



# *Olmsted 200*

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

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## **Dutch Elm Disease Was Costly for One Olmsted Family**

A little more than one year ago, *Olmsted 200* noted a 70-year-old item in the *Berea Enterprise* about Olmsted's fight against Dutch elm disease, which the Ohio State Extension Service calls "one of the most destructive urban forest diseases" in American history. Because of its devastation, many American communities, including Olmsted Falls, have Elm Streets, but few have any remaining elm trees.

That story spurred one reader, Lisa (Kunberger) Woodcock, to dig up some old photos and share her memories of her family's fight against Dutch elm disease at their Olmsted Township home in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1958, when she was a small child, her family moved to a Barton Road property that included two houses on a 3.5-acre lot.



*Part of the elm tree that once towered over Lisa Woodcock's childhood home on Barton Road can be seen on the left side of this photo.*

"There was plenty of room for a full vegetable garden and a great orchard to be brought back up to par," Woodcock wrote in an email. "It had apple, pear, plum, and cherry trees, plus blackberry and raspberry bushes, currants, wild strawberries... all just wonderful."

All that property with its orchard and full garden were meant to keep her grandfather, whom she called Pop, busy during his retirement, she said. He was 69 years old when they moved there.

“He grafted various fruit trees and brought others back to healthy fruit production, discovered grape vines hidden in the weeds and brought them back to where we could add juices from other vintners around the lake and make a barrel of wine per year, produced jugs of apple cider for many of our immediate neighbors, planted blueberry bushes and about 50 young blue spruce and scotch pine, and much more,” Woodcock wrote. “He was really something else.”

Having that 3.5-acre lot made a riding lawnmower and a tractor with a plow and disc tillers necessities, she said.



*A neighbor painted this picture showing the big elm tree one year before the Kunberger family moved into the property with the tree along Barton Road in 1958.*

However, she said, “the real treasure” was a huge elm tree in the middle of the driveway. It was so big that it took three people with linked arms to encircle its trunk. The canopy spread out over both of her family’s houses and that of another house next door.

In about 1961 or 1962, lightning hit the tree. That split about one-third of the tree off from the rest of it, Woodcock recalled, but fortunately, it fell between houses on open land. One day, her grandfather, who

then was about 73, and her father, who was about 37, had a competition.

“Who could cut the most wood with an axe and be the least tired during some predetermined time period?” she wrote. “My father was healthy and in good shape, but thin-armed Pop beat him hands down!”

Her family used all the wood, but getting it cut turned out to be quite expensive, Woodcock wrote.

As bad as that was, however, it was minor compared to the effect Dutch elm disease had on the tree. The disease is caused by fungus that grows inside the vascular tissue of a tree. An affected tree’s natural defenses are inadequate against the invader, so

its branches wilt and become susceptible to beetles that lay eggs in them. Some people and communities tried to combat the disease by spraying the trees with fungicide. In the February 26, 1954, *Berea Enterprise* item noted in Issue 129 of *Olmsted 200* from February 2024, that's what Olmsted Falls Village Council had decided to do. But such efforts did not stop the widespread disappearance of elm trees from the American landscape. And that's not the approach the Kunberger family took with their tree.

"No, our tree was never sprayed; it was too damn big for anyone to even have considered that!" Woodcock wrote. "Both Father and my grandfather were also a bit conservative on spraying in general, though there was some of that in the orchard trees and among the grape vines. I remember Pop letting loose praying mantis to deal with something one year (hmmm, not necessarily great either) and also reading up on 'natural' sprays."

Instead, the Kunbergers tried a method that involved "inoculating" the tree. Woodcock believes that occurred between 1961 and 1963. She recalls twice seeing little bottles about the size of small baby food jars around the base of the tree's trunk.

"I remember asking how it worked for a tree to get 'shots' like people," Woodcock wrote. "They stuck out from the trunk slightly, attached to the trunk by a needle looking tube and spaced maybe every 12-18 inches or so and maybe knee high from the ground."



*This photo dated April 1967 shows another view of the Kunbergers' elm tree before disease forced them to bring it down.*

Through some recent internet research, she found information that Lignasan BLP (carbendazim phosphate) was the first fungicide used to control Dutch elm disease. It was injected into the base of the tree using specialized equipment but was never especially effective. It was introduced in the 1970s, but Woodcock wonders if that method was tested on her family's tree in the 1960s before it became commercially available.

