

# Mount Clemens Public Library

## Local History Sketches

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### The Macomb Theatre

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*The Macomb Theatre about 1922*

A theatre to rival the movie showplaces of Detroit came to Mount Clemens in 1921, and she was a grand lady indeed.

The **Macomb Theatre** was the brainchild of **Frank J. Kendrick** of Mount Clemens, who, along with several other local men, saw the need in Mount Clemens for a theatre in addition to the **Bijou**. The men formed the **Macomb Theatre Company** with Frank Kendrick as president, **Harry M. Widrig** as resident manager, and **Louis F. Wolf**, **William E. Koehler**, **William Wagner**, **Jacob Malbin** and **John Guenther** as board members.

The company's original intent was to create an additional movie venue in downtown Mount Clemens, with more capacity than the 700-seat Bijou. A site on Walnut street was acquired and plans for a 1,000-seat movie palace were undertaken. Unsatisfied with the work of a local architect, the company turned to **C. Howard Crane** of Detroit, the designer of Detroit's Orchestra Hall and Radio City Music Hall in New York. Crane and his associates convinced the company to provide a stage for vaudeville acts, and the design of the theatre changed accordingly.

The new theatre would seat 1,035 on the main floor and an additional 600 in the balcony. The stage area was equipped with fly galleries for scenery, dressing rooms for performers, and spot and flood lights of the latest design. A massive Hillgren & Lane pipe organ was specially manufactured for the Macomb Theatre.

Local contractors for the construction were **Schott Bros. and Weber** of Mount Clemens. **L.F. Wolf Hardware** installed the plumbing, heating and ventilating apparatus; **Modern Electric** performed the electrical installation. Carpets were laid by **F.W. Krauseneck**, and building materials were supplied by **Kendrick & Bruel** and **R.C. Ullrich Hardware**. The cost of construction was

\$300,000, with an additional \$60,000 spent on furnishings.

Decorating was done by **Max Goldberg** of Detroit, and the *Daily Leader* marveled at the splendid appointments of the house:

**Massive pilasters resplendent with rich colorings, and ornate designs, and with bronze caps, support a well-proportioned entablature, on which rests the arched ceiling. Gold pilasters enrich the sides of the theater, the entire color scheme being in blue, green, gold and grey. The ceiling is paneled with plaster relief work and mural paintings by a renowned decorative artist and are inserted in the plaques.**



*The auditorium viewed from the stage, as it appeared before the 1921 grand opening*  
(Photo courtesy of Macomb County Historical Society)

The newspaper further noted that the main curtain was of deep blue silk velour with a huge letter "M" in gold at the bottom.

