



# Royal Oak Historical Society Spring 2011

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

**Mark Your Calendars!**

**Memorial Day Pancake Breakfast — Monday, May 30**  
**Farmer's Market**  
**7 a.m.-noon**

*See Page 3 for More Details.*

*Message from the president*

## Historical Society welcomes volunteers

Dear Members,

When I took the office of President of the Royal Oak Historical Society, I had great expectations and a mission of the change we needed to make so we could become solvent and remain successful. Past President Jay Dunstan has worked very hard to help with this transition. My goal was and is to make every person of every age come to know, be proud of and contribute to the preserving of the great heritage of our community. The statement "*It takes a village*" applies to the Royal Oak Historical Society. We need your help to make the Historical Society a success. There are many things to do and too few people doing them. We need your help, and each of you has a special talent. We need the "worker bees," "the thinkers and planners" and the "financial supporters." Please feel free to call me personally, and let me help you decide where you can help.

I want to take a few moments to thank some of

our volunteers. Muriel and Frank Versagi and their group of loyal volunteers made our WWII exhibit outstanding! We had over 1,000 visitors to the exhibit with over 50 families contributing their family photos and artifacts. Pete Mancour has worked tirelessly using his construction experience to help solve structural problems at the museum, getting us the best price and figuring out how it will be paid for. The new front doors — to seal out the cold and seal in the heat — should be completed very soon. Watch for more repairs and improvements to help insulate the building and bring the heating bill to a more manageable amount. Let's not forget Mike Frenz of Frenz and Sons Hardware. He shows up every week to help with the computers and devotes time, materials and experience to solving problems that arise with maintaining an old building.

*(Continued on Page 2)*

All proceeds go to the Museum

# Royal Oak History Books for Sale

By David G. Penney, PhD

“My Royal Oak: Images From the 20th Century” (2008), the new book on Royal Oak history that is heavy on historic images of our town, is a must for anyone who loves Royal Oak. Printed on glossy white paper, it contains 227 photographs on 128 pages and is 7x10 inches. The text consists of more than 17,000 words about the “old” town most of us remember in fragments. This is a very personal book, with many of my memories of growing up in Royal Oak in the 20th century. The cost is only \$25.

Everyone should have “Twigs and Acorns, Plus” (2007), the new edition of the much-loved scrapbook-style presentation about our town since its founding more than 180 years ago. It contains newspaper articles, previously unpublished letters, essays, etc. and photos of early Royal Oak. At \$40, the book is 425 pages, hardbound and fully indexed.

If you are going to explore historic Royal Oak or St. Mary cemeteries, you must have the new twelve-page edition of “Cemeteries Walking Tour” (2007), containing photographs and the locations of thousands of people interred in the two

cemeteries arranged in a surname index, available for \$5.

“To Walk That Old Indian Trail” has been a very popular booklet over the years, originally prepared for the 75th anniversary of our city in 1996. In 2007, the new twelve-page edition contains far more information on Native American traces in Royal Oak and features a Chief on the cover. At \$5, it is a bargain.

All the books are available at Frentz’s Hardware, as well as at our beautiful new Historical Society Museum.

As with all of my other books, all proceeds go to the Museum. Purchasing these books is simply a GIFT to the new museum.

Coming soon is a small book to be published soon on Northwood Subdivision (tentatively – “Northwood Subdivision and the Clawsons”), which will include the No. 2 Fire Station (site of the new Historical Museum), the old and new Northwood Schools, the Clawson family, GTW Railroad, the First Congregational Church and the Shrine of the Little Flower Church, etc. Contained inside will be essays on each subject and a number of rare historic photographs.

Watch for it!

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## Message from the president

*(Continued from Page 1)*

Those are just a few of the volunteers who have pledged their commitment to this wonderful museum. You can be part of this too. We have many needs, large and small. I know that there is the right opportunity for you!

So please stop by the museum and talk to Muriel, call me at 248-224-3690 or email me at

KarrieLeeM@aol.com.

