



# Olmsted 200

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

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## Olmsted Had a Big Celebration for Its Sesquicentennial

The upcoming celebration of Olmsted's bicentennial also marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the celebration of Olmsted's sesquicentennial. Many things were different in the Olmsted communities then, and it is interesting to see how they marked the occasion, especially considering that they apparently did nothing to celebrate the centennial a half-century before that. (For more on that, see Issue 8 of *Olmsted 200* from January 1, 2014.)

It's not clear who decided to mark the founding of Olmsted as 1814, when the only activity in what became Olmsted Township was that James Geer, who was still a resident of Columbia Township, crossed the border only to plant a small crop of corn. The year 1815, when Geer and his family moved into the township to become Olmsted's first settlers, would seem to have been more logical. But the decision certainly was made well before 1964, when the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration was held, because nothing in reports about planning for the event indicates that community leaders were even aware of the discrepancy.

The sesquicentennial celebration involved not just Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township but also West View, which then was a separate, incorporated village. In 1971, West View merged with Olmsted Falls, so the former West View is now roughly the southern half of Olmsted Falls. [West View sometimes was spelled as one word, "Westview" or "WestView." The *Berea News* used all three forms. A future issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about the history of West View.]

The first significant report about planning for the sesquicentennial appeared in the *Berea News* on February 20, 1964. The first paragraph of an article titled "Sesqui Committees Named" said this: "Olmsted Falls, Olmsted Township and Westview are recalling their first 150 years with a series of celebrations that began at the recent

Proclamation Dance, where there, leaders of the three communities jointly proclaimed 1964 the sesquicentennial year.” Accompanying the article was a photo of Olmsted Falls Mayor George Sohl, Olmsted Township Trustees Chairman Peter Ferrito and West View Mayor Carl Sprague as they signed the proclamation.

The co-chairmen of the events were listed as two couples: Mr. and Mrs. Al Caesar and Mr. and Mrs. Richard Radigan. They scheduled a kickoff dinner that April, antique car cavalcades in May and June and an ice cream social in June, but the climax of the celebrations was to be the Olmsted Falls Homecoming on July 2 through July 5.

Working under the chairpersons were several committees:

- **Historical** led by Mr. and Mrs. Grover Imhoff with members: Mr. and Mrs. W.B. Maynard, the Phillip Simmerer family, Mr. and Mrs. William Gibson, Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey Billings, Mrs. Bernice Offenber, Mr. and Mrs. Chester Atkinson, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Atkinson, Gilbert Hall, V. McElroy and M. Sheridan.
- **Donations** led by Alma Walkem with members: Mr. and Mrs. William Gilligan, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Zauner and Mr. and Mrs. Peter Ferrito.
- **Parade** led by Bill Williams with members: Sgt. And Mrs. F. Capes, Mr and Mrs. A. Saponari, Mr. and Mrs. Gil Guildford, Mrs. Harrington, Mrs. Anne L. Grant and Mrs. Hilda Noss.
- **Entertainment** led by Mr. and Mrs. William Ruppert with members: Evelyn Lance, Greta Lizotte, Shirley Hlutke, Mr. and Mrs. W. Rudolph and Mrs. Herbert Barnes.
- **Grounds and Booths** led by Mr. and Mrs. R. Klesta and Mr. and Mrs. Norman Butler with members: Mr. and Mrs. J. Maddon, Mr. and Mrs. V. Valek and William Alborn.
- **Queen’s Coronation** led by Mrs. Dorothy Williams with members: Mary Lou Stork, Marie Kolker, Rita Ontor and Dorothy Johnson.
- **Publicity** led by Mrs. William Kunberger with members: Mrs. Ken Yeager, Mrs. William Alborn (secretary) and Charles Jones (treasurer).

