



Olmsted 200

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

Issue 92

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Contents

Merger 50 Years Ago Changed Course for Two Villages	1
Neighbors Win Against the Railroad	8
Others Share Their Olmsted Railroad Stories	9
Book Puts Local Quarries into Bigger Perspective	10
Still to Come	11

Merger 50 Years Ago Changed Course for Two Villages

Fifty years ago this month, the map of southwestern Cuyahoga County changed and so did plans for two small villages. The Village of West View (also often written as one word, Westview) disappeared and a larger Village of Olmsted Falls emerged. What actually happened was West View annexed Olmsted Falls, but it took the Olmsted Falls name, so it appeared as though it happened the other way around. In fact, John Kuzman, who was running for a position on Olmsted Falls Village Council at the time, said about the proposed merger in a letter to voters:

'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished. Should Olmsted Falls (the groom) take Westview (the bride) and the happy couple adopt the Township, the union would be blessed by the county commissioners and myself.

West View had appeared on maps going back to the early 19th century, but it was just an unincorporated hamlet that straddled the border between Cuyahoga County and Lorain County until the early 20th century. From 1927 through the end of 1970, West View was an incorporated village entirely in Cuyahoga County. The decision to combine West View and Olmsted Falls emerged in 1969 amid a flurry of attempts to annex all or

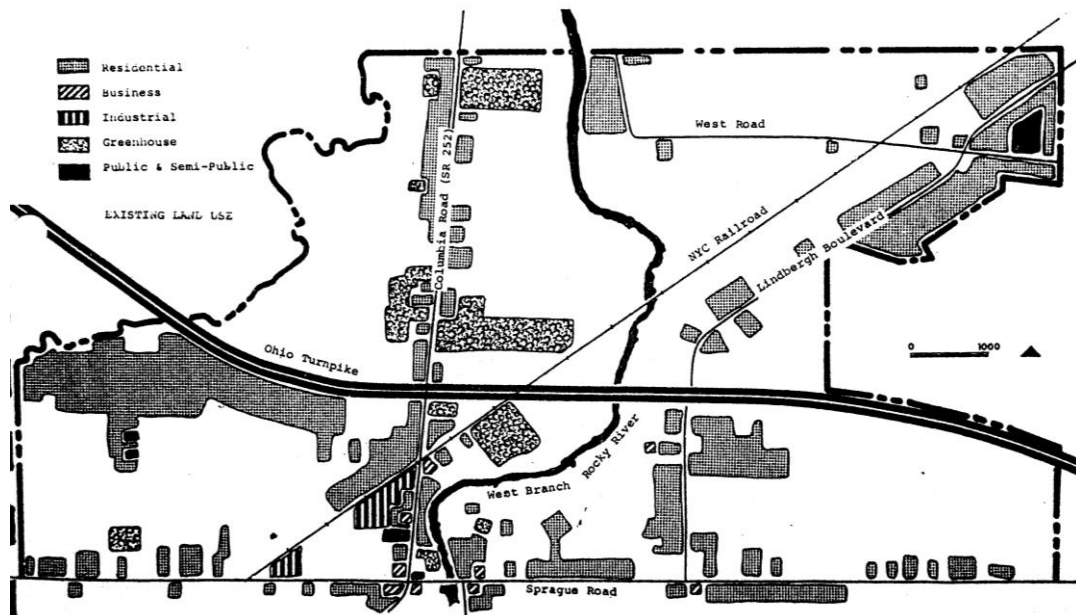


This button, owned by Ann Reichle, was used in the campaign to persuade people to support merging Olmsted Falls and West View.

part of Olmsted Township to Olmsted Falls, West View and other neighboring communities. The township annexation efforts mostly failed, but the work of the Olmsted Falls-West View Consolidation Commission proved fruitful and moved surprisingly quickly. That panel met for the first time on June 13, 1969, and within a year, voters of both villages voted on May 5, 1970, to approve the merger, which became effective January 1, 1971. (For more on that and the efforts to annex the township, see Issue 72 of *Olmsted 200* from May 2019. For another story about the short life of the Village of West View, see Issue 17 from October 2014.)

