



Olmsted 200

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

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Contents

Aging Accelerated for Olmsted 75 Years Ago	1
Two Centuries after the Corn Comes the Cornerstone Festival	4
Olmsted's Saloons Were Tougher than the Law	5
Barn Razing Reaches Final Days	8
Still to Come	9

Aging Accelerated for Olmsted 75 Years Ago

Few people beyond their teenage years like to be considered older than they really are, but the same is not true for communities. It now seems as though Olmsted unwittingly gained an extra year three-quarters of a century ago – an extra year that might never go away in official observances of Olmsted's age, such as this year's bicentennial celebration.

One of the oddities of Olmsted history is the curious decision someone made many years ago to credit 1814 as the year for the founding of Olmsted Township – and by extension, Olmsted Falls. That's why the two communities are celebrating their bicentennial this year. As has been noted in previous issues of *Olmsted 200*, it's odd, because most American communities mark their founding from the year when settlers first moved in, but the first settlers did not move into Olmsted Township (then known as Township 6, Range 15, of what had been Connecticut's Western Reserve) until 1815.

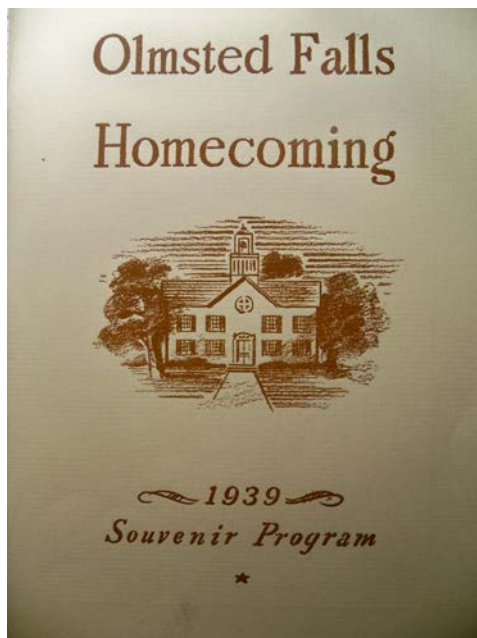
The only act of Olmsted's recorded history that occurred in 1814 was the planting of a small crop of corn. James Geer did that one year before he and his family moved into the township to become Olmsted's first settlers. Before 1815, they were still residents of Columbia Township. The earliest written history of Olmsted from Crisfield Johnson's 1879 *History of Cuyahoga County, Ohio*, tells us that. Even though Johnson got a couple of facts wrong – most notably using the incorrect "Olmstead" spelling – he made it clear in three ways that Geer only planted corn in Olmsted in 1814 and did not build a cabin and move his family into Olmsted until the next year. (See Issue 1 of *Olmsted 200* for more on that.)

Another account of Olmsted's history that is not quite as old as Johnson's book but older than other histories of the community comes from *Memorial to the Pioneer Women of the Western Reserve*, which was edited by Gertrude Van Rensselaer and published in 1896 by the Cleveland Centennial Commission. The publication told the stories of the settling of Cuyahoga and Portage counties by focusing on the women rather than the men who typically were the focus of historical accounts. The Olmsted section noted that there were few signs of civilization in the township in 1814. It then said, "In the spring of 1815 the Widow PARKER came with her husband, James GEER, from the adjoining township of Columbia...." Thus, in the latter years of the 19th century, there seemed to be no doubt about crediting 1815 as the year when Olmsted began to be settled.

So a long-running question has been: Who decided to count Olmsted's founding as occurring in 1814 instead of 1815 – and when was the decision made? Well, careful study now indicates the decision could have been made in 1939. But it might not have been so much an intentional decision as a misinterpretation.

As previous issues of *Olmsted 200* already reported, the decision seems to have been made sometime after 1915 and before 1964. Local newspaper stories from 1914 and 1915 gave no indication that Olmsted celebrated its centennial in either of those years, perhaps because residents then might have been generally unaware of when Olmsted got its start. The newspapers reported that Olmsted residents celebrated many events in those

years but not the community's 100th anniversary. Half a century later, reports about the sesquicentennial celebration indicated that residents in 1964 just took it for granted that Olmsted turned 150 years old that year. Thus, the decision to claim 1814 as the founding year must have been made well before 1964 but sometime after 1915,



In the 1920s, Olmsted began holding annual homecoming celebrations each summer for current and former residents. In 1939, the Olmsted Falls Homecoming Association prepared a 76-page program for that year's celebration. As the association's president, Earl J. Maule, put it, the program also was meant to be "a comprehensive published record of our community, its people, and their activities."

