



Olmsted 200

Two Centuries and More History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township –
First Farmed in 1814 and Settled in 1815

Issue 135

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Film's Outdoor Shots Give Insights into 1936's Olmsted Falls

When the days of summer wane and autumn approaches, many young men turn their attention to football. That was as true in 1936 as it is today, although the high school football season starts weeks earlier in the 21st century than it did 88 years ago. The latter part of the 1936 film of Olmsted Falls includes a few minutes of football practice among some of the high school students. While it's interesting to compare their helmets and uniforms to the more protective counterparts of today, it's also interesting to see how few buildings were in the background of the football field.



In this shot from the 1936 film, a coach looks on as a player dives to retrieve the football. There were no houses on the other side of the street.

The football field was next to the school along Division Street, which now is called Mapleway Drive. That continued to be the high school football field for the next few decades. It was even used for a couple of years after the current high school was opened in 1968 because the new high school didn't get a football field right away. The current Olmsted Falls Branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library is now located on part of the former football field.

These days, many houses are located across the street from the site, and the now-closed Evergreen Packaging (formerly Dairypak) plant stands on the other side of the railroad tracks. But in 1936, no houses stood across the street, and there was no factory on the other side of the tracks. The only building that can be seen clearly behind the practicing football players is a small one on the same side of the tracks. Sisters Amelia and Clara Harding, whose comments made in 1991 are included in the soundtrack recently added to the film by Jim Boddy, said that building belonged to the railroad.



Several players approach the camera in this shot. behind them is a simple goalpost and a building belonging to the railroad south of the tracks.

The football field itself seems very sparse in the film. The only infrastructure in 1936 seemed to be the goalposts on each end of the field. There were no permanent bleachers or concession stands.



These shots show football players approaching the line of scrimmage on the left and posing for the camera on the right.

Following the shots of the football practice, the film switches to showing students outside, apparently near the school. They are dressed well. Some boys wear ties. The girls wear nice dresses. In their commentary recorded in 1991, Amelia and Clara Harding indicate it wasn't unusual for students to dress for school like that regularly. A few shots show students lining up for and then going down a sliding board, playing on a swingset, and standing in a circle while tossing a ball around.

Behind them are trees and fields, as well as some parked cars, but not any buildings. Without such photographic evidence from the time, it would be hard to imagine now how removed the old school was from most residences in Olmsted Falls.



On the left, students line up to go down a sliding board. On the right is part of the circle students formed while tossing a ball back and forth.

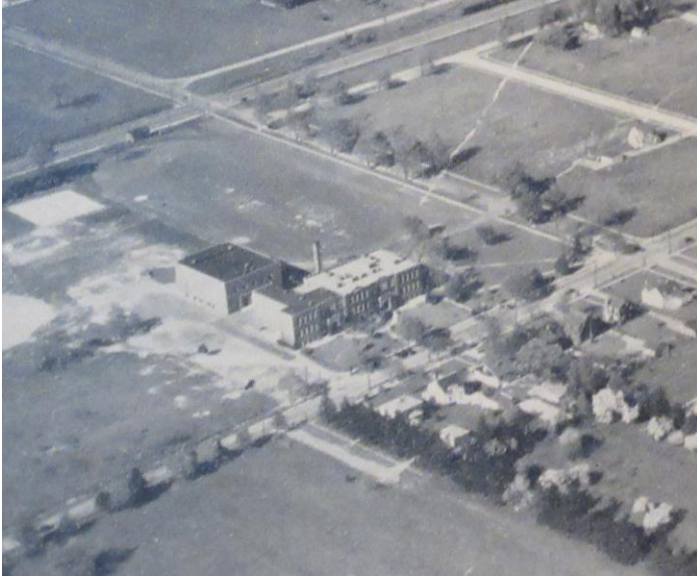
In the background of one shot is a large, three-story house that doesn't match any house currently in that neighborhood. Initially, Jim Boddy was perplexed about what that house could be – even after he had worked on the film for a few years while adding a soundtrack of commentary and music to it. But on May 3, 2024, he solved the mystery when he looked at an aerial photo of Olmsted Falls that was published on page 15 of the *Olmsted Falls Homecoming 1939 Souvenir Program*.



