

Mount Clemens Public Library

Local History Sketches

The Medea Bath House

by Nelly D. Longstaff

(excerpted from *Centennial History of Mount Clemens, Michigan, 1879-1979*. ©1980 by Mount Clemens Public Library. All rights reserved).



The second bath house, built in 1882 by the **Mount Clemens Bath Company**, was the Medea. In late 1881 **William J. Daley** had organized the company. According to the Eldredge history some other members of the company at that time were **Charles Nims**, **Charles Parsons**, **Thomas Fitzgerald**, and **Spencer B. Russell**. Mr. Daley served as the manager of the Medea for many years, but the majority interest in the company was held by the **Ullrich** family. The Medea was located on the east side of Gratiot Avenue, south of Court House Square. The *Cutter's Guide* of 1916 gives this information about the name, the first of a series of mythological names to be given to Mount Clemens bath houses:

Medea was a favorite goddess in mythical lore symbolizing the Dawn. Her virtues have been lauded by modern poets because of her mysterious power in restoring to rheumatic old Eson the bloom and activity of youth. She gave her name to the Medes, who in connection with the Persians have been handed down in history. She also gave her name with added luster to Mount Clemens' famous bath house where thousands of Esons are annually restored to health and youthful vigor.

The new bath house flourished, and in 1889 the Mount Clemens Bath Company voted to acquire the property surrounding the bath house and build a hotel. By that time the principal stockholders were Paul and Adam **Ullrich**, as well as Daley and Russell. The need for expanded facilities is indicated by the growth in the number of baths given at the Medea in the month of July; the total rose from 4,869 in 1890 to 6,748 in 1891, and to 7,681 in 1892. The first step was to rebuild the bath house, and 1891 saw the new Medea Bath House ready for business. With 150 porcelain tubs, it was one of the largest bathing establishments in the world, capable of giving 1,500 baths a day.



The dining room and the lobby of the Medea

On June 6, 1904, the new Hotel Medea opened its doors, and the dream of the Mount Clemens Bath Company was a reality. The Eldredge history describes the Medea building: "In every respect modern, [it] is constructed of brick, stone and steel and is practically fire-proof. The ten massive arches forming the first story of the Gratiot street frontage are of Lake Superior red sandstone, and enclose an arcade porch one hundred eighty feet in length by sixteen feet in width. The same stone is used with red pressed brick in carrying up the entire front of the building, giving a rich and massive effect" (p. 126). The interior included an imposing lobby finished in white marble and tile with a marble stairway. There were 135 bedrooms furnished with mahogany chairs and tables, brass bedsteads and handsome velvet or Wilton carpets. The dining room was "a grand apartment." There were writing rooms, a ladies waiting room, and a buffet and grill in a detached building reached by a passageway. **T. Van Damme** was the architect of the four-story building, which was built by **Hubarth and Schott** at a cost of \$150,000. **George R. Benton** was chief clerk and **J.D. Forsyth** was in charge of the culinary department.

Three generations of the Ullrich family were associated with the Medea Hotel and Bath House. Paul Ullrich's son, Paul J., purchased Adam Ullrich's interest and became treasurer in 1891. His brother, Leslie, acquired his interest in 1902 and was to serve as manager for along period. **Matthew Slush** was a stockholder at one time, but in the early 1930s the Ullrich family bought out the minority interests and became sole owners. Marcus, John and David Ullrich, sons of Paul J., were active in the business at various times until it was sold to the **Priehs Realty Company** in 1955.

After the sale of the Medea to Priehs Realty, baths were still given there until 1963, when the boiler house and wells were acquired by the city's urban renewal program and cleared for construction of northbound U.S. Highway 25. The hotel building was converted to offices and stores. [The building was razed in 1991].

For more information about the Medea, we recommend:

- Selweski, Chad. "Dispute Slows Medea Razing," *Macomb Daily*, January 8, 1992, p.1A.
- Hotts, Mitch. "Old Hotel May Be A Tough Sell," *Macomb Daily*, September 24, 1990, p.3A.
- Hotts, Mitch. "A Piece of the Medea Hotel Awaits Nostalgia Buffs," *Macomb Daily*, July 6, 1990, p.7A.
- Kleinknecht, William. "Preservationists Fear Medea Hotel's Future," *Detroit Free Press*, February 28, 1989, p.3A.
- Wowk, Michael. "Rebirth of a Hotel: Lawyers, Boutiques Where Bathers Cavorted," *Detroit News*, January 9, 1981, p.10F.
- Goldman, Leon. "Famed Mineral Baths Flow From City Scene," *Mount Clemens Daily Monitor-Leader*, May 16, 1963.
- "50-Year Old Hotel Bought By Syndicate," *Mount Clemens Daily Monitor-Leader*, November 15, 1954.
- "Medea Largest Tub Bath House in the World," in *Pageant of Progress*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Nellis Newspapers, [1928], sec.4, p.12.
- "A Terrible Accident," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, August 27, 1909, p.8. col.5.