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Local History Sketches

The Last Bath House – The Arethusa

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The lobby of the Arethusa, with its Mission oak furnishings

The Arethusa, built in 1911, was the last of the big bath houses erected in Mount Clemens. It was located on the west side of South Gratiot Avenue, a half-block south of Cass Avenue. A three-story colonial-style building, its red brick was enhanced by white columns. There were rooms on the two upper floors. The main lobby had furniture of mission oak. The interior of the bath house was constructed of Tennessee marble. The Arethusa's first two years were difficult for the new stock company formed by **William Lehner**, and in 1913 complete control passed to him. He had worked at the **Original Bath House** as a boy of 16.

The **Wappner Hotel**, built in 1908, was a family hotel. When the Arethusa Bath House was built, it adjoined the Wappner and was connected with it. Later the Wappner became part of the Arethusa properties and was renamed the **Arethusa Hotel**.

On January 15, 1925, the Arethusa Hotel and Bath House was sold to **Morris and Jacob Feldman** of Bridgeport, Connecticut. They, too, were visitors who had come for the mineral baths and stayed to enter the business. Morris Feldman remained active in the business for many years, one of his duties being to oversee the care of the mineral well. It was often necessary to "pull" a well in the spring of the year to insure its proper functioning for the summer season. The mineral water was very corrosive and the pipes that brought it to the surface frequently needed repair or replacement. In the height of the season 300 to 500 baths a day might be given, forcing the wells to pump almost

continuously. Mechanical breakdowns could occur, which naturally created a serious problem for the bath house. This was one reason many of the bath houses drilled a second well.

The Arethusa was sold to **Arthur** and **Jerome Feldman**, sons of Morris, on January 1, 1946. The *Macomb Daily* of October 26, 1972, reported that the Arethusa had been sold to the **L and T Development Company**, with **Nathan Litvin** as one of the principals. This company had plans to renovate the Arethusa, but unfortunately they were unable to carry them out. The Feldman family took back the building, but the doors were closed, never to reopen.

The Arethusa was the last of the bath houses to give mineral baths. It burned in 1976, and the spectacular blaze seemed almost appropriate for the end of an era.

For more information about the Arethusa, we recommend:

- Cain, Nancy. "Famed Arethusa Hotel Destroyed by Spectacular Three-Alarm Fire," *Macomb Daily*, May 26, 1976, p.1A.
- Morris, Julie. "Rise and Fall of Arethusa--From Healing Spa to Eyesore," *Detroit Free Press*, May 27, 1976, p.6B.
- Selwa, Robert. "Last Bathhouse in City Closes," *Macomb Daily*, December 7, 1973, p.1A.
- Howes, John. "Arethesa Hotel is Sold," *Macomb Daily*, October 26, 1972.
- Boyd, George. "...And Then There Was Only One," *Macomb Daily*, March 27, 1970, p.8D.
- Fink, Herschel P. "Mt. Clemens' Last Health Spa All Washed Up," *Detroit News*, September 27, 1968, p.5C.
- "Arethusa, Newest Mt. Clemens Bath-House, Was Built in 1911," in *Pageant of Progress*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Nellis Newspapers, [1928], sec.4, p.16.
- "Arethusa Baths Sold by Lehner," *Mount Clemens Press*, January 15, 1925, p.1, col.4.
- "The Arethusa Bath Co.: Name of the New Bath House Enterprise," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, September 2, 1910, p.4, col.2.