



Royal Oak Historical Society Winter 2008

www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.com

Mark Your Calendars! **Second Annual Swing Dance**

7-11 p.m. Saturday, March 1, at Royal Oak Middle School on Washington Avenue.
Featuring music provided by the Rhythm Society Orchestra, silent auction,
food donated by the best of Royal Oak restaurants,
World War II displays, women in the military and homefront displays.

Ticket price includes door-prize drawing, including for a Nintendo Wii and Tiger tickets.

For information, call committee contacts:

- * Food: Jeanne Sarnacki 248-548-1149
- * Displays: Sandy Wilkins 248-541-6441
- * Silent Auction: Nancy Briggs 248-399-4827
- * Tickets: Deb Anderson 248-542-2846

*This fundraiser is to benefit the Royal Oak Historical Society
and the Royal Oak Schools WPA Murals Restoration Committee.*
www.royaloakswingdance.com

Historical Society makes plans for a busy, productive 2008

By JAY DUNSTAN,
Historical Society President

The Royal Oak Historical Society welcomes new President Jay Dunstan and says a big thank you to Immediate Past President Pete Mancour for his two years of service. ROHS presidents serve for two years.

Dear Members,

2008 should prove to be a very memorable year for the Royal Oak Historical Society. The year started off with a Town Hall meeting January 9 at First Congregational Church. Bob Muller gave his "Ghost River of Royal Oak" talk to over 150 people. We expected a crowd less than half that size. Thanks to Steve and Karen Jones for serving as our point people at First Congregational Church. We appreciate their hospitality.

Our Town Hall meeting program has grown considerably over the past couple of years thanks

to the work of our board members and other volunteers. Our next Town Hall meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 12, when we will hear the history of the Flint Faience Tile Co. This company produced tiles that are still present in Oakland and Northwood elementary schools and other locations throughout our city. Read further in the newsletter for details of this program.

On March 1, we, along with the Royal Oak Schools WPA Murals Restoration Committee, will host our Second Annual Swing Dance at Royal Oak Middle School. Live music, dancing, food from local restaurants and door prizes will highlight the evening. Please join us for a wonderful community get-together. You don't need to dance to have fun — come just to listen and have some great food. Go to www.royaloakswingdance.com for details.

(Continued on Page 2)

Fat Tuesday at Pronto's

This Fat Tuesday, February 5th, there will be an All-Day Benefit at Pronto's (608 S. Washington) for the Royal Oak Nature Society. Carry out breakfast, lunch and/or dinner starting at 8 a.m., or come in and enjoy fabulous food and 50/50 drawings. This event is sponsored by Pronto's, Group 7 of the Royal Oak Woman's Club and the Royal Oak Nature Society.

Celebrate Mardi Gras and support the community!

Coming up! The Royal Oak Woman's Club Home Tour **June 28, 2008**

Featuring 9 locations including Fx Architecture on East Fifth, the penthouse loft at The Fifth on Washington Avenue, WPA murals at Royal Oak Middle School and 6 other homes.

Many docents are needed. Volunteer for a three-hour shift and get a free tour.

For information, call Sandy Wilkins 248-894-6441 or Pam Maser 248-541-8624.

Message from the president

(Continued from Page 1)

Our board has also met with members of the Royal Oak Historical Commission to discuss a "mission statement" dedicated to the education and preservation of local history. It's a long-range plan that involves participation from nearly every entity in Royal Oak, especially the library and the schools. A plan for the execution of this mission statement should be in place sometime this year. We look forward to participating in this endeavor.

We will once again be holding our Memorial Day Pancake Breakfast at the Royal Oak Farmer's Market. Our Annual Corn Roast, scheduled for later this summer, will also be held at the Market.

The question I'm asked most often is "What's happening with moving the museum to the fire hall on Webster?" Currently, architect Mark Farlow of Victor Saroki and Associates is putting together drawings of the updates required at the facility. Among the updates are plans to revamp the first-floor bathroom to meet ADA requirements. Once the Royal Oak Building Department approves these drawings, we can begin renovations. Mark, who is also a member of the Historic Commission, did the work on the Main North Lofts in downtown Royal Oak. We are very fortu-

nate to have someone of his stature helping us on this project. It is our goal to have a facility that is safe and user-friendly, while at the same time respecting the historical significance of the building. It is my hope to open our new museum by late summer or early fall of this year. I'll keep everyone up-to-date every step of the way.

Our new Web site should be up and running soon. A highlight will be many historical photos of Royal Oak that will also be available for purchase. You will receive a notification when the site goes live. It will be something you won't want to miss.

