



# Royal Oak Historical Society

## Fall 2011

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

### *Mark Your Calendars!*

## **Royal Oak Historical Society presents The 72<sup>nd</sup> Annual Dinner**

**Wednesday, October 12, 2011**

**At Red Run Country Club**

2036 Rochester Road Royal Oak (2 blocks north of 12 Mile Road)

**5:00 p.m. Social Hour (Cash Bar)**

**6:00 p.m. Buffet Dinner (Multiple selections pleasing all palates)**

**“Welcome” by ROHS President Karrie Mahrle**

**Recognition of Participants/Dignitaries by Master of Ceremonies Stan Sherman**

**Election of Officers**

**Awards**

*Dr. Joseph S. Morrison, Sophie V. Bowman  
And Spirit of Royal Oak Awards will be given.*

**Silent Auction**

**\$35 includes** Buffet Dinner (tax, gratuities & valet parking) plus your one-year membership to  
The Royal Oak Historical Society

Tickets are \$35 until October 6

After October 6 or at door: \$40 per ticket

*Please consider buying a business or personal ad in this year's program—  
or one with personal thoughts supporting ROHS.*

*Society Booster Page Recognition \$10 each name.*

*Deadline September 29 – Call: Jay Dunstan 248-990-8210*

Until October 6, tickets may be purchased at:

Decades (248-546-9289) at the Farmers Market

Kinsey-Garrett Funeral Home, 420 S. Lafayette Ave. (248-541-4400)

Ladybug Craft & Framing Shoppe, 210 W. Sixth St. (248-545-3200)

Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Home, 705 W. 11 Mile Rd. (248-541-7000)

and at the Historical Museum

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 It contains newspaper articles, previously unpublished letters, essays, etc.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 Frenz’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!

---

We need your help!

### Annual Dinner Silent Auction Donations Accepted

Donations are being accepted for the Annual Dinner Silent Auction! Perhaps you have something that someone else may want, or a gift card you haven’t used, tickets to an event, a service from your business or someone else’s, something

historical, a picture, jersey, brick, memorabilia, etc.—we are in need of lots of things. You may not think it is valuable, but it just might be the thing that someone else is looking for. Please call Sandy Wilkins at 248-541-6441.

---

**Note: Bob Muller’s Photo Game is on hiatus this issue as Bob is out taking photos for upcoming issues. Stay tuned!**

# Curator's Corner

By Muriel Versagi, Museum Curator

Volunteers continue to walk in the Museum door ...

Mark Swann, the program chair of the Lions Club, came in to ask me to speak to the club. Since his business card said he was a cabinet manufacturer, I asked him about the marble bases on our beautiful display cabinets as they needed some attention. He took a piece of marble base with him to see what would work, came back, re-attached the bases, filled the holes with a resin and then polished them.

Next, former fireman Rick Sage and his wife Maureen emailed me ... not only did they cut and weed-whack the grass, they trimmed the overgrown bushes alongside the driveway/alley. Next, Maureen wants to decorate our sign for Halloween.

Our backyard neighbor Ed has weeded and trimmed the bushes behind his fence and put mulch down, so our parking lot looks really good. Ed also purchased a beautiful new heavy-duty flag for us and raised it to the top last weekend.

The Civil War Exhibit continues to bring visitors to the Museum. One of the most frequent comments is, "Wow, I had no idea you would have so much stuff."

We are very fortunate to have not only our own Abraham Lincoln collection from the Dondero family, but we have Civil War re-enactors who have generously loaned us many items. The Exhibit will run until October 22, 2011. The following two weeks the Museum will be closed to visi-

tors to allow us to take down the Civil War exhibit and put up our new one... "Christmas Shopping through the Years in Downtown Royal Oak."

As we have done in the past, we are asking Royal Oak residents if you have and would be willing to loan us anything from a local store that you received as a gift, have a shopping bag for, toys from now-gone stores, anything that reminds you of Christmas in Royal Oak.