In the background over the shoulder of the boy caught in this shot is a large house that stood on Lynway Avenue.

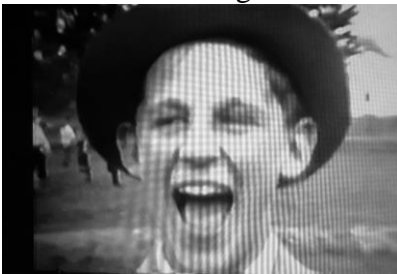
“It’s on Lynway [Avenue] about 1/2 way down,” Boddy wrote in an email. “Only house there. Garage is there too but sits further back of house than appears in the movie. I don’t believe that house is still there....fire or something? Dunno.”

That seems to be the explanation. Lynway was only one block east of Division Street. It was not filled with houses on each side the way it and Olmway Avenue are now. Likewise, the east side Division Street across also lacked the houses that now fill the east side of Mapleway Drive. The film and the aerial photo are testaments to how much open, undeveloped space Olmsted Falls had in the years before World War II – and of course, Olmsted Township had even more. Post-war housing developments that continue to be built in the 21st century have filled up most of that space.



This is the lower left section of the aerial view of Olmsted Falls from the 1939 Homecoming program. In the center is the old school building that was the school district's only school in the 1930s. (The gymnasium to the left was added in 1938, so it was not there when the 1936 film was shot.) To the upper right, about one-third of the way down, is the big house on Lynway Avenue that was caught in the background of the photo on the previous page.

Other shots in that section of the film show young students mugging for the camera and making faces. Two boys wrestle in the grass.



Above, these boys make funny faces as the film camera turns toward them. Below, smiling girls file past the camera on the left, a boy makes a funny pose with his glasses in the center, and two boys tussle on the ground on the right.



Next, the film switches to a scene of older students – presumably in high school – and teachers filing out of the school, perhaps at the end of the day. Those students also are dressed well. Some of them wear ties. The boys wear white or at least light-colored shirts. The girls and female teachers wear dresses or blouses and skirts that would have been suitable for a Sunday at church and not just a weekday at school. A few shy away from the camera, but most welcome it with big smiles.

Finally, that section of the film shows a young boy walking toward the camera while making big sweeping motions with a broom.



The shots above show a teacher and a few of the students as they file out of the school. The woman in the photo to the lower left seems to be a teacher. In the photo to the lower right, a boy swings a broom that seems to be about as tall as he is.



The story about the 1936 film in the next issue of *Olmsted 200* will show shots of other high school students playing football on the same field shown in this issue, but this time, it's girls who are playing. That section of the film also includes photos of two longtime and well-regarded teachers, including one who is still remembered well today by her former students.

August Has Been a Time for Welcoming New Olmsted Schools

Unlike today, during the 19th century and most of the 20th century, August was not the month when the school year began, but it was a time to get ready for school. In certain years, it was the time when Olmsted residents got ready not only for the new school year but also for a new school. Two of those times occurred 150 years ago this month and 70 years ago this month.

In 1874, the August 13 edition of Berea's *Grindstone City Advertiser* included this item in its Olmsted column: "The new school building is finished and the rubble is cleared away. The hedge is trimmed and our public square has quite a respectable appearance again, and we have a school house that that any village may feel proud to own."

That referred to the newly built Union Schoolhouse on the Village Green in Olmsted Falls. It was a two-story, brick building that replaced a much smaller, wooden-frame school building that had served the community for a few decades. Desire for something better than that arose in 1870, when an *Advertiser* columnist wrote:

Good scholars are a thing of no little importance in any community, but the most successful teachers cannot make them first-class while the buildings they occupy are inconvenient, uncomfortable and dilapidated. Nothing is more needed, or will add more largely to the value of property or the quality of our schools in Olmsted village.