As that timeline suggests, the proposal to combine Olmsted Falls and West View had not been considered very long – unlike the many proposals for annexing Olmsted Township to Olmsted Falls – and then became reality in a short time. The speed of the action is especially notable considering it was a big turning point, or inflection point, in the history of the two communities.

In fact, just one year before the merger came up, the people of West View were considering a much different future on their own. The evidence for that is a comprehensive plan for the community prepared by Visnapuu & Gaede, an architectural and planning firm, and presented to the village in January 1968. It was the culmination of four-and-a-half years of planning work by the community.



The 1968 comprehensive plan for West View included this map of what the village looked like then. Other than greenhouses, the village had little industry or business and plenty of room for more residential development.

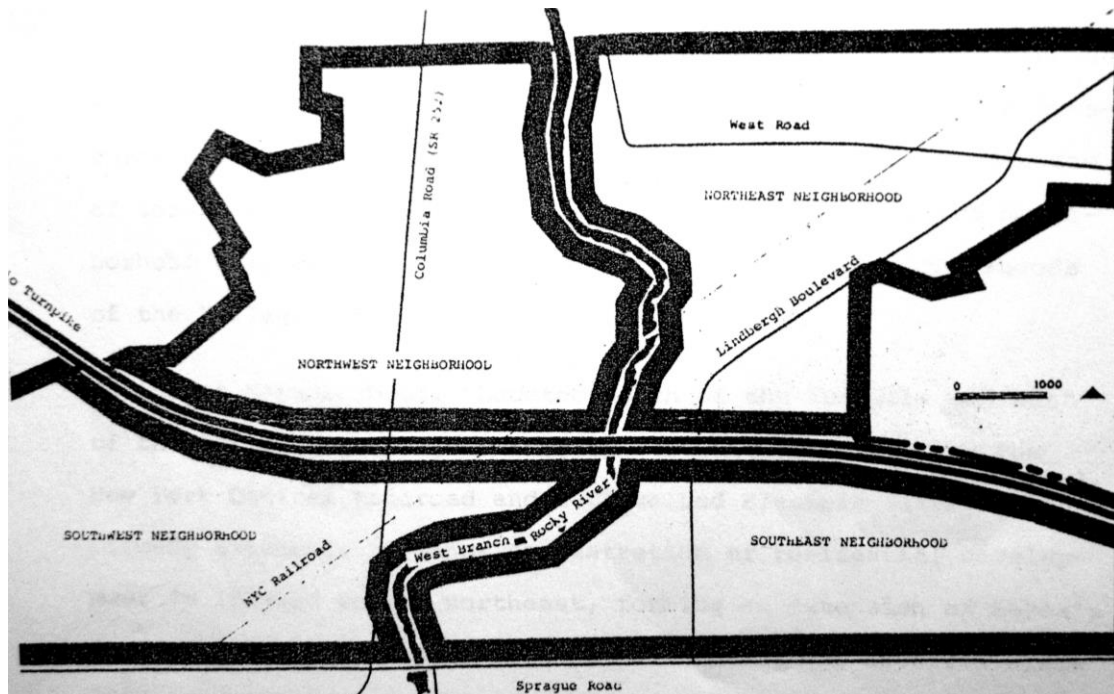
One reason given for developing the plan was the village's population growth. In 1930, three years after the community incorporated as a municipality, it had 345 residents. The population went up to 625 in 1950 and 1,302 in 1960. Projections were for the population to reach 2,450 in 1970 and 5,600 by 1980. It also was expected to get

younger with a median age of less than 30 in 1980 and about 40 percent of residents under age 18, while only 8 percent would be older than 64.

