

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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The Airport Became Olmsted's Neighbor a Century Ago

A century ago, the air over Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township was quieter than it ever would be again. June 1925 was the last month before a noisy neighbor went into operation – Cleveland Municipal Airport, now known as Cleveland Hopkins International Airport.



This undated photo shows some of the workers who helped build Cleveland Municipal Airport a century ago. That was before it opened on July 1, 1925, and before it became known as Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. The photo is courtesy of the Special Collections of the Cleveland State University Library.

The airport does not encroach on Olmsted territory, but it comes close. Just a slender sliver of Brook Park separates the northeastern edge of Olmsted Township from the tip of Cleveland that extends southwest to encompass the airport.

Ever since the airport opened on July 1, 1925, it has affected Olmsted life, especially because of the noise from planes that pass overhead going to and from the airport. The sound is loud enough to force conversations on the ground to pause and Sunday morning preachers to stop their sermons and wait to resume until the intruding planes have passed.

The story that pilots would use the steeple of the Olmsted Community Church to help guide them for landings at the airport is probably apocryphal, but there was a true connection between the church and the airport. When the church planned and constructed its current building in the 1950s, the man in charge of the building committee was Claude King, who also was the acting commissioner and then commissioner of the airport. Earlier, he was responsible for important innovations at the airport that were copied by other airports, including the nighttime lighting system, the airport control tower, two-way radio communication between the airport and airplanes, and the first electronic flight information board. *Olmsted 200* will have more about King next month in Issue 146.



Hangars for airmail planes were among the first structures built at the airport, as this photo from May 1925 shows.

It was no coincidence that Cleveland pushed its boundary to the southwest toward Olmsted to build the airport. When Cleveland became an important link in the nation's new airmail system in 1918, it did not have a true airport – just a landing strip at Woodland Hills Park at East 93rd Street and Kinsman Avenue. Pilots were not happy that it was surrounded by trees. An early aviation industry pioneer, Glenn Martin – whose company later became Martin Marietta – established a factory at East 162nd Street and St. Clair Avenue with a small landing strip called Martin Field, but it also was not adequate for the airmail service. The Post Office Department told Cleveland it had better establish a real airport if the city wanted to remain an airmail stop.

In January 1925, William Hopkins, Cleveland's city manager, submitted a proposal to city officials for the construction of a municipal airport. He then assembled a panel of aviation experts to choose a suitable site. That turned out to be in Brook Park. Unlike the east side locations of the previous landing strips, it was farther away from Lake Erie, so fog was less of a problem, and the land was flatter on the west side than on the east side of Cuyahoga County.

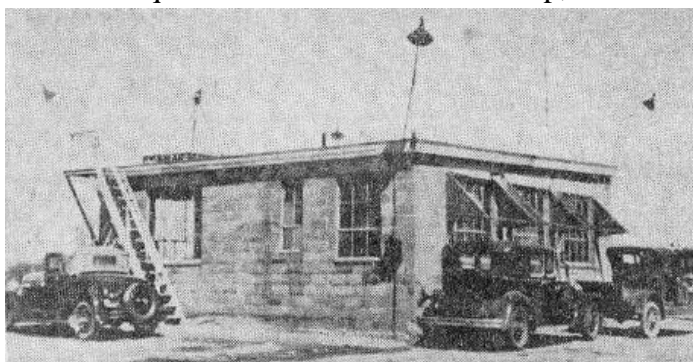


This aerial photo from June 30, 1926 – one year after Cleveland Municipal Airport opened – shows the hangars for airmail planes in the center and another hangar to the left. It also shows how flat and empty the surrounding land was, which is one reason why Cleveland extended its southwestern boundary to put the airport on land that previously was part of the Village of Brook Park and not far from the Olmsted Township border.

The whole process moved remarkably swiftly, going from concept to construction to opening within six months. The city used a \$1,250,000 bond issue to buy 1,014 acres from the Village of Brook Park. Only about 100 acres of that land was used initially, but all of it became useful when the airport expanded later. The city cleared about 30,000 trees in 1925 to make room for runways.

