



Olmsted 200

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

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Greenhouse Industry Had Early Roots in Olmsted

Greenhouses long have been part of life in Olmsted. How long might be surprising to some people.

During much of the 20th century, Olmsted and other nearby communities were part of what many people believe was the largest concentration of greenhouses in the nation, possibly the world. In 1972, the *Plain Dealer* referred to the area, which included several communities primarily in Cuyahoga and Lorain counties, as the “Greenhouse Capital of America.” According to the *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls together made up Cuyahoga County’s “second-largest area for greenhouses...its largest industry in the 1970s.” The greenhouse industry in northeastern Ohio has faded since then, but Olmsted Falls, Olmsted Township and other neighboring communities have quite a number of greenhouses that still are operating.



These greenhouses belonging to Uncle John's Plant Farm on Columbia Road are among many that still operate in Olmsted.

Some sources attribute the beginning of the greenhouse industry in the Cleveland area to Gustave and Martin Ruetenik, who started vegetable gardening under the name Ruetenik Gardens at 826 Schaaf Road in Brooklyn Heights in 1883 and built a greenhouse in 1885. Dennis Wagner cites those dates for the Ruetenik operations in “The Rise and Fall of the Cleveland Greenhouse Industry,” a 15-page article published in

January 2013 and available from the special collections of the Michael Schwartz Library at Cleveland State University (<http://images.ulib.csuohio.edu/cdm/ref/collection/urbanfarm/id/1523>).

The Cuyahoga Valley Greenhouse Growers Association gives a bit different account for when the greenhouse industry began in northeastern Ohio. The association provides a chronology for the area's greenhouse industry on its website (<http://cvgga.org/site/about-2/ne-ohio-greenhouse-industry-history/>) that goes back to 1887, when it says that T.W. James built a greenhouse on Schaaf Road near Brooklyn Heights. The next is for 1892, when Fred Witthuhn opened a greenhouse at Pearl and Dover streets, although he later moved it to the Schaaf Road area. Martin Ruetenik first appears in that chronology in 1901 for developing a design that became a standard for commercial greenhouses.

Although those dates differ, both versions agree that Schaaf Road was the early center for greenhouses. Not much is said about greenhouses in Olmsted until the 1920s. In his 1966 history of Olmsted, Walter Holzworth claims that George Hall began Olmsted Township's first vegetable greenhouse along McKenzie Road in 1923. He credits Gustave Ruetenik with building the first greenhouse for vegetable growing in the Cleveland area about 1880.

However, Olmsted actually had a greenhouse operator as early as the 1880s, contemporary with the operators along Schaaf Road. His name was Theodore Schueren. He was mentioned now and then in articles by the Olmsted Falls correspondent in the local newspaper, the *Advertiser*, in the 1880s. For example, an item in the May 29, 1884, paper about work being done at what is now called the Village Green said this: "Improvements to our park still continue. A number of juniper trees, donated by Mr. Schueren, has been planted at each entrance, also the laying of a five ft. side-walk on the west side of the park has been finished."

In the April 15, 1887, edition of the newspaper, the reporter, L.B. Adams, provided a long account of what Schueren had on his property:

In response to a cordial invitation from our enterprising florist, Mr. C. Theo. Schueren, we called upon him at his green house last week to find him very busy amid some of the most beautiful surroundings imaginable. Here plots of geraniums of all varieties, dahlias, tuber and monthly roses, all snugly rooted in a thousand or more little pots from which they send out a mingled perfume that intoxicates the olfactories and you loathe to leave the spot. From this we were conducted into the spacious hot houses. Here the richness of tropical foliage greets the eye; at our front looms up the India rubber tree (or caoutchoue) with its large waxen leaves; here are the orange and lemon trees surrounded by thousands of rare plants of which Mr. Schueren finds ready sale at his reasonable price. The prickly cactus in full bloom seems here as much at home as if in the sunny Mexican soil. These with many other trees, shrubs and plants make the collection one worth miles of travel to see. Mr.

Schueren's large nursery extending back nearly one mile, comprises evergreens, cedar, sycamore, poplar and many other varieties which are transplanted every season to beautify our lawns, make our parks, shady walks and evergreen hedges. It will pay any person having a desire for things of beauty to visit Mr. Scheuren and thus understand what I have endeavored to explain.

Other references to Schueren's nursery and greenhouse indicate that his property was northeast of downtown Olmsted Falls, perhaps somewhere around Turkeyfoot (or Chestnut Grove) Cemetery or maybe a bit further in that direction.