We will have pictures of stores from the early years to now, some will be "then and now" pictures. We have two small Christmas trees and one large one; we could use two or three more small trees, if you would be willing to loan or donate. Trees will be decorated with Victorian decorations and ones from the 1940s, '50s and '60s. We have many of the decorations but are always looking for more. If you have a small tree that you would be willing to loan us for three months, please call the Museum or better yet, come and bring your items in on a Thursday morning. We are there from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. working; at 1 p.m., we open for visitors.

Come and visit. The Civil War exhibit will be up until the third Saturday in October. Then we close to take it down and put up Christmas.

See you soon!

*Be Our Hero: We need a collapsible wheelchair in good condition to be donated for our use in our Historical Museum. Please contact Curator Muriel Versagi at 248-430-1501 or or e-mail [curator@royaloakhistoricalociety.org](mailto:curator@royaloakhistoricalociety.org).*

## Attention Members!!!

If you do not receive any e-mail from the Royal Oak Historical Society, please send your e-mail address to Board Member and Past 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.

# A need to say thank you

**By Kevin Sutherland,  
Honor Flight Michigan Past  
Treasurer and Current ROHS  
Board Member**

Can you believe that it all started right here in Royal Oak? One Sunday morning in October 2006, Dave and Carole Cameron were watching Charles Osgood on TV talk about some small group of WWII veterans who were flown from North Carolina to Washington, D.C., to see their newly built WW II Monument. Carole asked Dave, “Why couldn’t we fly our Michigan veterans to Washington, D.C.?”

Later the same week while at breakfast at the Royal Oak National Coney Island, Dave posed the same question to several of his breakfast friends including Pam Robbins, Rick Sage, Bud Wease, Jan Williams and me. The answer was a unanimous “Yes, let’s do it.” And so Honor Flight Michigan began.

Everyone was given a job to do: apply for non-profit status with the state, apply for an e-mail address and copyrights, media coverage, airplane tickets, transportation, wheelchairs, and on and on. We added a few more people to our board — a newspaper reporter, travel agent and public relations promoter and then elected officers. To this day,



**World War II veterans being welcomed at Reagan National Airport in Washington D.C. as they get off the plane from Detroit.**

every member of the Honor Flight Board has been strictly a volunteer.

Dave Cameron, a State Farm agent, was elected President of Honor Flight Michigan and worked over 50 hours a week getting Honor Flight Michigan off the ground. By May 2007, just six months after Dave had his idea, we began flying 40 WWII veterans from the Royal Oak area on an all-expense paid trip to Washington, D.C., to visit their WWII Monument and Arlington National Cemetery every two to three weeks through the summer. Each trip cost us around \$16,000, and by the time we left on our first trip, we had raised a

little over \$77,000. When we reached our goal four years later and had flown over 1,400 veterans, ages 80 to 94, to Washington, D.C., we had raised almost \$900,000. Amazingly, all of this money came from people like you and me and local civic organizations, none from big corporate sponsors.

On each flight, we had about eight to 10 volunteer guardians who paid their own way and that included a nurse and/or doctor. The veterans were given the air flight, deluxe tour buses, T-shirts, meals, and use of scooters, wheelchairs and/or oxygen if needed.

**(Continued on Page 5)**

# Honor Flight

(Continued from Page 4)

When we first began our trips, the veterans would meet in the Royal Oak Memorial Park parking lot at 4 a.m. After registering and picking up their T-shirts and souvenir bag, we left on a deluxe bus for Metro Airport. When we finished going through security, we went to the National Coney Island Restaurant at the airport for breakfast and then on to the plane. At the airport in Washington, D.C., another bus would meet us and take everyone to the WWII Monument and later to Arlington Cemetery. After lunch and a short tour of Washington, D.C., we would head back to the airport for the flight home, usually arriving around 8 p.m.

