



# Olmsted 200

Bicentennial Notes about Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township –  
First Farmed in 1814 and Settled in 1815

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## Old House Gets a New Use

One of the most senior buildings in Olmsted Falls is about to become a senior center. It will be just the latest of many uses for the building, which is almost 180 years old.

Until early this year, the building at 7850 Main Street had served almost six decades as the Olmsted Falls Branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library, so generations of Olmsted residents probably will refer to it for years as the “old library.” But, in February, the library loaded up its books and other materials and moved into a new building on Mapleway Drive. (The library also took something from the Main Street location it shouldn’t have. There is more on that later.)



As the city prepares to use a \$150,000 Community Development Block Grant to convert the building into a senior center, this is a good time to consider the facility's long history.

It began as the residence that Newton P. Loomis built for himself when he moved to Olmsted in 1834, two years after his father, Joseph Loomis, and two older brothers, John and Joseph, arrived. Newton came with his mother, Jerusha, as well as his brother, Gilbert, and sisters, Julia and Jerusha. At that time, the community still lacked a good north-south road, as Newton Loomis later told Crisfield Johnson for his 1879 *History of Cuyahoga County, Ohio*. Johnson wrote that Olmsted had "nothing but a path along the river bank. The main road, however, was 'slashed out,' but was ready for use. Where the Union school house now stands was a frog pond, and there were only six houses on the ground now occupied by the village." (The Union School was built in 1873-1874 on the spot where the Schoolhouse Pavilion now stands on the Village Green. The old school was torn down in 1960.)

The lack of good roads did not deter Newton Loomis from staying, but the house he built was not originally in the Main Street location where it sits now. It started out a bit farther south at what is now the location of the Falls Veterinary Clinic at 8017 Columbia Road, just north of the railroad tracks. (But it was 19 years after Loomis moved in when the railroad came through.)

Beginning in 1858, St. Mary's used the Loomis building as a parish house until 1873, which is when the original wooden Catholic church was rolled down the street from about where the Olmsted Community Church is now to near where St. Mary's is located currently at the corner of Bagley and Columbia roads.

### **Church donates house for library.**

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Community Church acquired the Loomis house and moved it to the location that is now the parking lot between the church and the Moosehead restaurant. That's where the house stood until 1955, when the church donated the building to the community for use as a library, and it was moved to the other side of Main Street, where it now stands. The village donated the land and \$1,000 for the library. (Previously, the community had a library of about 6,000 books housed on the second floor of Village Hall, the building that now contains the Moosehead.) The Loomis house opened as a library on June 5, 1955. In 1965, it expanded with the addition of a new wing. The building went through an extensive renovation in 1989.

Plans for a new library began a few years ago. In 2009, the county library system hired Triad Research Group to conduct a phone survey to find out what Olmsted residents thought of their library and whether they would support its relocation.

In 2010, the county system had Bostwick Design Partnership, an architecture firm, review the facilities of library branches in Olmsted Falls and other communities around the county. That review, which was used to update the system's master plan,

found that the Loomis house did not meet the needs of the community. For the service population of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township of 18,894, the plan recommended that the branch should have at least 20,000 square feet, but the Loomis house provided only 5,339 square feet. Bostwick estimated that, if the branch would stay at that location, it would cost \$553,000 to renovate the existing building and another \$3,996,000 to add 14,661 square feet to it.

On June 24, 2010, the Cuyahoga County Public Library's Board of Trustees voted to approve the new master plan. Olmsted was one of six communities scheduled to get new facilities while another nine branches were scheduled to be renovated. The master plan had three goals:

- To ensure the library's financial stability into the future by reducing operating costs through efficient building design;
- To create centers of excellence; and
- To establish equity of service across 47 communities.

Some Olmsted residents objected to moving the branch, but plans moved forward.

At the time, library leaders intended to have the Olmsted Falls branch move into existing retail space somewhere in the community, but retail space is not as plentiful in Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township as it is in other Cleveland suburbs. So plans changed. On June 29, 2011, the library system announced plans for a new building near City Hall (the former school built in 1916) along Mapleway Drive near Bagley Road. And they weren't for a 20,000-square-foot building but for one of about 6,000 square feet, just a little bigger than the Loomis house. However, as libraries devote more of their collections to digital media, they require less space for books. Mayor Robert Blomquist later called the planned branch "the right size and the right fit for this community," according to the *Sun Post-Herald*.



