



Mount Clemens Public Library

Local History Sketches

William DuLac and Shipbuilding in Mount Clemens

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Shipbuilding was an important industry in Mount Clemens from the early days of the town's settlement. Before the railroads were laid and inland roads were developed, the Clinton River and Lake St. Clair were vital transportation routes. In the last quarter of the 19th century, when Mount Clemens was booming and the river was being used to bring lumber, coal and other important freight to the area, an enterprising local citizen named **William DuLac** saw a fortune to be made in lumbering and shipping.

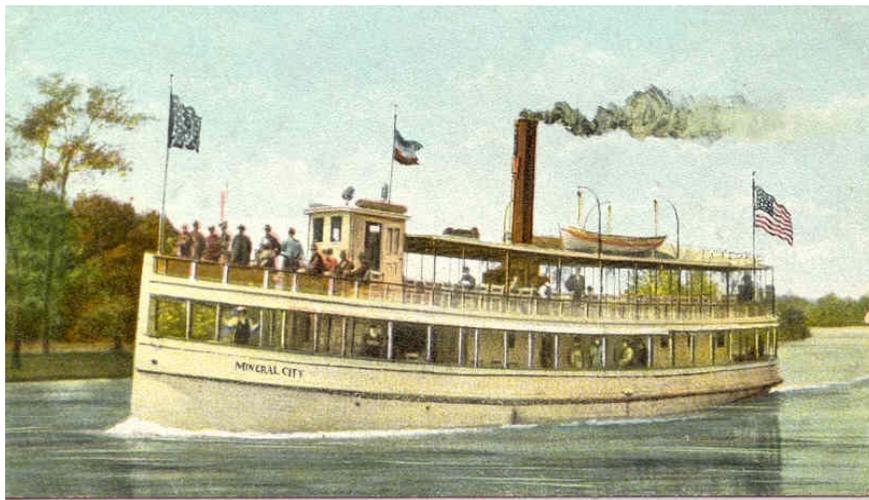
Vessel name	Build date	Type	Other Names	Disposition
Jennette	1881	tow barge		
A. Weston	1882	steam barge	Congercoal	burned May 11, 1917
Nellie	1882	schooner	Luna	burned May 18, 1903
Elmer	1882	tug		
City of Mount Clemens	1884	steam barge		dismantled 1920
Eleanor	1885	tow barge		
Canisteo	1886	steam barge		burned 1920
Annabell Wilson	1887	tow barge		sank July 12, 1913
Aloha	1888	tow barge		sank October 28, 1917
F.R. Buell	1888	steam barge	Nagaho	foundered October 27, 1922
A. Stewart	1889	tow barge	H. J. McAvoy, Keuka	sank, Lake Charlevoix, 1932
Benjamin Harrison	1889	tow barge		
Adele	1889	tug		
Lily	1889	steam barge		foundered July 31, 1924
Exilda	1889	scow		abandoned 1914
Byron Whitaker	1890	steam barge	Marian W.	burned March 6, 1920
J.B. Lozen	1890	tow barge	Richard Burns	sank November 4, 1921
Norwalk	1891	steam barge		
Mineral City	1895	excursion steamer		scrapped, Chicago, 1931

Clinton	1898	steam barge	
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List of Vessels Built at DuLac Shipyard, Mount Clemens, Michigan

William DuLac was born in nearby Harrison Township on December 27, 1837. He began sailing the lakes as a cabin boy in 1849 when he was only 12 years old. In 1881, by then a seasoned lake captain, DuLac began building vessels for the **Tonawanda Barge Line**, a company in which he had a financial interest. Tonawanda operated saw mills in Manistique, Michigan. The first ship launched from the DuLac shipyard was the tow barge **Jennette**, registered on May 6, 1881 and built for Tonawanda.

The business interests of William DuLac were many and varied. In addition to his interest in Tonawanda Barge Line, he was part owner, with several other Mount Clemens capitalists, in the **Shoal Water Transportation Company**. He had financial interests in several lake vessels, operated a lumber mill and shipyard in Mount Clemens with his sons, and served as a director of the **Ullrich Savings Bank**.



Mineral City plies the river (Image courtesy of William Lafferty)

Some of DuLac's boats were well-known on the Mount Clemens riverfront. One was the beloved **Mineral City**, built by the DuLac yard in 1895 for son **Burton G. DuLac**. *Mineral City* was a 200-passenger excursion steamer, built exclusively for the tourist trade. She carried hotel guests and local citizens to **Walpole Island**, the **St. Clair Flats**, and other prime fishing and recreational spots on Lake St. Clair.

Another familiar site in Mount Clemens was the steam barge **Lily**. Built in 1889 for **Captain Albert H. Tucker**, the *Lily* worked freight on the Clinton River and was regularly seen delivering coal to the various bathhouses along Front Street.

The tow barge **A. Stewart**, built by DuLac in 1889 and renamed **Keuka** in 1925, was in service until the 1930s but met an ignoble end. *Keuka* was used as a floating blind pig during the Prohibition era, and sank from neglect on Lake Charlevoix in 1932. Salvage operators made attempts to raise her in later years, but they were unsuccessful. *Keuka* is currently a popular dive wreck.

The DuLac children were also connected to their father's business interests. William DuLac married the former **Nancy Eleanor Peltier** in 1863 and the couple had six children. **Adele**, born September 22, 1866, married **Capt. William Lynn**, a scion of Great Lakes sailors. **William Arthur**, born September 22, 1867, and **Burton George**, born August 22, 1870, both worked with their father in the shipyard and lumber business. **Emma Elizabeth**, born December 5, 1868, married **Caspar Czizek**,

a local businessman. Two other DuLac sons, **Joseph** and **Louis**, died in infancy.



Steam barge *Lily* delivering coal on the Mount Clemens riverfront in 1913

When Captain Du Lac died on October 19, 1902, he left behind an estate with an estimated value of half a million dollars. In 1905, part of the old shipyard was purchased from his estate by **Capt. William J. "Jim" Wood**, a subsequent owner of the steamer *Mineral City*, who operated the **Mount Clemens Boat Works** at the site until his own death in 1924.

For more information about William DuLac and shipbuilding in Mount Clemens, we recommend:

- Anstett, Nancy. *Du Lac : a history and descendant record*. 1977.
- Neff, Norbert. "History of Shipbuilding at Mount Clemens," *Inland Seas Quarterly Bulletin*, v.3, no.4 (October 1947) pp. 224-232.
- Waterbury, Rodney A. "Way Back When in Mount Clemens," *Mount Clemens Monitor-Leader*, May 16, 1951.
- "Ship Building at Mt. Clemens," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, January 13, 1882, p.1.
- "Sail Forth Into the Sea, O! Ship!," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, June 27, 1890, p.4, col.3.
- "Captain Wm. Du Lac," [obituary], *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, October 21, 1902.
- "[Transportation](#)" [[chapter XXVI](#)] in Eldredge, Robert F. *Past and Present of Macomb County, Michigan*. Chicago : S.J. Clarke, 1905, pp. 699-702.