



Olmsted 200

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

Issue 150

November 1, 2025

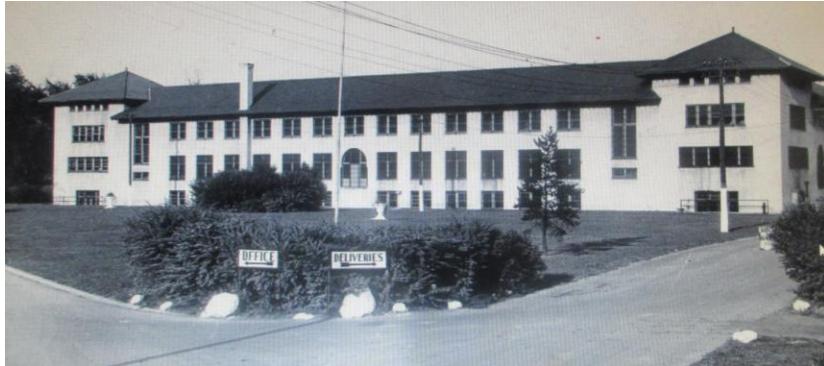
Contents

Cleveland Workhouse Plans Stirred Fury in Township	1
Oil Fever Hit Olmsted 150 Years Ago	7
Quarrying Boomed 150 Years Ago	12
Still to Come	13

Cleveland Workhouse Plans Stirred Fury in Township

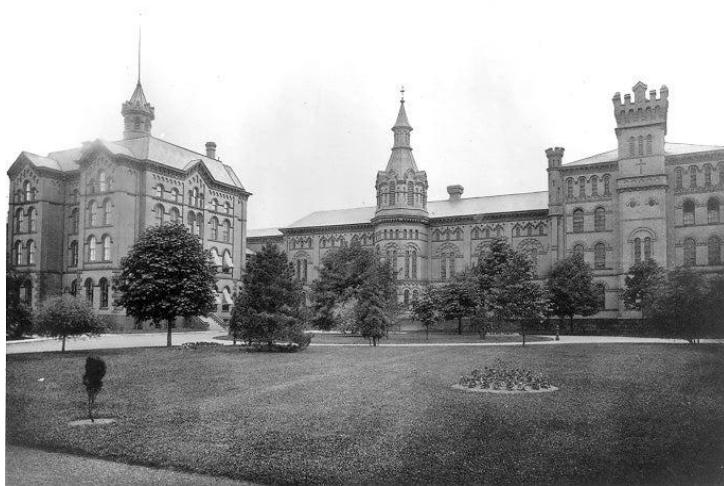
News that the City of Cleveland wanted to acquire about 700 acres of Olmsted Township land 80 years ago ignited a firestorm of reaction that could have changed the status of the township forever. It stirred efforts to either annex the township to Olmsted Falls or incorporate the township as a village. Neither change occurred, but that might have been only because of the amount of time needed to accomplish either option.

Township residents first learned about Cleveland's intentions late in November 1945, when the first newspaper stories appeared on the subject. Those stories said that Cleveland wanted the township land so it could build a \$4 million facility to replace the workhouse for petty offenders it had operated for decades in Warrensville Township, which was southeast of the city. Throughout December 1945 and the early months of 1946, township residents scrambled to figure out how they could prevent Cleveland from acquiring the Olmsted land it wanted, and many people from Olmsted Falls and Berea supported them.



This was Cleveland's workhouse for men as it looked in 1933.

Cleveland had relocated its workhouse twice before. The city established its first workhouse in 1855 along Scranton Road. In 1871, the city moved the workhouse into a



This was Cleveland's second workhouse as it looked in the 1880s. It was replaced in the early 1900s by a new workhouse in Warrensville Township.

new building along Woodland Avenue at East 79th Street. That lasted for four decades until Cleveland Mayor Tom Johnson and his welfare director, Dr. Harris Cooley, embraced a new progressive outlook for moving inmates out of the city to a rural environment that might aid their rehabilitation. From 1904 to 1912, the city spent more than \$350,000 to buy 25 adjacent farms totaling more than 2,000 acres for a complex in Warrensville Township that became known as Cooley Farms.

The workhouse was relocated there in 1912. Inmates were housed in dormitories and put to work in farming and other occupations. Other parts of the property included a poorhouse, a tuberculosis sanitorium and a halfway house.