We also want to welcome 24 new members listed in this newsletter. The vitality of the Royal Oak Historical Society depends on the volunteerism and participation of all the members. Thank you for joining us!

I also want to offer my thanks to all the members of our board who volunteer countless hours of their time to preserving and presenting Royal Oak history. I want to offer a special thanks to Pete Mancour, Tom Wurdock, Muriel Versagi and Bill Sullivan, who have helped guide me during my first few months as president. I look forward to serving all of you as we move forward into what should be a very memorable 2008.

My best to all of you,
Jay Dunstan

TOWN HALL

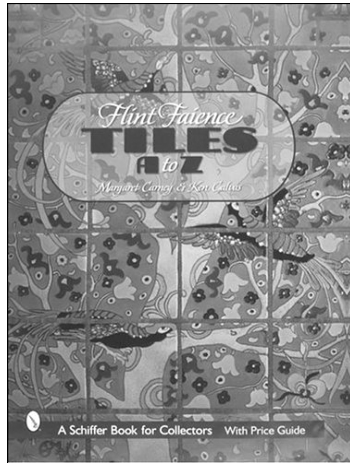
The Flint Faience Tile Company

Detroit's "Other" Historic Tile Company
7 p.m. Wednesday, March 12

Ken Galvas, co-author of the book Flint Faience: Tiles A to Z, will speak at the First Congregational Church at 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 12, about the Flint Faience Tile Company.

The company, founded in Flint in 1921, was an unexpected, albeit wonderful, by-product of an already flourishing automotive enterprise. The AC Sparkplug Company found a way to make ceramic art while maximizing their new production capabilities. In the process of producing sparkplugs, AC and General Motors launched an art project that rivaled long-established potteries across America.

Through the use of slides and examples from his own collection, Ken will explain the origins



of the company, the creative influences on its products, its sales practices and its eventual demise. Ken will also offer interesting anecdotes concerning many of the individuals who made this company an important part of our ceramic history. During the height of the Arts and Crafts movement in America, Michigan had TWO companies producing hand-crafted tiles and related wares. The majority of Royal Oak residents are familiar with Detroit's Pewabic Pottery. This evening will be an informative talk for those interested in learning about the other Michigan pottery.

The Royal Oak Historical Society will have the Flint Faience Tiles from the kindergarten rooms in Longfellow and Franklin elementary schools on display as well as photos of the Mother Goose fireplaces at Oakland and Northwood elementary schools.

Do you have tiles in your home – perhaps on the floor of your entrance foyer — and you don't know what they are? Or perhaps you've seen tiles in either the exterior or interior of a public building in Royal Oak or other nearby suburb? Bring in a photo and Ken will do his best to identify your tiles after the talk as time permits.

Ken will also have a limited amount of books for sale for anybody wishing to learn more.

The First Congregational Church is at 1314 Northwood Blvd (on the west side of Crooks just south of Webster. Parking is available behind the church). Admission is free but donations to The Royal Oak Historical Society are welcome and appreciated.

ORSON STARR HOUSE MUSEUM

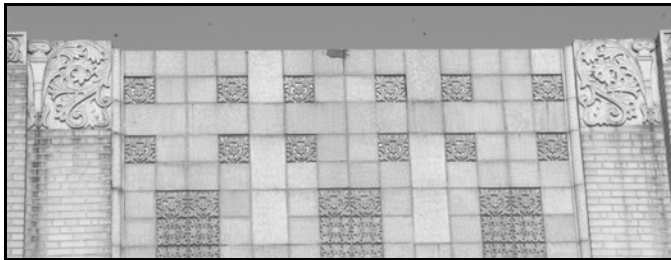
The Orson Starr House Guild cares for the Michigan Farmhouse circa 1845 at 3123 N. Main Street, Royal Oak, one block south of 13 Mile Road. Additional parking one block south at Salvation Army Citadel. Info: 248-541-6141. Open House second Sundays monthly, 1-4 p.m.

Donations to the Royal Oak Historical Society are gratefully accepted

Send checks payable to:
The Royal Oak Historical Society
c/o Churchill Community Education Center
707 Girard, Royal Oak, MI 48073
Donations are tax-deductible.
Thank you in advance.

PHOTO GAME

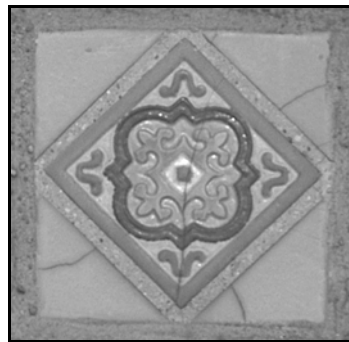
Play the photo game. As Royal Oak Historical Society Board Member Bob Muller walks around town, he spots interesting architectural details with his keen eye and tries to stump you, Dear Reader. Can you identify which downtown Royal Oak buildings have these unique architectural details? (Answers on back page of newsletter.)



