



# Olmsted 200

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

Issue 3

August 1, 2013

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## Olmsted Could Have Had a Different Course of Development

The turning points in history offer fuel for speculation on what might have been if events had turned out differently. For example, if the South had won the Civil War, what might have been the fate of the democratic republic form of government established in America but still an anomaly in most of the world? Also, would there have been an American nation strong enough to help win World War I, let alone World War II?



The little golfer shown here represents one way Olmsted's development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century could have taken a much different form than it did. He appeared in advertisements in the spring of 1929 from L.H. Heister, Jr., Inc., a Cleveland company that had created subdivisions in Lakewood and elsewhere in Cuyahoga County. The company planned to create a development called Homelinks that would have straddled the border between Olmsted Township and North Olmsted.

“PLAY ALL DAY IN YOUR OWN BACK YARD” a headline said in one full-page newspaper ad that appeared late April 1929. Under that, it said:

**Every method of transportation is available – every requisite for the home of your dreams – truly Homelinks presents a golden opportunity to buy and build out here where Nature and Man have produced perfection.**

**Now is the time – Right Now! Hop in your car and follow this route:**

**Cross Hilliard Bridge to Wooster Road; turn left on Wooster Road, cross Lorain Road, down hill through Metropolitan Park; bend right with concrete pavement at Bridge; up hill on Mastick Road to Columbia Road; left on Columbia Road to Butternut Ridge Road; turn right –**

**and you're in Homelinks, where every home has a golf course at its garden gate, and the definite assurance that your back yard is park land forever!**

If that wasn't enough to entice potential buyers, the ad went on to say: *You'll find the price range surprisingly low – the terms surprisingly easy – a phone call will bring complete information.*

**As It Will Look a Few Years Hence!**

**YOU'LL find beautiful homes set back in spacious lawns; wide, curving drives and stately shade trees; the prettiest bank of fields, clean air, mixed with the fragrant scents of growing things. —They dress the garden gates, your garden gate, and yours on the golf course. Lightness of the apartment houses in the state —that's Homelinks as it will look a few years hence. Homelinks, the man-made Paradise.**

**PLAY ALL DAY IN YOUR OWN BACK YARD**

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You'll find the price range surprisingly low—the terms surprisingly easy—a phone call will bring complete information.

**L. H. HEISTER, JR., Inc.**  
715 Bulkeley Bldg. CHerry 2485

Reinforcing the claim that every method of transportation was available, the ad had four inset photographs. One had a bus with “OLMSTED FALLS” shown above the windshield as the destination. Underneath the photo, the ad said: “Half hour bus service is maintained by the Olmsted Falls Bus Co. Big, beautiful coaches operated on very convenient schedules.”

Under a picture of an automobile on a curved road, it said: “This picture shows a delightful view at

one of the many beautiful state auto roads to Homelinks. It is a section of Mastick road as it wiggles thru the Rocky River Valley.”

A photo of a trolley had this caption: “Then, if you prefer, there is interurban service, also on half hour schedule during rush hours. One more advantage that makes Homelinks ideal.” The interurban train service ran along Lorain road through North Olmsted.

The fourth photo seemed to show a train near the Olmsted Falls depot. Underneath is this statement: “Five fast daily trains will serve you if you live in Homelinks. When the new Terminal project is completed there will be even more. Operated on very convenient schedules.” The Terminal project was construction of the Terminal Tower in downtown Cleveland. It was still more than one year away from its dedication on June 28, 1930.

The land for the proposed development seemed to be bound on the north by Butternut Ridge Road, on the east by Columbia Road and on the south by John Road. On the west, it apparently did not go all the way to Fitch Road.

#### **Former farmland was to be used.**

Much of the land had been the farm established by John Hall in the mid-1800s. According to Walter Holzworth in his 1966 history of Olmsted, Hall was born on April 1, 1838, in England. He was the oldest son of George and Elizabeth Hall, who brought their family to America in 1847. They settled first in Ridgeville Township (now North Ridgeville), and then in 1863, they moved across the county line into Cuyahoga County. From then on, the Halls were one of the most prominent families in Olmsted Township.



John Road was named after John Hall. Holzworth wrote that the name Hall Road already was taken elsewhere in the township, so the road John Hall lived on took his first name.