In March 2012, the Olmsted Falls Architectural Board of Review gave its approval to the several concepts for the building presented by Van Dyke Architects. At that time, library officials hoped the new branch might be ready for use that December. The groundbreaking took place on time on July 11, but construction took a bit longer than expected.

The grand opening occurred on February 23, 2013, a sunny but chilly day that made some in attendance regret not dressing more warmly. But the cold failed to deter hundreds of Olmsted residents who showed up to get their first views inside the new building, which cost \$1.75 million, and partake in a winter carnival.

Although it is only slightly bigger than the old facility, the new branch is all on one floor. When it was in the Loomis house, the branch had public space on the first floor and basement while second-floor space was used only by the staff.

Included in the new building are 20 computers for public use. It has about 11,000 books and other items available for borrowers, a public meeting room that can accommodate up to 60 people, and a children's section with an electric train and bookshelves with a Grand Pacific Junction theme. Just outside the front door is another connection to Olmsted's heritage: a grist mill stone that had been one of a pair used to grind wheat and corn.



*Robert Varley, president of the Cuyahoga County Public Library, and Olmsted Falls Mayor Robert Blomquist cut the ribbon while other city, township, library, business and legislative leaders watched.*



*The new library branch was ready for opening, February 23.*

### **It was a sign of the times – but not the right times.**

Although the community welcomed the new library branch, something was wrong with it. It wasn't anything in the building itself, but on the sign along Mapleway Drive that identified it. The name was right, but unfortunately, it also said at the bottom: Circa 1834. That was appropriate when the branch was still in the Loomis house, which was built in 1834. But it made no sense in relation to the new building. When the problem was pointed out to county library officials in an October 8 email, Scott Morgan, operations director and fiscal officer, responded the next day with thanks for having the incorrect



information pointed out. “We will be repainting the sign and will make the correction at that time,” he wrote. “That should happen soon.”

It should be noted that such a prompt response is not unusual for the library system. When *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township* came out in 2010, one of the tasks the authors took on at that time was to point out to all the entities using the incorrect story that “Olmsted” once had an “a” in it the error of their ways. The Olmsted Township trustees, thanks mainly to Trustee Sherri Lippus, were the first to correct their website. But within several days, the library system did the same.

“Thank you for bringing to our attention the misspelling of the Olmsted name on our public website for the North Olmsted and Olmsted Falls branches,” Sari Feldman, executive director, wrote. “This letter is to inform you that the spelling correction has been made as requested.” She also wrote, “I apologize for any confusion the misspelling may have caused and appreciate your effort to correct the record.”

Other entities were less prompt in responding. It took more than a year to get the City of North Olmsted to correct its website. Unfortunately, the Ohio Historical Marker for the Oxcart Library along Butternut Ridge Road near the North Olmsted library still refers erroneously to “heirs of Aaron Olmstead” who sent the books that gave the original Olmsted Township its first library. The Ohio Historical Society has been made aware of the incorrect spelling, but it’s harder to change a metal sign than to correct a Web page.

(For more on the subject of Olmsted’s spelling, see “‘A’ Is Not OK in Olmsted,” the second chapter of *The Olmsted Story*, pages 14-16.)

## **Ohio Benefitted from Year without Summer**

Many of Olmsted’s early settlers came from New England. One reason for that was northeastern Ohio had connections to Connecticut, because it had been considered that state’s Western Reserve after the Revolutionary War and before Ohio achieved statehood. Another reason was a spell of unusual weather.

As the War of 1812 ended early in 1815, no settlers lived in Olmsted Township (which did not yet have that name). It was that spring when James Geer and his family moved across the border from Columbia Township to become Olmsted’s first settlers. Later that year, Elijah Stearns and two of his six sons showed up to claim 1,002 acres they had bought near Butternut Ridge.

Settlement might have continued at a trickle if it hadn’t been for what happened in New England in 1816. It was known as the “Year without a Summer” and “eighteen hundred froze to death.” Snow fell in June and crop-killing frosts arrived in mid-August. Those who suffered through it had no idea why it occurred. Many years later, scientists connected the cold weather in New England, eastern Canada and much of Europe to an event that occurred on the other side of the world in April 1815: the eruption of the

Mount Tambora volcano in Indonesia. It put an estimated 1.7 million tons of dust into the atmosphere. By the summer of 1816, that dust reduced the amount of solar energy that reached much of the Northern Hemisphere and caused the unusually cold weather.

That prompted many New Englanders to consider moving south and west to Ohio, so the settlement of Olmsted Township and much of the rest of the old Western Reserve picked up in the years after 1816.

