



Olmsted 200

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

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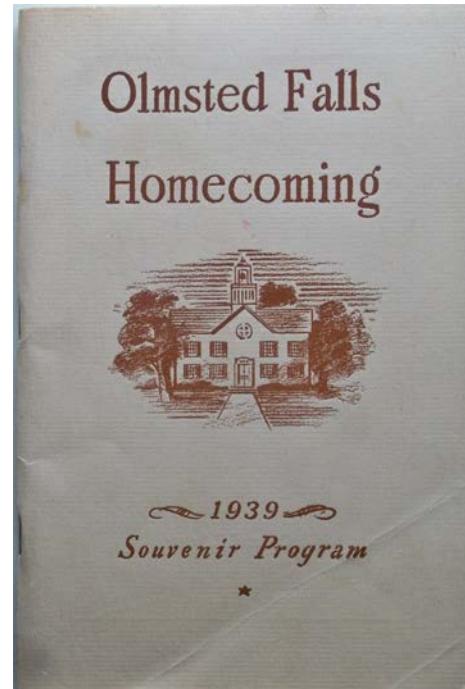
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Olmsted Had a Memorable Homecoming Eighty Years Ago

Olmsted Heritage Days, being held this year from August 1 through August 4, has been an annual festival based at Grand Pacific Junction for the better part of three decades now. But such gatherings in Olmsted go back almost a century, and one of the biggest in the early years was held 80 years ago this month.

The Eighteenth Annual Olmsted Falls Homecoming was held August 11 through 13, 1939. Friday and Saturday activities were on the grounds of the community's single school – now Olmsted Falls City Hall and Olmsted Community Center – at the corner of Bagley Road and Mapleway Drive. Sunday activities were mainly at the Village Green.

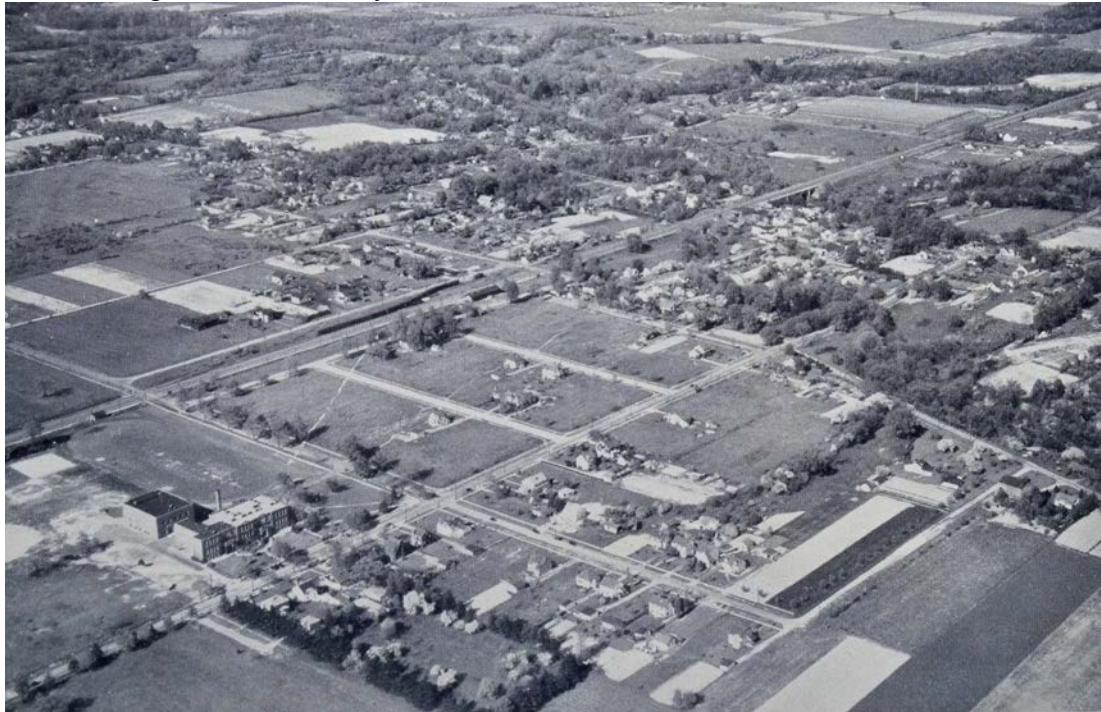
The 1939 Homecoming was notable not only for being a big festival but also because organizers published a 76-page (including front and back covers) souvenir program that included essays about different aspects of Olmsted history and many photographs that preserved what Olmsted looked like at that time. Thanks to that program, we know that the annual community homecomings were an outgrowth of a 1920 reunion of former pupils of