Phil & Marge Smith are coordinating the volunteers for the Memorial Day Pancake Breakfast at the Farmer’s Market. If you could help with set-up on Sunday, serving or taking tickets at the breakfast or even cleanup afterwards, please give the Smiths a call at 248-547-8967.

**Thank you.  
Karrie Mahrle  
President**

# Memorial Day Pancake Breakfast

*brought to you by the*

**Royal Oak Historical Society**

**Monday, May 30th from 7AM until Noon**

at the **Royal Oak Farmers Market**



**\*\*\*ALL YOU CAN EAT\*\*\***

**Adults \$6 Children 10 and Under \$3**

**Come Join Us Before Or After The Parade**

**Rain Or Shine!!**



*Sponsored by*

**The Holiday Market Royal Oak and The Hollywood Markets**

# Civil War Soldiers Of Royal Oak Township

## The Briggs Family Sons George W., James W., Benjamin A. & John Henry

### Researched and Contributed by Barbara K. Randau

During the Civil War era many young men from Royal Oak Township enlisted with the Union Army, but the Zebedee Briggs family of the Township sent four of their five sons to fight — only two would return.

The Briggs family ancestors, early settlers in Massachusetts, migrated in the early 1800s to New York where one son, Joshua, and wife Lorina became parents of a son Zebedee (1811-74). By 1850, he had migrated to Michigan, as the Zebedee Briggs family is found in U.S. Census Records from 1850-70 residing in Royal Oak Township. Census Records tell us that Zebedee, a farmer, and wife Ann Maria (Haynor) became the parents of eight children — five boys and three girls. His four oldest sons would become soldiers in the Civil War.

Son George W. (1842-63), was found in the 1860 Census, age 17, listed as living in the township with the William M. Parker family — a prominent family in Royal Oak history. Mr. Parker was a farmer, and one would suspect that George, perhaps for financial reasons, was working on the Parker farm rather than living at home. (It

was not unusual during this period for an older child in a family to live and work outside his or her own home to help with family expenses.) He enlisted in Company D, Michigan 22nd Infantry Regiment in 1862 at age 20 and was wounded at the battle of Chickamauga Sept. 20, 1863, and died on the 27th of September 1863.

The oldest son, James W. Briggs (1839-63), enlisted in the Union Army in 1862 at age 23, also in Company D, Michigan 22nd Infantry Regiment. The Briggs Family Bible records, “James W. Briggs Aged Twenty-four years Six months and Five days was killed at the battle of Chickamauga September 20th, 1863.” His Civil War pension file indicates that his mother Ann was to receive his war pension beginning in 1865.

Benjamin A. Briggs’ (1846-1901) Civil War Record has him enlisting in 1864 at age 18 in Unit 1 Light Artillery Company C and mustering out in 1865 at Detroit, MI. He had entered Harper Hospital July 5, 1865, and according to records, he was honorably discharged July 11, 1865. The 1870 Census shows Benjamin, having survived the Civil War, married, and living near his father and working as a carpenter. His wife, Mary E.

Briggs, received his war pension in 1883 under his status as an “invalid” and in 1901 as his “widow.”

John Henry Briggs (1844-92) is most likely the John H. Briggs that was in the 8th Michigan Cavalry according to U.S. Civil War Records. John, according to Family Bible notes, moved to Ludington, Mason County, Michigan, where he died in 1892 and was buried there.

The youngest son, Francis A. (Frank) Briggs (1855-aft 1910), seems to have remained at home during the Civil War period. He is found in the 1880 Census living with his mother. He married sometime after 1855, lived in Farmington, and was a farmer with five children according to the 1910 Census.

Research tells us that the Zebedee and Ann Maria Briggs family contributed dearly to the Civil War cause — having two sons perish at such an early age. Briggs Family Bible records indicate that the father Zebedee died of lung fever at “sixty-three years, one month, and nineteen days at his residence in Royal Oak, Oakland County, Mich. on the sixth of May A.D. 1874 and is buried in Troy Oakland Co. Mich.” This burial note is debatable as he and his wife are both

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## Civil War Soldiers

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listed in the Royal Oak Cemetery records as buried there.