Despite their efforts, the Kunbergers' tree eventually succumbed to the disease.

"Now getting it cut was almost impossible," she said. "Every piece of equipment would burn out trying to get thru the wood."

In about 1968 or 1969, the family managed to cut only the branches, leaving the trunk to rot slowly from then until about 1985 when it could be toppled. The Kunbergers weren't the only people who missed it.



*Lisa Woodcock believes she was nine or 10 when this photo on the left of her on the riding mower was taken, so that would have been 1963 or 1964. The elm tree is in the upper left of the photo. Woodcock says the lack of leaves on the tree is because it was autumn and not because of Dutch elm disease. The photo on the right shows what was left of the tree after its limbs were cut off and before it was removed in the mid-1980s.*

“We were told that this beautiful tree was easily 150 years old and pilots loved it as a visual cue for Cleveland Hopkins and Burke Lakefront airports,” Woodcock wrote. She backed up the claim about the tree’s beauty and size with pictures she shared with *Olmsted 200*.

“Considering the tree was green enough when cutting commenced that higher end equipment had to be brought in, and they still could only handle the limbs.... I think the tree would have stood for quite a while longer,” Woodcock wrote. But she said her family might also have been concerned that leaving the tree up could have contributed to the spread of the disease.

“I wasn’t privy to what all was discussed,” Woodcock wrote. “Just know I was very sad every time I looked out of my bedroom window to see that awkward stump reaching for the sky in memory of the full spread of that gorgeous tree.”

Certainly, the Kunbergers, were not alone in the community in losing a beautiful tree to Dutch elm disease, but her story is a good example of how Olmsted residents were affected by a widespread phenomenon – one which many people probably have forgotten about or never were aware of.

*Thanks go to Lisa (Kunberger) Woodcock for sharing her memories and all the photos used in this story.*



## Olmsted's Hopes Rose and Fell with Railroad Developments

It would be hard to emphasize too much how important the decisions of railroad companies were to communities like Olmsted Falls, West View and Olmsted Township in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. No newspaper was covering the Olmsted area regularly when the first railroad – then the Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati Railroad – cut northeast-southwest through West View in 1849. Nor was there any coverage a few years later when track for the second railroad – then the Toledo, Norwalk and Cleveland Railroad – were laid down east-west through the middle of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township in 1853.

It took until five years after the Civil War for Berea's *Grindstone City Advertiser* to begin covering Olmsted Falls, West View and Butternut Ridge. Yet another five years later, on March 4, 1875 – 150 years ago this month – the Olmsted column of the *Advertiser* included this item: "The Railroad Company have laid out the ground for the new Depot, and as soon as the ground is in proper shape, will commence grading."



*This photo of the Olmsted Falls depot was taken in 1957 by William Gibson, Jr. The depot was located farther west when it was built in 1876. Photo courtesy of Mike Gibson.*

That was one of the earliest of many items in which the column marked the progress toward getting a proper depot for Olmsted Falls. Two months earlier in January 1875, the *Advertiser* ran this item:

*The people of this village are determined to have a new Depot. The money is nearly all subscribed to purchase the ground to be used for that purpose, and the Railroad Company have agreed to build the Depot and put everything in shape in the coming season.*

For more than two decades Olmsted residents had made do with a small building at the center of town that served as a modest depot, but by the mid-1870s, they wanted the same type of depot that other communities had by then. Unfortunately for them, even though the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway, which then owned the tracks, began preparing the ground for the depot in March 1875, further progress went excruciatingly slowly for the people of Olmsted. The railroad put a fence around the property that June and began grading the land that August, but little happened after that.

In October 1875, the *Advertiser* ran this item: “If the new depot does not progress faster for two or three weeks past, it will not be occupied during the lives of the present generation.” Several months later in March 1876, some people got the idea that “the depot is a grand humbug.”