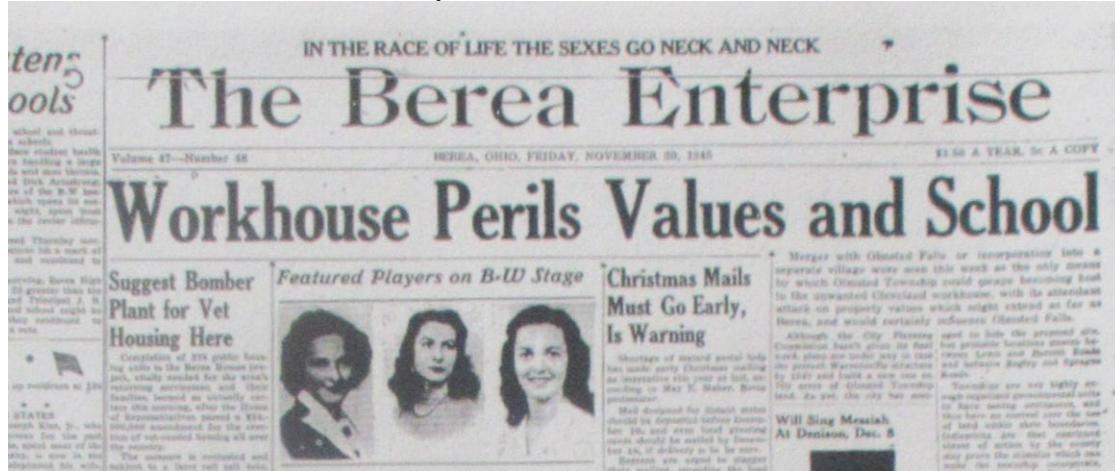
Jeffrey T. Darbee, a historic preservation consultant, wrote in 2001 about the history of Cooley Farms:

Adoption of the name "Farms" was not just to commemorate the original use of the land. Social philosophy of the time held that productive work was important in rehabilitating people of all kinds, from the aged and ill to the poor and the criminal. Thus the Cooley Farms complex was set up as a working farm, nearly self-sufficient, where everyone was expected to work according his physical and mental ability. Workhouse inmates did the heaviest work, which included operation of a quarry for building stone and cement production. They worked at the facility's dairy, piggery, greenhouse, blacksmith shop, sawmill and cannery. Farm work included vegetable and feed production and an orchard. Workhouse inmates also maintained the grounds of the entire complex and worked on construction of many of the buildings.

After the Cooley Farms workhouse for men was completed in 1912, a women's wing was added in 1913. The architect, Milton Dyer, designed buildings that Darbee said "employed a restrained Spanish Colonial Revival style, represented primarily by their red clay tile hip roofs and stuccoed walls. They were replaced by new facilities in the mid-1980s, and no historic structures survive at the site today."

The workhouse became overcrowded by 1925, during the Prohibition years, according to the *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, “with an increasing number of bootlegging and speeding convictions, and in 1927 a new women's building was constructed to provide more room. At that time the average daily population exceeded 750.”

The newspaper stories that began coming out in November 1945 said that Cleveland intended to raze the workhouse in Warrensville after building a new one in Olmsted Township. Cleveland officials didn't want to reveal exactly where it wanted to build the new workhouse, but they said few houses were located there at the time.



Worries about the proposed workhouse for Olmsted Township was the leading story in the Berea Enterprise on November 30, 1945.

The *Berea Enterprise* in a November 30, 1945, story, suggested the location could be either a section of the township between Lewis Road and Barrett Road or one between Bagley Road and Sprague. However, within a few days, another story was published saying that three sites were being considered by Cleveland officials. One was along Sprague Road, running west to Sharp Road. Another was along Bagley Road between Olmsted Falls and Berea (a section that Berea eventually annexed in the 1980s). The third was along John Road. The newspaper reports didn't say so, but perhaps the John Road site was what then was Homelinks Golf course.

It was reported that Cleveland wanted more acreage than was available at the workhouse's location in Warrensville Township to grow a wider range of crops for supplying food to Cleveland institutions and to have more room for recreation for the inmates. The city also wanted to use new scientific theories for rehabilitating inmates, not just jailing them.

Soon after Cleveland's intentions became known, some Olmsted Township residents scrambled to keep the workhouse out. According to newspaper reports, the leaders of the anti-workhouse effort were Columbia Road resident E.F. Davis, president of Davis Plywood Company of Cleveland, and Cook Road resident Gordon Hall. But at that time, townships in Ohio – unlike cities and villages – were not allowed to implement zoning ordinances, so zoning the workhouse out was not an option.

