



Olmsted 200

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

Issue 109

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Olmsted Produced Other Inventors

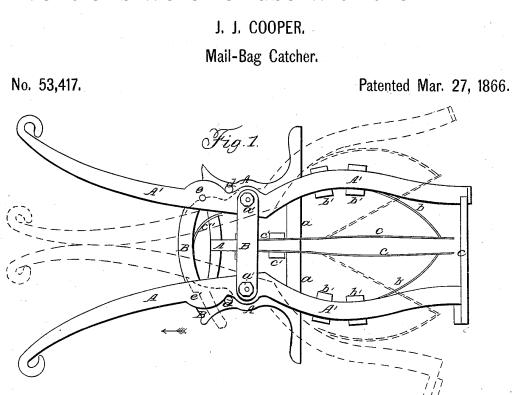
In the late 1800s and into the early 1900s, Ed Kidney and Joseph Lay were the most prominent inventors and entrepreneurs who came out of Olmsted Falls. As told in the past few issues of *Olmsted 200*, they not only created inventions that were worthy of patents, but they also created companies that manufactured goods sold throughout much of the country.

However, they weren't the only inventors to come out of Olmsted Falls or Olmsted Township. In fact, at least a few of those inventors received U.S. patents years before either Lay or Kidney – or Kidney's father, Peter – did. And it says something about life in Olmsted at that time that those earliest inventions were for use with the railroad.

One inventor was John J. Cooper, who received a patent on March 27, 1866, for what was called "improved apparatus for receiving and delivering mail-bags." It also was called a "Mail-Bag Catcher."

Judging by his invention, Cooper apparently had some connection to the railroad, but his only mention in Walter Holzworth's 1966 book of Olmsted history is that Cooper served on a jury in a case about a shooting death in 1878.

"My improvement relates to an apparatus for receiving and delivering mail-bags from cars simultaneously, or for receiving and delivering separately, while the train is in

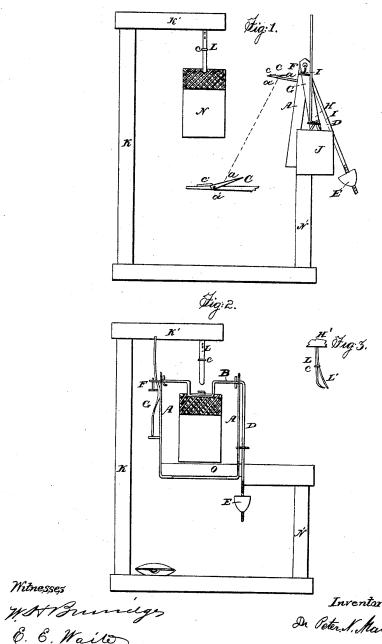


This illustration shows the mailbag catcher patented by John J. Cooper.

motion," Cooper wrote in his patent application. "This apparatus can be used when a bag is to be delivered from the car and not one returned to it...."

P. N. MAINE.
Mail-Bag Catcher.
No. 57,936.

Patented Sept. 11, 1866



Yet another mailbag catcher was the invention of Dr. Peter Maine as shown in this drawing in the application for his patent later in 1866.

different type of railroad-related invention. He called it "Improvements in Railroad-Car Couplings." The description is complicated, but the invention made use of wood, bolts and rubber springs.

Pierce, whose first name as signed on the patent application is hard to decipher, also failed to make it into books on Olmsted history. However, he likely worked for the railroad because the description of his invention shows he was well acquainted with how railroad cars were fastened together and unfastened.

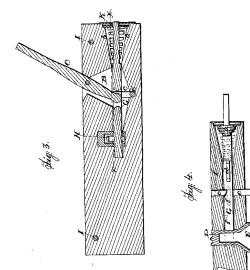
"In order to uncouple the cars, also to avoid the dangerous necessity of going between them for that purpose, the lever G is pushed inward toward the coupling," part of the application states. "This, as a consequence, forces the bolt back out of the link, and the catch again falls into the notch

Half a year later, another Olmsted resident, Dr. Peter N. Maine, also received a patent on September 11, 1866, for an "improved method of receiving and delivering mail-bags on railway-cars." He signed his name on the patent application with the title "Dr.," so Maine might have been a physician. However, he is not mentioned in Holtzworth's book or any other histories of Olmsted.

