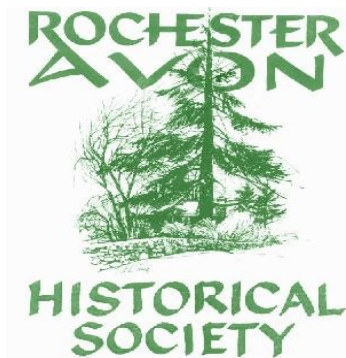


Rochester Avon Historical Society Research Reports

Research Report #12
Samuel A. Howlett Park
December 2013



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Samuel A. Howlett Park
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Introduction

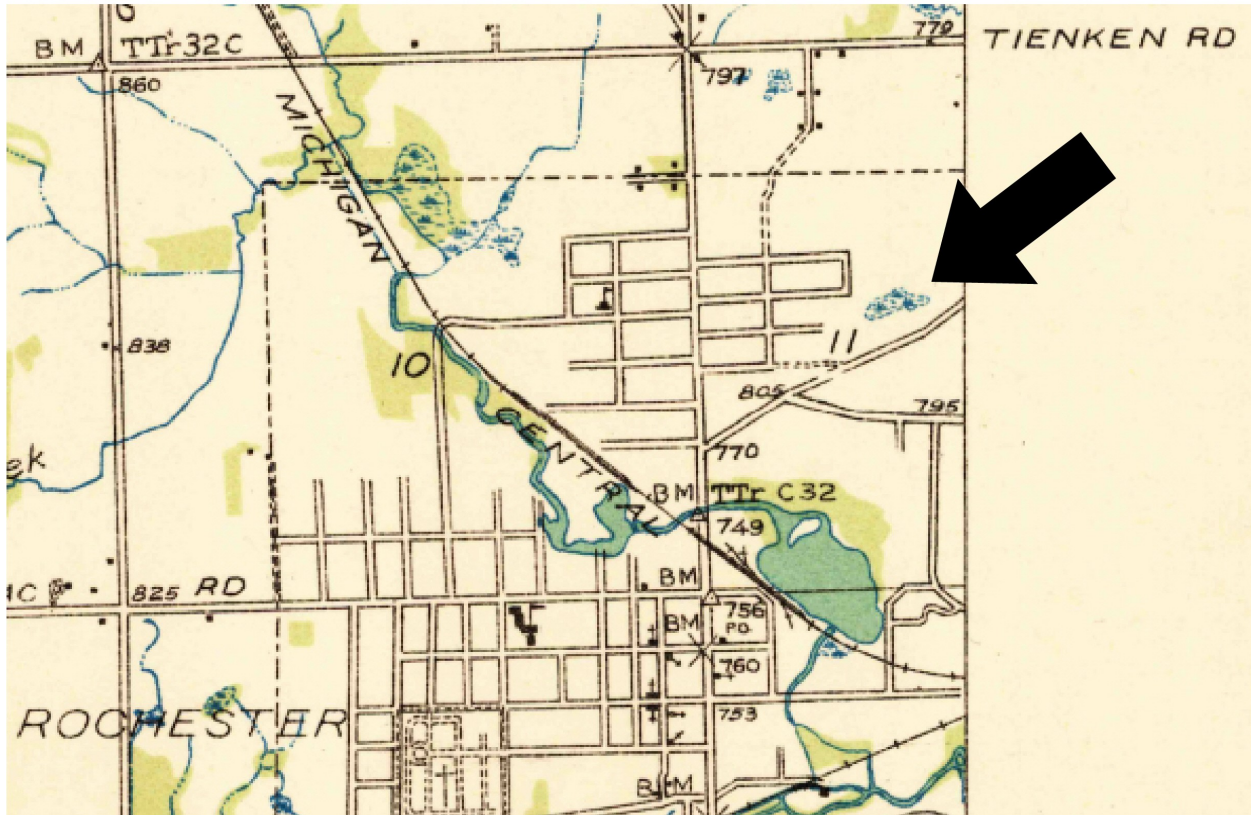
Samuel A. Howlett Park is a parcel of 13.1 acres lying in the northwest quarter of Section 11, immediately to the west of the quarter-section line and north of Romeo Road. It has been operated as a public park by the City of Rochester since 1978. With the intention of creating a park, the City of Rochester purchased the property from the Archdiocese of Detroit in 1978 for the sum of \$132,000.¹

As the property was part of the campus of St. Andrew Roman Catholic Church and School, at the time of the purchase the park was named St. Andrew Park. In May 1986, Rochester City Council passed a resolution renaming the park in honor of Samuel A. Howlett, former Rochester police chief, councilman and mayor. A re-dedication ceremony was held on June 30, 1986 and a new sign renaming the park "Samuel A. Howlett Municipal Park" was unveiled with Howlett himself in attendance for the event.²

