

Mount Clemens Public Library

Local History Sketches

The Macomb County Building

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During the "Roaring Twenties," Macomb County officials began to feel the pinch of overcrowded conditions in the county courthouse at Cass & Gratiot. The building had been constructed in 1880, and was shared by Macomb County and the City of Mount Clemens. The Board of Supervisors began a plan to build a new courthouse.

The board's first step, taken in 1927, was an attempt to break the will of Christian Clemens, founder of the city of Mount Clemens. The land on which the old courthouse stood had been [deeded to the county by Clemens](#) with the stipulation that it be used as the county seat. The Board of Supervisors sought to break the will so that they might sell the land upon which the courthouse stood and use the proceeds to finance the construction of a new building on another site.

After this plan was abandoned, the supervisors set about making plans to construct a new building on the existing site at Cass & Gratiot. On November 11, 1930, the Arrow Wrecking Company began the task of demolishing the old courthouse building. The old cornerstone which had been laid on October 21, 1880 was removed and opened, but its contents are reported to have been unremarkable and disappointing to the onlookers.

In August, 1930, architect George J. Haas of St. Clair Shores submitted his plans for a limestone-clad, 12-story building with a square footprint and an Art Deco design. In September of that

Most noteworthy among the design elements which grace the Macomb County Building's facade are the six granite figures perched atop the structure. When the designs were drawn, a military motif was favored because of the nearby presence of Selfridge Field. For that reason, the visages of a soldier, sailor, marine and airman were incorporated in the design. In a nod to the county's history, the figures of a Revolutionary War soldier and a Native American were added as well. The front and back of the building feature the Revolutionary War soldier and Native American faces. The sailor and marine face Cass Avenue, while the soldier and airman gaze toward Selfridge Air Base.

Macomb County Building Facts

Year built: started in 1931; partially occupied in 1933; substantially finished in 1944.

Height: 13 stories, rising 219 feet above street level

Architect: George J. Haas

Cost: \$605,000

Although a new county court building opened to the north of it in 1972, and a new administration building rose to the south of it in 1998, the Macomb County Building of 1931 still stands as a proud sentinel over Macomb's seat of justice, from the very spot that Christian Clemens selected for it in 1818.

For further information about the history of the Macomb County Building, we recommend:

- "Move to Break Clemens Deed: Drawing of Abstract Marks First Step in Changing Court House Site," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, August 10, 1927.
- "Tentative Plans Provide 12-Story County Building: Draft of Architect Now Being Considered by Committee," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, August 1, 1930, p.1.
- "New Courthouse Job Near Start," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, March 20, 1931, p.1.
- "Courthouse is Dedicated for Years to Come," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, June 5, 1933, p.1.
- "County's Once Staggering Debt on New Building is Discharged: Pretentious Structure is Now in Clear," *Mount Clemens Daily Monitor-Leader*, March 7, 1944.
- Kantner, Jack B. "Six Tax-Supported Gents Give Public Stony Stare," *Mount Clemens Daily Monitor-Leader*, September 3, 1948.
- "Crash, Depression Hinder Start of County Building Construction," *Mount Clemens Daily Monitor-Leader*, July 21, 1952.
- Laurain, Lawrence A. "History of a Building: County Structure Has Tradition," *Macomb Daily*, March 1975.
- Read the [Macomb County Building's](#) entry at skyscrapers.com