However, in April 1876, the railroad erected the frame of the building. It was mostly constructed by that July, but it took until the following October for it to be put into use. In the October 5, 1876, edition of the *Advertiser*, the Olmsted columnist wrote:

*The new depot is completed at last. Mr. Barnum, the station agent, took possession last Monday. Olmsted Falls has a good depot, finished in good shape with a waiting room for gentlemen and one for ladies, with a dressing room attached. There is also a large freight room, a ticket office and telegraph office, with night and day operators. There is only one disadvantage, it is much to [sic] far away to one side of the village.*

The original location of the depot was not its current location close to Brookside Drive. It was farther west along what once was called South Depot Avenue (now Garfield Avenue). That location remained a big disappointment, as reflected in an item in the Olmsted column of the *Advertiser* on December 7, 1876:

*When we got our new depot, we expected that all our inconveniences, present and future, were removed. We must say that we are a little disappointed. The management of affairs at the depot is in competent and willing hands and all things about it appear exceedingly well. But it is so far off. It costs our merchants as much to bring their goods from the depot as the shipment from the city.*

That complaint about the depot’s location endured for another few decades until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the railroad made Olmsted residents a little happier by moving the depot to its current location.



*This is one of the cars and the crew members of the electric railway built through the Butternut Ridge area in the 1890s.*

The enthusiasm that Olmsted Falls residents expressed in the mid-1870s about getting a new depot was echoed two decades later in the mid-1890s among residents in northern Olmsted Township around Butternut Ridge as they looked forward to completion of a new electric railroad that would provide them with easy access to Cleveland to the east and Elyria to the west. Just as the Olmsted column in the

*Advertiser* kept track of progress of the Olmsted Falls depot in 1875 and 1876, the Butternut Ridge column in 1895 included such items as: “Our new electric road is progressing rapidly.” That interurban line – the Cleveland, Berea and Elyria Street Railway – began operating late in 1895. When it did, it further oriented northern Olmsted Township residents’ attention and activities east and west rather than south toward the rest of the township. Their alienation, which began at least as early as the 1870s, grew until they split completely with the formation of the Village of North Olmsted at the beginning of 1909.

Meanwhile, Olmsted Falls residents had their own railroad hopes raised in 1895 with reports that a new railroad to connect Berea to Lorain would pass through the northern part of the village. But those hopes did not last very long. The railroad never got past the survey stage. If it had proceeded, parts of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township would have developed much differently than they did.

## **School Issue Brought Olmsted Residents Together in 1915**

Every now and then, people face big decisions that can affect their communities for many decades to come. Such a change was in the air 110 years ago this month in both Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township when this item appeared in the Olmsted Falls column of the *Berea Enterprise* on March 5, 1915:

*There will be an all-day session of the people of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township, Monday, March 8, to discuss the improvement of the schools. Prof. S.A. Harbourt of Cleveland will be the main speaker. Come with your lunch and boost the meeting. Hot coffee will be served free.*

In this case, the “improvement of the schools” was a proposal for the township and the village to merge their separate school systems, as well as abandon several small school buildings, and bring all Olmsted students together in one big, centrally located building.



*This was one of the small schools that were built around Olmsted Township in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was located along the east side of Sharp Road just north of Sprague Road. It was known as District 8 School because the township had eight schools before North Olmsted became a village in 1909 with three of the schools within its territory, leaving five schools in the township.*

Olmsted Falls already had removed students in 1914 from the 40-year-old Union Schoolhouse on the Village Green when it was declared structurally unsound and



*This was the Union Schoolhouse that stood on the Village Green. Although the photo labels it as a high school building, it housed all the classes from first grade through high school until the building was declared unsafe in 1914.*

relocated classes to the Town Hall (although the old school was used for other purposes for a few more decades until it was torn down in 1960). The township was still using five one-room or two-room schools scattered around its territory.

In an item dated March 30 but not published until April 2, the newspaper reported: “The people of the village and township are divided on the question of centralization.”

However, the April 2 edition also included two other items on the subject of the future of the schools in Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township:

- “Rapid strides are being made toward the centralizing of schools. Be a booster and help a good cause along. If you are in doubt, don’t condemn the move on the strength of information given by those that are less conversant with the subject than yourself.”
- “An interesting public school meeting was held last week at the town hall to consider consolidation of schools. Parents are getting interested and are anxious to do the thing that will be to the best interests of their children.”

After 50 Olmsted Falls residents signed a petition to dissolve the village’s school district and merge it with the township’s district, the village held an election on April 20, 1915. Three days later, the *Enterprise* reported: “The progressive element of the village are more than pleased by the result of election Tuesday 50 to 32 in favor of better school conditions.” The village school board met for the final time on June 3 and turned over all of its assets, including a check for \$323.07 to the Olmsted Township Rural School District.