Another effect of the ash in the atmosphere was that 1816's weather was so gloomy in Europe that it is said to have inspired Mary Shelley in writing her dark novel, *Frankenstein*.

## News of the Past

Last month's issue of *Olmsted 200* included an article by Bruce Banks about Damp's Mill, so it is interesting to note that it was almost exactly 100 years ago when the longtime proprietor of that mill, Ed Damp, died. The October 24, 1913, edition of the *Berea Enterprise* contained this item:

*The funeral of Mr. E. Damp was held at the Cong'l church Tuesday morning at 10 o'clock. Mr. Damp was one of our pioneers and a friend of every child in the village. He was a loyal supporter of the church in which services were held. Mr. Damp will be missed by all.*

Damp began running the gristmill along Rocky River in 1873. He took over the operations from Colonel H.N. Whitbeck, who had built it. Damp sold the mill in 1906. The flood of March 25, 1913, destroyed it just seven months before Damp's death. But as noted last month, the mill's stone foundation can still be seen from the overlook behind Falls Family Restaurant – at least when the leaves fall from the vegetation that blocks the view during the summer.

The Congregational Church, where Damp's funeral was held, stood at what is now the southern end of the parking lot between the Olmsted Community Church and the Moosehead restaurant. In 1917, it merged with the Methodist Episcopal Church across the street to form the Community Church. The Congregational Church was torn down when the current Community Church was built in the 1950s. The former Methodist Episcopal Church is now the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel.

Another item from that October 24, 1913, edition of the *Berea Enterprise* was this:

*A cement walk is being put down on the south side of Mill-st., between Columbia-ave., and Orchard-st.*

Two weeks earlier, the paper ran an item about one of Olmsted's many battles against the railroad:

*L.S. & M.S. Ry. Co. have advised our council they do not consider the traffic on Columbia-av., after 10 p.m., sufficiently heavy to warrant an additional watchman at their crossing.*

Apparently, people crossing the railroad tracks at night were on their own to watch for approaching trains.

## **Reader Shares His Olmsted Memories**

One of the benefits of putting out *Olmsted 200* is receiving comments from readers, some of whom share their memories of Olmsted's past. Shortly after the October issue came out, Paul Schmied wrote that he enjoyed the article in the July issue about the Olmsted Falls train depot. He described himself as a "railroad buff" and shared this memory: "I met 'the Plug' many times as a youngster riding a bike and got to know the mailman who took the mail from the train to the post office. When I became a little older the mailman had progressed to owning a service station in Berea after being the service manager at the Ford Dealership in Berea for many years. I was employed at the service station for summers while attending college the rest of the time and working for my board and would like to say all because of meeting the plug which was probably not true."

Schmied also mentioned that he worked at Barnum's grocery on Columbia Road after school and on Saturdays during his senior year of high school. Further, he wrote: "We had a steel workers strike and the steel mills were all shut down and many huge ore carriers were idled in the Cleveland Outer Harbor bristling with armed guards. Kids my age were amazed at the number of steel worker families who shopped in Olmsted Falls. One of my classmates worked at Hecker's Sohio station at the corner of Bagley and Columbia. He reported that many people had no money for gasoline and those pumping gas had standing orders to 'mark it down' with the confidence that the people would pay someday. In the grocery store many customers had no money to buy food and obtained groceries in the same manner. The checkout people had instructions as to what could be purchased 'on credit' and additional items had to be approved by the grocer himself and almost always were approved for some 'special occasion' like a birthday. There were no credit cards then."

Do you have memories of Olmsted's past you would like to share? If so, send them to [wallacestar@hotmail.com](mailto:wallacestar@hotmail.com).

