



Olmsted 200

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

Issue 67

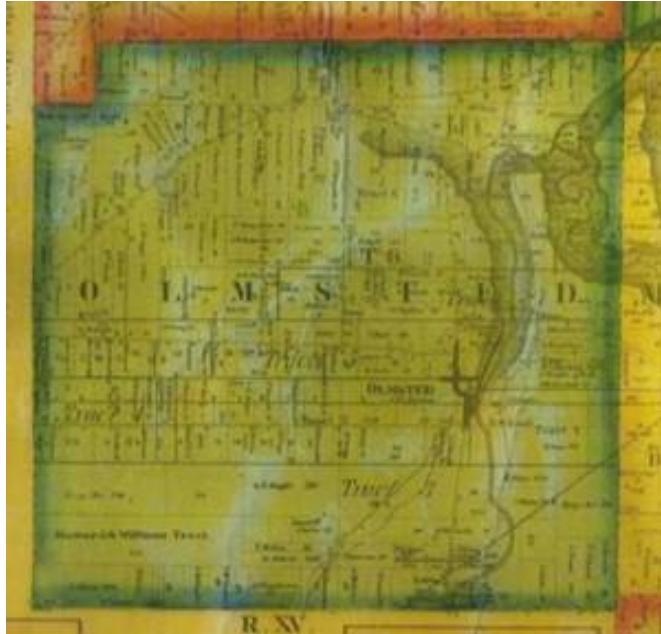
December 1, 2018

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North Olmsted Split from the Township 110 Years Ago

Olmsted Township became smaller 110 years ago and lost several hundred residents. That was the year, 1908, when people living in 10 square miles at the northern end of the township decided to break away. They set in motion a process that led to the creation of the Village of North Olmsted at the beginning of 1909.



Olmsted Township began as a compact square with five miles on each side. But sometime before 1858, when this map was published, the township lost a square piece from its northwestern corner. It is not clear why that section was removed and given to the next township to the north, Dover Township. When that happened also is a mystery. How it happened is likely buried somewhere in official records of either Cuyahoga County or the State of Ohio, but it was the only change in township territory until Olmsted Falls incorporated as a village in 1856.

When Olmsted Township was formed in the 1790s as Township 6, Range 15, of Connecticut's Western Reserve, it was a neat square of five miles on each side – or 25

square miles. In 1815, when James Geer and his family became the first settlers to move into the township from the south, members of the Stearns family soon joined them by settling in the northern section around Butternut Ridge, which now is part of North Olmsted.

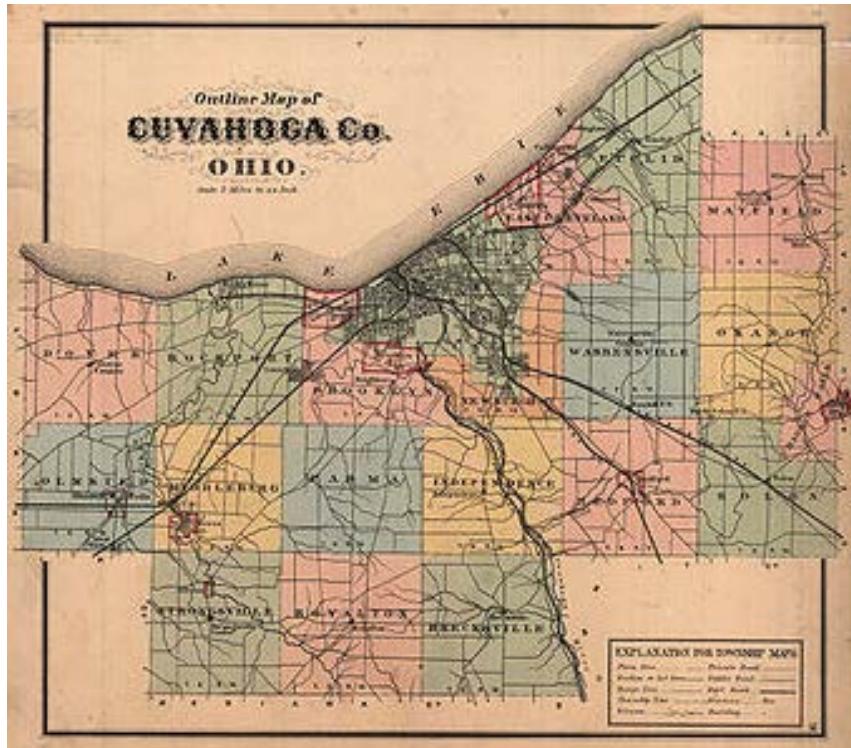
Sometime in the early to mid-1800s, Olmsted Township lost a square chunk off of its northwestern corner. How that happened and why might be written in some state or county records, but without them, it remains a mystery. That chunk now seems to be the southwestern corner of Westlake.

