



Olmsted 200

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

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Heckers Built a Stable Home in a Barn

If you had passed by the corner of Mill Street and Orchard Street in Olmsted Falls 75 years ago, you could have witnessed the transformation of an almost century-old building from a home for animals to a home for people.

Other people at another time might not have thought of doing that. The stone stable on that corner was old and decrepit. Carved in a stone inset above the doorway was the date 1854, the year of the building's construction – two years before Olmsted Falls incorporated as a village. But Dale and Dorothy Hecker were desperate for a home of their own.

Dale Hecker and Dorothy Graf Hecker, seen in these photos from the early 1940s, lived with her parents after World War II, but they wanted a home of their own in Olmsted Falls. After having trouble finding one in the post-war housing shortage, they made a home out of a stone barn built almost a century earlier.



In 1946, they weren't quite newlyweds, but they hadn't spent much time together since their wedding on September 7, 1941, in Painesville. World War II took Dale away

to serve in the Army for almost three years from December 5, 1942, until November 27, 1945. While he was stationed in Guam, Dorothy went to Florida to live with her sister and give birth to the Heckers' son, also named Dale.



Edward and Kathryn Graf acquired the house at the corner of Columbia Road and Mill Street in the middle of the 20th century when it already was a century old.

Olmsted Falls, like many communities in the years immediately after World War II, had a shortage of housing to meet the demand from all the newly returned young servicemen and their families. Dale and Dorothy Hecker couldn't find a place of their own, so they stayed with her parents, Edward and Kathryn Graf. The Grafs had moved from Lakewood to Olmsted Falls in 1936, and in 1945, they moved into a house at 8134 Columbia Road at the corner of Mill Street. That happened to be one of the oldest buildings in Olmsted Falls.

The Grafs' house was built by William Waring about 1830, just 15 years after the first settlers moved into Olmsted Township. In recent years, it was known as the French restaurant, Le Bistro du Beaujolais, until that business closed a couple of years ago.

(Plans are for a new restaurant to move in there soon.) In his 1966 book on Olmsted history, Walter Holzworth wrote that the house was "a pretentious dwelling" in its early days. However, its' stylishness didn't prevent a horse from running into a side door and out the back door, according to one story from the early 1800s.

By 1874, Sylvester Alcott acquired the house. Until his death on August 31, 1882, he and his brother, Levi, operated a sawmill at the waterfalls along Plum Creek. In the early years of the 1900s, Alcott's widow sold the house and property to James Burns. He ran a store next door on the first floor of the Odd Fellows Hall (later the



This house at 8134 Columbia Road has had many owners since it was built more 190 years ago. Through most of the early years of the 21 century, it housed Le Bistro du Beaujolais. In the middle of the 20th century, it was the home of Edward and Kathryn Graf. For two years, they also housed their daughter and son-in-law, Dorothy and Dale Hecker, there.



This photo, titled "An Old Landmark 1854 Olmsted Falls," shows the barn as it was in the 19th century. Note the pigeon house on top and stone wall along Mill Street.

captain named Ott, but Burns kept the store and barn. Burns moved into a large, square home he built on the southeast corner of Pineway Drive and Bagley Road. Later, he moved to Berea.

By 1946, the stone barn wasn't as indispensable as it had been just a few decades earlier. It was in bad shape. In different circumstances, it might have been torn down. But after Dale and Dorothy Hecker – tired of living with her parents in the former Waring house – failed to find a home of their own, they took new interest in the stone barn. Somehow, they saw its possibilities as a residence.



"Our new home – 1946 – needs a bit of work -- inside & out," Dorothy Hecker wrote above these photos from winter 1946.



Dorothy Hecker titled the left photo "Back – into Garage Area" and the right photo "Front on Mill Street."

"It was jammed with 'stuff,'" Dorothy Hecker said in a 1948 *Cleveland News* story written by Cornelia Curtiss. In addition, the upper floor was weak, and the roof was old and unstable. Nevertheless, they got to work fixing it.

Fortunately, her father, Edward Graf, was an engineer, so he drew up plans to strengthen the beams and joists, as well as for electrical wiring, and for making a home out of the barn. It took much hard work by Dale, Dorothy and Edward with cleanup assistance from Dorothy's mother, Kathryn. And it was dangerous. On April 15, 1947, as Dale was working on the second floor, the roof caved in, knocking him down to the first floor. He suffered a concussion.



This is the barn after the roof collapsed while Dale Hecker worked on the second floor, April 15, 1947.

