



# Olmsted 200

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

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## Columbia Park Dispute Foreshadowed Olmsted's Changes

A dispute that erupted 70 years ago this month forced Olmsted residents to face issues of post-World War II growth that affected the development of Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls for decades. Those issues included land use and the need for more schools.

It started with one man's plans for a section of Olmsted Township land on the west side of Columbia Road north of Nobottom Road and south of John Road. In its July 16, 1948, edition, the *Berea Enterprise* reported "residents there are up in arms over a possible trailer camp."



*This postcard photo from the 1950s or 1960s shows a streetcar from Trolleyville, U.S.A., passing through Columbia Park, the trailer park established by Gerald Brookins.*

“Trailer camp” was the term the newspaper used for what would later be called a “trailer park” or “mobile home park.” No matter what it was called, residents and government officials in both the township and the village considered it trouble.

The paper reported that Gerald Brookins and his wife, Alice, had acquired 49 acres of land referred to as “the old Casper property” with frontage on Columbia Road. It indicated that they also might have obtained another piece of property with frontage on John Road that could have provided “double access” for the trailer park.



*This sign now marks the entrance to Columbia Park.*

“They have requested permission of the County Board of Health to install a trailer and cabin camp there,” the *Enterprise* reported. “Original plans have been increased, it is stated, and now provide for a restaurant and stores on the Columbia Road frontage with approximately 500 trailers and cabins in the rear.”

In other words, Brookins wanted to build a trailer park with a shopping center in front of it. At the time, Olmsted Township already had two trailer parks – Foster’s Park on Cook Road and Olmsted Trailer Park on Bagley Road.

Although it wasn’t entirely clear at the time what Brookins planned to do, it was clear that he wouldn’t be able to do it without a fight.

“A suit was filed in the court of common pleas on Tuesday by E.M Rooney, Robert T. Lewis, V.A. McRae and A. Kossman through attorney Howell Lauck asking that installation of such a camp be enjoined,” the paper reported. “The Village of Olmsted Falls has instructed solicitor Aubrey Billings to take any necessary action to prevent the camp, inasmuch as it is contiguous to the village on the north and would throw an impossible burden on the activity of the village. It is pointed out that the school building, intended for 600 pupils, now has 800, and that while an addition must be built this fall it could not possibly accommodate the children of the camp and would mean financial ruin for the district, which already has the lowest tax valuation per pupil in the county.”



*All Olmsted public school students had classes in this building for decades.*

Of course, the school building referred to was the one at the corner of Bagley Road and Division Street (later Mapleway Drive) that had been built in 1916

and expanded twice. For three decades, all public school students in Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township had attended that school – and only that school – from the elementary grades through high school. (That building now serves as Olmsted Falls City Hall and Community Center.)

When Brookins proposed his trailer park, Olmsted Township officials had little power to oppose it because the township did not have a zoning ordinance. It was only in the previous year, 1947, that a new Ohio law allowed townships to create zoning, but by mid-1948, Olmsted Township was one of only two locations in Cuyahoga County without zoning. Also, in general, township governments had much less authority than incorporated municipalities did, so issues affecting the township often had to be decided at the county level.

As he faced lawsuits to prevent him from proceeding, Brookins said people would not be so opposed to his plans if they understood “the desirability of the project.” He suggested that they should look at the trailer park he already had operated since 1936 – the Trailer



*This is a current view inside Columbia Park.*

Gardens Mobile Home Park at 14901 Lorain Road in Cleveland. At the time he was struggling to establish his new trailer park in Olmsted Township, he also was setting up Brookins Trailer Court at 11800 Brookpark Road. He issued this statement about his Olmsted Township project:

*The park will bring highly desirable residents to the Olmsted township community. The park will be landscaped, will contain a community garden and will more than conform to state, county and local regulations of health, sanitation and conduct. The park is planned to conform to the very high standards set by the Trailer Coach Manufacturers’ Association and those standards are much higher than most local regulations.*

*The residents of my Cleveland park, and of any modern park, are people who turned to trailer life for a variety of reasons. Some adopted it because of the acute housing shortage. Others adopted it because of its efficiency, compactness and freedom from routine. They are professional, business and mercantile people. I have in my park professors, law enforcement officers, engineers, highly paid skilled workers, war veterans just starting out in business. I have had ministers, school teachers and*



*representatives of almost every profession and business. They demand high standards of the place in which they live and they get it.*

Brookins downplayed the charge that his trailer park would create a burden for the local school system. He said trailer parks tended to have few small children because parents often moved from trailers to houses after the arrival of children. “Less than 10 per cent of the occupants of a trailer park are small children and only a portion of those are of school age,” he told the newspaper.

