



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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Olmsted Has Had Highs and Lows Living Near Airport

A fan of horse racing might like to live near Churchill Downs in Louisville – home of the Kentucky Derby. A fan of car racing might like to live near the Indianapolis Motor Speedway – home of the Indianapolis 500. Likewise, the Olmsted communities would have been a good place to live for two decades in the early half of the 20th century for fans of fast airplanes. Not only were the communities close to the Cleveland Municipal Airport (before it was renamed Hopkins International Airport), home of the National Air Races, but some of the planes passed right over Olmsted Falls, Olmsted Township and Westview.



This billboard advertised the first time that the Cleveland Municipal Airport hosted the National Air Races in 1929 – just a few years after the airport was established a century ago.

Those races began in 1929, when the airport was only five years old but already the largest in the country, and they contributed to the fascination many local people then had for the still-young field of aviation. The races not only attracted top pilots from around the country and other parts of the world but also many other celebrities, including

Hollywood stars like Mary Pickford. Each year, thousands of people, including many from the Olmsted communities, filled the grandstands set up at one end of the airport for a close look at the activities.

This is how the Plain Dealer covered Jimmy Doolittle's crash on its front page. Photo courtesy of Ross Bassett.

But the races came close to going seriously awry for one prominent pilot and the people of Olmsted in their first year. On September 2, 1929, Jimmy Doolittle was practicing an aerobatic feat with a Curtiss P-1C Hawk army pursuit plane. It was an outside loop, a maneuver that Doolittle was the first to perform two years earlier. However, on this occasion, it didn't work out so well. As the plane was diving, the wings fell off over Olmsted Falls.

The *Cleveland Press* reported that the Curtiss P-1C had wing radiators instead of the large radiator that was under the nose of an earlier model, the P-1B. That modification significantly reduced the aerodynamic drag, which then allowed Doolittle's plane to go too fast during the maneuver.

According to the *Plain Dealer*, the plane crashed into a hayfield on the Harding farm about 30 yards away from the intersection of Fitch Road and Cook Road, which would have been in Olmsted Township. Doolittle was able to jump out of the plane with a parachute, but it didn't seem to save him at first.

“When I was clear of the plane, the parachute didn’t open immediately,” the *Plain Dealer* quoted him as saying. “That gave me something to think about. I jerked again and it came open.”

Fortunately, no one on the ground was hurt, and Doolittle survived to live through many other daring feats, including leading what was called the Doolittle Raid over Japan’s main islands in 1942 just four months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that brought the United States into World War II. He eventually reached the rank of general during a life of 96 years that ended in 1993 – 64 years after it could have concluded in an Olmsted Township farm field.



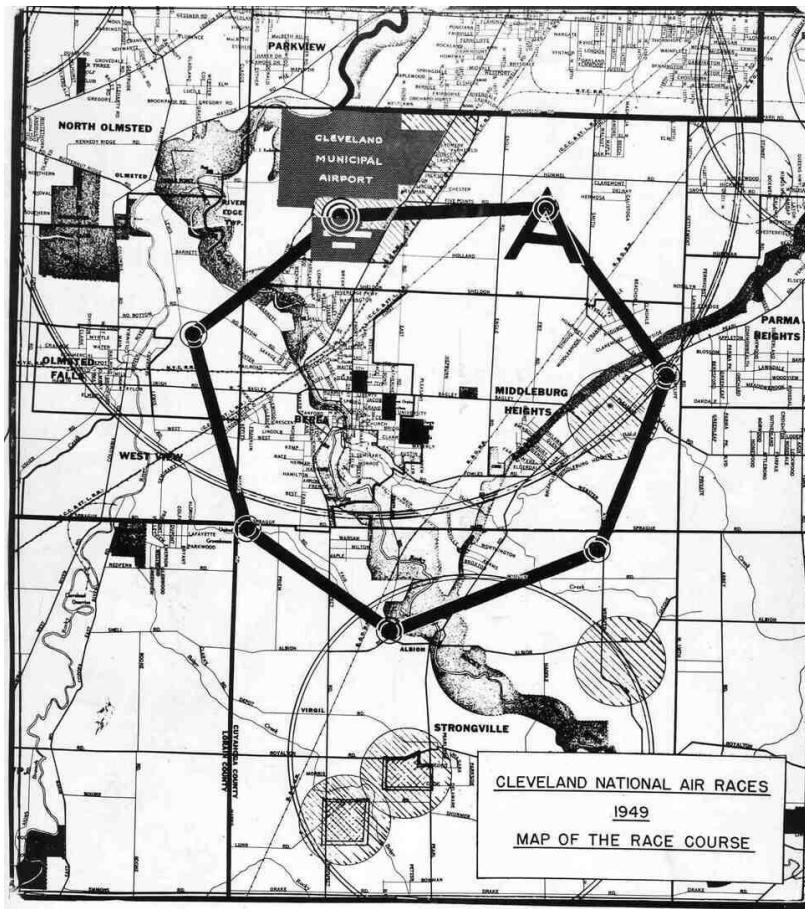
A crowd gathered to see the wreckage of Doolittle’s plane in Olmsted Township on September 2, 1929. Photo courtesy of Cleveland State University, Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland Press Collection.

