



# Olmsted 200

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

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Issue 15

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## Fitch Family Was Big When Olmsted Was Young

August long has been a month for big get-togethers for Olmsted residents. These days, it is Olmsted Heritage Days centered at Grand Pacific Junction. (See article below for more on that.) Decades ago, big homecoming celebrations were held at the Village Green or near Olmsted Township Hall. But in the late 1800s, the Fitch family was so prominent in Olmsted that its reunions served the same purpose. As Walter Holzworth put it in his 1966 history of Olmsted, “Some of their reunions did take on the proportions of a homecoming of the entire township and the area surrounding it.”

The Fitch reunions began in 1880. Sometimes they were held at one of the Fitch homesteads, but they also were held in other locations in Olmsted and elsewhere. For example, the Fitches went to Chippewa Lake for the reunion on Thursday, August 26, 1886, when they issued a general invitation to other Olmsted residents to join them and take advantage of apparently low railroad fares to get there that day.

“The start was made from West View depot at 8:30 arriving at the lake at 11 o'clock,” the *Berea Advertiser* reported. “The camp has amusements from the whirligig with hand-organ accompaniment – to every time you hit a baby you get a good cigar.” [Surely, that last phrase was not meant to be taken literally.]

The 1886 reunion also included a big dinner. People left for the return trip to Olmsted about 6:00 p.m.

The 1887 reunion was held at a place called Hickey's Grove, which apparently was in the northern part of Olmsted Township. A James Hickey owned land along what is

now Columbia Road close to where the road met Butternut Ridge, so that might have been the location. Some of his land became part of Sunset Memorial Cemetery. Hickey was married to Mary Elisa Fitch, daughter of Eli Fitch.

In the 1890s, the Fitch family began combining their reunion with that of Olmsted's other big family, Stearns. Some members of the two families already were united through marriage.

The Fitch family reunions typically were recounted in long columns in the *Advertiser* each year, which is an indication of how significant they were to the people of Olmsted. The 19<sup>th</sup> century prominence of the family might seem odd these days when the Fitch name is readily associated with a road and a school but not so much with Olmsted residents. However, through most of the 1800s, there were plenty of Fitches around Olmsted. Six sons of Thaddeus Fitch of East Windsor, Connecticut, arrived in Olmsted beginning in 1831, giving a "considerable boost," as Holzworth wrote, to the township's population. Those sons included: Chauncey, Horace, Chester, Elisha, Eli and Sanford. Daniel, a seventh son of Thaddeus Fitch, arrived in 1839 but did not stay. He settled in Townsend in Huron County.

Back in 1886, the history of the Fitch family in Olmsted and elsewhere was so extensive that it filled an entire book, *The Genealogy of the Fitch Family*, written by John G. Fitch. To account for just the Fitches of Olmsted is too much for one issue of *Olmsted 200*, so the focus here is on just one branch of the family – that of Elisha Fitch, who was born in 1807.

When Elisha and his brothers migrated to Ohio, Connecticut residents could buy land in Olmsted Township directly from Charles Olmsted, son of Aaron Olmsted, who entered an auction in 1795 for the opportunity to buy a sizeable portion of the township. That sale was consummated in 1807, the year after Aaron Olmsted died, so the land went to his widow and three sons. Charles was in charge of selling off the land. (He also was responsible for sending about 500 books by oxcart – the Oxcart Library – in gratitude for the township's decision in 1829 to give the Olmsted name to what had been called Lenox Township.)

The piece of land Elisha Fitch bought from Charles Olmsted was known as Lot 26 in Tract 6, which included 159 acres. The cost was \$319.50. Fitch had to put down only \$19.50 at the time they made the deal on May 19, 1831. The rest was due in three annual payments of \$100 plus interest. Those details are contained in the copy of the deed in the possession of Fitch descendant Tom Atkinson.

A photograph of a handwritten deed document. The top line reads "Chas. H. Olmsted" in cursive, followed by a circular seal containing the word "Seal". The second line reads "Elisha Fitch" in cursive, followed by another circular seal containing the word "Seal".

The names of Charles Olmsted and Elisha Fitch are on the deed transferring Olmsted Township land to Fitch.