"During the passing of the train the bag J is dropped upon the platform of the station by the upper arm of the lever G striking against the projecting arm K," Maine stated in part of the patent application. "This throws the other end of the lever back, forcing the hook on the end of said lever out of the handles of the bag, when it will drop...."

The fact that two Olmsted residents in 1866 received patents for inventions involving the delivery of mailbags by trains indicates that such delivery must have been a big concern in the community just after the Civil War. And yet another patent was granted also on September 11, 1866, to an Olmsted resident, A. Pierce, for a

2 Sheets—Sheet 2.
A. PIERCE.
Car Coupling.
No. 57,962.
Patented Sept. 11, 1866.



These are two of the drawings showing A. Pierce's invention.

above described. The cars are thus disconnected, to be moved away or again to be coupled in the manner as before described."



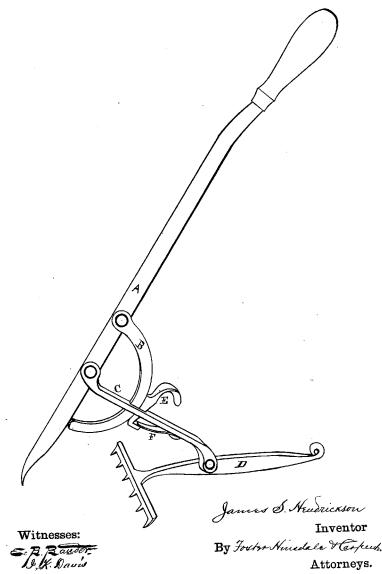
It is possible the inventions for catching mailbags from trains or coupling and decoupling railroad cars were used along the railroads that ran through Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township, such as on the tracks that ran by the depot at Olmsted Falls. Reader Jeffrey Stanley recently shared this undated depot photo from the late 1800s or the early 1900s.

Another Olmsted-based inventor appeared in Patent Office records more than a decade later. On August 12, 1879, James S. Hendrickson, received a patent for an "Improvement in Carpet-Stretchers." J. S. HENDRICKSON.

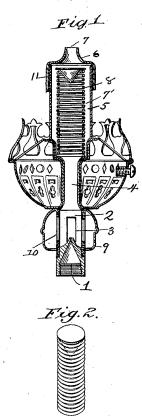
"The object of my invention is to more readily stretch or extend carpets or coverings for floors, and, when thus stretched, the slack to be held firmly in place by automatic action of the instrument, allowing the operator the use of both hands in tacking or otherwise securing or disposing of the carpet or covering," Hendrickson explained in his patent application.

Hendrickson received a few mentions in Holzworth's book, including one about his role in a large Independence Day celebration held in Olmsted Falls on July 4, 1882: "James Hendrickson, the iron fabricator, had a display along with a line of farm machinery he had agencies for." Another mention said he lived along Cook Road and had a daughter, Ella, who "was one of the best known and long time teachers in Olmsted Township and Village." Another reference to her teaching career, which began at age 14 in 1882, noted that her father was "a Civil War veteran and influential Olmsted Township resident."

Early in the 20th century, Charles Holmok received a patent on August 7, 1906, for an acetylene mantle-burner. He was from Cleveland rather than Olmsted, but he assigned his patent to the Alright Manufacturing Company of Olmsted Falls. It operated in Ed Kidney's former Cleveland Bending Works factory along River Street (now River Road). Alright's name was misspelled as "Allright" in the patent application. (For more on the company, see Issue 106 of *Olmsted 200* from March 2022.)



This is the illustration for James Hendrickson's patented carpet-stretcher.