Other than that, during the next 94 years, the township stayed mostly intact with the notable exception of the incorporation of the Village of Olmsted Falls in 1856 and then, in 1857, the annexation of the little hamlet of Plum Creek, which doubled the size of the village but left most of the township untouched. However, when North Olmsted broke away, it took about 40 percent of the original township's territory.

It wasn't a sudden break. Just as decades of differences between northern states and southern states led to the Civil War, people in northern Olmsted Township took decades to grow apart from their southern neighbors before they decided to break away.

One of the earliest signs that people in the Butternut Ridge area wanted to be treated as separate from residents farther south in Olmsted Township came in 1880. In the February 12, 1880, issue of the *Berea Advertiser*, the Olmsted Falls columnist, who went by the initials, A.J.P., wrote:

A petition has been circulated, and is said to have received over 200 signers, having for its object the division of the township into two voting precincts, one located on Butternut Ridge and the other at the



This 1874 map shows several of Cuyahoga County's original townships still were mostly intact, including Olmsted Township, although the Village of Olmsted Falls had been carved out of it.

Falls. Some of our townsmen expressed themselves to the effect that if Butternut Ridge wished to withdraw let them retire; others say it is the first step towards hostility, and emphatically object.

One week later, in the February 19 edition of the paper, that same columnist wrote:

A remonstrance was circulated last week and received the signatures of nearly all the voters south of the dividing line, objecting to the proposed “split” in the township. It was sent to Columbus Monday. It seems difficult to educate some of the influential, who have taken an active part in the canvass to the belief that it was wrong to torture the Ridge people by associating with the Fall’s people on election days. Should the seceders succeed, the voters south of the line will probably unite and elect such township officers as they choose, so they are in the majority.

Another week later, the February 26 edition of the paper included a small item from someone going by the initials C.C. in response to the comment from A.J.P.:

...Will A.J.P. of Olmsted Falls, be so kind as to inform us in what the secession of which he spoke consists? The 18th Sec. of the proposed bill provides that “The territory north of said line shall be known as Olmsted precinct, and the territory south of said line shall be known as Olmsted Falls precinct.” Does that sound like seceding from Olmsted?

The Olmsted Falls columnist seemed to backtrack on his criticism and try to make peace in the March 4 edition.

“When we gave you the appellation of ‘seceders,’ we did not infer that you had severed all connections with the township, and intended to set up a little independent government of your own,” A.J.P. wrote. “The people of the Falls always considered Butternut Ridge to be the sunny part of Olmsted – do at present and trust they always will.” – Berea Advertiser columnist 1880

outside of the political arena.”

In hindsight, it is interesting to note that the columnist denied suggesting that northern Olmsted residents might intend to set up an independent government. The last item from A.J.P. might have brought a truce in the barbs exchanged between the two parts of the township, but the words heated up again two and a half years later.

