



Mount Clemens Public Library

Local History Sketches

Mount Clemens Sugar Company

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Interest in a beet sugar factory in Mount Clemens was stirred by a successful venture in Bay City in 1898. Tantalized by visions of similar economic prosperity for Mount Clemens, the Chamber of Commerce sent **Sheriff William F. Nank** to Bay City on a fact-finding mission. His report to a large gathering of concerned citizens resulted in the formation of the Mount Clemens Sugar Committee, on which several businessmen of the town served, including: **Matthew Slush, George H. Nichols, Reuben C. Ullrich, Perry H. Irish, Frank E. Nellis** and **A.T. Donaldson**. In May, 1901, the **Macomb Sugar Company** was organized. The first board of directors included **Matthew Slush**, president; **Frank E. Nellis**, secretary; **Robert F. Eldredge**, treasurer; and **R.C. Ullrich, F.B. Schott, E.J. Olde, A.T. Donaldson, Ben Boutell** and **W.H. Boutell**, directors.

Superintendent	Years of Service
Edward Wolfbauer	1901-1902
Herman Wiese	1902-1905
William Moxon	1905-1913
Bill Weller	1913-1918
Oskar Kaiser	1918-1926
Rudolph Pospisil	1927-1933
Tom Neering	1933-1941
Jim Gillespie	1941-1946
Charlie Checketts	1950

Superintendents of the Mount Clemens Sugar Company, 1901-1950

A sixty-five acre site along the Clinton River was purchased, and a track was run to the location from the **Grand Trunk Railway**, at a cost of \$47,000. The contract for construction of the mill was let to **Kilby Manufacturing** for a sum of \$557,500. The operating staff was brought in from various places and included: superintendent **Edward Wolfbauer**, expert chemist; assistant superintendent **Herman Wiese** of Stettin, Germany; and chief chemist **William Moxon** of Marine City.

The process of turning beets into sugar began with the local farmers, who had to pledge to plant a certain number of acres in sugar beets. When the harvested beets were delivered to the factory, they

were weighed, washed and sliced. A diffusion battery separated the juice from the pulp. The pulp was dried and used as cattle fodder. The juice was processed and boiled under vacuum until grains of sugar were formed. The grains of sugar were separated from the molasses, or moisture, run through a drier to become the product known as granulated sugar, and then packaged.

The sugar mill normally operated for about 100 days, from October to January, during what was termed the "campaign season." Macomb Sugar's first campaign, however, lasted only 28 days because of a delayed harvest of substandard beets, caused by heavy rains. The second year's campaign was also unsuccessful and the company was unable to meet interest and mortgage payments. The company was reorganized in 1904 and 1905, and as a result **Captain James E. Davidson** of Bay City became the sole owner and changed the name to **Mount Clemens Sugar Company**.

Following the takeover by Captain Davidson, the sugar company enjoyed several years of successful campaigns. A serious downturn occurred in 1913, when American trade policy allowed foreign sugar to enter the market free of tariff, thereby threatening to destroy the domestic sugar industry. The trade policy was repealed when World War I engendered a sugar shortage and the U.S. Treasury felt the loss of revenue from the tariff.

After Captain Davidson died in 1929, the Mount Clemens Sugar Company went through a number of changes of management. In 1932, the factory was leased to a group of Detroit businessmen. However, when they did not reap the profits they expected, they turned over the lease to **Charles Coryell** and associates the following year. Coryell operated the plant profitably from 1933-1939. In 1940, the **Beet Growers Association** took over the lease for one campaign only, and in 1941 the Keiser interests of New York operated the plant for one campaign under the name of **Southeastern Sugar Company**. The Davidson estate then put the plant up for sale and accepted the offer of **Franklin Sugar Company** of Preston, Idaho. Franklin produced sugar during the war years then leased the plant to **Doughnut Corporation of America** in 1946. Doughnut used the plant to produce dextrose, but also managed to process a small tonnage of beets. The factory sat idle in 1949 and processed its last beet campaign in 1950.

Economic pressures caused the abandonment of sugar production in Mount Clemens after the 1950 campaign. Freight rates for beets were skyrocketing, while neighborhood acreage available for beet production was dwindling as farmers sold off property for residential and industrial development. In addition, the War Department appropriated 200 acres of the sugar company's own acreage for the expansion of **Selfridge Field** and required the sugar factory to cut 100 feet off the height of its chimney stack and replace the loss of draft by installing fans. Sugar production was given up as a lost cause and the plant works were dismantled and salvaged.

Franklin Sugar sold the property and building to Detroit attorney **John Palumbo** in 1959, and Palumbo had the abandoned factory building torn down in June, 1962.

For more information about the Mount Clemens Sugar Company, we recommend:

- DeMott, Stuart. "Wreckers Raze Old Landmark But 'Sugar Beet Pete' Stays On," *Mount Clemens Daily Monitor-Leader*, June 22, 1962, p.4.
- Gutleben, Dan. *The Sugar Tramp 1954 : Michigan*. San Francisco : The Author, 1955, pp.169-176.
- "Sugar Factory in New Hands," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, February 10, 1933, p.1.
- "Mt. Clemens Sugar Co. Founded in 1901: Employs 300 Men in Factory in Campaign Season," in *Pageant of Progress*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Nellis Newspapers, 1928.
- "Scared Out by the Democratic Tariff Bill : Improvements to the Mt. Clemens Sugar Mill Must Wait," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, March 29, 1912, p.4, col.2.
- "The Story of a Company," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, February 26, 1904, p.4, col.1.