Witnesses
Ed. Dickey
Maybell W. Gould

Inventor
Charles Holmok
by Mr. M. Horner
Attorney

Here is how Charles Holmok's invention was illustrated in his patent application.

Acetylene Burner Company of Jersey City, New Jersey. Atlantic might have been one of Alright's competitors.

That mantle-burner brings the list of patents by Olmsted residents or for Olmsted companies into the early 20th century. Many more came during the rest of the century. Among them were a matchbox, lawn sprinklers, products for Sherwin Williams, trees, bowling equipment and a wide range of items for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will explore some of them.

David Kennedy of Olmsted Falls helped with research for this and the next two stories.

Samuel Lay Left a Complicated Legacy

The Lays were one of the most prominent families in Olmsted Falls late in the 19th century. Family members included an inventor, entrepreneurs, a mayor and owners of good chunks of village property. But they left little behind by the early 20th century other than a long-running legal case.

As recounted in the previous two issues of *Olmsted 200*, Joseph Lay made quite a name for himself by inventing broom designs and founding a company to manufacture brooms and brushes in Olmsted Falls before moving it in 1887 to Indiana, where it grew

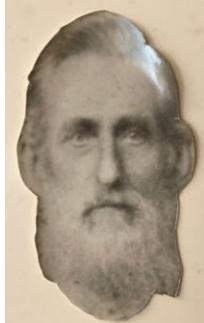
"The objects of the invention are to provide a gas-burner for incandescent-mantle lights and in which the gas employed is rich in carbon, such as acetylene or other analogous gas," the patent application states.

"A further object is to provide a noiseless burner in which the objectionable feature of backing up of the flame into the burner is eliminated and in which the capacity of the commingling agency or medium for gas and air is largely increased, whereby a more complete commingling or mixing of the gas and air is assured and the production of carbon in solid form is avoided, as well as the inevitable clogging of the burner when the carbon is deposited therein."

Presumably, Alright Manufacturing made such acetylene burners in the few years the company operated in Olmsted Falls.

The patent application said Holmok's invention was an improvement on a similar design patented in 1901 by another Cleveland man, John Harris. That patent was assigned to Atlantic

to be one of the largest in its industry. However, he had a troubled family life, including a divorce from his first wife in 1865 on grounds of her adultery and a split from his own company late in life in a battle between his sons, Samuel C. Lay and Frank R. Lay.



Joseph Lay, above, founded his broom-making company in Olmsted Falls before moving it to Indiana, where it made brooms like the Kitchenette, seen to the right. (Lay photo courtesy of Cristi Bost of the Ridgeville Public Library in Indiana)



The life of his father, Samuel A. Lay, was made more interesting by a second marriage in his later years, and still later, his death left years of complications.

Samuel A. Lay was in his 52nd year when he and his first wife, Lucetta (Moore) Lay, moved to Olmsted Falls in 1857 and bought 25 acres of land along what now is Columbia Road (then Main Street) across from the Village Green. That was four years after three of their five sons – John, Joseph and Samuel – had migrated to Olmsted Falls from Seneca County in upstate New York. It also was one year after his father, Nathaniel, died and one year before his mother, Mary, died in New York.

Lucetta lived another 20 years after arriving in Olmsted Falls. She died in 1877 after more than 50 years of marriage. Within two years after her death, the *Berea Advertiser* carried news of Samuel A. Lay's second marriage in its February 27, 1879, edition:

Mr. Samuel Lay, Sen., was married on Sunday, to Mrs. Worthing, of Rockport. If Mr. Lay don't make a good husband it will be because he has not improved the time during the 74 years that he has lived to learn how. But perhaps the bride who is somewhere in the forties, may be able to make him toe the scratch.