“We kept right on,” Dorothy told the *Cleveland News*. “Dad, Dale, after he recovered, and I. Of course, we had to engage plumbers and electricians and a man to build the fireplace, but all the rest is our work.”



Under this pair of photos, Dorothy Hecker wrote: “Clean up mess – sheds in back torn down – roof debris.”

In a page from a scrapbook – shared with *Olmsted 200* by her daughter, Jamie Hecker – Dorothy wrote that the walls also had to be straightened. “Fire dept. shoved them in as hazardous to passersby,” she noted. “Dale mixed the cement (the hard way in a wheelbarrow) & I cemented the inside walls (loose rocks) sealing in assorted bugs and centipedes. Pop & Dale jacked up beams (gotten from old town hall) into their slots & 2nd floor & stairs were laid. The only outside help was the plastering of upstairs walls/ceilings (done by Uncle Earl) & the roofs – tho I did my share of shingling & later I pointed up the outside stone walls. Most construction was done by Dale & Pop.”

They completed work on the house in time to move in before Christmas 1947.

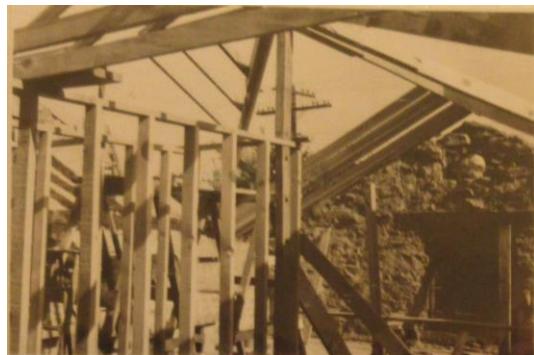
“The huge living room is walled in wormy chestnut, there are built-in niches and a desk surrounded by book shelves,” Curtiss wrote in her newspaper story. “Flagstones from the Graf garden went into the fireplace. The floor is cement covered with woven rugs. At right angles in a corner stand two army cots enclosed with wood to form a double davenport.”

Curtiss also noted that the Heckers had hung over the fireplace a painting of the barn in its original form. Credit for the painting went to Edward Ward, a local artist.

“Walls of the old barn are three feet thick,” Curtiss wrote. “Tiny windows in the original horse stalls were retained and form a row of tiny apertures at one side. Opposite are two deep recessed windows, the barn door space is filled with glass brick.”

The kitchen and dinette, located in an addition to the building, were blue and yellow. The second floor had three bedrooms and a bathroom.

Although the pigeon house that had been perched on the roof had fallen to pieces, Curtiss wrote, about 50 pigeons still congregated on the roof.



On a scrapbook page titled, “Evolution of a Barn to a Home,” Dorothy Hecker wrote that the pair of photos above show the second floor going up.



“Rafters going up” was the comment she wrote under this pair of photos.



“Roof on – kitchen added – nearing completion – 1947,” she wrote about these photos.

The Heckers used castoff pieces of construction material to create a playhouse in the yard for their children. At the time of the *Cleveland News* story, their daughter Leslye was six years old and son Dale was four. Not mentioned in the story was their second

daughter, Jamie, who was born later.



The 1949 photo on the left shows the stone wall that Dorothy Hecker built on the Orchard Street side of the building just off the kitchen they added. The 2021 photo on the right shows the wall back on the Mill Street side, as it was in the 19th century photo at the top of page 3.

Curtiss wrote that Dorothy was taking a ceramics class, so she could make special lamps for the house.

“And she is always busy with visitors,” Curtiss said. “Neighbors always like to bring guests over to see the old landmark which the owners have taken to calling ‘Hecker’s Stable.’”

One change the Heckers made after they turned the barn into a home was to move a stone wall from the Mill Street side of the building to the Orchard Street side. A later owner moved it back to the Mill Street side. Jamie Hecker just realized that earlier this year while looking at photos.



According to the back of this photo, it was taken by professional photographer Henry Barr of Berea.

“It’s on the Mill Street side,” she said. “When my parents owned this, it was on the Orchard Street side, and my mother built that wall on the Orchard Street side, and whoever currently lives in the house moved it back to the Mill Street side. I think that was fascinating. When I grew up there, it was on the Orchard Street side.”

According to the back of this photo, it was taken by professional photographer Henry Barr of Berea.

Jamie Hecker’s ability to share many photos of her childhood home is not only because her mother kept a good scrapbook but also because she had connections with a man who ran a photography studio in Berea for many years.

