Olmsted 200

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

Issue 49 June 1, 2017

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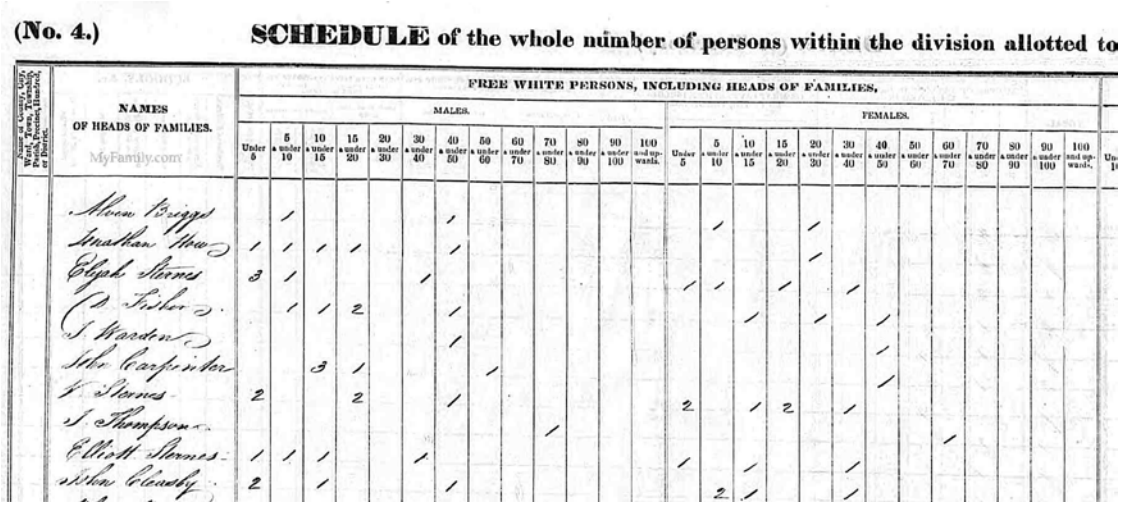
Olmsted Briefly Was "Splitsville" before It Became Olmsted

Of course, Olmsted never really was called Spiltsville, but that describes what it essentially was during a good portion of the 1820s. The state legislature had split the township into two parts with the western half going to the newly formed Lorain County and the eastern half remaining in Cuyahoga County. Then, 190 years ago, the legislature put the township back together.



(No. 4.) **SCHEDULE** of the whole number of persons within the division allotted to

