



# *Olmsted 200*

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

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## **Shady Chalet Was House of Unfulfilled Dreams**

Olmsted Falls is fortunate that many of the houses and other buildings that have been important to its two centuries of history have been preserved. Not every community in the Cleveland area can make such a claim. But not all of Olmsted's significant



*This is what the Shady Chalet looked like in 1945, when it was the home of Irving and Edna Geist and their family. That was more than a decade after the original owner lost it to foreclosure. Photo courtesy of Bruce Bustard.*

buildings have survived. One such building met its end on a December day 48 years ago following a long period of controversy over its fate.

It was a house at 7311 River Road that was known as the Shady Chalet. Amber Hines (as she was last known after a few marriages), a Cleveland teacher, had the house built in the 1920s to resemble a Swiss chalet. But in a 1948 story in *The News Sun*, reporter Barbara Geist Bustard described Amber as a “woman with a dream too big for her heart, her health and wealth.”

Bustard wrote that Amber's hobby was geology. When she still lived in Cleveland, she would ride her bicycle to Olmsted Falls to study igneous rock along the bed of Rocky River.

"She fell in love with Olmsted Falls and when she married Charles Phillips they bought about 50 acres of land at the end of River Rd. from Charles Romp," Bustard wrote. "This land had a small Early American home on it."

Amber's first plan was to build more Early American-style homes on the land, but after she returned from a trip to Switzerland, as the 1948 story explained, she decided to build a Swiss-style Utopian village:

*She would hire Kentucky mountain women to refinish beautiful antiques, she would house them and feed them while they also wove rugs and afghans – this was another skill at which Amber was very proficient. In another Swiss type home she planned to befriend tubercular boys and homeless children. They would work the acres in fresh air, beauty and sunshine and again become well in body and spirit."*

After the house left by the Romps burned, Amber had construction begin on a bigger, Swiss-style house, which became known as the Shady Chalet. However, early in the Great Depression, a barn, which contained the materials needed to finish the big house, burned. Her insurance and personal funds were too little to cover the losses.



Her nursery was stocked with flowers and blue spruce trees that grew abundantly, but few people at that time could afford to buy any of them.

*This undated photo shows the Shady Chalet's front yard sometime in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

*Photo courtesy of Bruce Bustard.*

After a divorce from Charles Phillips, she married Johnny Albrecht, who helped her for a while. But they had too many disagreements and did not stay together.

Barbara Geist Bustard wrote that life did not go well for Amber after that:

*Amber was then left with the skeleton of the big Shady Chalet. Handmade rugs separated rooms and covered priceless antiques, a rickety stairs was purposely not made safe as a precaution against prowlers. Handmade afghans were stacked in corners and given for gifts. She*

*struggled to keep her acreage, nursery and home going. Her health was bad. She was getting older and banks – in depressions or out of them – are not Santas.*

Meanwhile, some Olmsted Falls residents spoke of her disparagingly and suggested that her house was haunted.

In 1932, she lost the house when the mortgage was foreclosed. In stepped a couple from Lakewood, Irving and Edna Geist, who had known and admired Amber for years. They often stopped to chat with her as they rode by on horseback. They enjoyed talking with her about her knowledge of the world, great books and growing things. The Geists, who needed room for their five children, moved there from Lakewood.

By then, Irving Geist was familiar with Olmsted Falls through more than just horseback rides. In the late 1920s, when he became president of the Cleveland Chamber of Industry, he already was president of the Olmsted Falls Development Company and a director of the Olmsted Falls Lumber Company. He got his start in industrial work in a family-owned company that changed names a few times before becoming the Geist Building Material Company. He also was a director and treasurer of the Independent Brick & Tile Company.

Geist, who was born on March 7, 1890, in Brooklyn Village, which later became part of Cleveland, entered military service in May 1918, about a year after the United States entered World War I. After he spent 11 months in Europe, he married Edna Walther of Clifton Park following his return to America.

Barbara Geist Bustard, who wrote the 1948 *News Sun* story about the Shady Chalet, was the eldest of the Geists' five children. Her son, Bruce Bustard, noted in an email to *Olmsted 200* about his grandfather, "The announcement of his engagement to my grandmother even describes him as an 'Olmsted Falls Man' though he was still living at his family's home in West Cleveland. He bought lots of land in Olmsted Falls, including the land that now makes up the town park along the river. Unfortunately, he was overextended when the Depression hit. He sold the land and moved his family from Lakewood, where they owned a house on Edgewater Drive along Lake Erie, to Olmsted in 1932. The unfinished house was probably cheap and big enough for a family of five children."



