



# Royal Oak Historical Society

## Fall 2008

[www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.com)

*Mark Your Calendars!*

### **Royal Oak Historical Society 69<sup>th</sup> Annual Dinner**

**Thursday, October 16, 2008**

**Royal Oak Elks Club**

2401 E. Fourth Street at Stephenson Highway

*(Please leave parking places close to the entry for those who are handicapped.)*

**5 p.m. Social Hour**

**Cocktails and beverages available. Cash Bar. Soft Drinks \$1.**

**6 p.m. Buffet Dinner/Dessert**

*Same excellent chef and menu - something for everyone!*

*Servers will be available to carry plates to tables, if needed.*

*For more information, see Pages 3 and 4.*

*Message from the president*

## Upcoming events include annual dinner, town halls

**By JAY DUNSTAN,**  
Historical Society President

I want to take this opportunity to remind everyone that the Annual Royal Oak Historical Society Dinner will be held on Thursday, October 16, 2008, at the Royal Oak Elks Club. Social hour begins at 5 p.m. with dinner served at 6 p.m. Royal Oak City Commissioner Carlo Ginotti will be our emcee that evening. Join us as we honor Gloria Harper and Pete Mancour — this year's Bowman and Morrison Award winners respectively. Make sure to get tickets beforehand

as this is a sellout almost every year. If you don't yet have tickets contact either the Wurdocks at 248-547-5714 or myself at 248-990-8210. Admission is \$30 but it jumps to \$35 after October 7 or at the door.

Our town hall programs for 2008-2009 will commence on November 12 at Royal Oak Middle School. The program that evening will be "Tracing the History of the Royal Oak Middle School Building." The speaker will be retired teacher Ken Noble, who spent 35 years teaching in that building. Ken is a great speaker and a great teacher — I know as he was my

*(Continued on Page 2)*

## **Three New Books Available on Royal Oak History**

“Twigs and Acorns, Plus - A Book Of Royal Oak History”

*Second Edition, 2008, 420 pages, hardbound, 8½x11 inches, \$40*

“Walking Tour of the Royal Oak and St. Mary Cemeteries”

*Second Edition, 2008, 12 pages, 7x8½ inches, \$5*

“To Walk That Old Indian Trail”

*Second Edition, 2008, 12 pages, \$5, 7x8½ inches*

Books are available at the Royal Oak Historical Museum and at Frentz Hardware,  
or from David G. Penney, Ph.D.

P.O. Box 749, Beulah, MI 49617; e-mail davidpenney@comcast.net

Or call: (Office) 231-882-0204 or (Cell) 904-468-0401

*All proceeds go to the Royal Oak Historical Society Museum*

### **Message from the president**

*(Continued from Page 1)*

economics teacher at Dondero High School 30-some years ago. Then, on January 14, 2009, Bob Muller and Ted Vickers will present “From Goodwin’s of Royal Oak to Tenhave Woods, the History of a Piece of Land.” Bob has given me some insight on this program and it will be very interesting. Except for a few unique turns of events the spot where Royal Oak High School (formerly Kimball) now sits could look very different today. Details on both these programs will be shared at the dinner.

Progress continues to be made for our move into the Webster Fire Hall. Royal Oak architect Frank Arvan has completed drawings for the facility and shortly specs will be made available for contractors to bid on the project. Handicapped-accessible ramps and a bathroom that meets ADA requirements are the two major hurdles. The Community Block Grant we were awarded earlier this year will come into play very soon. We still hope to make our move sometime before the holidays. There has been much behind-the-scenes work done already on the facility by some very hard-working volunteers. We plan on recognizing these people at our annual dinner.