This is a copy of the 1939 Homecoming's souvenir program.

Olmsted Falls High School that attracted 35 persons. In 1921, the people involved in that reunion decided to hold annual events open not only to those who had attended the high school but also to all Olmsted residents and former residents.

“From that time on the Homecomings have become an important event in the community life,” A.B. Holton of the Olmsted Falls Homecoming Association wrote. “Beginning in 1922 these celebrations took the form of our present activities with the Sports and Games being on the program on Saturday afternoon, and the reunion program in the Village Park on Sunday afternoon.”



The 1939 Homecoming program included this aerial view of Olmsted Falls.



This was the scene in downtown Olmsted Falls in 1939.

One of the biggest photos in the booklet is an aerial view of Olmsted Falls looking east with the school building in the lower left and the center of the village up and to the right. Compared to today's Olmsted Falls, it is remarkable for the many open spaces that were filled later with housing developments during the years after World War II.

Another photo showed the business district along Columbia Road, but the only building not blocked by trees was Simmerer & Sons' Hardware in the building now occupied by the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Sam A. Jaeger, editor of the souvenir Program, wrote four historical essays: “A Word

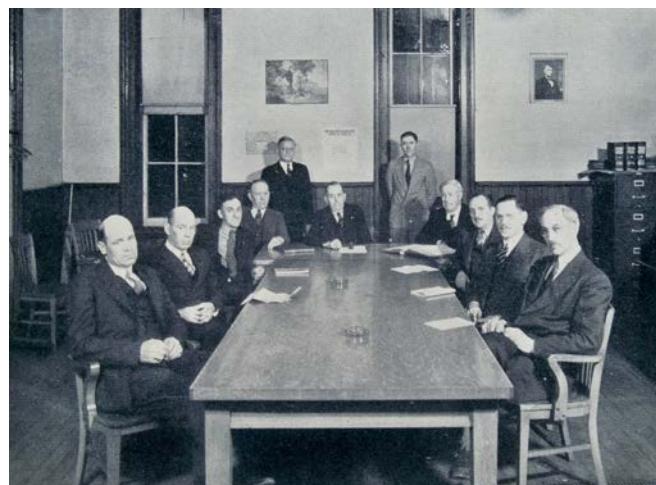
Picture of Olmsted Falls Village and Olmsted Township,” “The Big Little Red Schoolhouse,” and histories of the Olmsted Falls Fire Department and the Kiwanis Club.

The first one was a history of the village and township that seemed to be based largely on the history of Olmsted found in Crisfield Johnson’s 1879 book, *History of Cuyahoga County, Ohio*, with several paragraphs added to bring the history up through the years of the early 20th century. But Jaeger misinterpreted what Johnson wrote about the settling of Olmsted Township, and that error seems to have been responsible for the claim by Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township that they were founded in 1814. In that year, James Geer of Columbia Township merely planted a small crop of corn across the borderline. Although Johnson stated in three ways that it wasn’t until 1815 that Geer and his family built a cabin and moved into Olmsted Township (not yet named Olmsted) to become the township’s first settlers, Jaeger wrote that Geer “settled” in the township in 1814. Since then, the communities have claimed to have been founded in 1814. (For more on this subject, see Issue 14 of *Olmsted 200* from July 2014.)

