



Mount Clemens Public Library

Local History Sketches

Mount Clemens in Prose and Poetry

(©2008 by Mount Clemens Public Library. All rights reserved.)

In the heyday of the bath era, the population of Mount Clemens often doubled during the summer season when visitors came from all over the country to take the healing waters. Among the visitors were the rich and famous of the day, including a number of writers and poets. Mount Clemens was immortalized in the prose and poetry of several of these scribes.

An early appearance of Mount Clemens in the pages of literature came in 1877, when the town was used as the model for the setting of the novel *Out West, Or, Roughing it on the Great Lakes*, by William Taylor Adams (1822-1897). Adams wrote stories for boys under the pen name of Oliver Optic. The hero of his story is a young man named Alick, originally from a New England seaport, who seeks adventure on the Great Lakes in his sailing vessel, the *Lakebird*. In his travels, Alick makes his way up the "Glinton" River from Lake St. Clair, to the town of Montgomery, a place famous for its healing mineral baths. While sailing the lake one day, Alick picks up a passenger, a Mr. Garningham, who had come to the mouth of the river from town. Alick's passenger is introduced to the readers in this small passage from the story:

[Mr Garningham]: "I am an Englishman, travelling in the States for my health, which is bad. When I was in Canada, I heard of the Mineral Springs of Montgomery; and I am staying in that place at the Sherman House for three or four weeks. The mineral water is benefiting me, but I shall die for the want of some way to amuse myself."

"There is a library in Montgomery with plenty of good books in it," I [Alick] suggested.

"I don't care to read," he added, with a yawn. "Fishing and shooting are what I want."

"I think you can find enough of both."

The hero and his friend go on to a number of adventures on the lakes, and the town of Montgomery/Mount Clemens receives passing mentions throughout the story. When author Adams died in 1897, the *Mount Clemens Press* remembered his book and his visit to the area about 1872.

Mount Clemens was also used as a setting for another work of fiction which later became a motion picture. The novelist Fannie Hurst (1889-1968) visited Mount Clemens on a whim with her father around 1908. At the time she was an unknown and aspiring writer, but an event during her visit would permanently imprint Mount Clemens on her memory. While visiting at the Park Hotel, she met her future husband, Jacques S. Danielson, who was entertaining there. Later, when Hurst became a successful novelist, she used Mount Clemens as a backdrop for one of the chapters in her 1930 novel, *Back Street*.

On page 254 of *Back Street*, Hurst's characters make reservations at the Grove Hotel [a thinly-disguised Park Hotel] in Mount Clemens, and she describes it thus:

...a rambling red-brick structure situated on one of the central streets of the sulphuric-smelling little spa. Big interurban trolley-cars, which ran the twenty-five miles from Detroit, passed its doors; and figures in hooded bath-robcs hurried or rode in invalid-chairs through the streets.

Although she took pains to describe Mount Clemens as shabby, provincial and smelly, Hurst spent a lengthy paragraph lauding the Grove/Park's magnificent gardens, cuisine, and appointments.

The Bath City also inspired the poets. In 1882, a visitor to the baths took pen in hand and sent the editor of the *Mount Clemens Monitor* this testimonial in verse:

**Mt. Clemens Mineral Spring
by John W. Anderson**

**They are coming from all nations,
From every state and clime,
Unfortunate humanity
Are coming all the time,
To bathe in the healing waters
Of Mt. Clemens Mineral spring:
Poor cripples throw away their canes,
And loud their praises sing.**

**Like the waters of Bethesda,
In Bible times of old,
Were troubled by the angel,
At certain times we're told,
And they who first could step therein,
Were healed from all disease
But here we poor unfortunates,
Can bathe when ere we please.**

**Rheumatic pains are lulled to rest,
Dyspeptics loose their fears,
While skin disease of every kind,
Like magic disappears.
Then let us join in happy song,
God's praises let us sing,
For giving us such waters as
Mt. Clemens Mineral Spring.**

For more information, we recommend:

- Optic, Oliver. *Out West, Or, Roughing it on the Great Lakes*. Boston : Lee & Shepard, 1877.
- "Wm. T. Adams, known in the literary world as Oliver Optic, who recently died....," *Mount Clemens Press*, April 8, 1897, p.4, col.1.
- Hurst, Fannie. *Back Street*. New York : Grosset & Dunlap, 1931.
- Click here to read an [online biography of Fannie Hurst](#).
- "City is Used as Scene in Story, But Fannie Hurst, Clever as She is, Gets Her Rivers Mixed," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, December 19, 1930, p.1, col.3.
- "Mineral Spring Poetry," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, May 19, 1882, p.1, col.7.