In June 1882, the Olmsted Cornet Band, based in Olmsted Falls, played its first concert. Within a few months, another band was formed in the Butternut Ridge area. In a September 7, 1882, column with the dateline North Olmsted (rather than Butternut Ridge, which was a regular dateline in the paper), someone going by the pen name "Occasional" included this line: "The Butternut Ridge Cornet Band is making fine progress in a musical direction." Two weeks later, September 28, in the Olmsted Falls column, A.J.P. wrote: "The Olmsted Cornet Band were given a reception at Mr. Fortunes on the township line one evening last week; said to have been very enjoyable." Then in the October 12 edition, the Olmsted Falls column said: "The Olmsted Band were entertained at the residence of Mayor Barnum Wednesday of last week."

Those items about the two cornet bands might have been minor notices about the social life in Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls, except later in the October 12 Olmsted Falls column (presumably written by A.J.P. although it did not have those initials at the end), the writer included this putdown of the people at the northern end of the township:

Butternut Ridge can have a brass band if they want to; they can have all of the township offices, and lay miles of sidewalk if they choose; but if North Olmsted ever expects to keep apace with the Falls' enterprise, they must erect a couple of electric masts and a viaduct, and then wake up to find they are just a street railroad behind."

That comment turned out to be quite ironic, considering what would happen along Butternut Ridge more than a dozen years later. But in 1882, it seemed to be a reference to the presence of a railroad in Olmsted Falls that connected it to Cleveland to the east, as well as parts west, while Butternut Ridge did not have a railroad.

However, when that item appeared in the paper, the dispute was not over a railroad but over the desire by township trustees to build a Town Hall in Olmsted Falls. Some Butternut Ridge residents expressed concern that the proposed building would be larger than needed and would put the township too deeply in debt. Some people might have recalled when township government business was conducted in a building called Union Church, which was where Butternut Ridge Road and Cedar Point Road met Columbia Road (using its current name). That lasted until 1856, when



Olmsted Township built this Town Hall in 1882-1883 despite opposition from northern township residents. The Moosehead restaurant stands there now.

township officials relocated to the basement of the Methodist Episcopal Church (now the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel) in Olmsted Falls.

Despite the concerns of Butternut Ridge residents, the Town Hall project proceeded, but when it came time to dedicate the new building, northern Olmsted Township people wanted nothing to do with it.

As the *Advertiser* noted in its January 25, 1883, edition, a meeting was called for January 6 for planning “a grand celebration” for the dedication on Friday, January 19. “This meeting was quite generally attended by citizens of the village, but there was a noticeable absence of people from the north part of the township,” the newspaper reported. They also were absent from the dedication ceremony itself.

“Anticipating a general turnout, and a grand celebration our reporter was on the ground early, expecting to find the town all astir, with banners waving in the breeze and her streets crowded with citizens of Olmsted and adjoining townships,” the *Advertiser* reported. “It was ascertained however that owing to certain alleged misunderstandings between the residents of the north and south parts of the township that a number of citizens would not participate in the dedication.”

Thus, the dissatisfaction of northern Olmsted Township residents toward the rest of the township simmered in the 1880s. Then in the 1890s, a new development drove their affections further away from Olmsted Falls and the rest of the township. In 1893, two Berea men, feed store operator Leon Coe and banker Alson Pomeroy, got together in the interurban electric railroad business, the Cleveland & Berea Street Railway Company. As the name suggests, it started in Berea and expanded to connect Berea to Cleveland. In 1894, Coe petitioned Cuyahoga County to get a 25-year franchise to build an interurban railroad connecting Cleveland to Elyria. He arranged to have it routed along Coe Ridge, near where his grandfather, Asher Coe, had farmed in southeastern Dover Township, and then into northern Olmsted Township near Butternut Ridge.

Dover Township was the township that extended north of Olmsted Township to Lake Erie. Bay Village, Westlake and part of North Olmsted were carved out of it.

In his younger days, Leon Coe worked the farm his grandfather had established and participated in Dover Township political affairs. But he moved to Berea in 1886, when he bought out his brother-in-law’s ownership in a feed store. In addition to getting involved in the interurban railway, Coe served several terms on Berea Village Council and helped found the Cuyahoga County Fair.