*This photo of Irving Geist accompanied the announcement of his selection as president of the Cleveland Chamber of Industry.*

Bruce Bustard shared a *Plain Dealer* story from November 10, 1968, when Olmsted Falls leaders were beginning an effort to fix up the park (which now is known as David Fortier River Park) after years of neglect during which it had become rundown. That story included this explanation of how the village acquired the land for the park:

*The late Irving Geist owned much of the land, which he bought in 1926 from Ohio Stone Quarries. Later the village decided it wanted the land. Geist refused to sell. The village took him to court. The village lost.*

*Then came the Depression. Geist sold the land to the village.*

Although that story referred to the “late Irving Geist,” a subsequent *Plain Dealer* story said he had retired to Florida. His gravestone at the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery (Turkeyfoot) shows he lived until 1981.

In her 1948 *News Sun* story, Barbara Geist Bustard wrote about the Shady Chalet after her parents acquired the house:

*Amber’s spirit lived on for it seemed as if the house had the power of transmitting her love of the beautiful and her joy in roving over the acreage. The house echoed to fun and laughter and family times for 25 years, with good people from all climes and countries eventually getting around to say – ‘How did such a huge house come to be and what was it originally planned for?’*

*Shady Chalet has heard music, from German lullabies to raising the roof with the whole jazz band from Baldwin-Wallace, it has been host to many who needed housing during the war, it has been the view of inspiration to Dan Waugh and his family as he looked out of the third floor apartment when just beginning his Nature Rambles, it has had corn stalks brought to the fifth floor for Halloween parties, it has housed tourists from the air races, it has housed the Jehovah Witnesses during their convention, been the inspiration for a few poets and painters and to traditional violet teas in the spring.*

In addition, she wrote, the house had sheltered babies, kittens and puppies from the cold – and even horses and a burro in the basement.



*Snow covered the Shady Chalet when this photo was taken in 1952. Photo courtesy of Bruce Bustard.*

“Mrs. Hines, as Amber was mostly called in the later days, was invited to take a room with the Geists, but she began to feel defeat,” Barbara Geist Bustard wrote. “Her dream would have to sparkle out of the eyes of someone else and she refused. She lived at the Fenderbosch home for a time trading antiques for food.”

The Geists last saw her when she was living in a small room in a building along East 28<sup>th</sup> Street in Cleveland. The Shady Chalet fared better than she did – at least for a while.

A *Cleveland News* story on October 17, 1949, noted that Edna Geist was quite active in the arts and other activities while she was the lady of the house at the Shady Chalet. Her regular activities included attending a music appreciation class at Baldwin-Wallace College and Monday morning lectures arranged by women’s groups at Cleveland College. She maintained membership in the Lakewood Study Club and in the Fine Arts Club of Berea. During World War II, she helped teach music at the Olmsted Falls school.



*This is a portion of the News Sun story Barbara Geist Bustard wrote in 1948 about her childhood home.*

“She studied voice for years with Cleveland teachers and has at one time or another belonged to nearly every musical club in Cleveland,” the story said. “At present, she has five voice pupils.”

In addition, Edna Geist played duets with her daughter, Nanette, with the mother on the piano and the daughter on violin. Despite all those activities, she also began playing golf in hope of keeping up with her husband and son.

The story noted that her father, George Walther, also loved music and was a charter member of the Singer Club.

“She is always ready to invite club groups to meet at her home, and usually each one journeys to Shady Chalet in springtime,” the *Cleveland News* reported. “What with the huge rooms and adjoining terraces which look over Rocky River valley, the chalet can accommodate a couple hundred people.”

Irving and Edna Geist’s grandson, Bruce Bustard, was born several years after that story was written, but he recently recalled his fondness for the Shady Chalet in the 1950s and 1960s.

“I have wonderful memories of my grandparents’ house,” he wrote. “It had twenty-eight rooms, breathtakingly steep bannisters, wide hallways, high ceilings, and a marvelous attic. Its yard held huge spruce trees, beautiful bushes I could hide under, and

wonderful stepping-stoned paths. It's sad that it didn't survive. It was certainly a unique structure for a Cleveland suburb!"

A January 2, 1975, *News Sun* story by Carol Rajnicek filled in more details of the Shady Chalet's history. She wrote that the house was still unfinished as World War II began, so friends encouraged the Geists to turn some of the rooms into apartments for people who were having trouble finding homes because of the war. Other apartments – one on the third floor and another on the first floor – were added. It was in that third-floor apartment where Dan Waugh, the nature columnist for whom the Dan Waugh Nature Trail is named, resided with his family from 1947 to 1949.



