Christian Clemens, Founder

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Christian Clemens was born in Horsham Township, Montgomery (then Philadelphia) County, Pennsylvania, on January 30, 1768. He was a descendant of the early German settlers of Pennsylvania, and one of 13 children of a Pennsylvania Mennonite farmer who paid his fines as a conscientious objector during the Revolutionary War.

The signatures of Christian Clemens and his wife, Elizabeth, on the bottom of the 1818 deed granting to Macomb County a parcel of land in Mount Clemens on which to build a county courthouse.
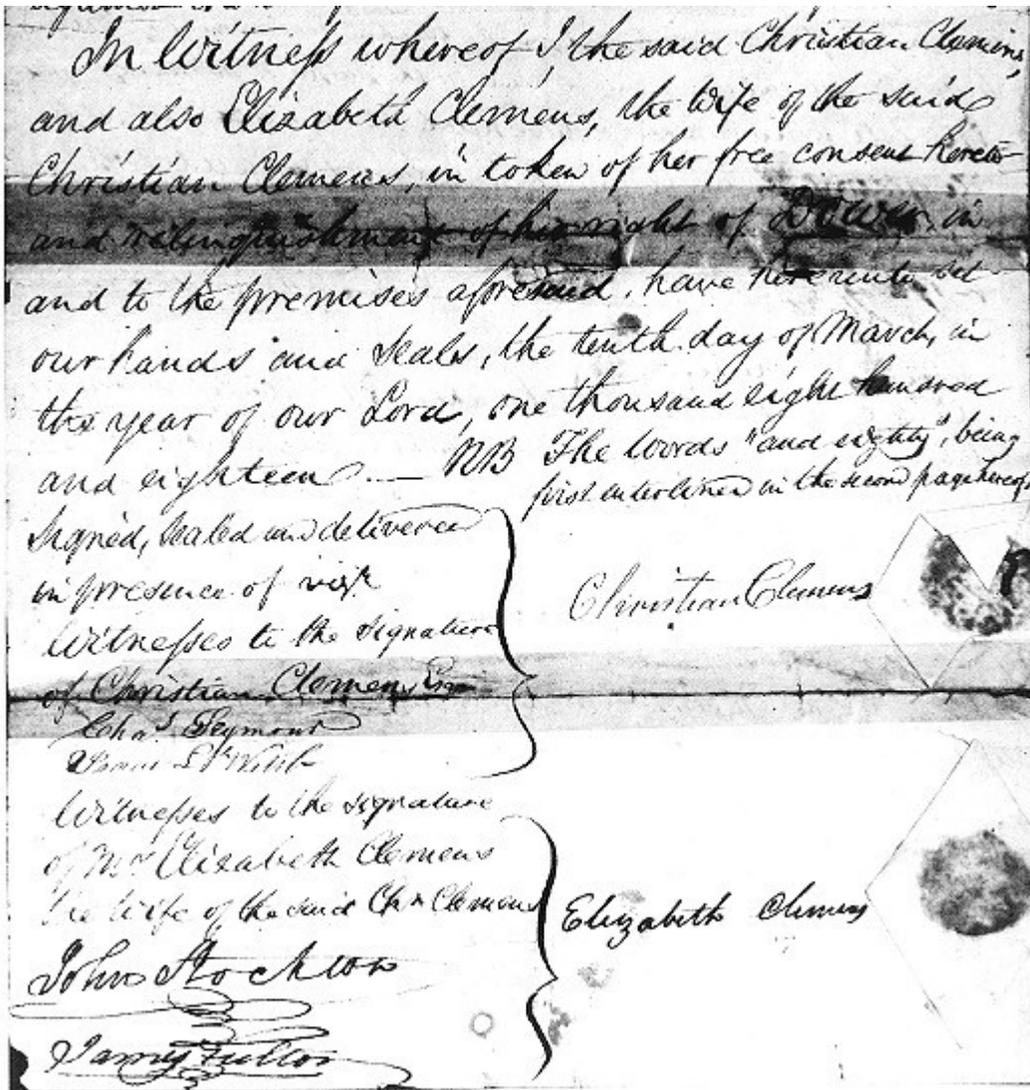
In 1795, Christian Clemens came to Detroit and engaged in the manufacture of leather. He is believed to have come to the area now known as Mount Clemens in 1798 with a surveying party under the leadership of **Lewis Cass**. On March 18, 1800, Clemens and **Oliver Wiswell** purchased a distillery which is considered to have been the first building on the site of the future Mount Clemens. The next year, Clemens bought the land surrounding the distillery, amounting to 500 acres in all; the village of Mount

Clemens would be named for him and platted on this very land in 1818.

