



# Olmsted 200

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

Issue 138

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## Dutch Immigrants Began a Prominent Olmsted Family

Two centuries ago this month, on November 20, 1824, a boy named Kornelius DeRooi was born in Groningen in the northern part of the Netherlands. He lived in Europe for more than half of his life, but during his latter decades, he became a prominent merchant in Olmsted Falls and the patriarch of a family that remained influential in the community throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the DeRooi name did not last very long.

Little is known about DeRooi's early life in the Netherlands except a few facts about his marriage and family. On May 5, 1847, he married Oktye Clevering, who was three years older than him. She had been born on October 17, 1821. In his 1966 history of Olmsted, Walter Holzworth called her Gertrude, so that might be how her family and friends referred to her. Holzworth said he got his information about the family from Amelia Harding, a longtime high school teacher in Olmsted Falls and a great granddaughter of Kornelius and Oktye – or Gertrude. The couple's son, Andrew, was born February 23, 1859.



*This is a colorized version of a photo of the store begun by Kornelius DeRooi that his son, Andrew, helped him run before taking it over.*

Perhaps life was tough in the Netherlands for the DeRooi family in the middle of the 19th century because they left there and immigrated to the United States. In 1864,

they arrived in Olmsted Falls. Kornelius soon set up a shop to make and sell boots and shoes. It was located on a 1.5-acre lot a few hundred feet south of Water Street along what then was called Main Street. Until the streets were renamed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the address was 59 Main Street, but now it is 7769 Columbia Road. When Andrew was old enough, he joined his father in the business.

A notable year for the DeRooi family was 1885. In the May 1 edition of the *Berea Advertiser*, the Olmsted Falls column included this item: “K. DeRooi and son are building the foundation for a new store. We understand they are going to put up a building that will be ornamental as well as a convenience to this place.”

At that time, Kornelius was 60 years old, and Andrew was 26. Two weeks later, the same newspaper column included this item: “The frame of DeRooi & Son’s new store is up and the work progressing nicely under the management of E.A. Barnard.”

In July 1885, Andrew DeRooi married Amelia Jane Hodgson of Cleveland. (Holzworth gave the wedding date as July 3, but Andrew’s obituary said it was July 4.) The couple moved into a house Andrew built that year. Andrew and Amelia had just one child, Josephine Clara, who was born on April 16, 1887. Her friends and family called her Clara.

At some time – at least by 1893 – Andrew and his family changed their last name from DeRooi to DeRoy. The reason for the change is unknown, but perhaps they got tired of explaining how to spell the name and chose a simplified spelling that represented the name’s pronunciation.



*This wooden box, left, and these stools, right, are among several items from Andrew DeRoy’s store that are now part of the collection at the General Store at the Olmsted Historical Society’s Frostville Museum in North Olmsted. “A. DEROU OLM. FALLS” is stenciled on the box. The label on one of the stools says: “Stools used in DeRoy’s store around pot-bellied stove - 59 Main Street Olmsted Falls.” The items were donated to the museum in 1985. Thanks to Dianne Plogger, manager of the store, for making the items available.*

In early 1893, a legal notice in the newspaper stated that the father and son had dissolved their business partnership. It said the father, identified as “C. DeRoy” (suggesting Kornelius DeRooi’s name had been changed to Cornelius DeRoy, although

that is not reflected in other records or his gravestone), would continue in the shoe business while the son, Andrew DeRoy, would handle the rest of the store's business.

## DISSOLUTION NOTICE.

THE FIRM of C. DeRoy & Son has been this day dissolved by mutual consent, C. DeRoy assuming the shoe business and A. DeRoy the remainder of the business. The business will be continued at the same place.

C. DeROY,  
A. DeROY.

Olmsted Falls, February 1, '93.

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This 1893 newspaper notice announced that the father and son intended to split their business in two.

Soon after that notice appeared, the Olmsted Falls column in the February 17, 1893, edition of the *Berea Advertiser* included this item: "Mr. A. DeRoy intends to build an addition to his store in the spring."

