



Mount Clemens Public Library

Local History Sketches

Tales of Old Mount Clemens

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[The following is from an old manuscript recently discovered in this city. *The Monitor* does not know who wrote it, but it has all the marks of authenticity. It is published apropos of the celebration of the completion of Mt. Clemens's first century that we will hold in 1918].

The first settlement of white people in vicinity of Mt. Clemens was in 1781. Thirty-four families in all built houses along the **Clinton** (then called **River Huron**), beginning at its mouth and extending up the river nine miles.

Christian Clemens first came here from Detroit with a surveying party in 1795. **Lewis Cass** (afterwards Gov. Cass) was the surveyor. They blazed trees through the wilderness from Detroit, and when they reached the site where this village was afterward located, Mr. Clemens remarked, "Now here is the first rise of ground since we left Detroit." Some one of the party laughingly answered, "Mr. Clemens has discovered a rise of ground, we will call it Mt. Clemens after him." He did not come here to live until several years afterward.

About the year 1797 **John Brooks** built a distillery on the site of **Fleumer's flour mill**, and continued the business until Mr. Clemens and **Mr. Wiseman** came here and bought the property. A log house stood down the river near the first salt well, another was built by Mr. Clemens on Front street about where **Smith & Preussell's** hardware store stands. A log house was also built over the river opposite the flour mill. A distillery and log house stood on the river bank a little above **Mr. VanLandegham's present mill**. This constituted the settlement previous to the war of 1812. During that war most of the families moved to Detroit on account of Indian depredations.

In 1818 Mr. Clemens returned to this place with his family and the village was platted under the personal supervision of Gov. Lewis Cass, **Gen. Alexander Macomb**, and Christian Clemens. Three streets called Front, Court, and Walnut, were laid out, running parallel with the river, and four streets called Cass, Macomb, New, and Market, crossing at right angles. The same year the county of Macomb was organized and Mt. Clemens was made the county seat. In 1819 a log court house was built. The lower story was used for a jail where were a few cells partitioned off with planks. The second story was used as a court house, school and church. It was burned in 1839. A prisoner from St. Clair county, who had committed murder, set it on fire in hopes to make his escape. He came near losing his life, as in the excitement the key could not be found and the door had to be battered open with an axe.

After the war of 1812, a military road was surveyed by government, from Fort Wayne to Fort Gratiot, in order to open communication by land between the forts and protect our border from English. When this village was reached, it was skipped over, which accounts in part for the width of Pearl street and the bends in Gratiot. Cass street extended only to Court and the remainder was called Shelby road, but as late as 1829 it was nothing but a cow path. It is related of one of the first sheriffs, **Mr. William Canfield**, that he had occasion to go to Utica to arrest a man. He rode his horse up to the river, then letting the horse come home alone, he crossed the river on logs, walked to Utica, and brought back his

prisoner. In 1819 a post office was established and **John Stockton** was the first postmaster. He had married the stepdaughter of Mr. Clemens, while the family were in Detroit, and when he came here, built a frame addition to Mr. Clemens's log house, which was the first frame structure erected here. The first burying ground (it could hardly be called a cemetery) was located where **Mrs. Czizek's** house now stands on New street. There were a few buried there, but it was not considered a fit place. There was some discussion about it and Mr. Clemens said when the next death occurred he would find a better burial place. Not long after **Henry Halsey** died and those interested asked Mr. Clemens where the grave should be made. History states that he accompanied the funeral and pointed out the spot which afterwards became the old cemetery on North Gratiot. In 1830 the settlement had grown to be more of a village. We have here a map of the original survey in 1818.

Mr. Clemens's first house on Front street, the second occupied the site of **Mr. Geo. Crocker's** residence.

Wm. Canfield's store and trading post with the Indians, where the **Ullrich** bank stands. The first merchant, however, was **Elis Doty**, whose place of business is not located.

In place of the **Sherman house** we must imagine a story and a half frame building painted red, facing Court street, with a long one story rear on Shelby. This was a "tavern" kept by **Horace Cady**.

Ezekiel Allen built a dwelling here on the site of **Grovier's store**. It was afterward occupied by **John Stevens**, who later built the present store building. One of the old residents told me that while calling on Mrs. Stevens one day, she noticed a rope hanging from the ceiling near the head of her bed. Mrs. Stevens said, "Wouldn't you like to know what that is for? Well, I have a cow bell fastened to the other end of it upstairs, and in the morning I ring it for the girls to get up and get breakfast." It was decidedly primitive compared with the electric bells of today.

On the location of **Mr. Jacobi's** store was another tavern kept by Mr. Halsey. This building was moved back on Macomb street, and we knew it as **Mrs. Mintonye's** millinery store. I believe it has now wandered off up Fraser street.