Although the newspaper gave his age as 74, Lay was born September 22, 1805, so he would have been 73 years old at the time of his second marriage to Jane Worthing. The marriage lasted six-and-a-half years until Samuel died after a long illness on July 23, 1885, just two months shy of his 80th birthday and about 28 years after he had moved to Olmsted Falls. His obituary in the August 7, 1885, edition of the *Berea Advertiser*, which incorrectly reported a few dates, referred to his second wife, "who has lived with, and kindly cared for, him during his few declining years." His funeral was held at the Methodist Episcopal Church (the building now known as the Grand Pacific Wedding

Chapel). His body was buried at Chestnut Grove Cemetery in Olmsted Falls.

Recently, David Kennedy, who helped with research for this story, found the headstone at old Chestnut Grove Cemetery for Samuel A. Lay and his first wife, Lucetta. He said it is six to eight feet tall with an inscription about a foot wide. Unfortunately, he said, the old sandstone is worn, so it is hard to read, “but one unmistakable part is that

Lay’s wife’s name is spelled with an S (not a C)!!” Other records spell her name in four different ways, but with a “c” rather than an “s.”

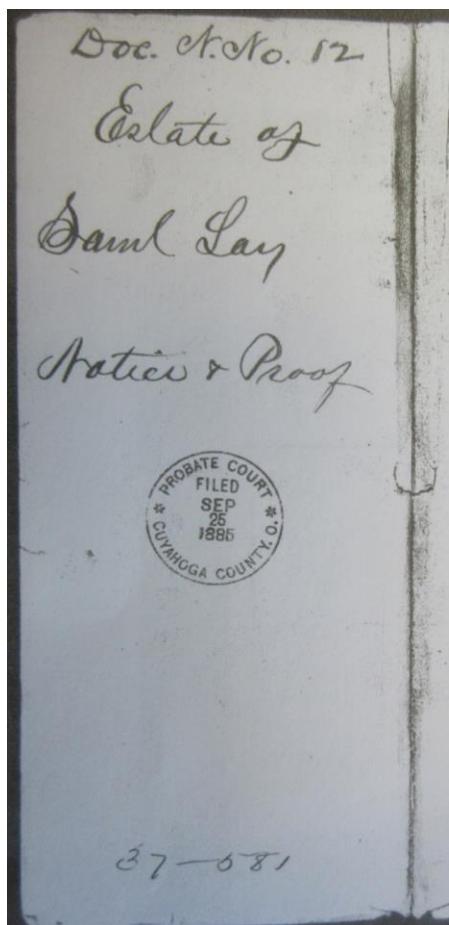
But Samuel A. Lay’s funeral and burial weren’t the end of his story because his will was contested for years. The first notice of that locally came in the Olmsted Falls column of the *Berea Advertiser* for October 28, 1887 – two years after his death:

The will of the late Samuel Lay, of Olmsted, is the subject of contention in a suit place on trial before Judge Noble. Mr. Lay died on July 24, 1885. After providing for the support of his widow, he bequeathed his property to his son, Joseph, and grandson, F.R. Lay. The property comprises nineteen acres of land. The complainants in the case are his sons, John and Samuel, and his grandchildren, George and Hattie Lay, who inherit nothing. They claim that at the time of his death Mr. Lay was mentally incapacitated from making a proper distribution of his property.

This was the cover of Samuel A. Lay’s will, filed September 25, 1885, with probate court.