### **Residents rode and bought souvenirs for the sesquicentennial.**

More information about sesquicentennial celebration plans came in the “Olmsted Notes” column in the June 4 edition of the *Berea News*. First, residents were invited to meet at Olmsted Township Hall on June 6 between 1:00 and 1:30 p.m. for the “Sesqui-Centennial Caravan.” Reporter Betty Latham wrote, “Everyone will climb aboard a truck or into a convertible and away they’ll go singing and having lots of old fashioned fun.” The caravan was to include a band performing old-time music and a player-piano to provide honky-tonk music.

The route for the caravan was to go through Olmsted Falls, Olmsted Township and West View, as well as other neighboring communities. The final stop was scheduled to be at a farm in Valley City, where participants would roast hot dogs over a fire. “Old

folks, young folks (with parents along), bring a noisemaker and join in the fun,” Latham wrote.

Also part of that column was the announcement of the availability of the official coin for the sesquicentennial at National City Bank. Local merchants could get coins at the bank and make them available to the public for 50 cents each. People then could keep them as souvenirs or use them to purchase 50 cents worth of merchandise.

Another souvenir available from local merchants was a plate depicting some of Olmsted’s past.



*The commemorative plate for the sesquicentennial depicted six sites and two people from Olmsted’s past. At the top were Jane and Calvin Geer. Calvin was the son of James Geer and a member of the family that became Olmsted’s first settlers in 1815. To the side of them were two of the biggest mills built in Olmsted Falls in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the left was Stokes’s Mill, which stood near the falls on Plum Creek. On the right was Damp’s Mill, which stood along Rocky River behind the current location of Mill River Plaza. In the center was the Union Schoolhouse that stood on the Village Green from 1873 until 1960. To the left of it was the Fenderbosch Saloon, which is the building that now houses Master Cleaners and the Olde Wine Cellar. To the right was the Town Hall, which stood from 1883 until 1940 at the spot where the Moosehead restaurant is now. At the bottom was the building, as well as derricks, for the sandstone quarry that was located in what now is David Fortier River Park.*

The year was a hairy one for many male residents as they competed in a beard contest. They called themselves Brothers of the Brush. They could purchase buttons saying they were members of that group at local merchants. Others who chose to remain clean-shaven – or perhaps had to because of their out-of-town jobs – could buy “permits to shave” at the barber shop.

“It is rumored that during the Sesqui-centennial celebration in July, that the ‘Keystone Cops’ will pick up anyone without a beard or shaving permit and give them a tour of the town in a paddy wagon,” Latham wrote.

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Organizers had allocated \$170 in prize money for the beard contest with a \$50 first-place prize for the person with the best all-around beard and \$20 prizes for seven other categories.

Women were encouraged to wear sun bonnets and old dresses. One local women’s organization, the Rebekahs, planned to make bonnets for sale.

Also planned for the celebration was a turtle race on Independence Day with turtles assigned to various organizations. There was some concern that organizations might try training turtles by pinching their tails and that some turtles could end up without tails.

Gail Knapp was named as the sesquicentennial queen. Another dozen girls were chosen as her attendants.

People outside of the Olmsted area, even outside of the Cleveland area, learned about the celebration on Monday, June 29, because *The Mike Douglas Show* designated it as Olmsted-Westview Sesquicentennial Day. About 30 people were scheduled to appear in costume on the show. At the time, the show was broadcast locally on KYW-TV (now WKYC), Channel 3, the Cleveland station owned by Westinghouse Broadcasting, as well as on Westinghouse stations in Baltimore, Boston, Pittsburgh and San Francisco. (The show later expanded to 27 markets.)

### **Residents had a four-day weekend of fun.**

The sesquicentennial celebration began on Thursday, July 2, at 6:00 p.m. with the opening of the midway with booths, rides and organ music on the grounds of Olmsted Falls High School. At that time, the high school was the old building built in 1916 and expanded in 1928 that now serves as Olmsted Falls City Hall. At 7:30, a parade that assembled at the Columbia Road Shopping Center in the township began marching to the high school. It had more than a dozen floats, including one carrying the queen, several bands, drill teams, antique cars, mounted riders and the Sesquicentennial Paddy Wagon with the Keystone Cops. The chairman of the parade was Bill Williams, a World War II navy veteran, while the parade marshal was Staff Sergeant Frank Capes, who served 15 years in the Marines including during World War II and the Korean War.