Despite such assurances, Brookins faced four lawsuits by early August 1948. One was filed by the Village of Olmsted Falls. The others were filed by owners of neighboring properties. Among their concerns were fears of a water shortage and having sewage flow into an open ditch. A deposition by an engineer for Brookins revealed that he planned to have 443 trailer sites, 14 cottages and two retail buildings, one for four stores and the other for eight stores.



*The shopping center Gerald Brookins planned in 1948 is now Town and Country Plaza.*

Later in August, a crowd of irate Olmsted citizens went to the offices of the county commissioners to argue against the trailer park’s plan to handle sewage. Still later in August, Brookins and his attorney, James Carney, addressed a crowd of about 250 people at Olmsted’s school. Joining them was Stephen Shipman, who was president of an organization of war veterans. He told the crowd that 82 percent of all trailer park



*This is one street in Columbia Park today.*

residents in Greater Cleveland were war veterans. At that time, World War II had been over for only three years. Nevertheless, the county commissioners rejected Brookins’s plan for handling sewage from the trailer park.

In September 1948, Brookins filed his own lawsuit, a mandamus action, seeking to force the Cuyahoga County commissioners to accept the sanitary plan for his trailer park. They had objected to his plan to use what was called the “Hoftzyer ditch” to carry effluent away.

Meanwhile, a lengthy discussion at a September meeting of the Olmsted Falls Kiwanis Club about the trailer park brought out residents’ concerns that the township might become, as the *Enterprise* put it, “the dumping ground of undesirable industries” in that period of post-war growth in the Cleveland area. The lack of zoning in the township was such an issue that a zoning proposal was put on the November ballot and people advocated on both sides of the issue.

“As other localities force out the undesirables they will naturally turn to unprotected localities making a rather unfavorable outlook for the township,” the paper said in its report on the Kiwanis club discussion. “The locality finds itself afflicted with growing pains basically. It is in the process of transition from a farming to a residence district. Improvements cannot be enforced now without making farming impossible – yet without farming much of the land would be useless and tax delinquent.”

Meanwhile, the fight over how the trailer park would handle sewage got both Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls to consider that they might need to install a modern sewage system or join with other communities in doing so. As the *Enterprise* said, residents realized “that open ditches cannot serve a community of 2200 people.”



*Drivers entering Columbia Park must pass this security checkpoint.*

Even before the dispute with Brookins, the school district had experienced enough Baby Boom growing pains to put rooms in Olmsted Township Hall and Olmsted Falls Village Hall to use to house two classes. The trailer park project just added to residents’ concerns about the need for more schools. In fall 1948, the school board asked Chester Atkinson, who handled busing for the district, to add a fifth school bus to his fleet.

“Enrollment has increased approximately 160, and the first grade now has over 100 pupils,” the *Enterprise* reported. “Kindergarten enrollment shows there will be no decrease next year, and it is not hard to see that enrollment in all grades will continue high for years to come. A new building can only do justice to the present building, say school officials, who don’t see how they can take care of an influx of children from the trailer park.”

As the November 1948 election neared, the fight over zoning in the township heated up. M.C. Renneker, the township clerk, said zoning was in the interest of public health, safety, morals, comfort, prosperity and welfare. He said it also would protect private property and the value of that property. The township's plan was to allow two sizes of residential lots, one with at least two acres with a width of at least 100 feet and one with at least one acre and frontage of at least 100 feet. That spacing of lots was deemed necessary to prevent contamination of septic tanks.

A leader on the other side was Bill Barnard of Usher Road. He was the founder of Natural Foods, Inc., which had just moved that year to Olmsted Township. That company later became Vitamix Corporation. Barnard argued that the township was "a darned good place to live" and zoning would ruin it. In a letter to voters complaining about zoning advocates, he wrote, "Someone is using police state tactics in a township where freedom abounds."



*As this sign indicates, growth is not over yet at Columbia Park.*

In the end, Brookins won his fight to establish his trailer park, which took the name Columbia Park, as well as to build the shopping center known now as Town and Country Plaza.

The zoning issue failed on the township ballot in November 1948, but in July 1952, township residents voted 407 to 160 to authorize zoning. In the 1950s and for decades after that, housing developments replaced much of the farmland as Olmsted Township became more of a

residential community. With such growth in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it likely was inevitable that Olmsted Township would adopt zoning at some point, but the fight over the trailer park helped push it along.

In later years, Brookins endured other fights to expand his trailer park. A big battle erupted in December 1960, when a Fitch Road resident reported that he had come across an area at the rear of the trailer park where Brookins was installing cement pads and sewer for more trailers. That dispute also went to court, and in the end, Brookins was able to expand Columbia Park.

According to filings in a lawsuit (*Colasant v. Olmsted Township*), Columbia Park had about 900 units in 1994, when the suit was filed. For comparison, Foster's Trailer Park had 75 units and Olmsted Mobile Home Park had about 130 units.