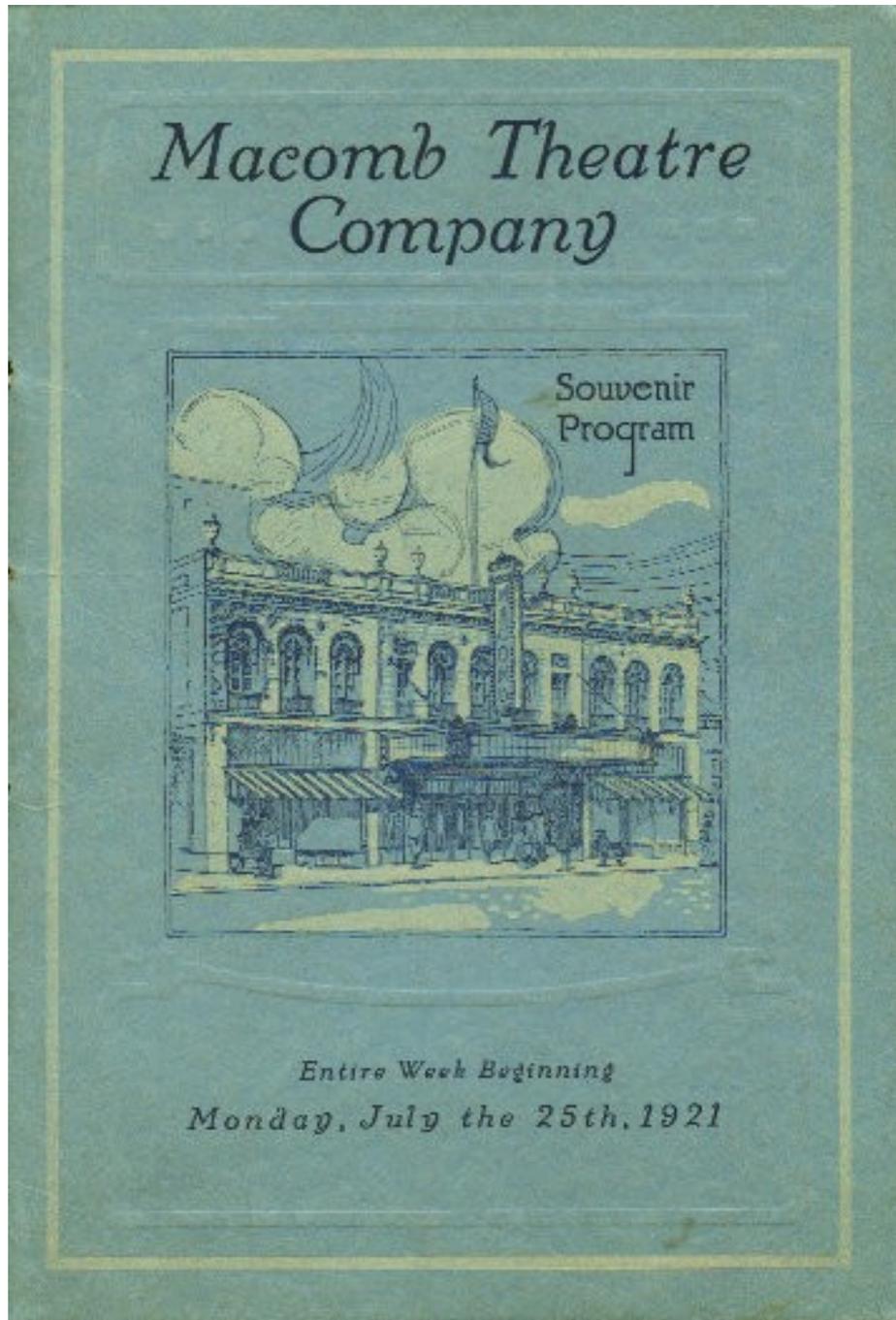
The Macomb's stage was devoted primarily to vaudeville acts at first, but motion pictures and road attractions were also regular features. The opening act on July 25, 1921, was the **Jimmie Hodges Musical Comedy Company** offering the musical farce *Pretty Baby*. The movie attraction was Charles Ray in *Scrap Iron*. Mount Clemens turned out in great numbers and filled every one of the 1,635 seats for the theatre's premiere performance.



*The balcony mezzanine as it appeared before the 1921 grand opening*  
(Photo courtesy of Macomb County Historical Society)

The Macomb continued to offer vaudeville and road shows well into the 1930s, and in the face of the decline of live theatre became a successful first-run movie house. The theatre was

briefly closed in 1953, then was purchased by former usher Robert Vickrey, who operated it as a movie theatre catering to the interests of teenagers for almost three decades. In June, 1980, beset by youthful vandals and stiff competition from multi-screen movie complexes at Lakeside and Macomb Malls, the Macomb rang down its final curtain as a movie house after running its last picture, *Kramer vs. Kramer*.