David Penney will have three of his publications for

sale at the annual dinner. “*Twigs and Acorns — A Book of Royal Oak History*,” “*Walking Tour of the Royal Oak and St. Mary Cemeteries*” and “*To Walk That Old Indian Trail*.” All three books are in their second edition. All proceeds from the sales of these books go to the Royal Oak Historical Museum. David will also give us a brief preview of his latest book “*My Royal Oak — Images From The Twentieth Century*.” David will also teach the fall version of his Royal Oak history class on October 15 at Royal Oak High School. Details can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

Lastly, I’d like to thank all the hard-working members of the Royal Oak Historical Society Board. This is an organization that in the past had only one event a year — the annual dinner. Through the hard work of our board members — both past and present — we now hold numerous events each year. Besides working to preserve Royal Oak history, we also hope to preserve the sense of community that is evident in our city today. Events such as town hall meetings, pancake breakfasts and corn roasts give everyone a chance to get out and interact with their neighbors. I would also invite anyone who might be interested in sitting on our board to contact me directly. Sometimes it’s a lot of hard work but in the end the fruits of our labors are there for future generations of Royal Oak residents.

Thanks,

Jay Dunstan

**THE ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESENTS**

# **THE 69TH ANNUAL DINNER**

**THURSDAY OCTOBER 16TH, 2008**

**AT THE ROYAL OAK ELKS CLUB**

**LOCATED AT FOURTH STREET AND THE I-75 SERVICE DRIVE**

**OPEN AT 5PM--DINNER AT 6PM**

**\*\*MORRISON AND BOWMAN AWARDS\*\***

**TICKETS--\$30 INCLUDING MEMBERSHIP**

**(\$35 AFTER OCTOBER 7TH OR AT THE DOOR)**

**TICKETS ALSO AVAILABLE AT SULLIVAN FUNERAL HOME,  
KINSEY-GARRETT FUNERAL HOME  
THE LADYBUG SHOPPE, DECADES AT THE FARMERS MARKET  
PHONE ORDERS CALL 248.547.5714 OR 248.547.8310**

**SOCIETY BOOSTER PAGE RECOGNITION--\$10  
(YOUR NAME IN THE SPECIAL BOOSTER SECTION OF  
THIS YEAR'S PROGRAM--DEADLINE OCTOBER 8TH,2007)**

**PLEASE CONSIDER AN AD IN THIS YEAR'S PROGRAM.  
GREAT FOR YOUR BUSINESS OR CONVEYING YOUR  
THOUGHTS REGARDING THE ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY.**

-----DETACH HERE-----

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**NAME**

---

**STREET ADDRESS**

---

**CITY**

**STATE**

**ZIP**

\_\_\_\_\_ **DINNER TICKETS @ \$25 each-----SUB TOTAL \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO THE ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**MAIL TO ROHS c/o Jay and Patty Dunstan, 111 East Parent Avenue, RO MI. 48067**

# BUY AN AD IN THE 2008 ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY DINNER PROGRAM!!!



This year we have added a ROHS Boosters Page. For \$10 you can become an ROHS Booster and have your name added to the page.

You can also voice your personal (Congrats to the ROHS!!) or business messages. Ads are available in three different sizes. Fill out the form below and return by October 6th, 2008 for inclusion.

\_\_\_\_\_ Booster names @ \$10 each-----Subtotal\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 1/4 Page Ad(s) @ \$25 each-----Subtotal\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ 1/2 Page Ad(s) @ \$50 each-----Subtotal\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Full Page Ad(s) @ \$100 each-----Subtotal\_\_\_\_\_

Submit materials by October 6th, 2008

Make checks payable to The Royal Oak Historical Society

For questions either e-mail or call Jay Dunstan

[jdunstan@ameritech.net](mailto:jdunstan@ameritech.net) 248.547.8310

ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY...111 EAST PARENT AVENUE...ROYAL OAK...MICHIGAN...48067

[www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.com)



A



B



C

## PHOTO GAME

*Play the Photo Game. As Royal Oak Historical Society Board Member Bob Muller walks around town, he spots interesting architectural details with his keen eye and tries to stump you, Dear Reader. Can you identify which downtown Royal Oak buildings have these unique architectural details? (Answers can be found on Page 7.)*

## Messages

Dear Friends of the Royal Oak Historical Society:

Not a day goes by that Tom and I do not give thanks and praise for our friends in the Society. You have gone above and beyond to care, encourage and support us through this time of Tom's illness. We have had cards, flowers, elbow grease and the most delicious and memorable food through your kindness and love. We cannot ever thank you enough. Since this is not an everyday illness and many have asked questions we decided to send you this message, so you can better understand the struggle that we share.