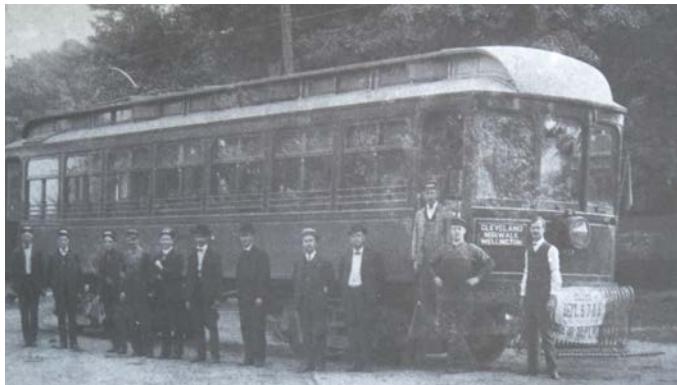


This photo of Leon Coe and Cora Beebe Coe is from about 1864.

One of the first big tasks for Coe and Pomeroy in establishing their new railway was to build a bridge to span the Rocky River Valley. In the November 2, 1894, edition of the *Advertiser*, the Butternut Ridge columnist, who went by the pen name “Aunt Mary,” indicated that she and her neighbors were excited about the project:

Work on bridge at crossing is moving right along and the railroad company is putting in a bridge of which we all will be proud of. In the meantime our folks are jubilant over the fact that before another year they are to have an electric car line direct from Cleveland to Elyria. As it will pass our house 1/4 of a mile to the east we are hoping a spur will be put in for the benefit of those who live on Butternut Ridge extension.

Once the bridge was in place, the railway could lay tracks from Kamm’s Corners in Cleveland all the way to Elyria. It took a route close to what now is Lorain Road. In the May 3, 1895, edition of the paper, Aunt Mary wrote, “Our new electric road is progressing rapidly.”



Beginning in December 1895, the interurban railway not only connected northern Olmsted Township to Cleveland but also to the neighboring area of southeastern Dover Township. It helped create a sense of community that led 13 years later to the creation of the Village of North Olmsted.

In the October 25, 1895, issue, she mentioned “a rumor that other Clevelanders are contemplating coming out here to build” because northern Olmsted Township soon would have easy access to and from Cleveland using the interurban trolleys. She also wrote that one man, identified as Mr. Rice, intended to build a street from the railroad switch to Butternut Ridge.

On December 15, 1895, the electric railroad made its first trip between Cleveland and Elyria. In the December 20 edition of the *Advertiser*, Aunt Mary made the rather cryptic comment: “As a foretaste of good time coming, a passenger car passes over the road every day. Now and after the 15th of the month we are promised the privilege of paying fare on the same.”

However, by the following week, in the December 27 edition, she seemed disillusioned by the cost of riding the rails. In another cryptic item, she wrote:

The electric road is a big institution in spite of the rather enormous fares that are charged. Of course everyone expects to take one ride for the novelty of it, after which they will again “jog along behind old Bill” to

quote from Aunt Keziah's writing last summer, or perhaps the corporation will reconsider the matter and give lower fares.

Perhaps the fares were higher than people expected, but the interurban railway quickly transformed life for people who lived near it. It gave them much easier and quicker access to Cleveland, which was growing considerably in those days. Farmers were better able to ship their meats and produce into the city, and the railway soon added cars to carry farmers' milk into Cleveland. Others were able to commute to jobs in Cleveland. Still others established new stores close to trolley stops. Thus, the railway helped the Butternut Ridge-Coe Ridge community grow.

Another effect the interurban rail line had was to bind residents along its path closer together. That meant that those in northern Olmsted Township had more commerce and social connections with people in southeastern Dover Township, and they had less and less need to associate with residents of Olmsted Falls and the rest of Olmsted Township. Likewise, the Coe Ridge residents grew apart from those in the rest of Dover Township.