On the site of the Fleumer mill, stood another tavern, kept by Alfred Ashley. He also owned a dock where the **Lady of the Lake** used to stop. It was the first steamer to run from Detroit and was owned by **Capt. Atwood**. The hull was said to be built of two large canoes made of white-wood logs fastened together. Here at the foot of Market street most of the freight from Detroit was landed, which probably accounts for its name.

R.O. Cooley, one of the first merchants, kept a general store on Front street at the foot of New street. He was the first county treasurer. His first dwelling was a small house on the site of the tea store. His second dwelling was the most pretentious house in town at that time, and still stands on the corner of Court and New streets, back of **Mr. Schanher's** drug store, built in 1834-5.

Ezekiel Allen kept a shoe shop on the bank of the river, near the Robertson block, and had a tannery back of it.

Aaron Weeks built a store on the site of the old **Medea bath house** in 1835, and afterward built the old **Clinton house**, nearer the corner, the second story running over the store. It was kept a number of years by **Joseph Hubbard**. Opposite was a building intended for a tavern, built by **Major Giles**. **Robert Eastman** and **Edward Gallup** used it for a store.

*Mr. Eastman's second store was where **Czizek's** hardware store now stands.*

Just below the **Ullrich** bank was a large building called in later years the **Leviathan** block, built by **Whitney brothers**. **Green Freeman** occupied one of the stores.

On the bank of the river, where the jail now stands, there was a dwelling house owned by **Wm. Lewis**, the grandfather of one of our members, who by the way was something of a genius. He wished to put a basement under his dwelling, and every heavy shower he would go out in the storm and dig in the bank so that the rain would wash the sand into the river. He used to say the Almighty was helping him grade down the bank.

In 1833 the only dwelling on South Gratiot was the home of **Richard Butler**. We knew it as the **Oliver** house. It gave way to the new **Medea bath house**, and marched down Gratiot street. **Aaron Weeks** soon after built the old house opposite with a basement, which has since been remodeled.

John J. Leonard, a lawyer, built the **Snook** cottage, where **Mrs. Brehler's** boarding house now stands.

The first brick dwelling was put up by **Charles Mather**, on the site of the **Fenton house**, and was afterwards owned by **Joseph Hubbard**.

The **Hayward** house was built a little later by **George Dixon**. His brother, **Silas**, had a dwelling on the opposite corner, which was burned and the present dwelling took its place.

The next house on Shelby road was built by **Theron Patterson**, on the site of **E.W. Hall's** present residence. This was considered quite out of town. The street was very muddy and no sidewalks of any account. It was afterwards sold to **Amos Dalby**, who was county clerk. As there was no room in the court house for an office, he had a little building not larger than a traveling photography gallery on the square near the court house. The ladies' sewing society had a circulating library, which was also kept in this little building. An amusing incident occurred in connection with this sewing society. At one of their meetings it was reported that an old lady, who was very ill, would probably die that night. The good ladies thought it would be nice to make her a shroud and cap, which they accordingly did. But the old lady didn't die. She recovered and lived several years, and the ladies were at their wits end to know how to dispose of the shroud, they finally made it over into baby clothes.

The house that is now standing on South Gratiot street with large pillars under the porch was built by **Capt. Atwood**, in 1835. **Mr. Porter Kibbee** lived there several years.

The **Eldredge** homestead was built soon after, also the **Hatch** house, which used to stand on the opposite corner. There was a small building next to the **Medea bath house**, where the first billiard table was kept. It soon became a gambling place and a general rendezvous for the husbands to stay until the small hours of the night. The good wives bore it patiently until forbearance ceased to be a virtue, when they congregated one dark night and stoned all the windows out, and that broke up the gambling and late hours.

Mr. Dodge and Porter Kibbee kept a grocery about where Mr. Ullrich's hardware store stands. There was no meat market in those days. **Robert McChesney**, a farmer, supplied the village with meat which he peddled from his wagon.

Near the site of **Lehner's grocery** a two story building was erected by **James Brown**. Stores below and the first public hall above, where political meetings, and after the court house was burned, church services were held. Brown was a mysterious character. He came from the south and was said to have been a pirate. He made himself notorious by horse-whipping the first editor, **Mr. Avery**, who published the *Macomb Democrat*, and who was unfortunate enough to offend Brown with some personal item.