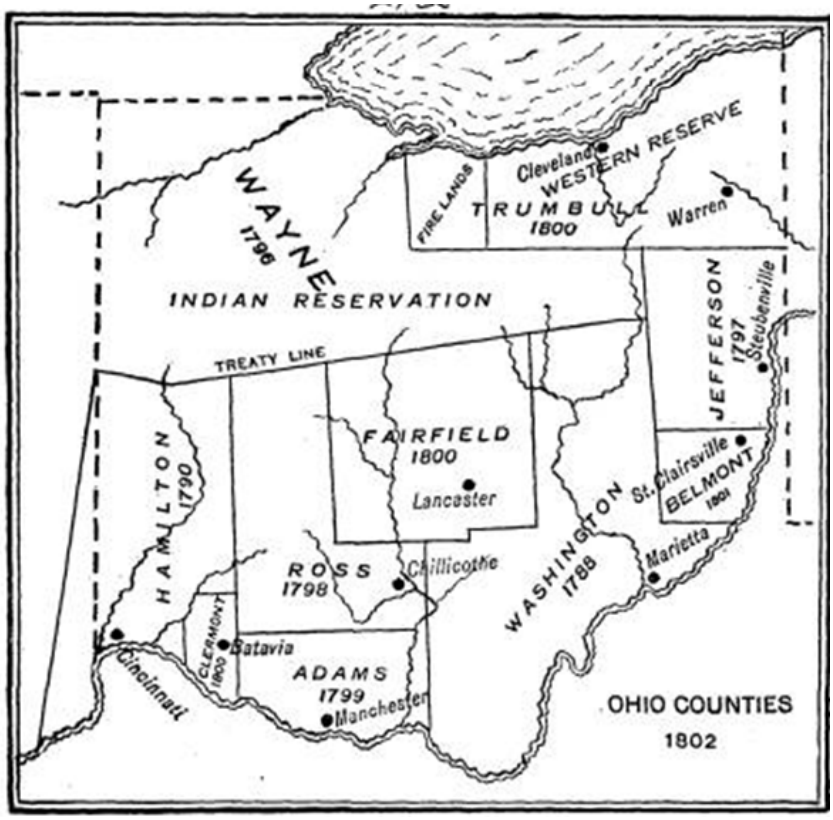
Name of County, City, Ward, Town, Township, Parish, Precinct, Hundred, or District.	NAMES OF HEADS OF FAMILIES.	FREE WHITE PERSONS, INCLUDING HEADS OF FAMILIES, MALES. Under 5	5 & under 10	10 & under 15	15 & under 20	20 & under 30	30 & under 40	40 & under 50	50 & under 60	60 & under 70	70 & under 80	80 & under 90	90 & under 100	100 and upwards.	FEMALES. Under 5	5 & under 10	10 & under 15	15 & under 20	20 & under 30	30 & under 40	40 & under 50	50 & under 60	60 & under 70	70 & under 80	80 & under 90	90 & under 100	100 and upwards.
	Moses Briggs		1					1								1			1								
	Jonathan Hoe	1	1	1	1			1											1								
	Elijah Stones	3	1				1								1	1		1		1							
	D. Fisher		1	1	2			1									1		1		1						
	I. Warden							1													1						
	John Carpenter			3	1				1												1						
	F. Stones	2			2			1							2		1	2		1							
	I. Thompson										1												1				
	Elliott Stones	1	1	1			1								1		1			1							
	John Cleasby	2		1				1								2	1			1							

This is a portion of the U.S. Census for Olmsted Township from 1840. The residents listed here would have lived in either Ridgeville Township in Lorain County or Middleburgh Township in Cuyahoga County if the township had remained split.

At the time the township was split, it wasn't called Olmsted yet. It still was called Lenox Township. The township acquired the Olmsted name shortly after it was put back together – but that's another story. (See "November Meteors Have Connection to Olmsted History" in Issue 42 of *Olmsted 200* from November 2016 for that story.)

Legislators might have had a reason for cutting the township in half, but that reason seems to have been lost to history. It certainly was an unusual decision. It was not unusual back then for the legislature to move whole townships from established counties and put them into newly formed counties. But half a township? That was odd.

