



Olmsted 200

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

Issue 123

August 1, 2023

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A Wild Tale Provides Clues to Olmsted's Early Days

As the high school mascot, the bulldog is the animal most associated these days with Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township, but long before any bulldog set foot in the area, the early white settlers were more likely to encounter bears, deer and wild turkeys. Two centuries ago, the mid-1820s, was a time of change for the local fauna as the settlers worked to convert the flora from unbroken forests to farmland.

Those were the years when the land was known briefly as Lenox Township before switching to the Olmsted name. It also was only about a decade since the first residents of European descent made their homes in the township – the Geer family in the southeastern corner and the Stearns family in the northwestern corner – in 1815.



*David Johnson Stearns
was an early settler.*

One of the earliest accounts of what the animals of the township were like back then comes from one of those early settlers, David Johnson Stearns, by way of Crisfield Johnson, who wrote the 1879 book, *History of Cuyahoga County, Ohio*. Stearns – who was born on August 24, 1793, in Dover, Vermont, and died at age 89 on September 25, 1882 – turned 86 the year Johnson's book came out. In the section about Olmsted (which Johnson mistakenly spelled as "Olmstead"), Johnson referred to Stearns as a friend and made it clear that this portion of the history of Olmsted came directly from him:

*By this time [mid-1820s] the rifles began to be a little too thick
even for the bears, which had previously flourished in great abundance. In
fact, it seems as if Bruin was more prosperous for several years after the*

advent of the white man than he had been before; for in a short time after his arrival, nearly every settler had fifteen or twenty hogs roaming through the woods, and nothing suited better the taste of the bears, who killed and devoured great numbers of them.

But, as has been said, the rifles were getting too thick for them. Our friend Stearns whom we have so often referred to, was not a “mighty hunter,” having observed that mighty hunters seldom made good farmers. Like nearly everybody else, however, he kept a rifle, and one day he loaned it (to hunt squirrels) to a youngster who was at work for him, who seems not to have been very bright for a pioneer boy, and who must have been a new-comer.

After hunting awhile [sic] he found something in a hollow tree, which he supposed to be a monstrous black squirrel. Sticking his rifle into the hollow, close to the animal’s head, he fired. The “black squirrel” came out growling, and sorely wounded – not so badly, however, but that he could conquer and mangle terribly the dog which was with the youngster, and which was bold enough to attack him. Astonished and alarmed at such obstreperous conduct on the part of a “black squirrel,” the youth made his way home as fast as possible. As soon as he saw his employer he cried out (calling him by the name by which he was commonly known):



“Oh, Johnson! I seen the monstrousest [sic] biggest black squirrel out in the woods that ever I seen in all my born days.”

Mr. Stearns directed him to describe this wonderful squirrel, and immediately recognized it as a bear. The next morning he and three of his friends started out to slay the animal. Being piloted by the boy to the tree before mentioned, they found it marked with blood six feet from the ground, where the creature had stood up and rubbed his wounded head against it. The hunters began to think that they, too, were mistaken as well as the boy, for the marks seemed to indicate something rather too large even for a bear.

However, they followed the trail, which was plainly marked with blood, for several miles, and at last came up with the “squirrel.” They found it to be a bear, but the largest one, Mr. Stearns says, which he ever saw in all his pioneer experience. One of the party shot and killed him, and it was then found that the bullet of the blundering boy had passed through his nose and broken one of his jaws.

After 1830 the bears rapidly disappeared. Deer, however, remained, though in constantly decreasing numbers, and occasionally one was to be seen as late as the building of the Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati railroad [1849]. Wild turkeys, too, abounded, even to a still later period, and the number of their bodies yearly brought to the tables of the settlers might at one time been counted by hundreds.

That account provides some sense of types of wildlife found in Olmsted Township in its earliest years.

According to wildlife photographer Jim Robertson on the website allcreatures.org, “In 1818, a ‘War of Extermination’ against wolves and bears was declared in Ohio.” Thus, by the time Stearns and his young friend encountered the bear mistaken by the boy as a big squirrel, bears already were on the decline in the area.

