



# Royal Oak Historical Society Winter 2009

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

**Mark Your Calendars!**

## **Third Annual Swing Dance**

March 7th at Royal Oak Middle School on Washington Avenue, 7:00 p.m.

**Featuring:**

**Big Band music provided by the Rhythm Society Orchestra**

Light refreshments, silent auction and military displays

For tickets or for more information,  
call Deb Anderson at 248-542-2846 or Sandy Wilkins at 248-894-6441

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

Message from the president

## Fire Hall progress continues; dance to raise funds

**By JAY DUNSTAN**  
Historical Society President

Dear Members,

I want to wish everyone a Happy New Year and thank all of you for your continued support of the Royal Oak Historical Society. 2008 was a very good year for the ROHS, and 2009 promises to be even better.

First of all, I'd like to let all of you know where we stand on the Webster Fire Hall. As you are aware by now, the fire hall will soon be our new home. We were awarded a Community Development Block Grant in the amount of \$132,700 last year. We are very close to spending this money. Royal Oak architect Frank Arvan

of FX Architecture has put in many, many hours coming up with construction drawings to be used in the construction bidding process. The three major projects involve barrier-free access to the building, an ADA-compliant restroom and an elevator. Those drawings have been approved by Royal Oak's Building Department. We hope to start construction soon and be open at some point in 2009 while the weather is still warm. We'll keep all of you up-to-date as we progress on making the fire hall the new home of the Royal Oak Historical Society Museum.

Our first major event of 2009 will be the Annual Swing Dance on March 7th at 7 p.m. This takes place at Royal Oak Middle School on Washington Avenue.

*(Continued on Page 2)*

**“My Royal Oak: Images for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”**  
**New Book Now Available**

*Hello Historical Museum Supporter:*

“My Royal Oak: Images From The 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” the absolutely new book on Royal Oak history that I have promised, is now available at Frenz Hardware. Containing 227 photographs on 128 pages, it is 7x10 inches in dimension; the images are printed high resolution on glossy paper. The text consists of more than 17,000 words about the “old” Royal Oak most of us remember in fragments. As with all of my other books, ALL PROCEEDS GO TO THE NEW ROYAL OAK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM. Everyone should purchase at least two copies, one to keep and one to give as a gift. The cost is only \$25. This is a very personal book, with many of my memories of growing up in Royal Oak in the 20th century. Don’t be historically square, get the new book and celebrate our town’s history, as well as support the Museum. Also for sale at Frenz are “Twigs and Acorns, Plus,” “To Walk That Old Indian Trail” and “Cemeteries Walking Tour.” All proceeds from book sales go to the Museum.

— David G. Penney

*Dear Dr. Penney:*

*On behalf of the Royal Oak Historical Society, I wanted to thank you for all your work in researching and publishing your latest book on Royal Oak. It is truly a work of love for our city. You have done much for both the city and the Society by way of donating all profits from the sale of the book to the Society.*

— Tom Wurdock,  
Second Vice-President, ROHS

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**ORSON STARR HOUSE MUSEUM**

The Orson Starr House Guild cares for the Michigan Farmhouse circa 1845 at 3123 N. Main St., 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.

**Message from the president**

*(Continued from Page 1)*

We are putting on this event in conjunction with the WPA Murals Committee. Live big band music will be performed by the renowned Rhythm Society Orchestra. Whether you like to dance or just listen to some awesome big band music you’ll find this to be a very enjoyable evening. Once you get there, you’ll find light refreshments and a silent auction. We’ve dropped the price of the tickets to \$20, and they are available from either Deb Anderson (248-542-2846) or Sandy Wilkins (248-894-6441). Besides being an enjoyable evening, it’s also a major fundraiser for the Society and the Murals Committee. I hope to see all of you there.

I would also like to make you all aware of David G. Penney’s latest book — *My Royal Oak: Images from the 20th Century*. It’s a rare collection of images from all corners of our city and backed up by historical narrative from David himself. It’s just \$25 and is available at Frenz and Sons Hardware Store on Main Street at Gardenia. All proceeds go to the Royal Oak Historical Museum. They also make great gifts.