It is really difficult to think back and try to pinpoint exactly when great concern set into Tom's health problems. He had been having trouble with arterial fibrillation of his heart for several years, First, it was off and on, and then it became more often and disturbed more of his everyday activities. Several times, doctors tried procedures to try and correct the problem as it began to take a greater toll on his heart and general health. Finally, the end of October last year, he had a seven-hour heart ablation that put the heart back in rhythm. Things went along well until we realized he was having difficulty breathing and was

exceptionally tired.

By April of this year a visit to Beaumont turned into a 2 1/2-week stay for what appeared to be pneumonia. Soon it was clear it was something more. Following an open lung biopsy, the report came, IPF (interstitial pulmonary fibrosis). There is much to learn about this condition. It is aggressive, and a cure will someday be found, I am confident. Many studies and dedicated professionals are working to find answers. We have had the pleasure of meeting some of these at U of M Hospital as well as Royal Oak William Beaumont.

We appreciate all the care and concern shown to our family these last months. For many years, Tom has truly been dedicated to the success of a memorable museum. We continue to be proud of all that has been done to make this happen for Royal Oak.

Thank you again for all your kindness.

Dian and Tom Wurdock

Dear Editor:

I loved Tom Wurdock's story about the chickens, combining history and humor ("*Mutt and Jeff*," Spring 2008). I hope he has more of those yarns to share. We all need more laughs.

Lois Lance

# Remembering Norman A. Starr, Royal Oak Builder

Submitted by his grandson,  
**Michael D. Harveth**  
(now of Tulsa, OK)

*Editor's Note: As the owner of N.A. Starr Construction Co., Starr was the premier contractor of the 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 William, Royal Oak Middle School (formerly Dondero High School), Longfellow, Oak Ridge, Parker and Northwood elementary schools, among others. He frequently worked with Royal Oak architect Frederick D. Madison. An Ohio native, he was not directly related to Orson Starr (the bell maker) or his descendants (the brick and tile manufacturers or the seed farmers), according to local historian and author Owen A. Perkins.*

In the 1890s, when he was about 14, my grandfather Norman A. Starr came to America from Germany via Canada to make a better life. He started a construction company in 1913 and married Margaret Ellen Griffin from Grand Ledge, Mich. Her family was from Ireland. My grandmother Margaret Ellen taught at St. Mary's Catholic Elementary School, along with her sister Rose. My grandfather built St. Mary's Elementary School (now Payroll One); perhaps that's how they met. Norman and Margaret Ellen had two daughters — my mother Margaret Alice (she went by "Alice") and another daughter Dorothy Rose. My grandfather built the Al-Dor Manor at the northwest corner of Sixth and Washington (now Urbane Apartments) and named it after Alice and Dorothy.

In 1925, he built his family's home at 160 Hendrie Blvd. (*This home was featured on the Royal Oak*



*Alice, Norman and Margaret (above, circa 1945); Norman and Margaret (right, circa 1925)*



*Woman's Club 1997 and 2004 Home and Garden Tours.)* At 7,400 square feet, this Tudor Revival was then the largest home in Royal Oak, and it may still hold that distinction. It had central air conditioning, central vacuums, a security system, a sprinkler system, a phone booth and an indoor fountain. The home has 20 rooms including nine bedrooms, six bathrooms and seven fireplaces. Architect Frederick D. Madison, with whom my grandfather frequently collaborated, designed it. Huge tapestries from Germany adorned the walls. German craftsmen carved the oak doors.

The family lived quite lavishly on Hendrie. My mother told me they had a chauffeur who took them to St. Mary's school every day. They had cooks and a butler. My mother and her sister eventually went to Catholic Central at Woodward and Belmont for high school and later attended University of Detroit. Great Aunt Rose lived with Norman and Margaret Ellen on Hendrie. She never married, and when she retired from teaching at St. Mary's, she opened Griff's Grill in Pontiac. She lived until about

age 90.

Grandfather Norman served on the board of directors for the Wayne Oakland Bank (which he also built). The Depression was really tough on him. As a bank officer, he was one of the only people who did not pull out his money when there was a run on the bank. He left his money in believing that this would help keep the bank solvent. However, he thereby lost it all. Banks did not have FDIC then, and bank officers had to use their own money as collateral.

