



# Olmsted 200

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

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## Big Red Mill Was a Busy Place in Olmsted's Past

One of the charming aspects of Olmsted Falls is that so many buildings from the 1800s and early 1900s have survived to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and have been put to new uses. One example of that is the former warehouse and meeting hall built in 1887 by Tom Stokes that is now a residence and was featured in Issue 50 of *Olmsted 200* last month.



*This painting of the mill by Kinley Shogren once hung in the former library along Main Street. It indicates the red color of the mill. Shogren reportedly based the painting on a photograph. More about Shogren can be found in Olmsted 200 Issue 41 from October 2016.*

Not so fortunate was the big, water-powered sawmill he operated and for which he needed the warehouse. However, for many years, that mill was a prominent feature in downtown Olmsted Falls.

The mill was located at the waterfall along Plum Creek between the streets now known as Columbia Road and Main Street. It is at the western end of the Dan Waugh Nature Trail behind the Newton P. Loomis house, which many people still recognize as the former library.

The exact chronology of

what happened there is not clear because of discrepancies in past historical accounts, but it seems the first mill located there was built several years before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. “Joseph Olmsted Loomis and his son N.P. Loomis built this mill in 1844,” Bernice Offenberg wrote in her 1964 history of Olmsted. She then indicated that brothers Levi and Sylvester Alcott established a planing mill and sawmill at the site sometime before 1864.

“Their woodlot was on Usher Road,” Offenberg wrote. “When they cleared off the timber they sold the lot to Charles Harding. This lot contained 44.40 acres (by an old map in Lakes Atlas) which was owned by L.D. & Sylvester Alcott in 1864.”



*This is the best existing photograph of the mill that once stood near the falls along Plum Creek. Because it is labeled “Stokes Mill,” the photo apparently was taken sometime after January 1883, when Tom Stokes became the sole proprietor.*

In his 1966 book on Olmsted history, Walter Holzworth gave a slightly different account. He wrote that Thomas Lemmon came along before the Alcott brothers and built a mill, which the Alcotts later acquired. Such transactions occurred before newspapers covered Olmsted news, so it is hard to determine precisely what happened when.

According to Holzworth, Lemmon and his wife moved to Olmsted in 1850. He was a native of Edinburgh, Scotland. Before moving to the United States, he owned and operated a sawmill in Canada. Initially after coming to Olmsted, Lemmon operated a chair factory near Minnie Creek, which is the small stream that crosses under Columbia Road north of Nobottom Road. Thomas Lemmon died on December 6, 1869.

Among the Lemmons’ 11 children were two daughters who married the Alcott brothers. The youngest daughter, Isabelle, married Sylvester Alcott. Her sister, Liby, married Levi Alcott.

Holzworth wasn’t sure when the Alcotts moved to Olmsted, but he wrote that they bought wooded acreage around Schady and Usher roads in 1872. (He added that the formerly wooded land had become the site of a housing development by 1965.)

At one time (around 1874), Sylvester Alcott and his family lived in the house at the southwestern corner of Mill Street and Columbia Road. That house had been built about 1830 by William Waring. It now houses Le Bistro du Beaujolais, the French restaurant at 8134 Columbia Road. Levi Alcott lived three doors down at the corner of what now are Columbia Road and Bagley Road, where the BP gas station is located today.

It's not clear when, but at some point, Tom Stokes joined the Alcotts as a business partner. Then they built a larger waterwheel, which allowed them to provide the community with finished lumber and trim, as well as other building supplies.

"In 1873 they added a [planing] and matching mill and with a stock of sized lumber and timbers, started what could be termed Olmsted's first lumber and builders supply yard," Holzworth wrote.

The mill builders used a dam upstream of the waterfall to back up a pool of water. The water then was directed down a narrow channel, the mill race, to pour over the big wheel, which turned and powered the mill's wood-cutting blades. Old photographs and paintings show that the mill was a large structure. Because of its size and color, it was called the Big Red Mill.

As steam-powered engines came into use late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many smaller sawmills were set up in the wooded areas of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township, but as Holzworth wrote, the Alcott and Stokes mill remained "a flourishing business."

