



# Olmsted 200

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

Issue 119

April 1, 2023

## Contents

Olmsted Township Government Reaches Bicentennial	1
Former Resident Knows Paint and Connecticut Connection	9
Old Photo Shows Minnie Creek on Gibson Farm	11
Still to Come	12

## Olmsted Township Government Reaches Bicentennial

Birthday greetings are due for Olmsted Township this month – bicentennial birthday greetings for township government.



*Signs like this welcome people to Olmsted Township today, 200 years after the township's government was created,*

It was 200 years ago on April 14, 1823, that residents elected the township's first officers, a crucial step in the formation of a civil township. In other words, the township went from being just a square of land on the map to having an organized government and a formal name.

At that time, the name was Lenox Township. Why Lenox? The reason for that name has not been passed down in the annals of history, but it took the place of Township 6, Range 15. That was what it was designated by authorities in Connecticut when they established the Western Reserve, the section of northeastern Ohio land claimed by Connecticut before and after the Revolutionary War. It also was called New Connecticut.

Connecticut's claim to the land went back to its colonial charter, which was granted by King Charles II in 1662. It was a time when Europeans' understanding of North American geography was very sketchy. Over the years, the English crown granted land rights to different colonies that were quite expansive and overlapped. Connecticut's grant was for all land between the 41<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> parallels of northern latitude with a few exceptions. Thus, at one time, Connecticut claimed a strip of territory that later became

parts of the states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana and Illinois, as well as other states as far west as California. It skipped over sections of Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey, so the western lands were well separated from Connecticut itself.

*This 1784 map shows a time when Connecticut claimed land that included not only what became northeastern Ohio but also northwestern Pennsylvania and a strip that extended to the Mississippi River, and perhaps beyond. Likewise, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia claimed land all the way to the Mississippi.*



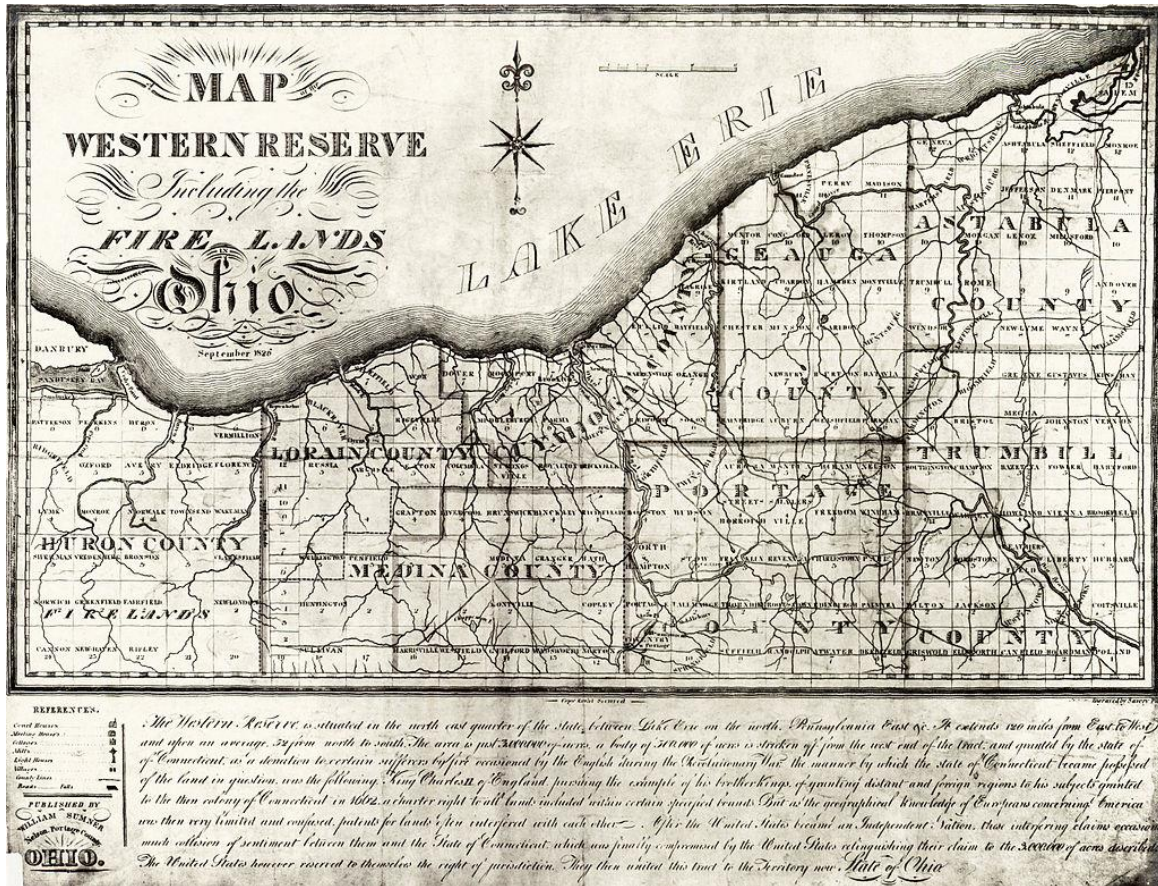
Connecticut and other Eastern Seaboard states gave up their claims to western land after the Revolutionary War in exchange for assumption of their debts by the federal government. On September 14, 1786, Connecticut gave up its claims to the lands beyond a north-south line 120 miles west of the Pennsylvania border. But the state retained its claim to almost 3.4 million acres in northeastern Ohio that became known as Connecticut's Western Reserve, or New Connecticut. From north to south, it stretched 68 miles at the Pennsylvania border but varied farther west because of the fluctuations of the Lake Erie shoreline. The north-to-south average length was about 50 miles.