Although some people thought the new airport site was too far from downtown Cleveland, it had to be far enough for the city to acquire enough undeveloped land. But it was close enough that Cleveland was able to annex the land to its West Park area. It's not inconceivable that, if Cleveland could not have acquired enough Brook Park land, the city might have pushed farther southwest to acquire land in Olmsted Township, which was still sparsely populated then.

That early version of Cleveland Municipal Airport included a 1,400-foot runway and a simple cement block building that contained not only the airport's operations office but also an office for the National Weather Service and an office for National Air Transport, an airmail company that later became part of Boeing and then United Airlines, as well as hangars for the airmail planes.



This cement block building housed offices for airport operations, weather forecasters and an airmail company during the airport's early years.

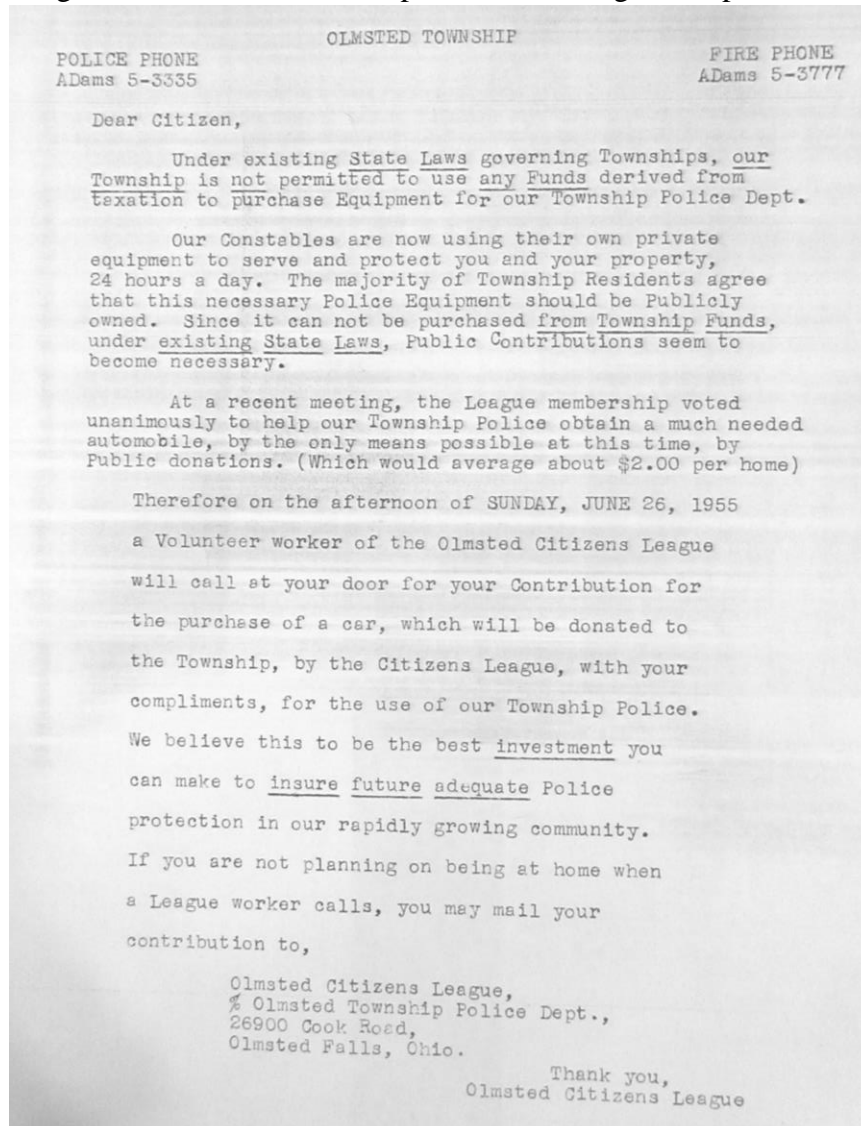
Airmail was very important to the airport in those days. The first takeoff at the new airport occurred on May 1, 1925 – two months before the airport was dedicated. It was by an airmail plane that had flown in from the west and then headed to New York after its stopover in Cleveland.