Hall raised sheep on the land and bought and sold wool from other farmers in Cuyahoga, Lorain and Medina counties. He did so well at it that, as Holzworth wrote, Hall built a three-story, brick mansion with seven fireplaces and kept enough cash on hand that he could have opened a bank. “When remodeling the interior of the old home, workmen entertained the hope that somewhere they might find a roll of bills or a box of gold coins that Hall may have hidden away and forgotten about,” Holzworth wrote.

*“When remodeling the interior of the old home, workmen entertained the hope that somewhere they might find a roll of bills or a box of gold coins that Hall may have hidden away and forgotten about.” – Walter Holzworth*

Hall’s son, George, raised Holstein cattle on the farm and ran a dairy. In 1926, he sold the farm, which covered 164 acres, to Hall Acres Incorporated. Holzworth said that the plan was “an allotment laid out around a golf course,” but he did not mention the involvement of the Heister company or give much detail.

Homelinks was not the first golf course proposed for that area. The Biddulph family also had a farm on part of the land. According to an Ohio Historical Marker along Canterbury Road in North Olmsted, John Biddulph, an English immigrant, bought the land in 1840, although Holzworth wrote that the Biddulph family moved to the property in 1860. Fred Biddulph, who was John’s grandson, was born there in 1887. In 1922 and 1923, Fred and his wife, Clara, built a ballroom on the site, which is near Butternut Ridge Road. Springvale Ballroom held its first dance on May 23, 1923. A 1953 *Plain Dealer* article said that the original plan for Homelinks was to use Springvale Ballroom as the clubhouse for the golf course.

In 1928, five years after the ballroom opened, the Biddulphs opened the Butternut Ridge Golf Course next to it, so it preceded the proposal for Homelinks by a year. But Butternut Ridge was a very small course. It initially had only five holes. Perhaps, however, that was enough to open the eyes of others, such as Heister, to the possibility of establishing other golf courses in that area.

### **Heister makes another pitch.**

Heister’s logo included a motto with a double meaning: “A look means a lot.” Apparently, some people did look and took interest in acquiring lots, because two months after the first ad, another full-page newspaper ad appeared on June 23, 1929, under the headline, “Wouldn’t you?”

For this one, the little golfer was in a small, irregular box in the lower right, under which was this: “We shall be pleased to show you a list of those who have already purchased in Homelinks. Men and women of affairs whose judgment may well be looked to for guidance.”

The location of Homelinks was described as “situated along the edge of the west branch of Rocky River on a beautiful rolling plateau of land where Columbia and Butternut Ridge Roads intersect in the Village of North Olmsted.” Not mentioned was that about half of the land was in Olmsted Township. The ad also made it seem as though Homelinks was right along the bank of Rocky River instead of on the opposite side of Columbia Road from the river.

The main copy of the ad lured prospective buyers with this pitch:

**IN the evening when the day's work is done wouldn't you like to lock your desk and hit the trail to rest, recreation and fun? Leave behind traffic, crowds, frazzled nerves, and go to a home midst peace and seclusion. Here in Homelinks you will find such an environment. It is a different world from the city. Winding streets, fragrant flowers, green shrubs, beauty - nature at her best.**

**Those who will live in Homelinks are like yourself - they want something better - something different from the ordinary. Here they will build their homes - jewels of architecture in settings of landscaped splendor.**

**Here in Homelinks you can golf with men who play the kind of game you enjoy and when you have finished you have no long rides through crowded thoroughfares to ruin a perfect day. Just a few steps through your own garden gate into the comfortable environment of your home. You can ride - play tennis - do as you please - get all the zest out of life. Your wife, your kiddies and yourself will find happiness in Homelinks.**

Prospects seemed bright for Homelinks back then in the final year of the Roaring Twenties. Of course, little did the developer or the prospective buyers realize in the

# Wouldn't you?

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715 Bulkley Bldg. CHerry 2485

**HEISTER** L.H. HEISTER CLEVELAND

middle of 1929 that they were just a few months away from the stock market crash that ushered in the Great Depression.

### **Crash alters course of golf.**

The big plans for Homelinks never were fulfilled. Holzworth noted that the company that had acquired the land went into bankruptcy in the 1930s. That's not to say that nothing happened there. Another company called Home Links Golf Club with Roy Darby as principal stockholder and president acquired the land.