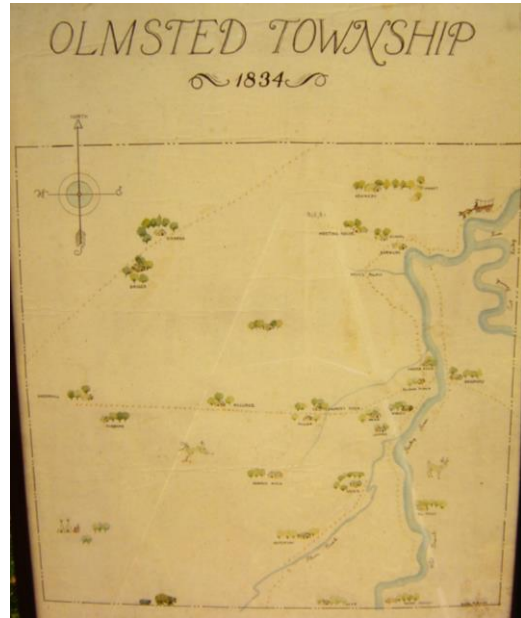
The Ohio Department of Natural Resources, which is responsible for the photograph of the black bear on the previous page, says that black bears roamed throughout Ohio before the settlers moved in.

“Unfortunately, unregulated hunting and habitat loss rendered bears extirpated from Ohio by 1850,” ODNR says on its website. “Today, Ohio is again home to a small but growing population of black bears. Ohio’s bear population is estimated to be anywhere from 50-100 individual bears.”

Rebekah Flory, wrote for the Ohio Wildlife Center, in a September 30, 2019, article, “Black Bears Returning to Ohio Habitats”:

Black bears are strong distance swimmers, fast runners (35 mph) and with their short, sharp claws, expert tree climbers. While they were once abundant in our state, their skills were no match for unregulated hunting and trapping. With the severe loss of forest habitat, by 1850, they were completely wiped out in Ohio.

However, she wrote, there were 191 sightings of black bears in 45 Ohio counties in 2018. Most of them were believed to be young males dispersing from Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Kentucky, Flory wrote. The most likely places to find them were



On this map of Olmsted Township in 1834, David Johnson Stearns’s home is the one farthest to the northwest (upper left). That was the area of the bear encounter. Map courtesy of Bruce Banks.

Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake, Trumbull and Tuscarawas counties in northeastern Ohio and Washington, Athens, Hocking and Vinton counties in southeastern Ohio, she wrote.

There are no recent reports of anyone mistaking a bear for a squirrel.

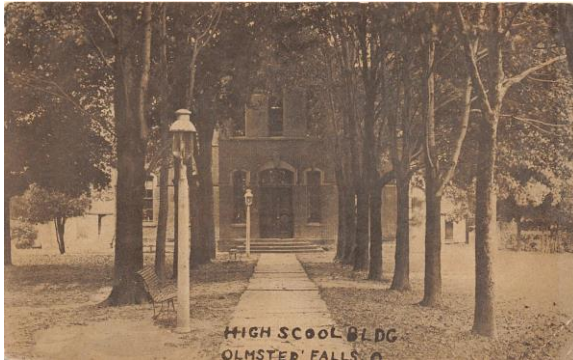
Railroad, School and Telegraph Work Marked Progress

The Olmsted column in Berea's *Grindstone City Advertiser* 150 years ago this month included four items that noted progress in the development of Olmsted Falls.

Two of them appeared in the August 8, 1873, issue. The first one stated: "Mr. Peter Kidney has taken the job of grading the street on both sides of the railroad, and the work is being done as fast as possible. It will improve the appearance of the village very much as it will raise the street almost to its former level, before the railroad was built."

That seems to indicate that the level of Columbia Street (now Columbia Road) on each side of the railroad tracks had been left much lower than the level of the tracks for two decades. The Toledo, Norwalk and Cleveland Railroad, which later became the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway, was built through Olmsted Falls in 1853. Thus, until Kidney regraded the street in 1873, people crossing the tracks by foot, by horse or by horse-drawn wagon or carriage had to go up and then back down. It would have been a bumpy ride, which would have drawn more complaints in the age of the automobile. Apparently, no one pressed the railroad over two decades to fix the problem. The railroad still causes problems for the community in the 21st century, but at least the crossings are graded better than they were more than 150 years ago.

More about Peter Kidney, who was one of Olmsted's earliest inventors, can be found in Issue 104 of *Olmsted 200* from January 2022.



This photo of the Union Schoolhouse was taken years after it was built in 1873 – long enough for the trees in front to have grown tall. It's not known whether the person who labeled it a 'scool bldg.' had been educated there.