About 8:30, Mayor Sohl, Mayor Sprague and Trustee James Tassie gave opening speeches. Prizes for floats were awarded about 9:00. The American Legion Clifton Post drill team performed about 9:15. The Mr. and Mrs. Citizen dance and awards were scheduled for 9:30. The Caledonian Pipe Band performed about 10:00. The evening concluded with a drawing for prizes at 11:00. People with small children were able to take advantage of babysitting services at the Girl Scouts' booth from 8:00 to 9:30.

That evening and throughout the weekend, the Keystone Cops rounded up men without beards and took them to a kangaroo court presided over by Judge Dick Radigan. He offered those men the option of paying a \$10 fine or purchasing a shaving permit for \$2.

The next few days went like this:

- Friday, July 3 – Midway reopened at 6:00 p.m., the queen's coronation was held at 7:30, Job's Daughters Drill Team performed at 8:00, the Queen's Ball and Twist Contest began at 8:30, the Sally Stark Cadets performed at 9:30, and the evening ended with a prize drawing at 11:00.
- Saturday, July 4 – The flag-raising ceremony was held at noon followed by the opening of the midway, a Hot Stove League baseball game began at 2:00, a wrestling match was held at 4:00, a cake-decorating contest with judges from Columbia Gas Company and a cookbook as first-place prize for the best sesquicentennial theme began at 5:00, the turtle race started at 7:00, a barber shop quartet performed at 7:30, the Brothers of the Brush contest for beards was judged at 8:30, the prize drawing was held at 10:30, and the evening ended with fireworks beginning at 11:00.
- Sunday, July 5 – The scene of the celebration switched to the Village Green, beginning with a youth parade at 1:30, followed by speeches and the shaving of beards at 2:15, the awarding of parade prizes at 3:00, children's games at 3:15 and a band concert and ice cream social beginning at 4:00.

The June 25 issue of the *Berea News* included a full-page advertisement for the sesquicentennial celebration with individual ads from 17 local businesses. The top of the page featured a drawing of settlers traveling with oxen-pulled Conestoga wagons that would have been more fitting for celebrating the history of a community in the western United States than one in northeastern Ohio. Underneath that, the following businesses had ads:



- Roberson's Sohio at Columbia and Bagley roads, featuring two free Atlas Plycron tires for guessing the mileage on the "Mystery Tire" displayed at the station.
- Len's Service Center at 7512 Columbia Road, featuring Pepsi for five cents, ice cream bars for five cents, pretzels and chips for five cents and hot dogs for 10 cents with any purchase of \$1.00 or more.
- Yondo & Son Meat Market at 24523 Sprague Road in Columbia Station, featuring homemade, fresh "kolbosal," three dozen medium eggs for \$1.00 and three pounds of sliced bacon for 89 cents.
- Hirsch Superette at Cook and Fitch roads, featuring a complete line of meats and groceries, as well as beer and wine for takeout.
- Kucklick's Village Square Shoppe, featuring early American furniture.
- Dottie's Beauty Salon at 8081 Columbia Road, featuring complete beauty care "For Those Who Care."
- Paul's Texaco at 7160 Columbia Road, featuring minor repairs, tune-ups, brake service, mufflers, tailpipes, carburetors, Delco batteries and Firestone tires. The ad also had a reference to one of the customer loyalty programs of the day – "We give TV Stamps" – a reference to Top Value Stamps, which customers would collect in books and then redeem for merchandise.
- Columbia Leader Drug at 7072 Columbia Road, featuring black-and-white photographic film for 29 cents per roll or a three-roll pack for 79 cents.
- Columbia Auto Parts and Hardware at 24519 Sprague Road, featuring Sherwin-Williams paint, drum turning, valve refacing and a complete line of auto parts. The store's sesquicentennial special was brake drums turned for only \$1.00 per drum with the purchase of lining.
- Westview Lumber at 9680 Columbia Road, featuring 10 percent off on a semi-assembled picnic table along with a free camping stool. A six-foot table cost \$15.95, and an eight-foot table cost \$17.95.
- Schady's Shell at 7684 Columbia Road, featuring a complete line of Shell products, lubrication, batteries, tires, minor repairs and road calls.
- Barnum's Frozen Food Lockers at 8061 Columbia Road, suggesting that customers fill their freezers with Barnum's U.S.A.A., choice-grade, Black Angus steer beef that was "Unconditionally Guaranteed."
- Westview Concrete at 26000 Sprague Road, featuring sacked, ready-to-use Mix-Kwik products, as well as concrete, block, brick, sewer pipe, drain tile, finishing tools, sand, stone, cement and mortar.
- Olmsted Falls Sparkle Market, featuring chunk bologna for 29 cents per pound, Gerber's strained baby food for eight cents per jar and four rolls of Pampers toilet tissue for 19 cents.
- Westview Appliance Center at 8020 Columbia Road, featuring a Thinette air conditioner for \$119.95, a saving of \$10.
- Bagley Golf Inc., at 24475 Bagley Road, "Your Neighborhood Dairy Queen and Arnold Palmer Putting Course."