But it is interesting to note that the August 25, 1931, edition of the *Plain Dealer* included a small ad that said:

**GOLF**  
For  
**WOMEN AND JUNIORS**  
(Juniors' Age 14 to 16 Years)  
Green Fee 50¢ Every Week Day Morning  
**BUTTERNUT RIDGE GOLF CLUB**  
(Homelinks)  
Butternut Ridge Rd., North Olmsted  
Westlake 348J1

Why the name Homelinks was included parenthetically is not clear. Perhaps the publicity for Homelinks was still fresh enough that the Butternut Ridge Golf Club played off of it to help people identify the location.

Less than one year later on April 29, 1932, another ad ran in the *Plain Dealer* for seven golf courses that were members of the Cleveland District Golf Association. Four were on the east side and three were on the west side. Two of them were in North Olmsted. One was called simply Par Three and had an address of Stop 30, Lorain Road. The other was called Homelinks with an address of Butternut Ridge Road in North Olmsted.

However, the golf course known for several decades as Homelinks did not have its entrance on Butternut Ridge but on John Road. It used John Hall's three-story brick home as its clubhouse. A small *Plain Dealer* ad on August 18, 1940, said:

**HOMELINKS**  
**SEMI-PUBLIC – 18 HOLES**  
W. on Lorain Rd. to Colum-  
bia Rd. (Route 252); left on  
Columbia to John Rd., right  
to clubhouse.  
OLMSTED FALLS 1121J.

Also in 1940, work began on the North Olmsted Golf Club next to Homelinks and Springvale. According to Holzworth, it did not open until 1948, but other information places the opening in 1946. It was a nine-hole course with an entrance on Canterbury Road opposite of Springvale Ballroom and its associated golf course, which by then had taken the Springvale name and abandoned the Butternut Ridge name.

Another *Plain Dealer* ad on May 7, 1944, indicated what became of some of the other land that had been intended for use in the original Homelinks development. It said:

OLMSTED TOWNSHIP

Frontage on Columbia and John rds. The old Homelinks Golf Course has been divided into large 100-ft. front parcels, each containing more than 1 acre. Fertile soil, tile-drained, and parts of it fully improved. Low taxes: no future assessments.

REALTY SERVICE INC

MA 0836

Eves. BO 8910

If you drive along John Road or Columbia Road to the north of John, you can see the lots that were laid out as a result of that parceling of the land originally intended to be part of the big Homelinks development in 1929. Those along Columbia Road extend back farther from the road than those along John Road.

Springvale expanded from a five-hole course to a nine-hole course in 1936. In the 1950s, it expanded again to 18 holes under the direction of George Biddulph, son of Fred. He had hoped to open the additional nine holes in 1952, but that year turned out to be a poor growing season, so he had to wait until 1953 to get the expanded course into shape. The expansion extended Springvale south into Olmsted Township, almost to John Road. The full course opened in April 1953.

In a *Plain Dealer* article on April 12, 1953, that looked forward to the opening of the expanded course, reporter John Dietrich wrote, "Any addition to the number of golf holes in the Cleveland district is a real event, for the congestion on local courses increases annually."

The result was three golf courses next to each other. North Olmsted Golf Club was in the northwestern corner. Homelinks was just south of it with the fairways for holes 16, 17 and 18 on the south side of John Road and the other 15 holes to the north of John Road. To the east of them was Springvale, separated from Homelinks by a double row of trees and from North Olmsted Golf Club by Canterbury Road. That meant there were 45 holes of golf available in that section of land along the North Olmsted-Olmsted Township border, where the original Homelinks with a housing development surrounding a golf course would have been built if the Great Depression had not gotten in the way. Dietrich wrote, "This is the largest concentration of golf activity in northern Ohio."

In 1994, the City of North Olmsted acquired Springvale, so it became a municipal golf course. One result of that was that the city later petitioned to annex the portion of the golf course that was in Olmsted Township. Because the city owned the land, there was no good reason for the county to reject including it within North Olmsted's city limits. That means that, in that section, only a small wooded area separates John Road from the southern border of North Olmsted.