The next item of interest from the August 8, 1873, issue of the *Advertiser* was this: "THE work on the new school building is progressing finely. The walls of the lower story are nearly completed."

That school was the Union Schoolhouse, which stood on the Village Green from 1873 until 1960. The last three issues of *Olmsted 200*, Issues 120 through 122, included stories about that school and photos of it on the inside and outside.

The August 29, 1873, edition of the *Advertiser* followed up with this item: "THE work on the new school building is progressing finely, the walls of the second story will be completed this week."

That August 29, 1873, issue of the *Advertiser* also included this item:
“OLMSTED FALLS is to have a telegraph office at last. It will be fitted up in the second story of Moley’s building.”

That was a big development back then. These days, when almost everyone has a phone in a pocket or pocketbook with quick access to people around the world, it’s worth noting that before the arrival of the telegraph, the only way for someone in Olmsted to communicate with a person in another town was to travel there or send a letter. The telegraph opened the community up to communication with people far and near as quickly as the dots and dashes could travel over the wires. Later, the Olmsted Falls depot was connected to the telegraph.

Moley’s building was the store operated by French immigrant Hypolite Moley and his son, Felix, who also was known as Phil. It was a tailor shop that employed as many as 25 women when Hypolite Moley got a government contract to supply uniforms to the Union Army during the Civil War. It was located south of the railroad tracks, about where the Grand Pacific Popcorn Company is now located.

Getting back to the Union Schoolhouse: Issue 121 of *Olmsted 200* from June, included a story about how Mike Gibson had used new technology to restore photos of the school from 1880 and 1886. He noted that he had never seen the 1886 photo published anywhere. However, the 1880 photo has been circulated quite well for years. Bruce Banks has used it for at least a few decades in his “Olmsted Then and Now” history talks that began as a slide show and later became a PowerPoint presentation. It also was published on page 128 of *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township*, for which he provided many of the photos. However, the 1886 photo does seem to have seldom little seen for many years.

Also, the story in Issue 122 from July about how the bell from the Union Schoolhouse was saved after the building was torn down in 1960 mentioned that the bell had been displayed for a few decades in a 10-foot-by-10-foot wooden structure on the Village Green. After that issue went out, the editor of *Olmsted 200* noticed that Shirley Hecker included a depiction of that structure in the pewter plate of the Village Green she designed in the 1980s. The shelter for the bell can be seen to the right of the gazebo. As the Issue 122 story noted, the bell later was placed in the tower on top of the picnic shelter that was built in the 1990s.



In this pewter plate depiction of the Village Green designed by Shirley Hecker, the wooden structure holding the former Union Schoolhouse bell can be seen to the right of the gazebo.

Lenau Park Gave Aging German Immigrant a Boost

Several readers commented that they appreciated the story in Issue 121 of *Olmsted 200* for June about how the former farm that belonged to the Gibson family and then the Ritter family became Lenau Park, a home for cultural and athletic activities by the Donauschwaben – the Danube Swabians – a group of German immigrants who came from several eastern European countries after World War II. But the most interesting reaction came in early July from Lisa (Kunberger) Woodcock, who grew up mostly in Olmsted Township and graduated from Olmsted Falls High School in 1972.



This was the passport photo for Wilhelm Kunberger in 1979.

Her response was delayed because she had been out of the United States during all of May, and it took her a while to catch up on tasks at her home in Texas before she remembered to get back to reading *Olmsted 200*. She then shared a story about her grandfather, Wilhelm F. Kunberger, who also went by William in the United States, but she knew him as Pop.

Here is what she wrote through email:

Found it delightful to read about the Danube Swabians as we had just heard a bit about it while in Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. More though... it brought back a cherished memory of my grandfather.

Pop immigrated here with wife and son from Stuttgart at the top of 1930. We moved from Cleveland (Kamms Corner area/Rocky River Dr.) to Olmsted Township in 1958 upon his retirement and he stayed QUITE active working the orchard, vegetable garden, etc. on our 3+ acres.... all in good German style. But by the time I went to college in 1972 he was slowing down. The arthritis in the knees of this once-upon-a-time Swiss Alps mountain-climber was starting to get the better of him in his 80s. I believe it was sometime during the second or third summer college break at home that, out of the blue, Pop asked if I'd drive him over to the park on Columbia. I'd seen the signs before and hadn't thought anything about it really, but Pop wasn't comfortable driving much anymore, and he was eager for this. He'd read that a soccer team from Stuttgart was to play there.