Senator Bob Dole, the man who personally pushed Congress to finally build the Memorial to WWII veterans after all these years, greeted the Michigan veterans every Saturday when we were in Washington, D.C. He was so impressed with what Dave Cameron had started here in Royal Oak and soon copied in 33 other states that when Dave died in 2008, Senator Dole called Dave's wife, Carole, and their son, Michael, to offer his sympathy and told Carole that because of what Dave started, he now makes it a point to be at the Monument every Saturday during the summer months to greet veterans from around the country.

Dave Cameron was a true patriot who selflessly committed himself to our nation's most senior heroes. *We all owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude; however, Dave would always say that the honor and privilege were all his.*

Can you believe it — this miracle of love for veterans called Honor Flight Michigan began with an idea from Dave Cameron and a few of his morning breakfast friends right here in Royal Oak in the National Coney Island in 2006? \$900,000 was raised, and almost 1,500

***We all owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude; however, Dave would always say that the honor and privilege were all his.***

heroes from Michigan were able to see their monument before it was too late.

*God bless all our veterans.*

Footnote: It is now estimated by the Secretary of the Army that over 1,500 WWII veterans die each day in America. If you can read, thank a teacher; if you can read it in English, thank a veteran.

*Kevin Sutherland, a former high school teacher in the 1960s and 1970s and recently retired Court Administrator of the 44th District Court in Royal Oak for the past 25 years, now volunteers as Director of Facilities for the National Shrine of the Little Flower. He has lived in Royal Oak since 1960, been married to his wife, Jennie, for 27 years and they have a daughter, Anne Marie, now a Junior at Albion College. Kevin has always loved history and been very active in the Royal Oak community. Past President of the Royal Oak Kiwanis Club, President of the Michigan Court Administrator Association, only recipient to be voted Court Administrator of the Year for the State of Michigan twice, Past President of the National Shrine of the Little Flower Parish Council, former Grand Knight and District Deputy for the Knights of Columbus, former treasurer of Honor Flight Michigan, present member of the Drug Task Force for Royal Oak Schools for six years and two-year member (and current board member) of the Historical Society.*

## The Mayor's Daughter

### **Submitted by Local Historian Lois Lance**

Another author in our midst! Therese Clawson Christman, one of our Royal Oak Historical Society members, has written a book, *The Mayor's Daughter*.

"A laugh on almost every page, a bit of history for every age!"

Therese Clawson Christman has written in a humorous manner about her childhood in Royal Oak during the 1930s and '40s. She was born in the family home on Northwood Boulevard. For

24 years, her father was either Mayor of Royal Oak or a City Commissioner. The book includes stories about the founding of Beaumont Hospital and how the city weathered the Great Depression, and concludes with tales of her family's relationship with the Shrine of the Little Flower and Father Coughlin.

Copies are available at Frenz Hardware (1010 N. Main Street in Royal Oak), the Royal Oak Historical Society Museum (1414 W. Webster, 248-439-1501) and from the author at the Annual Dinner on October 12.

## Orson Starr House Notes

### **By Karen Crawford, Historical Commission Chairperson**

On Saturday, June 25, the Historical Commission held a plant sale at the Orson Starr House. We had noted the flowerbeds were becoming overgrown and thinning was needed. We thought we would offer the "extras" for sale to the public and promoted it as a chance to own something that was grown in what is left of one of the oldest farms in Royal Oak. One of the docents from the Historical Guild was on hand to present tours as well. We were not sure how much interest we would have for either the tour or the plants.

I am pleased to report the citizens of Royal Oak responded. We had about 50 visitors who either purchased plants or took the tour or both! We were delighted with the number of people who came, their desire to acquire a plant or two

and their sincere interest in the house and its history.

We learned a lesson that Saturday as well. Sometimes doing what you do in a different way, on a different day and with a different orientation, can produce the best results. We will be looking for other ideas to attract visitors who are interested in sharing this Royal Oak treasure.