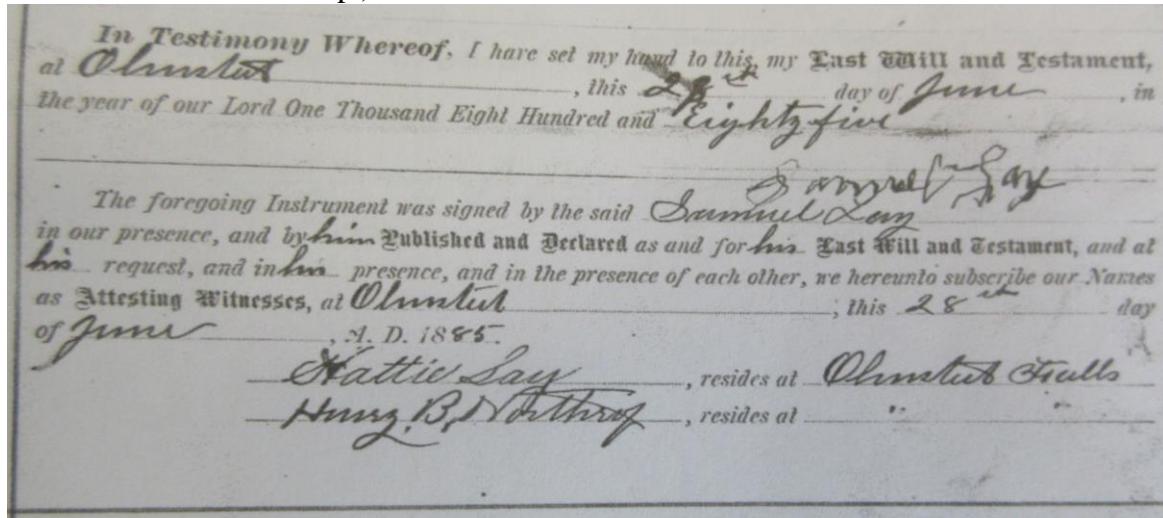
apparently had sold several lots totaling about seven acres to people who built houses on them, and he farmed the rest of the property.

His will gave his 19-acre homestead and all the buildings on it to his grandson, Frank R. Lay, the second son of Joseph Lay, who in 1887 (two years after Samuel A. Lay’s death) moved his broom manufacturing company from Olmsted Falls to Ridgeville, Indiana. Why he favored Frank rather than Frank’s older brother, Samuel C. Lay, who apparently has been named for his grandfather, is not clear. Joseph, until late in his life, seemed to favor son Samuel over Frank because Samuel was his partner in the broom-



making company, while Frank worked at times as a traveling salesman for the company and at another time started a new broom-making factory in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Other than the property that went to Frank, Samuel A. Lay's will provided for Frank, who was executor of the estate, to pay his widow, Jane, \$10.00 per month for the rest of her life. It also granted \$100 to son John and \$50 each to sons Joseph and Samuel (who might not have had a middle name because no middle initial is listed for him in any records that have turned up.)



This final section of Samuel A. Lay's will shows he signed it with a shaky hand on June 28, 1885, just 25 days before his death. The attesting witnesses included his granddaughter Hattie (daughter of John Lay) and longtime Justice of the Peace Henry Northrup.

One week after the earlier item about the will being contested ran in the newspaper, the November 4 edition of the *Advertiser* followed up with this report:

The will contest which has been in progress in Common Pleas Court this week ended Tuesday in a verdict for the plaintiff. The case was brought by John Lay against Samuel Lay and others for the purpose of setting aside a will in which nineteen acres of land in Olmsted township were the principal bone of contention. The jury declared the will void.

Even though the will was declared void at that time, there is no indication in any records that it was replaced by other arrangements. A 1908 appeals court ruling (more about that later) revealed that Frank Lay served as executor of his grandfather's estate for several years "but never completed the settlement of the estate." By 1889, he asked to give up his role as administrator of the estate. He already had moved to Indiana by then.

Probate court appointed the widow, Jane Lay, to be administratrix of the estate in 1890. By that time, she had moved off the old homestead. In May 1894, a probate court judge ruled that Jane Lay owed a man named H.C. Bunts \$448.00 with interest for unpaid expenses related to administration of the estate.

But the big case over the estate wasn't settled until more than two decades after Samuel A. Lay died. A man named Valentine Christ filed it against Jane Lay. In the late 1800s, Christ acquired several properties in Olmsted Falls and laid claim to Samuel A. Lay's property, but his case indicates there was considerable confusion over who rightfully owned the property.

