



# Olmsted 200

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

Issue 50

July 1, 2017

## Contents

Olmsted Falls House Served as Civil War Vets' Meeting Hall	1
Turkeyfoot Vault Has Lasted 130 Years	8
Reader Corrects Big House's Former Address	10
Is This Really the 50 <sup>th</sup> Issue of <i>Olmsted 200</i> ?	11
Still to Come	11

## Olmsted Falls House Served as Civil War Vets' Meeting Hall

Life in Olmsted Falls became more lively 130 years ago. Also in 1887, the community acquired a well-known building that is still in use.

Both developments were connected to the formation of a local unit of a veterans group called the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R). The beginning came late in the winter. The Berea newspaper, the *Advertiser*, ran this item in its Olmsted Falls column on March 4, 1887:

*All old soldiers and sailors will please bear in mind that they are requested to meet at town hall at 2 p.m., Friday, March 11, for the purpose of organizing a G.A.R. Post. It is an order that has for its object charitable work and protection of the rights of members. The regulations bind more closely the men who braved perils for the love of country, and will greatly increase the interest in one another. 'Tis a worthy object. For further particulars call on Comrade T.M. Stokes.*

One week after that meeting, the newspaper followed up with this in its March 18 issue:

*About fifty comrades met at the Town Hall on Friday afternoon for the purpose of organizing a G.A.R. Post. Forty names were signed pledging to stand by and start the movement. Messrs. T.M. Stokes, E.A. Barnard and ---- were appointed a committee to secure charter, etc. Will hear from them later.*

Although the reporter seemed to think the formation of the G.A.R. post was important, he apparently forgot the name of the third man assigned to the committee with Stokes and Barnard to get the post started. But he was right that the community would hear from them later. It took only another month for them to come out with this notice in the April 22 edition of the paper:

*POST NO. 634*

*The following circular has been issued to veterans of the late civil war:*

*OLMSTED FALLS, O.*

*Comrades: – The time is now set to meet at the Town Hall, Olmsted, Saturday evening, April 23, 1887, to be mustered into the Grand Army of the Republic, Post No. 634. The mustering officer and escort will be present from Cleveland, and others. Bring your wife and lunch, to be served in the hall. Also you are requested to bring your discharge papers.*

*COMMITTEE*

The significance of that event might not be apparent to people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Veterans groups, such as the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), have posts in many communities. They hold regular meetings and occasionally have fundraisers and other events that get some attention locally. But getting a G.A.R. post was a big development in the social life of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township.

It wasn't the first veterans' group in Olmsted. As Walter Holzworth wrote in his 1966 book of Olmsted history, a "Boys in Blue" club had been formed in 1868, but he said it was "loosely organized and held occasional gatherings until 1887." However, the G.A.R. post was part of a prestigious national organization that had been created in 1866, the year after the Civil War ended. The G.A.R. was dissolved only after the death of its last member in 1956. At its peak around 1890, the organization had about 490,000 members nationwide. It was credited with helping to make Memorial Day a national holiday and establish regular pensions for veterans.



*G.A.R. members wore this badge.*

A report in the April 29, 1887, edition of the *Advertiser* indicates how G.A.R. Post 634 (mistakenly called Post 643 by Holzworth) quickly became a significant part of life in Olmsted:

*A GRAND ARMY POST*

*It was a happy people that assembled at the town hall Saturday evening, with laden baskets and hearts brimful of patriotism for country, and the brave soldiers who defended it in her hour of peril. Delegates were present from Eaton, Dover, Rockport, Columbia, many of whom joined the Post. The twenty-two Cleveland comrades arrived at about 8*

*p.m. Among the number was Thomas Young, the mustering officer, Dave Kimberly, who provided much merriment and good feeling with songs and stories, and many other comrades...*

*At 9 o'clock the veterans closeted themselves for an hour to be mustered in and receive instructions. The Post was organized with 45 members. Following is the roster:*

*Commander – T.C. Stokes  
Senior Vice Commander – J.G. Fitch  
Junior V. Commander – M.B. Northrop  
Quartermaster – Ed Damp  
Q.M. Sergeant – H.A. Vaughn  
Adjutant – A. Paddock  
Chaplain – E.A. Barnard  
Surgeon – Dr. Parker  
Officer of the Day – E. Elliott*