Please visit our recently revamped website ([www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.com)) to learn of other Society events for 2009. Our website design and construction have been donated by Susan and Edward Wolfrum of Audio Graphic Services. They have done a tremendous job.

See you all at the Swing Dance!!

My best to all of you,  
Jay Dunstan

## A New Year's Resolution?

By **GLORIA J. MORAN HARPER**  
ROHS Board Member

This past year, my family lost its last older member, and it was left to me to clean out her house, dispose of things and preserve the family keepsakes and records. How I wished someone was still around who could help me identify those family members and friends ... too late for me, but maybe not for you!

### Strangers in a Box

*By Pam Harazim*

Come look inside this drawer,  
In this box I've often seen,  
At the picture, black and white  
Faces proud, still, serene.

I wish I knew the people  
These strangers in the box,  
Their names and all their memories  
Are lost among the socks.

I wonder what their lives were like.  
How did they spend their days?  
What about their special times?  
I'll never know their ways.

If only someone had taken time  
To tell who, what, where and when,  
These faces of my heritage  
Would come to life again.

Could this become the fate  
Of pictures we take today?  
The faces and the memories  
Someday to be tossed away?

Make time to save your pictures,  
Seize the opportunity when it knocks,  
Or someday you and yours could be  
"The Strangers in the Box."

## Photo Game



A



C

B

*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 Royal Oak buildings have these unique architectural details? (Answers can be found on Page 5.)*

## 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.

# My Block in 1920

By TRISH OLIVER  
ROHS Newsletter Editor

Recently, I signed up for a 14-day trial membership of Ancestry.com and got bitten by the genealogy bug. Fascinated by the Census and Ellis Island immigration records I instantly accessed for long-departed family members, I then turned my attention to my Royal Oak block. Since my home was built in 1916, the first relevant Census for me was the 1920 one. That Census showed that the head of the household in each of the five homes on my block worked in the auto industry. Their jobs included: “accountant” in engineering, machine foreman, assistant foreman, machinist and “welfare worker,” all in auto factories.

Children were in abundance in 1920. Seven children, all under the age of 6, resided on my block: Margaret Warren (6, born in Alaska) and her brother Charles (4); Virginia (6) and Viola (1) Ponifer; Mary Muller (2); Arthur Rauchle (2), and Kathleen Dunham (4).

These were the post-World War I Baby Boom years, which led to the construction of the many 1920s Royal Oak schools: Longfellow (1919), Parker (1921), Grant (1922), Whittier (1922), the original Northwood (1923), Oakland (1924), Starr (1925), (Royal Oak High School, 1927, now Royal Oak Middle School) and Franklin (c. 1920s). A February 14, 1919, Daily Tribune article (“New School

*Just 10 years later, the 1930 Census showed a complete turnover in families; only one of those 1920s families was still in residence. Where did they all go? Those questions remain to be answered on some other snowy day, perhaps.*

Building on Maxwell Ave”) stated that “school rooms are now filled to capacity and more students are entering steadily. . . . Ever since (World War I) the war began, our school population has increased.”

In 1900, the population of Royal Oak Village was 488, only 200 more than in 1860. As Detroit became an industrial giant, Royal Oak’s population increased to slightly over 6,000 in 1920, up from 1072 in 1910. R.L. Polk reported a local population of 21,840 in 1928, while the 1930 population was estimated at 22,805.

The rush to Detroit for auto factory jobs in the 1920s brought people from all around the world to my block. The five heads of household were born in Ohio; Frankfurt, Germany; England; Pennsylvania and Michigan. Their wives hailed from Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Canada. In addition, one household had a boarder from Ireland, and another had a mother-in-law in residence from England. The average age of the homeowners was 35.

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Those questions remain to be answered on some other snowy day, perhaps.

