



Olmsted 200

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

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Historic Houses Get New Life

With the bicentennial of Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls coming up, it would be nice if the log cabin that James Geer built in 1815, when he and his family became the first settlers in the township, still existed. It was just north of what is now Sprague Road, not far from Rocky River, in the section of Olmsted Falls that once was West View. When Geer built it, he might have given little thought to whether he and his family would get credit for being the first settlers in a new community. He likely would be surprised to learn that Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township date their founding to 1814, when he planted a small crop of corn on the site, rather than one year later when he and his family moved across the border from Columbia Township, as reported in Crisfield Johnson's 1879 *History of Cuyahoga County, Ohio*.

Although Geer's cabin is long gone, Olmsted is fortunate to have many 19th century houses, including some from the early part of that century. Fortunately, most of them have been cared for well. Several can be found on River Road, while others are along Columbia Road, Lewis Road and Water Street and elsewhere.

However, until recently, one of those historic homes was in danger of deteriorating. The house at 7622 Columbia Road was believed to have been built in 1845, even though the National Register of History Places lists it as 1858. The house has been on the list since 1979. Although Samuel Lay, Jr., a member of one Olmsted's most industrious families in the 1800s, did not acquire the house until about 1855, it has



retained his name through the years. It is considered to be one of the best examples of Greek Revival architecture in the community. The original portion of the house was L-shaped. Additions were built in the 1890s and the 1930s.

After Larry and Holly Gordon bought the house in 1976, they spent more than a decade restoring it and exposed some of the original plaster and flooring, according to a 1987 article in the *News Sun*. That account said the house had 15 rooms, six doors, 32 windows and four thermostats. It also said the house originally had not only the existing staircase in the front but also another staircase in the rear that was hidden by doors.



Unfortunately, about a decade ago, another owner started restoring the house, but according to a real estate agent who was trying to sell it a few years ago, that owner ran out of funds before he could finish it. Except for one second-floor room, the interior was left stripped and unfinished with much of the original woodwork showing.

Much of the outside became covered with vines and other vegetation as the house sat idle for several years. The Century Home sign by the street deteriorated and fell down, which some people feared also might be the eventual fate of the Samuel Lay House.

But fortunately, the old house has a new owner intent on fixing it up again. Attorney Kevin Roberts took title to the house on August 15 and hired Mathias Sterner to begin the process of renovating it by clearing away the vines and other plants that had obscured much of the outside.

“My wife and I have admired this house for years: the quality of construction, the traditional design, the wraparound porch, the fact that so much of the original construction is still intact, and most of all the history,” Roberts said. “Both my wife and I are descended from people who were involved in the 18th century history of the USA and we both love historical sites. The two-doored, four seater outhouse was too much to pass up. High end for its day.”





That four-seater outhouse is part of a mystery that Roberts and Sterner are trying to solve. It and another small building, also wooden and painted the same shade of red – apparently a storage or work shed – stand behind the house. What Roberts and Sterner would like to know is when they were built. Do they, like the house, go back to the 1800s, or were they more recent additions? Both have deteriorated badly with roofs that are falling in, so it will take quite a bit of work

to fix them up. Unfortunately, the large barn with hand-hewn beams that was moved into the house’s backyard in 1921 is long gone.

Asked how long he expects it will take to restore the house and its outbuildings, Roberts said, “The rest of our life expectancy.” And what does he plan to do with it? “We want to restore [it] authentically, and convert most of the land back to an orchard and cropland.”

It’s not the first experience Roberts and his wife have had with historic buildings. They live in a house built in 1854 on River Road that once was Florin Peltz’s wheel and blacksmith’s shop. Peltz’s son, Joseph, later was a partner with his brother-in-law, Philip Simmerer, in the hardware store that once occupied what is now the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Anyone who has information about the Samuel Lay House or its outbuildings should let Roberts know. His office is in the former town hall known as the Bonsey Building, now better known for the Moosehead restaurant.

