



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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Contents

Film Shows Olmsted Life in 1936	1
Many Still Are Fond of Olmsted's Former Library	8
Current Community Church's Creation Began 70 Years Ago	10
Still to Come	11

Film Shows Olmsted Life in 1936

It has been almost four years since one *Olmsted 200* reader, Ross Bassett, asked what had happened to an old film showing scenes around Olmsted Falls and two neighboring communities. The mystery of what had happened to that film was soon solved, but few people have seen the film since then. However, a newly edited version of that film is ready to make its public debut later this year.



Many people remember Jim Boddy, who has added a soundtrack to the 1936 film, as the Olmsted Heritage Days town crier and his wife, Joyce, as his escort, as seen here on August 14, 2014, during the annual parade.

It was early in 2020 that Bassett brought up the mystery of the film. As reported in Issue 82 of *Olmsted 200* in March 2020, he said he recalled seeing the film in the auditorium of a school in Olmsted Falls – he couldn't remember which one. It was shown by Mayor William Mahoney, who served two terms as mayor from 1980 through 1983, so the showing of the film apparently occurred about 40 years ago.

In 2020, the fate of the film remained a mystery for about one month until Jim Boddy, a longtime resident of Olmsted Falls, responded, "I have a copy." He said he had received a videotape dub of the film about 25 to 30 years, earlier from Ken Knuth, who had found a copy of the film.

Over the past few years, Boddy spent considerable time and effort editing the film, which was silent, to create a new version with a soundtrack. Part of that new soundtrack consists of vintage music he found suitable for when the film was shot in 1936 – songs by Bix Beiderbecke, Benny Goodman, the Capital City Four and the Chick Webb Orchestra.

But the most important part of the soundtrack consists of audio commentary he fortunately recorded in 1991 when he showed the film to Amelia and Clara Harding, two sisters who spent their long lives from the early 20th century to the early 21st century as residents of Olmsted Falls. Clara died at age 88 in 2006, and Amelia died at age 97 in 2011. They were able to identify some of the individuals seen in the film. Also present for that viewing were Boddy's parents, Gordon and Virginia Boddy. Gordon Boddy served as the principal of Olmsted Falls High School from 1949 until 1972.

Unfortunately, it took Jim Boddy much longer than he expected to edit the film. The COVID-19 pandemic and family matters got in the way. After pausing work on the project for several months, he discovered that some of the audio files he had stored on his computer had disappeared – and so did their backups. Thus, he had to redo much of what he had done earlier. However, by the latter half of 2023, his work paid off with a version that is ready to be shown. A public viewing has yet to be scheduled, but it could occur as early as this spring. In the meantime, *Olmsted 200* has a preview.

It's not known who shot the film, but it was done in 1936. That's apparent because the first scenes are from that year's homecoming celebration on the Village Green. One shot shows a poster that identifies the event as the "Olmsted Falls 15th Annual Home Coming," which was held August 8-9, 1936.



Scenes from the homecoming comprise the first five-and-a-half minutes of the original film, which ran almost 27 minutes.

This brief shot of the homecoming poster confirms the film was made in 1936.

The first shot in the film shows a flag for Boy Scout Troop 201. One of the Harding sisters identified one young man next to the flag as Bernie Simmerer "because his father was scoutmaster," she said. Clarence Simmerer served as scoutmaster from 1926 to 1938. Parked behind the flag were several automobiles from the 1930s.



The first 10 seconds of the original 1936 film show the flag for Troop 201 of the Boys Scouts of America. The troop started in 1925 with Dan Waugh as the first scoutmaster, but Clarence Simmerer served longer as scoutmaster – from 1926 to 1938. In the audio commentary on the film's new soundtrack, one of the Harding sisters identified the young man next to the flag as Bernie Simmerer, the son of the scoutmaster.

Something else that showed up in the background of many scenes was the Union Schoolhouse. It was built in 1873 and served as a school from 1874 until 1914, when it was determined to be unsafe, so the community had quit using the building as a school more than two decades before the 1936 homecoming. But the building remained standing on the Village Green until the village tore it down in 1960.

The Union Schoolhouse can be seen in the background of many scenes in the 1936 film. It had been built on the Village Green 63 years earlier, but by the time the film was shot, it had not been used as a school for 22 years. It was declared unsafe for students in 1914, but the village left it standing for another 46 years until it was torn down in 1960 after it had been vandalized.



