

Mount Clemens Public Library

Local History Sketches

The Mount Clemens Glass Factory

by Betty Lou Morris

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In the spring of 1835 the residents of Mount Clemens were amazed to see, coming up the Clinton River, "40 barges, a full army of workmen, bricks...and family and relatives" of **Dr. Ebenezer W. Hall** and his son-in-law, **Isaac Grovier**. They had come to build and operate a factory for making window glass for this town and the surrounding area, as well as for shipment by water to Detroit and other Great Lakes ports. They had purchased the property on the river at the eastern edge of the village from **Christian Clemens** who specified this use of the property in the deed. He was, no doubt, encouraging this kind of investment and industrial development for his community. A considerable capital investment was needed for materials and equipment and to entice skilled glass blowers to come here.



Dr. Ebenezer W. Hall

Hall and Grovier must have worked very quickly to get their factory into production because by January 1836 the *Detroit Free Press* reported: "Recently opened in Mount Clemens was a glass factory employing 50 men brought from eastern cities. It is the only plant of its kind in the state." Skilled workmen included glass blowers, glass cutters, pot moulders, blacksmiths and glass box makers. In addition to the factory the site included an ashery, blacksmith shop, lime kiln and store, as well as houses for the workmen. Window glass was the chief product and the *Detroit Free Press* reported exports from the port of Detroit of 1,860 boxes of Michigan glass in 1843 and 4,500 in 1844. The only examples of Mount Clemens glass known today are non-production pieces such as bowls, ladles, flasks, etc. which were probably made by the glass blowers for their own use as gifts.

The factory was in operation until about 1850 but financial problems began in the 1840s when creditors forced the business into receivership. By 1849 Isaac Grovier was the sole owner. He died shortly after leasing the business to **Jeremiah Folsom**. Several reasons may account for the failure of this enterprise. Local needs may not have been met. Local sand and water and wood for fuel may have become unsatisfactory. Transportation and competition may have been factors as well as the generally poor economic conditions of the period.

In spite of its limited financial success, the Mount Clemens Glass Factory, an early manufacturing venture and one of the first in Michigan, was important to the developing state as well as to Mount Clemens itself. It was not a typical home-based business. It was a complicated manufacturing enterprise requiring skilled craftsmen, knowledgeable management and a large investment at risk. It filled a vital need in our new, sparsely settled community and brought many workmen and their families here to live. Ebenezer Hall was a dynamic man--a teacher, physician, entrepreneur, druggist, herbalist, Masonic leader and man of public affairs. His descendants were similarly gifted and continued to live and work here and to lay the foundation that permitted Mount Clemens to prosper and grow.

For further information about the Mount Clemens Glass Factory, we recommend:

- Henry, Russell B. "The Mount Clemens Glass Works," *Michigan History*, March/April 1988, pp.12-19.
- King, John. "History of Glass-Making Will Include Bath City," *Mount Clemens Advertiser-Monitor*, February 10, 1939, p.1, col.3.
- Morris, Betty Lou. "Mount Clemens Glass Factory, " (Lecture given before the Macomb County Historical Society, Mount Clemens, Michigan, April 26, 1987)
- "Reveal Opening of Glass Factory Here in 1835," *Mount Clemens Monitor-Leader*, July 19, 1945.
- "An Ancient Document" (reprint of a petition of Hall & Grovier to the Michigan Legislature for financial assistance in 1838), *Mount Clemens Monitor*, December 30, 1904, p.5, col.4.