*Received on the within Article, Nineteen Dollars and Fifty Cents,  
it being the sum agreed to be paid at the time of executing this  
Article -  
Olmsted, May 19<sup>th</sup> 1831 -  
Chas. H. Olmsted*

*Charles Olmsted signed this receipt when he received the \$19.50 down payment from Elisha Fitch.*



*Elisha Fitch*

On August 15, 1831, Elisha married Mary Ann Olcott, who was born in 1811 the daughter of a Hartford, Connecticut, merchant. Soon after that, they moved to Olmsted. They built a log cabin on their land, which was in the northern part of the township. They adopted a daughter, Helen, who came from the Painesville area. But in 1856, they sold their farm and moved to land that now has the address of 7555 Columbia Road, which is a short distance north of the Village Green in Olmsted Falls. There they built a new home that stood for more than a century.



*Mary Ann Fitch*



*Elisha, Helen and Mary Ann Fitch stand in front of the house they built along what now is Columbia Road. (In the 1800s, that section of Columbia Road was called Main Street.)*





*Elisha Fitch in later years*

In *The Genealogy of the Fitch Family*, Elisha Fitch was described as “punctual, exact and honest in business matters, and in his life and conduct practically exemplified the principles of Christianity.” He died January 11, 1884. His widow, Mary Ann, survived until 1901 and had an honored place at the Fitch family reunions of the late 1800s. Elisha’s 1868 Elgin pocket watch was handed down through his family. It bears his initials and those of his grandson, Arthur Atkinson. (The watch is now owned by Tom Atkinson, Fitch’s great-great-grandson.)



*Elisha Fitch's Elgin pocket watch*



*Arthur Elisha Atkinson (1863-1921)*

Helen Fitch married James Atkinson in 1862. He was born in Yorkshire, England, on September 7, 1837. At the time he married Helen Fitch, he was a resident of Ridgeville Township (now North Ridgeville). They had four sons, Arthur, Albert, Everett and Clarence. James died on January 12, 1879. After his death, the eldest son, Arthur, was 16 years old. He went to live with Elisha and Mary Ann Fitch.



*Rebuilt Fitch-Atkinson house today at 7555 Columbia Rd.*



*Cousins Tom and Tim Atkinson with Elisha Fitch's watch*

Helen later married Joseph Brice, a tailor from Elyria. The Fitch farm in Olmsted Falls passed on to Arthur and his heirs, including his wife, Josephine, and then their son, Bruce.

In the late 1980s, new owners extensively rebuilt the house, but retained the distinctive gingerbread roof decoration.

*Thanks to Tom Atkinson for the historic photos and much of the information for this article. For more on the Atkinson family and its role in bus transportation in Olmsted, see Issue 5 of Olmsted 200 from October 1, 2013.*

## **Saloons Survived in Olmsted in 19<sup>th</sup> Century but Not 20<sup>th</sup>**

*This is the sixth and final article in a series about saloons in Olmsted's history. Previous articles appeared in the February, March, April, June and July issues.*

The late 1800s were a tough time for people who opposed Olmsted’s saloons. They fought many fruitless battles against them. Even when they managed to persuade enough voters in both Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls to approve laws to close the saloons, the saloonkeepers got around those laws and suffered little.

In 1891, Olmsted Falls had become a “wet” community again through an ordinance passed by a newly elected council. That was despite a referendum in 1888 to prohibit saloons in the village, although that law was poorly enforced. Olmsted Township’s 1888 ordinance to go dry was still in effect after the village went wet, but being in effect and being effective are not the same.

The enthusiasm for temperance seemed itself to have tempered in the early 1890s. Newspaper notices of temperance meetings around Olmsted were few. So were items about the saloons. The March 31, 1893, issue of the *Berea Advertiser* had this item: “H. Fenderbosch is building a wing onto his house 24X20. He intends it for billiard parlor.” Although the article refers to Herman Fenderbosch’s “house,” the word “saloon” would have been more appropriate. The saloon part is now the Olde Wine Cellar, and the former billiard parlor houses Master Cleaners.

The May 12, 1893, issue of the paper reported: “H. Fenderbosch’s new addition to his house is nearly ready for the masons.”

The *Advertiser* had nothing more to say about Olmsted’s saloons until almost a year later, and even then, the paper was not clear in its reporting. The April 20, 1894, edition included this item: “Mrs. Fenderbosch was seriously injured by a fracture of the head Saturday night by being accidentally struck by a glass, it is claimed. Drs. Coates and Kirkland of Berea were called over.” A reader could infer that the Saturday night patrons of the Fenderbosch saloon got a bit rowdy, even though the paper avoided saying the event happened at the saloon. However, an item in the April 27 issue was not so cautious in its wording: “Mrs. Fenderbosch, the woman accidentally hurt during the saloon quarrel between two men, is slowly improving, and it is thought will recover.” Despite that report, Mrs. Fenderbosch’s injury must have been more serious than originally thought, because almost one year later on March 8, 1895, the paper said: “Mrs. Fenderbosch is still quite poorly.”