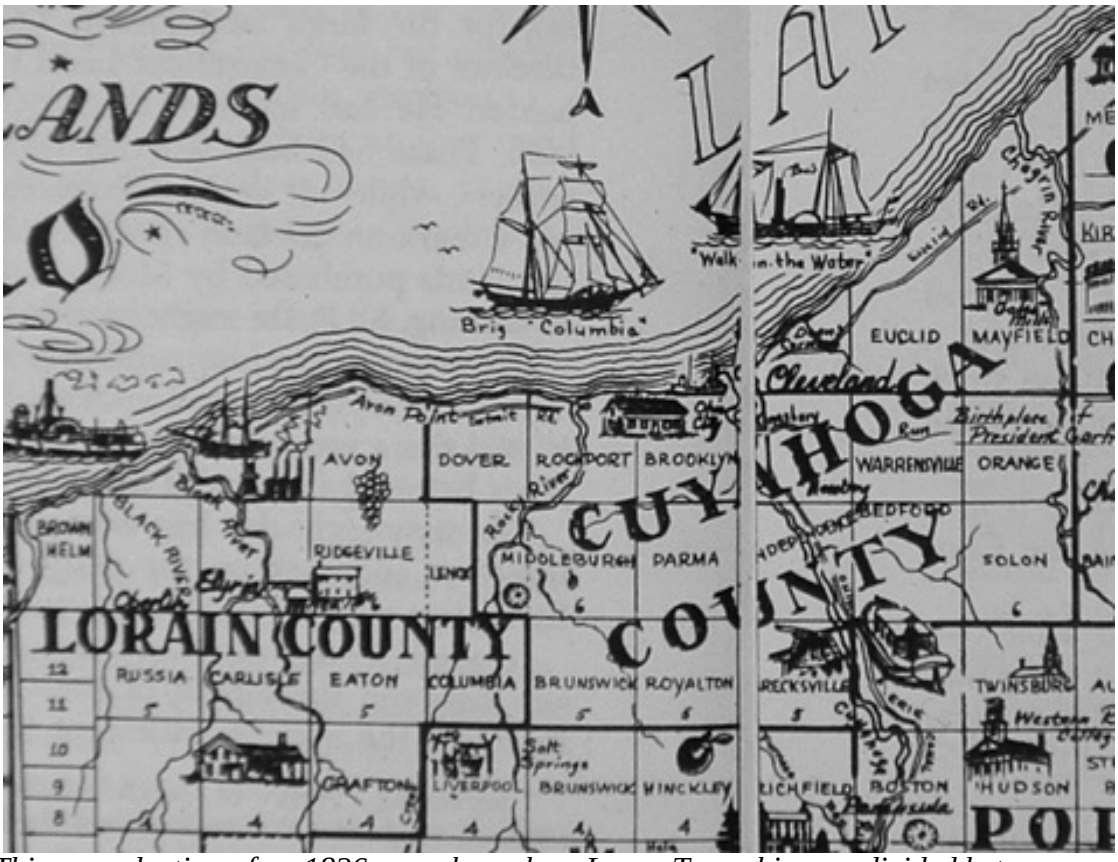
It might help to understand how Ohio's counties were created. In the early days of the state, some counties started out as much bigger than they are today before the Ohio General Assembly carved smaller counties out of them. Initially, even before Ohio gained statehood in 1803, the entire area of the Western Reserve of northeastern Ohio was put into Trumbull County. (Consequently, some early records relating to Olmsted's early history still can be found at the Trumbull County Courthouse.)



Ohio had just 10 counties in 1802, one year before it achieved statehood, as this map shows. Northeastern Ohio then was known as the Western Reserve because Connecticut had claimed it for years after the Revolutionary War. Land in that section was sold by the Connecticut Land Company, which is why so many early settlers came from New England. By 1800, the area was organized as Trumbull County.

In 1802, Trumbull was one of just 10 counties in Ohio. In 1806, part of that territory was separated to become Geauga County. Then in 1808, the General Assembly formed Cuyahoga County, Portage County and Ashtabula County out of Geauga and Trumbull counties. However, those new counties did not become independent right away. For example, it took until 1810 for Cuyahoga County to become fully independent of Geauga County. Legislators provided for Medina County to be formed out of part of Portage County in 1812, but it became independent in 1818.

Initially, Cuyahoga County included portions of a few other future counties, including Lorain. On December 26, 1822, the Ohio General Assembly decided to create Lorain County by taking six townships from Huron County, five townships from Medina County and six and a half townships from Cuyahoga County. Of course, that half township was the western half of Lenox Township.