It was a small thing to be his driver. I helped him out of the car and stayed close to escort him over the unknown grassy area to the field, sadly noting not a sign of shade for my dearly loved elderly grandfather's comfort. Found I wished I had thought to bring a folding chair for him as some others had as well. Well, I'd just have to go back for that if he wanted to stay more than a few minutes.

The closer we got to where the teams were gathered pre-game, the more upright and sprightly Pop became. He watched... listened... and marched right up to the Stuttgart team's coach to introduce himself! I benignly smiled, thankful that they deemed him worthy of a small little chat and then we'd leave. Think again! We stayed the entire game AND rather than sitting when offered a seat, Pop spent much of the time up and down the field to get a better look, cheer the team on, and keep talking with the players, coach, etc.

My 80-plus-year-old, achy grandfather had become a man maybe in his 50s for at least that day. Never asked him how badly he ached over the next several days at home, but he certainly did beam and became talkative for a few days about times long ago. It was an extraordinary day to spend with him, and I'm thankful to that club's very existence to make it happen.



On the left is Lisa (Kunberger) Woodcock in 1959 with her grandparents and the dollhouse her grandfather had built for her. On the right, she sits between the two of them. She thinks the year might have been 1961.

When Woodcock married and moved to northern Alabama, her grandfather was 88 years old. She wrote that he was 89 when her grandmother, Friederika Karoline Gruner Kunberger, also called Friedl, passed away the following February in 1979. Her grandmother was born in December 1889, so she was 89 years old when she died. Further, she wrote about her grandfather: "He returned to Germany that summer (the one and only time) in order to visit family and places over a month's time and return her ashes to be with her parents. He flew without any escorts, which even made a local human interest story blip at the time in Cleveland."

Her grandfather, who was born in April 1889, lived until October 1983, when he was 94.

"He was without a doubt a fascinating self-made man, which is why I'm trying to find out more about his side in Germany," Woodcock wrote. She went on to say:

Funny thing is that I always thought I knew so much more about my heritage because I was growing up with them vs. a once or twice yearly visit like so many of my peers. Now that I've been "orphaned" for 34 years, I discover major gaps for all 4 members of my family; he's the least "known" in that way. However, I do know he was a mountain climber and guide, amateur photographer early on, painter, musician (mandolin and sang/studied for the opera), quite knowledgeable with electricity and plumbing, tool and die maker by trade and well known as such in Detroit a good 10 yrs. after his retirement, expert gardener, wine maker, and just the best grandfather I could ever have had.



These photos show Wilhelm Kunberger before World War I, when he was a mountain climber and tour guide in the Swiss Alps about 1911 or 1912.

Wilhelm Kunberger taught himself to speak English, and he was quite good, because of his work in international industry. "My grandmother was the one who really spoke mixing proper German of the south (hoch deutsch/high German), their dialect Swabian, and English all in any one sentence.... and I never noticed," Woodcock wrote.

Depression had already hit Germany post WWI, but I believe per pics of my father's birth in 1925 that they were living fairly well. Per documentation their visas were issued March 1929; boarded ship 1-3-30 and went straight to Cleveland. They both were emphatic that they DID NOT "go thru Ellis Island." They had sold some items, including a piano, and thus paid to transport her good china, a dining room set, a bedroom set, and other assorted goods.

Woodcock noted that, back then, the head of a household had to have a job waiting in America to get a visa that covered the family.

"I believe Pop had a tool-and-die-maker job in Cleveland due to a younger brother already living there in same trade," she wrote, but because the United States went

into the Great Depression late in 1929, the job was gone by the time the family arrived. “He hit the streets hard looking for another job once here. Something happened between the brothers at some point also, because I had no knowledge of the brother until I was in college, and that was VERY cursory.”