In the summer of 1882, one of the Alcott brothers died. The Berea newspaper, the *Advertiser*, reported in the Olmsted Falls column its September 17, 1882, edition:

*Sylvester L. Alcott expired on Thursday, August 31, '82 after a prolonged illness of consumption, aged 54 years. He was a well known and respected resident in this township, and leaves a widow and two children, and a large circle of friends to mourn their loss. The funeral occurred Saturday.*



*This photo probably is from the early 20th century, after the heyday of the mill but before it was torn down.*

*Mrs. S.L. Alcott expresses her thanks to all neighbors and friends who assisted at the obsequies and previous illness of her late husband.*

*Mr. S. Alcott of Napoleon, Mich., attended his brother's funeral Sunday.*



*In this photo, the waterwheel is still intact, but the structure above it was mostly dismantled. Thus, the photo likely was taken in 1920 or 1921, when Grover Imhoff was in the process of taking the mill apart. In the upper left is a part of the warehouse and G.A.R. meeting hall built by Tom Stokes in 1887. That portion of the photo was shown in last month's story about that building.*

There is no explanation for why the paper reported the funeral was on a Saturday but Alcott's brother attended it on Sunday.

The partnership of Alcott & Stokes did not last much longer past the death of Sylvester Alcott.

The January 4, 1883, edition of the *Advertiser* reported: "The firm of Alcott & Stokes, lumber dealers, etc., has dissolved. Mr. Stokes purchased Mr. Alcott's interest and will continue the business." As the sole proprietor of the business, Stokes expanded it by building the warehouse (which was featured in Issue 50 of *Olmsted 200* from last month) that also provided the Civil War veterans'

group, Grand Army of the Republic Post 634, with a meeting hall in 1887.

Offenberg apparently spoke with Grover Imhoff, who tore down the mill about 1920 or 1921. She wrote that he said "that the two-story part of the mill in the middle of the building and the one-story part of the mill on the south side were of old barn construction, and the one story part on the north was of stud construction with two-by-fours and drop siding. This was a cider mill. The Planing mill was on the south and the sawmill was in the two-story part of the mill where the mill wheel was



*The waterwheel still was there when this photo was taken. Note the stones in front of it. Some still remain.*

situated.”

Charles Bonsey, who was born in 1893 and once served as mayor of Olmsted Falls, remembered the mill well many years later. Local historian Bruce Banks, who is co-author of *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township*, interviewed Bonsey in 1982. The mill was still operating when he was a child. He recalled that the mill not only cut timber but also planed it to produce finished lumber.

“We used to go down and watch the planer,” Bonsey said. “It made a fascinating noise. The knives would spin around and would throw out little shavings about like that.”

The warehouse that Stokes built in 1887 allowed him to store lumber inside to keep it from getting wet, he said.

“That mill, in addition to making finished lumber, had a cider press, and [Stokes] had apple orchards,” Bonsey recalled. “One of them was right up on the corner of Brookside and now-Elm Street. That whole corner was apple orchard on the southeast side. He owned all that property along there. Eventually, people built houses on it. There were several kids in the neighborhood that liked to go and sample the cider.... We used to go down to the cider mill when he was pressing apples for cider and get straws out of



*Here is another early 20<sup>th</sup> century view of the mill's wheel from after the mill above it had been removed.*

freight on a car of lumber.”

the straw stack. Of course, they left the bung hole open. We'd stick the straw down and suck the cider out of it through a straw.”

Stokes had a hired hand named Charlie Peters to take care of his horses and deliver lumber to carpenters or people building houses, Bonsey said.

“But Mr. Stokes was another one of those pious individuals, always good natured, always friendly,” he said. “He was another man that I never heard use a cuss word. Uncle Tom, we used to call him. And he would come up to the depot when I worked there to pay freight on a carload of lumber, and he always had no checks. They didn't write checks in those years. [He used] a roll of 300 or 400 or 500 dollars to pay



When Grover Imhoff, who served as superintendent of schools for Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township in the early 1920s, tore down the mill building, he left the waterwheel intact. Offenberger wrote, “He thought it should have something built around it to preserve it, but nothing was done about it.”



*Some of the stones that formed the wall around the waterwheel remain in place today. The left photo shows them in relation to the falls along Plum Creek.*

*The right photo is a closer view of just the stones. They can be seen from the overlook platform at the western end of the Dan Waugh Nature Trail.*

The mill has been gone for almost a century now, and the waterwheel for almost as long. But one small part of the structure remains: a few dozen stones forming part of the wall that once enclosed the waterwheel. They can be seen from the platform on the other side of Plum Creek overlooking the falls where the mill once stood tall. Also remaining are some stones on the other side of Plum Creek that were part of the dam that backed up the creek’s water, so it could be directed to the waterwheel.