Brookins made his money on trailers, but his passion was for trolleys. Over a few decades, he collected more than two dozen streetcars from around the country and from as far away as Mexico, England and Switzerland and put them on display at what he called Trolleyville, U.S.A., at Columbia Park. But even that was controversial, and



*Seen here is one of the streetcars parked outside the Trolleyville, U.S.A., office and the sales center for Columbia Park. The date of this postcard photo is uncertain.*

Brookins had to fight a battle with the Olmsted Township Board of Zoning Appeals in the early 1960s to be allowed to set up loops of tracks for the streetcars at Columbia Park. Visitors could ride the trolleys on certain days from the shopping center through the trailer park to almost Fitch Road and back. Brookins died in 1983, but Trolleyville, U.S.A., continued until 2002. By then, a new owner had taken over Columbia Park from the Brookins family and was not interested in continuing to operate the streetcars. (For more on Trolleyville, U.S.A., see Issue 36 of *Olmsted 200* from May 2016.)

Although much of the early concern about Brookins’s trailer park was that it would add too many children to the school system, Columbia Park eventually limited residency to only older adults. Today, people must be at least 55 years old to live there. The community’s guidelines allow children 18 years old and under to stay with residents only with permission from management for a maximum of 15 consecutive days and a maximum of 30 days a year.

“Our residents enjoy peaceful neighborhoods with amenities such as on-site shopping plaza, planned community events, shuffleboard court, manned gatehouse entry, on-site library and more,” Columbia Park



*Tenants have changed over the years, but Town and Country Plaza is still in business in front of Columbia Park.*

Manufactured Home Community says on its website.

Although Brookins's proposal 70 years ago to build a trailer park sparked concerns among Olmsted residents about whether the school district had adequate facilities for a growing student population, the effects Columbia Park had on the school system were minor compared to other housing developments that converted mostly agricultural land into residential properties. The school district had to address the need for more school buildings repeatedly over the next several decades.

In 1949-1950, the school district initially responded to the Baby Boom's additional enrollment by adding a wing with seven classrooms onto the west side of the district's sole school building, but that failed to handle growth for very long. Falls Elementary School opened in 1954 and was expanded in 1955 and 1957. Fitch Elementary School opened in 1958 and expanded in 1961. Lenox Elementary opened in 1961. By the mid-1960s, the school district focused on building a new high school, which opened in 1968. Subsequently, the district added a new middle school in 1996 and an intermediate school in 2009. The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will feature a story about Olmsted Falls High School as it approaches the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its opening.



*For decades, streetcar tracks for Trolleyville, U.S.A., ran alongside the Town and Country Plaza building. That's why one of the longest-lasting tenants of the shopping center has been the Trolley House Pub & Grille. Although it has been gone for years, another longtime tenant was Leader Drug, which occupied the corner shop.*

## **Resident Finds Sign of Service for Olmsted Doctor**

One of the best-remembered physicians who worked and lived in Olmsted Falls was Dr. Forrest Adams. Not so well remembered is his predecessor, Dr. Delbert V. Kechele. However, a literal sign of his service recently appeared at the home of Jaime O'Connor at 25659 Water Street.

“We repaired the flooring of the garage attic and found some newspaper clippings and some signs left up there including this hand painted one,” she wrote, referring to a sign listing walk-in hours for Kechele as 1:00 to 3:00 and 7:00 to 8:00 p.m.

So far, historical references available to *Olmsted 200* have turned up little information about Kechele.



Walter Holzworth's 1966 book on Olmsted history says little more than Dr. Adams not only succeeded Kechele as the community's doctor in 1942 but also moved into his house. Holzworth wrote many paragraphs about Adams but nothing more about Kechele.



*This is the sign Jaime O'Connor found in her garage attic at 25659 Water Street. Photo courtesy of Jaime O'Connor.*

The only other reference that has turned up information about Kechele is the 1940 U.S. Census, which reveals that he still was living in Olmsted Falls at the time the census was taken. He was 47 years old. His family included his wife Gertrude (age 43), sons John (19) and Philip (15), and daughter Helen (16). Another woman named Harriet Muche (32) lived with them. It's not clear what her relationship to them was.

And that's it. If anyone has more information about Kechele, please share it with *Olmsted 200*.

## **Cool Pool, Hot Spot and Twister Evoke Readers' Responses**

Last month's story about Adler's Swim Club and the Corral stirred memories for many *Olmsted 200* readers.

"Thanks for doing this!" Sue Kucklick wrote in an email. "It brought back memories of learning to swim at Adler's pool. My mom was a Red Cross swim instructor there."