In his last several paragraphs, he accounted for how Olmsted made “the transition from an independent, hustling, farming, and industrial community to a suburb of Cleveland.” Jaeger wrote that the coming of the automobile and better roads played a role, but so did “the formation of large industrial corporations” in the big city that small firms could not compete with.

“It was about the year 1905 that Cleveland people first began to cast eyes toward this section as a future home,” he wrote. “The movement was slow at first and there were few changes in the next ten or fifteen years. In this time natural gas and electricity were made available to the citizens of the community and gradually more and more new people from Cleveland and other points came to make their home with us.”

Jaeger devoted quite a bit of space to praising George Spaulding, who then was mayor, for his accomplishments in office, including paving Main Street, building many sidewalks, installing a new electric lighting system and a municipal water system, purchasing new fire department equipment, adopting a



The program included this photo of Olmsted Falls village officers showing, from left to right: Councilman John Smith, Councilman Charles Bonsey, Council President Roy Hecker, engineer J.R. Cloyd, treasurer A.C. Berry, Mayor George Spaulding, Marshal George Renton, clerk James Scroggie, Councilman E.M Jenkins, Councilman A.H. Staten, Councilman E.E.Breisch and solicitor George Darmstatter.



Illustrating Olmsted's beauty, one page showed these photos of Rocky River looking south from Lewis Road (top) and Rocky River and the park looking south from the Water Street Bridge.

too small for any other purpose than to accomodate [sic] the chairs and tables for the trustees and a few seats for spectators."

Jaeger concluded his essay by saying: "When, in our busy and strenuous life of today, we hesitate and contemplate our many blessings and realize what a beautiful spot we are permitted to call home, we do not wonder that the first settlers chose the confluence of Rocky River and Plum Creek for their new home that we now call

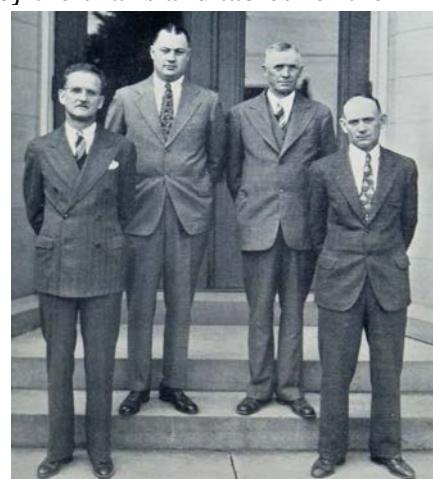
OLMSTED FALLS."

Jaeger wrote "The Big Little Red Schoolhouse" about the Union Schoolhouse that stood on the Village Green (until 1960) as though the building was telling its own story in first person by relating it through him. The building, which opened in 1874, served as a school for four decades before becoming unsafe. In 1915, the village and the

zoning ordinance, appointing a planning commission, and purchasing "many acres of land along Rocky River and Plum Creek for the development of our fine little park system."

Expanding further on the last point, Jaeger wrote, "Our parks not only have natural beauty, being situated along scenic Rocky River, but improvements have been made in the line of fine picnic grounds, facilities for swimming, and grounds for athletics."

Similarly, Jaeger praised the services of Olmsted Township trustees for having "at all times been constructive and praiseworthy." He also noted that the current trustees were constructing a new Township Hall at the corner of Fitch Road and Cook Road. "When completed, this building will be the center of township activity, in that it will provide a central location in which to hold Trustee meetings and elections, and will adequately house township records," he wrote. However, it did not take long for Township Hall to be found to be far from adequate. As Walter Holzworth wrote in his 1966 book on Olmsted history, "The building was pleasing in design but far



Olmsted Township officials were, from left, Clyde Rennecker, clerk-treasurer, and Trustees Harold Otterson, Watkin Lewis and Archie Barnard.

township merged their school districts and then built a new consolidated school at the corner of what now is Bagley Road and Mapleway Drive. It opened in 1916. After the old schoolhouse sat idle for four years, the village bought it and renovated it to serve as the village hall. By 1939, it also served as a meeting place for the Masonic Lodge and the Eastern Star.

