

Mount Clemens Public Library

Local History Sketches

Mount Clemens Excursion Boats

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Situated as it is along the **Clinton River** near **Lake St. Clair**, Mount Clemens had been home to shipyards since the town was settled in the early 19th century. When the bath industry began to attract large numbers of tourists to the city during the warm weather months, excursion boats carrying passengers on pleasure tours of the river and lake became a natural outgrowth of the bath business.

Mount Clemens was the home port of several vessels that were used primarily as excursion craft, and a number of freighters carrying commodities such as coal, salt and lumber which were occasionally used in the passenger trade as well.



Mineral City passes the "Leap the Dips" roller coaster (background, left) on the east bank of the Clinton in Mount Clemens

An early passenger carrier was the steamer **Ida**, built as a freight steamer for **Captain Albert H. Tucker** in 1872. She was refitted as a passenger boat in 1882 and ran a daily service between Detroit and Mount Clemens.

One of the larger vessels, well-remembered by many visitors to Mount Clemens, was the 70-foot steamer **Mineral City**. Built at the DuLac shipyard and owned and operated by **Captain Burton G. DuLac**, the Mineral City was launched on April 9, 1895, and began passenger service a month later. She was built exclusively for the excursion trade and could carry as many as 200 passengers. During the week, the Mineral City made day trips across Lake St. Clair to **Walpole Island**, as well as to fertile

fishing grounds in the area. On Sundays, passengers were carried to the **St. Clair Flats**, known at the turn of the century as the "Venice of America." Mineral City was sold to Chicago men in 1913 and eventually abandoned at Ogden Slip, Chicago, in the 1930s.

The steamer yacht **Roberta** was built in 1888 for hotelman **E.R. Egnew**, who named the vessel after **Miss Roberta Ruggles**, the daughter of the **Michigan Central Railroad's** general passenger agent, **O.W. Ruggles**. *Roberta* operated pleasure tours of the river and the lake, and during the summer of 1889 made a grand two-week tour of Lake Erie and the Saint Lawrence River, covering over 1,500 miles. *Roberta* met an unhappy end in July, 1900, when she caught fire near **Middle Sister Island** in Lake Erie and sank to the bottom.



The **Major Wilcox**, launched for passenger service in 1904, had a long and varied history. A 55-footer with powerful Packard engines, she was taken over and refitted by the **United States Coast Guard** during World War II. In 1953, **John Ruby** purchased the vessel, refurbished her, and began running charter excursions to the St. Clair Flats from the **MacArthur Park** dock on the Clinton River. Other excursion boats operating out of Mount Clemens were **Paulina, Mascotte, Ivanhoe, Bath City, Newsboy, Uarda, Perry D, Red Star** and **Mary**.

As early as 1909, the *Mount Clemens Monitor* lamented the death of the excursion trade. More than a hundred gasoline boats were already on the river by that time, and streetcars and automobiles were taking visitors to the clubhouses and resort areas on the lake. The day of the leisurely steamer was fading away.

In the spring of 1990, after a long absence, excursion boats returned to the Mount Clemens riverfront. The passenger cruiser **Clinton**, operated by Waterway Tours and later by Clinton River Cruises, offered boat tours and charters from the gazebo dock in downtown Mount Clemens.

For further information about Mount Clemens' excursion boats, we recommend:

- Hotts, Mitch. "Cruisin': Clinton River Boat Ride Offers Fresh Perspective," *Macomb Daily*, August 3, 1991, p.1A.
- Schabath, Gene. "Clinton River: A Liquid Asset to Two Cruise Ship Owners," *Detroit News*, May 31, 1990, p.3B.
- Arnsby, Desmond. "It's All in the Day," *Mount Clemens Monitor-Leader*, May 26, 1953
- "Pleasure Trips on the Clinton: Outings of Other Years Show Evidence of Revival," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, August 5, 1924, p.1, col.6.

- "The Mineral City has been sold....," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, April 18, 1913, p.1, col.3.
- "The river excursion business seems to be fading...," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, June 18, 1909, p.1, col.4.
- "The yacht Roberta, which took fire..." *Mount Clemens Monitor*, August 3, 1900, p.8, col.3.
- "The Mineral City," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, April 26, 1895, p.1, col.5.
- "The Roberta tied up at her dock...." *Mount Clemens Monitor*, September 13, 1889, p.4, col.1.
- "Steam Yacht Roberta," *Mount Clemens Press*, May 17, 1888, p.1.
- Follow this link to visit the homepage of [Clinton River Cruises](#) and read about the company's current excursion schedule
- Lafferty, William. "The Silly, the Tragic, and the Sad: The *Mary M.*, *Favorite*, and *Mineral City*." *Lake Michigan Maritime Marginalia*, v.1, no.2 (February 1999).