- Ritter's Farm at 7370 Columbia Road, featuring a hall for rent for weddings and picnics, as well as catering.



One other ad, using a drawing of an American Indian maiden, urged readers to “always shop in Olmsted Township.” It said, “All Indians Guaranteed Friendly” and “All Savings Guaranteed Great.” The ad said it was compliments of the Sesqui-Centennial Committee, which might mean that the committee fell short of filling up the page with merchants’ ads and had to pay for that one on its own. Actually, the ad was twice the size of most of the other ads, so the committee might have fallen two short in getting merchants to buy ads.

As shown above, some people still have the sesquicentennial commemorative plates. One even turned up last August in a garage sale at a home in the section of Olmsted Falls that once was West View. But what about the Brothers of the Brush buttons and the shaving permits? Does anybody still have them? If so, please send photos to share with readers of *Olmsted 200*.

Also, anyone with specific memories about the sesquicentennial celebration is invited to share them, especially if there are photos to go with them.

## Barn Is Scheduled to Come Down

Anyone who wants to see the 19<sup>th</sup> century barn along John Road at The Renaissance and perhaps take photos had better go soon. Officials of the Eliza Jennings organization, which owns The Renaissance, have decided that the dismantling of the barn, which John Hall built in 1880, will begin later this month.

“Over the last several months, we’ve been looking at the barn, Sandy Skerda, executive director of the Eliza Jennings Retirement Campus at The Renaissance, said today. “As soon as it came to our attention that there appeared to be some structural problems, we started investigating and talking to a lot of different people, initially talking to people with the intention of restoring the barn, repairing the barn. The more people we spoke with and the more news we got, unfortunately, the worse the news became.”

Among the estimates The Renaissance received from the experts it consulted was one for \$200,000 to totally dismantle and reassemble it with damaged pieces replaced. Skerda said the cost could go as high as \$300,000. The estimate to repair the north wall, the siding and the roof was \$100,000. Repairing just the north wall was estimated to cost \$20,000 to \$30,000, but that was not expected to prevent further deterioration of the building from water penetration.

“If we were to restore it, what we would actually have to do is we would have to use a crane to lift off the roof, deconstruct the barn and then rebuild it in order to give it any kind of stability at all,” Skerda said.

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– Sandy Skerda

Sheryl Sereda, the chief advancement officer for Eliza Jennings, agreed that’s what a report from a structural engineer indicated. “What the report has told us is that so many of the components are rotted and deteriorated that that would be the only way that we could reconstruct a structure that would meet code and be sound. What would occur, of course...is that we would no longer have a historical structure.”

Of particular concern is the north side of the barn, because the wall’s braces have become disconnected from the horizontal timbers. The wall is pushing outward, leading to fears that the barn could come down on its own with the help of a strong wind.