Work began on the new school building in May 1873 and went slowly. Although the first classes were held in the building in February 1874, it wasn't until finished until the following June, and as the August 13, 1874, newspaper item indicated, the grounds weren't cleaned up until several weeks later, just a few weeks before the new school year. The total cost of construction was \$9,610.28.

As a June 25, 1874, *Advertiser* column noted, the old wooden school building already had been removed: "The old school house has been purchased by the officers of the Catholic Church and they have moved it up near the Catholic Church and it will still be used as a school house." That occurred one year after the Catholics moved their church on rollers down Columbia Street (now Columbia Road) from the site of the current Olmsted Community Church to the current site of St. Mary of the Falls.



The Union Schoolhouse served as a school for 40 years until 1914, when officials decided it was too unsafe structurally, and classes

were moved to the Town Hall. That led to a merger of the Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township school systems and the construction in 1916 of a new school for all the village and township students. (That building, which was later expanded, now serves as Olmsted Falls City Hall.) The Union Schoolhouse remained standing on the Village Green, and

This photo shows the Union Schoolhouse on the Village Green in 1880, just six years after it was finished in 1874. It is one of two 1880s photos of the school that Mike Gibson preserved and restored in 2023. He now lives in Sonoma, California.

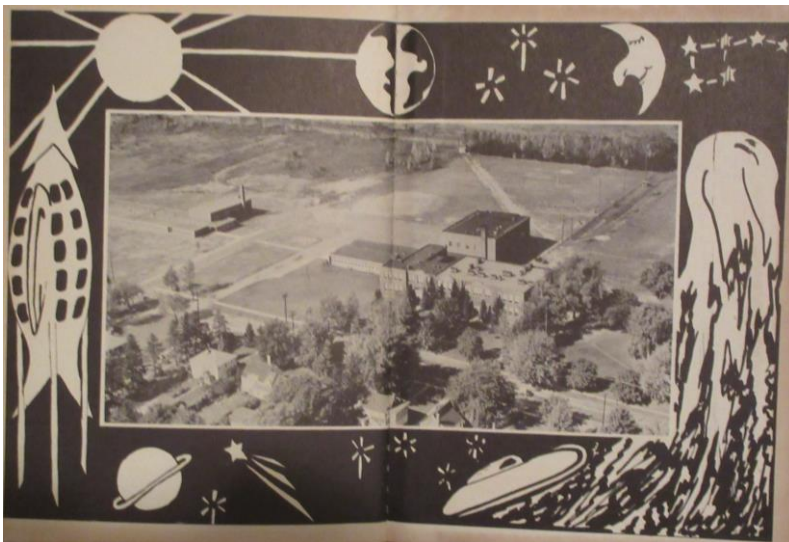
was put to other uses, including for a while as a masonic lodge, until the village tore it down in 1960.

Eight decades after the Union Schoolhouse was finished, another new school building was nearing completion in August 1954. It was especially notable because it was the first new school building in the Olmsted Falls Local School District in 38 years and was just the beginning of construction of several new schools that were needed to accommodate an expanding population following World War II. Until then, the district had been content to simply add onto the 1916 building with a section that doubled its size in 1926, a gymnasium in 1938 and two wings on the west side in 1948.

The new building that opened in September 1954 was Falls Elementary School, which was located west of the other school building along Bagley Road. The Olmsted Falls column of the *Berea Enterprise* on August 20, 1954, included this paragraph about the new school:

The new elementary building now under construction will be ready for occupancy by the time school opens. This building contains two kindergarten rooms, 14 classrooms, cafeteria, all-purpose room, clinic, teachers' room and office. It will house the kindergarten through fourth grade.

That story also noted that moving most elementary students to the new school left room in the older school building for a new study hall, a library, a science room and a band room for high school students.



This aerial photo from the 1955 yearbook, Senorio, shows the new Falls Elementary School to the left of the older school and well separated from it. The elementary school opened at the beginning of that 1954-1955 school year. It was the first new school in the district in decades.