*These photos from the January 2, 1975, News Sun show the Shady Chalet before and after it was demolished on December 10-11, 1974.*

"While the Geists lived in the house, each of their four daughters was married and wedding receptions were held there," Rajnicek wrote.

In 1959, Ralph Cutty bought the Shady Chalet and added two more apartments. That gave him six apartments to rent out, and he became the first owner to use the building exclusively in that way.

In 1965, Dennis Wendt bought the house and continued its use as an apartment building. But neighbors weren't happy with it. At least as early as April 1966, some citizens complained to Olmsted Falls Village Council that the building was hazardous. In November 1966, Mayor Donald Zimmer said some problems had been fixed, but others then were found.

In March 1969, Zimmer said the state fire marshal would inspect the house. He said the village would require hazards to be fixed. But the building's condition deteriorated further.

In July 1973, after Olmsted Falls had become a city, the building inspector, Pete Vodan, condemned the house and ordered the tenants out. Members of City Council decided that Wendt had failed to respond to requests to fix the house, so it could meet building and housing codes. The violations included exposed wires, holes in the stairs, water in the basement and leaking gas pipes.



Even the Environmental Protection Agency got involved. In October 1974, the EPA determined the sewage facilities were inadequate and recommended the house should have no occupants if that problem remained unaddressed.

In November 1974, two men from Lakewood bought the Shady Chalet. One was Mark Magnotto, who was a member of Lakewood City Council. The other was Delmar Wilburn, a policeman from that city. They attended Olmsted Falls City Council meetings to request permits to repair the house and bring it up to standards, but the council rejected each request, partly because the house's conditions were subject to litigation.

Instead of allowing the house to be repaired, City Council members decided that November it should be demolished – and the owners should have to pay the cost of the demolition. Magnotto went to court and got a temporary injunction that delayed any action on the house until December 10, 1974, when Common Pleas Court Judge George White heard the case. He dismissed it.

The city lost no time in getting rid of the house. Within hours of the court hearing, B and B Wrecking Company of Cleveland began tearing it down. The company completed the work the next day, Wednesday, December 11.



*The site at 7311 River Road, where the Shady Chalet once stood, is covered by grass and trees today.*

On December 13, Lawrence Cox, attorney for Wendt, the former owner, filed suit to restrain Olmsted Falls from demolishing the building. He was informed he was too late because the house was rubble by then.

“The city acted in peril by tearing down the house while the case is still pending,” Cox said, according to the story by Rajnicek.

In almost half a century since the Shady Chalet came down, other houses have been built in that area, where Nobottom Road meets River Road, but the lot at 7311 River Road is filled instead with trees and grass.

*Thanks go to Bruce Bustard for sharing most of the photos and information that made this story possible.*

## **Directory Preserves the Olmsted of 55 Years Ago**

Ross Bassett, who researches history on behalf of the West Park Historical Society, has come up with an interesting way to look back at the history of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. As a historian, he has collected about three dozen city and

county directories. One of them is a 1967 directory for western Cuyahoga County that includes listings of businesses by street addresses.

Bassett, who has contributed information previously for *Olmsted 200* stories, looked up the listing of mostly retail establishments from 55 years ago along a key section of Columbia Road from the Town and Country Shopping Center south, as well as a little bit of Bagley Road, and shared what he found with *Olmsted 200*. He used an X to indicate buildings he believes no longer exist. Here is his list:

On Columbia heading south from the shopping center:

- 7062 – Lawson’s Milk
- 7064 – Bill’s Barber Shop (still Bill’s)
- 7066 – Trolley House bar (still vacant)
- 7068 – Lamplighter Inn (still vacant)
- 7070 – Seng's Eagle Super Market (now Bi Rite)
- 7022 – Columbia Leader Drug
- 7160 – Paul's Texaco X
- 7370 – Ritter's Farm Caterers X (now Lenau Park, German-American club)



*The Lawson’s Food & Deli logo was familiar in Olmsted Township and elsewhere in northeastern Ohio in the 1960s.*



*The Lamplighter Inn used this logo, as seen here from a matchbook cover, when it was a popular restaurant.*

*Before it was replaced by the Donauschwaben German-American Cultural Center, Lenau Park, the site at 7370 Columbia Road was home to Ritter’s Farm, which operated as a catering and meeting center for many years. Photo courtesy of Mike Gibson.*



- 7512 – Olmsted Falls Atlantic Gas X
- 7684 – Olmsted Shell Service
- 7932 – Custom Quality Picture Frames
- 7970 – Masonic Lodge



*As seen in this old postcard photo (above), the building now home to the Moosehead Hoof & Ladder Restaurant, once served as Olmsted Falls Village Hall.*