*At 10:30 the tables had received a heavy charge of palatable things which seemed inexhaustible. But mistakes will arise, and as with the whale and oyster, the old veterans and their many friends left no room for a doubt as to the sentiment on this occasion. The remainder of the stay was spent in a social manner and many were the reminiscences of soldier life that were related. At 12 m., the Cleveland comrades took their departure on a special train which was in waiting at the depot, and profuse were the wishes that prosperity attend the G.A.R. Post of Olmsted Falls.*



*This photo shows Tom Stokes in front of his house when it was decorated flags and patriotic bunting.*

Note the early items about the G.A.R. post referred to T.M. Stokes as an organizer, but the April 29 item listed T.C. Stokes as the commander. At that time, Olmsted had two men named Tom Stokes. One operated a sawmill in Olmsted Falls along the Plum Creek waterfall between what are now Main Street and Columbia Road (behind the former library). The other ran an Olmsted Township farm along Fitch Road between Cook Road and John Road and also owned a threshing machine, which he

apparently used for earning extra income from neighboring farmers. The newspaper stories might have confused the two, but the Tom Stokes in Olmsted Falls was definitely

a proud veteran of the Union Army and strong supporter of the G.A.R. He even made sure the post would have a regular meeting place.

On May 20, 1887, the newspaper noted that Stokes was building “a commodious ware house for fertilizers.” On July 15, the paper had more to say about both the building and Stokes:

*Mr. Stokes' new building is rapidly nearing completion, and it will be one of the most substantial and commodious structures in the town when finished. The basement and lower floor will be used as warerooms for fertilizers, lime, cement, etc., and the upper floor will be the G.A.R. Hall. From the south end looms a 24 ft. flag staff, from which Mr. Stokes will air his patriotism at proper times.*



*This is Tom Stokes's G.A.R. flag. Perhaps he flew it at times from the 24-foot staff mentioned in the May 20, 1887, newspaper article about his new building.*

Meanwhile, the G.A.R. post kept growing. In May, during a meeting held at the Odd Fellows building, the post took on two new members and made preparations for Decoration Day, which was the name then for what now is Memorial Day. In a May 20 item, the *Advertiser* reported that Thomas Young, the local mustering officer, said that “the Olmsted Post has most flattering prospects of any Post he has ever mustered.”

The post made big plans for Decoration Day. It sent different people to the southern and northern parts of Olmsted Township and to Olmsted Falls to solicit contributions for flowers. It invited ladies “to meet at the school house early to arrange flowers.” On the holiday, members of the post met for an oration at what was called Public Square (probably the Village Green). From there, they went to Turkeyfoot (Chestnut Grove) Cemetery and then to Butternut Ridge Cemetery.

People in the northern part of the township welcomed the latter stop, judging by this item in the newspaper for June 3, 1887: “For several years decoration ceremonies at Butternut Ridge

cemetery have been limited to a few flowers strewn by the children, who always remembered the day. But the day was celebrated this year in a manner entirely satisfactory to all present.”

About one o’clock that day, people began to gather at Butternut Ridge. “Promptly at two o’clock, Olmsted Post No. 634, G.A.R. arrived,” the *Advertiser* reported. “The column was formed at the corner, near George Barnum’s place, and marched to the sound of martial music to the central gate of the cemetery, which had been appropriately decorated with an evergreen arch, flags, and a motto bearing the device, ‘Honor the Nation’s dead.’ The Olmsted Falls decorating committee was present and assisted the Butternut Ridge committee in the distribution of flowers...”

Festivities broke up about four o’clock that afternoon. The newspaper said they were “necessarily shortened by the threatening aspect of weather.”

The day set a pattern. For many years afterward, G.A.R. Post 634 played a key role in celebrations on every patriotic holiday.

“During the score of years the G.A.R. held sway, Olmsted was treated to the sights and sounds of veterans dressed in their old uniforms, marching to the tempo of drums and bugles on every occasion a parade was called for,” Holzworth

wrote in his book. “Fourth of July and Decoration Day were G.A.R. days. Dignitaries such as political candidates, senators or congressmen arriving in Olmsted received the G.A.R. salute and service as escorts from the railroad station to the Town Hall.”