However, a subsequent item in that column on May 12, 1893, muddled the status of the business split and the name of the father and son: "C. DeRooi and Son's new building is up and enclosed."

Less than a decade after the change in the business, Cornelius DeRooi died on January 19, 1901, at the age of 76. His widow, Oktye – or Gertrude – died two weeks later, February 2, 1901, at the age of 79. Both were buried at the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery, also known as Turkeyfoot.

Andrew expanded the store to sell groceries and general merchandise in addition to shoes and boots. According to his 1928 obituary, Andrew DeRoy continued to run the store until about five years before his death, so that would have been about 1922 or 1923. In addition, his obituary said this about him:

*He is and will be gratefully remembered, especially by all who as children, went to the store after groceries for their parents or if by chance they had a penny to spend, to get a supply of candy for themselves. In the earlier days a penny would go much farther than a nickel or even a dime does today. At least it went a long ways with Mr. DeRoy, moreso if he knew that the little boy or girl very seldom had it. Many a time a penniless*



*This is how the store looked early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

*child would come to the store and receive with his basket of groceries, a generous gift of caramels or peanuts.*

*There were men, women and families whom he befriended. The ranks of the Olmsteders of those days are thinning but once in a while, sometimes twice in a while, is met one of these people who feel and give expression to those feelings, that in the passing of Mr. DeRoy, they have seen for the last time, one more faithful friend.*

Andrew DeRoy died on February 8, 1928 – 15 days shy of his 69<sup>th</sup> birthday. His widow, Amelia, died eight years later, April 28, 1936. Both were buried at the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery.

Their daughter, Clara, was 22 years old when she married 25-year-old Harry Harding on December 5, 1909. He was a farmer and the son of Charles W. Harding and Emma Lay Harding.

Application No. 65414		Filed and Marriage License Issued	DEC 8- 1909	190
Name	Harry L. Harding	Name	J. Clara DeRoy	
Age	25	Residence	Olmsted Falls, O.	Age 22 Residence Olmsted Falls, O.
Place of Birth	Olmsted Falls, O.	Place of Birth	Olmsted Falls, O.	
Occupation	Farmer	Occupation	House	
Father's Name	Charles W.	Father's Name	Andrew	
Mother's Maiden Name	Emma Lay	Mother's Maiden Name	Amelia J. Hodgeson	
Number of times previously married	Never	Number of times previously married	Never	
Applicant	Harry L. Harding	Married Name		
Marriage to be solemnized by Rev.	D. F. Bradley	License issued by	Frank G. Elmendorf, Dep'y Clk.	
Consent of	Filed 190	Consent of	Filed 190	
...RETURN...				
The State of Ohio, ss.				
I Certify, That on the 5th day of December 1909 Mr. Harry L. Harding and Miss J. Clara DeRoy were by me legally joined in marriage. Rev. D. F. Bradley				

*This is the official record of the marriage of Harry L. Harding to J. Clara DeRoy.*

According to Holzworth, Harry's father served as a teacher and then superintendent for 20 years at the Olmsted Falls school, known as the Union Schoolhouse, which stood on the Village Green. Charles W. Harding was the son of William and Mary Harding, who were both from Bruntingthorpe, Leicestershire, England. They immigrated to Olmsted Township in 1848, the same year they were married.

Sometime after Charles and Emma Harding married in 1883, they took over the Lay family farm at the northwest corner of Usher Road and Schady Road that their son, Harry, eventually acquired. Thus, he was a farmer when he married Clara Deroy in 1909. In the 1960s, the Brentwood housing development replaced the farm.

Before he took up farming, Harry Harding went to elementary school in Olmsted Falls and high school in Berea. He then attended Baldwin Wallace College. Holzworth wrote that Harding engaged in dairy farming and raising Holstein cattle for several years until he became associated with the Bank of Berea. He was elected a vice president of the

bank and appointed to manage its North Olmsted branch. In addition, he was an organizing member and a director of the United Farmers Exchange in Olmsted Falls.