That might have been enough for them to consider forming their own community, but it didn't hurt that others nearby already had set an example. People in the northern part of Dover Township along Lake Erie began a movement in 1900 to break away from the rest of the township. That led them in 1903 to form the municipality of Bay Village.



The interurban trolley tracks ran parallel to Lorain Road, which was a much narrower roadway then.

Even while residents of northern Olmsted Township were growing closer to their neighbors in southeastern Dover Township, they grew more irritated with their fellow Olmsted Township residents to the south. Ever since the township had built the new Town Hall in Olmsted Falls in 1882-1883, the people along Butternut Ridge had complained that too much of their tax money was spent in Olmsted Falls and the central part of the township. Their disaffection increased late in 1905 when township voters rejected a bond issue that would have funded road and drainage projects in the northern end of the township.

Soon, residents of northern Olmsted Township and southeastern Dover Township began talking about forming their own community. But incorporation for them was not as simple as it had been for Olmsted Falls and later Bay Village. In those cases, the new villages were each carved out of a single township. To form a new municipality out of parts of two townships, the incorporators first had to get the Cuyahoga County Commission to create a new township, North Olmsted Township, to knit them together.

That township, which included 10 square miles from Olmsted Township and four square miles from Dover Township, lasted only long enough to petition to form a new village. Brookpark Road is roughly in the place where the former boundary between Olmsted Township and Dover Township was.

Oddly, something similar had happened seven decades years earlier. In June 1839, the Cuyahoga County commissioners joined the southern part of Dover Township to Olmsted Township to form a boundary close to the one later resulting from the creation of North Olmsted. It's not clear why that was done (although Asher Coe, grandfather of Leon, was believed to have been the instigator), but the commissioners reversed it in September 1840. That occurred only a decade after the Ohio General Assembly divided Olmsted Township, then called Lenox Township, for two years, 1825-1827, with the western half assigned to Ridgeville Township in Lorain County and the eastern half assigned to Middleburgh Township in Cuyahoga County. Lenox residents' protests got that reversed, but it showed it was not unusual for township boundaries, as well as county boundaries, to be changed in the early 1800s when Ohio was still a young state.

In September 1908, North Olmsted residents voted to incorporate their township as a village. North Olmsted held its first municipal election on December 8, 1908, in preparation for the village to come into being at the beginning of 1909. According to the 1910 Census, North Olmsted had 1,030 residents one year after it became a village.

At meetings on the formation of North Olmsted during the summer of 1908, a leader in the movement was George Orman Willet, who worked as a lawyer in Cleveland and had moved to Coe Ridge earlier that year. In the December 8 election, voters chose him to be the first mayor of North Olmsted. He served a one-year term in 1909 and then was re-elected to three two-year terms. In 1915, he decided not to run for re-election. He died a decade later in 1925.

In the 1915 election, village residents chose Leon Coe to become North Olmsted's second mayor. He already had served as mayor of Berea from 1909 to 1912 and had moved back to Coe Ridge in North Olmsted in 1914 after serving a term in the Ohio House of Representatives. He served as North Olmsted's mayor from 1916 through 1919 and again from 1922 through 1929, when Charles Alden Seltzer defeated him in that year's election. Coe died in 1931 at age 85.

Among Seltzer's accomplishments in village government was the creation of the North Olmsted Municipal Bus Line, which provided transportation services for several communities including Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township and replaced the interurban railway. He served as mayor from 1930 to 1935. Outside of local government, Seltzer



George Orman Willet was North Olmsted's first mayor.

was known nationally as the author of western stories and novels, some of which were made into feature films, both silent films and talkies. Seltzer's son, Louis, became one of the most powerful men in Cleveland as editor-in-chief of the *Cleveland Press*, where he worked from 1928 to 1966.