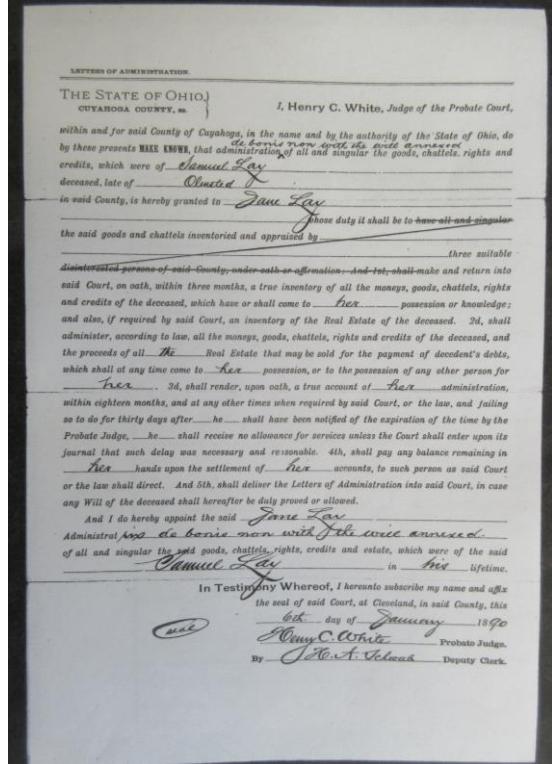
Jane Lay, shortly after being appointed administratrix, filed a petition with probate court to be allowed to sell the property to pay debts. Christ's case stated that the property was sold to him in 1902, and then, after the sale was challenged, the court found in 1906 that the sale "was not lawfully made." However, he contended in his case, he had previously purchased the property at a tax sale, "and thereafter paid taxes upon the premises until he purchased at the administrator's sale. After this purchase, he continued to pay the taxes until the sale was set aside. Thereafter, the taxes being again delinquent, the premises were again sold at tax sale and Christ again purchased.

Neither of those tax sales gave him any valid title to the premises, but after the tax purchase at tax sale, he paid the taxes for a considerable time."

If that seems confusing, it is, and it might explain why the status of the property remained unsettled for so long.

The November 4, 1908, appellate court document states that Christ took possession of the property for three years and eight months between the time he paid for it in the administrator's sale and when that sale was set aside. He made some repairs but "made very little use of the premises, getting very little income from them," the document says.

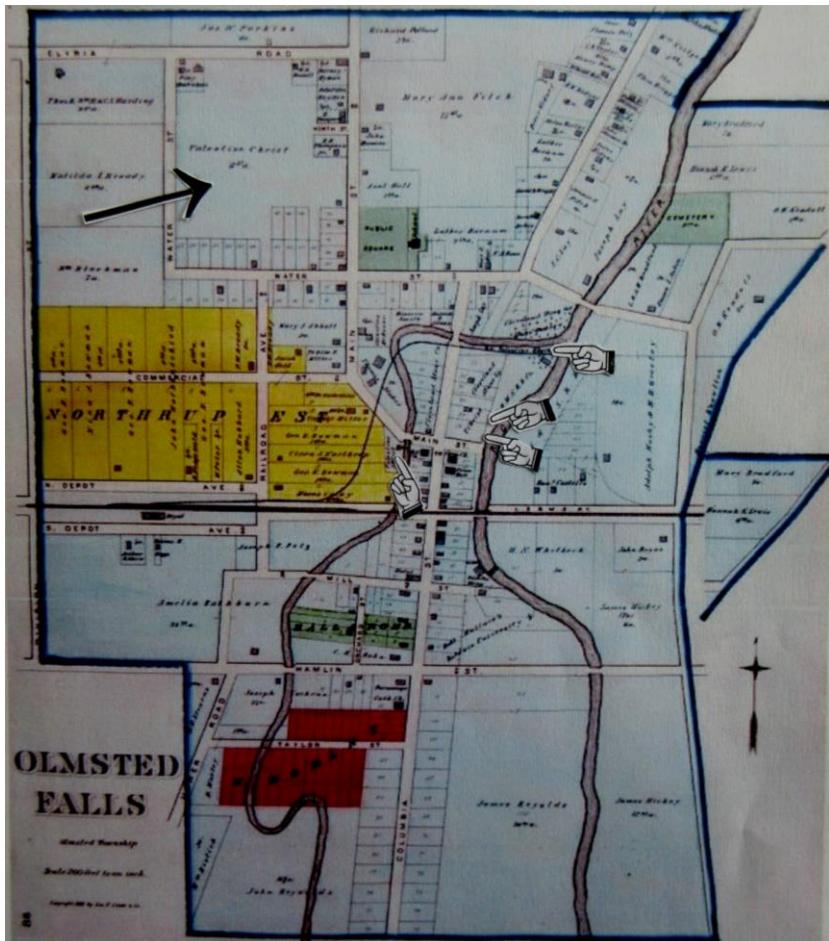
"Some time after the administrator's sale was set aside a new petition was filed by her [Jane Lay] in the probate court for authority to sell, and Christ was made a defendant in that proceeding, which was proper, because of his rights under the tax sales," the court said. Jane Lay tried to recover rent from Christ for about 12 years during which she claimed he had use of the premises. Christ maintained that he had a lien against the property because of his payment of taxes and the repairs he had made.