In the meantime, it was fun to take a look at my block in 1920 and share that view with my neighbors. (By the way, since there are actually six homes on my block today, and the 1920 Census listed only five, I also learned from a later conversation with a neighbor that the sixth bungalow was moved to our block in the 1950s.)

*(If you would like to find your block on the 1920 and 1930 Census, go to <http://stevemorse.org/census/index.html>. This website allows you to find the “enumeration district” for your block on the Census. Census-takers worked “enumeration districts,” which means they basically had areas of blocks in which they went door-to-door collecting Census information. You also need at least a trial membership to Ancestry.com. If you don’t have one, you can access Ancestry.com at the Royal Oak Public Library. On April 1, 2012, the 1940 Census will be released from the 72-year privacy mandate, and 1940 Census information will become available.)*

## Curator's Corner

By MURIEL VERSAGI

January 2009

This March will be the fifth anniversary of our Museum in Churchill School. Sometimes, it seems longer, sometimes shorter. So much has happened. Volunteers have helped document and scan and enter into the data base well over 2,500 items. Our very first volunteer, **Susan Wolfrum**, has logged close to 2,000 hours, and she and her husband **Ed** redesigned and now maintain our website ([www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.com)). **Joanna Becker** continues to scan documents and pictures for us, which are accessible in the visitors computer, where visitors have the ability to add descriptions to photographs about which they have historical knowledge.

At the fire station, **Johanna Schurrer** has cleaned, painted the cupboards, sanded and varnished the doors of our kitchen cupboards, and she came up with a great idea that saves us from having to tear down walls for our women's bathrooms. **Architect Frank Arvan of FX Architecture** is including her idea in his revised drawings. Working nights and weekends alone, **Chuck Button, Button's Rental**, spent many hours double-sanding and triple-coating the upstairs former dormitory floor, which will become the museum's central archival storage area.

Remember the steam boiler burst almost two years ago? Well, **Paul Leonard of Leonard Bros. Storage** has been keeping, in their controlled environment storage building, the pictures and artifacts that were restored to the tune of \$10,000. Thank heavens for insurance. If you ever need to store documents or

need a storage facility, it would be a nice way to say thank you for his company's generous donation of help to the ROHS Museum.

Visitors continue to bring us stories, several of which have been published in the Daily Tribune Sunday edition under my byline, "Yesteryear." I get calls from people wanting to know if we have a picture of this store or do we have a Class of '32 Royal Oak High School yearbook. And often we do. Residents also continue to bring pictures, books and documents for our collection as well as the stories that go along with the items.

Children who attend the Suzuki School of Music visit frequently. They especially like the trolley fare box. They drop the collection of pennies, nickels and dimes that I have left for them to use into the fare box and push the lever, which moves the coins to a lower level, crank the handle to drop the coins into the very bottom of the fare box and then verify the count of the recovered coins.

We have still have books for sale: *Images, Twigs & Acorns* and *Royal Oak in Pictures*, along with two pamphlets: *The Indian Trail* and *Royal Oak Cemetery*, as well as a few postcards and ROHS lapel pins.

Because we began packing too soon for the move from Churchill to the Fire Station, there are boxes scattered here and there, but several exhibits remain and continue to attract visitors. Stored elsewhere at Churchill are hundreds of boxes of artifacts from closed schools. After the move to the Fire Station, we will need many more volunteers to catalog the thousands of historical items those boxes contain.

Our Museum Hours at this time are 4-6 p.m. Tuesdays and 2-6 p.m. Thursdays. We can make arrangements to meet you at the Museum (not on a Saturday or Sunday; school is closed) if you have a guest from out of town.

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### ANSWERS TO BOB MULLER'S PHOTO GAME — See Page 3:

Photo A- The Post Office.

Photo B- Detroit Edison building at Fourth and Williams streets.

Photo C- Chimney at 160 Hendrie Blvd., Royal Oak's largest home at 7,400 sq. ft. Built in 1925 by Norman A. Starr, who also built Royal Oak Middle School and the Washington Square Building, among other prominent Royal Oak buildings. The "S" on the chimney stood for "Starr." See "Recollections of Norman A. Starr, Royal Oak Builder" in the Fall 2008 Newsletter.