Included in the *Olmsted Falls Homecoming 1939 Souvenir Program* was an essay on Olmsted's history titled "A Word Picture of Olmsted Falls Village and Olmsted Township" by Sam A. Jaeger. He paraphrased Johnson by writing: "The first permanent resident was James Geer, who settled in the south-west corner of the township in 1814 on

what has since been known as the Browning farm. He cleared a piece of land and put in a crop of corn that same year. The following year he erected a log cabin.”

Unfortunately, Jaeger both repeated and contradicted Johnson. He correctly noted that Geer planted his corn in 1814 and did not build the cabin until the following year, meaning that 1815 was when Geer and his family became Olmsted’s first settlers. But that was only after he wrote that Geer “**settled** in the...township in 1814....” Planting corn on a piece of land without living on it is not what most people would regard as settling on the land. The *Oxford American Dictionary* gives the pertinent definition of “settle” as: “to make one’s home, to occupy as settlers.” In 1814, Geer and his family still were settled in Columbia Township.

Judging by the wording, there is no doubt that Jaeger got his version of Olmsted’s history from Johnson. Here is what Johnson’s 1879 book said:

Township six and range fifteen, now known as Olmstead, saw the first improvement made while war was still raging along the not distant frontier. In the year 1814 James Geer, then a resident of Columbia, which is now in Lorain county, but was at that time in Cuyahoga, cut out the underbrush and girdled the trees on a small piece of land in the southwest corner of the township, on what has since been known as the Browning farm. This he planted to corn the same year, and raised such a crop as he could among the trees.

The next spring, after the declaration of peace, Mr. Geer put up a small log house at the place first mentioned, and moved thither with his family, becoming the first permanent resident of the present township of Olmstead. His son, Calvin Geer, was then a boy of seven, and is now the earliest surviving resident of the township.

Although Jaeger paraphrased Johnson, he picked up enough of Johnson’s language to confirm that Johnson was the source for what Jaeger wrote in 1939. For example, both referred to the Geers’ land as having become the Browning farm. Jaeger also picked up Johnson’s mistake of saying the land was in the southwestern corner of Olmsted Township. It actually was in the southeastern corner of the township. We know that for two reasons. One is that just a few sentences after saying the land was in the southwestern corner of the township, Johnson wrote that the Geers’ cabin was not far from Rocky River. The other reason is that the southwestern portion of the township was swampy until later residents dug a series of ditches to drain it. In 1814 and 1815, southwestern Olmsted Township would have been too wet to be a good location for growing corn or building a cabin.

Obviously, historians are humans who make mistakes, so it sometimes takes a careful reading of their works to determine the truth. Unfortunately, Jaeger apparently did a disservice to readers when he condensed Johnson’s account too much and put the word “settled” in the same sentence as “1814.” That made it too easy for later readers to seize

on 1814 as the year Olmsted was founded and not pick up on the distinction Johnson made between what happened in 1814 and what happened in 1815 – a distinction that Jaeger failed to state clearly.

For many years, copies of the souvenir program from the 1939 homecoming were more readily available around Olmsted than Johnson's 1879 book or Van Rensselaer's publication was. In fact, as recently as a decade ago, copies of the 1939 program were on sale at a Grand Pacific Junction shop, but Johnson's book generally has been available only in libraries and Van Rensselaer's publication has been even harder to find. Therefore, Olmsted residents were more likely to be familiar with Jaeger's shortened version than with Johnson's original version, which he apparently got from Calvin Geer.

Thus, it seems that Sam A. Jaeger likely is responsible for the claim by Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township that they were founded in 1814. In turn, that is why Olmsted residents celebrated the sesquicentennial in 1964 and are celebrating the bicentennial this year. As has been stated before in these pages, 2014 is the 200th anniversary of the planting of a meager crop of corn, but 2015 will be the bicentennial of Olmsted's settlement.