The December 28, 1894, edition of the *Advertiser* had a small item that indicated that the supposedly dry township really wasn’t so dry. The item was in the West View column: “Judging from the noise at the saloon and about some private residences on Christmas eve, there is great need of a little ‘local option’ about this village.”

### **The issue goes to the ballot again.**

The West View correspondent’s column included a pair of related items in the March 22, 1895, issue of the *Advertiser*. The first said that “the trustees have notified the voters of Olmsted township to be ready to vote on local option at the upcoming election. Now, this will be a good chance to see whether this township does want saloons. Every one who fails to vote will be counted on the side of the ‘wets.’ As only the votes cast will count, let every voter in the township turn out and vote his sentiments, so we will know what the people want.”

Right after that, the correspondent included an item about an upcoming meeting of the local chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union at the Wesleyan Methodist Church that said: "It promises to be something more than ordinarily good. It will consist of songs, recitations and an address to the voters on local option." One week later in the March 29 issue, the correspondent reported that the WCTU meeting was very pleasant. The item went on to say: "They show a membership of twenty five and are making things lively around here. They say: 'The saloon must go.'"

After the election came and went, the West View correspondent, who went by the single name Mike, reported in the April 5 edition: "The election is over and the result is known, but to say that everybody is satisfied is another thing." Then he explained why: "The 'wets' have carried the township by 22. Just how it was done may make matter for another letter a little farther on." Thus, another poorly enforced ban on saloons was lifted, and they were allowed to operate legally again in the township. Within four years, both Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township had shifted from being officially dry to being officially wet.

Nevertheless, the temperance advocates kept on with their activities. In the same column that announced the election results, Mike included this: "The entertainment given by the W.C.T.U. last week was a success in every way."

In the April 12 issue of the *Advertiser*, the reporter offered an analysis of the election result:

*The election is over, and it is very clear now that the "Wets" were not to blame for the defeat of the "Drys." They done what you would expect men to do, who have an object in view, they worked for that object, and when the time came to vote they went to the polls like business men, for the thing they desired, and as a result obtained that object. But how was it with the other side; many of them voted for a dry Township, but many who professed to be interested in the question were like butternuts in time of the war, they were either gone to Canada, or their good resolutions failed in the day of battle. Some of them said: "It is a West View fight, and we are not in it; let West View do her own voting." Others were suddenly taken with a great sympathy for the saloon-keeper, saying: "we wont vote the bread away from any mans family" forgetting the families whose bread goes for drink. If reports be true, these same persons may want help before the two years are out. But why should we complain if we are Rum ruled. We are no worse off than the last Congress and Senate of the United States, judging from the way they kept the Sabbath day before adjournment, and we are only a single Township.*

Other than notices of meetings of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the *Advertiser* had little about the drinking issue in Olmsted during the rest of 1895 and throughout 1896. A notable exception was this item in the January 10, 1896, issue: "A petition was sent away last Monday to Columbus, showing the legislature that not all the

people of Olmsted Falls are in favor of the hard ware business – that is, selling it by the glass. We feel safe in saying that it will not be very long before our men, engaged in the business, will have to tear down their saloon signs and replace them with the more credible ones of groceries, etc.”

In April 1896, the paper reported that the Ohio Anti-Saloon League planned to hold its first meeting of the season in Olmsted Falls. The organization’s state secretary, the Rev. J. Brant of Cleveland, was scheduled to speak. The April 17 edition reported, “A very interesting time was held.” It also changed the spelling of the speaker’s last name to Brand.

On June 16 and 17, the WCTU held its county convention at West View.

### **Saloon opponents make another push.**

In 1897, anti-saloon activities picked up. The Congregational Church in Olmsted Falls held an evening of “temperance entertainment” on February 7 with topics of addresses including:

- “Consistency in licensing the saloon”;
- “Cost of liquor drank in Olmsted township”;
- “What should be the attitude of the Church toward temperance”;
- “The Ohio Anti-Saloon League”;
- “Effect of Alcohol on the human body as shown by physiology”;
- “Chemical illustration showing how alcohol affects brain and nerves.”

On March 7, 1897, the Rev. Oman Lawrence, pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church, brought in Mrs. Allen A. Dayton Blair, a national WCTU organizer “to deliver one of her inimitable chalk talks,” as he wrote in the *Advertiser*.