When the airport was dedicated on July 1, 2025, it was quite an event. The ceremony attracted an estimated 100,000 people. They likely included some Olmsted residents who came out to get to know their new neighbor. *Olmsted 200* will have more about Olmsted's relationship with the airport in Issue 146 for July.

Township Police Cars Were Once a Charitable Cause

Imagine driving along a road in Olmsted Township and getting pulled over by a law enforcement officer driving not a police cruiser but his own personal vehicle. Now, imagine being a township official and being told by the state that you are not allowed to use taxpayer funds to buy a police car for your community. That might seem unimaginable in the 21st century, but halfway through the 20th century that was exactly how law enforcement worked in Olmsted Township.

In June 1955 – 70 years ago this month – a group called the Olmsted Citizens League sent a letter to township residents asking for help.



This is the letter sent to Olmsted Township residents in June 1955 that announced a fundraising effort beginning with a door-to-door canvass on June 26, 1955, to collect money to buy a police car for the township constables. This copy comes from the files of the Berea Historical Society.

The problem was that the laws governing townships were established during Ohio's formative years as a state in the early 1800s and had not been adequately updated to meet the demands of the mid-1900s. In the early 1800s, townships had no need to buy police cars, and they still weren't allowed to use taxpayers' funds to buy them in the 1950s. The people who enforced townships' laws weren't even called police yet; they were constables.

Thus, the Olmsted Citizens League figured that, if township citizens wanted the protection of a police car, they had to raise money for it themselves – and they did. By July 7, 1955, a local newspaper reported that William L. Swan, president of the Citizens League, had announced that the house-to-house canvass on June 26 brought in about \$1,000 toward the group's \$2,000 fundraising goal, and another \$250 had come in since then.

Not only were the township constables using their own automobiles to conduct their official duties, but they also had to pay for the upkeep of those vehicles out of their salaries, which were \$4,920 a year for the full-time constable and \$960 a year for a part-time constable. According to Ben Warner, who was then a township trustee, the township had paid mileage for the constables up until 1955, but the trustees raised their salaries in 1955 to cover mileage and vehicle upkeep.

Later newspaper reports indicated that the Citizens League did not reach its goal of raising \$2,000, but it raised \$1,650, which was apparently enough to buy a 1955 Ford for the township. However, the group must have gotten a good deal on the car because even the cheapest mainline Ford sedans – not those outfitted for police work – were listed as costing almost \$2,000 at the time.

It wasn't reported what type of car the Citizens League bought for the township, but Ford was promoting sedans with the company's "mighty 'Interceptor' V-8 [engine] with Trigger-Torque Performance" for police work in 1955, although it also sold six-cylinder sedans. Given its fundraising effort, the Citizens League likely couldn't buy one of the best models on the market for the township.



This Ford Motor Company brochure, which was printed in 1954, promoted a 1955 police car with an "Interceptor" V-8 engine. That was apparently the top of the line for police cars from Ford. This is not likely the vehicle the Olmsted Citizens League bought for Olmsted Township in 1955 because its fundraising effort fell short of its original \$2,000 goal.

Although Ohio prohibited townships from using taxpayers' money to buy police cars back then, the state did make one change in the law affecting township law enforcement in 1955, according to Walter Holzworth in his 1966 Olmsted history book, *Township 6, Range 15*. A new state law abolished the election of township constables. Thus, Harry Morrison, Jr., who began serving as Olmsted Township's constable on January 1, 1952, after being elected in November 1951, became the township's first appointed constable under the new law with a salary of \$4,800 per year.