Likewise, Sue (Ryan) Proctor wrote, "Loved the article on Adler's pool as I was one of those kids that learned how to swim there for a few summers."

Two members of the Rice family wrote emails about their experiences. Lynn Rice wrote, "Thanks, I took swimming lessons at Adler's as well. I enjoyed this article." However, Linda (Rice) Mitrik, was more specific with her recollections. "As a youngster growing up in OF it was a summertime treat to swim at Adler's Pool," she wrote. "I recall several 8:00 a.m. swim classes though where it was mighty chilly water! Never did

get the rhythmic breathing down right...just couldn't stand putting my head and ear into the frigid water. Shivering is how we stayed warm. ☺ But once the lessons were over and the free swimming permitted the sun warmed up the pool (or maybe it was the crowds of people). At any rate such a fun read down memory lane."



*Many people still have fond memories of Adler's Swim Club, where Olmsted residents cooled off in the 1950s and 1960s. Photo courtesy of Rick Adler.*

Many people also posted Facebook comments about the story. For example, Dottie Correll wrote, "I taught swimming for years at Adler's! Fun days!" And Missy Myers Kinney wrote, "I remember the diving pool was always freezing!!"

Here are a few other responses:

- "My kids learned to swim there. We still live in the township. Of course, kids are all grown up and are grandparents themselves." – Joanne Becker Louis
- "I learned to swim there! I went there every day, all day!! I eventually taught swimming lessons there too!!" – Patty Smith Lahood
- "Like many kids, I learned to swim there, then danced many nights away at the Corral." – Linda Zinn

But not everyone had fond memories of Adler's Swim Club. "I hated this place," Julie Dunwoodie-Balfour posted on Facebook. "I have nightmares about my swim instructor. He was terrible!!"

While most of the responses to the story were about Adler's Swim Club, others recalled the Corral.

"Hey, I loved this," Jenny Manning wrote. "I graduated from John Marshall in 1964 and we often went to the Corral and really enjoyed this story. As a lot of kids did, I was too young to hit it at graduation, but snatched someone else's driver's license a year older and used to sneak in there. I always tried to figure out exactly where it was in Olmsted Township and had forgotten it burned down. Did not know about the pool."

Judy Evancho Vassel wrote, "We spent many Saturday nights at the Corral."

Paul Majcher said in a Facebook post he "borrowed" his older brother's draft card, so he could drink at the Corral. He said he noticed an older woman, about 22 years old,

eyeing him. “Thought she was interested in me,” he wrote. “Turns out she was a daughter of a friend of my Dad!! And she told her dad who told my dad she saw me at a bar drinking! BUSTED!!!”

Bruce Hislop wrote, “Fun times at the Corral. Live local bands.”

And James Graven, who now is mayor of Olmsted Falls, wrote, “I remember going to the Corral in the late 1970s. The Corral was a great place – fun times!”

One of the best responses about both Adler’s Swim Club and the Corral came from Patrick Carroll. He wrote:

*Such memories at Adler's I and so many others possess fondly. My sisters and I and later, my friends and I, would frequent Adler's almost every day in the hot, steamy endless Julys and Augusts of our youth. We only lived about a mile and a half down where Cook Rd. meets Clark St., so it was so convenient to ride bikes there. I was always afraid of jumping off the high dive and many times thought, 'maybe next year.' But alas, that never came!*

*Then in the late seventies, my friends and I would frequent the Corral for dancing, drinking and general enjoyment. I met my wife there in December of 1978. And the rest, as you know, is history!*

In a subsequent email, Carroll added, that he had his first experience with puppy love at the pool. “A girl who I liked in 6<sup>th</sup> grade who I will call ‘Anna’ and I met everyday for a week and splashed about and youthfully cavorted. [It] began and ended at the end of the week,” he wrote. “Ahhh, to be young!”

In addition, a few people wrote about the story on the June 8, 1953, tornado that seemed to skip over the northern edge of Olmsted Township before destroying homes and taking several lives in Cleveland.

Jenny Manning said she was not there at the time of the tornado, but she lived for 25 years along Lewis Road next to Metroparks’ riding ring. “Word was Dorothy Fuldheim [a longtime commentator on WEWS television] was visiting a friend on Lewis Rd. hill when that 53 tornado hit and witnessed and felt the tornado,” she wrote. “Also people on Memory Lane had damage from it. So it was there before skipping across the valley over near the airport.”

Finally, Sue Kucklick wrote, “The 1953 tornado went skipping through Ohio City. It destroyed a 5 story apartment building at W. 38th and Clinton Ave. near where I live now, and left its twin on the other side of the street!”



## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about the planning and building of Olmsted Falls High School, which opened almost 50 years ago. It also will include a story about another local landmark marking its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

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, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Florida, 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](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. 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 in Olmsted Falls and the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.

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