The small brick building, afterwards **Roskopp's meat market**, was the first bank building. In 1835 a law was passed by the territorial legislature to incorporate the **Mt. Clemens & Saginaw R.R.** with banking privileges. **Col. John Stockton** was the president and **Charles Emerson**, cashier. The

railroad was never built, except that a few wooden rails were laid on cross pieces, spiked down with wooden pins. The bank was sold to the **Tucker** brothers, who came from the south. Their nephew, the father of **J.G. Tucker**, was the cashier.

Daniel Chandler owned a dwelling on Macomb street, and also the brick blacksmith shop that stood on the site of **Shotwell's drug store**.

James Williams lived in a small house opposite the post office in an early day.

Mr. Ashley owned the point of land west of the **Lee** residence, also a number of lots extending up the south side of Market street. He built the old house that still remains on the **Gordon** land, and fenced in the Gratiot road, taking in the point opposite. When the authorities attempted to open the street, Mr. Ashley with two hired men stood guard over it with loaded muskets. He afterwards built the large house up Market street, which in later years was known as the **L'Eterneau** house, and when he moved to New Baltimore, he sold to James Williams, who lived there some years.

Wm. Canfield built the large house that was remodeled into the **Park hotel**.

In 1838 Dr. Hall, **James Snook** and **Wm. Beer** built the block of houses on East street, now known as the **Foster, Allen** and **Wade** houses.

The **Grovier** house, where **Capt. Dulac's** house stands, was built about the same time. Just previous a glass factory was erected near the first salt well by Dr. Hall and Isaac Grovier. They also kept a general store and drugs, in a small building near the foot of Market street. They then built a store on the site of **Donaldson's shop**. It was moved up to the corner occupied by the **Jacobi** store, then to the lot where the old opera house stands, and finally it went down South Gratiot and was remodeled into the Grovier residence. So that building has been quite a traveler.

Dr. Rice was the first physician, then came Dr. Lee, Dr. Henry Taylor Sr., and Dr. Tilson, who built the old brick house on the corner of Mullett and East streets owned by Mrs. John Connor.

The first school house was erected where **Mrs. Pelton's** house now stands.

In 1835 the **Presbyterian** church society was organized, the **Methodist** and **Baptist** a little later. Itinerant ministers of all denominations visited the place in an early day and alternate services were held in the old log court house, until it was burned. Then the little school house was used, also a cooper shop that stood near the **Fenton house**. An old resident told me that **Elder Hillis** used to preach in the cooper shop and when the young ladies came in, if the seats were all taken, the young gallants would sweep back the shavings and bring in boards for them to sit on. She also spoke of a minister who held service in the court house, whose wife had a young baby. Before service a rocking chair and pillows were carried over and during service the baby would be rocked to sleep and placed on the pillows which were laid on the table where the minister stood preaching.

North Branch road came down to Macomb street and near that corner stood a barn where a dead Indian was found, by some boys, hid in the hay. It was supposed to have been put there by the doctors for dissection. It caused great excitement among the Indians and for a time it was feared they would make an attack upon the white inhabitants.

It was not until about 1836 that the Shelby road was opened to **Frederick**. The first road ran along the bank of the river, from Gratiot road, with a bridge across near the **Hacker** farm.

Judge Stevens, Judge Harrington, and Judge Conner lived at Frederick. The question may be asked why they bore the title of judge. In those days the circuit judge had what was called associate judges, two of them to sit with him on the bench, and those three with **Judge Clemens** were appointed to that office. It is said that at eleven o'clock court would take a recess, and the judge and his associates

would march over to the tavern and take a drink of an extra quality of brandy kept for their use.

Judge Clemens had a queer way of fixing his boundary lines. It is related that when he sold a lot to **Wm. S. Robinson** up North Gratiot, he went with him to the spot, paced off the lot, fixed that stakes, and said, "Now go ahead and build your house." At one time there was a lawsuit over one of his boundary lines, and a young lawyer came up from Detroit to plead the case. He read Blackstone until Judge Clemens, who was on the bench got out of patience, when he sprang up and said, "I'd like to know what the devil Blackstone has got to do with my village anyway?"

Mr. Moross, an old French settler, lived down on the lake shore and owned a fast horse that he called "Old Coffee." One day the family were preparing a grand dinner for friends, who were visiting them, when just before dinner was ready, the large platter that was to hold the roast turkey, or pig, was broken. "Old Coffee" rose to the occasion. His master harnessed him to the sleigh, drove to Detroit on the ice and brought back a new platter by the time dinner was ready. But poor "Old Coffee" came to a sad end. His master came up town one day and imbibed too much of that which Shakespeare says steals away men's brains. He insisted on driving home on the ice, which was not frozen thick enough to hold, and said, "Old Coffee" would get over it before it had time to break. But alas, he didn't, the ice gave way, and "Old Coffee" was drowned, and his master came near sharing the same fate.