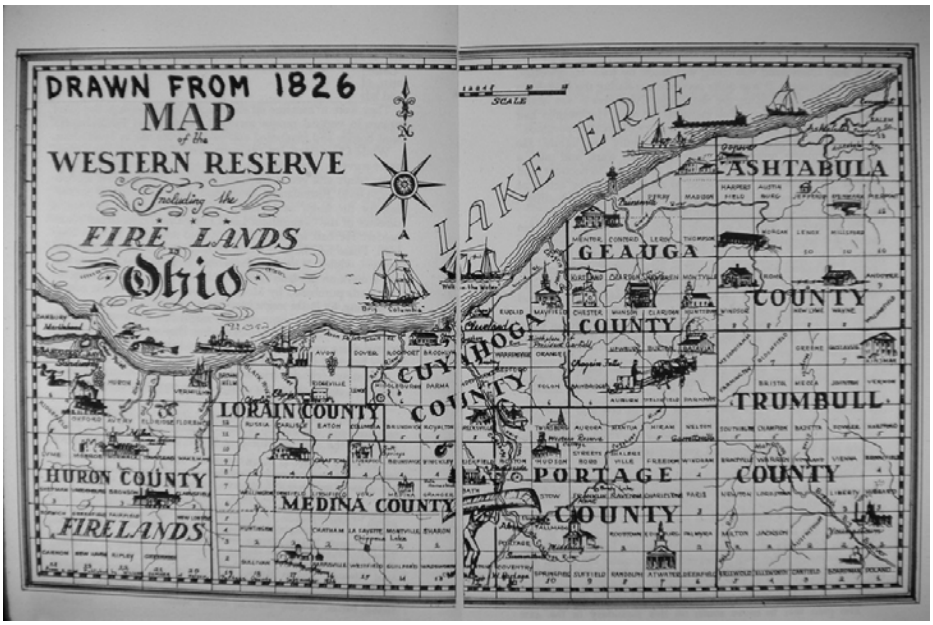


This reproduction of an 1826 map shows how Lenox Township was divided between Lorain County and Cuyahoga County. Although this map has "Lenox" printed in the western half of the divided township, that name was not found on original versions of the map. It seems to have been added for this reproduction. Also, the dashed, rather than solid, lines showing the former eastern and western borders of the township indicated that the two halves had been incorporated into Ridgeville Township and Middleburgh Township.

But an 1879 book, *History of Lorain County, Ohio*, by W.W. Williams contended that Lorain County began operating as a county even before the legislature approved its formation: "It was, however, organized independently and went into operation on the 21st day of January, 1821. In the organization of the county, it was 1821, and at that election, that part of Lenox that was brought into Lorain, should vote at Ridgeville…."

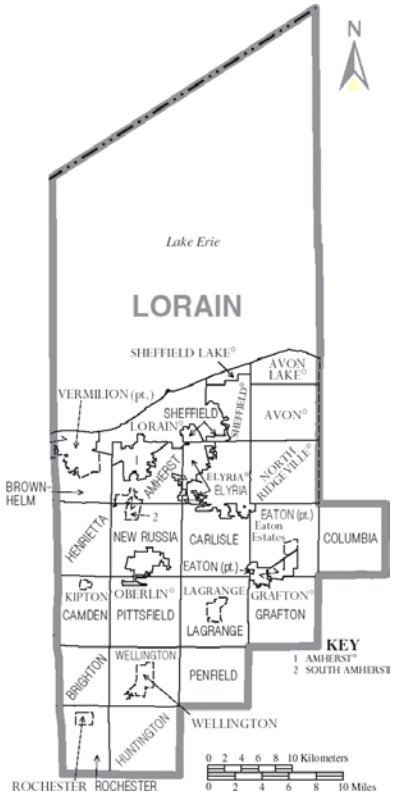
That doesn't explain why the western half of Lenox Township was attached to Lorain County – only that provisions were made for it to operate that way. The township's split would have been somewhere around the present location of Fitch Road,

which runs north-south halfway across what was the township's original territory (before municipalities like Olmsted Falls and North Olmsted were carved out of it.)