So if you want to celebrate the bicentennial this year, that's OK. But you'll have even more reason to celebrate next year. Let this year be just a warm-up.

Thanks to Anne Radney for help with the research for this article.

Two Centuries after the Corn Comes the Cornerstone Festival

Considering that Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls mark their beginning from 1814, when James Geer planted corn, rather than 1815, when Geer and his family moved into the township, it's appropriate that the new Cornerstone Festival begins with C-o-r-n. OK, that's not why the organizers named it the Cornerstone Festival, but it's an interesting coincidence.

No matter when you consider Olmsted to have begun, it's always good to have a reason to celebrate its history. The inaugural Cornerstone Festival will be held July fourth. It will begin at 10:30 a.m. with a parade that will start at Evergreen Packaging (the plant that many longtime residents and former residents still think of as Dairy Pak) on Mapleway Drive in Olmsted Falls. The parade will travel south on Mapleway and then west on Bagley Road to Olmsted Falls Middle School in the township, where the rest of the festival activities will be held.

Opening ceremonies will begin at noon. Other activities will include concerts, a Battle of the Barrel by fire departments, a balloon launch, eating contests and more. The day's activities will end with fireworks beginning at 10:00 p.m. The Olmsted Bicentennial website has more at: <http://www.olmstedbicentennial.org/home.html>.

The addition of the Cornerstone Festival gives Olmsted two summertime festivals celebrating the history of both Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. Olmsted Heritage Days will begin with the traditional parade on the evening of Thursday, August 14, and continue through Sunday, August 17. The festival began in the early 1990s after Clint Williams renovated the buildings in downtown Olmsted Falls to become Grand Pacific Junction, and it has been centered there. But the festival always has been a celebration for all of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township, not just a Grand Pacific Junction event. For



An Olmsted parade always includes waiting for trains.

example, the so-called Citywide Garage Sale on Thursday and Friday of Heritage Days includes locations throughout not only the city but also the township.

Next year, when Olmsted will have the opportunity to mark the true bicentennial of settlement, also will be the 25th year for Olmsted Heritage Days. So Olmsted should have two reasons to make next year's Heritage Days extra special.

Olmsted's Saloons Were Tougher than the Law

This is the fifth in a series of articles about the role saloons played through decades of Olmsted's history. Previous articles appeared in the February, March, April and June issues.

Olmsted's anti-drinking partisans thought they had put the saloons out of business in 1888 with an election in Olmsted Township to exercise the local option of the state's Dow Law followed by a similar election in Olmsted Falls. As far as they were concerned, that should have been the end of the saloons. The *Berea Advertiser* even ran an item in the form of an obituary for Olmsted Falls saloons. But that item warned people to watch the "grave" of the saloons, "lest the ghost be tempted to arise and walk." That proved to be good advice, because by early 1889, it became clear that reports of the saloons' death were premature.

The newspaper's Olmsted Falls correspondent reported this in the January 25, 1889, edition: "Trial set for Monday morning between Mrs C B Taylor, and Jos Nick, saloonist, charged with violation of village ordinance by selling intoxicants, was adjourned until Saturday morning, 10 o'clock. The hours from 10 a.m. until 10 p.m., Monday were spent in preliminaries and obtaining the twelve jurymen. Case is before Mayor Lay with Lawyer H. Bunce for the plaintiff and Stewart of Cleveland for defense. The entire population are watching the issue of this battle between right and wrong."

Two weeks later, on February 8, this was the report on the outcome of the case: "The suit before Esq. Lay was decided in favor of complainant. Saloonkeeper Nick was

fined \$25 and costs. A new hearing is set for Saturday night.” (What the new hearing was for was not explained then or later.)

Although women were not allowed to vote then, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union was one of the chief groups in the fight against intoxicating drinks. The WCTU’s youth wing, the Young Women’s Christian Temperance Union, YWCTU – often referred to simply as the Y’s – also was active. The Olmsted Falls reporter had this on March 1, 1889: “The Y’s will help defray expenses in prosecuting the saloonkeepers

“Mrs. C.B. Taylor deserves much credit as being a woman of the village who possessed enough native ‘spunk’ to act as plaintiff in prosecuting a saloonkeeper.”

who violate the prohibitory ordinance.” The reporter also wrote: “Mrs. C.B. Taylor deserves much credit as being a woman of the village who possessed enough native ‘spunk’ to act as plaintiff in prosecuting a saloonkeeper.” In addition, the column reported

that the WCTU would hold meetings on the first Friday of each month.