On Tuesday evening December 11, more than 800 Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls residents attended a meeting at the Olmsted Falls School. That was at a time when the township had only about 750 registered voters. They considered two plans to prevent Cleveland from building a new workhouse in Olmsted. One was to annex the township to Olmsted Falls. The other was for the township to incorporate as a separate village. But Aubrey Billings, the village solicitor for Olmsted Falls, warned that either option would likely take five to seven months or longer to implement, and Cleveland might be able to act more quickly than that. Nevertheless, the citizens formed a 12-member committee led by Davis to consider the merits of both options.



This 1940 photo shows a garage for farm equipment at Cleveland's workhouse at Cooley Farms in Warrensville Township.

annexed the township, their tax rate would likely increase by 29 cents for every \$100 of valuation. At the time, the township's tax rate was \$2.06 per \$100 of valuation.

“All parties are opposed to the workhouse,” the *Enterprise* reported on December 14. “Some, however, feel it is unlikely and are reluctant to give up their low township tax rates by incorporation or lose identity by merging with Olmsted Falls village.”

That story also indicated that, if the township would reject either annexation or incorporation, some residents in the Stearns Road area might consider such action on their own.

By January 10, 1946, the 12-member committee led by Davis completed a survey of township residents that found that 174 favored annexation by Olmsted Falls, 147 favored incorporation of the township, and 44 favored keeping the township the way it was. Those who responded to the survey represented 59 percent of the 618 township residents who were sent the survey.

One of the residents' biggest concerns was about how the proposed workhouse would affect the Olmsted Falls Local School District. The 700 acres for the workhouse would no longer be taxable land. School Superintendent Wilbur Smith also suggested that the presence of the workhouse would lower neighboring property values, which would further reduce the district's tax revenues.

Olmsted Falls Mayor Charles Bonsey told township residents that, if the village

Meanwhile, other township residents separate from the 12-member committee were ready by January 11 to present two petitions – each with signatures of 35 property owners – to the township trustees to hold an election on whether the township should incorporate as a village. Gordon Hall led the group who presented one of the petitions, and W.J. Kosman of Columbia Road led the group who presented the other.

An *Enterprise* story published that day said township residents were afraid of not only the Cleveland workhouse but also the possibility that incinerators and “unwelcome private developments” might come to the township if it remained unable to protect itself with a zoning ordinance.



On January 11, 1946, the top story in the Berea Enterprise was about the effort to incorporate Olmsted Township as a village.

Upon receiving the two petitions, township trustees scheduled an election on January 29 with Township Hall as the polling place to decide the incorporation issue. The petitions differed over what to call the township if the incorporation vote was successful. One wanted to call it Olmsted Village, while the other preferred Olmsted Heights (even though the township was mostly flat). The trustees chose Olmsted Village.

However, the voters chose not to incorporate. The vote in the January 29 election was 143 in favor of incorporation and 214 against it.

Davis's committee then turned its attention to seeking annexation of the township by Olmsted Falls. But a new group called the Anti-Tax Committee of Olmsted Township formed in opposition to that effort. Kosman was a member of that group. He said he had learned that Cleveland had decided not to relocate its workhouse from Warrensville Township. One Cleveland radio station, WJW, reported that as the case, but the Berea newspapers couldn't get anyone at Cleveland City Hall to confirm that.

In early March, Davis presented a petition to Cuyahoga County commissioners calling for the township's annexation to Olmsted Falls even though Cleveland officials confirmed by then that they had decided not to relocate their workhouse.

By mid-March, county officials cast doubt about whether the annexation petition was sufficient because it failed to describe the property correctly with reference to original boundaries and lot numbers, as the law required. Nevertheless, the

commissioners set a public hearing for May 20 on the annexation issue. Meanwhile, William Kroesen, president of the Olmsted Township trustees, said that, if the county commissioners rejected the annexation petition, he would circulate a new petition calling for the township to incorporate as a village.

When the county commissioners held their public hearing on May 20, they postponed

action on the matter after polling the 50 people who attended and finding they were evenly split between those favoring annexation and those opposing it, according to one newspaper report. Another newspaper report said they also found that some people had signed both the pro-annexation petition and the anti-annexation petition. Billings, the Olmsted Falls solicitor, told the commissioners that the village was neutral on the matter, although the council had passed a resolution saying it would welcome the township territory if annexation was approved. The commissioners set another public hearing for June 27.