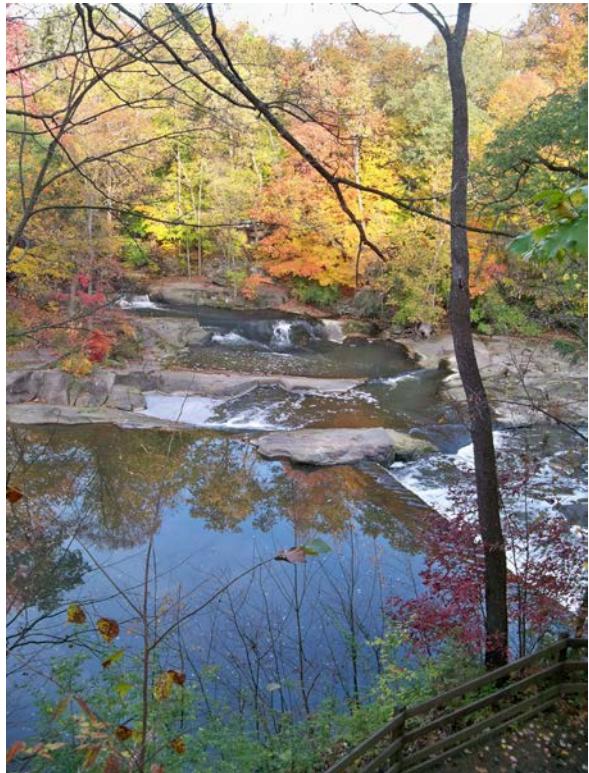
## **Readers Offer Encouragement**

In addition to receiving the recollections of readers like Paul Schmied, it has been nice to receive the comments of many readers who have enjoyed receiving *Olmsted 200*. Here are a few:

- “I just finished reading a copy of *Olmsted 200*, Issue 5. It was so interesting and filled with so much information... Thank you very much for all your hard work in putting together all of the facts and articles. What a job! Much appreciated.”
- “You are doing a great job. Keep it up.”
- “Just got your 5th issue of *Olmsted 200* today. I did receive the first four issues & printed them out to keep in a binder. However, I cannot find the binder anywhere. Could you please email me the first four issues again?”
- “Thanks Jim....love it.”
- “Thanks Jim for another wonderful look back at where we grew up...so much history.... I’m for a 2 year celebration! Any reason for a good party!!!!”

That last comment is a reference to the suggestion that Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township could hold a two-year bicentennial celebration: in 2014 for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of James Geer’s corn crop in Olmsted Township and in 2015 for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of when Geer and his family moved out of Columbia Township to become Olmsted’s first settlers. What do you think?

## **Autumn Shows Its Splendor in Olmsted Falls**



Olmsted Falls not only displays much of its history but also much beauty, especially when the leaves turn color in the fall. This photo was taken this past Monday, October 28, from East River Park as the morning sun was just reaching David Fortier River Park. Although that park is now one of the most beautiful spots in Ohio, it’s always interesting to recall that, during much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was an industrial site filled with mills and quarries. In the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) used many of the stones left over from the quarries to build a bridge over Plum Creek, stairways and shelters. That is when this spot where Plum Creek meets Rocky River really became the park it is today.

## Still to Come

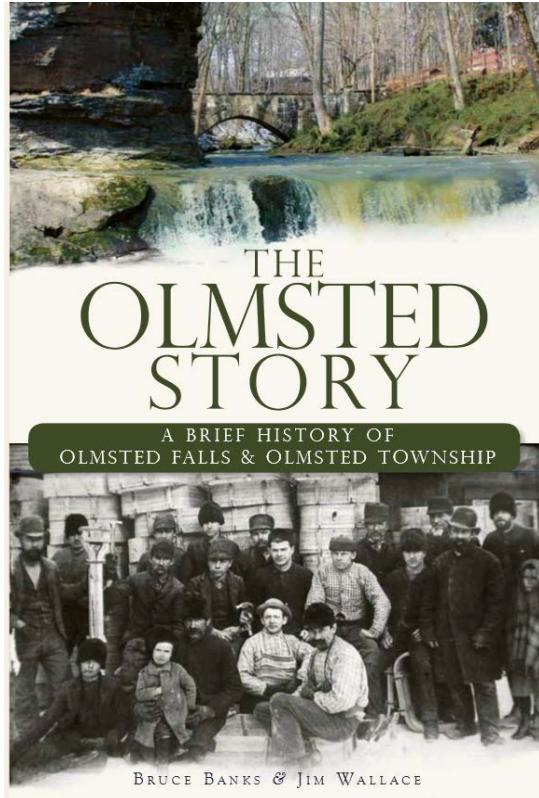
In future issues, we will look at the electrification of Olmsted Falls and what happened a century ago for Olmsted's centennial. Did residents celebrate in 1914 or 1915? The answer might surprise you.

If you know of others who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: [wallacestar@hotmail.com](mailto:wallacestar@hotmail.com). If you are a new reader and would like to receive the first five issues, let me know that at the same address.

Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted's history that you would like me to pull out of my extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information about the community's history that you would like to share.

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. Written contributions, 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 Clementine's Victorian Restaurant at Grand Pacific Junction and through online booksellers.



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