had left school but had not been seen since. It was her third day as a school pupil.

The sheriff's office at Pontiac and the Royal Oak police were notified; neighbors and Boy Scouts searched the woods near the Thirteen Mile Road; auto parties were out in all directions. No trace of the child was found. The parents were nearly frantic.

Early in the evening, a Detroit police officer came to Royal Oak on another errand. He heard about the missing girl and informed local officers that a child answering the Drake girl's description was at the Detroit detention home. The parents were informed and immediately left for Detroit in the automobile of Dr. Irvine R. Hayhow. They found their daughter safe and sound.

Marie had been picked up late in the afternoon at Woodward and Adelaide avenues, just north of Grand Circus Park, by a patrolman who noticed that the child seemed to be uncertain as to where she was going. She told her parents that she walked the entire distance, more than 12 miles. Apparently, the child had no conception of where she was going.

October 1921

60,000 Population Here in 10 Years

Royal Oak will have a population of 60,000 in 1931, according to the conviction of census statisticians and other experts familiar with the cause and effect of population and industry.

"If this is possible, what is the Royal Oak Real Estate Board doing to meet the demands which will be brought about by this probable exigency?"

L.C. Batdorff, secretary of the Michigan Real Estate Association, hurled this statement and questions at some 40 members of the Royal Oak Real Estate Board assembled Monday night in special session in the Avalon Tea rooms.

November 1921

Dondero is Winner

George A. Dondero, elected first mayor of Royal Oak, has been the last 11 years village attorney of Royal Oak and president of the school board. He was chairman of the city charter commission and is senior member of the legal firm, Dondero & Hoxie.

There were a total of 1,088 votes cast in the first city election. Mr. Dondero beat George B. Hartrick, 624 to 444. Nearly 800 persons were unable to vote because they had failed to register.

December 1921

Will Distribute Anti-Toxin

Royal Oak will have two distributing centers for anti-toxins for diphtheria, which will be furnished free by the state board of health after the first of the year. Wilkinson & Boughner, druggists, received an appointment this week to distribute the anti-toxins. The anti-toxins will be furnished to physicians who will report diphtheria cases.



Photograph courtesy of the Royal Oak Historical Society, 1923



Image courtesy of The Daily Tribune digital archives at the Royal Oak Public Library



ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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ROYAL OAK
Historical Society

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Individual: \$20 ____ Family: \$30 ____ Supporter: \$50 ____
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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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