*This is an early photo of the building Tom Stokes erected as a warehouse for his sawmill with space on the top floor for the G.A.R. post to meet.*

By late fall 1887, Tom Stokes was ready to devote part of his new building to the post – well, almost. On November 4, the newspaper ran this item: “The new G.A.R. hall will be dedicated Tuesday evening, Nov. 15. When completed it will be far the finest hall in town.” But that apparently was premature, because one week later, the *Advertiser* had this notice: “Dedication of the G.A.R. hall has been postponed. Timely notice will be given.”

After the hall was dedicated on November 29, 1887, the December 2 issue of the paper reported that “when the G.A.R. boys announced their intentions of entertaining their friends at the dedication of the new hall, every person in this and surrounding

communities jumped into harness and pulled the preparations along. Consequently when Tuesday evening arrived from 500 to 900 people were elbowing their way through the upper hall at a very early hour and the ladies were busy in the warerooms below, which had been converted into a spacious dining hall, preparing for a monster spread."



*Tom Stokes lived in this house next to his warehouse, which also provided the G.A.R. with a meeting hall.*

That's another indication of how important a role the post played in Olmsted's social life. The evening's activities began promptly at 7:45 as Commander Stokes took his chair and a quartet sang "America," which the paper called "the national hymn." (Congress did not designate the "Star-Spangled Banner" the national anthem until 1931.) After a minister gave a prayer, Stokes delivered remarks and then a long program ensued. The paper said dinner was served at 1:00 a.m. to more than 300 people, although the *Advertiser* reported that "many did not find time to eat."



*This is how Tom Stokes's former house looks in 2017 at 7865 Columbia Road..*

Further, the reporter wrote about the event:

*Your correspondent feels incapable of detailing the many attractive features of the evening and the most that imagination will portray it, is as the most interesting occasion ever entertained in Olmsted, and those who unnecessarily missed this treat can never know their loss.*

*Here we will say, Comrade T.C. Stokes who erected this fine building and so artistically decorated the beautiful hall, will ever be held in the esteem by all who know him, as a man of stirring [sic] worth to our community.*

The evening's festivities did not end until about two o'clock in the morning.



Holzworth wrote about the building: “For the next decade it was the hub of the township’s social activities and most important organizations other than the several churches.”

Despite his role in getting the G.A.R. post started and providing it with a meeting hall, Tom Stokes did not remain in a leadership position very long. In December 1887, he announced that he would resign as commander effective January 1, 1888. But that just gave the post a reason to hold another big banquet to honor him.



*This is how the former warehouse/G.A.R. hall looks today at 7835 Columbia Road. It now is a residence.*

As with the national Grand Army of the Republic organization, the post in Olmsted Falls lasted only as long as it had Civil War veterans to keep it going. “One by one the veterans faded away until there were no more,” Holzworth wrote. “Perhaps somewhere in the township are records and the name of the last survivor. Perhaps there is an answer to the mystery, what happened to the G.A.R. cannon?”



*This photo shows the back of the former warehouse, which is close to the waterfall on Plum Creek, where Tom Stokes had a sawmill.*

Holzworth wrote that he was unable to determine when the post met for the last time. “Mention is made that several members had joined the Elyria post,” he wrote. “In addition to the original 45 members, the names of 39 others were entered in the Post record book. Eighteen came from Dover [Township]. The enrollment is

estimated to be about 40% of all the men in the township who were in the Union Army. Many did not join. Some joined other Posts and some moved away.”

According to a list in Holzworth’s book, four members of the post were from Columbia Township, two were from Rockport Township and one was from Berea. Dover Township was the area that later became the municipalities of Bay Village, Westlake and



*This portion of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century photo shows the former warehouse/G.A.R. hall was in bad shape. The full photo will appear in next month's issue.*

the northeastern portion of North Olmsted. Rockport Township was to the east. It now is Lakewood, Rocky River, Fairview Park, Linndale and part of Cleveland.