This is the full version of the reproduction of the 1826 map of northeastern Ohio, which still was referred to as the Western Reserve. Note that some counties, such as Summit, Lake, Mahoning and Erie, had not yet been carved out of other counties

Perhaps someone noticed that Lorain County's boundary with Medina County was like stair steps, and by taking half of Lenox Township, the boundary with Cuyahoga County would be like another set of stair steps. That might have had some aesthetic appeal but would not have been so good for Lenox residents. Either they would have ended up with two mini-townships or those halves would have been tacked onto Ridgeville Township in Lorain County and Middleburgh Township in Cuyahoga County. An 1826 map indicates that Ridgeville and Middleburgh townships were enlarged. (The spelling of the name "Middleburgh" was changed in the 20th century when Middleburg Heights was incorporated.)



This U.S. Census map shows the stair-step border between Lorain and Medina counties.

In his 1966 book on Olmsted history, Walter Holzworth wrote, "The residents of former Lenox were utterly dissatisfied with the decree that cut their promising community in two and placing its halves in to different counties."

Somehow, that dissatisfaction reached Columbus. In January 1827, the Ohio General Assembly reversed its previous action and put Lenox Township back together. Holzworth wrote that the legislature took that action on January 29, but Williams wrote that it occurred on January 20. The township had about 400 residents then.

If the township split had persisted, this sign for Olmsted Township would never have been put up. Instead, there might have been a sign showing the eastern border of North Ridgeville about where Fitch Road is.

If that split, which occurred early in the history of the township, had stood, the development of the Olmsted communities – Olmsted Township, Olmsted Falls and North Olmsted – would have been much different. First, the Olmsted name would not have been used. The township changed its name to Olmsted in 1829 to avoid confusion with a Lenox Township in Ashtabula County. But if the two halves of the township remained part of an expanded Ridgeville Township and an expanded Middleburgh Township, there would have been no need to adopt the name Olmsted.

Subsequently, Olmsted Falls would likely to have remained as Norris Falls, the name of the first post office established there in 1843. The name was changed to Olmsted Falls in 1845, but if the township it was in were not already called Olmsted, the Norris Falls name might have stuck. Even if it hadn't stuck, there is little reason to believe Olmsted Falls would have been considered as a name.

If the township had remained split, residents in the western half would have been drawn toward Ridgeville for government and other affairs, while people in the eastern half would have been drawn toward Middleburgh or the city that grew out of it, Berea. Those patterns would have led to different development.

North Olmsted was created early in the 20th century when the northern portion of Olmsted Township joined with a small portion of southern Dover Township to form a new municipality. Seeds for that split were sown decades earlier when

This is another sign that would not have existed if the township split had not been reversed. There would have been no Olmsted Falls High School Bulldogs to win a state football championship.

northern Olmsted Township residents began feeling alienated from township government and residents based in Olmsted Falls. But if the township already had been split between east and west for several decades, North Olmsted could have formed differently or not at all. It certainly would not have been called North Olmsted.

When the first section of this building opened in 1916, Olmsted's school district became the first in Cuyahoga County to consolidate all students into one location. But if the former Lenox Township had remained divided between two counties, this location would not have been a logical site for such a school building. The building now serves as Olmsted Falls City Hall.

A common school system for Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls never would have been created. That would have been significant because a common school system is generally one of the most important unifiers in a community. Without a common school system, residents never would have built the 1916 school (as well as its subsequent additions) that now serves as Olmsted Falls City Hall. Therefore, another school district would have gained the distinction of becoming the first in Cuyahoga County to consolidate all students into one facility and eliminate the use of one-room and two-room schoolhouses.

Of course, no new Olmsted Falls High School would have been built and opened in 1968, and the Olmsted Falls Middle School/Intermediate School Complex farther west on Bagley Road would not have been built years later. It's quite likely that the two parts of the former Lenox Township would at least have contained elementary schools, but older students would have gone to high school in North Ridgeville and Berea. Would one

of those elementary schools in the former Lenox Township have been named Lenox, as happened in the 1950s? Possibly, but it's also possible the Lenox name would have been long relegated to just a footnote in history.