Other interesting statistics from the 1968 comprehensive plan were that:

- Almost half of the village's labor force was white-collar, or professional, workers that year.
- The median family income in 1960 was \$8,054, which was considered middle income.
- The village had 440 households in 1968, and that number was expected to increase to 630 by 1970 and 1,490 by 1980.
- The number of public school students was expected to be about 600 in 1970 and 1,420 by 1980.
- The village was expected to have 660 housing units by 1970 with 50 of them being multi-family units.
- About half of the housing units were more than 25 years old.
- The median value of owner-occupied housing units was about \$22,000.
- About one-quarter of the 1,250 acres of land in the community was developed at that time, including 235 acres of residential land, 10 acres with businesses, 55 acres with greenhouses or other industry and 60 acres of right-of way (such as for the New York Central Railroad, Cleveland Electric Illuminating and the Ohio Turnpike). Another 885 acres remained undeveloped.

The study proposed for the development of vacant land into four well-organized neighborhoods. West View was conveniently divided into those four neighborhoods by Rocky River running roughly north-south and the Ohio Turnpike running east-west.

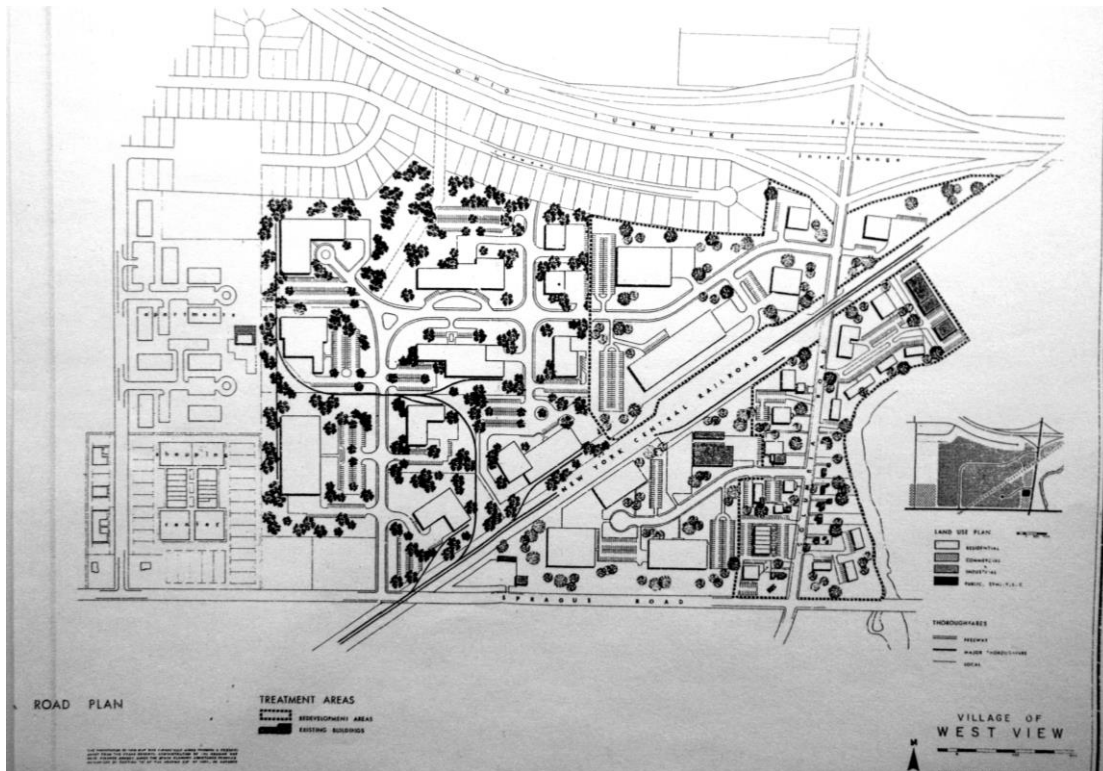


The plan would have divided West View into four neighborhoods

In the Northwest Neighborhood, the predominant land use included one-family residences along Columbia Road and greenhouse operations, but more than 60 percent of the land was seen as suitable for residential growth while greenhouse operations would shrink.

The Northeast Neighborhood had a “major concentration of residential development...forming an extension of Berea’s residential growth.” Its development was considered to be closely related to Berea’s future expansion. It was noted that 150 acres of that section had already been annexed by Berea. It was suggested that large-scale development would depend on water and sanitary sewers, which Berea was positioned to provide. (Perhaps that was a warning that Berea might try to get more land if West View didn’t get its act together.)