*The barn has holes in the roof and walls, and wooden pegs are coming out of their holes.*

“We’ve been told actually by several experts, if you will, that it could collapse at any time,” Skerda said. “Time is not on our side unfortunately.”

Other problems are that some timbers have rotted and others have cracked, rotted planks and rafters have left holes in the roof, the siding also has some holes, and some wooden pegs are gradually coming out of their holes. However, except for some deteriorated floor boards in a couple of corners, the floor and

foundation seem to be in relatively good shape.

Skerda and Sereda said spending about \$200,000 is too much for Eliza Jennings, which is a not-for-profit organization, to consider putting into the restoration of the barn. Just 20 years ago, the organization spent about \$150,000 to put a new roof on the barn and make other repairs.

During April, Skerda and Deb Hiller, president and chief executive officer of Eliza Jennings, met with Olmsted Township Trustees Sherri Lippus and Jeanene Kress,



as well as an architect and representatives of Razing Cleveland, an organization that specializes in reusing old building materials. Kress also took another look at the barn on Tuesday with Clint Williams, who restored the buildings at Grand Pacific Junction. Skerda said Williams's opinion was that it probably would take at least \$200,000 to restore the barn.

As part of their efforts, the trustees sought grant funding, and an employee of the county planning department provided some help. They also contacted the Olmsted Historical Society, which maintains several restored buildings at the Frostville Museum, but Lippus said that organization doesn't have the funds to take the barn, and it has other projects ahead of it.

"So it is looking as though no one wants to put up the necessary funds to save the barn," Lippus said in an email this week. "Since it is on private property and not on the Historical Registry there is not much that the Trustees can do to help the cause."

### **Preservation enthusiast suggested another way.**

Not everyone thought saving the barn would be too expensive. Kevin Roberts, a lawyer and member of Olmsted Falls City Council, has been involved in the preservation of other 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings. He lives in a restored house on River Road. Since last summer, he has been restoring the Samuel Lay House, which was built in 1845, at 7622 Columbia Road.

After seeing photos of the interior of the barn, Roberts expressed confidence that it could be saved for much less than the estimates The Renaissance had received, especially if Amish carpenters were hired to do the work.

"This is a gorgeous barn, with an excellent foundation, and still remarkably square and solid, regardless of age," Roberts

wrote. "These barns are amazingly well built and resilient. I see that some timbers are rotted and cracked, and some have come apart, and can see that some pegs have moved. Any Amish farmer can repair all this easily and at nowhere near the prices quoted."

*"These barns are amazingly well built and resilient. I see that some timbers are rotted and cracked, and some have come apart, and can see that some pegs have moved. Any Amish farmer can repair all this easily and at nowhere near the prices quoted."  
– Kevin Roberts*

Suggesting that Amish workers could build several barns the size of the one along John Road for \$200,000, he added, "I know an Amish guy who rebuilt my brother's house – built in 1850 – including lifting it off the foundation, building a new foundation." Also part of that work, Roberts wrote, were repairs and/or replacement of seven columns

and beams, the laying of new oak floors and rebuilding of the front porch for a total cost of about \$40,000.

“The same guy quoted me \$1800 for all the new wood siding I would need to completely recover my own 1860 barn (which is bigger than the Hall barn),” he said. “He also built me a 14 x 20 hemlock log cabin, with all windows, doors, metal roof, woodburner chimney, etc. and delivered it 30 miles away, for \$9000.”

In regard to John Hall’s barn, Roberts wrote, “I predict some Amish craftsmen would put this barn back in good shape for \$20,000. That’s my best guess.”

Unfortunately, Skerda said, Roberts did not contact her about his suggestion, and there is no indication that any Amish carpenter looked at the barn recently. She said Eliza Jennings officials considered the possibility of having the Amish repair the barn, but Amish workers were reportedly involved in the work done on the barn about 20 years ago. “And unfortunately, the work that was done – we are told – may have actually contributed to a quicker deterioration of the barn,” Skerda said.