In other essays, Mina Staten wrote about the history of the local Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and 4-H Club, Mrs. S.W. Jennings wrote about the history of the Olmsted Grange, the Rev. Arthur Decker wrote about the history of the Olmsted Community Church, the Rev. Joseph Walsh wrote about the history of St. Mary's of the Falls Catholic Church, Pauline Breisch wrote about the history of the Olmsted Falls Chapter 531 of the Order of the Eastern Star, Marshall Laird wrote about the history of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows Number 264 and its auxiliary Rebekah Lodge Number 393, Helen Sohl wrote about the history of the Olmsted Falls Parent-Teacher Organization, Wilbur Smith wrote about the history of the Olmsted Falls School, and a committee wrote about the history of the Olmsted Falls Lodge Number 705 of the Free and Accepted Masons.



The school board included: Mrs. Elmer Hall, J.H. Schick (president), Dr. D.V. Kechale (all seated), Charles Barnum and Gordon Muttersbaugh, with Aubrey Billings as clerk.



The old Union Schoolhouse then served as Olmsted Falls Village Hall in 1939.

The program included 25-and-a-half pages of advertisements ranging in size from an eighth of a page to a full page from various local businesses in Olmsted Falls, Olmsted Township, North Olmsted, Berea, Columbia Station, Strongsville and Cleveland. It also listed 63 patrons over two pages. They included many Olmsted residents at the time, but almost half of the listings were for former residents who had moved away to other communities in Ohio or to other states, including Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin and California.

Notable among them was Mrs. J.P. Peltz of 2218 Yosemite Drive, Eagle Rock, California. That was Minnie Peltz, second wife of Joseph Peltz, who operated drug and hardware stores in Olmsted Falls for decades, either on his own or in partnership with his brother-in-law, Philip Simmerer. The Peltzes moved to the Los Angeles area in 1920. Joseph Peltz died in 1938, but Minnie's listing as a patron in the souvenir program in 1939 indicated that she still was in touch with friends in Olmsted Falls.

The Homecoming activities began on Friday evening, August 11, from 8:00 to 10:15 with four movies shown for free in the auditorium of the Olmsted Falls School. The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company provided the projector and its operator, as well as the first movie, "The Coal Bin of America." Other movies included "Nobody's Fool" with Edward Everett Horton from Universal Pictures, an Andy Clyde comedy called "Shopping with Wifie," and one called "A Capitol Idea" about Washington, D.C., as seen through the eyes of the Easy Aces, characters in a popular radio comedy series of the time.

"Through the generous check for \$25.00 sent by Mr. Geo. B. Dryden of Chicago, children attending the movie will receive free ice cream immediately after the show," the program said. "With the donation Mr. Dryden notes that he was born in Olmsted Falls July 6, 1869, and recalls fondly his early associations here. We thank you, Mr. Dryden, on behalf of all Olmsted Falls children."

The activities on Saturday, August 12, were held on the school grounds beginning at noon with concessions and "Amplified Recorded Music." A sports program that began at 2:00 included 15 contests for participants of various ages from small children up to adults. A "Base Ball Game" at 3:30 pitted the "Coffee-Pot Dodgers" (married men) against the "Olmsted Falls Cubs" (single men). At 4:30, Parker's Ranch staged a rodeo. At 5:00, the "Amplified Recorded Music" resumed with sandwiches, coffee and other refreshments for sale.

That evening beginning at 8:00, two programs were held inside the school. The auditorium had "Modern Dancing," which included music from Bob Hagedorn's Rhythm Riders, as well as waltz and jitterbug contests. It cost just five cents per couple. Meanwhile, the cafeteria had "Old Time Dancing" with music from the Billie Brandt Orchestra, as well as an "Old Fashion Prize Waltz." Tickets for that cost 25 cents per person.