Subsequently, the commissioners decided to mail postcards to all registered voters in Olmsted Township asking whether they approved or disapproved of annexation to Olmsted Falls. They set July 18 as the deadline for the cards to be returned and scheduled another hearing on the matter for July 25.

Early in July, Davis's committee urged township residents to support annexing the township to Olmsted Falls. "We need one village to protect our homes and afford a better living to our common citizens," the committee said. "Return your card for annexation."

The committee said the merged community would have a tax rate of \$2.34 per \$100 of valuation by 1948, which was higher than the township's rate of \$2.04 [reported earlier as \$2.06] but lower than the village's \$3.19 rate.

The commissioners did not decide the issue on July 25 but postponed their hearing until August 26 after they decided to contact the 104 people who signed both pro-annexation and anti-annexation petitions that were submitted in May to determine which option they preferred. They learned that 60 of them preferred the township to remain a



In this photo from 1943, about two dozen men rest outside Cleveland's workhouse in Warrensville Township. It seems that Olmsted Township residents didn't want a scene like that in their community.

a township, 32 favored annexation, and the other 12 failed to respond.

At the August 26 hearing, a spokesman for the commissioners said they had determined that the pro-annexation petition did not have enough valid signatures. Davis and his group withdrew their petition and pledged to gather more signatures on a new petition. Kroesen pledged to continue to oppose annexation.

But the annexation issue mostly faded away after that. The exception was a section of 60 acres of township land on the east side of Columbia Road between John Road and Nobottom Road and five acres south of Lewis Road. The 16 families living there petitioned for annexation to Olmsted Falls. The *Plain Dealer* reported on February 25, 1947, that they wanted to have the zoning protection that the village could offer. Excluded from annexation was the strip of land on the north side of Nobottom Road between Columbia Road and River Road and one lot across from John Road. That annexation occurred in 1947, giving Olmsted Falls the shape it still has on its northern end.



This portion of a 1954 map shows the land that was annexed to the northern end of Olmsted Falls in 1947, two years after an attempt to annex all of Olmsted Township to Olmsted Falls.

Oil Fever Hit Olmsted 150 Years Ago

The Olmsted communities never were big in oil or natural gas production, but they haven't been strangers to it. Drilling rigs can be found in some spots around Olmsted, although they tend to be secluded from public view. However, 150 years ago, some Olmsted residents began to have big hopes about getting rich off of oil.

On November 4, 1875, the West View column in Berea's *Grindstone City Advertiser* reported with some awkward wording: "Oil excitement is running at high rate. A Mr. James Brooks of Dunkirk, an old oil operator is here, much pleased with the prospects, and outside show is good as any he ever found in the Pennsylvania oil territory, and will be putting down a well in the course of a week or ten days."

On December 9, 1875, the Olmsted Falls column in the *Advertiser* was devoted to a long tale about a group of local citizens who rode a train to Grafton to examine oil-drilling operations there. The story was subtitled, "'Oil on the Brain,' or Five Hours in the Oil Region." The story began this way:

“Eighty barrels of oil are pumped from a single well in a day, selling at twenty dollars per barrel, and a chance for all to invest and get rich,” was the report brought to the ears of the contented inhabitants of our little city, and the man who can live under such a prospect and not be affected thereby, has not been discovered. The first affected here was a member of the Board of Education.



Perhaps this 1885 photo of Cygnet in Wood County, Ohio, illustrates what oil drillers in the Olmsted communities dreamed of when they started seeking oil on their lands in the 1870s.

When the Olmsted Falls residents arrived at Grafton, they examined 15 wells. The newspaper correspondent wrote that “some were drilling, others pumping, and out of one the oil was slowly oozing.” One man told the group that he had just sold his farm for \$90 per acre.

In a separate Olmsted column in the same edition of the newspaper, this was the lead item:

Oil has not begun spouting here yet, but if talking would bring it, a regiment of coopers could not furnish barrels. A company has been formed, and they have least [leased] several pieces of land, and an engine to use for drilling and pumping is needed. May success attend them.

One week later, on December 16, the Olmsted Falls column in the *Advertiser* included this item:

Another Oil Company has been formed, and it seems they intend to push the work more vigorously than the first company organized, for they intend to punch a few holes into the ground immediately, for oil. They will commence operations on the Osborn farm...the present week.