The interurban railway spurred North Olmsted to grow faster than Olmsted Falls, and it kept growing. By the 1950 Census, North Olmsted had 6,604 residents. That was more than enough for it to become a city in 1951. While Olmsted Township remained mostly rural, North Olmsted became more of a commercial district. That development increased with the construction of Great Northern Shopping Center, which opened in 1958.

By the 1960 Census, North Olmsted had 16,290 residents. By 1970, it had 34,861 residents, and it grew further to 36,480 residents by 1980. Since then, North Olmsted's population dropped slightly to 32,718 in 2010, but it still was bigger than the communities it left behind eleven decades ago. In the 2010 Census, the combined population of Olmsted Falls (9,024) and Olmsted Township (13,513) was 22,537, just a little more than two-thirds the population of North Olmsted.

North Olmsted's breakaway from Olmsted Township represented the biggest change in township land, but it was just the beginning of many attempts over the next century to change the township either by annexing all or part of it onto neighboring municipalities or to incorporate the township into its own municipality.

Thanks go to Lee Willet, a great nephew of George Orman Willet, for help with this story. Next month, Olmsted 200 will have more on the troubled history of the old Town Hall that exacerbated tensions between northern and southern Olmsted Township residents, as well as more on efforts over the decades to annex all or part of the township to neighboring municipalities or to turn the township into its own municipality.

Early Olmsted Resident Passed Away 130 Years Ago

A little story in a newspaper published 130 years ago contains all that might survive of the life of one of Olmsted Township's earliest residents. It was an obituary in the December 14, 1888, edition of the *Berea Advertiser* for Leonard Bunnel. He didn't make it into the history books. Even Walter Holzworth's 1966 book of Olmsted history, which mentioned more than a thousand people, didn't list Bunnel in its index. Nevertheless, he witnessed seven decades of Olmsted's development from a frontier forest and surely could have told some interesting stories.

According to the obituary, Bunnel was born on May 6, 1813, in Columbia Township – two years before Olmsted Township was settled. His father, Daniel Bunnel,



Charles Alden Seltzer was a famous author and a mayor of North Olmsted.

moved the family in 1816 to the northeastern corner of Olmsted Township, where he built a rough plank house. They might have been the third family to move into the township after the Geer family and the Stearns family.

The Bunnel house was near Cedar Point, where the two branches of Rocky River met and where Lemuel Hoadley built a grist mill. When he was still a boy, Bunnel lost an arm when it was caught in the machinery of the mill.

“In spite of this misfortune he was always industrious and many were the extraordinary feats of labor he was noted for performing with his one arm,” the obituary said. “He followed for many years the business of a peddler and was able to make a comfortable living until poor health and the infirmities of old age began to settle upon him. Mr. Bunnel married rather late in life a widow with one son, and this son still gratefully remembers and speaks of his stepfather’s kindness.”

After his marriage, Bunnel lived briefly in a few other neighboring communities, but he returned to Olmsted Township for the last 18 years of his life.

“Here he spent his boyhood days and here he felt at home.” – obituary for Leonard Bunnel

“Here he spent his boyhood days and here he felt at home,” the obituary said. “Though he had no near relatives to cheer his loneliness his kind and amiable temperament and sterling

honesty had built up hosts of friends everywhere who respected and loved him.”

Bunnel’s many siblings scattered across the country, and he lost track of them. He outlived his wife by six years.

On the morning of December 7, 1888, a friend found Bunnel sitting in a chair by a window in his house. The friend soon realized Bunnel had died there. He was 75 years and seven months old. He was buried next to his late wife at Butternut Ridge Cemetery.