- 7987 – Olmsted Falls Village Hall
- 7984 – Master Cleaners
- 8020 – Westview Appliance
- Railroad
- 8062 – National City Bank
- 8068 – Kucklick's Village Square Shoppe
- 8086 Acme Blue Company (blueprints)
- 8093 – Fran's Patient Drug X
- 8199 – Rudy's Barber Shoppe X



*From 1956 until 2001, this former church (above) served as the Olmsted Falls Masonic Lodge. It now is the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel, as part of Grand Pacific Junction, which repurposed many of the old downtown buildings in Olmsted Falls.*



*Kucklick's Village Square Shoppe sold furniture in Olmsted Falls for decades in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*



*P. Simmerer's Sons Hardware operated in a former hotel building from 1893 (when it was Peltz & Simmerer's Hardware) until it closed in 1971. For almost two decades after that, the building served as an annex for Kucklick's Village Square Shoppe. After Clint Williams acquired it and other buildings from Bill Kucklick, he restored its historical name, the Grand Pacific Hotel, and made it a centerpiece of his Grand Pacific Junction development. Photo courtesy of Maryann Knuth Dixon.*

- 8112 – P. Simmerer's Sons Hardware
- 8200 – Roberson's Sohio Station
- 8209 – Nichols Gulf X
- 8231 – Ed Shartman's Marathon X

On Bagley Road, heading west from Lewis Road:

- 24600 – Fra-Mar Restaurant X
- 25564 – Snow's Beauty Salon
- 25576 – U.S. Post Office
- 25586 – Gravener Real Estate

Bassett added this observation: “Have you ever noticed that people enjoy the history of their youth so much more than the history before they were born?” If he is right, then readers who were around in the mid-1960s and earlier might enjoy seeing his list.

## **Story Triggered Memories of Aunt Judy/Ma Nichols**

The story in Issue 114 of *Olmsted 200* about John and Judy Nichols stirred recollections from several readers. Among them was David Shirer,

“Thank you for your current report,” he wrote in an email. “I was particularly interested in the story regarding Aunt Judy. We at OFHS knew her well. She was very enthusiastic about kids.”

Shirer wrote further:

*During the 1950-51 school year she had my barber shop quartet perform on her live TV show. The quartet was named the Clef Dwellers and the members were Mark Barnard (lead), Tom Goodall (baritone), Martin Milkovich (bass), and myself (top tenor). All of the group were seniors except me, I was a junior. Later, Tom dropped out and John Mutersbaugh (a freshman) stepped in. A picture of our group is displayed on the Family Activities page of the 1951 Seniorio yearbook.*

*I don't recall much about the TV experience except the lights were quite hot and Aunt Judy was effusive in her praise.*

*Thanks again for bringing back pleasant memories, I really appreciate it.*

If anyone could provide a photo of that picture of the barbershop quartet in the 1951 *Seniorio*, it would be welcome here.

Another reader who responded by email was Mike Reitz, who graduated in 1972 from Olmsted Falls High School. He also enjoyed the story about John and Judy Nichols. Although she went by the air name of Aunt Judy on radio and television, Judy Nichols was known as Ma Nichols to years of OFHS athletes when she gave them locker room pep talks before Friday evening football games.

“It was never explained to us who this woman with a Bulldog letter sweater was,” Reitz wrote. “Judy would show up every Friday and give us the ‘win one for the Gipper’ speech. The speech never seemed to work. We only won a handful of games back in the day.”

Reitz also found it interesting that John Nichols worked for Gibbs Meats on West 65<sup>th</sup> Street in Cleveland. He wondered if that business has any connection to Gibbs Butcher and Brews restaurant in Olmsted Falls.

The Nichols story sparked other comments on Facebook, such as this one from Gary Franklin: “She was Ma Nichols to me [when] I worked for her in 72-73. She would come to all the football games and even into the locker room. I would take her to dinner. She loved Howard Johnson’s. She was an awesome lady. And my dad even bought her house after she passed.”

## **Still to Come**

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about new revelations on what happened to the first mayor of Olmsted Falls. It might not have been what many historical accounts have repeated for many years.

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](mailto:wallacestar@hotmail.com). *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin, and as well as overseas in the Netherlands, Germany and Japan.

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

If you have missed any of the past issues of *Olmsted 200* or want to share them with someone else, all of them can be found on Olmsted Township's website. Go to <http://olmstedtownship.org/newsletters/>. A list of *Olmsted 200* issues is on the right side. Click on the number of the issue you want to read. All 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](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 helping 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](mailto: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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