Although the townships laid out in the rest of Ohio were squares of six miles on each side, the townships in the Western Reserve were just five-by-five. If the six-by-six standard had been used, the township borders would have been arranged much differently. Thus, the land that became Olmsted Township might have been divided among two or more townships with much different borders.

In 1795, Connecticut sold all the Western Reserve to 36 men, who formed the Connecticut Land Company, for \$1.2 million. Among them was Aaron Olmsted, for whom Olmsted Township and, subsequently, Olmsted Falls and North Olmsted were later named. Connecticut eventually relinquished its claim to sovereignty over the Western Reserve land in 1800, but the land sales established by the men of the Connecticut Land Company set the pattern for the development of northeastern Ohio.



(Of course, all that wrangling over rights to North American land by white men of European heritage ignores the rights Native Americans had to the land, but that was common practice back then.)



*This 1826 map of the Western Reserve shows northeastern Ohio when it was divided into only eight counties shortly after the creation of Lorain County. It also shows one township divided between Lorain County and Cuyahoga County. That was Lenox Township, which was later renamed Olmsted Township.*

When the citizens of what then was Lenox Township held their first election on April 14, 1823, they took a step toward defining their government in a way that set the pattern for the following two centuries and beyond. They chose Hosea Bradford, Amos Briggs and Watrous Usher to be the township's first trustees. They also chose David Stearns to be the clerk and Isaac Frost to be the treasurer.

The township has been the most basic form of local government in Ohio from the beginning – or even before the beginning of Ohio. According to the Ohio Township Association, “The Pilgrim fathers brought the township form of government to America in 1620. This unit of local government eventually spread as far west as the Rocky Mountains. Today, it is found in 20 states, known as the town or township.”

Here is more on the early history of townships from the association's website:



*In Ohio, the township predates our state government. The townships' size and shape were determined by the Congressional Acts, which established the various land grants. Within each of the Ohio land grants, Congress set aside sections of land for the use of schools and the support of religious institutions.*

*As the Ohio territory became populated, it was only natural that the surveyed townships should become the basic unit of local government. In 1804, the elected officials of a township consisted of three trustees, a clerk, two overseers of the poor, and a sufficient number of supervisors of highway — in addition to justices of the peace and constables.*

As that statement indicates, the Western Reserve was one of several large sections of Ohio land that Congress allowed various groups to organize and settle.

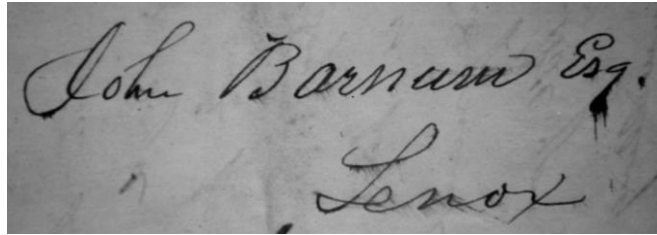


*This map, created in 1922 by C.E. Sherman for the Geological Survey of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, is based on original surveys of the several subdivisions of Ohio land from the late 1700s and early 1800s. The Western Reserve in northeastern Ohio was just one of those subdivisions used to organize the territory.*

The township form of government set up in Lenox Township in 1823 is roughly what Olmsted Township still has today with some modifications. Its elected officials

now include three trustees and a fiscal officer.