As the 1939 edition of the National Air Races ended, World War II broke out in Europe. Although the United States did not enter the war for another two years, the National Air Races were suspended until after the war. When they returned in 1946, they were different. The planes were faster, so the racecourse was enlarged. It then covered parts of Olmsted Township, Westview and other communities.



Mike Gibson, who grew up in Olmsted Falls, has provided these photos of planes at the Cleveland Municipal Airport during the National Air Races in 1939 from his father’s collection.

The racing was dangerous, and some planes crashed. Fortunately, none crashed in Olmsted after Doolittle’s mishap in 1929, but other nearby communities were not so lucky. On September 5, 1949, a P-51 fighter plane from World War II piloted by Bill Odom was flying in the day’s biggest race when he lost control. The plane crashed into a house at 429 West Street in Berea, killing Odom, a young mother and her 13-month-old son. That’s cited as one reason the National Air Races did not continue into the 1950s. However, they were revived in Reno, Nevada, in 1964, and the new Cleveland National Air Show began that same year at Cleveland’s Burke Lakefront Airport with an emphasis on demonstrations rather than races – and with much of the flying over water.



This map, marked with the locations of the seven pylons the pilots were to navigate around, shows the route for a closed-course race held during the National Air Races in 1949. One pylon was in Olmsted Township just northeast of Olmsted Falls. Another was located at a point near where Westview, Berea, Strongsville and Columbia Township met. Image courtesy of Cleveland State University Library Special Collections.

The National Air Races were just one way the proximity of Cleveland's main airport has affected the lives of Olmsted residents. Fortunately, they haven't had to worry much about airplanes – or parts of airplanes – falling from the sky since Doolittle's mishap in 1929. One notable exception occurred on April 5, 1979, when an Allegheny Airlines flight took off about 8:45 p.m. from Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. Shortly after takeoff, a 70-pound cargo door from a compartment under the right rear of the fuselage came off. It landed several hundred feet northeast of Olmsted Falls Middle School (the building that now serves as City Hall), where students found it the next morning.

"I always thought this would happen someday," Olmsted Falls Mayor Allan Mills told the *Cleveland Press*. "I'm only grateful that it was a door and not a plane."

That was a rare event, but Olmsted residents' relationship with the airport in the 100 years since it opened has been mixed. Many of them attended the National Air Races, but they didn't need air races to draw them to the airport. It was not unusual – especially in those years before tight security and when aviation still seemed novel – for local people to drive to the airport just to watch planes take off and land, perhaps while having a meal at the Sky Chefs restaurant in the terminal or the Brown Derby just outside the airport.

Early in the airport's history, Olmsted Falls did what it could to be supportive. On December 13, 1929, the *Plain Dealer* reported that the village put a sign with a huge yellow arrow on top of the Olmsted Falls school (now being used as City Hall) pointing toward the airport. Next to it were letters 12 feet high and 22 inches wide saying: "Olmsted Falls." That was in response to a letter from the Ohio Bureau of Aeronautics asking the village to display some identification mark to aid pilots.

"Clarence Simmerer, chairman of the safety committee, fire chief and councilman, supervised the erection of the sign," the newspaper reported. "It was built at a cost of \$250 to the village."

The airport also provided many Olmsted residents with employment with the airport itself, the airlines, government agencies and the many businesses located at or near the airport. Frank Kalamajka, who grew up in Olmsted Township and graduated from Olmsted Falls High School in 1972, recalled going to the airport with his father, who worked for the Federal Aviation Administration.