### **Renaissance reconfigures land.**

The configuration of the three courses established in the mid-1950s remained for the next three decades. Then in 1984, the Eliza Jennings Foundation announced plans to build the Renaissance, a retirement community, on the grounds of Homelinks. Jennings purchased the 164 acres of Homelinks by the end of 1985. In June 1986, the groundbreaking ceremony for the new development featured Willard Scott of NBC-TV's *Today* show. It did not mean an end to the golf course but a redesign. Instead of having just three holes south of John Road, the new course had the entire front nine on that side of the road as a result of cutting into some of the woods that had been there. The back nine was built to circle around the buildings of the Renaissance on the north side of John Road. The first residents of the Renaissance moved in early in 1989. The newly redesigned golf course also opened that year. It no longer was called Homelinks but The Links at the Renaissance.



The new course also received a new clubhouse on the south side of John Road. The old clubhouse, John Hall's former home, was torn down, but his barn was left standing. It remains today as one of the most picturesque reminders of Olmsted Township's agricultural past.

In 2006, the front nine of Homelinks closed and the grass was left to grow out for a few years. A 2009 *Plain Dealer* article blamed drainage problems for the closure, but that part of the course also reportedly was under consideration for conversion into a housing development. After a few years of operation as a nine-hole course, the full 18 holes returned to play in May 2010 under the direction of Danny Panek, the new owner. By then, it was called Links Golf Course.

The current configuration of the golf course around the retirement community is the opposite of the original Homelinks proposal for a housing development surrounding a golf course. You could say the plans for the land came full circle and turned inside out.

If the original plan for Homelinks had been carried out, it could have resulted in a different path of development for Olmsted Township. Although some new housing



sprang up in Olmsted Falls during the late 1920s, the township remained largely agricultural until after World War II. In the late 1950s, K&L Builders of Middleburg Heights proposed a new subdivision of 232 houses just west of Fitch Road. That resulted in housing along Elizabeth, Eastwood, Westwood, Crestwood and Adele lanes. Many more housing developments followed in the decades after that. But if Homelinks had been successful as originally planned, it could have spurred more such development in the wide, open tracts of Olmsted Township well before World War II.

A bigger population in the township could have led to more efforts by North Olmsted or Olmsted Falls to annex township land – or for the incorporation of the township as a village. There were plenty such efforts throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Olmsted Township lost significant amounts of its territory to North Olmsted, Olmsted Falls and Berea. But with a different mix of population and earlier attempts at such changes, Olmsted Township and its neighboring communities could have looked much different than they do today.

## **News from the Past**

Considering that the main story in this issue is about the Homelinks development that was announced in 1929, this could be an appropriate opportunity to check on what else was on residents' minds that year. Many of them read about local activities in *The Towne Crier*, a newspaper that was published in Olmsted Falls. In fact, the paper had something in common with Homelinks, because it also came out in 1929, just months before the stock market crash, and did not survive the Great Depression.

But no one realized that summer what was about to occur, and many people were looking forward to the same thing many Olmsted residents now await eagerly each August: a community festival. Since the early 1990s, that festival has been Olmsted Heritage Days, which will be held this year from August 15 through August 18. In 1929, it was the eighth annual homecoming and community picnic. The August 9 issue of *The Towne Crier* said the activities would be held that Saturday and Sunday, August 10-11, on the grounds of the municipal building – the old town hall, which had been in service since 1883. The building lasted a little more than a decade longer after the 1929 homecoming. It was torn down in 1940 and replaced with a new building made from locally quarried sandstone. The new building later was named the Bonsey Building after Charles Bonsey, who was mayor when it was built, but now it is better known as the home of the Moosehead restaurant.

The newspaper said the activities for the 1929 homecoming included an “indoor ball game” between the Community Church and St. Mary’s, but it didn’t say what kind of ballgame it would be. “Races and other athletic events under the direction of Charles Bonsey are also on the program,” the paper reported. Other activities included a Saturday evening dance with music from Roy Hecker and his orchestra. “Mammoth display of fireworks is also planned for the evening,” the paper said.

Sunday's events included an 11:15 service at the Community Church followed by a dinner served by the Ladies' Guild at the Community House. The Community House was the old Congregational Church that stood where the parking lot between the Moosehead and the current Community Church is located. After the Methodist Episcopal and Congregational churches merged in 1917, the Methodist building was used for services while the Congregational building became the Community House and was used for Sunday school classes and other meetings. The former Methodist church is now the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel.

Sunday afternoon's activities for the homecoming included a concert by the Cleveland Railway Company's seven-piece boys' band, followed by an address by the Rev. James Sivard of LaGrange, Ohio, and then a pageant called "Evolution of the American Flag."