Harry and Clara Harding had three children. The first was a daughter, Amelia, who was born March 26, 1914. Amelia was her middle name. Her first name was Ruth, but she didn't go by it. Her brother, Charles Andrew, was born June 24, 1915. Their sister, Clara Emma, was born on January 14, 1918.



*The photo on the left shows the Harding family at Cedar Point amusement park sometime in the 1920s. The right photo, dated 1923, shows the Harding children with Amelia on the left, Charles in the middle and Clara on the right. Photos courtesy of Emily Maurer, who got them from Charlene Sanford.*

Harry and Clara Harding remained on the farm while their children were young, but in 1936, they built a new brick home on the site where the DeRooi/DeRoy store had stood at 59 Main Street (now 7769 Columbia Road). It's not clear whether the store was torn down then or earlier.



*This is a recent photo of what was the Hardings' house at 7769 Columbia Road.*

The three siblings followed in the footsteps of their family. Like her grandfather, Charles W. Harding, Amelia became a teacher and served in the Olmsted Falls school system from the 1930s until the 1970s. Like their father, Charles and Clara both went into the banking industry. Clara served as executive secretary of National City Bank for many years.

At Olmsted Falls High School, Charles Andrew Harding competed in football and track. About him, Holzworth wrote: "He was one of the most popular and promising young men of Olmsted Falls. He won the rank of Eagle Scout and also was honored with

the Bronze Palm, a distinction very few Scouts attain. He organized a band, The Nite Owls, a very bright future was ahead for him in the banking business." After high school, Harding attended Baldwin Wallace College for three years before he went to work for the Bank of Berea.

But his banking career was cut short. The U.S. Army drafted him, and he entered military service on January 31, 1941. (Note: that was more than 10 months before the United States entered World War II on December 8, 1941, the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.) After Harding received basic training as an infantry soldier, he went into Officer Candidate School. At Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1942, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the infantry. After assisting in activating the 612<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion at Camp Swift in Texas, he was promoted to captain in May 1943. He was given command of Company A.

On April 7, 1944, Harding shipped out of New York with the 612<sup>th</sup> and arrived at Greenock, Scotland, on April 15. Eight days after the Allies launched the Battle of Normandy on June 6, 1944, members of the 612<sup>th</sup> rode transports that took them to France on June 14. They engaged in fighting the Germans around Cerisy and then at Vire in July and early August. According to the official history of the unit, Captain Charles Harding and Private John J. Arvin were reported missing in action about 8:30 p.m. on August 2, 1944:

*Captain Harding, together with his company officers and enlisted personnel of his company, were on a reconnaissance for gun positions in the vicinity of coordinates 599420. Private Arvin was wounded by enemy fire and Captain Harding remained with the wounded man after all small arms ammunition had been expended. As a result of this action Captain Harding and Private Arvin were in all probability captured by the enemy and were reported as missing in action. Staff Sgt. Maynard C. Taylor, of Co. A was also wounded in action in an unsuccessful attempt to rescue Captain Harding and Private Arvin. 1st Lt. William S. Groff then assumed command of Co. A.*

Harding is believed to have died on August 3, 1944, as a prisoner of war in an unidentified German hospital. His body later was given to Allied troops and buried in a temporary grave. Posthumously, he received the Bronze Star and the Oak Leaf Cluster for heroism. The Olmsted Community Church held a memorial service for him on February 11, 1945.

It took a few years before Harding's body was returned to the United States for a funeral service. When it did, as Holzworth wrote, "tragedy again struck the Harding



*This was Charles A. Harding as he looked during World War II.*

family.” Charles’s father, Harry, had become ill in May 1949. He resigned as bank manager and went into Lutheran Hospital in Cleveland. He died there on June 11, 1949, at the age of 65, so a double funeral was held for the father and the son on June 14. Their bodies were buried at Sunset Memorial Park.