On Sunday, August 13, the day began with masses at St. Mary's at 7:30 and 10:30 and a worship service at Olmsted Community Church at 10:30. At noon, a dinner was provided at what was called the "Community House – River Street Circle" at a cost of 50 cents for adults and 25 cents for children under age 12. From 1:00 to 6:00, the chamber of the Village Council in the old Union Schoolhouse building was the location for an exhibit of community mementoes. At 2:00, a commemorative program that included prayers, singing and an address by Cleveland Mayor Harold Burton was held on the Village Green.

At 4:30, Ella Hendrickson Sinclair was scheduled to ring the bell of the schoolhouse and then welcome many of her former students in what then was the meeting room for the Masonic Lodge. At the same time, S.W. Jennings was also to be on hand to greet his former pupils. The program gave this advice: "Brush up, you 'OLD TIMERS,' on your 'Readin', Writin' and Rithmatic."



Also included in the souvenir program were photos of the mostly female Parent-Teacher Association (left) and the all-male Kiwanis Club. In the right photo, Sam Jaeger, who wrote four essays and edited the program, is the third man from the left in the back row.

The 1939 Homecoming occurred just a few weeks before World War II began in Europe on September 1. A little more than two years after that, the United States entered the war, bringing changes for Olmsted and the rest of the country. Dozens of young men and women from Olmsted served in the war, and 17 of them lost their lives in it.



Although the photo on the left, courtesy of Denny Shirer, was taken in 1955, the Village Green probably had changed very little in 16 years from when Sunday activities for the 1939 Homecoming were held there. In addition to the Union Schoolhouse in the background, a bandstand and a swing set can be seen in the foreground. On the right is a photo taken from the same vantage point on June 22, 2019. A basketball court has taken the place of the bandstand and the Schoolhouse Pavilion stands in place of the Union Schoolhouse, which was torn down in 1960.

Almost Everyone Got into the Annexation Act in the 1990s

After several years in the 1980s when Olmsted Falls and Berea each annexed about 200 acres of Olmsted Township land, efforts by the township's neighbors to grow at the township's expense only intensified as the eighties became the nineties. The only neighboring communities that didn't seek to annex Olmsted Township were those in Lorain County: North Ridgeville and Columbia Township. And one annexation proposal could have created perhaps the oddest-shaped community in Cuyahoga County.

The fight over the annexation of Flair Corporation land to Olmsted Falls (see Issue 73 of *Olmsted 200* for more) had not even ended when North Olmsted started

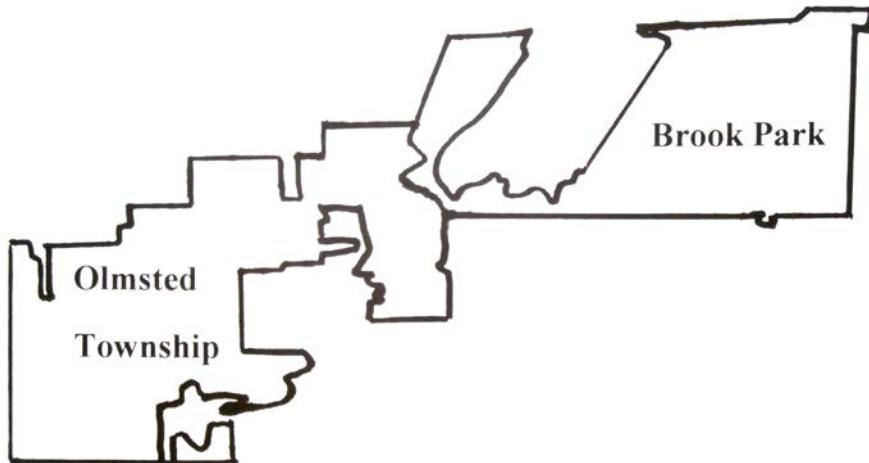
making noise late in the summer of 1988 about wanting to acquire a big section of the township.

“I would like to see North Olmsted include township land from the county line east down into the [Rocky River] valley,” Mayor Yvonne Petrigac told the *News Sun*. “Many homeowners in this area are tied into our city’s sewage system so we might as well have it.”