The building that Tom Stokes constructed to serve as a warehouse for his business, as well as the G.A.R. post's meeting hall, also had other uses over the years. Peter Kidney rented a room on the second floor for his chair factory. The building also had a milliner shop for a while. However, it fell into disrepair early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and might have been lost to history. But it was renovated to serve as a residence, which it still is at 7835 Columbia Road. Many people recognize it as the long building right where the road curves across from Elm Street.

Holzworth wrote that he was uncertain about when the building was constructed. Cuyahoga County property records, which are not always correct, especially for 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings, list its year of construction as 1853. However, the newspaper stories cited above seem to make it clear that Tom Stokes built it in 1887. Perhaps some portion of the building was older, but the reporter for the *Advertiser* would not likely have referred to construction of "one of the most substantial and commodious structures in the town" in 1887 if Stokes were not putting up all or most of a large building at that time.

Stokes had an advantage in doing such construction in that he operated his sawmill right there at the falls along Plum Creek, so he had a ready source of lumber. The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will consider the history of that mill from before Stokes got involved with it to after it was dismantled. A small part of the structure from that mill actually still exists.

*Thanks to Bruce Banks for collecting and sharing many of the old photos used in this and other issues.*

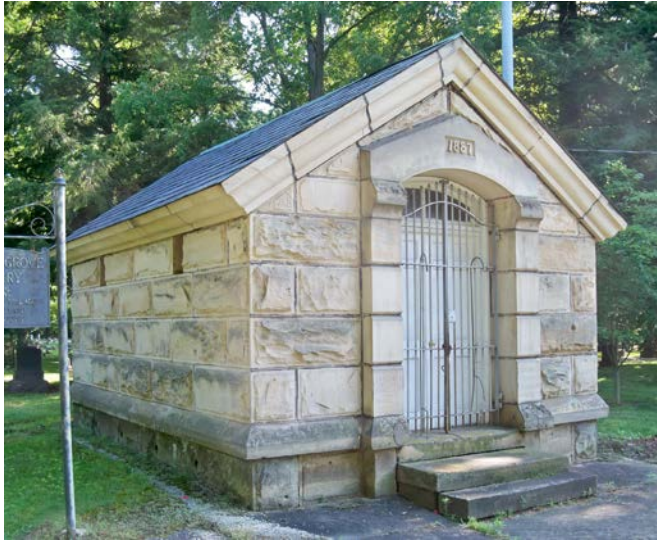
## **Turkeyfoot Vault Has Lasted 130 Years**

The building that served as Tom Stokes's warehouse and the meeting hall for the Grand Army of the Republic Post 634 was not the only lasting structure constructed in 1887. While it was going up during the summer and fall of that year, another man was busy assembling cut stone at Chestnut Grove Cemetery, also known as Turkeyfoot, to build what was called a "vault."



In its June 24, 1887, edition, the *Berea Advertiser* ran this item: “Mr. Wm. Sabin has the contract to furnish stone for the new vault.” However, the community awarded the contract to build the “vault” to another man, S.C. Broadey.

“Our vault is beginning to show itself,” the paper reported on July 15. “Experts claim it will be one of the first vaults in the county.”



*The vault built in 1887 has been a permanent part of Chestnut Grove (Turkeyfoot) Cemetery 130 years. This is how it looks today.*

Although it was called a vault at that time, it should not be confused with a burial vault, which is a lined and sealed receptacle that a casket is put into. The “vault” built at the cemetery in 1887 could more properly be called a “mausoleum,” except it was not meant to serve as the permanent burial place for anyone. Rather, it was intended as a place to store recently deceased bodies until they could be buried at the cemetery.

Dan Hill, who served as superintendent of Chestnut Grove Cemetery until 2016, explained during a 2007 cemetery tour that

bodies were not embalmed back in the 1800s. “So when somebody would pass away, while they were waiting for the rest of the relatives to come into town, they’d put him inside here,” he said. “The floor is actually raised three foot above the ground. That’s all gravel underneath there. You can go in there in the summer, when it’s about 80 degrees, it’s only 65 in there. It’s really cool in there. There’s air pockets underneath. It creates the air to come around, and it just takes the stone, which is very, very thick – and it is from the local quarry – a long time to get the heat from the outside to the inside because it’s sandstone. It’s not granite. Granite would transpose it in a hurry.”