*Above is the grave marker for Charles A. Harding at Sunset Memorial Park. On the right is the patch that members of the 612<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion wore during World War II.*



*This is an undated photo of Clara Harding.*

Charles’s younger sister, Clara, graduated from Olmsted Falls High School in 1936 and then graduated from Spencerian College, a business school, in 1937. She worked for National City Bank from 1938 to 1983 – 45 years. She rose to the position of executive secretary. Although she was the youngest of the Harding siblings, she preceded Amelia in death when she died at Southwest General Health Center on July 7, 2006, at the age of 88. Neither she nor Amelia ever married. They lived together until Clara’s death at the family home at 7769 Columbia Road. They also owned the lot directly across the road and kept it vacant, so their view to the west would remain unblocked. That lot recently was put up for sale.

Because of her long career teaching in the Olmsted Falls school district and her long life in the community, Amelia Harding is the best remembered of the three siblings. Many of her former students still have fond memories of her. She graduated with a major in English from Baldwin Wallace College in 1936. That was just four years after she graduated from Olmsted Falls High School, where she soon returned and taught English for 38 years until the early 1970s. She returned as a teacher just in time to be caught briefly in the 1936 film of Olmsted Falls, as shown on the fourth page of Issue 136 of *Olmsted 200* from September.

Among the many honors Amelia Harding received over her career was the 1963-1964 Master Teacher Award from the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation. She was one of the first six teachers to receive the award. The Northeastern Ohio Teachers Association also recognized her for her teaching skills. She served at one time as secretary of that organization and was one of two candidates considered for president of the organization in 1963.



*The left photo shows a young Amelia Harding with her mother, Clara DeRoy Harding. The center photo shows Amelia sometime during the middle of her teaching career. The right photo shows her holding the Master Teacher Award from the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation in 1963, about a decade before she retired. Photos courtesy of Emily Maurer, who got them from Charlene Sanford.*

In their later years, Amelia and Clara Harding were generous in giving back to their community, typically in the name of their brother. For example, they donated \$100,000 for the construction of the covered bridge made of red oak over Plum Creek on Main Street. That was about one-quarter of its cost. Olmsted Falls City Council voted on June 24, 1998, to name the bridge after their brother. The community dedicated the Charles A. Harding Memorial Bridge on August 6, 1998. Since then, it has become one of the most photographed structures in Olmsted Falls, especially for wedding parties from the nearby Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel, the Grand Pacific Wedding Garden and local churches. (For more about the bridge, see Issue 63 of *Olmsted 200* from August 2018.)

In 2005, Amelia and Clara contributed to an Olmsted Falls Alumni Association project to build new home-side stands at the high school football stadium to replace those that had stood since the stadium was built in 1971 (when Amelia Harding was still teaching). They were the leading donors to the \$700,000 project. Along with the new stands and a press box, the project included the erection of an arched entranceway with a new name, Charles A. Harding Memorial Stadium.



*This pedestrian bridge on Main Street is named for Charles Harding thanks to his sisters' donation for its construction.*

(At the same time, the Shaker family also made a significant donation, so the press box was named for Bob Shaker, a member of the OFHS Class of 1972. He had died from cancer six years earlier. Later, the Vita-Mix Corporation entered a 10-year, collaborative partnership with the school district, so the football field was dedicated in 2019 as Vitamix Field, but the stadium remained named for Charles Harding.)



*This is the arched entranceway added to the high school football stadium in 2005 after Amelia and Clara Harding donated money for it and the new home-side stands, which can be seen behind it.*

scholarships for students at Olmsted Falls High School and Baldwin Wallace.

“We have always been lucky,” Clara Harding was quoted as saying in the newspaper story. “Our parents sacrificed for us and we believe people should give back.”

The story also quoted Thomas Lanning, one of the teachers who recommended that the Hardings should receive the award.

“Both of these women have devoted their lives to service within this community,” he said. “Their financial support of programs and institutions in this area is legendary. Without them, we would be much less of a school and community.”

When Amelia Harding died at age 97 on August 3, 2011, it brought an end to a family that had been prominent in Olmsted Falls since the Civil War, when Cornelius, Oktye and their son, Andrew, arrived from the Netherlands. Like their brother and parents, the bodies of Amelia and Clara Harding were buried at Sunset Memorial Park, just 1.5 miles north of where they lived most of their lives.