The description of the Southeast Neighborhood was that it was “characterized by vacant land to the east with about half of the road frontage developed and partially developed subdivisions along Lindberg [sic] Boulevard. The report predicted growth and development pressures for the vacant land.



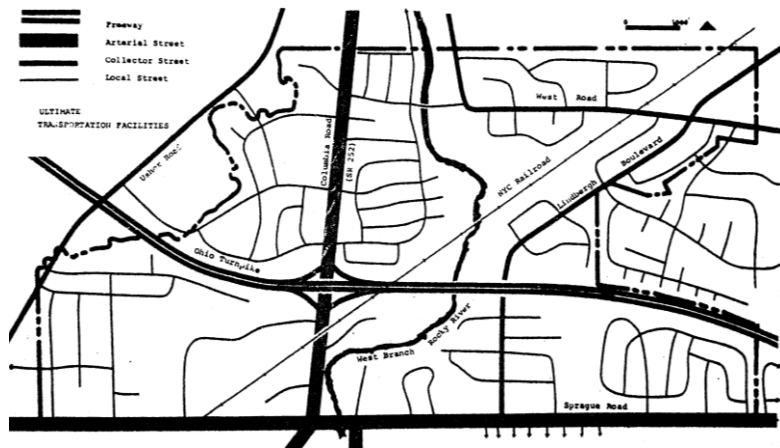
The comprehensive plan included this depiction of what West View’s Southwest Neighborhood could look like with controlled development.

The Southwest Neighborhood contained the “older sections” of West View. “Mixed uses of land and greenhouses are found along Columbia Road,” the report said. “Homes have been converted to double occupancy and, because of age, are deteriorated. Part of the neighborhood along the New York Central Railroad is developed for industrial uses and the Comprehensive Plan proposes an expansion of those industrial areas.”

The plan called for “redevelopment and rehabilitation of two relatively small areas along Columbia Road. These areas have been carefully coordinated with industrial development along the New York Central Railroad.”

Under the category of transportation, the plan suggested that the major streets – Columbia Road, Sprague Road and Lindbergh Boulevard each should be widened to four lanes by 1980. It also proposed two other major improvements: a Columbia Road interchange on the Ohio Turnpike and a bridge over the New York Central railroad tracks on Columbia Road. The turnpike interchange was never built, and the nearest interchanges remain those in North Ridgeville and Strongsville. However, instead of a Columbia Road bridge over the railroad (now owned by CSX Transportation), an underpass was built to serve the same purpose, although not until the early 21st century (as detailed in last month’s issue of *Olmsted 200*).

In addition to those changes, the plan suggested the village would get an assortment of secondary streets as housing developments filled the undeveloped land in much of the village. That, of course, did happen not only in the former West View but also in the rest of Olmsted Falls, as well as much of Olmsted Township.



This is what the plan thought West View’s road system could have looked like with proposed development. Note the Columbia Road interchange for the Ohio Turnpike.

“Because of the relative large amount of land which could be developed, Westview is especially vulnerable to scattered and unrelated residential development,” the plan said. “Such development would result in a wasteful consumption of land.”

Thus, the plan encouraged the community to use zoning and control lot sizes to encourage the appropriate location and density of residential development. It said single-family residential areas should have lot sizes of at least 11,250 square feet. Smaller concentrations of medium-density residential areas for single-family and two-family units should have minimum lot sizes of 8,500 square feet.

One section of the comprehensive plan was devoted to proposed new public facilities for the community. Included were three types of recreational facilities, such as a community park. It suggested the park should cover 25 acres and could include facilities for swimming, picnicking, hiking and field sports, as well as a secluded section for a day camp. “A bird sanctuary, botanical garden, nature museum and arboretum are appropriate

features,” the report said. But it didn’t suggest exactly where in West View a park might be established other than near Rocky River.