*The cover and inside pages (see below) of the grand opening program for July 25, 1921*

(Images courtesy of The Macomb County Historical Society)

# OPENING WEEK'S PROGRAM

## Monday and Tuesday, July 25-26th

Jimmie Hodges Presents  
**HODGES MUSICAL COMEDY COMPANY**  
 With Don Lanning in  
**"PRETTY BABY"**

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**  
 Mrs. DuPont (wife of a recreant husband) ..... Jean Chapman  
 Mr. DuPont (the husband) ..... Bert Morley  
 Mike (the house boy from Dixie) ..... Tom Williams  
 ..... **DON LANNING**  
 The Pretty Baby..... Blanche Wilcox  
 Fred Smith..... Lew Evans  
 Edwin Norkin..... Ray Yearwood  
 Alfred Harris..... Bert Morley  
 George Norman..... Harry Rose  
 Cornelius Van Cort..... Eddie Gordon  
 George Durand..... Billie Parish  
 Cabaret Girls, Show Girls, Guests  
**MUSICAL PROGRAM**  
 Introducing Pretty Baby.....  
 ..... Miss DeSales and Co.  
 Beautiful Anabelle Lee.....  
 ..... Jean Chapman and Girls

Aunt Jemima's Jubilee.....  
 ..... Blanche Wilcox and Girls  
 Trail to Home Sweet Home.....  
 ..... Bert Morley  
 Japanese Sandman.....  
 ..... Eddie Gordon and Girls  
 Parisiela, Blanche Wilcox and Girls  
 A Few Minutes With.....  
 ..... Mr. Don Lanning  
 Sweetest Girl on Old Broadway  
 ..... Eddie Gordon and Girls  
 Broadway Blues.....  
 ..... Blanche Wilcox and Girls  
 Mammy..... Don Lanning  
 Hodges Trio and Girls  
 Wonderful Baby.....  
 ..... Don Lanning and Girls  
 Finale..... Entire Company

## Wednesday and Thurs., July 27-28

Jimmie Hodges Presents  
**HODGES MUSICAL COMEDY COMPANY**  
 with Don Lanning in  
**"ALL ABOARD FOR CUBA"**

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**  
 Ebenezer..... William Parish  
 Naydine Millsford..... Johnnie O'Neil  
 Dick Bolliver..... Ray Yearwood  
 Rob. Walton..... Bert Morley  
 Mrs. Thompson..... Jean Chapman  
 Reginald Amesley..... Eddie Gordon  
 Rev. Pollock..... Harry Rose  
 Jimmie (a chauffeur)..... Lew Evans  
 Winifred Thompson.....  
 ..... Blanche Wilcox  
 Johnnie Smith.....  
 ..... **MR. DON LANNING**  
 Friends and bridesmaids  
**MUSICAL PROGRAM**  
 Opening Ensemble..... Boys and Girls  
 It's the Little Things That Tell.....  
 ..... Nadine  
 Some Music If You Please.....  
 ..... Bert Morley

Havana Moon..... Naydine & Co.  
 Rock-a-Bye Lullaby Mammy.....  
 ..... Mrs. Thompson  
 Hold Me..... Reginald and Winifred  
 Jazz Babies' Ball..... Nadine and Co.  
 A Few Minutes of Harmony.....  
 ..... Hodges Trio  
 Miami Shore..... Mrs. Thompson & Co.  
 On Their Way to Jersey.....  
 ..... Dick and Boys  
 La Veeda..... Mrs. Thompson & Co.  
 Kentucky Blues..... Jimmie & Co.  
 Peacock Alley..... Reginald and Girls  
 I'll Miss You..... Johnnie  
 I've Had a Lot of Girlies.....  
 ..... Girls and Boys  
 Finale..... Entire Company

**Motion Picture Attractions**

**Chas. Ray**  
 in "Scrap Iron"

**Movie Madness**  
 Educational Comedy

**Kinograms**

Friday and Saturday's  
 Program on Page 21



**Motion Picture Attractions**

**Norma Talmadge**  
 in "The Passion Flower"

Hill Room Boys in "Is Bad Again"  
 Also Screen Snapshots

Sunday Program on  
 Page 25

### AN ORGAN YOU'LL ENJOY

One of the delights of the modern theatre of today is the organ music which appeals to everyone. In the New Macomb Theatre considerable thought has been given to this essential and after a careful study of all the instruments on the market, a Hillgren and Lane organ has been chosen. This organ is noted for its soft tones and the superior quality of its music. It includes two chambers over the auditorium and an echo chamber back of the mezzanine floor, producing an effect that is particularly delightful. The organ was built especially for the Macomb theatre on special order. An organ similar to this is to be installed in the Capitol Theatre, now building, in Detroit.