Those activities preceded another local option election in Olmsted Township in April 1897. The newspaper pushed hard for a dry victory. In the April 2 edition, the Olmsted Falls reporter wrote: “The local option law gives Olmsted township another

*“We hope the township will redeem itself, and to this end let the temperance people at the Falls roll up a big vote against the saloon.”*

chance to vote on the saloon question next Monday. What will the verdict be? We hope the township will redeem itself, and to this end let the temperance people at the Falls roll up a big vote against the saloon. It is quite probable that the village vote will decide the

issue, and for that reason some hard work should be done here. Vote against the saloon.”

From the Butternut Ridge correspondent came this: “Will North Olmsted do its duty next Monday and get out a full vote? There is a big anti-saloon vote in this part of

the township, and every vote is needed next Monday. Have the township 'dry' by outlawing the saloon."

The West View correspondent wrote that members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union "are greatly interested in temperance agitation just now. Next Monday the township vote[s] on the saloon question again, and they want every temperance vote at West View to be case against the saloon. Let no one stay at home; let every temperance worker be as active as the saloon element, and the result will be in our favor. The majority is on our side if we can get out a full vote. Let West View vote against the saloon next Monday."

However, the result wasn't in the temperance movement's favor. In contrast to the attention the *Advertiser* gave to the subject before the election, its April 9 report on the outcome was notably terse: "The township went wet by forty-three majority."

In following months, little more was said about anti-saloon efforts other than notice of meetings of the WCTU. In the December 1, 1899, issue, the Olmsted Falls reporter wrote: "At a special council meeting an ordinance was introduced to close saloons nights at 10 o'clock; Saturday at 11 to 5 a.m. Monday." Whether that ordinance was passed or enforced is not clear from subsequent issues of the *Advertiser*. No more such activity was reported in 1900.

Consequently, both Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls ended the 19<sup>th</sup> century the way they had been a few decades earlier when temperance supporters began their efforts with as many saloons as the market could support.

In 1901, the Olmsted Falls reporter wrote in the August 23 paper: "An intoxicated Polish man was arrested and was fined \$5 and costs. Why not serve all drunken parties with the same medicine. What is good for one ought to be good for all."

The West View correspondent reported in the December 13, 1901, issue: "Mrs. Mary Healey the W.C.T.U. anti narcotic officer has formed an anti tobacco league in the West View school. There are sixteen members, Thomas Watson president. The next regular W.C.T.U. meeting will be at the parsonage, Dec. 14."

One week later, in the December 20 edition, the Olmsted Falls reporter had this strange item: "We have a temperance saloon now." There was no further explanation about what that meant.

### **Olmsted dried out in the new century.**

But changes were ahead for Olmsted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When Olmsted Falls held another local option election in May 1908, the dry side won. The Methodist Episcopal Church held a praise service to celebrate. But the drinkers were upset. The *Advertiser* reported on June 5: "There are a great many disgruntled people in Olmsted Falls at the present time because of the local option election. Dire threats were made as to what will



be done, but so far nothing has happened out of the ordinary. It is said that the boycott is to be used. Some people may find that two can play at that game.”

The township followed the village’s lead. In November 1908, township residents voted 109 to 97 to go dry.

Pro-drinking advocates tried to reverse the village’s status in 1914 with another election, but Olmsted Falls voters decided 87 to 49 to keep the village dry.

No further attempts were made to turn either the township or the village wet again in the following years. When the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution instituted prohibition nationwide in 1920, it put an end to the attempts to legalize saloons again in Olmsted. As in the rest of the nation, drinking became an underground activity until prohibition was repealed in 1933.

The next attempt to change Olmsted’s legal status came in 1938, when a nightclub was proposed for Olmsted Falls. That stirred up enough people that 206 of them – representing about two-thirds of the village’s voters – signed a petition calling for a local option election. An election was scheduled for February 1939 with five questions on the ballot:

- 1) Shall the sale of any intoxicating liquor be permitted?
- 2) Shall the sale of wine by the package for consumption off the premises be sold or permitted?
- 3) Shall the sale of wine for consumption on and off the premises where sold be permitted?
- 4) Shall the sale of spirituous liquors by the glass be permitted?
- 5) Shall state liquor stores be permitted?

The overwhelming answer to all of those questions was no. Each one got 67 to 69 yes votes and 228 to 230 no votes. That kept Olmsted Falls dry for several decades. But it was a dry island in a wet zone. Bars were established in Olmsted Township and West View, which had become an incorporated village in 1927.