“My mother worked part-time for Henry Barr,” she said. “They used to tint pictures, colorize them. They would take black-and-white pictures, and then they would colorize them. She did that for him. So when the barn was finished – I’m sure these are his – he came over and took pictures of the inside of the barn when it was finished. These pictures must have been a little later because I’m born. I’m a baby, and so it’s my

whole family inside the house probably in 1949 or 1950."



These photos are from the 1948 Cleveland News story about the Heckers' house. On the upper left, Dorothy reads to her children, Leslye and Dale, in front of the glass block window and next to the built-in chestnut desk. On the upper right, they stand by the fireplace next to the painting by Edward Ward of the building as it looked when it was a barn. To the lower left, Dorothy cuts grass next to the three-foot-thick walls and near the outside of the glass block window. The building was her home for about 30 years. Below

right is a Christmas card the family used with a photo of themselves in the living room of the house. The photo likely was taken by Henry Barr, who ran a photography studio in Berea and employed Dorothy Hecker part-time.





Here are two more photos taken inside the house, quite likely by Henry Barr. The whole Hecker family is seen in the one on the left. Note the painting of the building as a barn above the fireplace. The right photo shows Dorothy and Dale Hecker with what looks like an aquarium.

The homes at the corner of Columbia Road and Mill Street and at the corner of Mill Street and Orchard Street served the Graf and Hecker families for about three decades. Although Edward Graf died in 1963, his widow Kathryn stayed in their house until about 1975, when she went into a nursing home. She died in 1977. However, several years earlier in 1969, she deeded her property over to the Heckers.

Dale Hecker, who was born in 1915, died in 1975 and is buried at the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery in Olmsted Falls. Dorothy sold both of the Olmsted Falls properties in 1977, when she moved to Pennsylvania. She died there in 2006 and was cremated.

About her former home in Olmsted Falls, she wrote in her scrapbook, “Tho small for a growing family – I loved our odd stone fortress – it was unique.”

Many thanks go to Jamie Hecker for reaching out to Olmsted 200 and sharing the story and photos of her family and the two historic homes her parents and grandparents owned.

Story Reveals Significance of Civil War Book

The story in Issue 98 of *Olmsted 200* about Civil War veteran Hudson Fitch, who grew up in Olmsted and survived the South’s deadliest prisoner-of-war camp at Andersonville, Georgia, caught the interest of Tom Atkinson, a descendant of the Fitch and Atkinson families. It shed new light on a book he has that belonged to Elisha Fitch, one of the original Fitch brothers who moved to Olmsted Township, in 1831.

The book, *Life and Death in Rebel Prisons* by Sergeant Major Robert H. Kellogg of the Connecticut Volunteers, was published in 1865. It provides a “history of the human and barbarous treatment of our brave soldiers by rebel authorities, inflicting terrible suffering and frightful mortality, principally at Andersonville, Ga., and Florence, S.C.”

The book describes plans of escape and the arrival of prisoners, along “with numerous and varied incidents and anecdotes of prison life.”



THE MIDNIGHT STORM: OUR MISERABLE LODGINGS.—PAGES 196-213

This illustration from Life and Death in Rebel Prisons shows Union prisoners suffering through a thunderstorm without protection.

Atkinson wrote that it is the only book he can confirm belonged to Elisha Fitch because of his signature inside the cover. Previously, Atkinson had wondered why the book's subject was of particular interest to Elisha Fitch and his wife Mary Ann, and now he knows.



This signature inside the cover of the book is proof for Tom Atkinson that his ancestor, Elisha Fitch, owned the book.

“Elisha Fitch would have been an Uncle to both Smith Webster Fitch (son of Chester Fitch) and Marie Sabra Fitch (daughter of Eli Fitch) and therefore Hudson Arthur Fitch would have been Elisha’s nephew,” Atkinson wrote. “Thanks again for your time, research and documenting Olmsted’s ancestors and history!”

For more on the role of the Fitch family in early Olmsted history, see Issue 15 of *Olmsted 200* from August 2014.

Thanks go to Tom Atkinson for contributing the photos and information for this story.

Olmsted Has a New Sign of Service

Fewer families have been more associated with the history of the Olmsted Falls City School District than the Atkinson family. The family will remain associated with the school system thanks to a recent action by the school board, which has renamed the school bus garage on Schady Road as the Atkinson Transportation Facility.

The immediate reason for the designation in July was a tribute to more than four decades of service to the school system by Tim Atkinson. He retired at the end of the month from his position as the district's director of business affairs.



The school bus garage on Schady Road is now the Atkinson Transportation Facility.