The second type of recreational facility the comprehensive plan proposed was at least one centrally located recreation field that would include court areas for tennis, badminton, volleyball, basketball and shuffleboard, as well as fields for football, baseball, softball, soccer and field hockey and perhaps a field house with dressing rooms and showers. The field ideally would cover at least 10 acres.

The third type of recreational facility included in the plan was a playground for children from pre-school age through 15 years old in each of the four neighborhoods. Each would cover three to five acres and include a shelter with toilets, drinking fountains and space for handicraft, dramatics and music.

In regard to where parks and recreational areas should be located, the plan noted a considerable amount of suitable land was available along the west branch of Rocky River. “The preservation of this ‘green belt’ should be encouraged and represents an important feature of Westview’s Comprehensive Plan,” the study said.

In addition to recreational facilities, the plan suggested that West View should have at least two elementary schools by 1980, one in the Northwest Neighborhood and one in the Southwest Neighborhood. But that wasn’t something the municipality could decide on its own because most of the village was in the Olmsted Falls Local School District, which already had elementary schools on Bagley Road and Fitch Road. (Part of West View was on the outskirts of the Berea City School District, which made it an unlikely location for a new school.)



This 1880 schoolhouse served as West View’s Village Hall. The plan said it was still adequate for that but might need to be expanded in the future. It now houses Barbara Richardson’s Emerald & Violet Studio.

The comprehensive plan found the community’s existing Village Hall (a former 19th century school building along Columbia Road) and its fire station and service garage were located well to serve the entire community, but it suggested expanded facilities might be needed as the village grew.

On the issue of commercial development, the plan suggested the village had the potential for the construction of a single shopping center with 50,000 square feet of floor space. For the economic health of the shopping center and to avoid traffic hazards and congestion, the plan suggested the best place for it would be along Sprague Road west of the railroad tracks. It said other limited commercial development around the community could be considered.

The plan accurately projected that the village was not likely to attract much industrial development because of a lack of sewer and

water services. But in the expectation that such services would be established in the future, it suggested a relatively large area close to Columbia Road and the railroad should be preserved for industrial development. However, it also advised that industrial development should be “carefully controlled by means of zoning and subdivision regulations.”

Also part of the plan was an urban renewal project for two small areas along Columbia Road with an expected cost of \$300,000. “Under renewal procedures, aging and deteriorating sections of the Village can be cleared and the land made ready for new uses in accordance with the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan,” the study said. “This is accomplished through the investment of private capital along with Federal grant assistance.” The proposed budget called for \$300,000 for land purchase, \$50,000 for clearance of the land and \$50,000 for administration costs, but it expected to recoup \$100,000 through proceeds from sale of the land. The expectation was that the federal government would pick up 75 percent of the cost, \$225,000, leaving just \$75,000 for the village to pay, but that could be in the form of streets, schools, fire stations, sidewalks and sewers.



This sign no longer was needed after West View and Olmsted Falls merged. Photo courtesy of Bill Anderer.

That was how one architectural and planning firm thought West View might develop as it approached the 1970s. Meanwhile, John Kuzman had some of the same issues on his wish list as he

ran for Olmsted Falls Village Council. For example, he favored zoning as “the greatest power a municipality wields. Used improperly, it can deprive people of their property and cause serious dislocations and financial problems in a community. Wisely used, it can direct the development of a community to provide a place for all segments of its people and also accommodate *[sic]* business and industry with least disruption of a good living environment.”

Kuzman wanted to integrate poor people, old people and young people throughout the village and avoid having any such segment of society concentrated in any particular area. He said that meant accepting some low-cost housing but avoiding the building of huge “warrens for housing these people,” as he said the Metropolitan Housing Authority was doing in some parts of the Cleveland area.

However, Kuzman opposed plans at the time for sewers in Olmsted Falls. He blamed the previous four village administrations for negotiating the community into a corner. “The citizens of Olmsted Falls should tell the Ohio Pollution Board to jump in their polluted lake,” he wrote in his letter to voters. “We will not put in sewers nor build a treatment plant. Throw the problem into the lap of the state where it belongs.” He wanted the state to establish a sewer district that would serve several communities. Long after Kuzman’s service as a councilman, Olmsted Falls, which by then included the former West View, grappled with the task of installing sewers and related facilities.