In the June 29, 1888, paper, the reporter had this complimentary item: "Theo. Schueren, our genial florist, is doing some fine work in flower beds, shade trees, etc. You can do no better than to place your order in his hands. The green houses are always open to visitors."

"Theo. Schueren, our genial florist, is doing some fine work in flower beds, shade trees, etc. You can do no better than to place your order in his hands. The green houses are always open to visitors."

Unfortunately, Schueren did not keep his operations in Olmsted much longer after that. In the early 1890s, he moved to Rockport, the township that later became Rocky River, Lakewood, Fairview Park and the western end of Cleveland.

Schueren seems to have been the only person in Olmsted Falls or Olmsted Township back in the 1880s to have a greenhouse, but many residents were engaged in agriculture. One resident in the northern part of the township had notable orchards, as this item from the Butternut Ridge correspondent in the October 18, 1889, edition of the paper demonstrated:

Mr. D.K. Huntington, our well known and popular fruit grower, has forty acres planted in small fruit. The past year during picking season, he employed as many as sixty pickers and paid from five to eight hundred for the same. These pickers are mostly children under sixteen. Where they all come from is mystery to the uninitiated, but there they are and many of them with their nimble fingers earn from \$1.50 to \$2 per day. Mr. Huntington has nearly everything in the shape of small fruit; but the past season was a poor one for nearly everything except strawberries which bore well and found a paying market at nearly any point to which they were shipped to.

In 1909, the Butternut Ridge area became part of North Olmsted, which experienced much more commercial growth in the 20th century than the township it left. Olmsted Township remained largely an agricultural community through most of the century. As noted earlier, beginning in the 1920s Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls

began getting into the greenhouse industry in a big way. More about that will be covered in the next issue of *Olmsted 200*.

Sidewalks' End Mark Former Village Border

Sometimes the signs of history are in plain sight. You just have to know what they represent.

For example, if you travel south on Columbia Road from Grand Pacific Junction, you might notice that the sidewalk ends just a little north of Uncle John's Plant Farm. That's because the sidewalk was built before Olmsted Falls and West View merged in the early 1970s, so the sidewalk ended at what then was the southern border of Olmsted Falls.



Olmsted 200 reader Dottie Rigo pointed that out after reading the article in last month's issue about West View. The story included a brief account about how the villages of Olmsted Falls and West View merged and then, because of the combined population, became a city. Rigo wrote that the sidewalks were required in Olmsted Falls, when it was a small village, "but the city never insisted that they be added to the annexed portions." And she had a good reason for knowing that.

"Our house is just a few houses north of that line and we lived there at the time," she wrote. "My dad was on the architectural review board for OF and made us kids aware of it."

Artist Is Honored for Work Showing Olmsted Scenes

Many an artist has been inspired by the beauty of the natural and historical sites in Olmsted Falls, and one has received civic recognition for her work.

An example that Olmsted's scenery has stirred artistic interest for many decades can be found in the November 12, 1897, edition of the *Berea Advertiser*:

Olmsted Falls is one of the oldest villages in Northern Ohio; it is likewise one of the prettiest and most romantic. The natural scenery along the rapids in the river is picturesque and worthy of the artist's pencil and brush.

Since then, plenty of artists have used not only pencils and brushes but also various other tools to depict scenes from around the community. One of the best known and most prolific of those artists over the past half century is Shirley Hecker, who moved to Olmsted Falls from North Olmsted in 1963.

As reporter Helen Rathburn wrote in an article in the January 29, 1981, edition of the *News Sun*, Hecker had “become well known for her wood cuts of local sights and private homes. She became interested in the technique while showing her son how to use

a wood burning set he had received as a Christmas gift.” Rathburn also noted that several of Hecker’s pieces had been reproduced as stationery that was available at two local shops, the Village Shelf and the Wayside Shop. The occasion for the article was that some of Hecker’s works were being featured in a showcase display at Baldwin-Wallace College Theatre.



This is the pewter plate of Shirley Hecker’s depiction of the Olmsted Falls Depot.

Green until 1960 and the Olmsted Falls Depot and 1983 respectively. A second series of octagonal plates came out a few years later with these scenes: the falls (1986), the Village Green gazebo (1987) and the Newton Loomis house (1988) that then was being used as the library. One more came out showing the Charles A. Harding Memorial Bridge years later, obviously after the bridge was built in 1998. That last one also was octagonal but was smaller than the others.