Petrigac went on to say she wanted North Olmsted to have more land for the development of upscale houses with large acreage, and she thought township land would be ideal for that. She figured township residents would have to decide at some time to annex to Olmsted Falls, Berea or North Olmsted. “And it might as well be us,” she said.

Of course, township officials disagreed. Trustee Robert Venefra pointed out that township residents had voted the previous November against setting up a study for a merger with Olmsted Falls. Nevertheless, by November 1988, some residents of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township began unofficial talks about the possibility of a merger. In May 1989, it was revealed that Venefra himself had been involved in those talks, along with Olmsted Falls Councilman Russell Schuster and school board member Carl Stewart, a township resident. They were serving as an unofficial steering committee working toward putting the issue on the ballot in November 1990.

“By forming this committee, we are sending a message to everyone that if we are going to get married, we would probably want to get married with Olmsted Falls,” Stewart told the *News Sun*.



If Olmsted Township had become part of the City of Brook Park, the combination would have created one of the oddest-shaped communities in Cuyahoga County.

Despite that declaration, a new suitor for the township emerged in July 1989 – Brook Park. Of all of the township’s neighbors, Brook Park had the smallest border with the township, and that border ran through Metroparks land, but it was enough to make the city’s proposed annexation of the township a possibility. Mayor Thomas Coyne expressed interest in not just the portion of the township closest to Brook Park in the

Lewis Road-Spafford Road area but the whole thing. He said his city could offer township residents lower property taxes, better services and a nice recreation center. He pledged that Brook Park would make fewer changes in the township than any other city that might annex it or merge with it, although he added that he looked at township land as prime territory for the construction of nicer homes on bigger lots, which some upwardly mobile Brook Park residents wanted.

At the time, Brook Park had about 26,000 residents on about eight square miles, while the township had about 7,800 residents on about 10 square miles.

Residents of the northeastern portion of the township closest to Brook Park expressed strong opposition to any merger. Those who had large lots and owned horses were especially adamant in their opposition out of fear of losing the quiet, rural nature of their area. However, residents in other parts of the township started to warm up to the idea, especially after Coyne held meetings with them in various township residents' homes.

By October 1989, North Olmsted Mayor Petrigac reasserted her interest in the township. Unlike Coyne, however, she didn't want the entire township – just everything north of Cook Road.

Within a few weeks, Berea Mayor Stanley Trupo expressed interest in annexing the entire township and began holding his own meetings with residents to discuss the matter. However, Berea City Council later indicated interest in taking only part of the township. Annexation of township land up to Lewis Road to Berea would have precluded the possibility that Brook Park could get any township land because that city no longer would be adjacent to the township.

That November, about 500 Olmsted residents attended a meeting at Olmsted Falls High School to hear a preliminary report from the Olmsted Township-Olmsted Falls Merger Study Committee. That committee found that a merger of the two communities would result in a small increase in costs for township residents, but they would receive better fire and police protection, emergency services, and enforcement of zoning and building regulations. After the meeting, Olmsted Falls Mayor Robert Kennedy told the *Elyria Chronicle-Telegram* he no longer would support requests to annex portions of the township to his city and would support only a complete merger of the two.

The reaction from the township trustees was not just to oppose the loss of any land to neighboring cities but to try to incorporate the township as a city on its own. They



Many residents of the northeastern corner of Olmsted Township are horse owners who are wary of any changes in government that might alter the rural nature of their area.

voted unanimously in January 1990 to attempt incorporation. But that wasn't as easy to do toward the end of the 20th century as it was decades earlier because of changes in state law. The only way for Olmsted Township to incorporate was to get permission to do so from each of the cities bordering it – the same cities that wanted to annex all or parts of the township. Olmsted Falls City Council gave its blessing to the township, but the mayors of Berea and Brook Park increased their efforts to get county land.