A



B



C

ROYAL OAK IMAGES

Yesterday's Charm Today's Treasures Second Printing Now Available

Royal Oak Images Yesterday's Charm Today's Treasures, a book illustrating the diversity of architecture and streetscapes within the City of Royal Oak from Historic to Contemporary, is in its second printing. Published by the Roundtable of Royal Oak Historical Organizations — a standing committee of the Royal Oak Historical Commission — the book recently received a State History Award from the Historical Society of Michigan.

A limited number of copies are available for \$30 at:

- Chinn Jewelry, 1003 S. Washington Ave.
- Frentz & Son's Hardware, 1010 N. Main.
- Ladybug Craft Shoppe, 210 W. Sixth St.
- Miner's Den, 3417 Rochester Rd.
- The Royal Oak Historical Society Museum at Churchill Community Education Center, 707 Girard St., east of Rochester and ½ mile north of 12 Mile. (Best entrance to the north parking lot is from DeVillen Rd. east off of Rochester Rd. or take N. Alexander, south off of 13 Mile Rd. Enter through the double doors in the middle of the building.)

Welcome, New Members!

The Royal Oak Historical Society welcomes the following new members who signed up at the January 9th Town Hall Talk "The Ghost River of Royal Oak":

Joan Belanger
Peggy Brennan
Don & Adair Calder
Donald Claeys
Robert Cranbury
Diane Dovico
Peter Dunkerly

Katie Hershberger
Kathy Howell
Chris LeClerc
Al Linusti
William E. Love
Charlene Ludwig
John McPhail

Kathleen Meyer
Jim A. Nemeth
Muriel & William
Newman
Lorelei Oye
Deborah Scruggs
Prunkard

Christopher Randolph
Robert Schneider
Ann Schoss
Benjamin Swincicki
Grace Ure

Honoring Dorothy Norton Hessel

July 5, 1912 - September 20, 2007

By GLORIA MORAN HARPER
Historical Society Board Member

Editor's Note: In our Fall 2007 Newsletter (mailed September 14), Board Member Gloria Harper paid tribute to 95-year-old member Dorothy Hessel. We were glad we could celebrate her life before she passed on September 20th.

Dorothy was a resident of Royal Oak nearly her entire life. Her family moved to Royal Oak from East Lansing in 1913 and lived on Altadena just south of Twelve Mile Road. She loved "her" town and enjoyed sharing stories about Royal Oak. She wrote a collection of short stories for her family about special events and people in her life that of course often included Royal Oak. You may read these eight stories — that mentioned such things as the Royal Oak parade, Hermann's Bakery, Starr House bricks and Whittier School — at the Royal Oak Historical Museum. Dorothy was an avid supporter of the Royal Oak Historical Society and her town. She had many words of wisdom such as "Learn all you can but join in the fun."

(Thank you to the family of Dorothy Hessel for your donations to the Royal Oak Historical Society in memory of Dorothy.)



***Dorothy Hessel's
Royal Oak High School
graduation photo, 1931***

The Royal Oak Planing Mill

By BLANCHE HOWARD
Orson Starr House Guild Chairperson

If you live in a Royal Oak bungalow, you probably enjoy beautiful oak woodwork in your home. The Royal Oak Planing Co. at 211 E. Lincoln (right at the railroad tracks), circa 1915, was the only (as far as we know) planing mill in Royal Oak to supply finished interior woodwork.

My brother Charles Landendorf (USAF retired) visited me recently from Florida to help me move into a condo. We visited his close friends, Don and Elly Luedke, who live near Hastings, Mich. "Curly" (Charles) and Don attended school together at the original Oak Ridge School from kindergarten through junior high, then graduated from Royal Oak High School in 1941.

Don mentioned his grandfather had started the above-mentioned Royal Oak Planing Mill, where he and Curly had visited many times. Don even gave us a Royal Oak Planing Mill yardstick, which will be going to you-know-where (the museum)! A 1924 ad for the Oak Planing Mill listed "Mill Work; Interior Finish; Sash, Doors, Moulding."

Since I am an amateur genealogist, I enjoy browsing the Polk Directories at the Royal Oak (and Detroit) libraries — these directories date back

to the 1800s and list addresses and in later years, telephone numbers. Royal Oak became a city in 1921 so the first Royal Oak Polk Directory was in 1922. While browsing them after our visit to the Luedkes', I found many mentions of Don's grandparents, the Pringnitzes — and references to the Royal Oak Planing Mill.