Over the past 35 years, Hecker also has been responsible for creating artwork for presentation each year to the Olmsted Falls Citizen of the Year. Like all good things, this tradition is coming to an end. This year’s Citizen of the Year, Holly McFadden, is the last to

It also was in the early 1980s that several of Hecker’s works began appearing in pewter in a series of collectable plates. The first three were circular and depicted the Plum Creek Bridge, the old Union Schoolhouse that stood on the Village



Hecker depicted the bridge over Plum Creek with this plate. This photo is courtesy of Hecker’s daughter, Darci Spilman. The previous photo of the plate showing the depot was taken by Jim Wallace.

receive one of those plaques. McFadden was not present in East River Park at the Falls Day in the Park festival on October 5 to receive her plaque from Mayor Ann Marie Donegan, but Hecker was there to receive her own recognition from the mayor.

The mayor's proclamation noted that Hecker and her late husband, Bob, built



Mayor Ann Marie Donegan presents her proclamation to Shirley Hecker.

their home on Metropolitan Boulevard, where they raised three children. (Bob Hecker died on February 24, 2013, at age 87.)

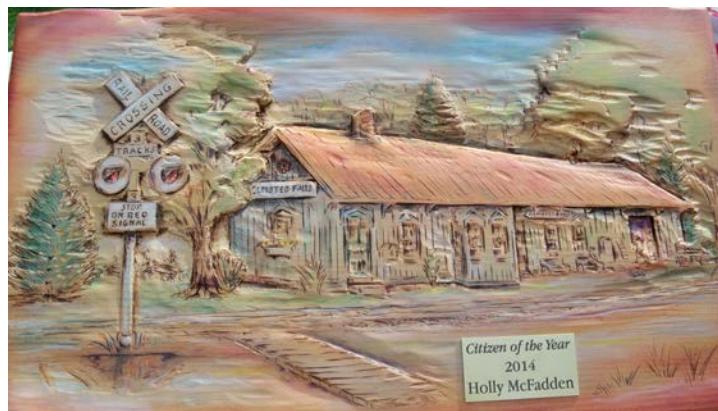
About Hecker's artwork, the proclamation said:

“WHEREAS; Shirley has been recognized as possessing the characteristics of which most people identify as what they most love about the Olmsted Falls community - love, caring and a rich appreciation for our history. This history has been permanently carved by way of Shirley's art work as displays of notable buildings and landmarks....”

The proclamation also noted Hecker's volunteerism, her love for walking, riding her bicycle, visiting the library and local parks, and picnicking. At the end, the proclamation said:

“Without the love of community and the civic dedication from people like Shirley Hecker, the world would be a much darker place.

**“NOW
THEREFORE BE IT
PROCLAIMED THAT I,
MAYOR ANN MARIE
DONEGAN, offer my
sincere thanks and
congratulations to Shirley
Hecker for her outstanding
achievements, volunteerism and dedication to the Olmsted Communities.”**



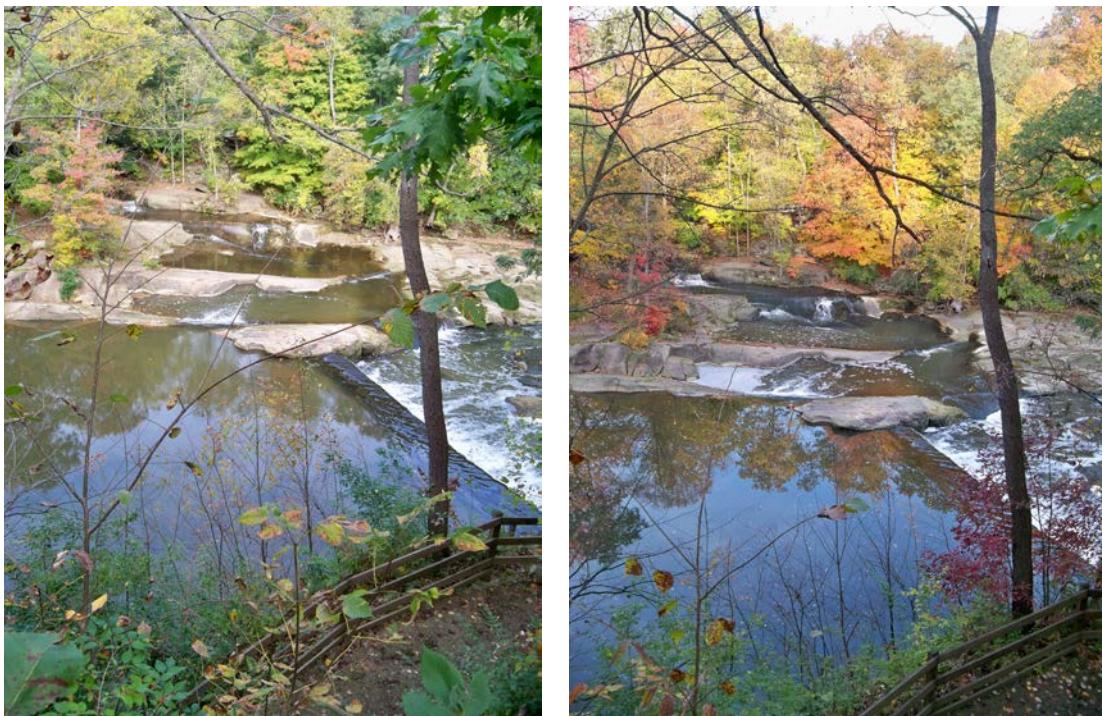
This is the Hecker woodcut for the 2014 Citizen of the Year award.