In April 1990, the Olmsted Falls-Olmsted Township Merger Study Committee – which included 12 township residents and 12 city residents – concluded 11 months of study by releasing a unanimous recommendation in favor of merger and putting the issue on the November 1991 ballot. Among the reasons the committee gave for the merger was that the two communities' operating costs would go down by as much as \$200,000 a year by operating as one community. Another reason was that the combined community would receive about \$180,000 annually from license and gasoline tax revenue that the township was sending to the county. In addition, the committee said property tax rates would go down for both communities because expanding the city's income tax to township residents would make up the difference.

In the summer of 1990, the Olmsted Township-Brook Park Merger/Annexation Panel, consisting of seven township residents, sent surveys to about 2,600 township voters. By September, 715 of them responded. That was less than one-third of the people who received the survey, and two-thirds of them opposed having the township become part of Brook Park.

The committee for an Olmsted Falls-Olmsted Township merger pushed forward. By May 1991, it filed petitions with the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections with signatures from 424 township residents and 335 city residents. The issue of whether to form an official commission to consider the merger of the township and the city went on the November 1991 ballot. During the weeks leading up to the election, residents advocated for and against the issue in letters to the editor and otherwise.

On Tuesday, November 5, the vote went the way previous such votes had gone. Olmsted Falls residents voted 1,801 to 220 in favor of establishing the commission, while township residents voted 1,606 to 1,466 against it. Residents in six township precincts voted in



Signs such as this one on Cedar Point Road could have been seen as far west and south as Lorain County's border with Cuyahoga County if Olmsted Township had become part of Brook Park.

favor of the merger commission. Those in another precinct voted 56 percent against it, and voters of the two precincts in Columbia Mobile Home Park were 86 percent against it. Gary Brookins, who then owned Columbia Park, had campaigned against the merger. Thus, it's possible that, if the question of merger was put before all township voters except those in Columbia Park, it might have been approved. But that wasn't the case, and merger opponents took the result of the election as definitive.

"This is a clear mandate from the people that they don't want to merge with Olmsted Falls," Paul Scheutzow, chairman of Citizens Opposed to Merger, told the *News Sun*. "They are also sending a message to Berea, North Olmsted and Brook Park that they don't want to merge with them either."

But Scheutzow didn't speak for all township residents. A few of them moved within days of the election to set up a meeting to discuss the possibilities of merging the township with North Olmsted, Brook Park or Berea. That didn't go anywhere right away, but annexation and merger efforts flared up with renewed intensity several months later. *Olmsted 200* will have more on that next month.

Olmsted Loses Links to the Past

About 90 years after developers planned a golf course surrounded by homes in northern Olmsted Township, a new developer plans to build 140 homes to replace a golf course. Valore Fine Homes of Westlake intends to create two developments – The Sanctuary of Olmsted with 51 80-foot-wide lots and The Preserve of Olmsted with 89 60-foot-wide lots – on the south side of John Road, where The Links golf course operated.



The fairways that once were groomed well at The Links have been growing unabated this year as Valore Fine Homes gets ready to replace the golf course with new houses.

In 1929, L.H. Heister, Jr., Inc. of Cleveland announced plans for Homelinks, a development that would have turned the former John Hall farm into a golf course with houses along at least three sides – "where every home has a golf course at its garden gate," as one newspaper ad put it. The development would have been bound on the north by Butternut Ridge Road, on the east by Columbia Road, and on the south by John Road. The onset of the Great Depression derailed plans, although Homelinks Golf Course was built on both the north and south sides of John Road. When The Renaissance was built in

the 1980s, the golf course was reconfigured to go around it and renamed The Links. The full story of Homelinks can be found in Issue 3 of *Olmsted 200* from August 2013.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include the next story about attempts to attach Olmsted Township land to neighboring communities and a story about memories of the heyday of Schady's Shell.

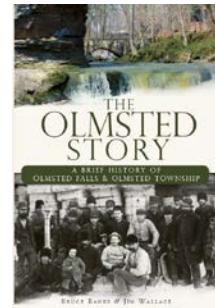
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Michigan, Wisconsin, New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Maine, 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. 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 Village Bean in Olmsted Falls and the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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