However, the West View column in the same edition of the newspaper led with this item:

The oil fever seems to have abated somewhat, in the last two weeks. It is not quite as contagious as when it first broke out, but there is enough left, if talk is any criterion, but Messrs. Tanney, Brook, West & Co., are not of the talking kind, they mean business, as their work will show. They began to drill, but after going down seventeen or eighteen feet, found that some of their machinery was too light, and are replacing it with

heavier. They will be running again soon. Oil or China, is their watchword.

One week later, the West View column in the December 23 *Advertiser* reported this:

The Tanney well is progressing very favorably going down from ten to fifteen feet per day. The first fifty feet is clay with 18 or 20 inches of loose gravel next to the rock, then sand stone eighty feet, deep in layers of three to ten feet thick, then comes a softer substance of reddish color, resembling the Olmsted Falls clay paint which crops out in the lower part of the village, near Lay Brothers shops, they are twenty-five feet into that.

As 1875 neared an end, the West View column in the *Advertiser* on December 30 included a long item of several paragraphs describing a visit by the editor of the newspaper to the oil-drilling site in West View operated by C.L. Rathbun, A. Osborn and R. Osborn with J.W. Lynch, “a man with an oil experience, acquired in the Penna. oil regions near Oil City,” in charge. The writer described drilling machinery that looked like “a new fangled patent self-regulating pin-back, gilt-edged, ruffle front sausage mill, with the ‘pin-back’ left off.” He said the mud was about ten inches deep, and the water was “on a level with the highest ground.”

Then, he indicated the drilling site was near a site that had been quarried for sandstone when he wrote: “The indications of oil are said to be strong by oil men. The ground was once broken for stone quarrying purposes, but, as the proprietor said, that nasty, greasy stuff made the stone bad to handle, and almost spoiled them for use; on account of which, he gave up his quarrying.”

Further, he wrote: “They expect to sink the first foot of their shaft this week on Tuesday. They mean business, and are hopeful of success.”

Early in 1876, the Olmsted Falls column in the *Advertiser* on January 6 reported that the drilling operation by the Osborn Brothers & Rathbun Oil Company suffered a setback late in December when a high wind “prostrated their derricks,” but the company was ready to try again. “They will drill by horse power,” the column said, and in those days, horsepower really meant power provided by horses.

On January 13, the Olmsted column reported that the Osborns and Rathbun had resumed drilling on January 3. By Saturday night, January 8, they had drilled down 30



This illustration shows the structure for the oil well drilled near Titusville, Pennsylvania, in 1859. As the first commercial oil well in the United States, it led to a surge in drilling, refining and marketing oil like the drilling that was done later in Olmsted.

feet. After going another 20 feet, they found not the oil they sought but natural gas, which they didn't want. In that same edition, the West View column reported this:

The Tanney oil well has now reached the depth of 321 feet, and struck the second sand rock with a good show of heavy oil. The last 152 feet was through shell and blue clay. The company will now stop boring and put in their pump, and test the well. If oil is got in paying quantities they will sink another well forthwith.

One week later, on January 20, the Olmsted column, which was filed on January 17, reported:

Osborn & Rathbun have improved their manner of drilling by supplanting their horse power by an engine. They have not drilled any for some time owing to making the change. Monday the 17th, they will again commence drilling.

The Olmsted column in the January 20 edition of the *Advertiser* told about a visit the correspondent made the previous Saturday to the Osborn & Rathbun oil works. He wrote:

They are comfortably quartered, as they are doing all their work under a good cover of pine lumber, improved by a stove of ample dimensions. It stands close to the well, but they are not at all afraid that their oil will take fire. They are down 76 feet, are getting nearer China daily. Success to them.

The West View column in the February 3 edition of the newspaper reported:



This 1870s photo shows a rig and many behind it at Tidioute in Pennsylvania's oil country.

The proprietors of the Tanney well are pumping their well to test it, with a light show of oil, and a very good supply of gas. They are using the gas for fuel for their boiler, also for lighting their office. They will continue to test the well for a week to ten days, when if no oil is found, they will sink it deeper.

Meanwhile, the Olmsted columnist wrote about visiting a new oil-drilling site about half a mile west of Olmsted Falls. He identified the operators as A.B. Barnard, E.A. Barnard and W. Daily and said they were drilling on A.B. Barnard's land. At the time of the visit, the operators had drilled 14 to 125 feet deep.