Olmsted Falls High School, which opened in 1968, is just a short distance west of Fitch Road. If the former Lenox Township had remained split about where Fitch Road is located, there would have been no common school district for Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. This spot probably would have been on the far eastern side of North Ridgeville's school district. It would have been an unlikely location for a high school. Instead, students from this area would have traveled miles west to attend high school in North Ridgeville, while those east of Fitch road would have gone miles east to Berea for high school.

Obviously, no one would have considered building Township Hall at the corner of Fitch and Cook roads in 1939. That would have been on the far eastern edge of Ridgeville Township. By now, that area might have been part of the City of North Ridgeville, which would be 37.5 square miles instead of its current 25 square miles. Likewise, the site along Fitch Road would have been an unlikely spot for a fire department or police department because it would not have been centrally located.

This photo shows Olmsted Township Hall last August, when the township was getting ready to dedicate its new Ohio Historical Marker. But there would have been no Township Hall or marker if legislators in 1827 had not put the township back together after splitting it between two counties.

Those are just a few of the changes that might have resulted if the split in Lenox Township had persisted. There likely would have been more differences because a divided community just would not have developed the same as a united community. When Ohio legislators agreed 190 years ago to put Lenox Township back together, it would have been a very minor matter for most of those senators and representatives, but it mattered very much to the future residents of Olmsted Township, Olmsted Falls and North Olmsted.

Old House Once Had Native American Visitors

Stories about what is apparently Olmsted's oldest house have been featured several times in *Olmsted 200*, including last month, but here is the oldest story available. It goes back to a time when early Olmsted settlers still had encounters with Native Americans, although by the time white settlers began establishing their own homes in the township in 1815 no natives seemed to have been permanent residents of what was later named Olmsted Township.

The house at the corner of Columbia and Nobottom roads is now owned by Bill and Marty Richner, who have been renovating it for several years. Last month's issue of *Olmsted 200* included mid-20th century photos and stories from the TeGrotenhuis family, which owned the house for several decades. Although the house was expanded several times over the years, it began as a small house built by John and Maria Adams almost two centuries ago.

In her 1964 book, *Over the Years in Olmsted, Township 6, Range 15*, Bernice Offenberg included a story she heard from Theodore Alcott TeGrotenhuis, whose family moved into the house in 1947 after swapping houses with his parents. Offenberg titled it "A Pioneer Story" and said it was told to TeGrotenhuis by his grandmother, Isabelle (Lemmon) Alcott. Here is how she wrote about it:

> *When Mrs. Alcott was a little girl, Mr. John Adams, Jr. used to tell her stories about the pioneers in Olmsted. He said they used to hear a knock on their door and a whoop. When they opened the door a part of a butchered deer would be on the step and no one in sight, so they would take the meat inside and shut the door. Then there would be another knock and a whoop. When they opened the door this time an Indian would be standing there. He would walk in and look around the house and take something that pleased him and then leave. After this the Adams family hid everything that they valued very highly when they heard the Indian at their door.*
>
> *In 1820 John Adams Jr. and his family lived in a two-room cottage that is now in the center of the house that is at 7314 Columbia and Nobottom Roads, the home of Mr. T. TeGrotenhuis. This house is next door to what was once Thomas Lemmon's home where Isabelle Lemmon*

lived when she was a girl. This John Adams (who later moved to West View) used to come to visit this family in Olmsted Falls.

As Offenberg wrote, the house's address was 7314 Columbia Road, but the Richners had it changed to 25390 Nobottom Road because the house now faces Nobottom and the driveway is along that road. In the 1800s, the driveway came up the hill from Columbia Road.

This room in the Richners' house was part of the two-room home of John and Maria Adams in 1820.

The "two-room cottage" from the time of the Adamses that Offenberg said was at the center of the house in 1964 is still the living room. Previous *Olmsted 200* stories about the house and photos can be found in Issue 4 from September 2013, Issue 20 from October 2015, Issue 43 from December 2016 and Issue 48 from May 2017.