*These stones on the east side of Plum Creek are left over from the dam that once stretched across the creek to hold back water that then was diverted over the waterwheel to power the mill.*

In addition, there are some square and rectangular cuts in the stone bed alongside the stream (and sometimes under it when the water level is high). It is hard to tell now



exactly what they were used for, but there are two good possibilities. One is that they could have been used to anchor structures that reinforced the dam. Another is that they could have been used to anchor the train trestle that passed over Plum Creek to carry a railroad spur to the sandstone quarries in what is now David Fortier River Park. It's possible both explanations are right with some there for reinforcing the dam and others for holding the train trestle. (The quarries will be the subject of a future story in *Olmsted 200*.)



*Here are examples of some square and rectangular cutouts in the stone alongside Plum Creek upstream of the waterfall. They could have been used to anchor supports for a train trestle that passed over the creek or structures to reinforce the dam or both.*



*To the left is a rear view of the house once owned by Tom Stokes when he operated the Big Red Mill, which would have been off to the right of this photo, as is the falls along Plum Creek. He lived close to his work. Photos showing a recent front view of the house at 7865 Columbia Road and how it looked in the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be found in Issue 50 of *Olmsted 200* from July.*

The Big Red Mill along Plum Creek and Damp's Mill long the West Branch of Rocky River were the two most prominent mills in Olmsted Falls in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Damp's Mill was featured in stories in *Olmsted 200* Issue 5 from October 2013 and Issue 16 from September 2014.) They were among many mills built in the 1800s to take advantage of the water power provided by those two streams. Next month, Issue 52 of *Olmsted 200* will consider other mills that operated around Olmsted,

as well as another big mill that served Olmsted residents even though it was located just outside of the community's border.

## Who Was Miss Eva Stokes?

A few items from the *Berea Advertiser* from 120 years ago provide an insight into life in Olmsted Falls near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But they also raise a mystery.

The Olmsted Falls column of the newspaper from September 24, 1897, included this item:

*“Miss Eva Stokes has opened up a fine line of millinery in the new rooms in T.C. Stokes’ building. The ladies of Olmsted Falls and vicinity are cordially invited to call and see her stock and get her prices before purchasing elsewhere. Miss Stokes has secured the services of a competent and stylish trimmer from Cleveland, and their fall opening shows taste and elegance of design. Come and see for yourselves.”*

T.C.Stokes’s building was the warehouse he had built in 1887 to serve his sawmill, which is the subject of the first story in this issue. That warehouse building also provided the Civil War veterans’ group, Grand Army of the Republic Post 634, with meeting space. The story of that building was featured last month in Issue 50 of *Olmsted 200*, which also noted that the building at times housed other businesses, including Peter Kidney’s chair-making business and a millinery.

The issue of the newspaper with the item about Eva Stokes’s new shop also included an advertisement for the business. It looked something like this:

### NEW MILLINERY STORE

#### The T.C. Stokes Building, Olmsted Falls

Ladies – you are invited to call and inspect my beautiful new stock  
of Millinery Goods, which includes the latest styles in  
Ladies’ Hats, Street Hats, Sailors, Children’s Caps, Etc.  
NEW GOODS, LATEST STYLES  
....AND LOWEST PRICES

### EVA STOKES.

Apparently, the business got off to a good start, even though the typesetter misspelled “LATEST.” The October 1, 1897, edition of the *Advertiser* included this item: “The millinery opening of the new store in T.C. Stokes’ building was a decided success.”



The newspaper item and ad above confirm that a millinery, a shop for women's hats, did locate in the building 10 years after Tom Stokes constructed the warehouse. That the milliner's name was Miss Eva Stokes does not seem surprising. It seems logical that she could have been the daughter of Tom Stokes. However, Walter Holzworth wrote in his 1966 book about Olmsted history that Stokes did not have any offspring. There was another Tom Stokes – or T.M. Stokes – a farmer who lived along Fitch Road in Olmsted Township. He did have four children. Holzworth wrote about the three sons, but not the daughter. He didn't even mention her name.