But saloon opponents were not the only ones who tried to use the Dow Law to their advantage in court. The *Advertiser* on March 15, 1889, reported this about the man who had operated the saloon in the building that now houses the Olde Wine Cellar and Master Cleaners: “H. Fenderbosch brought a suit against County-treasurer Kimberly, Tuesday, asking that he be restrained from collecting \$264.84 assessed on him as Dow law tax and penalty on his saloon in Olmsted Falls. He says he paid up the tax to the time he quit business. Judge Noble issued temporary restraining order.”

Another example that Olmsted had not really become a dry community despite the local option elections of 1888 came in the June 21, 1889, from a correspondent who covered what was called “East Olmsted.” That writer reported: “By all accounts a lively time was had near the Falls on last Sunday. We learn that some ignoramus had purchased two or three kegs of beer and was making merry by using profane language and drinking. A rougher and more unwholesome crowd could not be found. Had not something ought to be done to stop such work on Sunday??”

Late in the year, another saloon operator followed Herman Fenderbosch’s example of going to court to use the Dow Law to his advantage. But as the *Advertiser* reported on December 13, 1889, the result was much different: “Judge Lamson was engaged, Tuesday in hearing the lawsuit of Joseph Nickels of Olmsted Falls against Co. Treas Kimberley in which Judge Noble enjoined the latter from collecting the Dow law tax of \$205.70 which had been assessed against Nichols on June 20, 1888. Nich is claimed that he was not in the saloon business at the time the tax was assessed or during the period covered by it. Several witnesses however testified that they drank both beer and whisky at Nickels’ place at the time named, and Judge Lamson rendered a decision in favor of the Treasurer. Nickles will take the case to the Circuit Court on appeal.” [The

different spellings of Nichols/Nickles are found in the original report and simply copied here.]

That case seemed to have the effect of actually closing one saloon, which apparently had stayed in business purportedly as a billiard room. The newspaper reported this on January 3, 1890: “Jo Nickle has closed his billiard room, for the want of business, and gone west prospecting for a short time.”

The issue of saloons came up again in 1890 in the election for Olmsted Falls officials. The *Advertiser* had this item on April 11, 1890: “In the village the lines were drawn on the return of the saloons and the temperance ticket was victorious. The people should use every effort and see that the town is kept ‘dry.’ It was Prof. Frost of Oberlin College who said that one might as well think of running a sawmill without sawings as to think of running a saloon without boys. It is only a question of whose boy will be next.”

The other issue in the news at the time was the long-awaited installation by the railroad of gates at the crossing on Columbia Street (now Columbia Road). The paper reported this in the April 18, 1890, issue: “Mrs. L.B. Adams entertained the temperance ladies last Friday evening in a thank meeting over their victory at the village election. With no saloons, and railroad gates, the Falls may be happy.”

“With no saloons, and railroad gates, the Falls may be happy.”

The *Berea Advertiser* had little more to say about saloons in Olmsted for the rest of the year. But in December the *Cleveland Leader* ran a revealing item from its Olmsted Falls correspondent that the *Advertiser* repeated in its December 5, 1890, edition: “The saloons in this place are all running openly doing a so-called hop tea business, but just as many drunken men are seen on the streets as when the stuff was called by its right name. On the 18th of June, 1888, the Village Council passed a prohibitory ordinance but it has never been enforced. There was one prosecution, and the evidence was strong enough to have hung the man if his trial had been for murder, but he escaped in the Court of Common Pleas upon a small error that would not have been noticed in a case of any other kind.”

In 1891, Olmsted Falls took another turn on the issue of saloons with a new municipal election. The *Advertiser* reported on April 24: “The new ‘wet’ Council have been sworn in and heard from. One of their first acts



The White Elephant, between Olmsted Falls and West View, was one of the saloons more than a century ago.

was to repeal the local option law passed two or three years ago, but which has been feebly enforced.”

The results of that change were reported in the May 8 edition of the *Advertiser*: “The corporation now has four saloons that pay an aggregate tax of \$1000 – two-thirds, \$666, of which goes to the village yearly. What are the boys worth? It takes them to run a saloon.”