The car the Olmsted Citizens League purchased for Olmsted Township might have looked somewhat like this – a six-cylinder 1955 Ford Mainline Tudor Sedan police car. Unfortunately, the township no longer has any photos of what its first police car looked like.

Two years after its original fundraising drive, the Citizens League sent another letter in June 1957 to township residents announcing another drive. By then, Harold Hudson was president of the group. His letter gave this reason for the new campaign:

The car purchased has been used to capacity twenty-four hours a day for the protection of Township residents – in response to hundreds of emergency calls and assistance. Through heavy use, this car has become worn to the point where it needs to be replaced.



This sign hung outside Township Hall for many years when the police department was in the basement. Photo courtesy of Julie Boyer.

The group set Sunday, June 23, 1957, for its new house-to-house fundraising effort.

Fortunately for Olmsted Township, Ohio has updated its laws governing townships over the past several decades so that townships now can take many of the actions, such as buying police vehicles, that cities and villages can do. However, police vehicles now cost more than 40 times as much as they did in the mid-1950s.

“We recently just purchased a 2024 Chevy Tahoe to add to the fleet,” Julie Boyer, the township’s administrative services director, said in an email to *Olmsted 200*. “The base cost was \$60,000 and after adding equipment (in-car camera, computers, radar, lighting, sirens, decals, etc.) the final cost was \$85,000. A slight increase

from \$1650!”

Boyer said the township now has 14 cars, including administrative vehicles, in the fleet.



Olmsted Township now can purchase its own police vehicles, such as these six parked recently behind the police station along Fitch Road.

New Library Opened 70 Years Ago

Many people who grew up in Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township during the latter half of the 20th century and first dozen years of the 21st century still have fond memories of the public library when it was in a little house along Main Street. That library began welcoming the public 70 years ago this month.

That was the first time the Olmsted Falls branch of the Cuyahoga County Library had its own home. When the branch was established in May 1940, it was housed in one room of the Village Hall. In November 1944, it moved to the second floor of the Village Hall above the police department. That is the building that now is home to the Moosehead Hoof & Ladder Restaurant. But while that arrangement might have been suitable in the early years, it didn't provide adequate space for a library serving a growing Olmsted community in the years following World War II.

Fortunately for the library, leaders at the Olmsted Community Church in the early 1950s realized they needed a bigger church to serve the growing community. Their solution was to leave behind their old church building at the corner of Columbia Road and Main Street that was built a century earlier in 1853 as the Methodist Episcopal Church. They chose to build a bigger church on the other side of Main Street. But to do that, they needed to clear the site for the new church building, which meant getting rid of a house located there. The house was built by Newton Loomis after he arrived in Olmsted Falls in 1834, although it originally was located a bit farther south along Columbia Road – or Columbia Street, as it was formerly called.

That led to a three-way deal among the church, the village and the county library. The church donated the former Loomis house to the community, the village donated a



The former Newton Loomis house served as a public library from June 1955 until February 2013.

location on the west side of Main Street plus \$1,000, and the county library system provided \$10,000 to cover remodeling the house to serve as a library. That deal was announced in May 1954. Local architect Erwin Lauffer offered his services to the project at no charge. One year later, the library was ready to move books from the Village Hall into the renovated Loomis house, which included two stories on top of a usable basement.

The new branch library at 7928 Main Street held an open house on June 5, 1955. The next day, the *Plain Dealer*

reported on it this way:

Several hundred persons gathered at the new Olmsted Falls Library yesterday for dedication ceremonies in the remodeled Western Reserve house on Main Street.

The ribbon was cut by Miss Marion Sheil, librarian. Among the speakers were Mayor Charles L. Blickle, Rev. Richard Mapes of Olmsted Falls Community Church and Dan Waugh, president of the Library Guild.

Aubrey Billings, president of the county library board, presided. Mrs. Elwin C. Leslie was general chairman for the day.

The suburb's Kiwanis Club gave the library a movie projector and screen.