The status of Olmsted Falls as a dry community was an issue in certain efforts to annex the township to the village. For example, during one of those attempts in 1968, Olmsted Township Trustee William Gilligan wondered what would be the fate of the township’s taverns if annexation were approved. Olmsted Falls Council President Charles Wright said those that were in the township could remain in business at least until 1970, when the issue of their future could be put to all the voters of what would have been a larger Olmsted Falls. But, in May 1968, township voters rejected annexation by a two-to-one ratio, so the issue of the township taverns did not have to be decided.

However, voters in Olmsted Falls and West View voted in 1970 to merge their villages. When that merger became effective at the beginning of 1971, nothing changed

for barkeepers or bar patrons. What had been West View remained wet, and the rest of Olmsted Falls remained dry.

That status lasted for the next few decades until the development of Grand Pacific Junction brought new restaurants to the heart of the old Olmsted Falls. The city loosened up further in recent years by allowing beer and wine sales on Sundays.

## It's the Season of Festivals in Olmsted



*Ohio Flags of Honor display stood at Olmsted Falls City Hall July 3-5.*

Residents get their second opportunity in six weeks to celebrate Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township with the 23<sup>rd</sup> annual Olmsted Heritage Days from August 14 through 17. Most events occur around Grand Pacific Junction, but the festival is for all of Olmsted. The first event, the Citywide Garage Sale, actually occurs in garages, driveways and lawns all around the city and the township. It is scheduled to run from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on both Thursday, August 14, and Friday, August 15. Maps of participating locations will be available at Grand Pacific Junction merchants and elsewhere.

The annual Heritage Days parade will begin 6:30 p.m., August 14, at the high school and proceed down Bagley Road, Brookside Drive, Water Street and Columbia Road to Grand Pacific Junction. Then, the next few days will be filled music, other entertainment and food. As befits a festival based in the historic district of Olmsted Falls, the festival's motto is: "Preserving our past and focusing on our future."

Heritage Days will be the summer's second celebration of the bicentennial of James Geer's first crop of corn in Olmsted Township. (Next year will mark 200 years since Geer and his family became Olmsted's first settlers.) The first was the new Cornerstone Festival held on July 4 on the grounds of the middle and intermediate schools. The festival was blessed with sunshine, a high temperature of 72 degrees and fluffy clouds that passed through during the day, as well as a first quarter moon that hung in the southern sky during the evening's fireworks. Nearby, Olmsted Falls City Hall hosted the Ohio Flags of Honor display.



*The Cornerstone Festival parade went from Mapleway Drive to the middle school.*



*Events during the Cornerstone Festival included the release of balloons by people who had been Olmsted residents for 50 years or more.*

*Other activities included the battle of the barrel by members of fire departments from Olmsted Township,*

*Olmsted Falls and several nearby communities, bands playing on a stage, vendors offering food and other items at booths on both side of the field and the fireworks that concluded the evening.*



Other photos and videos from the Cornerstone Festival can be found at these links:

<http://events.graymatterdigitalmedia.com/olmstedbicentennial/parade/>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMZDrIxnWk&feature=em-share\\_video\\_user](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMZDrIxnWk&feature=em-share_video_user)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xpsZAb0Nig&feature=em-share\\_video\\_user](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xpsZAb0Nig&feature=em-share_video_user)

*Thanks to Olmsted Township Trustee Jeanene Kress for sharing those links.*



## **Still to Come**

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include updates on putting the foundation of Damp's Mill on display and on the razing of John Hall's barn. Other articles in the works for future issues include one about West View, using some recently uncovered Olmsted Township records, and one about Olmsted's greenhouses.

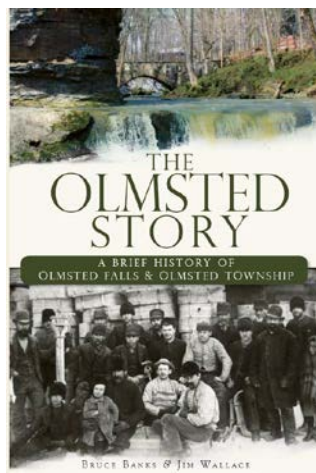
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: [wallacestar@hotmail.com](mailto:wallacestar@hotmail.com). *Olmsted 200* now has readers in several states, including California, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Florida, Massachusetts and Maine, as well as in Mongolia and Japan.

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 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://www.egovlink.com/olmsted/docs/menu/home.asp> and click on "Olmsted 200." Also, beginning with the June 1, 2014, issue, Olmsted Falls has made room on the city's website for the latest issue of *Olmsted 200*. Look for it at: <http://www.olmstedfalls.org/2008/fullnews.php?n=174>,

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. 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 Clementine's Victorian Restaurant at Grand Pacific Junction and through online booksellers.



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