In 1802, Clemens built a log house on what is now known as Northbound Gratiot Avenue, and then married **Elizabeth Talmadge Allen (1777-1824)**, the widow of a Detroit physician. Elizabeth Allen had two children, named James and Mary; Mary later became the wife of **Col. John Stockton**. In addition, Christian and Elizabeth Clemens had the following children who lived to maturity: Harriet (1804-1887), who became the wife of **Dr. George Lee**; Ann (1806-1879), who became the wife of **William Canfield**; Elizabeth Keturah (1812-1889), who became the wife of **Sydney S. Hawkins**, and after his death, of **Edward C. Gallup**; and Louise Marion (1818-1890), who became the wife of **Henry D. Terry.**
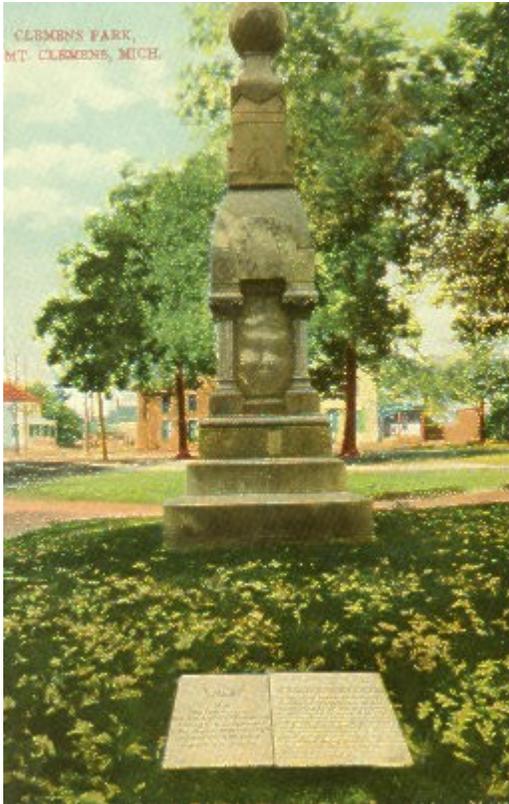
Gravestones of Christian and Elizabeth Clemens in Clemens Park (postcard view ca. 1915).

Clemens was appointed Lieutenant-Colonel of the militia along the Clinton River (then known as the river Huron) in 1805. During the War of 1812, he spent much of his time confined in a dungeon after the British took control of Detroit, but was not harmed and returned to his home on the Clinton River at war's end.

Following the war, the activities of Christian Clemens were of paramount importance in making Mount Clemens a viable settlement. He used his influence to see that Mount Clemens was named the county seat when Macomb County was organized in 1818; he then conveyed land to the county for the building of a courthouse and also contributed funds and materials for its construction. He also provided land for churches and for a cemetery. In 1822, he helped establish a stage line between Detroit and Mount Clemens. Several local businesses were organized by Clemens and he also operated a distillery.

Christian Clemens contributed many years of public service to the people of Macomb County and of Michigan. He was appointed Justice of the Peace in 1805; he also served as Chief Justice of the County Court from 1818 to 1829, county treasurer from 1818 to 1827, and Probate Judge from 1818 to 1836. In 1821 he was selected to serve as a trustee of the University of Michigan. He died at Mount Clemens on August 25, 1844 and was buried in the town cemetery for which he had provided the land, known today as Clemens Park.

For more information on Christian Clemens, we recommend:

- Crittenden, Rebecca L. "Christian Clemens of Mt. Clemens, Michigan : With Notes on His Forebears and Descendants," *Detroit Society For Genealogical Research Magazine*, Winter 1960, Spring 1961, Summer 1961.
- Beal, Robert H. *A Story: the Early Years of Christian Clemens, 1768-1798*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Macomb County Historical Society, 1987.
- "Old Families and Enterprises of Mt. Clemens and Vicinity." In Eldredge, Robert P. *Past and Present of Macomb County, Michigan.* Chicago : S.J. Clarke, 1905, pp.604-605.