Bicycles Blossomed in Olmsted's Spring 12 Decades Ago

As spring waned and summer approached 120 years ago, cycling seems to have been all the rage in Olmsted Falls. At least that's what a small item in the Olmsted Falls column in the *Berea Advertiser* for May 28, 1897, indicated:

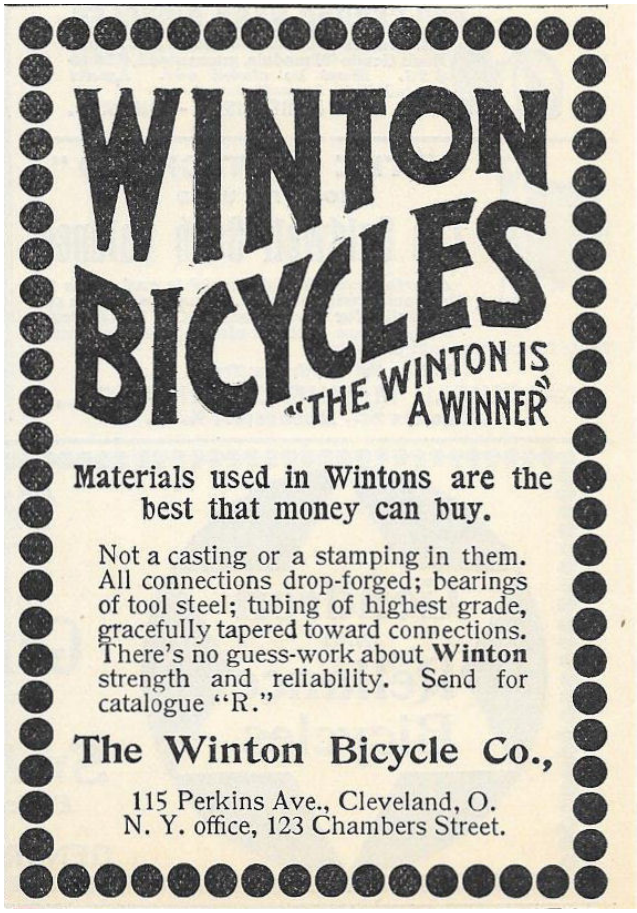
Forty new bicycles in Olmsted Falls. Wheels! Wheels! Wheels! In the head, in the feet, in the talk, in everything past, present and future.

The item doesn't say where the 40 bicycles came from or why they were suddenly so popular, but Olmsted Falls likely was caught up in a trend that was sweeping the nation in the last few years of the 19th century. In 2000, Rebecca Edwards of Vassar College wrote in an article, "The Popularity of Bicycles," that the United States was "in the middle of a bicycle craze" beginning in 1896.

"Though different types of bicycles had been around in the United States and Europe for years, recent technological innovation brought about changes in material and design that made the late nineteenth century bicycle a lighter, smoother, and faster ride than ever before," she wrote. "Doctors wrote about the health risks and benefits of cycling, scientists explained the physics of the bicycle's motion, while concerned critics discussed the changes in women's fashion that so much cycling would necessitate. By 1896, there were over 150 bicycle factories in the United States, producing over 1,000 different makes of bicycles for men, women, and children. They were used for recreation and exercise, and in some cases, even for political campaigning."

Likewise, the Ohio History Connection says that bicycles changed life in Ohio dramatically late in the 1800s. “Ohioans, especially teenagers, formed bicycle clubs, allowing young people to share their common interest,” an article on the organization’s website (http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Bicycles) says.

“By the 1890s, many Americans believed that bicycles would eventually replace horses,” the article says. “Bicycles were significantly cheaper than horses, easier to use, and provided a much smoother ride once improvements occurred in roads.” The story adds that the use of rubber for bicycle tires helped spur the rubber industry, which was based in Akron.



This ad for Winton Bicycles ran in 1897.

Perhaps some of the bicycles owned by Olmsted residents were made locally. One manufacturer that was advertising in 1897 was the Winton Bicycle Company of Cleveland, which also began production of early automobiles about that time as the Winton Motor Carriage Company.