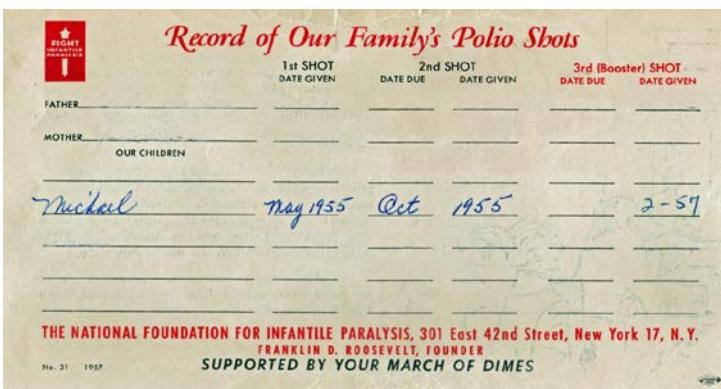
Former Olmsted Resident Remembers Polio Vaccinations

Many people of a certain age remember being young students in the Olmsted Falls schools and getting vaccinated to prevent polio, which is short for poliomyelitis and often has been called infantile paralysis. Mike Gibson, who now lives in Oregon, remembers those days.

“I taught biology in high school for 30 plus years,” he wrote recently. “When the lessons came around to bacteria, viruses, and infectious diseases, I would always mention my distant memory of heading down to my elementary school with many, many other kids and getting my Salk polio vaccine in 1955. Polio in Olmsted Falls sort of disappeared ‘overnight.’ I remember (or at least I think I do) lots of little kids in the

[cafeteria] of the brand new Falls Elementary, big nurses left over from World War II,

and many relieved parents. My mother kept the records and I have them now. I wonder if anybody else in Olmsted who is about 70 years old remembers this."



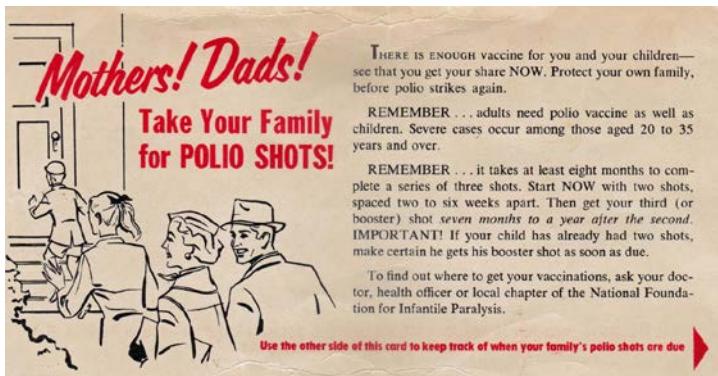
This side of his immunization card shows Mike Gibson received his polio shots in 1955 and 1957.

had regarding polio."

Indeed, children and their parents had good reason to be afraid of polio through much of the 20th century. The United States and Europe experienced large outbreaks of the disease in the late 1800s and well into the 1900s. In 1938, President Franklin Roosevelt, who suffered from the crippling results of polio, founded the March of Dimes to fund research into preventing polio.

By the beginning of the 1950s, 20,000 to 25,000 cases of polio occurred each year in the United States. That more than doubled to about 58,000 in 1952 and dropped to about 35,000 in 1953. The epidemic occurred while millions of dollars were spent on research to come up with a polio vaccine that could be used widely across the country.

In 1952, Jonas Salk and other researchers at the University of Pittsburgh developed an effective vaccine, but it took until February 1954 for that vaccine to be ready to be tested on school children. From there, polio vaccinations spread across the country. Thus, Mike Gibson and his classmates received the vaccine within a few years after it became available. The Salk vaccine was administered by injection. By the early 1960s, oral vaccine became available. There were a few blips in the process, but vaccination proved to be successful in eliminating polio in the Americas by 1994 and



This side of the immunization card reminded parents about why and when their children should get their polio shots.

then in most of the rest of the world, although there are a few areas where it still is a problem.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include stories about the old Town Hall, which had a troubled existence in addition to exacerbating tensions between northern and southern Olmsted Township residents. The issue also will have more on efforts over the decades to annex all or part of the township to neighboring municipalities or to turn the township into its own municipality, plus new information about Olmsted's Peltz family.

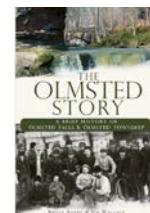
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Florida, 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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