Scenes of the homecoming showed the many men, women and children who gathered for the festivities seem to have worn their Sunday-best outfits. If it was August 9, 1936, which was a Sunday, maybe some of them had gathered on the Village Green after attending church services. The women all wore nice dresses, and some wore hats. The men wore white shirts and neckties. Some wore hats, and some wore sports coats. That was custom of the time, although it was not done for comfort. Many of them can be seen fanning themselves in the August heat and drinking bottles of soda pop. Although many of the children were allowed to play on the swings and the seesaws, they also were dressed nicely. By contrast, in the 21st century, people attending an outdoor event like a homecoming would wear casual clothes, opting to be more comfortable, if not stylish, on a hot summer day.



These are a few of the people who came to the homecoming festivities dressed in their Sunday-best attire, which might have been because August 9, 1936, was a Sunday or because people tended to dress up more for community events back then, even if those events took place in a public park on a hot summer day.



Behind this trio of men singing for the crowd on the left, the bandstand that once stood on the Village Green can be seen. On the right, children play on a swing set behind a man speaking into a microphone next to an upright piano.



The Hardings identified this man as Henry Fenderbosch, son of Herman Fenderbosch, who established a saloon in the late 1800s. About 1900, Henry partnered with James Burns to run a farm implement business, but in 1904, he took over running the saloon upon his father's retirement. After Olmsted Falls went dry in 1908, Henry joined his brother-in-law, Arthur Dodd, running a grocery store. He bought out Dodd's interest in the store in 1914. In 1936, Henry turned 58 years old.



The Harding sisters identified this man as Charlie Peters. He was the son of a cobbler Andrew Peters, who had a shop and shoe store in Olmsted Falls. Charlie worked for some time in Tom Stokes's lumber business. In 1906, he and his wife, Jennie, bought a farm along Schady Road in Olmsted Township.



Among those who entertained the homecoming crowd were, on the left, a man who played the xylophone near the Village Green bandstand and, on the right, a woman who played the harp. The Harding sisters did not identify either of those musicians.

The film provides an opportunity to see some prominent citizens of the time. They include the Rev. Arthur Decker, who was pastor of the Olmsted Community Church from 1934 to 1940. The church was formed in 1917 from the merger of the Methodist Episcopal Church (now the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel) and the Congregational Church, which stood across the street. Two decades later, when Decker was the pastor, they were still using both buildings with Sunday morning services in the former Methodist Episcopal building and other meetings in the former Congregational building. In the mid-1950s, both buildings were replaced by the construction of the current Community Church building, and the Congregational Church's spot became part of the parking lot next to the Village Hall, which is occupied now by the Moosehead restaurant.

Although there were other churches nearby in North Olmsted, West View and Berea, the Olmsted Community Church was the only Protestant church in Olmsted Falls,



The Harding sisters identified this man as the Rev. Arthur Decker of the Olmsted Community Church.

and its predecessors.

while St. Mary of the Falls was the only Roman Catholic church. Thus, as the only Protestant minister in town, Decker was the religious leader for roughly half of the community, while his Catholic counterpart, the Rev. William Haggerty, served in the same capacity for the rest.

Three years later, when the community put out a 72-page souvenir program for the 1939 homecoming that was filled with 16 articles about various aspects of the history of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township, Decker wrote the one about the history of the Olmsted Community Church

Another prominent citizen captured by the film was John Bonsey, and it shows him in action doing one of his favorite activities – reciting a poem he had written. He was



This was John Bonsey as he recited one of his poems at the 1936 homecoming, something he regularly did at homecomings.

1936. Walter Holzworth, in his 1966 book on Olmsted history, referred to Bonsey as the “Unofficial Poet Laureate of Olmsted Falls.” Holzworth also wrote, “A homecoming was not complete without a poetic contribution from John Bonsey.”

the older brother of Charles Bonsey, who became mayor of Olmsted Falls in the early 1940s. (See Issue 127 of *Olmsted 200* for more on Charles Bonsey.)