*This signature of an early settler, John Barnum, is from a time before Lenox Township became Olmsted Township. Photo courtesy of Bruce Banks.*



But the township almost was killed in its infancy. As Crisfield Johnson wrote in his 1879 book, *History of Cuyahoga County, Ohio*, the township “was cut in twain” in 1825 with the eastern half attached to Middleburgh Township in Cuyahoga County and the western half attached to Ridgeville Township in Lorain County. The division occurred because of the way Lorain County was carved out of parts of Cuyahoga, Huron and Medina counties.



*This section of the 1826 Western Reserve map shows how Lenox Township temporarily was divided between Lorain County and Cuyahoga County.*

Lorain County received several townships from each of its neighbors. From Cuyahoga County, it received all of the townships of Troy (later Avon), Ridgeville, Eaton and Columbia. It also received the eastern parts of the townships of Black River and Sheffield, and they were united with the western parts of those townships, which came from Huron County. But for some strange reason, Lenox Township was split into two, roughly along where Fitch Road now runs.

The reason why that one township was cut in half might have been known to the state legislators in

Columbus who authorized it, as well as local advocates of creating Lorain County, but that reason hasn't been passed down in the journals of history. Even the exact timing of the split is not clear. In his book, Johnson wrote that it occurred in 1825. He wrote, “This state of affairs continued two years more, when the west half of the township was set back into Cuyahoga county, the two halves were united, and the breath of municipal life was breathed again into the defunct form of Lenox.”

However, the 1916 book, *A Standard History of Lorain County, Ohio*, edited by G. Frederick Wright, offers a different timeline. It says Lorain County was created on December 26, 1822. Further, it states:

*The county, as originally formed, embraced seventeen and one-half townships, which, until the county was organized, were to remain attached to the counties of Medina, Huron and Cuyahoga, as formerly. It was,*

*however, organized independently, and went into operation on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of January, 1824. In the organization of the county, it was provided that the first officers should be elected in April, 1824; and at that election, that part of Lenox that was brought into Lorain, should vote at Ridgeville, and that part of Brighton, lying in Medina before then, should vote in the adjoining township of Wellington.*

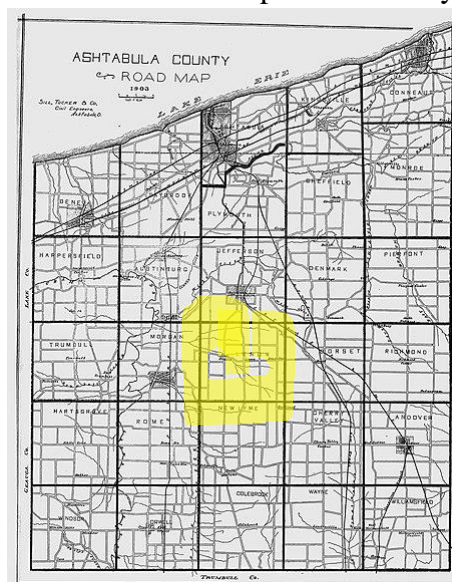
If that timeline is correct, Lenox Township was cut into two just one year after it held its first election – not two years later.

No matter when it occurred, the split evidently wasn't popular with Lenox residents. The population was reported to be about 400 then, and the people were scattered around the township, so that wasn't a powerful voting bloc. But somehow, they got their message of dissatisfaction to politicians in Columbus because on January 29, 1827, state legislators passed an act that reunited the two halves of the township with all of it back in Cuyahoga County.

On June 18, 1827, Lenox Township held its first election since reunification. Harry Barnum, Thomas Briggs and Elias C. Frost served as election judges. Voters chose Elias Frost, Alvah Stearns and Truman Wolf to be township trustees, David J. Stearns to be clerk, Isaac C. Frost to be treasurer, Joel B. Lawrence and Elliott Stearns to be constables, John Barnum and Elias P. Usher to be overseers of the poor, Olden Thompson and Harry Shults to be fence viewers, Daniel Bunnell, Hezekiah Usher, H.F. Adams and Elliott Smith to be supervisors of highways, and Watrous Usher to be justice of the peace. The job titles indicate some of the priorities for the township in those early years of its development.

The reunification solved one big problem, but Lenox Township had another one: its name. Lenox might have been fine as a name if it weren't also being used as the name of a township in Ashtabula County. In those days before postal zones and ZIP Codes, the result was that mail meant for one Lenox sometimes went to the other one.