In the February 10 *Advertiser*, he wrote:

The oil fever is still raging and some are getting it so bad that a person can almost smell it in their breath. Rathbun and Osborn are still at work, and have reached a depth of over one hundred feet.

It was more of the same when the columnist wrote on February 14 for the February 17 newspaper:

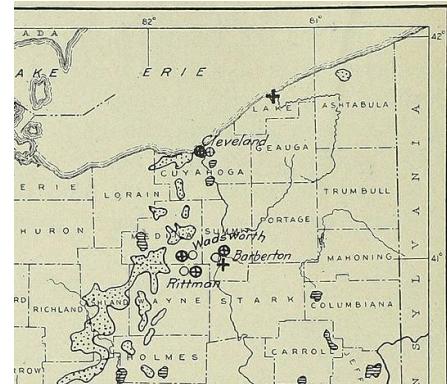
Oil companies are springing up like mushrooms after a warm shower. Scarcely a week passes but that we hear of the preparations of some parties who intend to drill for oil. Barnard & Son are drilling, and the report is that R.H. Rice will soon commence a well at his saw mill west of this place. Rathbun & Osborn are still drilling. Many are watching the results of the different parties and if they succeed the prospects are that the town will boast of a score of oil companies before many days.

Later in the same column, he wrote: "The oil well of Barnard & Co., is down twenty-seven feet in the rock, and no oil yet." One week later, in the February 24 edition, he wrote: "The Barnard Oil Company are still at work, having reached a depth of over forty feet."

The news was not so good for one set of drillers when the Olmsted columnist wrote in the March 9 edition of the *Advertiser*: "Last week Osborn & Rathbun had the misfortune to lose their drilling tools in their well, which they fished out four days after. At that time they had reached a depth of 170 feet and – no oil yet."

Over the next few weeks, the local columns mentioned nothing about oil drilling until April 6, when the Olmsted columnist wrote:

There ain't near as much oil under Olmsted as people supposed. Oil stock is cheap, nearly as cheap as Plank Road stock. At Rice's well, the report is, they got a good show of oil. Barnard is still drilling. They have reached a depth of 128 feet.



This portion of a 1923 map of the oil and gas fields in Ohio shows a few fields in Cuyahoga County but not in Olmsted, which explains why drillers in the 1870s were disappointed.

More than two months then passed before the subject of oil drilling came up again with this item in the Olmsted column on June 15: "The oil excitement has died out entirely, leaving quite a number of citizens wiser if not sadder."

Throughout those months of oil fever, the drillers seemed to be single-mindedly focused on oil, while they largely disregarded the natural gas they found. However, that changed more than a decade later. In February 1887, the West View columnist wrote:

“The citizens of this place are agitating the question of natural gas. There are very good indications.”

West View had two natural gas wells by May 1888. In 1890, the *Advertiser* reported that D.K. Huntington had “gas on the brain.” He struck gas on his Butternut Ridge property and expected to have enough to light his house.

“Gas! Gas! we’ve got it,” the *Advertiser* reported later in 1890 when Cornelius DeRooi drilled near his house in Olmsted Falls. That report further said:



This is one of the few wells that can be found today in Olmsted. It is well back from the road at 7622 Columbia Road, across from the Village Green. A sign on the fence says it belongs to EOS Energy of Columbus.

a special election on the matter in May 1891, it failed by a margin of nine votes.

On Monday of last week Mr. DeRooi struck a large vein of gas, at a depth of less than 800 feet, throwing the drill from the well and blowing up things in general. There is a great deal of speculative talk, but if there is gas in paying quantities underneath this sleepy town it will certainly be developed.

By January 1891, at least nine gas wells were operating around Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. In April 1891, Olmsted Falls residents elected a new council after the old council resisted an effort to issue \$1,500 in bonds to fund the drilling of wells. Proponents of the issue even got state legislators to pass a bill to permit such bonds. But when the village held

Over the many decades since then, the Olmsted communities never became a hotbed for oil or gas drilling, but they had – and still do have – a few operating wells.