Thus, the saloons apparently were able to operate in the open again in Olmsted Falls after a few years of using the ruse of just being billiard halls or just selling “hop tea.” The local option law that saloon opponents had fought for so hard had had little effect. Even so, it is unclear how the action of a new village council could reverse the decision voters had made in the referendum of 1888 to approve the local option of banning saloons under Ohio’s Dow Law. Perhaps no one bothered to challenge council’s action.

Another change that occurred was the disappearance of the saloon issue from the pages of the newspaper, at least in the columns for news of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. In the late 1880s, those columns had plenty of items about meetings of temperance groups and Prohibition Party activists, as well as references to problems with the saloons and the people who patronized them. After May 1891 and running through 1892, hardly a mention was made about the issue. Even items about meetings of the WCTU were scarce. Perhaps the newspaper decided to stay away from the issue after seeing its efforts to advocate for the elimination of saloons thwarted. Another possibility is that the temperance supporters and Prohibition Party activists were dispirited after seeing their apparent victory fall apart.

The council’s decision in May 1891 left the village of Olmsted Falls as a wet oasis surrounded by a dry township. That status would change, but it took a few years before it happened. The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will have the story of the next few rounds in Olmsted’s saloon wars.

Barn Razing Reaches Final Days



This mid-June photo of the barn is courtesy of Deidre O’Flaherty.

The dismantling of John Hall’s barn, which the firm Razing Cleveland began May 19 near the entrance to The Renaissance along John Road, is nearing an end. By mid-June, only the stone foundation of the barn, which Hall had erected in 1880, was still standing.

“We are nearing completion of the barn deconstruction,” Holly Reed of Razing Cleveland wrote in

an email on Monday. “The salvage of the stone will begin late this week, or directly after the holiday weekend. We still have some of the dimensional oak and pine framing materials left to sell, as well as the flooring and structural flooring joists. We will begin moving much of the materials off the [site] this week.”

When Razing Cleveland dismantles old buildings like the barn, it attempts to save as many of the building materials as possible for reuse in other projects.

“One very interesting sell was a large amount of the oak and poplar beam material to a business man who owns a bar and grill in Columbia Station,” Reed wrote. “While the establishment is currently closed for renovations (formerly known as The Pump), he is using the beams as a lodge décor in the newly renovated establishment. He is looking forward to sharing the story of those beams with all of his patrons.”

After Razing Cleveland removes the remaining barn materials, the company will work with the Eliza Jennings organization to plan for the “landscape park” that is scheduled to be completed next May.

Eliza Jennings officials decided earlier this year to have the barn dismantled after receiving estimates it would cost in the range of \$200,000 to \$300,000 to repair and preserve it. Reed said Razing Cleveland appreciates the opportunity Eliza Jennings gave her firm to do the deconstruction project, as well support from the Olmsted Township Board of Trustees, township residents and residents of The Renaissance.

Still to Come

The next issue will include the story of a once-prominent Olmsted family, as well as the next part of the series about Olmsted’s saloons. Other articles planned 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. *Olmsted 200* now has readers in several states,



The stone with John Hall’s initials and the barn’s construction year is to remain on the green space at the site. Photo courtesy of Deidre O’Flaherty.

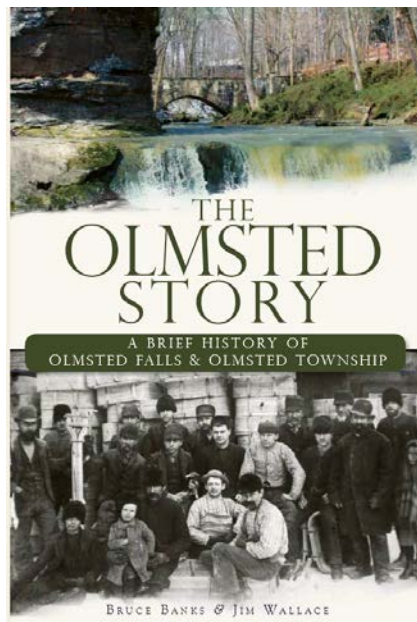
including California, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Florida, Massachusetts and Maine, as well as in Mongolia and Japan.

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.

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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