After Amelia’s death, the Harding house was donated to Baldwin Wallace University with the intention of providing a residence for visiting professors. But about a

decade later, the university decided to sell the property. In 2023, Brian and Emily Maurer bought it to be a home for them and their four children.

*Thanks go to Dianne Plogger of the Frostville Museum and Emily Maurer for their help with this story.*

## Businessman's Decision 140 Years Ago Affected West View

Readers of the *Berea Advertiser* might have paid little attention to an item in its West View column in the November 28, 1884, edition, but it preceded a significant change in the commercial life of the community. It said: "Mr. E. Biglow, postmaster and proprietor of a store at this place has decided to sell out his stock and retire from the business. He is largely interested in the manufacture of tile, which absorbs his attention to such an extent that he is obliged to discontinue the mercantile business."

The businessman was Ephraim Biglow, who had started the E. Biglow Drain Tile Company in 1880 after having some success with baking local clay in a kiln. His manufacturing operation was in Columbia Township just east of the railroad and south of what now is Sprague Road. Back then, West View was an unincorporated community that straddled the border between Olmsted Township and Columbia Township, as well as Cuyahoga County and Lorain County. Thus, what happened on one side of the border had a big effect on community life on the other side.

Biglow's tile business produced about 350,000 tiles and about 250,000 bricks with a workforce of eight men in 1884. The market was good because many property owners wanted to drain their swampy land, including some land in southwestern Olmsted Township.

All went well for more than a decade – too well for West View. In 1897, Biglow bought another brick-and-tile manufacturing facility in New London, Ohio, where he thought the clay was better. He soon shut down his West View operation and moved to New London, which is in Huron County. By 1909, Biglow's tile works employed about 50 men. Biglow and his son, Ernest, operated the New London facility until they sold it in 1928. Although it closed from 1931 until 1933 during the Great Depression, the facility operated until 1981, when plastic pipes replaced the use of much clay tile.



*This photo from the late 1800s shows the Biglow Drain Tile Company's operation at West View in Columbia Township, just south of the Olmsted Township border.*

For more about Ephraim Biglow and his tile-and-brick manufacturing company, see Issue 54 of *Olmsted 200* from November 2017.

## Construction of Electric Railroad Preceded Olmsted Split

North Olmsted became a separate, incorporated village in 1909. But one development that helped lead to that separation was noted 130 years ago this month.

On November 2, 1894, the Butternut Ridge column in the *Berea Advertiser*, included this item: “Work on the bridge at crossing is moving right along and the railroad



company is putting in a bridge of which we will all be proud of. In the meantime our folks are jubilant over the fact that before another year they are to have an electric car line direct from Cleveland to Elyria. As it will pass our house  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile to the east we are hoping a spur will be put in for the benefit of those who live on Butternut Ridge extension.”

*This was one of the interurban railway cars that began operating in northern Olmsted Township in 1895.*

northern Olmsted Township residents to travel to downtown Cleveland in just about 45 minutes. Eventually, the tracks extended west to Elyria and beyond. Northern Olmsted Township residents already had been drifting away from the rest of the township, but the construction of the railroad with its convenient east-west connections exacerbated that alienation. (For more on North Olmsted’s split from Olmsted Township, see Issue 67 of *Olmsted 200* from December 2018.)

## Cook Road Story Was Welcomed

Many readers wrote that they were pleased to learn about the family for which Cook Road got its name in the lead story in Issue 137 of *Olmsted 200* last month. One reaction came from Nancy Naso, who wrote:

*I just wanted you to know that I really enjoyed this issue, I grew up on Stearns Rd, four houses down from Cook. As a child I always wondered about the history of the area, it was still pretty much country then and you could still see vague reminders of what had been. From roaming around in the woods and fields as a child I often wished I could see the area as it had been in the early days. It was a great place to grow up.*

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include stories about significant changes on the northern and southern ends of downtown Olmsted Falls 65 years ago, a Prohibition-era bust of an Olmsted roadhouse and the arrival of telephone lines in Olmsted.

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](mailto: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](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](mailto: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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