### **Razing Cleveland will do the work.**

After what she described as an extensive search, the organization decided to have Razing Cleveland deconstruct the barn. Skerda said she and others were impressed with the “environmentally conscious approach” that Razing Cleveland officials take in their work.

“The first thing that they did was a lot of research on the barn, on the Hall farm and on the community as a whole,” she said. “In looking at the barn, they realized that

*“In looking at the barn, they realized that this was a special structure and would likely be a very sensitive project in the community. And they wanted to approach it in a very mindful way because of that.” – Sandy Skerda*

this was a special structure and would likely be a very sensitive project in the community. And they wanted to approach it in a very mindful way because of that. So that really struck a chord with me, and I think that it has struck a chord with the residents at The Renaissance and, I believe, with the trustees of the township as well.”

Sereda added, “One thing that Razing Cleveland did commit to was repurposing the materials as opposed to dumping them into a dump heap or a trash heap.”

“Nothing will go into a landfill,” Skerda said. “They have end-users for all of the materials, some locally, some out of state, and the items that cannot be repurposed will be recycled.”

The sandstone foundation is the most valuable part of the barn, she said, and the sale of those stones is expected to help pay for the project. If weather permits, Razing Cleveland is scheduled to begin taking the barn down on May 19. The work is expected to take two to four weeks.

But when it is finished, not all of John Hall's barn will be gone from the site. Razing Cleveland has agreed to create some sort of green space. Skerda said what it will look like has not been determined yet, but the stone with "1880," the date Hall built the barn, will remain. So will a board from inside the barn with Hall's name carved in it. "We'll also retain some of the stone to be used in that space and some of the barn siding to be used whether it be for some benches or whatever it might be," Skerda said. "The general idea is that that space will be used to commemorate the barn that was there and the Hall farm."



*The stones and timbers of the foundation are in better condition than the rest of the barn.*

#### **Ideas for green space are sought.**

The Eliza Jennings officials are open to suggestions on what the green space should look like. Perhaps it could include a sign with a picture of the barn, along with a description of its history and how it represented Olmsted Township's agricultural past. That's just one idea. Perhaps you have another. Skerda is already a reader of *Olmsted 200*, and other Eliza Jennings officials have been added to the distribution list with this issue. They are welcoming readers to offer suggestions for the green space. Send your ideas to [wallacestar@hotmail.com](mailto:wallacestar@hotmail.com). All of them will be shared with Skerda and her colleagues. The loss of a 134-year-old barn is regrettable, but here is a chance for you to have your say on what should remain in its place.

## **Still to Come**

Editor's note: The latest article in the series about the 19<sup>th</sup> century battles over saloons in Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township that was scheduled for this issue of *Olmsted 200* has been postponed until next month's issue. That's because the preceding story about John Hall's barn kept getting bigger as more information came in. When Sandy Skerda and Sheryl Sereda made themselves available for an interview hours before this issue was scheduled to go out, the article about the barn had to be extensively rewritten and took up much more space. To prevent it from getting too big, the article about the saloons is being held for June.

Also in June, *Olmsted 200* expects to have an update on the deconstruction of John Hall's barn. Another article will be about what life was like in the Olmsted-West View communities when they celebrated the sesquicentennial.

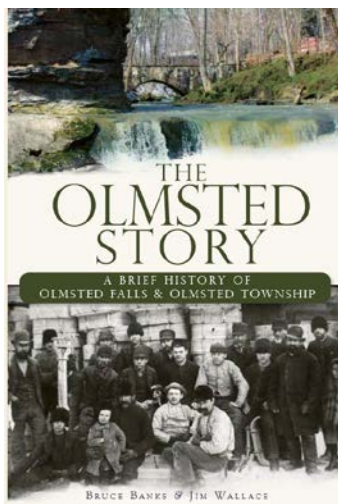
If you know of others who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: [wallacestar@hotmail.com](mailto:wallacestar@hotmail.com). *Olmsted 200* now has readers in several states, including California, Arizona, Texas, Louisiana, 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."

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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