



*Elizabeth Blay Maison Schelling*  
**Local History Writing Contest**

## Mount Clemens History

by Sarah Ellison

*2009 Elizabeth Blay Maison Schelling Local History Writing Contest  
Division II Award Winner*

**I**t was a crisp autumn evening when I took a walk. I crunched through the leaves which released their bitter essence as they cracked. As I crunched and clomped I noticed something different about this particular street in my neighborhood, a tree was missing. It hadn't entirely disappeared, though; the chopped remnants of its trunk were firmly planted in the earth. I knelt down to examine the damage some man made machine had created and noticed a peculiar thing. All trees of course have rings but this was a particularly wide tree and after evaluating the count I concluded that the tree had lived for about 120 years! That's quite a remarkable feat for any living thing so I wondered: what was its story, did it witness the growth of our city Mount Clemens? It was then that the rings told me a story.

"My seed took root in about the year 1889," the tree told me," not that I can tell time but as a sapling that was the year the newspaper was dated and the large quantity of land consisting of what is now South Wilson and a part of Moross street was divided up into individual plots for home development. A few years later the land was dotted with houses slowly being built. The neighbors were kindly and I listened in to each conversation of the people as they strolled past on their evening walk. I seemed to be in a quieter part of town rather than being bothered by all the hustle and bustle of the Bath City. However in 1892 I noticed a bit of a stir. I caught a conversation of two from the neighbors about regal men in finely pressed suits and shiny buttons. These men were the beginnings of a grand justice system, the Mount Clemens Police Department. These proud men began to clean up some of the more notorious prostitution "red lights" and gambling that Mount Clemens gossip had

been reputed for.

Things kept changing although many new establishments never directly effected me, I only heard them through word of mouth such as a new roller coaster that young people raved about called "Leap the Dips" near the Clinton River but much farther down from my bend in the creek. Things began to excite the people who lived in the neighborhood. I recall one particular sunny afternoon in 1915 when the woman who lived in my house arrived home grinning brightly while trying to juggle a large box overflowing with tissue paper. The whole family was so delighted that they all rushed out to meet the woman. She carefully unwrapped a parcel and held a saucer up to the sunlight. As it gleamed and shone brightly in the light I could distinguish little eyes widen with delight and hear the man murmur "simply marvelous" such was the enchantment of one plate. The woman turned the plate around and read quite distinguishingly the stamp on the back - "Mount Clemens Pottery 1915". Just hearing the animation in their tone of speech made me proud to live in my city.

A new topic was abuzz in the city about an air base to be built nearby, where machines flew just like birds. By 1917 the headlines announced the establishment of Selfridge Airfield named after Lt. Thomas Selfridge who died in a tragic plane crash.

Industrialization led to a faster paced life and it was hard to keep up. I recall the Hacker Boat Company being established in Mount Clemens in the '20s. The owners, Edsel Ford and J. Packard, built fine mahogany rowboats from local wood but luckily I was spared because I was a maple tree. I also remember new parks like Shadyside Park being built up along with Mount Clemens High School not but three or four blocks away. From then on things began to blur, traffic lights were installed, a new Macomb County building was founded, Park Hotel which had long been a part of neighborly talk was torn down in 1940, and the Ironrite company founded later that decade. New forms of entertainment were sprouting up like green shoots in spring; in 1951, families visited the new Metropolitan Park and the Mount Clemens Race Track. But while all these new urban recreations were being built, the Bath City I had grown up with was slowly being torn down and put out of use; by 1955 Olympia Hotel and Bath House had been crushed to the ground. The people were no longer talking about how mineral water had healed their aches and pains but how there were going to raise a family. I was happy for the new neighbors I had but saddened by the loss of happy saplinghood memories and a new arrangement of trees around me. Everything seemed different, faster and it continued with the Urban Renewal projects creating a whole new neighborhood around me, and even a new headline of *Macomb Daily* on my newspaper in 1964 (rather than the usual *Monitor-Leader*). By the '70s and '80s many more of my well known baths and hotels had either been destroyed by fire or closed down like the Arethusa Hotel and the Colonial Hotel. In the cold of December of 1987 I read about the Mount Clemens Pottery going out of business (by 1993 it would be torn down); I wept for remembrance of that proud family and their new plate shining in the sun. Those years were a blur; by then I was 118 years old and entitled to my cranky disposition. My branches creaked and my leaves withered. About the only thing left to do was wave to the passer-bys and

listen to their happy life stories. In my years I had heard it all, the history of a city on a sidewalk in suburbia. It was "my time to go back to the earth," the stump announced. I myself am proud to have lived in a city where so much can happen in one lifetime.