

Mount Clemens Public Library

Local History Sketches

The Colonial Hotel and Bath House

by Nelly D. Longstaff

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The Colonial opened as the **Mount Clemens Sanitarium** on December 1, 1896, and was located on Gratiot Avenue on high ground about a quarter of a mile south of the center of the city. **Dr. A. N. Shotwell**, the first medical director, was associated with **Emma** and **Ida Lilly** of Indianapolis, Indiana, in the building of the new establishment. The Lilly sisters had been visitors to Mount Clemens for several years, and Emma was to become a Mount Clemens citizen.

The name "Colonial" was taken in 1897, according to the *Mount Clemens Monitor* of July 7, 1897. The style of the architecture must have prompted the change. The imposing building was brick and stone and set on spacious grounds. The main building, five stories high, had a broad porch and stately columns. The tiled office had a fireplace, columns of Florentine marble and walls of a rich Pompeian red. The reading and writing room was decorated in blue and the ladies' parlor in green. Offices of the medical director were on the first floor, as was the fine dining room, which had a separate outside entrance on the south end of the building. The bedrooms had hardwood floors and carpets. On the basement level were the billiard room, barber shop, smoking room, cigar stand and lavatories.

Plans for the building were by **T. Van Damme**, and it was erected under the supervision of **Charles C. Lamb** and **George H. Nichols**. The plumbing and heating work was done by **A.F. Glover** and the electrical work by Electrical Engineering Company of Detroit. **E.R. Egnew** served as manager of the Colonial beginning in July, 1901. Another manager was **W.W. Witt**, who, according to the

Pageant of Progress, had then been manager for ten years.

Although Emma Lilly was to continue to live at the hotel for many years, control of the hotel and bath house passed to **Dr. Gustof A. Persson** in the late 1920s. Persson came to Mount Clemens about 1907 and was first connected with the **Minnestola Hotel** on North Avenue. He and his family were living there when the hotel burned. Later he served as medical director of both the **Park** and the Colonial bath houses. Persson planned to build a new bath house, the Perssondale, on the banks of the Clinton River in the Breitmeyer subdivision. It was to have research facilities as well as beautiful gardens. This project was abandoned, however, and the Persson Foundation was formed to operate the Colonial and to conduct research on the cure of rheumatism. Dr. Persson died in 1934, and in 1935 his widow sold the Colonial to a New York syndicate headed by **Max Elkin**. Max Elkin sold it in 1966 to **John P. Bedard** and **William Lindsay**, who in turn sold it to **George Rinaldi** in 1968. Baths had not been given there for some years, and the building was converted to many uses. [The Colonial burned on May 31, 1984 and the site is now the location of a drug store.]

For more information about the Colonial, we recommend:

- Hotts, Mitch. "Three-Alarm Fire Levels Colonial," *Macomb Daily*, May 31, 1984, p.1A.
- Thomas, Charles. "Old Hotel Could Become Health Clinic," *Macomb Daily*, October 22, 1981.
- Thomas, Charles. "State Now Owns Colonial," *Macomb Daily*, September 26, 1981.
- Thomas, Charles. "New Hotel Owner Seeks Tax Break," *Macomb Daily*, May 28, 1980.
- Chargot, Patricia. "Want the Secret of Youth? Try Mt. Clemens' Last Spa," *Detroit Free Press*, October 9, 1979, p.15A.
- DeMott, G. Stuart. "Colonial Hotel is Sold," *Macomb Daily*, May 3, 1966.
- "Death Claims Emma Lilly, 91: Former Colonial Hotel Owner Dies," *Mount Clemens Daily Monitor*, November 27, 1940, p.1, col.6.
- "Colonial Hotel Preserves All the Comforts of By-Gone Days," in *Pageant of Progress*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Nellis Newspapers, [1928], sec.4, p.7.
- "A Splendid Institution is the New Sanitarium at Mt. Clemens," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, November 20, 1896, p.1, col.4.