Among the other issues Kuzman advocated were outlawing garbage disposals, raising municipal salaries and replacing “the unkempt crab trees” that had been planted along village streets with sugar maples, which he considered to be stormproof, non-sewer clogging and beautiful, followed by getting the Illuminating Company to put its lines underground to replace its “unsightly poles and wires.”

West View did not evolve the way the planning firm proposed, nor did Olmsted Falls go quite the way Kuzman wanted. Instead, the two villages became one 50 years ago. The immediate task for the leaders of the new combined village was the creation of a charter to govern the municipality. Members of the Charter Commission of Olmsted Falls were elected on May 4, 1971, and worked for several months before presenting their proposed charter in early 1972 in preparation for a vote to adopt it on May 2, 1972. That charter went into effect in July 1972.

Also in May 1972, Mayor Alan Mills, who was the last mayor of West View and then the first mayor of the larger Olmsted Falls, asked the state to recognize Olmsted Falls as a city because its population by then exceeded 5,000 people. State officials soon agreed and allowed Olmsted Falls to become Ohio’s 231st city. That subsequently in 1975 allowed the Olmsted Falls Local School District to become the Olmsted Falls City School District, which gave the school board more autonomy over local school affairs. Thus, the merger of Olmsted Falls and West View affected not only their residents but also those throughout Olmsted Township who shared the school district with them.

Neighbors Win Against the Railroad

By Bob Miller

Editor’s Note: Stories in recent issues of Olmsted 200 about how dangerous Olmsted’s railroad crossings were over many decades have prompted readers to share their own experiences. Here, reader Bob Miller recounts a battle with the railroad that involved him in the late 1950s, when he and his family lived at the corner of Fitch Road and Bagley Road.

It was in about 1957 that there was a fatality at the crossing on Fitch Road where there were no crossing gates or signals. A car with one male driver was struck by a train at night and the driver was killed. He lived in Olmsted Falls, but I don’t remember his name. There had been numerous accidents at this crossing, but the railroad was doing nothing about it.

Several of the neighbors and I got together and decided that something had to be done to convince the railroad to install



The Fitch Road railroad crossing had gates and signals when this photo was taken in 2011, but they weren’t installed until after a fatal accident occurred in the late 1950s.

signals. We set up a schedule to take turns measuring the time between when the trains would blow their whistles and when they reached the crossing. From this, we could also estimate their speed using a stopwatch. Measurements covered the period between dusk and dawn.

We were surprised to find that there were many trains that did not blow their whistles. We recorded the times and locomotive numbers and compiled all of the data for about a week. Arrangements were then made to go to Columbus to present the data to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio. The commission was so impressed with what we had done that they scheduled a meeting in Cleveland to review the situation with our group.

Ultimately, the railroad agreed that it was a dangerous situation and installed crossing signals and later gates at the Fitch Road crossing.

Bob Miller is a longtime Olmsted resident and father of Ann Reichle, who owns Angelina's Pizza in Olmsted Falls and formerly also operated the Village Bean.

Others Share Their Olmsted Railroad Stories

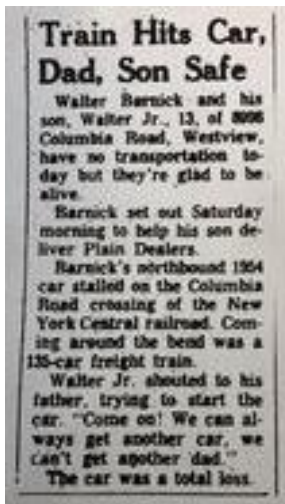


Photo courtesy of Wally Barnick.

Few topics evoke more reaction among people who have lived in Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township than trains and the troubles they have caused. Several people reacted on Facebook and elsewhere to last month's story about how Olmsted's railroad crossings were upgraded over the past two decades to make them safer and quieter.