“We have had many, many people come by to look at the house and tell us how to renovate it,” Roberts said. “We don’t mind company as long as you want to help renovate while you are talking.”



Kevin Roberts and Mary and Mathias Sterner

Big house gets new look.

One of Olmsted’s oldest houses – perhaps the oldest – also is undergoing renovations. It is the house at the northeastern corner of Columbia and Nobottom roads. That’s the side of Nobottom that is in Olmsted Township, while the south side is in Olmsted Falls. Since Bill and Marty Richner acquired the house in 2009, they have been making steady progress in fixing it up with a combination of restoring portions to former



appearances and creating new looks for other parts of the house. Their plans include eventually putting up a sign listing the previous owners of the house over the years. That list begins with John Adams, Sr., and his wife Maria, who came to the area from Connecticut in 1810 and settled in Olmsted – before it was called Olmsted – in 1820, when they built a small house on the site. What was their house later was incorporated into a larger

house when additions were built. The Adams portion is the section next to the tall stone chimney.

Bill Richner said he recently was told that because of that 1820 section, the house is considered to be the oldest residence in Cuyahoga County that always has been a residence. Other, older houses in the county have been put to various other uses over the years, he said.



Looking at that room in the house today requires great imagination to visualize it as the small house that Adams built in 1820.



Because of its origins, the house could be called the John Adams House, but many longtime Olmsted residents still think of it as the TeGrotenhuis house, because of the family who acquired it in 1935 and owned it through much of the 20th century. Appropriately, TeGrotenhuis in Dutch means “the big house.” With its additions, including a tower built in the 1860s, the house is one of the biggest in Olmsted.

Fortunately, the Richners, who formerly lived in the Cincinnati area, brought with them many pieces of old furniture and large paintings to fill up the house. They have made many changes to the house since they acquired it about four

years ago but have many more in mind. In recent months, they had to remove a few big trees in front of the house because of their age and danger of falling. Although it is regrettable when an old tree must be removed, it did open the view of the house from Nobottom Road.

Trustees Seek Information on Township Houses

The Olmsted Township trustees are looking for more information on several historic buildings from one end of the township to the other. They plan to begin celebrating Olmsted's bicentennial in 2014, which as noted earlier will be the 200th anniversary of James Geer's planting of a small crop of corn in the township, although he and his family did not become the first settlers until 1815 (meaning Olmsted could continue celebrating the bicentennial through 2015).

As part of the observance, Trustee Jeanene Kress said, the township would like to identify some of its historic buildings with markers. Among the first buildings of interest to them are several listed in a document prepared in 1978 by the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and the Western Reserve Historical Society on behalf of the Cuyahoga



County Department of Community Development. Its title is *Historic and Archeological Resources of the Urban County Block Grant Communities in Cuyahoga County, Ohio*.

One of the houses is at 27264 Sprague Road in the southwestern portion of the township. The county document describes it as:

“Two-storey [sic] farmhouse in Eastlake vernacular. Shed roof porch running the length of the south side has delicate spindle railing and millwright wood trim. House features clapboard siding that is notched at the 2nd storey [sic]. Shingles in gable ends have sawtooth edges. There is an oriel window extending to the roof line in the east elevation. Shed addition at rear. House is painted white with green trim. Foundation stones have been painted green.” It lists J. Cicky as an early owner of the house, but in 1978, the owner was listed as E.L. Webb. The date it was built was listed only as “late 19th century.”

E.L. Webb, Jr., the house's current owner, said the house was built in 1883. The barn in back was built in 1923 after a lightning strike caused the previous barn to burn down, he said. The house now is painted gray with white trim, and Webb said he plans to repaint it using the same colors.

Another house on the 1978 inventory stands at 26950 Bagley Road. The document describes it this way: “Greek Revival house. Central entrance is flanked by two double-hung windows, 6/6 lights. There are 2 small windows in the frieze. Door features 3-part entablatures with incised pediment over a round-arch top light. House has internal end chimneys. An early brick shed addition runs the length of the house at the rear, giving it the form of a saltbox. This brick portion features sills and lintels of tooled stone with margins.”



