

Welcome to Clara's Lansing Station!

Note- this history is shared for archival purposes. Clara's Lansing Station closed in June 2016. Please visit Clara's on the River in Battle Creek.

From its beginning in 1903, the "Union Depot" on Michigan Avenue was a haven of hospitality for train passengers and Lansing locals whose entertainment was watching the iron horse pull in each day. It's rumored this station was also used as a backdrop in the production and shooting of the famous novel turned movie "Anatomy of a Murder." The elaborate combination of cut stone arches and towers was designed by Detroit architects Spiers and Rohns who gave several Michigan railroad stations a similar dash of Romanesque design.

Visible signs of wealth appeared throughout Lansing in the early days of the new century, thanks to an industrial pioneer named Ransom E. Olds. His genius in motor car design brought a revolution in travel that quickly labeled Lansing "Olds Town" and insured Michigan's future as the Automotive State. Many of the homes built by the city's automobile elite were impressive but relatively modest, like the Queen Anne style mansion of the Olds family. The carefully planned residence of tile, brick, leaded glass and tiffany windows was built about the same time as the station. Through the research efforts of Dick Hanley, a local artist, the windows in Clara's authentically duplicate the popular 1903 designs. Progress built Lansing but the industrial era was the death knell for many of the city's landmarks, including the Olds home. It was torn down in 1972 to make way for I-496. Good fortune came to Clara's owners when they discovered a statue lamp which had once lighted the way to the family's second floor music room. This signed Bradley-Hubbard edition of solid bronze at the bottom of our stair railing now brightens the way to our balcony dining area.

When you reach the top of the stairs, keep looking up to the very peak of our magnificent cathedral ceiling. The bronze chandelier hanging there is one of our oldest antiques. Just imagine how the soft light must have its Baccarat crystal glitter in a Paris mansion in 1825. A bit of European elegance reflects in the three crystal chandeliers hanging above the main dining area. Long ago, they shone upon grand times in a London opera house. And our hand carved cherry Enquiries door closing off the bar from the parlor also had its beginning somewhere in England. The old ticket office, on the east side of the station, has been glamorized with the bronze chandelier from a Belgium department store. The slag gas lamp in the parlor, once the ticket agent's office, lighted the entrance of the original Consumers Power Building.



Most of Saginaw's mansions, built by the lumber barons, are gone also, but their memories remain alive in Clara's. The walnut manager's office is constructed from the ceiling of one home built about 1890. The fireplace mantel at the north end and the stair railing supporting the Olds statue lamp were also adornments in a lumber mansion. Next to the fireplace we've added a pair of original floor candelabra which were used for light in a palace in Venice. Solid oak sideboards like our hostess stand and the oak hall trees are typical of those found in the better homes of the 1890s. Most of us don't remember when the circus came to town, at least not arriving in a horse-drawn wagon. But anyone in the early 1900s will recognize the elaborate circus wagon decoration hanging from the balcony above the Wurlitzer juke box.

Our street lamps on our outdoor patio were among the first used to guide Oldsmobile motorists through Lansing's streets. The Saginaw brick planters on our patio were from the old baggage building, formerly located at the north end of the station. Connected to the east side of the depot is a restored 1910 Pullman dining car. Clara's passengers can relive the romance of dining on the rails while feeling the rumble of the passing trains.

Evidence of the good "Olds" days kept disappearing but Union Station continued to serve passengers until 1972 when all service through Lansing was discontinued and the station was closed. Three years later Amtrak resumed service but East Lansing won the depot bid. Active restaurateurs bought the station in 1978 and today you enjoy the results of their efforts in reconstructing a little of Lansing's tradition. With the help of the Wooden Skate Antique Shop, they have collected the artifacts that surround you and it is their design plan that shows off our heritage with such good taste. They appropriately chose the name Clara's for their landmark business. It was a popular name for ladies at the turn of the century.

Welcome back to the present. Now that you know how we arrived, let us freshen your cocktail while you connect with some of Clara's popular specialties. Our clock over the parlor entrance, with one of the first General Electric movements ever made, will let you know when you must disembark. Thanks for joining us at Clara's, and stop in again soon! We invite you to visit our Clara's on the River Restaurant in Battle Creek. This 1888 Michigan Central Depot is every bit charming, and is another delightful destination.