The 1922 Polk Directory listed Don's parents, Emil W. Luedke and Esther Pringnitz Luedke, as living at 312 New Hampshire Court in Pleasant Ridge. Emil was a mill worker; by 1924, he was a foreman of the Oak Planing Mill and had moved to 206 E. Thirteen Mile Road in Royal Oak. The 1915 Polk Directory listed Esther's parents, John W. and Bertha J. Pringnitz, and their children Esther, Eva and Russell as living at 201 W. Hudson. The 1931 Polk Directory listed the company as the Royal Oak Planing Mill at 211 E. Lincoln. By 1948, the company was called the Royal Oak Wholesale Co. (Mill), and by 1960, the company listed at 211 E. Lincoln was now Montgomery Ward and Co. (Wholesale).

Do you have any recollections of the Royal Oak Planing Mill? Write us with your memories. Look at the woodwork in your Royal Oak bungalow — the Royal Oak Planing Mill is a piece of your personal history, too, that you enjoy every day in your home.

What WAS His Name?

By LOIS LANCE

Royal Oak Author and Historian

Lois Lance is co-author of the award-winning 2006 book Royal Oak Images Yesterday's Charm Today's Treasures. Further, in commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the City of Royal Oak in 1996, she and fellow historian David G. Penney compiled Royal Oak Twigs and Acorns Articles, Essays, Letters and Other Historical Writing about Royal Oak Township. Mrs. Lance just celebrated her 90th birthday. Happy birthday, Mrs. Lance, and thank you to Mrs. Lance's family for the donations to the Historical Society in honor of her 90th.

What WAS his name?

We don't think it was JOHN.

And we know it wasn't ALMOND. That's a nut — a food that you eat.

We are talking about ALMON STARR, a k a John Almon Starr. He came from Richmond, Ontario County, NY, with his parents in 1831, when he was 3. He died in Royal Oak in 1895.

So HOW did that "John" get in his name?

In the 1970s, another local historian was writing about Almon Starr, the brickmaker. Because Almon had a grandson by the name of John Almon Starr, still living at that time, I think he assumed the grandson was named for the grandfather and called the grandfather John Almon Starr also.

In the 1980s, I researched the ALMON STARR HOUSE at 3123 Crooks Road, Royal Oak, and copied the name as JOHN



Lois Lance dressed as Mrs. Almon Starr, in the doorway of the Almon Starr House on Crooks Road, south of 13 Mile Road

ALMON STARR from the article referred to above, without thinking to verify it.

Later in the 1980s and into the 1990s, I visited most of the elementary schools in Royal Oak dressed in vintage clothes and told the life story of Nancy Quick Starr and called her "Mrs. John Almon Starr." The children were fascinated to learn she lived all of her life within one square mile. They loved the old-fashioned clothes I let them try on and heard what schooldays were like before electricity and indoor plumbing.

I very much regret that when David Penney and I published Royal Oak Twigs and Acorns in 1996, we used the name John Almon Starr many times. I now think that was a mistake.

I have been a docent at the Orson Starr House, circa 1845 — now owned by the city of Royal Oak — for 30 years. I have read everything I could find about the Starr family. About five years ago, I began to wonder about the "John" in the name "John Almon

Starr."

The Starr family — father Orson, mother Rhoda and son Almon — came to Royal Oak (Township) in 1831. I obtained copies of Census records from 1840 to 1900 and found that the son was ALWAYS listed as ALMON.

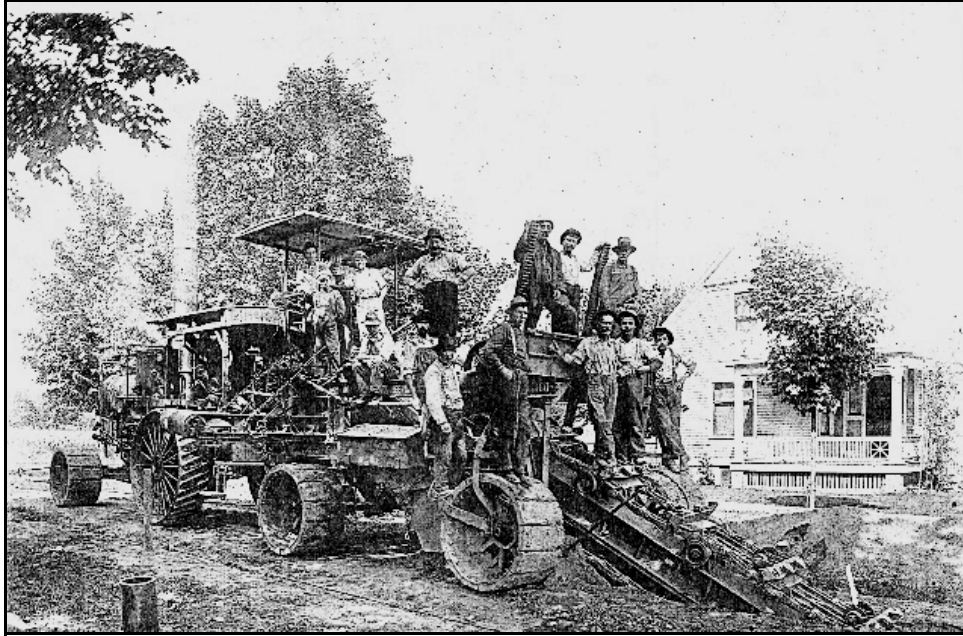
I talked to the author of the first article I had read using the name "John Almon Starr," and he couldn't recall whether he had used it intentionally or accidentally. Then I talked to Almon's descendants, and they had never heard of "John" as part of his name. One great-grandson provided me with copies of the Family Record page from three family Bibles, listing the birth and marriage of ALMON Starr.