For almost six decades after that, the building served the community, including many students who researched term papers and other school projects there. But the community kept growing and so did the library building. A wing was added on the north side in 1965. In 1989, the building was renovated.

Since it opened in February 2013, this building at 8100 Mapleway Drive has served as the public library in Olmsted Falls.



However, by the early 21st century, the county library system decided that the Olmsted community needed a new library in a building designed to be a library, rather than a mid-19th century house that was retrofitted to become a library in the mid-20th century. On February 23, 2013, the new library at 8100 Mapleway Drive was dedicated.

After the old library sat vacant for a few years, developer Josh Lorek and partners acquired it in 2017 with plans to turn it into a library-themed steakhouse. Those plans got delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and other obstacles, but in 2024, it opened as Gunselman's Steakhouse and Bar – an offshoot of the original Gunselman's at 21490



Lorain Road in Fairview Park. Fortunately for those with fond memories from decades ago, it is decorated inside with many photos of what the building looked like as a library and even earlier.

After being extensively remodeled, the former library at 7928 Main Street became Gunselman's Steakhouse and Bar in 2024.

For more about the former library building, see Issue 60

of *Olmsted 200* from May 2018, Issue 127 from December 2023 and Issue 128 from January 2024.

Westview Leaders Preferred to Use the Silent Treatment

It's not unusual for elected officials to be upset with news media coverage of them. Often, they respond by shutting out certain reporters and favoring others or using other means to get their preferred narratives out. Less often, they just clam up and say nothing outside of official meetings. That latter option was chosen by Westview leaders 70 years ago.

June 1955 began with Marion H. Erman, who had been the village council president, taking over as mayor upon the retirement of Erwin Sauke, who had served as mayor for almost a year and a half. As the *Berea Enterprise* reported on June 3, 1955, the first thing Erman told newspaper reporters upon becoming mayor was: "I do not have any comment now, and I will not have any comment at any time in the future."

His explanation was that he was not interested in personal publicity, and he believed the interests of the village were best served by giving out no news. Erman said loose talk and distorted news had hindered the council.

"Anybody may come to council meetings, but I will make no statements outside the council chamber," the *Enterprise* reported him as saying.

Erman's rise to mayor came quickly. Less than a week before Sauke's resignation took effect, the council chose Erman on May 26 to serve as council president to replace Russell Ingersoll, who resigned from the position. That set Erman up to replace Sauke as mayor just six days later. Erman's full-time job was as the superintendent of grounds for the Berea Board of Education.

On June 7, when the council held its first meeting with Erman as mayor, he asked council members to go along with his policy of refusing to make any statements at all to newspapers.

"When the newspapers want information about the village, they should get it in this hall and no place else," Erman said. "The news released previously has always been distorted. This way there will be no hard feelings, and if there is a mistake we will know why."



When Westview was a village, council meetings and other municipal activities took place in this former school building at 9722 Columbia Road. In recent years, it has been home to Barbara Richardson's *Emerald & Violet Studio*, as seen in this 2018 photo.

All seven councilmen – they were all men at the time – agreed to do that. They indicated they had no problem with the local weekly newspapers – the *Berea Enterprise* and the *Berea News* – but they thought one of Cleveland's three daily newspapers had distorted news of the village during Sauke's administration.

A June 17 *Enterprise* story revealed that the offending newspaper was the *Cleveland News* (which operated until 1960, when the *Cleveland Press* acquired it and absorbed it). But instead of shutting out just the *Cleveland News*, the mayor and council shut

them all out.

By mid-June, Carl Sprague, who had been chosen to serve as council president after Erman moved up to be mayor, had agreed to reconsider the issue, but after a council meeting on June 14, he said his fellow council members had decided to stick with the silent treatment.

"The matter is closed," Sprague told the *Enterprise*.

It's not clear what effect the official silence had on what already was a quiet little village of 2.45 square miles with a population that reached just 1,303 during the 1950s (according to the online *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* maintained by Case Western Reserve University). But Erman served as mayor throughout the rest of the 1950s, and Sprague took over as mayor in 1960.