In addition, the story said the school district had 46 faculty members that school year, as well as three secretaries, seven cafeteria workers, nine engineers and custodians, one full-time librarian, three part-time librarians and seven bus operators. The school year was set to begin for students on Wednesday, September 8.

The story said that school officials expected total enrollment for the 1954-1955 school year to range from 1,300 to 1,350 students. That turned out to be a good estimate. A few weeks later, on September 17, 1954, an *Enterprise* story reported the total number of students in the Olmsted Falls schools was 1,343.

As the population continued to grow over the years, the school district opened more schools – Fitch Elementary School in 1958, Lenox Elementary School in 1961, the new Olmsted Falls High School in 1968, the new Olmsted Falls Middle School in 1996, and Olmsted Falls Intermediate School in 2009. Most of those buildings also were renovated and expanded over the years.

John Hall's Barn Has Been Gone for a Decade Now

A decade now has passed since Olmsted Township lost one of its most scenic and most photographed buildings – the big red barn that farmer John Hall built along John Road in 1880. It served more than 13 decades, first as the barn for his farm and later as a storage building for the Homelinks golf course and then its successor, The Links.

However, by early 2014, the Eliza Jennings organization, which owns the Renaissance retirement community where the barn stood, decided that the barn could not be saved and must come down. By then, one side of the barn was bowing out,

Several people looked at the building to consider whether it could be saved, but no one came up with a plan for doing so. Among those who looked at the barn was the late Clint Williams, who had restored many old buildings that now are part of Grand Pacific Junction.



This is what John Hall's barn along John Road looked like before it was torn down a decade ago.

Demolition work by Razing Cleveland, a Brooklyn company specializing in deconstructing old buildings, began on May 19, 2014. Within weeks, the company removed the barn piece by piece. The company then repurposed wooden and stone materials for use in flooring, furniture and art designs.

Just three stones were left on the site. One of them is the stone with the inscription "J.H. 1880" that John Hall used to show when he built the barn. In 2014, Sandy Skerda, executive director of the Renaissance, said, "We are collaborating with Razing Cleveland to create a space that will be a beautiful reminder of the historic significance of the barn that once stood in its place."



On the left is a photo shared by Razing Cleveland in 2014 as the company was taking apart John Hall's barn. On the right are the three stones from the barn that remain on the site.

Today, only the three stones remain on the site. They sit on a circular area of gravel-covered ground amid grass next to a large tree.

Shirley Hecker Passes Away, but Her Artwork Remains

The Olmsted community recently lost an artist who commemorated many sites around Olmsted on materials as varied as metal, wood, paper and slate. Shirley Brookins Hecker was 95 years old when she died on June 16, 2024. Her husband, Bob, had



Shirley Hecker, right, looks on as Mayor Ann Marie Donegan presents her with a proclamation in honor of her artwork and other contributions to the community. The occasion was Falls Day in the Park at East River Park on October 5, 2014.

preceded her in passing away on February 24, 2013, at age 87. She left behind three children, seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, according to an obituary published by the Baker, Osinski, Kensinger Funeral Home.

Hecker also left behind many of her artworks in the possession of Olmsted residents and former residents. As her obituary stated, "She provided a sketched drawing on slate to the citizen of the year of Olmsted Falls for over 35 years. Her unique carvings on wood and slate depicting local scenes remain a treasure to our community. Shirley continued her artwork throughout her life, still doodling and sketching well into her 90s." (Actually, some of her offerings for the Citizen of the Year Award were wooden carvings rather than slate sketches.)

In 2014, when Hecker provided her last artwork, a wooden carving showing the Olmsted Falls depot, for the Citizen of the Year Award, then-Mayor Ann Marie Donegan

presented her with a proclamation honoring her for her longtime service to the community. Among other things, the proclamation stated:

“WHEREAS; Shirley has been recognized as possessing the characteristics of which most people identify as what they most love about the Olmsted Falls community – love, caring and a rich appreciation for our history. This history has been permanently carved by way of Shirley’s art work as displays of notable buildings and landmarks....”