In regard to those safety measures, Wally Barnick wrote: "A little too late for me and my dad." He was referring to an incident that occurred in September 1962, when he was 13 years old, and his father, Walter Barnick Sr., helped him deliver copies of the *Plain Dealer* one Saturday morning. As told in a *Plain Dealer* story from September 24, 1962, his father's car stalled on the New York Central crossing at Columbia Road in West View just as a 135-car freight train was coming around the bend.

"Come on!" the story quotes the younger Barnick as saying. "We can always get another car. We can't get another dad."

They escaped, but the car was a total loss.

Gail Crawford Walker wrote, "I grew up near the Columbia Rd. tracks and was so glad to see the improved crossing there."

Wanette Ball wrote, “My first home was on Water Street. I remember the tracks very well. The fire station and/or police station was...on the other side of the tracks. I was told about a plan to rob the National City Bank bcuz it was on the other side of the tracks and if a train stopped, no law enforcement could get there in time.”

Another comment came from Dawn Gear, who wrote, “I remember in high school, if we drove ourselves, we were told that you live in Olmsted Falls, you know there’s trains, so you need to leave early. If you get stuck by a train, that’s your fault. You are late!” G.L. Kraken added, “When we were late to a class, any class, we blamed the trains!” Then Dawnel Snyder added, “Or home late for curfew!”

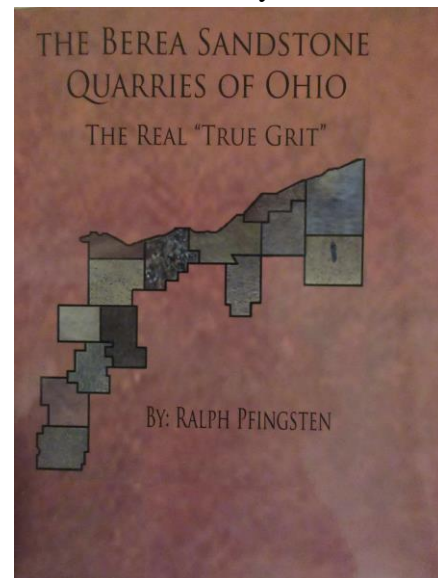
Mary Coyle wrote, “I grew up on Fitch Rd. and many times crossed those tracks. I knew the whistles between freight and passenger trains.”

Book Puts Local Quarries into Bigger Perspective

One year ago this month, *Olmsted 200* began a series of stories about the sandstone quarries of Olmsted Falls and West View. That series concentrated on the local quarries but put them into the broader context of the Ohio sandstone industry that started in Berea in the early 1800s and still operates in Lorain County.

Recently, *Olmsted 200* acquired a book published in 2019 that includes the Olmsted Falls and West View quarries as just one chapter among 28 chapters about the sandstone quarries that stretched across 14 counties from the northeastern corner of Ohio to the center of the state. *The Berea Sandstone Quarries of Ohio: The Real “True Grit”* was written by Ralph Pfingsten of the West Park Historical Society. As a biology researcher, he had visited many of the quarries in search of salamanders years before he decided to create a book about the quarries.

The book includes many maps, photos and other illustrations amid the historical accounts that stretch over 228 pages. The chapter on the quarries of Olmsted Falls and West View covers eight of those pages. Anyone interested in how the local quarries fit into the bigger picture of quarrying in northeastern Ohio should be able to learn quite a bit from Pfingsten’s book. Information about purchasing the book and other publications is available from the West Park Historical Society at <http://www.westparkhistory.org/>.



The chapter on Olmsted Falls and West View quarries covers eight pages of this 228-page book.



This pond on the east side of Chestnut Grove Cemetery along Lewis Road, seen on October 5, 2019, is what is left from the quarry started by O.W. Kendall in 1871. More information on that quarry and other quarries that operated in Olmsted Falls and West View can be found in Ralph Pfingsten's book, The Berea Sandstone Quarries of Ohio: The Real "True Grit," from the West Park Historical Society.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include more stories about the history of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township.

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, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Michigan, Wisconsin, New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Maine, as well as overseas in the Netherlands, Germany and Japan.