With this order, Probate Court Judge Henry C. White appointed Jane Lay to be administratrix of her late husband's estate on January 6, 1890.

After the case was tried in probate court, it was appealed to common pleas court, which ruled against Christ. But the appellate court found in 1908 – 23 years after Samuel A. Lay's death – that that ruling was in error.

"In making this finding we do not hold that the administrator was ever entitled to the possession of the premises; Mrs. Jane Lay had, under the will, a right to a home on these premises," the appellate judges ruled. "She had no other right in the premises, she having waived her dower."



The big arrow on the upper left of this 1892 Olmsted Falls map points to the land formerly owned by the late Samuel A. Lay and claimed by Valentine Christ. The small hands point to four other Olmsted Falls properties owned by Christ.

Two properties were located about where the Moosehead restaurant and the parking lot next to it are now. The fourth was just east of Plum Creek and south of what now is Columbia Road (then called Main Street).

A later map in 1903 shows Christ as still the owner of Samuel A. Lay's former homestead, but by 1914, another map shows the land then belonged to Thomas Stokes,

The appellate court found that only Frank Lay could have claimed the right to possess the premises. However, in the end, Christ seems to have gotten the property somehow.

An 1892 Olmsted Falls map shows Christ was considered the property's owner at that time. He also was shown as the owner of four more Olmsted Falls properties. One was a narrow strip that ran between Plum Creek and the railroad spur that carried cut sandstone out of the Cleveland Stone quarry (about where the walking path along the creek between Main Street and Rocky River in David Fortier River Park lies now).

the longtime operator of a sawmill at the falls along Plum Creek, and the property was down to 18 acres.

No records indicate that Valentine Christ ever lived at any of his properties in Olmsted Falls. Instead, his Olmsted Falls properties seemed to be just part of his large collection of land in the area. A 1910 obituary titled “Rich Recluse Is Dead” with a Cleveland dateline gave this account of his life:

Valentine Christ, 70 years old, eccentric millionaire land owner, died at the home of his niece here. Christ died from a complication of diseases resulting partly from many years in foul atmosphere and unsanitary surroundings and from insufficient nourishment. It was only a few months ago that he would consent to go to his niece. For years he suffered from asthma, but denied himself the pure air of any of his 190 farms, so that he could be downtown to collect his rents.

That obituary gives Christ’s age at death as 70, although records from Saint John Cemetery in Cleveland indicate he was born in 1841, so he would have been no more than 69 when he died. No matter what his age was, the obituary indicates he was like an Ebeneezer Scrooge character who was more interested in accumulating wealth (and land) than even his own health. Perhaps he would have been healthier and lived longer if he had taken up residence on one of his Olmsted Falls properties.