June Once Was Fair Time in Olmsted Falls

For more than a quarter-century, Olmsted Heritage Days – scheduled this year for August 3 through 6 – has been Olmsted’s biggest summertime festival. But 80 years ago, the last Saturday in June was the time to go to the fair. An advertisement in the June 24, 1927, edition of the *Berea Enterprise* invited people to attend the free Olmsted Falls Village Fair the following day. The ad did not say where the fair was to be held, but such festivities generally were held either at the Village Green or on the grounds of the school building that now serves as Olmsted Falls City Hall. The ad encouraged people to bring three things: the family, a lunch basket and a smile.”

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include the story of a once-prominent veterans' organization that was formed 130 years ago and the existing building associated with it.

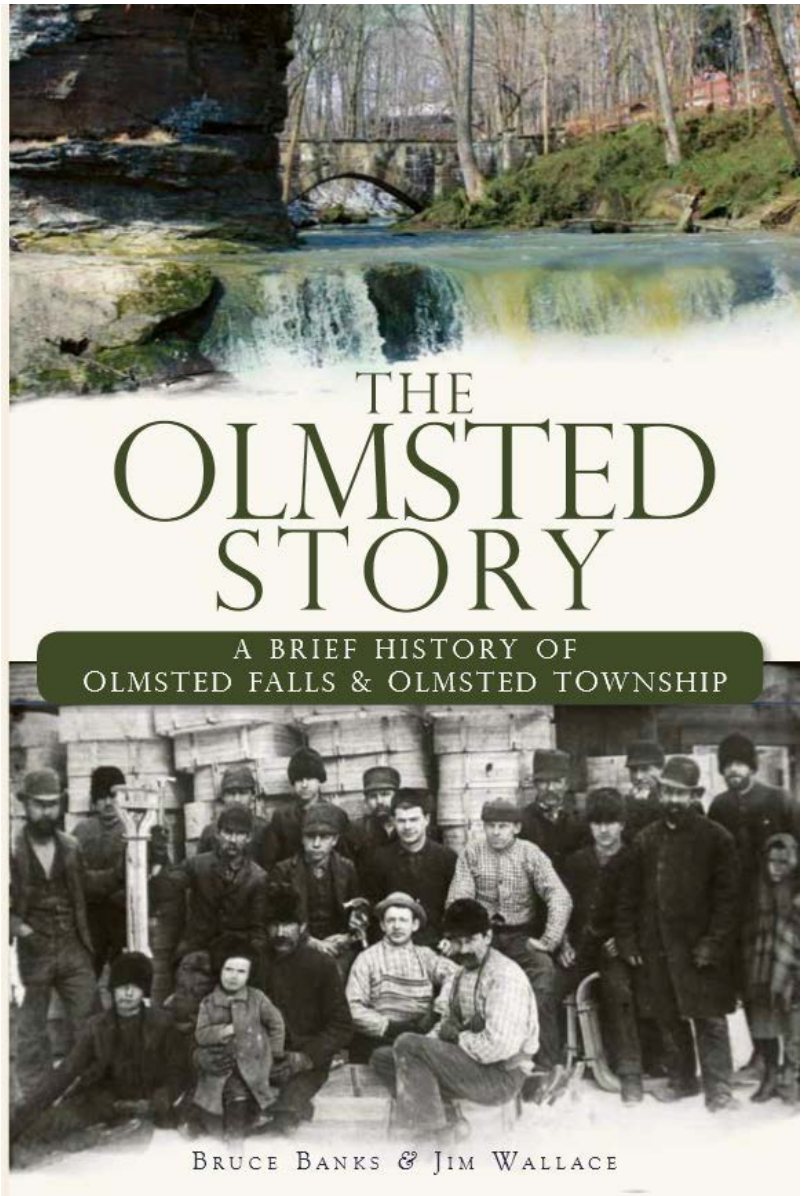
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Colorado, Arizona,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

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. 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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