# Dean's Drug Store

By **REYNOLDS L. SMITH**  
Of Bayonet Point, FL

*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. Mr. Smith contributed "Fourth and Main Remembered" in the Fall 2007 and "The Development of Northwood Subdivision" in Winter 2008 newsletters. Mr. Smith recently celebrated his 88<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

During my teen years in the 1930s, our family lived in Berkley. Shopping was limited because there were no department stores and few specialty shops. Royal Oak was the choice destination when something was needed. It was also the place to

go for treats. Brown's Creamery had wonderful ice cream. Sanders on Fourth Street had hot fudge cream puffs that were sure to add a pound or two over time.

Another spot that attracted my buddies and me was Dean's Soda Bar at the southwest corner of Catalpa and Main. I remember it as being a drugstore as well. They had 15-cent milkshakes that were to die for. We would ride our bikes down Catalpa, and there we were.

The shakes were made in those metal containers and then slid up on the blender to mix. When they were finished, the clerk would pour them into a large glass. If there was too much for the glass to hold, he would place the metal container on the counter next to the glass, and we could pour it in the glass as we drank and made room for it. How good that cold metal felt on a hot summer afternoon.

I recall on one such occasion when we were ordering our favorite flavor shakes that when it was my

turn to order, I resorted to the prankster character within me and said "My good man, I believe that today I would like a *Cherry Phosphate*." The clerk said, "Okay, coming right up." My buddies gulped. I had read that the Hollywood and "Ritzy People" had made phosphate the new fad drink.

I was just clowning around and didn't even know what the drink tasted like. It was served in a small Coca-Cola glass over shaved ice. It tasted pretty good, but it was nothing like the bargain of a delicious milkshake for 15 cents. Once was enough for me.

Another good feature of Dean's was that it was right at the turnaround for the interurban trolley cars, and we would go outside and watch them turn up the short spur on Catalpa and then back up north on Main Street before heading south to Detroit. It was fun to see the sparks fly when the electrical contact wheel was connected to the overhead power wire.

## **CELEBRATE ROYAL OAK HISTORY!** **2009 CALENDAR SALE**

The Roundtable of Royal Oak Historical Organizations has produced another exciting project! Using the artwork of Mike Byrne, a Royal Oak native and very talented artist, they have designed a new calendar for 2009....

Since several copies are still remaining, it is now *ON SALE!* Was \$10, now \$5!

A pen-and-ink stipple drawing for each month showcases a different site within our city, from both past and present. In addition, there is a copy of the original 1872 township map, showing who owned which lots and the route of the old Detroit and Milwaukee Railroad line. A brief history of our city is also provided with an emphasis on the importance of transportation in our development. "Location, location, location" was as true then as it is now! You can buy a Roundtable 2009 calendar for just \$5 (was \$10) at Frentz Hardware, Lady Bug Craft & Framing Shop, Chamber of Commerce, Friends of the Library and Miner's Den.

## Royal Oak Historical Commission Plaques

The Royal Oak Historical Commission is pleased to announce that they have designed a new plaque that can be placed on both residential and commercial buildings, identifying that structure as a part of Royal Oak's diverse past.

Made of heavy gauge aluminum, they are round and measure 7½ inches across. The words HISTORIC ROYAL OAK circle the plaque and the particular construction year of the structure is inserted in the center. The plaques are black with silver letters and numbers. Made by a craftsman right here in Michigan, these plaques can be ordered at Frenz Hardware (1010 N. Main St at the corner



of Gardenia) in what used to be referred to as the "North End" of the Village of Royal Oak. The plaques cost \$70. Any structure that is at least 50 years old can be considered eligible

for this designation.

Call Historical Commission Chairperson Karen Crawford with questions at 248-542-1774 or Vice Chairperson Jim Craft at 248-425-9817.

### Royal Oak Historical Society Board Members

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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.