About the history and significance of the building, the inventory says: “The house was built by William and Mary Broadwell Harding, who emigrated from Leicestershire, England, to Olmsted Township in 1848. They had 4 children. Mary died in 1861, William in 1889, whereupon the house passed to their eldest son, John Harding. The house was later owned by Henry Hoftuzer [should be Hoftzyer], son of early Dutch immigrants from which ‘Dutch Road’ (later called Bagley Road) received its name.” The document lists the date of the house’s construction as circa 1850.



shingled.”

At 26975 Cook Road is a third house on the 1978 inventory. This one is listed as having been built about 1910. The description is: “This square Bungalow has a full front porch under the flared eaves of a broad gable roof. Above the porch is a large hip-roof dormer with wide eaves, thick brackets, and basket handle arched windows. The side entrance has a gable hood supported on large, shaped brackets. The ground floor is sided and the gable ends,

About the house’s history and significance, the document says: “This bungalow retains some architectural elements of the earlier Queen Anne style (brackets, arched windows). It was built by Herman Bieschoff [spelled Beischoff elsewhere in the document], one of several prosperous Dutch and German farmers in the area.” It also warns: “These properties on Cook Road have increased in value and are threatened by possible suburban developments.”

A fourth house of interest is at 24426 Barrett Road in the northeastern part of the township. The 1978 inventory lists its construction date as 1845 and describes the house

this way: “Greek Revival house with 1-½ storey [sic] and 1 storey [sic] ell. Entrance on right side of main block is recessed within a thin molded architrave and features pilasters and sidelights. House has a plain frieze. The ell, originally the wood and carriage shed, is now the dining room. A garage with an art studio above has been added on the other side of the main block. Windows and frames have been replaced and the shutters have been removed.”



On history and significance, the document says: “Circa 1835 Martin Barrett purchased a 300-acre tract on the west side of the east branch of the Rocky River. One hundred acres of it was in Olmsted Twp. and the remainder in Middleburg [Township, actually spelled “Middleburgh” back then]. Barrett built first a log cabin then a frame house, which still stands. The trail that ran through his property was later named Barrett Road. Barrett died in 1878, his wife Margaret in 1898. The farm was sold off in small parcels.”

The sixth building on the 1978 inventory is not a house but a barn, called the Clyde Ramsey Barn, at 7617 Lewis Road. It was built in 1880. Today, it can barely be seen from the road through trees and other vegetation behind a house that is in such a state of disrepair that the roof on the front porch has partially collapsed. The property is fenced off and has signs warning against trespassing. All that can be seen of the barn from the road is a portion of its red side. It is impossible from there to tell if the barn is in better shape than the house.

Here is what the 1978 document says about it: “Bank barn with rock-faced red sandstone foundation and vertical board siding. Barn features gable roof of slate surmounted by a cupola. Cupola has intersecting gable roofs. Each of its four sides features double column of louvered vents. There is delicate bargeboard trim in the cupola eaves.” Of the history and significance, the inventory says: “Typical late-19th century bank barn. Barn originally part of Eastman Bradford farm, later acquired by ‘B. Lewis,’ according to 1914 atlas. Lewis family owned much of the land along the road that bears their name.” Further, the document says the house near the barn was built in the early 20th century and adds, “Truck farming is still pursued here, as it is in scattered parts of Olmsted Township.”

If you have any other information about any of these structures, please send it to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. Any information received will be shared with the Olmsted Township trustees.

News of the Past

Old newspapers provide some of the best sources of information about what happened in Olmsted's past. Unfortunately, no newspaper provided regular coverage about events in Olmsted for more than the first half century after the first settlers moved in during 1815. The first newspaper to provide regular coverage was Berea's *Grindstone City Advertiser*, which began in 1868, but it took another year before Olmsted items started appearing in it.