The construction of the vault allowed Chestnut Grove Cemetery to catch up with Butternut Ridge Cemetery, where township trustees had spent \$1,000 in 1879 to build a similar vault. It’s not clear how much they spent at Chestnut Grove in 1887, but the community seemed to have been pleased with the results. On November 11 of that year, the *Advertiser* reported: “The



*The names of W.D. Bennett, E.A. Barnard and S.C. Broadey are carved in stone.*

new vault is an excellent piece of workmanship from the skill of a practical builder, Mr. S.C. Broadey.”

Broadey is one of several men whose names are carved into the stone of the vault. To the left of the door are the names of Olmsted Township Trustees T.M. Stokes, R.T. Elliot and T.M. Miller. To the right of the door are the names of Township Clerk W.D. Bennett, as well as E.A. Barnard, the vault’s architect, and Broadey, the builder. The vault remains a prominent structure at the cemetery to this day.



*The 1887 vault at Chestnut Grove is almost identical to this 1879 vault at Butternut Ridge Cemetery.*



*This portion of a late 1940s photo shows the vault then was covered with vines. The whole photo can be found in Issue 37 of Olmsted 200 from June 2016.*

By the way, another item about the cemetery, but unrelated to the vault, in the *Advertiser* in 1887 provides an explanation for how Turkeyfoot got its name. The item in the August 12 edition of the paper was about a picnic that had been held at the cemetery. It included this sentence: “The speakers’ stand and booths were on the palm of the foot – so named from its resemblance to a turkey’s foot.”

That explanation is different than the one given by Holzworth and mentioned in an article about the Turkeyfoot name in *Olmsted 200* Issue 41 from October 2016. In his 1966 book, Holzworth said Turkeyfoot got its name “because a flock of Bradford turkeys roosted there.”

Although township trustees gave the cemetery the official name “Chestnut Grove” in 1878, Olmsted residents never have quit referring to it as “Turkeyfoot.”

## **Reader Corrects Big House’s Former Address**

Writing about history and getting the facts straight can be tricky. Sometimes, when one writer gets something wrong, that mistake can be repeated by others who come along later.

That happened in Issue 49 of *Olmsted 200* from June. A story about the early history of the house at 25390 Nobottom Road – the big house at the corner of Columbia Road and Nobottom – quoted two paragraphs from Bernice Offenberg’s 1964 book, *Over the Years in Olmsted*, in which she referred to the house’s former address as 7314 Columbia Road. It turns out that was incorrect.

Lynn (TeGrotenhuis) Rice, who lived there as a child, wrote to express gratitude for the story in *Olmsted 200* about the house. But she added, “I just wanted to point out that the original address for our home was 7315 Columbia Road not 7314.” She thought that wasn’t worth mentioning as a correction, but it is worth mentioning lest someone else would repeat the error later on. So thanks, Lynn. *Olmsted 200* appreciates the sharp eyes of readers.

And if you missed it, a story about the house with a few of Lynn Rice’s mid-20<sup>th</sup> century photos of it can be found in Issue 48 from May.

## **Is This Really the 50<sup>th</sup> Issue of *Olmsted 200*?**

Yes, *Olmsted 200* now has 50 issues thanks to readers like you who enjoy reading about the history of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township and keep encouraging more. *Olmsted 200* began four years ago as the Olmsted communities approached their bicentennial. At the time, some well-meaning people were circulating incorrect stories about Olmsted’s history, so it seemed as though a newsletter that could correct the record might be needed.

Well, it not only served that purpose but caught on with a readership that continues to grow. That’s a testament to how fascinating Olmsted’s history is and how many people are interested in learning about it.

It has been gratifying that many of the best stories have resulted from readers’ contributions of information and photos that might otherwise not have come to public attention and perhaps would have been lost to fading memories and people’s attics. Keep them coming, folks. And keep looking for more Olmsted history in the months ahead in *Olmsted 200*.

## **Still to Come**

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about the Big Red Mill that Tom Stokes and others operated at the falls along Plum Creek, as well as other stories about Olmsted history.

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 California, Washington, 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](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 the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.

*Olmsted 200* is copyright © 2017 by Jim Wallace. All rights reserved.