John Bonsey, who once served as the railroad’s station agent at the Olmsted Falls depot, was born in 1888, so he would have been 48 years old at the homecoming in

One of Bonsey's good friends was Dan Waugh, whose weekly Berea newspaper column, "Nature Rambles," ran for many years. After Bonsey's death in 1952, Waugh devoted one of his columns to him. Waugh credited Bonsey with helping him develop his love of birds. He also noted that Bonsey was very fond of Turkeyfoot Cemetery, formally known as the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery, where he was laid to rest "among the oaks and the hemlocks," as Waugh put it. In one paragraph of his tribute to Bonsey, Waugh wrote:

Those of us in Olmsted Falls who knew John could read his love of nature in his yearly homecoming poems and somehow or other old "turkey foot" would get into some of those poems. I have been over to Turkey Foot twice since John was put to rest there, both times in the early morning, and a mantle of peace and serenity seemed to drop upon my shoulders. A scarlet tanager and a red-eyed vireo were singing in a tree over his grave and I almost felt that John was going to call my attention to them.

Another homecoming speaker, as identified by the Harding sisters, was longtime hardware store operator Philip Simmerer. He was born on August 9, 1865, so his 71st birthday was on the weekend of the 1936 homecoming. He lived another 28 years. He was 99 years old when he died in 1964.



This was hardware store owner and operator Philip Simmerer as he addressed the crowd at the 1936 homecoming. The film later captured shots of his store, P. Simmerer and Sons. The store lasted 35 more years. He lasted almost as long.

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include more shots from the 1936 film, including scenes showing these Olmsted Falls businesses: United Farmers' Exchange, Olmsted Falls Lumber Company, P. Simmerer & Sons Hardware, the United Food Stores grocery (owned by Bill Maynard), Schritz Motor Sales (a Chrysler-Plymouth dealership), the Edwards Food Stores grocery (owned by Henry Fenderbosch), Schady's gas station, and Tom's Garage.

Many Still Are Fond of Olmsted's Former Library

Many people responded to the story in Issue 127 of *Olmsted 200* about the conversion of the former library at 7928 Main Street in Olmsted Falls into a library-themed restaurant. From 1955 until early 2013, the building served as the local branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library.

"I spent much of my childhood in that library!" Susan Moore wrote on Facebook. "So many memories. I can still smell the stacks downstairs."

Likewise, Laurel Veinfortner Decker wrote, "I remember the downstairs smell as well! If no one else was down there, it scared me. But I loved it!"

"So many memories," Tracy Colecchio wrote.



These photos were taken in February 2013 right after the old library at 7928 Main Street was closed in preparation for the opening of the new library at 8100 Mapleway Drive. On the left is the sign announcing the closure of the old library. On the right is the old building as it looked then.

Ann Hartwell Houlette wrote, "I remember the library! I could walk there from our house on Water Street and [I] spent lots of time upstairs in the 'young adult' section. Great memories!"

Jill Sommer wrote, "My favorite building in OF. I spent many, many hours there."

Liz Stearns Shore wrote, "I loved visiting the library, except at term paper time in high school."

Like her, Dee Schippel wrote, "I loved that little library! I loved the smell of books when I went through the door! Many an hour spent on homework there!"

"My second home," Chris Wood wrote.



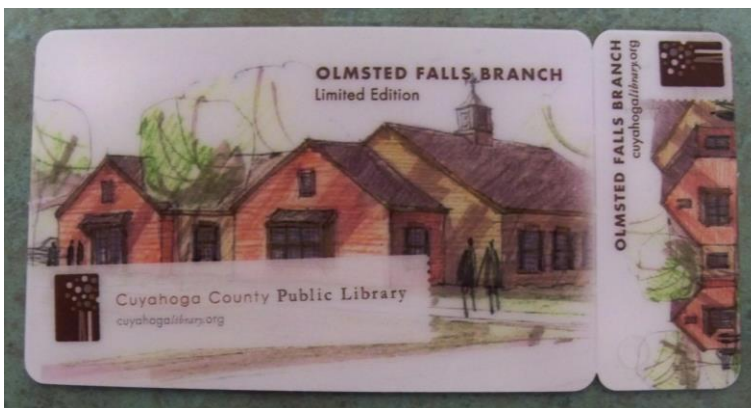
On the left is a photo of the current Olmsted Falls Branch of the Cuyahoga County Library at 8100 Mapleway Drive shortly before the building was dedicated on February 23, 2013. On the right is a photo of the artist's depiction of what the new library would look like as it was projected on a screen behind the circulation desk shortly after the new branch was opened.