But that end was just a beginning. It led to the construction of a new consolidated school building in 1916. For more on that, see Issue 5 of *Olmsted 200* from October 2013.

## **Township History Emerged from the Dark 70 Years Ago**

Olmsted Township officials received a history lesson 70 years ago this month when they figured out how to open an old safe that had been tucked away in the basement of Township Hall. The *Berea Enterprise* covered it in a March 17, 1955, story titled: “Safe Doors Swing Open to Reveal Township’s Past.”



Among the items found inside the safe were three books of records with minutes of township trustees' meetings. One covered the period from 1827 to 1838, another covered 1838 to 1856, and the third covered 1856 to 1876.

"The three record books had been 'lost' for some years because no one remembered the combination of the old safe," the unidentified newspaper reporter wrote. "It wasn't until Constable Harry W. Morrison, Jr., found the combination of figures in an old book and tried it on the antique in the basement that the huge door swung open."

The first entry in the old records was made by David B. Stearns, who was then the township clerk, in 1827, which was 12 years after the first settlers of European descent began moving into the township. The entry described the organization of the township, then called Lenox Township, under its first civil government. The first election was held on June 18, 1827. At that time, the elected officials included three trustees, a clerk, a treasurer, two constables, four supervisors of the highways, two fence viewers, and two overseers of the poor.

"One of the first tasks of the new Township officials was to divide the area into suitable school districts and they did so, listing the same by lot numbers," the *Enterprise* reported. "Householders in each of the three districts were listed as 14, 16 and 18, thus giving the record that there were 48 homes in Lenox Township."

Although the name of the township was changed sometime between December 1829 and March 1830, the official records did not explain that the change was made to avoid confusion through the postal system and otherwise with a Lenox Township in Ashtabula County. (More on that can be found in Issue 79 of *Olmsted 200* from December 2019.)

"The first time the name 'Olmsted' appears is in the record of the minutes of the first Monday of March, 1830, when it is reported that 'trustees of Olmsted Township' met and that Burt Peek, treasurer, presented his account which showed \$54.33 spent for road purposes and a balance of \$4.35 in the treasury," the *Enterprise* reported.



*The March 17, 1955, Berea Enterprise story included these photos. The top one shows Olmsted Township Clerk M.C. Rennecker and Constable Robert Byer next to the opened safe. The bottom one shows Rennecker and Trustees Ben Warner, William Gilligan and Peter Ferrito at one of their meetings. The photo is credited to Jack MacDonald.*

The township's treasury and spending have expanded quite a bit since then. By 2022, the township had total annual revenue of \$12,217,853 and total expenses of \$9,827,530, according to the *Olmsted Township Today* newsletter for spring/summer 2023 on the township's website. During 2023, the township spent \$918,042 on road improvements and had 44 center-line miles of township and county roads, according to the *State of Olmsted Township* report for 2024.

## Deaths of Mill Operator and Historian Occurred in March

Two individuals who affected Olmsted history – one by making it and another by writing it – died several decades ago in March – 40 years apart.

The first was Thomas William Chambers, whose obituary appeared in the *Plain Dealer* on March 31, 1935, under the headline: "Operator of Old Hoadley Mill Dies." The Hoadley mill was the gristmill that two brothers, Samuel and Lemuel Hoadley, built along Rocky River in 1809 just south of what now is Sprague Road. It was on the northern edge of Columbia Township, but it was very important in the lives of many

southeastern Olmsted Township residents in the community of West View.



*This was the gristmill that stood along Rocky River just south of Sprague Road. Although writing on the photo says it was built in 1810, other sources say Samuel and Lemuel Hoadley built it in 1809. Gibbs Butcher Block now occupies that site.*

Although the Village of West View that was incorporated in 1927 was only on the Cuyahoga County side of the border with Lorain County, both sides of the border were considered to be part of West View before then.

Chambers was 87 years old when he died in 1935 at the home of his son, Sherman D. Chambers, professor of engineering at Purdue University in Indiana. His funeral services were held in Berea followed by a burial at Butternut Ridge Cemetery in North Olmsted.