"As a kid, visiting the airport was a treat, as the FAA had a center right there, at the old tank plant (now it's in Oberlin)," he wrote in an email. "I'd see the radars and rows of lighted buttons and talk to controllers there – all high tech for the 1950s. Sometimes Dad would take me up to the control tower, totally a trip for a little kid. Watching 4-engine propeller airliners taxiing into a gate was a real sight, with all four blades spinning. I just knew I was going to be an airline captain one day -- then I found out in 7th grade I had to wear glasses, and that's that."

Having a nearby airport also has benefited Olmsted residents when they have traveled to and from distant locations for business or pleasure.

However, the airport also has been a nuisance for Olmsted residents and others in southwestern Cuyahoga County. A July 27, 1960, *Plain Dealer* story told about how Donald Patrick, who was then Cleveland's commissioner of airports, faced a meeting of more than 100 upset people who lived in communities near the airport. One of them was an unidentified Olmsted Falls woman who lived on Metropolitan Drive, about two miles from the airport. She complained about a low-flying plane "which shook my bed at 2 a.m."

To her and others, Patrick said, "We don't kid about the fact it's not a quiet business we're in."



Bill Eichenberg of Olmsted Falls has shared this photo, which he believes his father took of two airplanes in about 1937 at the Cleveland Municipal Airport.



Many Olmsted residents might have felt good about their location when they drove by this billboard several decades ago. This photo is on a postcard from Kier Photo Service of Cleveland. The reverse side says: "This spectacular bill board greets visitors leaving Cleveland Hopkins Airport. Believed to be the country's largest outdoor billboard promoting area growth, it dramatically emphasizes the facts which make Cleveland-Northeast Ohio the Best Location in the Nation. How many people see this sign every year? Approximately 20 million."

Bob Miller, who was a longtime Olmsted Falls resident and active in municipal government from 1952 until he moved to Tucson in 1990, recalls another effort to address the airport noise issue.

“During that time period, after serving as Village Council member and Council President, I was involved both with a high school science group as well as serving the Village as head of a group working with the airport on reducing aircraft noise over our communities,” he wrote in an email to *Olmsted 200*. “With the science group, we took on a project of building several electronic sound level devices and conducted aircraft noise tests at various locations in the community. The results were compiled, and a report was written. We then met with the airport commissioner to discuss what could be done to minimize the problem. This eventually resulted in forming a committee with Brook Park, Berea, and North Olmsted to work with the airport to develop flight procedures for both landing and taking off to reduce noise in the surrounding communities.”

Miller added that he believes it was about 1968 when he worked with the high school science group.

That was one of many battles Olmsted residents have had with the airport. Another occurred in the mid-1980s, when Olmsted Falls, Olmsted Township and other communities objected to the airport's runway extension plans. David Jones, who was then an Olmsted Falls City Council member, expressed his frustration in an August 11, 1983, story in the *News Sun*.

"I don't think they'll pay attention to us because we've been screaming for 20 years," the newspaper quoted him as saying.



Many planes fly over the Olmsted communities going to and from Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. This one passed over the Village Green gazebo during the Memorial Day ceremony on May 26, 2025.

While the main complaint of Olmsted Falls residents then was about noise, at least one Olmsted Township resident with a home along Lewis Road complained about pollution from the planes that he feared might affect his family's health. Lawsuits ensued, but the complaints remained as much in the air as the planes. By the end of the 1980s, both Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls complained about pollution from the jets passing overhead.

Two decades later, Olmsted residents were still battling over the same issues. In a May 29, 2006, interview, Robert Blomquist, who then was mayor of Olmsted Falls, was upset about an expansion of the airport that would have resulted in more planes flying low over the community.

"Before, they used to line up to land and take off over the same flight path," he said. "We're 2.2 miles off of the end of the airport runways. Everything used to come straight in, and when they took off in the southwest, everything would go straight out. That would hit the same areas of town, especially the historic homes and the historic district."

Blomquist said the community invoked provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act to get some of the effects of the expansion mitigated, such as by having airplanes fan out in different directions after takeoff instead of following the same flight patterns repeatedly.

"We don't have that duplicate pattern, because they don't land where they take off," he said.

The community also got some help, after a series of lawsuits involving federal and state agencies, with efforts to protect doors and windows of 38 historic Olmsted Falls homes that were being harmed by the vibrations caused by the low-flying aircraft, Blomquist said. He said he was afraid that, without that help, certain homes might have been knocked off the National Register of Historic Places.

Having a major airport nearby has both fascinated and frustrated Olmsted residents. A century ago, they might not have been fully aware of what they were in for when the airport was built so close, but they have had plenty of time since then to get accustomed to having their airspace filled with planes. It's just another feature of life in Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township.