The August 16 edition of *The Towne Crier* reported that 500 people attended the homecoming, but the "indoor ball game" turned out differently than originally planned. Instead of pitting teams from the Community Church and St. Mary's against each other, it had married men playing against the single men. No explanation was given for the change nor was it mentioned what kind of ballgame it was. The single men won 28 to five.

That issue of the paper also included this editorial:

### **Olmsted Falls Moves Forward**

OLMSTED FALLS is to be congratulated on its progress. Not being satisfied with an up-to-date zoning ordinance, city water, new pavements and bridges, and extension of sidewalks, the mayor and council have taken the necessary steps to provide new firefighting equipment for the village.

Citizens at the last council meeting approved of council's action, and well they might. There have been a number of new homes built this year and many more have been modernized. These buildings should have the protection of an up-to-date fire department, and as the citizens expressed themselves, "as good a one as the village can afford."

The citizens were surprised to know that the fire equipment could be purchased without resorting to a bond issue. In other words "good housekeeping" on the part of the village administration made it possible to expend this sum of money without increasing the tax rate.

Thus, a homecoming celebration and new equipment for the fire department were the big news in Olmsted in early August 1929, during that last summer before hard times hit the nation.

Copies of *The Towne Crier* cost three cents each. Each one had this motto in the upper right corner of the front page: "Olmsted Falls, the Village of Good Fellowship."

## History during Heritage Days

A good time to reflect on Olmsted's history is during Olmsted Heritage Days, which will run from August 15 to August 18. In particular, make sure you catch one of Bruce Banks's history presentations filled with plenty of photos of Olmsted's past. We used some of those photos in our book, *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township*, but he has many more to show. His talks are scheduled for 6:00 p.m. on Friday, August 16, and again at the same time on Saturday, August 17, in the Grand Pacific Hotel.

On Sunday, August 18, at 1:30 p.m. and 2:45 p.m., I will lead a Historical Sampler Tour on Lolly the Trolley. We'll start at the Grand Pacific Hotel and go to Turkeyfoot Cemetery (properly known as Chestnut Grove), where Dan Hill, cemetery superintendent, will talk about some of its notable "residents." After the cemetery, we will make a few stops around Olmsted Falls. At each of the stops, I will point out several historical sites. I call it a "historical sampler," because the sites we will view will be only a small sample of those available to see around Olmsted Falls. My hope is that the tour will encourage participants to explore more of Olmsted's history on their own. The cost of the tour is \$15 per person. Tickets will be available at Grand Pacific Junction. I hope to see many of you there.

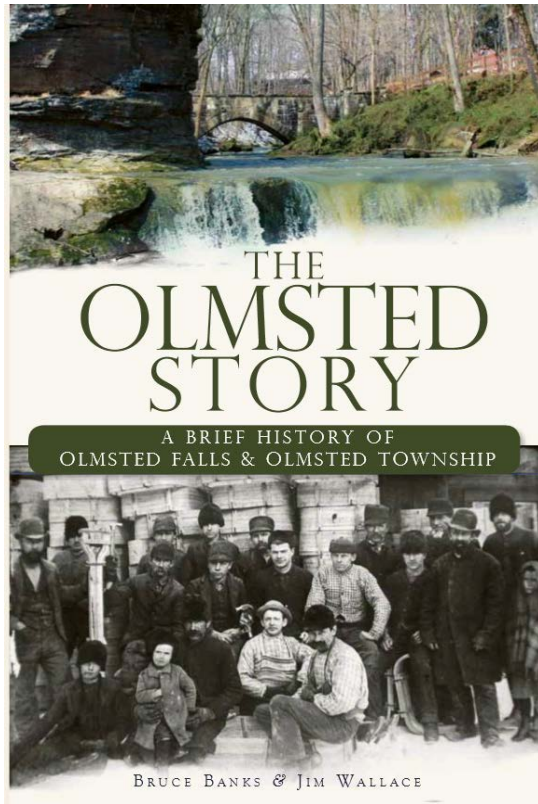
## Still to Come

Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township still have many houses that were built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most, but not all, have been restored and kept well. In the next issue, we'll consider the fate of the old homes.

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

Written contributions, 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). Anyone who wants to receive future issues should send a request to that same email address. Feel free to share this issue with others who are interested in Olmsted's history.

*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 Clementine's Victorian Restaurant at Grand Pacific Junction and through online booksellers.



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