But Tim was just the latest in a long line of Atkinsons who have served the school district. Notably, the Atkinson family ran the school district's bus system for several decades during the 20th century. In the beginning, Chester Atkinson became one of three owner-operators of school buses in 1934. By 1940, the school system needed four buses, and Chester, with his brother Bruce, won the rights to operate all four. In 1947, they began building the bus garage on Schady Road.



Tom Atkinson, who contributed to the previous story, is on the left. His cousin, Tim Atkinson, who just retired from the school system, is on the right. This photo was taken July 4, 2014, at the Olmsted Cornerstone Festival.

By the time Chester Atkinson retired in 1973, his company operated 13 buses for the school system. His son, Chester Jr., took over briefly, but in 1975, the school system decided to own and operate all buses itself. In 1981, the school board bought the Schady Road facility.

For a more complete story of the Atkinson family's role in busing for schools in Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township, see Issue 5 of *Olmsted 200* from October 2013.

A Priest Got Things Moving 150 Years Ago

A small move 150 years ago this month had a big effect on the layout of downtown Olmsted Falls for all the years that followed.

Berea's *Grindstone City Advertiser* on August 25, 1871, marked the occasion this way: "Priest Filiere [sic] has purchased the old Stone House, and four acres of land, and is repairing and fixing up with a new slate roof – making for himself a fine residence."

The priest referred to there was Father Louis Filiere, who had arrived in 1856 to establish a Roman Catholic church in Olmsted Falls. In 1858, he established St. Mary's of the Falls Church on the northern end of the downtown area. The church might have stayed in that location, but in 1873, Filiere and his parishioners rolled the church building down the street to the southern end of downtown. Filiere's decision to establish his own home in an existing stone house at that location in 1871 was a prologue for what happened to the church.

The reason for moving Filiere's home and the church might have been the startup about 1870 of sandstone quarries nearby in what now is David Fortier River Park. The quarry activities would have been dusty and noisy, and thus, not what Filiere wanted to have next door.

Many years later, the Olmsted Community Church built its facility on the site abandoned by the Catholics. That is how Olmsted Falls ended up with a large Protestant church at the northern end of downtown and a large Catholic one on the other end.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include stories about the coming of telephone service to Olmsted, football and more related to the history of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township.

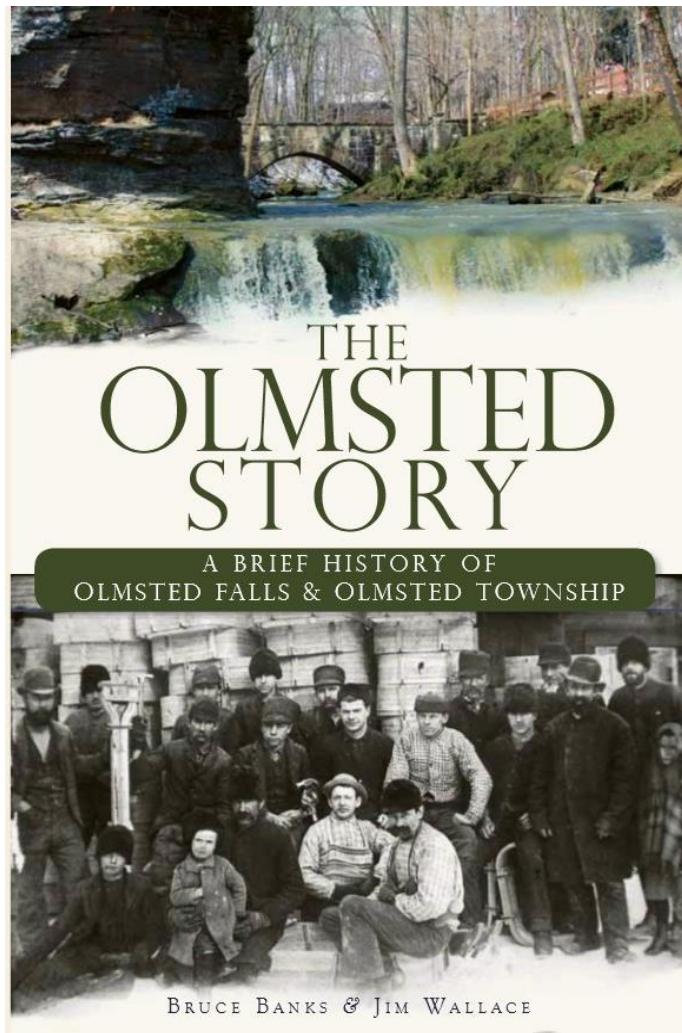
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Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted's history that you would like to have pulled out of *Olmsted 200*'s extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information or photos about the community's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