



# Royal Oak Historical Society Winter 2010

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

## Mark Your Calendars!

### **Grand Opening Black Tie Gala — Friday, April 30th** **Royal Oak Historical Society Museum**

*Details to follow.*

### **Town Hall — “Then and Now” — 7 p.m. March 10 at Northwood**

*Featuring old photos from the Historical Society’s Daily Tribune collection  
along with photos of the locations today.*

## Message from the president

# Museum opening celebration is scheduled

By **JAY DUNSTAN**  
Historical Society President

Dear Members,

Even as you read this, preparations are under way for the Grand Opening of the Royal Oak Historical Museum at Northwood Fire Station. Two and a half years after we first signed our lease, we’re finally ready to share this moment with the residents of Royal Oak. Much has happened during this period of time leading to what will be our April 30 Black Tie Grand Opening.

The question I’ve been asked most over the past two years is “When will you be opening?” My answer has been a moving target dictated by the pitfalls of trying to renovate and make safe a building that is over 80 years old. With the help of Jason Craig of the Royal Oak Building Department, builder Chuck Bennett of Bloom Construction, architect Frank Arvan of FX Architecture, and Construction Manager and Past Society President Pete Mancour, we were able to overcome numerous obstacles. A leaky roof and leaky base-

ment sent us sideways for a period of time. We may have finally tamed the boiler that has required much attention and expense. For a while, it seemed like we were constantly two steps forward and three steps back. I was getting two or three calls a day describing one issue or another. Without the teamwork exhibited by these four men, we would not be talking about an April 30 Grand Opening.

I also need to thank all of those residents and businesses throughout Royal Oak and beyond who recognized this as a very viable project and offered their support both by financial and in-kind contributions. A special thank you as well to the First Congregational Church for their patience and support. Without all of your help, this would not be happening.

It will be necessary to continue raising funds so that we are not only able to sustain our new museum but also acquire new collections and set up displays. Our annual Memorial Day Pancake

*(Continued on Page 2)*

## **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 and Museum  
1411 West Webster Road  
Royal Oak, Michigan 48073  
Donations are tax-deductible.  
Thank you in advance.



### **Royal Oak's First Jail?**

Submitted by William Sullivan  
Board Member and Former ROHS President

When Fletcher Bragborne bought his home at 322 E. Parent 35 years ago, the previous owner told him the structure pictured above was the original Royal Oak jail that he had purchased from the city at some point. Mr. Bragborne paid him \$50 for it. Does anyone have any further information as to the origins of this structure?

## **Message from the president**

*(Continued from Page 1)*

Breakfast will be held once again this year at the Farmer's Market on May 31. Besides being our biggest annual fundraiser, this is also a chance for those in our community to reconnect. I look forward to seeing all of your familiar faces once again this year.

We are also tentatively on the list to work a beverage tent at the upcoming Arts, Beats and Eats in downtown Royal Oak Labor Day weekend. In future months, we will be asking Society members to help us with volunteering at this event. I can't give you exact details yet, but I expect this to rival the pancake breakfast in fundraising potential.

As we move forward, we hope the move to our new location will give us more opportunities to reach out to our community. There is already talk

of trying to set up a student program with our schools. Other activities — for seniors, for example — have been discussed as well.

Even while the majority of our time was tied up in getting the new museum ready for you, we didn't lose sight of our other responsibilities. Our Town Hall Meetings continue for 2010, thanks to Bob Muller and the Royal Oak Schools. In January, Dr. Richard Stamps gave an interesting talk on the architectural dig at the Starr House that occurred more than 30 years ago. Please check our website ([www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.royaloakhistoricalsociety.org)) for more Town Hall dates and topics.

I would like to once again thank each and every one of you for your support. In the coming months, there is certainly much to be excited about.

My best to all of you,  
Jay Dunstan

## Curator's Corner

What an amazing town we live in! So many people have volunteered in the last few months to do all the packing at Churchill (20 plus) and moving (40 plus) into the Fire Station. If I were to list them all, it would take up the whole newsletter.

Key companies who DONATED their time, materials and workers include Roy and Paul Painting, who sanded, skim coated and painted the rooms upstairs and the ceilings downstairs before the move. The other is Andrew Androff and his company Professional Movers; he donated two huge moving vans, two smaller vans and 10 men. They loaded all of the boxes and “stuff” and unloaded it at the Fire Station. The generosity of these two men and their companies is outstanding!!! Please ... if you are moving or need painting done, call them.

Then, the ongoing work of making the Museum comfortable ... retired Royal Oak fireman Rick Sage “gave blood” in the project to seal off the rolling door from the winter winds. Sandy Wilkins, George Gomez, our Eagle Scout applicant David Poduska, our “electrical” handyman Bob Muller and our newest member and volunteer Ed Kalil with his amazing woodworking

skills were all very helpful. Ed repaired a bathroom door that I really believed was “hopeless,” and it now looks and works like new. He also made and installed coat hooks in the ladies bathrooms. The list is endless.