Tom Parker gave this assessment of the building: "A very good and serviceable library in its day, but the new one is a wonderful use for the grounds of our football stadium and track. Nice job Olmsted Falls!"

Paul Levy, wrote, "I loved that library...even in the rooms that were difficult to stand straight. !!!"

But not everyone wrote about memories of what the building once was. Marla Monzo-Holmes, a former Olmsted Falls resident who did not grow up in the community, is more interested in the future of the building. "I can't wait to dine there!" she wrote. She now lives in Huntersville, North Carolina, but still gets back to northeastern Ohio from time to time as she promotes her cooking classes. Many people know her as "Marla, the Chef in Red."

The current library at 8100 Mapleway Drive opened at 2:00 p.m. on February 23, 2013.



Right after the new library opened on February 23, 2013, some people were able to get this limited-edition version of a library card. It shows the same artist's rendering of what the building was designed to look like that was displayed at the circulation desk.

Current Community Church's Creation Began 70 Years Ago

Seven decades ago, as 1953 turned into 1954, a story in the January 1 edition of the *Berea Enterprise*, titled "Readying for New Building," let the community know that the landscape of the northern end of downtown Olmsted Falls was about to undergo a major change. Here is how that story began:

Olmsted Community Church, which announced last week its plans to build a new church in 1954, has appointed committees to carry forward its work in preparation for a building fund campaign in February.

Claude F. King, acting commissioner of Cleveland Hopkins Airport, is chairman of the building committee. Mr. King has had much to do with the building of the present airport and the new building program there now underway. Other members of the committee are former Mayor Albert F. Scott, an architect for the Ohio Bell Telephone Co.; William Maynard, Jr., a member of the Olmsted Falls Board of Education and a construction engineer for Albert W. Higley Co.; Robert Reed, president of Reed's Inc., real estate and insurance; Mr. Gordon Muttersbaugh, superintendent of Glidden Company; and Mr. I.J. Kurse, greenhouse owner and president of Greenhouse Vegetable Packing Co. This strong committee of workers [is] well qualified to work with the architect, Mr. Erwin O. Lauffer, for the educational unit planned for 1954.

As that paragraph indicated, the fate of the new building project to replace two old church buildings with one new one was in good hands with a phone company architect, a construction engineer, the head of a real estate and insurance company, and a superintendent of a paint company, among those on the building committee, which was headed by Claude King. As the story said, King played a big role in developing Hopkins Airport into a major transportation hub. (A future issue of *Olmsted 200* will have more on King and Olmsted's relationship with the airport.)



The *Enterprise* story said the church had organized other committees including those for memorial, public relations, finance, church administration, young adult activities, youth activities, worship and music. Further, it said:

Claude King served as the chairman of the committee to construct a new church.

Organization meetings of these committees are being held pointing to the campaign for funds to start on February 21.

Preliminary plans are being submitted by the architect. The estimated cost of the educational unit has been placed at \$150,000.

Although the *Enterprise* story seemed to indicate that the beginning of planning for the new church building had occurred late in 1953, Walter Holzworth in his 1966



The Olmsted Community Church issued this plate in 1952 to commemorate the centennial of the organization of one of its predecessors, the Methodist Episcopal Church. Later that year, the congregation began raising funds to build a new church.

book on Olmsted history wrote that a fundraising campaign had begun one year earlier in October 1952. That would have been shortly after the Olmsted Community Church celebrated the centennial of one of its predecessors, the Methodist Episcopal Church. It was in 1852 that the church was organized and that plans were made for a building, but it took until 1853 for the new church to be constructed.

The decision to build a new Olmsted Community Church came just a few years after the Roman Catholic congregation on the southern end of downtown Olmsted Falls built a grand, new replacement for the more modest old church that burned down on January 24, 1948, after a furnace overheated. The new St. Mary of the Falls was dedicated on May 20, 1950. It took until 1959 for construction of the new Olmsted Community Church to be

completed, but when it was, Olmsted Falls had had both ends of its downtown anchored by majestic brick church buildings within the span of a decade.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include more scenes from the 1936 film of Olmsted Falls and the public's first view of what the current Olmsted Community Church would look like 70 years ago.

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 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.

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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