Prior Land Use and Park Development

At the time of the 1978 purchase, the land now known as Samuel A. Howlett Park was an unimproved parcel lying to the south of the St. Andrew (now Holy Family) School. Historically, from approximately 1850, the property was part of the considerable holdings of the Lysander Woodward family. Woodward and his wife retained ownership of this portion of land even after they platted the Woodward Addition to the Village of Rochester in 1874 (which created Lysander, Terry, High and Short streets). The subject property later passed to the ownership of Lysander Woodward's son, Hubert Woodward, and was part of his estate until the 1920s, when it was purchased by Henry A. George, who owned the land upon which the Hillcrest subdivisions were platted.

After the City of Rochester acquired the property for park purposes, a number of improvements were gradually made including trails and pathways, a picnic area, a playground, and a pond. The pond was not an original natural feature of the property, but was formed through excavation of the marsh land on the parcel. The 1936 United States Geographical Survey topographical map of the Rochester quadrangle depicts this area as marsh land rather than as a body of water (see below).



A local civic organization, Friends of Samuel A. Howlett Park, provides volunteer assistance with park maintenance, clean-up and planting.

Samuel A. Howlett Biography

Samuel Adolph Howlett was born in Troy Township, Oakland County, Michigan, on June 30, 1909. He was the fourth of nine children of Palmer B. and Nettie James Howlett, who farmed land near Rochester & Big Beaver roads and trucked produce to Eastern Market in Detroit.³

Howlett's lineage in Oakland County goes back to pioneer days. His great-grandfather, also named Samuel Howlett, emigrated from Suffolk, England and came to Oakland County in 1832. The elder Howlett volunteered for the militia during the Toledo War, carried mail between Ann Arbor and St. Joseph, and bought and sold livestock in Detroit before settling in Avon Township in 1864.⁴ His son, Charles, and grandson Palmer, followed in his footsteps as Oakland County farmers.

After his graduation from Royal Oak's Oak Ridge High School in 1928, Sam Howlett worked briefly in the automobile industry before moving into law enforcement as a part-time traffic officer in the summer of 1933. He was hired by the village of Rochester in 1935 as the town's first daytime officer. Following the retirement of George Spencer in 1937, Howlett became chief of police and was, for a time, the only officer in the police department. In a 1977 interview given to the *Rochester Eccentric*, Howlett recalled that for four years he was a "one man operation," handling all emergency calls by himself.⁵

Howlett served as Rochester's chief of police for 27 years, from 1937 until his retirement from the force in 1964. During his years as chief, the department hired additional officers, a round-the-clock dispatcher, and in 1947, bought its first radio-equipped patrol car.⁶

Following his retirement from the police department, Howlett served as chief of security at National Twist Drill in Avon Township from 1965 to 1970. In 1970 he moved to Crittenton Hospital, where he established and organized the hospital's security department and served as its chief until 1978.⁷

Sam Howlett's civic contributions included serving on the city's charter commission in 1967, as a member of the Rochester City Council from 1967-1973 and 1977-1981, and two

terms as mayor of Rochester, in 1973-74 and 1975-76.⁸ During his tenure as mayor, the city began the Community House remodeling project, filed a petition to annex two square miles of Avon Township, and let bids for the rebuilding the Ludlow bridge.⁹



Sam Howlett at the Rochester Police Department dispatcher's desk in 1949.

Howlett also served his community as a member of the OPC governing board, the Oakland County Substance Abuse Advisory Council, as a justice of the peace in Avon Township. He was a life member of the Rochester Elks, past president of the Rochester Lions, a member of the Rochester Masonic Lodge and of First Congregational Church of Rochester.¹⁰ He died on July 7, 1996.

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- 2 "Howlett Park Dedicated," *Rochester Eccentric*, July 3, 1986, p.3A.
- 3 Sklar, Robert A. "Sam Howlett: He's Hooked on Rochester," *Rochester Eccentric*, July 28, 1977, p.16A.
- 4 Michigan Historical Commission. *Michigan Historical Collections*. (Lansing: Michigan Historical Commission), v.13 (1888), pp.250-251.
- 5 Sklar, *op cit*.
- 6 Sklar, *op cit*.
- 7 Manolatos, Tony. "Rochester's Mentor Passes Quietly at 87," *Rochester Clarion*, July 11, 1996, p.1A.
- 8 Manolatos, Tony. "Golf Outing Planned in Memory of Sam Howlett," *Rochester Clarion*, April 10, 1997.
- 9 "Howlett Returned to Mayor's Chair," *Rochester Clarion*, November 27, 1975, p.1.
- 10 Sklar, *op cit*.