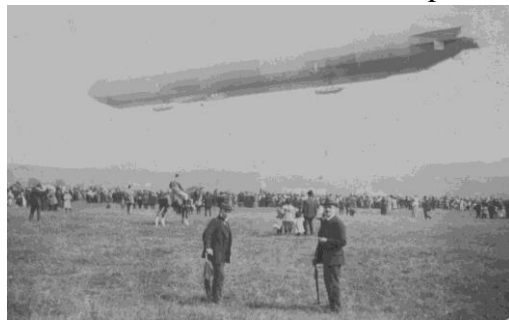


Wilhelm Kunberger dressed quite dapperly as a young man. On the left, he has his foot on the car's running board. The right photo was taken in about 1913 or 1914.



Woodcock said she also is trying to flesh out the story of her grandmother, whom she called Ma, even though she had spoken more about life growing up in Stuttgart.

“I'd always thought her stories were just homesick elaborations,” Woodcock wrote. “She said her jeweler father actually brought home the king's crown one time to pry out and re-set the stones securely. I thought that was nuts, primarily because she was born in 1889, and Germany was united under Prussia/the Kaiser. Only a few years ago did I discover Baden-Württemberg (capital Stuttgart) was allowed to keep its king until the end of WWI.... and her descriptions of him were accurate!”



Wilhelm Kunberger was a talented, 17-year-old photographer in 1906

when he took these photos of a zeppelin. On the right photo, he marked where zeppelin engineering head Ludwig Dürr, General Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz (who served in the Prussian and German armies) and Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin (who invented the rigid airships that bore his name) stood in the gondola.





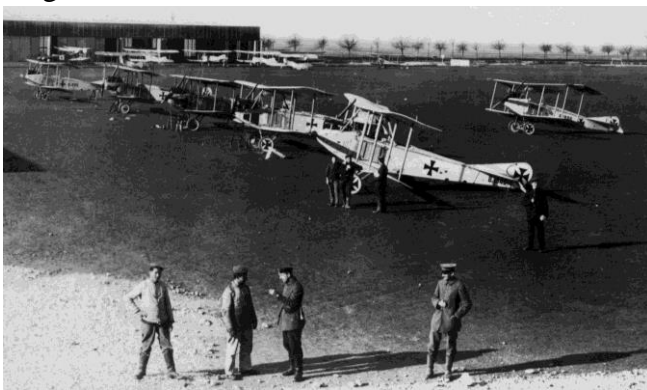
This is the senior photo for Lisa Kunberger as seen in the 1972 edition of Senorio, the Olmsted Falls High School yearbook.

In a little more than a year between when Wilhelm Kunberger returned from the Alps and when the king of Baden-Württemberg called him into service in World War I, he married Friederika, and they lived in Berlin. During the war, he was stationed at an airfield in Alsace-Lorraine, which now is part of France but was claimed by Germany until its war defeat in 1918.

Although the job that lured him to Cleveland disappeared before he arrived, Wilhelm Kunberger found a job with Standard Products in Cleveland. In that position, he had to work with the Detroit-based automobile industry.

Woodcock wrote that it might be a result of reaching her late 60s that she wants to learn all she can about her grandparents and parents “so that they stay alive in a way. All 4 people who raised me were strong and scarred in ways that played out in forming my psyche and what I passed on. I research and form conjectures that no one can answer any

longer.”



Wilhem Kunberger took these photos of World War I German biplanes. All the photos in this story, except Lisa (Kunberger) Woodcock’s senior yearbook photo, were provided by her. Thanks go to her for help in preparing this story through several email messages that began with her reaction to the Lenau Park story in the June issue of Olmsted 200.



Her family's experience is one version of the immigrant stories told in many American families.

"Some of the details differ, in that my family's story was not the one of severe poverty and/or persecution we typically saw pictures of in our school history books," Woodcock wrote. "My father was just shy of turning 5 when they came over and very bright. He adapted quickly and was the one my grandmother leaned on. Meeting him, you would think he fit the mold of the '1st generation' after immigration, but in some ways, I grew up that way also. All of us come from immigrants at some point in our backgrounds. I just 'feel' it deeply in my bones, because of Ma's stories.... her pointing out and/or using objects daily that I still have.... the homesickness I felt thru her. I grew up with feet planted daily in two very different worlds."



Woodcock is not sure, but she believes her grandfather might have taken these aerial photos during World War I, when he worked on aircraft engines.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include stories about what high school football programs from six decades ago reveal about Olmsted in the 1960s and how a development at the Methodist Episcopal Church (now the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel) 125 years ago might have helped lead to a merger two decades later that created the Olmsted Community Church.

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 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. 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.

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 Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.

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