Olmsted 200 used a photo of one of Hecker’s wooden carvings a few months ago in Issue 132 from May 2024. The carving depicts the former schoolhouse that served for many years during the 20th century as the Village Hall for West View and then as the Village Hall and later City Hall for Olmsted Falls after the 1971 merger of Olmsted Falls and West View. Former West View and then Olmsted Falls Councilman Norman Sherbert, also known as Ron, received it as a parting gift from fellow municipal leaders and their spouses when he had to move away in 1972 to keep working for General Motors. That’s just one example of how Shirley Hecker’s artwork was used over the

years to commemorate Olmsted events.



Shirley Hecker depicted the former Simmerer & Sons hardware store (now the Grand Pacific Hotel) on this 9.25-inch-by-15-inch piece of wood. The date on the back of it is 1975.

In the January 29, 1981, edition of the *News Sun*, the Berea newspaper that then covered Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township, reporter Helen Rathburn wrote in her “Olmsted Dates and Data” column that Hecker had “become well known for her wood cuts of local sights and private homes. She became interested in the technique while showing her son how to use a wood burning set he had received as a Christmas gift (that may have been the last time he saw the wood burner).”

Rathburn also wrote that several examples of Hecker’s artwork had been reproduced as stationery that was available at two local shops, the Village Shelf and the Wayside Shop.

“Shirley, an active jogger as well as an artist, can often be seen jogging around town or sitting along the road sketching a local landmark,” Rathburn wrote.

The reason Rathburn wrote about Hecker in early 1981 was that some of Hecker’s works were being featured in a showcase display at the Baldwin-Wallace College Theatre.

On this 11-inch-by-21-inch piece of wood, Hecker depicted the old school that then was Olmsted Falls Middle School. The date on the piece is 1995, which was the last year before the school district opened the new middle school in 1996.



In the 1980s, several of Hecker's depictions of Olmsted scenes began appearing in a series of collectable pewter plates. *Olmsted 200* published photos of all of them in Issue 18 from November 2014 and Issue 20 from January 2015.



This is one of the pewter plates from the 1980s with depictions by Shirley Hecker of scenes around Olmsted Falls. In this case, it is the Union Schoolhouse that stood on the Village Green until the community demolished it in 1960. Notice that Hecker's standard signature – "Shirl" – can be seen in the lower right along the border of the plate.

How can you tell if a wooden carving, pewter plate or sketch of an Olmsted scene was created by Hecker? Look for her simple signature – "Shirl" – in the lower right.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include one more story about the 1936 film, as well as stories about Bradford bricks and the day eels invaded Damp's Mill.

If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New

Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin, and as well as overseas in the Netherlands, Germany and Japan.

Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted's history that you would like to have pulled out of *Olmsted 200*'s extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information or photos about the community's history that you would like to share.

If you have missed any of the past issues of *Olmsted 200* or want to share them with someone else, all of them can be found on Olmsted Township's website. Go to <https://www.olmstedtownshipohio.gov/290/Past-Newsletters-Olmsted-200>. All the issues of *Olmsted 200* also are available on the website of the City of Olmsted Falls. Find them at: http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted_falls_history/olmsted_200_issues.php. A link to *Olmsted 200* can be found on the left side of the page. On each site, click on the number of the issue you want to read.

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. Thanks go to Mary Louise King for helping in proofreading and editing many issues. Thanks also go to David Kennedy for frequently contributing research and insight for some stories. Written contributions and photos, as well as comments and questions about items in this newsletter, will be considered for publication. Send any correspondence by email to: wallacestar@hotmail.com.

Olmsted 200 is written, researched and edited by Jim Wallace, who is solely responsible for its content. He is co-author (with Bruce Banks) of ***The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township***, published in 2010 by The History Press of Charleston, S.C. ***The Olmsted Story*** is available at the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.

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