To those of you who came, thank you!

*In other news, the Royal Oak Historical Commission has recently acquired an early gramophone that we hope to be able to play during some open houses at the Starr House. We are looking for anyone who has knowledge of these early machines and who knows about the care and maintenance of them. This machine 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.*

---

**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.

# Civil War Soldiers of Royal Oak Township

## **The Briggs Family Sons**

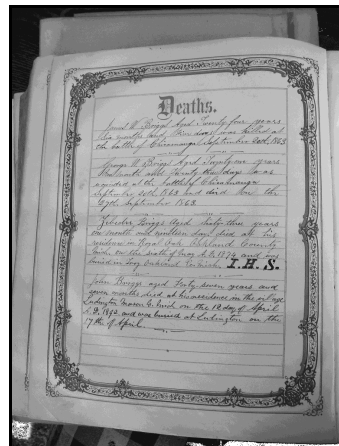
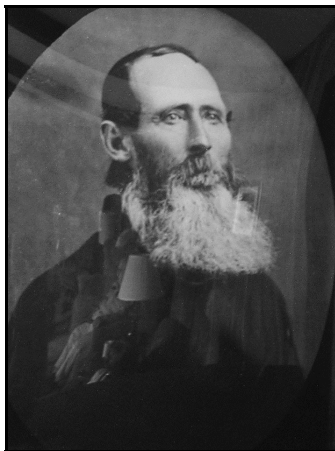
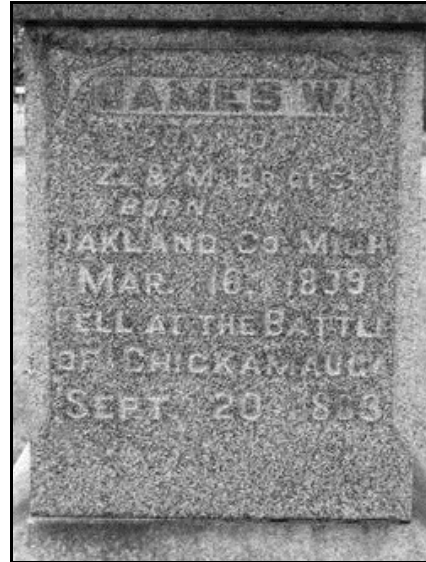
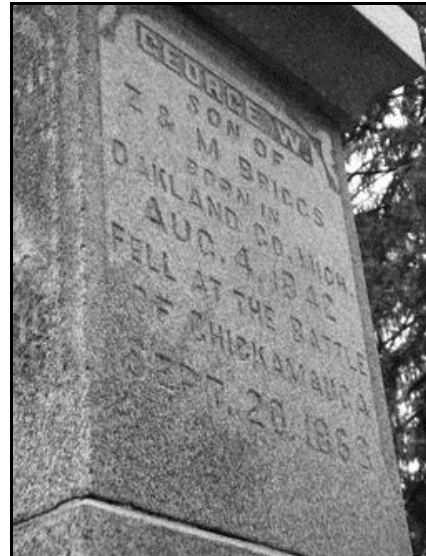
George W., James W., Benjamin A. & John Henry

Researched and Contributed by:

Barbara K. Randau,

*Chairperson of Roundtable of Royal Oak Historical Organizations and Royal Oak Historic Commission  
Past President (and current member)*

***Editor's Note: Thank you to Barbara K. Randau for contributing her excellent research on the Briggs Family Sons Civil War Soldiers in the Spring 2011 issue. We did not have space for photos in the last issue but want to provide them now.***



**Briggs patriarch Zebedee Briggs (buried in Royal Oak Cemetery) (photo at left); page from the Briggs' family Bible listing deaths (photo above right)**

**Above photos: Monuments located in Royal Oak Cemetery to the Briggs brothers who were killed at the Battle of Chickamauga**

**Photos Courtesy of Dave Faulkner**



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.