However, unlike Scrooge, a public record shows Christ was married at one time. The marriage record dated June 30, 1869, when he would have been about 28, shows he married Elizabeth Enghart, who was listed as being at least 18 years old, although her exact age wasn’t given. No other information seems to be available about her or their marriage.

The house where Samuel A. Lay, as well as his two wives, lived now has the address of 7622 Columbia Road. Some sources say it was built in 1845, which would mean it was there when Samuel and Lucetta Lay arrived about a dozen years later. The house is considered one of the best examples of Greek Revival style architecture in Olmsted Falls. It originally was shaped like an “L” with two stories. Additions in the 1890s and the 1930s expanded it. A barn, which had hand-hewn beams, was moved to the property in 1921, but it later was removed.



This house at 7622 Columbia Road is where Samuel A. Lay and his two wives lived in the late 19th century.

Both Samuel A. Lay and his son, Samuel (with no known middle initial), reportedly lived at the house, although it’s not clear when the younger one lived there.

The Other Brother Lay Stayed and Led Olmsted

Samuel A. Lay's house was located next to the house, which has the current address of 7642 Columbia Road, that belonged to his eldest son, John Lay. John was an early partner with his brother Joseph in making rakes



and other tools before Joseph established his broom-making company. Unlike Joseph, John stayed in Olmsted Falls and eventually served as mayor, as the April 13, 1888, edition of the *Berea Advertiser* reported: "It is Mayor John Lay now – shake."

In the forefront is the house at 7642 Columbia Road where John Lay lived. To the rear on the right is the house where his father, Samuel A. Lay, lived.

the daughter of Henry and Amy (Romp) Barnum. They had four daughters. One of them, Alice, married Chauncey Wright, and another, Emma, married a man from western Olmsted Township, Charles W. Harding, who served as both a teacher and superintendent of the Union Schoolhouse on the Village Green for about 20 years. He was the grandfather of Charles A. Harding for whom the covered bridge on Main Street is named.

John and Parmelia's other two daughters, Harriet (known as Hattie) and May, worked as teachers in Olmsted for many years. Walter Holzworth wrote in his 1966 Olmsted history that they eventually moved to Hawaii, where Hattie continued to teach.

On July 28, 1893, the *Berea Advertiser* reported: "Mayor John Lay is still laid up with some kidney affection [sic]. His many friends hope to see him out soon." But his many friends were disappointed. The August 4, 1893, *Advertiser* carried a story with the headline: "MAYOR JOHN LAY DEAD." Here is what it reported:

The Falls has suffered another loss. Mr. John Lay died at his home Monday, July 31, 1893. The funeral took place at the residence Wednesday and the remains were placed in the vault on Turkeyfoot. Mr. Lay was one of the foremost citizens of this town connected with its history and growth for many years. He came here with his family when quite young, and married Miss Permelia Barnum, one of the pioneer families of the township. His family of four daughters and the widow have the sympathy of the community. Mr. Lay was 67 years old and Mayor of the town at the time of his death. Although suffering from kidney trouble, his death was unexpected and a great shock to his friends.

Mrs. Lay and family feel doubly greatful [sic] for the many courtesies shown them in their time of grief.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include the next part of the series about Olmsted's inventors and more.

If you know of other people 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. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, 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. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted's history that you would like to have pulled out of *Olmsted 200*'s extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information or photos about the community's history that you would like to share.

If you have missed any of the past issues of *Olmsted 200* or want to share them with someone else, all of them can be found on Olmsted Township's website. Go to <http://olmstedtownship.org/newsletters/>. A list of *Olmsted 200* issues is on the right side. Click on the number of the issue you want to read. All of the issues of *Olmsted 200* also are available on the website of the City of Olmsted Falls. Find them at: http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted_falls_history/index.php. A link to *Olmsted 200* can be found on the left side of the page.

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. Thanks go to Mary Louise King for help 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 Angelina's Pizza in Olmsted Falls and the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.

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