However, by the mid-1960s, a few people who were not satisfied with the way the village was being run began speaking out and got themselves elected to the council. Among them were Norman “Ron” Sherbert and Allan Mills, who played leading roles in the movement that led to the merger of Olmsted Falls and Westview in 1971. Mills, who often spoke to the news media, served as both the last mayor of Westview and the first mayor of the newly enlarged Village of Olmsted Falls and soon the City of Olmsted Falls. (For more about the merger based on Sherbert's memories, see Issue 132 of *Olmsted 200* from May 2024.)



This state highway sign once pointed the way to the Village of Westview, although the sign used the older, two-word version of the community's name. This photo is courtesy of Bill Anderer, who acquired the sign after the Olmsted Falls-Westview merger and hung it in his garage.

(NOTE: Both “West View” and “Westview” were used as names of the community formed in the early 1800s in the area where Rocky River's west branch crossed the Cuyahoga County-Lorain County line. For most of its history as an unincorporated community, it was usually called West View and included territory on both sides of the county line. However, during the decades when it was an incorporated village entirely within Cuyahoga County from 1927 through 1970, it typically used a one-word name, Westview.)

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include more about Olmsted's relationship with Cleveland's airport and the Olmsted man who came up with innovations that airports around the world adopted, as well as other stories about the history of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township.

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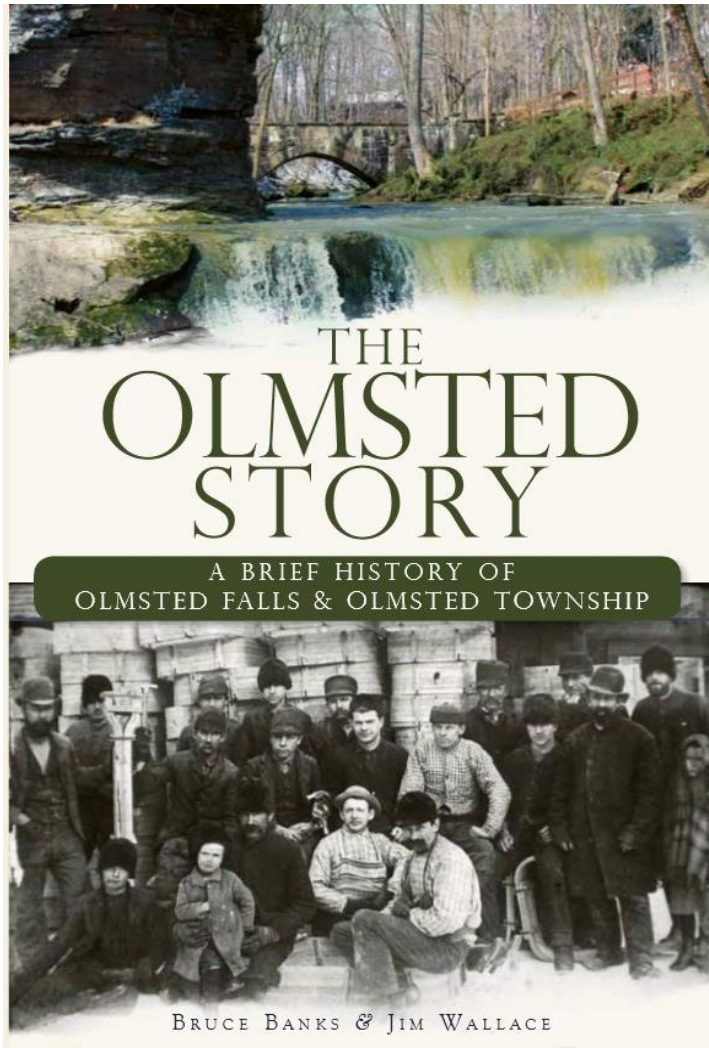
Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin, and as well as overseas in the Netherlands, Germany and Japan.

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.

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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