One resident of the Lenox Township in Cuyahoga County got fed up with that situation and came up with a solution. Orson Spencer sent a letter to Charles Hyde Olmsted suggesting the possibility of changing the township's name to Olmsted. Olmsted's father, Captain Aaron Olmsted, had bought about half of the township's land in the "punchbowl draft" auction the Connecticut Land Company held in 1795. But he died in 1806, the



*Lenox Township in the center of Ashtabula County is highlighted in yellow in this 1903 road map.*





*The land Captain Aaron Olmsted of Connecticut bought in the Western Reserve did not bear his name, but years later, a whole township did.*

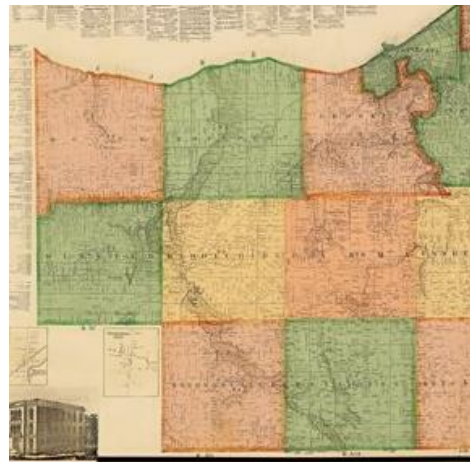
year before the sale was consummated, so Charles Hyde Olmsted became the heir responsible for selling off the land.

When the younger Olmsted received Spencer's proposal to change Lenox Township to Olmsted Township, he liked it so much that he offered to send books to start a community library. The township changed its name in 1829. Charles Hyde Olmsted then sent about 500 books by oxcart from Connecticut. Many of them were religious. They were covered by heavy blue paper, which is not the best protection from the elements, so rain damaged many of the books during their long journey to Ohio. Nevertheless, enough survived for the community to create what is believed to be the first publicly owned circulating library in northeastern Ohio. It became known as the Oxcart Library. About 150 of its books remain in a display case at the North Olmsted Branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library.

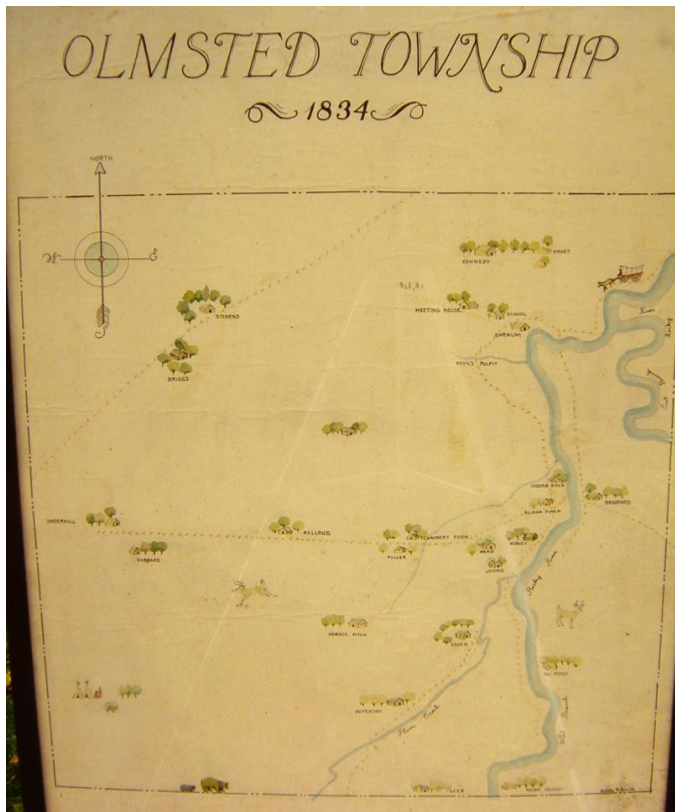
Olmsted Township's first election under its new name was held in 1830. It's not clear where officials initially held meetings, but sometime after the first church was built in 1835, the township used the building for meetings and other governmental affairs. It was a "union church" serving Presbyterians, Methodists and Universalists near where the old Columbia Road and Butternut Ridge Road now meet. That area became known as Town House Corners.

In 1849, the township moved its headquarters to the basement of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Olmsted Falls – the building now known as the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel. That lasted until the township built a new Town Hall that opened in 1883 at the site now occupied by the Moosehead restaurant. The township shared that building with the Village of Olmsted Falls until the current Township Hall was built in 1939 at the corner of Fitch Road and Cook Road.

