

Mount Clemens Public Library

Local History Sketches

Origins of The Mineral Bath Era

by Nelly D. Longstaff

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A display in the window of Meyers' Drug Store shows the solids evaporated from one 65-gallon tub of Mount Clemens mineral water.

America's oil fever of the 1860s was in large part responsible for the discovery of the mineral water which was to make Mount Clemens famous for almost 90 years. With this discovery, great changes would come to the sleepy little village. Visitors would flock from all over the country to seek the benefits of the health-giving "black" waters, and many would stay to participate in the business opportunities they could see developing. More people would come to entertain the visitors. The little town would absorb various ethnic groups and people from all walks of life. In so doing, it would obtain a high degree of sophistication -- and acquire a few vices.

The first well in Mount Clemens was drilled by **Charles Steffens** in 1862. He hoped to strike oil but found only brine, and the well was abandoned. On January 31, 1865, the **Mount Clemens Salt Company** was formed, and drilling began again. The *Mount Clemens Monitor* of October 6, 1865, reported on the progress of the new well. "This well is now down the distance of 250 feet, and boring is being kept up night and day. Mr. Parke, who has the contract for sinking the well, informs us that the water now pumped from the well is impregnated with three percent of salt, and that every indication for a paying well is better than any he ever saw at the Saginaw salt wells the same distance down." For about five years, salt was manufactured from this well; the project was then abandoned because the water contained other minerals which made it difficult to produce a good commercial quality of salt.

At this point an old lame horse and a man named **Dorr Kellogg** enter the story. Legend has it that a farmer turned the horse out to die. The horse sought the shade of an abandoned tank of the old salt mine and stamped out a small basin that collected the dripping mineral water. After repeated exposure to this water, the horse was rejuvenated!

Actually, the discovery of the curative powers of mineral water from this well was probably made by Dorr Kellogg. When he came to Mount Clemens in 1870 to operate the milling firm of **Hess and Kellogg** on the site of the **Fluemer Mill**, he had a bad case of eczema. Remembering the beneficial effects of a sea voyage, he asked for permission to use the mineral water. He made a rough tub between the vats, and, after a series of baths, he was cured. The *Mount Clemens Monitor* interviewed Kellogg and printed his version of the story on July 17, 1903. "I came here in October, 1870, and in December of that year I rigged up a couple of bath tubs in the old salt block. Some of the men who have in late years been heralded as discoverers of the water warned me it was no good. But I went on and after a lot of cures had been made they endured, and then embraced. I am going to have my picture taken as the real Columbus."

The second cure was that of **Mr. E.E. Trombley** of Mount Clemens, who used the same tub. Then, in 1872, **Dr. Abner Hayward** used the water to bathe a **Mrs. Tedman** of Romeo, using an improvised rubber tub in his home. She must have been Mount Clemens's first visitor for the baths.

For more information about the bath era in Mount Clemens, we recommend:

- Worrell, Donald E., Jr. "Mount Clemens's Fabulous Bath Era," *Historical Society of Michigan Chronicle*, (Summer 1978), pp.4-9.
 - Cain, Ruth. "Where the Waters Worked Wonders," *Michigan History Magazine*, 79:3 (May/June 1995), pp.20-27.
 - *Mount Clemens: the Bath City of America*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : City of Mount Clemens, 1993.
 - Aldrich, Ralph. "Legends of Bath Industry's Origin Are Many; But Always It's An Old White Horse That Figures As Hero," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, April 20, 1934, p.1, col.5.
 - "Mineral Water Powers First Found in 1870: Deep Wells are Source of City's Famous Supply," in *Pageant of Progress*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Nellis Newspapers, [1928], sec. 4., p.1.
 - "Chemist Analyzes a Mt. Clemens Bath: List of Elements in Curative Liquid Given," in *Pageant of Progress*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Nellis Newspapers, [1928], sec.4, p.1.
 - Use this link to read the *Detroit News'* Rearview Mirror feature, "[Mt. Clemens, 'Bath City of America.'](#)"
 - Use this link to view the [Bath City historical marker](#) on Jim Brennan's Michigan Historical Markers page.
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