"Born in England, Mr. Chambers became a master miller there before coming to this country as a young man," the obituary said. He arrived in the United States in 1870, so he would have been about 22 years old then. He soon found work managing one of the mills established by Captain Jabez Burrell and Captain John Day at Sheffield, Ohio (which was named for their hometown of Sheffield, Massachusetts). Chambers then leased the mill and operated it until he bought the Hoadley mill in 1882.

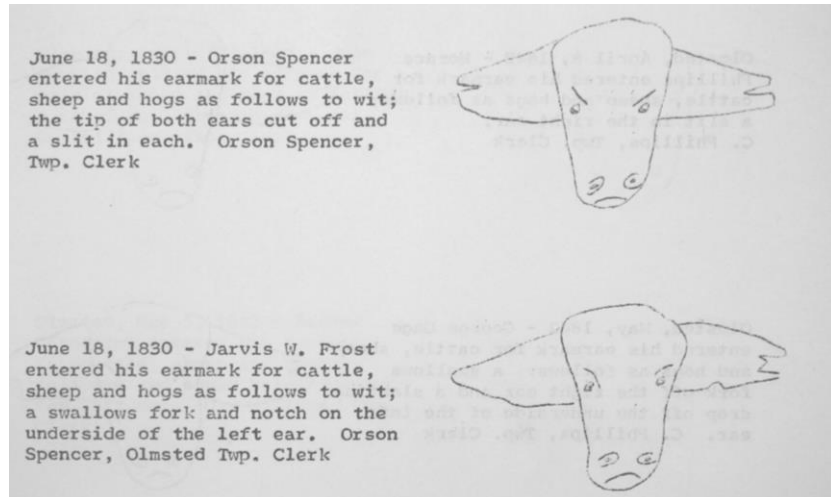
“He rebuilt the old mill, replacing the outmoded grinding machinery with new, and operated it until it was put out of commission about fifteen years ago,” the *Plain Dealer* reported.

Four decades after Chambers died, the *News Sun* reported in its March 27, 1975, edition that Bernice Offenberg had died three days earlier at Southwest General Hospital. Her funeral was held in Berea before her body was buried at Chestnut Grove Cemetery in Olmsted Falls.

“A noted Olmsted Falls historian, she was honored in 1974 when August of that year was proclaimed Bernice Offenberg month by Olmsted Falls,” the newspaper reported.

Her contribution to Olmsted history was to produce her 1964 book, *Over the Years in Olmsted*, which had 153 mimeographed pages of stories about various aspects of the history of Olmsted Township, Olmsted Falls and West View. Offenberg, who lived at 7650 River Road, wrote some of them, but she took others word-for-word from other sources.

Among the odd items included in the book were 14 pages of 55 earmarks used to identify cattle, sheep and hogs in Olmsted Township from 1827 to 1886. The book also included five pages with a list of 152 businesses and 10 government agencies operating in Olmsted Falls, West View and Olmsted Township in 1964.



*From Page 35 of her book, these are two of the examples of livestock ear markings that Bernice Offenberg included in her account of Olmsted history. The top one is from Orson Spencer, who is credited with coming up with the proposal to change the name of what had been Lenox Township to Olmsted Township to avoid confusion with another Lenox Township in Ashtabula County.*

Although the book is a hodgepodge of subjects, Offenberg’s work has proven to be useful to people who have written subsequent accounts of Olmsted history, such as the 1966 book, *Township 6, Range 15*, by Walter Holzworth, who called Offenberg’s book “the most authoritative [sic] account on record about the early homes” of Olmsted Falls. Her book was also helpful in the writing of the 2010 book, *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township*, as well as some issues of *Olmsted 200*.

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include stories about how much it cost Olmsted Falls to build the Union Schoolhouse on the Village Green 150 years ago and a tunnel that might have been part of the pre-Civil War Underground Railroad.

Anyone who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: [wallacestar@hotmail.com](mailto:wallacestar@hotmail.com). *Olmsted 200* has readers Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, 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. So are photos and information to share about Olmsted's history.

All issues of *Olmsted 200* are available in two online locations. One is on Olmsted Township's website at: <https://www.olmstedtownshipohio.gov/290/Past-Newsletters-Olmsted-200>. The other is the website of the City of Olmsted Falls at: [http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted\\_falls\\_history/olmsted\\_200\\_issues.php](http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted_falls_history/olmsted_200_issues.php).

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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