### Clementine Restaurant

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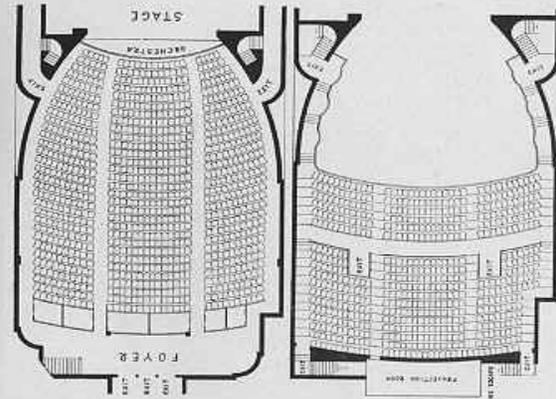
15 North  
Walnut Street



YOU WILL  
ALWAYS  
FIND A  
WELCOME



HOFFMANN'S  
BAZAAR



FLOOR PLAN OF THE MACOMB THEATRE — NOTE THE EXITS

An attempt to return the Macomb to its former glory was made when the **Macomb Council for the Performing Arts** purchased the building in 1981 and restored it for use as a live theatre. The Council was recognized by the federal government for funding the restoration with local donations. *Godspell* was the inaugural performance at the rejuvenated Macomb Theatre, but its troubles were far from over. The theatre was closed in June 1984 to restructure its debt, and the Council was forced to offer it for sale in October 1984.

Another live theatre project was undertaken in 1987 when the building became the **Great Lakes Dinner Playhouse**, but that venture folded after only a year. In 1991, new owners of the building converted the once-grand Macomb Theatre to the **Club Hollywood** nightclub, and in 1997 the nightclub's name was changed to JD's Macomb Theater. The year 2000 saw the building's restoration and reopening as the [Emerald Theatre](#).

For further information about the Macomb Theatre, we recommend:

- "New Macomb to Stage Varied Attractions," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, July 22, 1921, p.1, col.7.
- "The New Theater to Open Monday: Wonderful Work Accomplished," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, July 22, 1921, p.1, col.4.
- "Society Packs New Theater at Opening," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, July 26, 1921, p.1, col.7.
- "Krim Obtains Macomb Lease," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, October 28, 1926, p.1.
- Thomas, Charles. "The Last Picture Show: Landmark Macomb Theater Shut; Young Rowdies Share the Blame," *Macomb Daily*, June 6, 1980, p.2A.
- Kehetian, Mitch. "White House Salutes Rededicated Theater," *Macomb Daily*, May 14, 1981.

- Thomas, Charles. "Macomb Theater Gets Facelift," *Macomb Daily*, April 26, 1982.
- Hotts, Mitch. "Macomb Theater For Sale, Again," *Macomb Daily*, October 3, 1984, p.1A.
- Holmes, Jennifer. "Macomb Theatre on Comeback Trail--Again," *Detroit Free Press*, January 16, 1986, p.1B.
- Driskell, Bill. "'New' Macomb Theater Observes 65th Birthday," *Macomb Daily*, July 16, 1986, p.3A.
- Walker, Donna. "Dinner Theater Still Battling to Stay Afloat," *Macomb Daily*, September 28, 1988 p.3A.
- Hotts, Mitch. "Nightclub in Future for Macomb Theater," *Macomb Daily*, August 30, 1991, p.3A.
- Puls, Mark. "Mt. Clemens Hopes High-Tech Dance Club Makes Downtown Jump," *Detroit News*, January 19, 1996.
- Use this link to read more about the theatre designs of architect [C. Howard Crane](#)
- Read a portion of an interview with [Milton G. Kendrick](#) in which he recalls his father's role in the founding of the Macomb Theatre