At the Orson Starr House, 3123 N. Main St., Royal Oak, there is a package of Starr Family papers. In it are several receipts for taxes signed ALMON Starr from when he was the Royal Oak Township Treasurer. I feel that the family history, family records, Census records and his own signature prove that the "John" in his name is a gross error. As a historian, however, I have to say... "until we have proof to the contrary."

His name was Almon Starr. Let's call him just Almon Starr.

P.S. Who wants to be the next Nancy Quick Starr (Mrs. Almon Starr)?

Lois Lance adds: "We are trying to obtain names, dates and pictures of all descendants of Orson and Rhoda Starr, right down to the present. If you have such information, or know of its whereabouts, please call Lois Lance at 248-546-0138."



Albert A. Smith (seated in the middle of the photo with his feet on the railing above the toolbox) was a trenching contractor for the installation of water and sewer lines. This photo is taken in the early 1920s in Royal Oak's Northwood Subdivision when it was being developed and the sewer and water lines were installed.

The Development of Northwood Subdivision

By REYNOLDS L. SMITH
Of Bayonet Point, Fla.

Banker Reynolds L. Smith worked for the former Guardian Bank of Royal Oak at the southwest corner of Main and Fourth streets (now occupied by jewelry store Metals in Time) from 1938 to 1981 and rose up through the ranks from messenger boy to Vice President in Charge of Investments. In 1939, the Guardian Bank was renamed Wayne Oakland Bank. He contributed "Fourth and Main Remembered" in the Fall 2007 newsletter. Mr. Smith recently celebrated his 88th birthday. Happy Birthday, Mr. Smith!

In the 1920s and 1930s, my father Albert A. Smith was a trenching contractor for the installation of water and sewer lines. He had several trenching machines and did work in the Detroit area. One of his contracts was with Dr. F. W. Clawson, a Royal Oak developer, and my father installed the sewer and water lines in the Northwood Subdivision of Royal Oak. He was proud of

his work and I have photos of several trenching machines that he used. Dad was an excellent mechanic as well as an inventor.

In 1925, we went to Florida for a year; Dad installed the water and sewer lines in Delray, Florida, while we were there. In 1927, our family moved to an 80-acre farm in Fowlerville, Michigan, for three years as my father had a contract to install drain tile for the entire Ira Wilson Dairy Farm at Howell, Michigan.

Vinsetta Bridges: Rob Duchene and the Royal Oak Historic District Study Committee are investigating the history of the Vinsetta Bridges. Anyone with any knowledge or interesting anecdotes about the bridges should contact Rob at RRDuchene@yahoo.com or 248-549-6328. Rob is particularly interested in whether there ever were lights on the bridges and the exact date they were constructed.



Royal Oak Historical Society
707 Girard
Royal Oak, MI 48073
248-542-7449
www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.com

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Trish Oliver, Newsletter Editor
Barry Sullivan
Christy Smith
Marge Smith
Phil Smith Jr.
William J. Sullivan
Sandy Wilkins

Answers to Bob Muller's Photo Game:

Photo A: Above the Royal Oak Music Theatre

Photo B: Above Pronto's on Washington Avenue

Photo C: David Pressley School of Cosmetology on Washington south of Lincoln. This is a Flint Faience tile near the roofline on the David Pressley building. Come hear the Royal Oak Historical Society Town Hall Talk March 12th featuring Flint Faience tiles. Ken Galvas, co-author of Flint Faience Tiles A to Z, will be the speaker. See notice in this newsletter.