Quarrying Boomed 150 Years Ago

Even while oil fever was gripping the Olmsted area 150 years ago, a better-established industry – quarrying sandstone – was going strong. One example of that was this item that appeared in the West View column of the *Grindstone City Advertiser* on November 4, 1875:

In spite of hard times and closeness of money the Rocky River Stone Co. are pushing their work along at a brisk and lively rate in getting out grindstones, which are said to be equal if not superior to any stone now in the market by those that have used them. By the energy of H.M. Townshend, President, and H.D. Chase, Supt., they have worked up a fair trade. They cannot supply the demand for their blue stone grinding. They

are running one large lathe and will put in another one this month for small stone. The success of the enterprise is safely established.

The quarrying industry flourished in West View and Olmsted Falls during the last few decades in the 19th century and into the early 20th century before operations ceased. One former quarry became a park in Olmsted Falls that now is known as David Fortier River Park. Another in the southern section of Olmsted Falls that formerly was West View has remained largely untouched in the past century. For more about the history of quarries in West View and Olmsted Falls, see Issues 80 through 85 of *Olmsted 200* from January through June 2020.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will feature a story about glimpse into life in Olmsted Falls 140 years ago. It also will have stories about a proposal to address Olmsted's problem with saloons 150 years ago, a development 130 years ago that contributed to North Olmsted's eventual split from Olmsted Township and the coming of Dairypak to Olmsted Falls 70 years ago.

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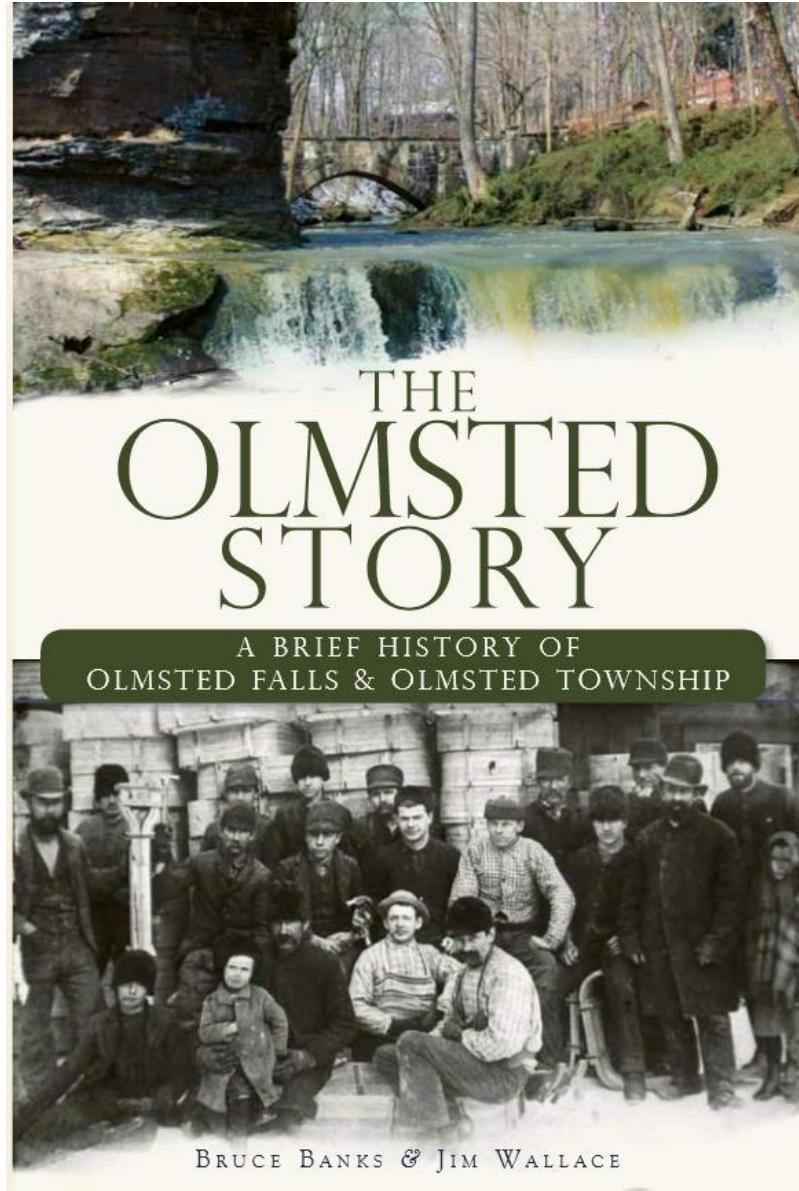
Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. So are photos and information to share about Olmsted's history.

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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