Thanks for help with this story go to Ross Bassett, Jim Boddy, Bill Eichenberg, Mike Gibson, Frank Kalamajka and Bob Miller.

Changes in 1915 Helped Set Olmsted's Way in 20th Century

A look back at news coverage of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township 110 years ago this month reveals a few endeavors that helped the communities make the transition from the 19th century to the 20th century. For example, two items in the Olmsted Falls column of the *Berea Enterprise* on August 6, 1915, told about upgrades to local roadways.

The first one reported: "The paving of the Cook-rd. is approaching completion, but has been seriously hindered by the wet weather the last few weeks. Residents along the road will heave several sighs of relief when the road is opened, as the work has necessitated many inconvenient detours."

From the perspective of the 21st century, it's hard to imagine a time before Cook Road was paved, but in 1915 and the years around it, many long-established dirt roads were being paved as more people were opting to drive automobiles instead of horse-drawn wagons.

But if Cook Road with a dirt surface is hard to picture, imagine having to cross over Rocky River on a bridge with old, wooden planks. That was the situation in 1915, but that same August 6 issue of the *Enterprise* reported on news about the bridge from the Olmsted Falls Village Council meeting on Monday night of that week: "Mayor



This 1906 photo of the home of Aldus and Lizzie Cook shows Cook Road when it still was covered with dirt. Photo courtesy of Donald Cook.

[Anson] Mitchell informed the members that the dangerous old plank floor of the Irish-rd. bridge over the river was to be replaced by the county with a creosoted block floor, after the structure itself had been strengthened."

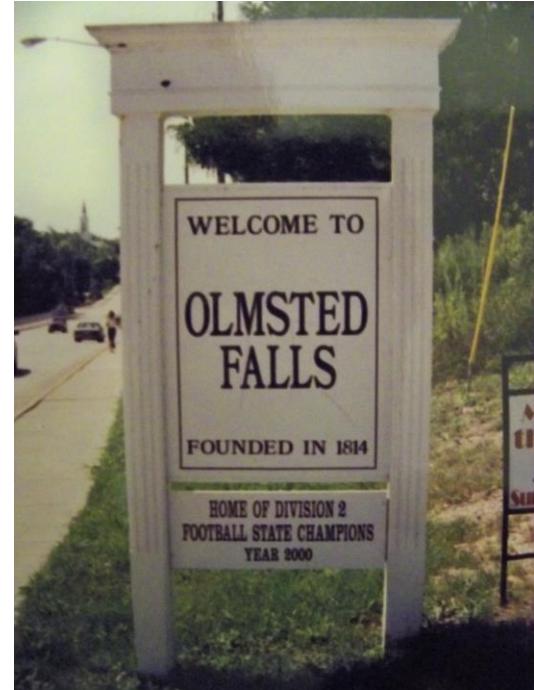
What then was called Irish Road is now called Bagley Road, which is the main east-west roadway through the center of Olmsted Falls. Before the name was changed to Bagley later in the 20th century, it was called Irish Road from Berea to Olmsted Falls and Dutch Road west of the village into Olmsted Township. The names were derived from the ethnicity of early residents with property along them. Throughout most of the 19th century, the section within the Olmsted Falls village limits was called Hamlin Street after Edward S. Hamlin, a lawyer who laid out the streets of the village in the 1840s.

The opening of Irish Road from Berea to Olmsted Falls in 1870 was a significant event for both communities but especially for Olmsted Falls, which benefited from the direct connection to its larger neighbor. According to Walter Holzworth in his 1966 Olmsted history book, *Township 6, Range 15*, James Hickey, the Irishman who lived at the western end of Irish Road, where it met Olmsted Falls, was given the honor of driving a team of oxen over the road in the ceremony that opened it.

At that time, the weekly newspaper serving the area was Berea's *Grindstone City Advertiser*. In its September 23, 1870, edition, the paper's Olmsted correspondent wrote: "We are happy to report that the 'direct road' to Berea has been opened. We trust the county commissioners will take immediate steps to have a bridge built across the branch of Rocky River."

After calling for the building of a road along the east side of the river all the way to Columbia Township (which did not happen), the correspondent further wrote:

The advantages to the citizens of Berea, Olmsted and the surrounding country, in opening these roads, will be appreciated, especially by those who have to travel from two to three miles around in going from place to place. The new bridge across Plum Creek is completed, and the grading is to be commenced immediately. This is another decided improvement to



This Olmsted Falls sign is next to the current bridge that carries Bagley Road across Rocky River. A century ago, the bridge still had a surface of wooden planks. This photo was taken in 2013.