Then, we have the City..... The DPS called to remind us they are still holding the bell from Grant School and the original “Crooks, Main, and Rochester Road” street sign for us. We didn’t have hot water, so the City’s Roger Jacobs had our hot water tank repaired as well as sending out the City’s boiler man to show me how the shut-off valves on the radiators worked. Last summer, we had a huge, dying tree with branches hanging over the roof of the Station; again, DPS and Greg Russell came to the rescue — they cut down the tree and removed the stump. The lighting was out in the back of the station, so the Electrical Department’s Jim Harris and his assistant replaced the fixture and the bulbs. All this was handled with one phone call for each situation.

My Museum Angels have multiplied by two. Beth Girling, a recently unemployed IT professional, and Megan Keller, a library student at WSU, have joined Johanna and Susan in washing, painting and moving “stuff” on Thursdays for the last several weeks.

We are working towards having our Grand Opening Black Tie Gala on Friday, April

30. Your Board and Museum Angels will serve hors d'oeuvres and champagne. Watch for your invitation. The committee will meet soon to determine ticket price.

When we open, the Museum will need a few people who would like to run a small store to work our sales counter, keep records of sales and make suggestions as to what might sell. This volunteer position will be really important when we open on both Saturday and Sunday afternoons in the spring, summer and fall. If we pulled together four to eight people to rotate through the weekends, that would be great.

And, of course, we will need members who love history to serve as docents on the same Saturday and Sunday afternoons. We will provide training and hope the docents would also like to be involved in choosing and setting up future exhibits. We will continue to have new exhibits every four months — not the whole Museum but a new exhibit in one area.

We are so grateful for the outpouring of support — financial and physical — as well as the expressions of pleasure all of us on the Board receive. The donations of memorabilia and artifacts and the emails and calls in response to the articles in the Tribune are truly a joy.

*To volunteer, contact Curator Muriel Versagi at 248-542-7449 or [mversagi@versagivoice.com](mailto:mversagi@versagivoice.com).*

# A Glimpse of Royal Oak Fire Department History

Excerpted from “The City of Royal Oak,  
Michigan 1817-1954” by Charles Fey

*In honor of the Royal Oak Historical Society Museum’s move into the historic Northwood Fire Station (Fire Station No. 2) on Webster just west of Crooks Road, we are providing a glimpse of Royal Oak Fire Department history ...*

The danger from fire was one of the earliest and most constant worries of the early settlers of not only Royal Oak but all other communities, and in the real early days, from the Indians. In Detroit, in 1802, an ordinance was adopted requiring that all chimneys should be swept every two weeks between October and April, and every four weeks the rest of the year, under penalty of \$5 fine for neglect. If a chimney caught fire, the fine was \$10. The ordinance also required that every householder and shopkeeper should keep on his premises two bags to hold three bushels each for carrying out goods in case of fire; to keep in his house where it should not freeze a light barrel filled with water, and to keep two hand buckets and a ladder for each chimney. The barrels were fitted with handles or ears and by means of poles, each barrel could be carried by two men. Every householder was required to turn out on the first alarm of fire and to send barrels or buckets to the scene of the conflagration. The penalty for failure to turn out was a fine of \$2 or two weeks in jail, and that for failure to send equipment was a \$5 fine. Complaints were frequent that the ordinance was not obeyed, and fines furnished quite an income. It is noted that on one occasion, three of the town trustees, their secretary and the assessor were all fined. The mode of procedure in case of fire was

to form two lines from the river to the burning building, passing the buckets of water up one line and the empties back to the river by the other.

There were two elements of weakness in this method. A good deal of the water slopped over in transit and unless the line was formed before the fire had much headway, no one could get near enough to reach it with the contents of the bucket. In the latter case, the energies of the department were devoted to the protection of adjacent buildings by flooding them with water.

In 1912, Royal Oak suffered a fire in the stores on Main Street between Second and Third Streets and as a result of this fire, the merchants got together and organized a volunteer fire department. This organization was formed February 13, 1913, with a membership of fifteen - Roy Wing, James Allen, William West, William Wheeler, Carlos Marshall, Delbert Geyer, Homer Ebling, George J. Scott, Mark Halsey, J. Frank Codling, Robert McClure, Harry A. Brace, William Sullivan (*Editor’s note: grandfather of current ROHS Board Member William J. Sullivan*), Julius Robar and Chief William J. Folland. The first meetings were held in the old town hall, northwest corner of Main and Fourth Streets. When this was sold, they moved into the homes of the members and still later into the old Sorenson blacksmith shop at Fifth and Main Streets. ... The first alarm was sounded by the bell on the old St. Mary’s Church on the corner of Fifth and Main Streets. The first horse to appear after the alarm was hitched to the ladder truck and the firemen deserted their active employment to man the truck, and it rushed down Main Street. The owner of the horse received \$2.