Members of Hecker's family were on hand for the presentation.

October Is the Month for Autumn Colors in Olmsted

David Fortier River Park in Olmsted Falls is one of the most beautiful spots in northeastern Ohio in any season, but its beauty comes out the best during October when the leaves change colors. The steps across Rocky River at East River Park provide a good point for viewing those changes.

These two photos show how the colors change over the month. They actually were taken almost 11 months apart but still are good representations of what can be seen each year. The photo on the left was taken on the morning of October 6, 2014. The photo on the right was taken on October 28, 2013, and longtime *Olmsted 200* readers might recognize it from last November's issue. The comparison was too good to pass up.



As noted one year ago, it is interesting to remember that this spot was not always a municipal park. In the 1800s and early 1900s, it was home to quarries and mills. In other words, it was an industrial site. Eventually, the last mill along Plum Creek was dismantled and the quarries ceased operating. In the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) used the leftover quarry stones to build the stone bridge over Plum Creek, as well as stairways and shelters.

The point in East River Park is close to a stairway made of the stone from the former quarries nearby. The stairway connects East River Park to the river. Here are two photos, one looking up and one looking down, of that stairway. They were taken on October 6, 2014, the same day as the above photo on the left.



Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will have more about the greenhouse industry in Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. Also still in the works is an article about what Olmsted Falls looked like 60 years ago, based on a map that was a souvenir of the 1954 Homecoming. Anyone with information about Olmsted six decades ago is invited to share that information with *Olmsted 200* and its readers.

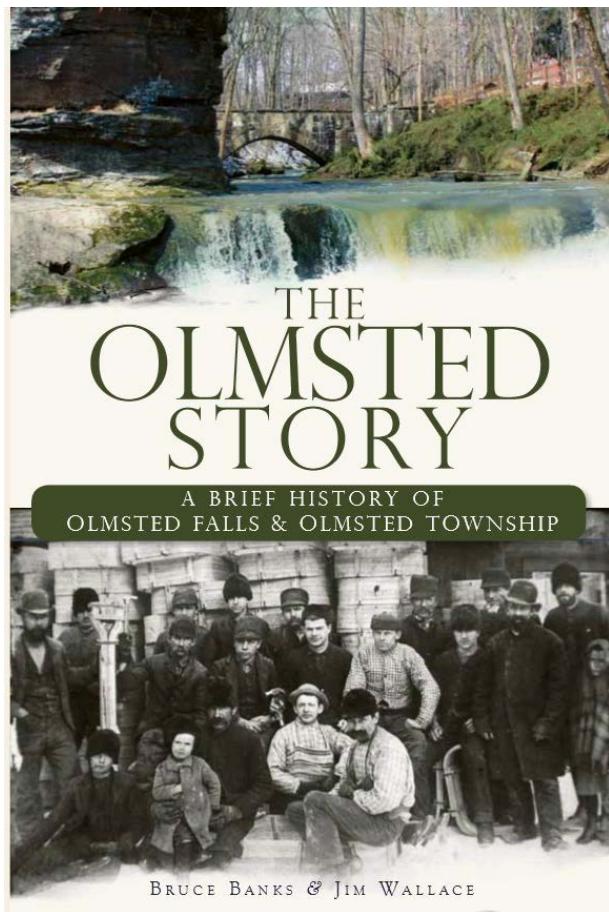
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Colorado, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, West Virginia, Florida, Massachusetts and Maine, as well as overseas in Mongolia and Japan.

Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted's history that you would like me to pull out of my extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information 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://www.egovlink.com/olmsted/docs/menu/home.asp> and click on "Olmsted 200." Also, beginning with the June 1, 2014, issue, Olmsted Falls made room on the city's website for the latest issue of *Olmsted 200*. Look for it at: <http://www.olmstedfalls.org/2008/fullnews.php?n=174>,

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. 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 Clementine's Victorian Restaurant at Grand Pacific Junction, the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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