Olmsted Falls, and one which is due, in a great measure, to the influence and persevering energy of our excellent mayor.

Unfortunately, for Olmsted residents, the county commissioners did not take immediate steps to build a bridge over Rocky River. That took several more years. (*Olmsted 200* will have more about that in a future issue.)

Although the bridge over Rocky River still had wooden planks in 1915, Irish Road had been paved several years earlier. In 1909, the county commissioners awarded a

\$60,000 contract to W.H. Otter to pave it 15 feet wide with bricks and with stone curbs on each side. Frank Hickey, son of James, had the honor of driving a team of horses over Irish Road to ceremonially open it. Dutch Road was paved with bricks from Olmsted Falls to the Lorain County border a few years later.



This mid-20th century photo shows what then was the sole school building serving the Olmsted Falls district. The right half was built in 1916 following plans made a century ago this year. The left half was built a decade later.

headline. “Committee Meets to Consider Proposition for Olmsted School” was the sub-headline. This is what the story reported:

The School Centralization Committee met in the Town Hall Thursday night and after going over the entire proposition of a new building with three architects, decided to recommend to the School Board the immediate employment of either of two of them. As the members of the Board comprise nearly half of the committee it is expected that at its meeting next Thursday night the Board will make its selection, and the architect will begin immediately his study of the case and the making of preliminary plans and an accurate estimate which will be the basis of the amount of the bond issue for a new school to be submitted to the voters at the general election this fall. L.L. Partch, Frank Hall and C.M. Durbin were named to secure options on a site for the new building.

That effort led to the construction in 1916 of the single school that replaced several small schoolhouses around Olmsted Township and the Union Schoolhouse at the Village Green in Olmsted Falls that had been closed to students in 1914 because of structural problems.

A decade later, the Olmsted communities had outgrown the school built in 1916. On August 22, 1925 – 100 years ago this month – the competing newspaper, the *Berea News*, provided an update. “Olmsted Board Votes to Enlarge School” was the headline. Here is what it said:

A bond issue for \$75,000 for an addition to the present Olmsted Falls high school will be brought for a vote before the citizens of Olmsted Falls at the next election in November, according to Supt. C.B. Ferguson. The Board of Education passed a resolution, at a recent meeting, for the bond issue.

Nine rooms will be added to the old building, with a cafeteria in the basement. Lester Redding was hired as architect.

The result was an addition that doubled the size of the original school. The enlarged school opened in 1926.



This 2018 photo shows the former school building as it has been for almost three decades as Olmsted Falls City Hall.

Living in Olmsted Was Cheaper 70 Years Ago

Sometimes an old newspaper ad can say much about how times have changed. Such is the case for the ad seen here for Barnum's Supermarket and Frozen Food Center from the *Berea News* on August 4, 1955.

Some people might remember Eagle Stamps, which many stores gave to customers with their purchases. The stamps later could be redeemed for merchandise or cash. The Barnum's ad refers to them as “Ohio's favorite stamp.”

The ad promotes Miracle Whip salad dressing for 49 cents a quart, Maxwell House instant coffee for \$1.49 for a six-ounce jar, Ritz Crackers for 33 cents a pound, milk for 61 cents a quart, rib-end pork roast for 39 cents a pound, choice beef rib steaks for 79 cents a pound, and pails of strawberries for 35 cents a pound.

In case those prices weren't enough to entice someone into the store at 8061 Columbia Road in Olmsted Falls, the bottom of the ad notes that it was “Home-Owned and Full of Friendly Folks.”



Charles Barnum, who was known as the “singing grocer,” established the store in 1932 after reopening the store that Walter Locke had operated for decades until 1931. The store burned down in the 1960s. Almost half a century later, developer Clint Williams built a replica of an 1880s train depot on the site. It now is home to the Grand Pacific Popcorn Company.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about a long-gone Olmsted Township farm that was one of the first in the county to allow customers to pick their own produce. It also will have stories about the beginning of the effort to build what now is the Olmsted Community Center and about a road proposed four decades ago but not built that would have connected North Olmsted and Olmsted Township.

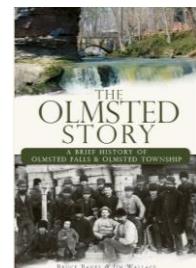
Anyone who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, 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.

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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