Much has changed in Olmsted Township over the past 200 years, especially its borders. In the beginning, it was a perfect square of five miles by five miles, but it started losing territory early. In fact, it's not clear when the first loss (other than the brief division of the township between two counties) occurred, but by the time the S.H. Matthews Company of Philadelphia published a map of Cuyahoga County in 1858, Olmsted Township already was missing a square of land in its northwestern corner. That piece had



*This portion of an 1858 Cuyahoga County map shows a square of land from Olmsted Township had been annexed to Dover Township to the north.*



*The details of this map depicting Olmsted Township in 1834 might be hard to read here, but it indicates the population was spread out. Just about two dozen residences are shown, but there likely were others. Photo courtesy of Bruce Banks.*

Olmsted Township remains one of only two townships left in Cuyahoga County, the most urban county in Ohio. All the other original townships have been replaced with incorporated cities and villages. The other remaining township is tiny Chagrin Falls Township, which had a population of just 129 in the 2020 Census in a territory of 0.52 square miles. By contrast, Olmsted Township is almost 20 times larger, covering 9.8 square miles with a population of 14,406 in the 2020 Census.

Much has changed in Olmsted Township over the two centuries since then-Lenox Township was organized as a civil township in 1823, but the township still has basically the same form of government led by three trustees that began then. Happy 200<sup>th</sup> birthday, Olmsted Township.

been given to Dover Township (which became Bay Village, Westlake and part of North Olmsted). The reason for that isn't included in any history books, but it might have been to connect a small portion of a road to Dover Township, where most of the road was located, at least the part of the road east of Lorain County. It appears the road is the one now known as Center Ridge Road.

Later, Olmsted Township lost territory to the incorporation of three villages – Olmsted Falls in 1856, North Olmsted in 1909 and West View in 1927 (until it merged with Olmsted Falls in 1971) – and various annexations by those communities, as well as Berea and Brook Park. (A more extensive review of the history of the township's changing borders can be found in a long series of *Olmsted 200* stories from Issue 67 in December 2018 through Issue 79 in December 2019.)



*The Olmsted Township sign shines in the dark near the Administration Building and Community Room along Fitch Road.*



## Former Resident Knows Paint and Connecticut Connection

Former Olmsted Falls resident Kevin Roberts has offered an interesting response to a story in Issue 118 of *Olmsted 200*, as well as the perspective of someone who has migrated in the opposite direction from that taken by many of Olmsted's early settlers. A few years ago, he moved from Olmsted Falls to Lyme, Connecticut.



*Kevin Roberts said he and his wife painted this house at 7486 River Road a deep wine-red color in 1993 because they liked it, not because it was close to the reddish-brown paint the Bradford brothers made nearby in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.*

Before they moved, Roberts and his wife, Hilary, renovated and lived in two historic houses in Olmsted Falls. The first house they lived in is at 7486 River Road. In the mid-1800s, it was the home of Florian and Magdalena Peltz and their sons. (It was the boyhood home of Joseph Peltz, who later operated drug and hardware stores in Olmsted Falls – the latter with his brother-in-law, Philip Simmerer – and built a house that now is the location of Mary's Hair Salon at 8086 Columbia Road.) In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the house on River Road became the home of David Fortier, who served as a councilman and mayor before his untimely death in a traffic accident.

The story about the Bradford family in Issue 118 included information about how a few of the Bradford brothers made a reddish-brown paint from shale they found along Minnie Creek. That paint was used on many buildings around Olmsted Falls. Although the story acknowledged that the remaining buildings surely had been repainted since the 19th century, it suggested that a few of them might still display that color because of their heritage going back to the days of the Bradford brothers.

The house at 7486 River Road was included among those that might have retained that color because of historical heritage. However, Roberts wrote, "We painted it that deep wine red color in 1993 because we liked it...it had been a plain brown before. We were not aware it was close to Bradford Red....it was just serendipitous, although Hilary grew up on River Road and might have been subconsciously influenced."

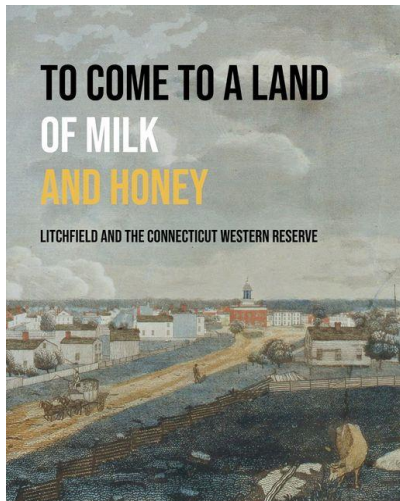
Roberts added, "There is red shale along the east side of Rocky River just north of the cemetery, too."