*(Continued on Page 6)*



A



B



C

## **PHOTO GAME**

### **Name That Corner**

**By ROHS**

**Board Member**

**Bob Muller**

Here's Bob Muller's Photo Game *with a twist*... Look at these old photos from the Historical Society's Daily Tribune collection, and see if you can name the corner today. The next Town Hall entitled "Then and Now" will feature these photos (and more) along with photos of the locations today. The "Then and Now" Town Hall will be at 7 p.m. March 10 at Northwood School. (Answers can be found on Page 6.)

## A Glimpse of Fire Department History

*(Continued from Page 4)*

In 1915, the group grew discontented. The boys did not like the club rooms (at the blacksmith shop). On October 12, 1915, they voted unanimously to give the village council a mandate in which to furnish suitable club rooms. If the council did not comply, the group would disband. At the invitation of Mr. Frank J. Hoffman, President, and councilmen met with the Volunteers at the blacksmith shop. "We were ready for them," smiled William J. Folland as he recalled the occasion, "I removed all of the tables from the club room and tossed all of the horse hoof cuttings that I could find in the fire. Meanwhile, the other boys borrowed a half dozen nail kegs. The stench was terrific from the hoof cuttings. The kegs were difficult things to sit on, I tried one. We Volunteers were very polite. We all perched on the ladder truck while the committee got the preferred nail keg seats."

"I'll give President Hoffman credit. He stayed through the entire meeting, seated calmly on the nail keg. We boys could hardly stand the stench but stuck it out like we were used to it. The result of the meeting was an agreement to build a new fire hall. Two months later, the No. 1 hall (at Fifth and Main) was built at a cost of \$1,700... Many of the wives in the old days, then young brides, recalled hubby's stock excuse when he wanted an evening out, 'I've got to practice with the Volunteers.'" Chief Folland chuckles as he recalls the good old days of the Volunteers,

"Mother Folland knew the right answer when one of the wives called up - 'I think he's down at the fire hall.' But that excuse covered up a lot of evenings out when the boys never showed up at the hall." (Fey, pp. 252-4)

### Fire Station No. 2

This station known as the Northwood station was started in 1927 and was completed July 16, 1928, at a cost of \$44, 287. It was built by Max. Bartholomei and Son of Detroit. Excellent quarters. First floor rest room, dining room and kitchen. The hose tower, an essential feature of any fire hall, since the hose must be dried after every fire in which it sees service, is well equipped. Space for two trucks and a ladder truck is also provided on the first floor. It fronts on Webster Road near Crooks Road. (Fey, p. 257)

*Editor's Note: The aforementioned hose tower is now sealed and houses the elevator. Thank you to the Royal Oak Fire Department for its almost 100 years of service to our city!*

*\*Former Royal Oak (and Lathrup) resident Charles Fey (1884-1971) wrote the extremely valuable manuscript entitled "The City of Royal Oak Michigan, 1817-1954," which was never published in book form, but was a valuable research aid to the late Owen Perkins in his book "Royal Oak: The Early Years" (1971).*

*A member of Royal Oak Lodge 464, F and AM, the Moslem Shrine and a 33rd Degree Mason, Mr. Fey was married to Alice Taylor Brown. Several copies of the Fey manuscript are available at the Royal Oak Public Library (Hist. Coll. 977.438 F433c, c4). There is also one at the Museum.*

*Thank you to David Penney who scanned the 300-page document to disk for us for easy access.*

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

- A. Main and Eleven Mile, northwest corner
- B. Main Theater
- C. Sangria

## **Royal Oak History Books For Sale At Frenz Hardware**

**All proceeds go to the Museum**

**By David G. Penney**

“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 12-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 through the years, originally prepared for the 75th anniversary of our city in 1996. In 2007, the new 12-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 Frenz Hardware, and soon will be 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 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!

---

### **Royal Oak Historical Society Board**

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

### **Directors:**

Deb Anderson  
Nancy Briggs  
Gloria Harper Moran

Joan Coulton Larson,  
Corresponding Secretary  
Dorothy Moonen  
Robert Muller  
Trish Oliver,  
Newsletter Editor  
Barry Shulman  
Marge Smith  
Phil Smith Jr.  
William J. Sullivan  
Kevin Sutherland  
Sandy Wilkins



Royal Oak Historical Society  
1411 W. Webster Road  
Royal Oak, MI 48073  
248-542-7449  
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, 1411 W. Webster Road, Royal Oak MI 48073

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