Mother Ann Haynor Briggs, Zebedee's wife, died at her home in Royal Oak in January 1899. Her death notice states that she (they) lived in Farmington, Southfield, Birmingham, Troy and Royal Oak.

It is uncertain whether the two cemetery monuments to George W. and James W. Briggs located in the Royal Oak Cemetery are their actual gravesites or rather monuments to their lives and to their service to their country during the Civil War.

Sources: *Ancestry.com - Civil War Records, Ancestry.com - Family Tree Records, Ancestry.com - U.S. Census Records, Family Search.org - Records, Chickamauga & Chattanooga National Military Park* -<http://roadsidegeorgia.com/site/chickamauganmp.html>.

### Briggs Family buried in Royal Oak Cemetery

Zebedee Briggs - May 6, 1874 - father  
Ann Maria Briggs - January 27, 1899 -  
w/o Zebedee

Benjamin Briggs - September 11, 1901 -  
s/o Zebedee & Ann

Mary Elizabeth Briggs - 1935 - wife of Benjamin  
George W. Briggs - 1863 - s/o of Zebedee & Ann -  
memorial monument

James W. Briggs - 1863 - s/o Zebedee & Ann -  
memorial monument

*A former elementary teacher, Barbara Randau has lived in Royal Oak with her husband, Charles, since 1964. She has always been interested in history and worked with curators at The Henry Ford & Greenfield Village in the late 1980s helping to inventory their collections in preparation for computerizing gathered data regarding the collections. She began doing genealogical research 10 years ago on her family as well as on the girls who stitched the historic needlework samplers she has collected for 30 years. Barbara is a former vice president of the Oakland County Historical Commission, a past president and current member of the Royal Oak Historical Commission, past chair of the Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee, current chair of the Roundtable of Royal Oak Historical Organizations, and is one of the authors of the Roundtable book "Royal Oak Images: Yesterday's Charm-Today's Treasures."*

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**Assistance needed in getting gramophone in working order:** The Royal Oak Historical Commission has acquired an early gramophone that we hope to be able to play during some Starr House open houses. We are looking for anyone who has knowledge of these early machines, including care and maintenance. It operates with a hand crank and uses tubes rather than discs to produce the sounds. Not surprisingly, it did not come with an owner's manual! If you can help or know of someone who can, please call Karen Crawford at 248-542-1774.

**The Orson Starr House Guild** cares for the Michigan Farmhouse circa 1845 at 3123 N. Main Street, Royal Oak, one block south of 13 Mile Road. Additional parking one block south at Salvation Army Citadel. Info: 248-541-6141. Open House second Sundays monthly, 1-4 p.m.

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### **ANSWERS TO BOB MULLER'S PHOTO GAME — See Page 7:**

Photo A: Razor Law Firm (4th and Williams)

Photo B: Caretel Inns of America corporate headquarters (Washington, south of Lincoln)

Photo C: First United Methodist Church (7th and Lafayette).

## Curator's Corner

### **By Muriel Versagi, Museum Curator**

A huge thank you to the over 59 families in the Royal Oak area who loaned pictures, uniforms and stories of their loved ones who served in WWII for the museum exhibit. The number of WWII veterans at the opening of the exhibit was so moving. The family members who were there to tell the story of their loved one was again ... so moving. They truly are the "Greatest Generation." We had over 1000 visitors during the 13 weeks (an average of 9 hours a week) the exhibit was open. That works out to 72 visitors a week.

The museum is closed for reconstruction of the doors on the front of the building.