The other historic Olmsted Falls home that Kevin and Hilary Roberts renovated and then lived in is at 7622 Columbia Road. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was the home of Samuel Lay. Kevin and Hilary Roberts moved to Lyme, Connecticut, in 2020.



*The Robertses also renovated this historic house at 7622 Columbia Road in Olmsted Falls before they moved to Connecticut.*

The latter part of the email from Roberts is about the historical connection between Connecticut and northeastern Ohio:



*This is a poster promoting the Litchfield Historical Society's exhibit about the Western Reserve.*

*Here in Connecticut there is an exhibit opening soon focusing on the history of New Connecticut aka the Connecticut Western Reserve. Fascinating. Up here I keep driving through towns with the same names so familiar to anyone living in NEO: Avon, Coventry, Hamden, New London, Lyme, Salem, Windsor, Trumbull.....even Macedonia and Northfield. (I went to Nordonia H.S. in the Northfield-Macedonia School District.) There is a Fitch Elementary School 2 towns over and even a Samuel Lay house and a hamlet called Laysville.*

The Litchfield Historical Society in Connecticut is scheduled to open an exhibit on April 21 called "To Come to a Land of Milk and Honey: Litchfield and the Connecticut Western Reserve." The society also will host a series of lectures and community events related to the exhibit at its museum. Here is part of how the society explains the Western Reserve on its website ([litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org](http://litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org)):

*Imagine taking Connecticut's northern and southern borders and extending them west to the Pacific Ocean. This is what Connecticut would have looked like in 1662 under the colony's royal charter (in theory, at least). After the Revolution, Connecticut gave most of these claimed lands over to the new American government, but it "reserved" land in the northeast of present-day Ohio for its continued use and settlement. This*

*became the Connecticut Western Reserve, also known as “New Connecticut.”*

By organizing the settlement of the Western Reserve, Connecticut had a big influence on the development of communities in northeastern Ohio. In turn, the Western Reserve had a long-lasting influence on the development of Connecticut. “The revenue from selling land in NEO helped fund Connecticut public schools until as late as 2005!” Roberts wrote in his email.

## Old Photo Shows Minnie Creek on Gibson Farm

Another response to Issue 118 of *Olmsted 200* came from Mike Gibson of Oregon. He spent most of his childhood in Olmsted Falls until his family moved to California before he graduated from high school. Fortunately, he inherited many photos and information about Olmsted history that he sometimes shares with *Olmsted 200*. For example, he shared some family photos that helped illustrate Olmsted life during World War II in Issue 103 from December 2021 and photos of Olmsted Falls High School football from the 1940s and 1950s in Issue 101 from October 2021.



*This 1915 photo shows Minnie Creek running through the Gibson farm. Photo courtesy of Gibson.*

The mention of Minnie Creek, where the Bradford brothers found shale for making reddish-brown paint in the mid-1800s, in Issue 118 prompted Gibson to send more photos and write:

*Minnie Creek (although I never knew its name as a kid in the 1950s and 60s) flowed through the Gibson Farm. That farm was in my family from 1875 (GG grandfather Joseph) through 1917 (G grandfather Alexander). Lenau Park, German Heritage, has occupied this land since 1983. In 1915 Alex, or his wife Maude, took photographs around the farm. I’m not sure whose handwriting is on the creek photo.*

The Gibson farm was in Olmsted Township, but Mike Gibson wrote that the 1910 Census for Olmsted Falls indicates that half of the land in the village from the Village Green north to Nobottom Road was owned by his family. More information and photos from Gibson about his family and the Gibson farm, which is now Lenau Park, the Donauschwaben German-American Cultural Center, will be shared in upcoming issues of *Olmsted 200*.



## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include more about the Gibson family and farm and other stories about the history of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township.

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, Georgia, 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 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](http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted_falls_history/index.php). A link to *Olmsted 200* can be found on the left side of the page.

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. Thanks go to Mary Louise King for help in proofreading and editing many issues. Thanks also go to David Kennedy for frequently contributing research and insight for some stories. Written contributions and photos, as well as comments and questions about items in this newsletter, will be considered for publication. Send any correspondence by email to: [wallacestar@hotmail.com](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.

*Olmsted 200* is copyright © 2023 by Jim Wallace. All rights reserved.

