

Mount Clemens Public Library

Local History Sketches

The Fabulous Park Hotel

by Nelly D. Longstaff

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The largest and best known of the Mount Clemens hotels and bath houses was the fabulous Park, located on East Broadway Street. Over a period of years, **Mrs. John (Margretha) Kieffer** developed it from a small hotel into the showplace of Mount Clemens.

Mrs. Kieffer came from Buffalo, New York, with her daughter in 1887 to take the baths. Recognizing the opportunities in the bath industry, she and her husband purchased the **Central Park Hotel**. In the early years the venture must have required hard work. **Elsie Kendrick Gemmer** remembers her father, the manager of the **Original**, telling of going over to visit Mrs. Kieffer and finding her in the kitchen, peeling potatoes and preparing meals. Mrs. Kieffer was joined in the management of the Park by her son-in-law, **Benjamin McArthur**. The hotel prospered and was enlarged and refurnished in 1891. In 1892, a bath house was added, giving Mount Clemens a total of four bath houses.

In 1897, work was begun on a large addition to the Park, with the outside work being done by **Hubarth and Schott**. The *Cutter's Guide* of 1901 describes the New Park Hotel as being three stories high, with 200 rooms, all with washstands and some with private toilets and bathrooms. The bath house and hotel were by then under one roof and there was a new elevator. The lovely dining room could accommodate 350 guests. There was a gymnasium, a bowling alley, a bar and card rooms in the basement. The plans were drawn by **Theophilus Van Damme**.

The social center of Mount Clemens for many years, the Park was the scene of fabulous parties and balls. One remembered by **Mrs. Elizabeth Czizek Grant** was a Dutch garden party. It cost \$5,000 to create gardens for this gala event. All the guests received hand-carved wooden shoes as souvenirs.

The Park was host to many well-known guests, among them **Charles Murphy**, the boss of Tammany Hall; **Fannie Hurst**; **Arthur Brisbane**; **Floyd Gibbons**; **Gene Fowler**; **Honest John Kelly**, the gambler; **Adolphus Busch**; **Emil Blatz**; **Ruth Hanna McCormick**; **Adolph Zukor**; **Helena Rubinstein**; **Jerome Kern**; **Sigmund Romberg**; **William Jennings Bryan**; **Nazimova**; **Alice Roosevelt**; and **George M. Cohan**.

When Mrs. Kieffer died, she left the Park Hotel to her daughter, **Julia McArthur**, and the bath house to her son, **George Kieffer**. **William Burgard** was associated with George Kieffer in the bath house. **Joseph Rickert** and **F.C. Magnan** served as managers of the hotel at different times following McArthur's death in 1902. After the **Avery Hotel** burned, the land was purchased by the Park's owners and made into a park with fountains, flowers, and shrubbery. A boat house and a landing were built on the Clinton River. This park, located across from the hotel, was named **Margretha Park**, according to the *Cutter's Guide*, in honor of Mrs. Kieffer. Mrs. McArthur later donated it to the city, and it is now called **McArthur Park**. The Park was razed in 1940.

For more information about the Park Hotel, we recommend:

- "Hotel Razing Job Approved," *Mount Clemens Advertiser-Monitor*, July 26, 1940, p.1, col.4.
- "City Acts to Gain Title to Park Hotel," *Mount Clemens Advertiser-Monitor*, April 5, 1940, p.1, col.1.
- Waterbury, Rodney A. "Way Back When in Mount Clemens," *Mount Clemens Monitor-Leader*, July 2, 1951.
- "Hotel Purchaser Planning Change : River and Ice Fetes on Clements Program At The Park," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, September 19, 1930, p.3, col.5.
- "Park Hotel Sold; Pla \$50,000 Improvements : \$175,000 is Price Paid by C.H. Clemens," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, September 15, 1930, p.1.
- "George Kieffer, Owner of Park Baths, is Dead," *Mount Clemens Daily Leader*, September 9, 1927, p.1, col.1.
- "Park Has Been Serving Patrons 43 Years," in *Pageant of Progress*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Nellis Newspapers, [1928], sec.4, p.5.
- "Many Notables Have Been Guests At Park: People Famous in Many Fields Visitors Here," in *Pageant of Progress*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Nellis Newspapers, [1928], sec.4, p.6.
- "Half Million Baths Have Been Given At the Park," in *Pageant of Progress*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Nellis Newspapers, [1928], sec.4, p.6.
- "A Splendid Undertaking Grandly Consummated--The History of the Park Establishment," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, May 26, 1893, p.1, col.3.
- "The Park Baths: Something About the Fine Establishment to be Opened on Monday Next," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, June 17, 1892, p.1, col.4.
- "The Park House Baths : The Extensive Improvement Determined Upon by Messrs. Kieffer & McArthur to be Finished in Ninety Days," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, February 5, 1892, p.1, col.5.
- "The New Park House : The Model Hotel to be Opened Monday by Kieffer & McArthur," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, May 1, 1890, p.8, col.6.