Later, he went into commercial real estate and had an office in the Penobscot Building in Detroit. He moved to the Boston-Edison district in Detroit, probably to be closer to his office. He also built his large home on Boston Boulevard — I remember walking to the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament to attend Mass when I visited him as a boy. When he died in the early 1950s at age 66, he was laid out in the foyer of his home. The foyer in and of itself was 600 square feet. He only had a ninth-grade education but worked very hard and was a good man.



David Pressley waves from the Historical Society's Pancake Breakfast at the Farmer's Market in May. (Photo by Bill Sullivan.)

### Royal Oak Historical Society Board Members

Jay Dunstan, President  
 Pete Wurdock, Vice President  
 Pete Mancour, Past President  
 Tom Wurdock, Second Vice President  
 Patti Dunstan, Secretary  
 Andrew Arends, Treasurer  
 Muriel Versagi, Curator

Gloria Moran Harper  
 Joan Coulton Larson,  
 Corresponding Secretary  
 Karrie Thom Mahrle  
 Dorothy Moonen  
 Robert Muller  
 Trish Oliver  
 Barry Sullivan  
 Christy Smith  
 Marge Smith  
 Phil Smith Jr.  
 William J. Sullivan  
 Sandy Wilkins

#### Directors:

Deb Anderson  
 Nancy Briggs

### Royal Oak History Class Offered

**“TOUR THROUGH ROYAL OAK’S PAST”:** Join local historian Dr. David Penney, as he takes you on a trip through time to discover Royal Oak’s past. Explore the city’s heritage from its beginnings in 1819 to its present-day status as one of the largest cities in southern Oakland County. Learn interesting facts about your community and the lives of those who made Royal Oak what it is today. Offered through Royal Oak Continuing Education at Churchill Community Education Center (707 Girard). To register, call (248) 588-5050 ext. 204 or register online at [www.rosd.k12.mi.us/schools/churchill](http://www.rosd.k12.mi.us/schools/churchill)

The Oakland County Historical Commission presents

### **ENDANGERED SCHOOL BUILDINGS: *Plan Ahead or Face the Wrecking Ball!***

*Case studies by five veterans of the struggle to retain community school buildings.*

September 20, 2008 \*\* 8 a.m.-noon \*\* Maxfield Training Center, Farmington

Information: 248-625-8181

*Co-sponsors: Farmington Historical Society, Farmington Historical Commission, Governor Warner Mansion, Oakland County Pioneer & Historical Society and Oakland County Planning & Economic Development Services*

### **ANSWERS TO BOB MULLER’S PHOTO GAME — See Page 5 :**

*Editor’s Note: Coincidentally, all three of the buildings featured in "Bob Muller’s Photo Game" this issue were built by Norman A. Starr. Also in this issue is an article on Page 6 remembering Mr. Starr by his grandson Michael Harveth, now of Tulsa, OK.*

Photo A- Door of Metals in Time, originally the Guardian Bank of Royal Oak at the southwest corner of Main and Fourth streets (circa 1922).

Photo B- Door of the original Michigan Bell Company building (circa 1926 — the original phone exchange building) bordering William, Troy and Fifth streets. Now AT&T. This building features brass elevator doors and a marble-faced foyer. They really knew how to build ’em in the Roaring 20’s!

Photo C- Doorway of the Washington Square building (circa 1928).



Royal Oak Historical Society  
707 Girard  
Royal Oak, MI 48073  
248-542-7449  
[www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.com)

**\*Royal Oak Historical Society Membership Application\***

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please check:

Individual: \$10.00 \_\_\_ Family: \$18.00 \_\_\_ Donor: \$25.00 \_\_\_

Benefactor: \$50.00 \_\_\_ Seniors: 60+: \$8.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Mail with your check to Royal Oak Historical Society, 707 Girard, Royal Oak MI 48073

PLEASE CHECK YOUR MAILING LABEL FOR THE DATE  
YOU LAST PAID YOUR DUES. THANK YOU.