Our museum volunteers have been working for many weeks on our next exhibit: the *Commemoration of the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War*, which by the time you receive this newsletter should have opened. Check our website [www.royaloakhistoricalociety.org](http://www.royaloakhistoricalociety.org) for events connected with the opening. The main emphasis will be our large collection of Abraham Lincoln artifacts donated by Robert Dondero, son of George A. Dondero, the collector of the Lincoln artifacts. We have many pictures and documents.

We have among our membership many families with relatives who fought in the Civil War who will loan us artifacts and documents. We also have members who are Civil War re-enactors who will be part of our opening event. Lynn & Ed Kalil celebrated their anniversary at the re-enactment of the attack on Fort Sumter. They and their grandson, along with another couple, will be

a huge part of our opening commemoration.

The museum is so fortunate to have a crew of dedicated volunteers under the guidance of Susan Wolfrum, who holds a degree in Museum Science and is our graphics person and webmaster. She, Johanna Schurrer and Rita Simons have been busy every Thursday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. working on the Civil War exhibit.

We have an Information Technology expert in Mike Frentz, who works Tuesdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. keeping our computers working properly. Not only has he networked and password protected all the museum's computers, when there is a problem, he solves it. Joanna Becker, a designer at GM, works in the evenings and some Saturdays scanning the pictures that come into our possession and creates files that can be viewed on the visitor's computer in the Library.

Preston Brunning and Stu Schuster identified all of the model airplanes that were given to us to sell several years ago. They spent several afternoons going through the boxes with their books to identify and tag all of the planes with the proper names. Another young woman just began volunteering Saturday, April 16. My key volunteer and husband, Frank, gave her "homework" to help her learn our software program "Past Perfect for Small Museums." And I just received 2 emails from people interested in volunteering. We have logged over 4000 volunteer hours in 2010 and are going strong for 2011. We are truly blessed.

*To volunteer or to schedule a museum visit, contact Muriel Versagi, Curator of the Royal Oak Historical Society Museum, at 248-542-7449 or [mversagi@versagivoice.com](mailto:mversagi@versagivoice.com).*

**Attention Members!!!** If you do not receive any email from the Royal Oak Historical Society, please send your email address to Board Member and Past President Tom Wurdock at [wurdy@aol.com](mailto:wurdy@aol.com) We like to keep our members informed about Historical Society events and related news. Thank you.

**Donations to the Royal Oak Historical Society are gratefully accepted** — Send checks payable to: The Royal Oak Historical Society, 1411 W. Webster Road, Royal Oak, Michigan 48073. Donations are tax-deductible. Thank you in advance.

## Photo Game



A—Above; B—Below



C

### *Royal Oak Chimneys*

**By Bob Muller  
ROHS Board Member**

Play Bob Muller's  
"Photo Game." Can you  
identify which Royal  
Oak Buildings have  
these unique architec-  
tural details?

(Answers on page 5.)

### More Proof that History Can be Fun and Interesting: **1860's rules Vintage Base Ball in Royal Oak on Memorial Day**

Did you know that Royal Oak has had its very own "Base Ball the way it was meant to be played" historical club? The Wahoo Base Ball Club of Royal Oak, established in 2004, will march in the Memorial Day parade, along with its very worthy opponents, the Lah De Dahs of Greenfield Village on Monday, May 30. Shortly after that, both Clubs will meander over to Starr – Jaycee Park (south of 13 Mile, just east of Crooks) for a FREE to all "cranks" (fans) 12:30 p.m. match.

C'mon out and see what gentlemanly Base Ball (2 words back then) was all about at the time of the Civil War. No gloves, no spitting, no swearing, but lots of fun for the entire family. We'd love to have you cheer us on, so if you'd like, "Bring a chair and we'll see you there"!! To get a quick lesson on more of the 1860 rules and slang, go to: Vintage Base Ball Association ([www.vbba.org](http://www.vbba.org)) and our website: ([www.wahoobaseball.com](http://www.wahoobaseball.com)).

"Huzzah" (cheers to you)!

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**\*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, 1411 W. Webster Road, Royal Oak MI 48073

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