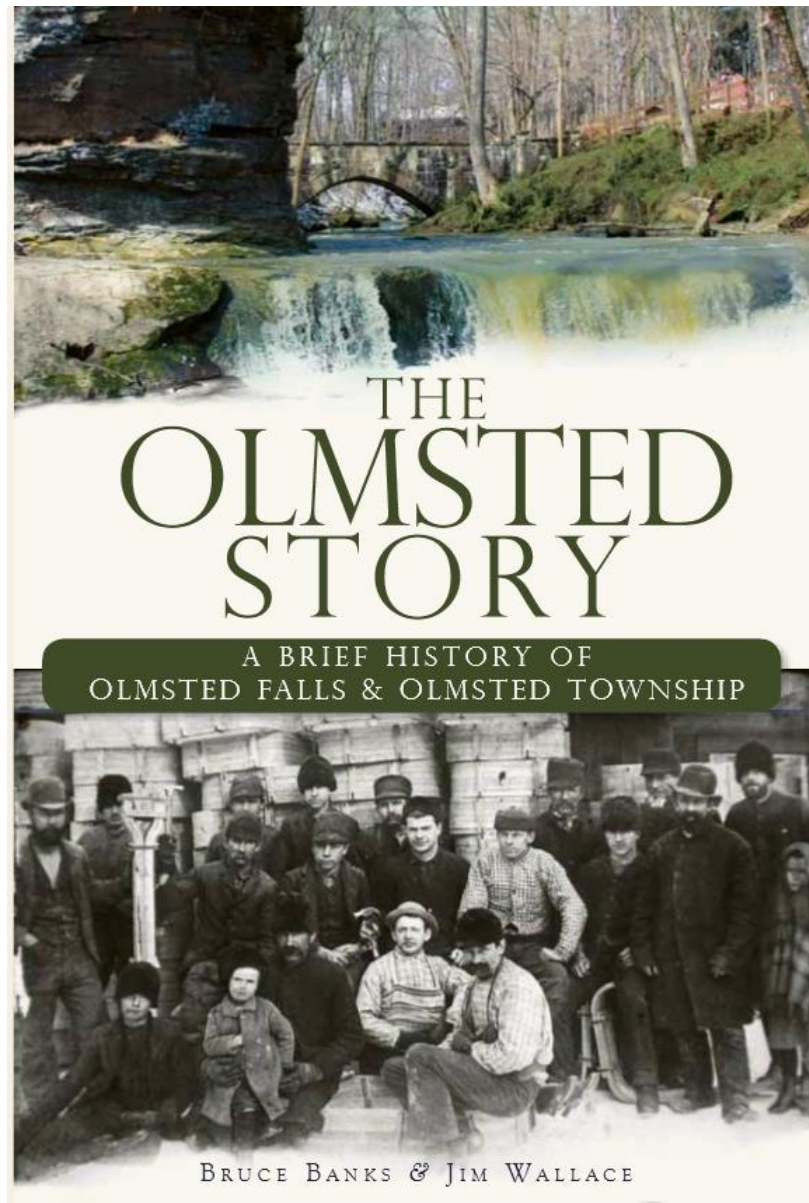
Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted's history that you would like to have pulled out of *Olmsted 200*'s extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information or photos about the community's history that you would like to share.

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. All of the issues of *Olmsted 200* also are available on the website of the City of Olmsted Falls. Find them at: http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted_falls_history/index.php. A link to *Olmsted 200* can be found on the left side of the page.

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. Thanks go to Mary Louise King for help in proofreading and editing many

issues. Thanks also go to David Kennedy for frequently contributing research and insight for some stories. Written contributions and photos, as well as comments and questions about items in this newsletter, will be considered for publication. Send any correspondence by email to: wallacestar@hotmail.com.

Olmsted 200 is written, researched and edited by Jim Wallace, who is solely responsible for its content. He is co-author (with Bruce Banks) of ***The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township***, published in 2010 by The History Press of Charleston, S.C. ***The Olmsted Story*** is available at Angelina's Pizza in Olmsted Falls and the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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