So who was Eva Stokes? Because she was called "Miss," she obviously was not married, so she could not have been the wife of T.C. Stokes, the owner of the building where her shop was located. Unless she was his niece, it seems likely that she was the daughter of T.M. Stokes, the farmer. Considering that she was among few women to operate businesses in Olmsted Falls in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it seems odd that Holzworth failed to mention her name. But thanks to old newspaper items, we now know it.

## Olmsted's PTA Turns 100

As the new school year begins in the Olmsted Falls City Schools, the work of the local Parent Teacher Association (PTA) will head into its second century. The local PTA got started 100 years ago in 1917.

That was the year after the school district had opened its new school at the corner of what now are called Bagley Road and Mapleway Drive. The new school (now Olmsted Falls City Hall) replaced several smaller schools – some with only one or two rooms – spread around Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. It made the school district the first in Cuyahoga County to consolidate that way.



*The 1916 school was in its second year when the local PTA was formed.*

Although the new school was a big improvement over those it replaced, an amenity that planners failed to include was a kitchen. Therefore, one of the first projects the PTA took on was to provide hot lunches to students. PTA members brought in hot soup and other food. By doing so, the local PTA followed a trend begun in 1912, when other PTAs across the nation started sponsoring hot lunch projects in schools.

When Olmsted's chapter was formed, the PTA's national organization was 20 years old. It was founded in 1897 by Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst as the National Congress of Mothers. However, despite the name, the more than 2,000 people who attended the organization's first convocation in Washington, D.C., on February 17, 1897, included not just mothers but also fathers, teachers, laborers and legislators.

Today, the Olmsted Falls City School District has five PTA organizations, one for each of the schools: the Olmsted Early Childhood PTA, the Falls-Lenox/Early Childhood Center PTA, the Olmsted Falls Intermediate School PTA, the Olmsted Falls Middle School PTA and the Olmsted Falls High School PTA.

By the way, it was 20 years ago when the school board sold the old school that was built in 1916 and was subsequently expanded in 1926, 1938 and late in the 1940s. In its latter years, the building was a middle school, but after the current middle school opened farther west on Bagley Road in November 1996, the district no longer needed the old school. The school board reached an agreement in March 1997 to sell the building to FirstNorth Development Corporation, of Cleveland for \$225,000. After renovations, the building later became Olmsted Falls City Hall, Olmsted Community Center and a day care center.



*Here is a photo of the former school from the 1930s or 1940s that turned up recently on an old postcard. The original 1916 building is on the right. The 1926 addition is on the left. It seems that parking was permitted at the time of the photo on each side of Bagley Road. More than 20 years have passed since the building was used as a school. It now serves as Olmsted Falls City Hall.*

## **Olmsted Had Its Own “Footloose” Dispute**

It has been 33 years since the movie *Footloose* portrayed a small town in which dancing was banned through the efforts of a prominent preacher. Although dancing was

never banned in Olmsted Falls, the community had its own version of suppression of dancing by religious leaders 140 years ago this month.

The Berea newspaper, which then was called the *Cuyahoga Republican*, had this item in the Olmsted column for August 30, 1877:

*Those who attended church on the last two Sundays, had a chance to listen to a tirade against dancing. On the first Sunday, Mr. Burlison went so far as to call those ladies who attended dances, "Things," and on last Sunday, Mr. Grogan nearly matched him. Perhaps those men have made friends by their remarks but we would like to ask them which is the greater sin to go to a dance properly conducted and while away few hours in "tripping the light fantastic" or for a crowd to go off into the woods where the temptations to sin are many times greater, and make night hideous until hours when most dancing would be over, and call it a camp-meeting? We wait with patience for the explanation.*

The Mr. Burlison referred to was the preacher at the Methodist Episcopal Church (in the building now called the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel), and Mr. Grogan was preacher at the Congregational Church (which was torn down in the 1950s) across the street. Those were the two main churches for Protestants in Olmsted Falls at that time.

Did such preaching have an effect? Well, another item in that same Olmsted column indicated it did: "The dance at Shueren's Grove, was not very well patronized by the young people of this place."

Theodore Schueren (correct spelling) had a tree nursery and eventually a greenhouse just north of Olmsted Falls along Lewis Road. Thus, his grove was apparently the place where the dance was held. For more on Schueren, see Issue 18 of *Olmsted 200* from November 2014.

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include more stories about Olmsted history, including a story about other mills built in or near Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township that used water from either Rocky River or Plum Creek for sawing lumber or grinding grain.

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 Village Bean Café in Olmsted Falls and the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.

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