One of the first bits of Olmsted news in the *Advertiser* appeared in the June 19, 1869, edition, although a typesetting error made it seem as though it was addressing an event scheduled for 27 years in the future. It read like this:

FOURTH OF JULY to be celebrated
at Olmsted Falls on *Saturday July 3rd* 1896.
The citizens of Berea and vicinity are
notified that a meeting will be held at Nokes
Hall on Monday evening, June 21st, at 8
o'clock, to make arrangements by
committees &c., to join Olmsted, in
celebrating the day and time aforesaid.

P.B. GARDNER,
D.R. WATSON,
GEO. NOKES.

That same issue of the *Advertiser* in also included a want ad from a business in Olmsted Falls:

WANTED. – A First Class Tailoress
wanted, apply at once at Moley's Clothing
Store, in Olmsted or the branch Store in
Berea.

A regular ad for F.J. Moley's store promoted "ready made clothing for the people!" and also said that clothing was "Cheap! Cheap! Cheap!"

Another ad was for W.W. Mead, an auctioneer in Olmsted Falls, which said, "Orders promptly attended to."

Under a heading for Olmsted news was the note: "(LOCAL EDITOR WANTED.)" Without an editor for Olmsted news, the paper had just one news item in that section:

The Good Templars will present the
Temperance drama of "The Fruits of the

Wine Cup,” and the Farce entitled “Aunt Judy,” at the Town Hall, Nov. 25th and 26th. Fifteen cents is only charged for admission, which is altogether too little.

That temperance drama was an early indication of the battles that Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township would go through for several decades over whether to have saloons or outlaw them. It was such a prominent issue in Olmsted for so many years that *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township* devotes an entire chapter, “Saloon Wars,” to it.

Still to Come

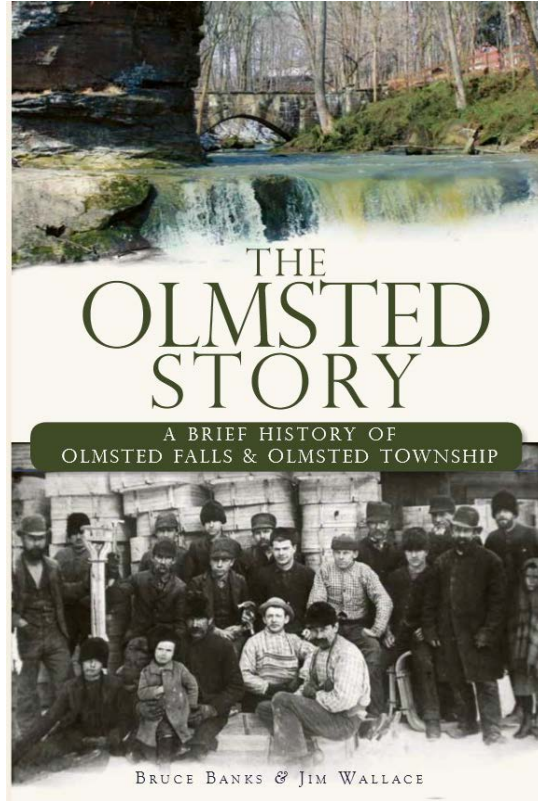
School is back in session. In the next issue, we’ll consider how the school system has developed since the 1800s. Even though Olmsted Township was not settled until 1815, which was five to eight years after all the townships surrounding it were settled, Olmsted’s school system became a pioneer one century later.

It was good to see many readers of *Olmsted 200* in person during Olmsted Heritage Days last month and to receive requests to add new readers to the email list. Perhaps the illustrated presentations Bruce Banks gave at the Grand Pacific Hotel and the Lolly the Trolley historical tour I led through Olmsted Falls stirred some people’s interest in learning more about Olmsted’s history. If you know of others 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. If you are a new reader and would like to receive the first three issues, let me know that at the same address.

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.

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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