



Olmsted 200

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

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A Postcard and Photos Fill in Details of Peltz Family History

This is the third part of a series about the Peltz and Simmerer families who were prominent in Olmsted Falls for decades during the 19th and 20th centuries. It includes photos that have not been seen around Olmsted for perhaps almost a century.

The Peltz and Simmerer sign on the side of the Grand Pacific Hotel recalls both a business partnership and family ties. Joseph Peltz and Philip Simmerer were brothers-in-law before Peltz hired Simmerer to work in his drugstore that also sold a variety of dry goods. By the time they moved the business across the street into what is now the Grand Pacific Hotel in 1893, their relationship was no longer that of employer/employee but partners.

But 20 years later, they no longer were partners. Peltz had moved out of the building that went on to serve until the 1970s as the Simmerer family's hardware store. In 1913, he re-established a store on his own in the location of his original store on the other side of Columbia Street (now Columbia Road). For photos of that store, see last month's issue of *Olmsted 200*. Also, Peltz no longer was married to Simmerer's sister, Anna, because she had died in 1906. In 1910, Peltz married Minnie Schnierle Stilwell. They continued to live in Olmsted Falls until 1920, when they moved to southern California.

For years, Peltz's great-great-grandson, Doug Peltz, has been investigating his family's history. During the past year, that effort intensified as he made contact with Alice Stilwell McPeak, the granddaughter of Minnie Peltz from her first marriage. Fortunately, both of them live only about an hour apart in northern California, so they

were able to meet. McPeak shared family photos that long had been stored away. As a result, Doug Peltz has been able to get some questions answered about the lives of



This photo seems to show Joseph and Anna Simmerer Peltz.

Joseph, Minnie and others in the family. But that has led to still more questions he is trying to answer. In the meantime, he has been filling in details of some long-lost Olmsted history.

One photo that McPeak shared shows Joseph Peltz with his wife. But the question is: Which wife was it? Doug Peltz wrote, “Written on the back (by Alice Stilwell McPeak?) is that this is Joseph & second wife Minnie, however both Alice and myself have doubts that this is Minnie, as the woman appears too tall. My hunch is that this is Joseph with first Anna H. Simmerer, my great-great grandmother. I am attempting to track down photos of Anna Simmerer with the existing Simmerer family, so may be able to confirm. (If this is her, it’s

our modern family’s first glimpse at her. She died at age 45 in 1906.)”

Although both Joseph Peltz and his wife wore hats in that photo, it does appear that his wife was slightly taller than him. In other photos of Peltz with Minnie, such as the one below, Joseph was taller than her. Thus, it does seem that the first photo shows Anna Simmerer Peltz rather than Minnie.

Another interesting item that McPeak turned up in December is a postcard written by Minnie Peltz to her son, Graves Stilwell, who was McPeak’s father. On one side is a photo. On the other is a message from Minnie.



The postcard bears an Olmsted Falls postmark from October 25, 1913. Back then, postmarks even included the time of day. In this case, it was 3 p.m.

This photo on one side of a 1913 postcard shows Joseph and Minnie Peltz, third and fourth from the left, on the side of the Peltz store.

According to McPeak, Joseph Peltz is the third person from the left in the photo. He holds a basket in one hand and a bucket in the other. Minnie Peltz is the fourth person from the left. McPeak identified them as her grandfather and grandmother, because she lived with them as a child and considered Joseph Peltz as a grandfather, even though he was not her biological grandfather.

On the other side, Minnie wrote: “These are some of the folks who boarded with us last Spring. One of them took the Picture. The young lady is Florence Mitte. She works for us. The one with the basket is dad. It is one side of store. The children are neighbors.”

Therefore, the photo shows what one side of Peltz’s store looked like. Photos in last month’s issue of *Olmsted 200* showed what the front looked like both before Peltz partnered with Simmerer in the Grand Pacific Hotel building and after he split with Simmerer. It also indicates that Minnie’s son, who already lived in California, had not yet met Peltz. Otherwise, she likely would not have had to specify which one in the photo was him.



This side of the postcard contains the message Minnie Peltz sent from Olmsted Falls to her son, Graves Stilwell, in California in 1913.

According to several sources, this type of postcard using a personal photograph was quite common more than a century ago. A few developments made such postcards very popular. First, in the late 1890s, the U.S. Post Office made it possible for people to send privately printed postcards at a reduced postage rate. Then early in the 20th century, the Eastman Kodak Company introduced cameras that made it easy for people to take

postcard-sized photos and paper to print them on. Then, in 1907, federal legislation relaxed postal rules so that more than just an address could be written on the side of the postcard opposite of the photo. That allowed people to add short messages. The postcards with personal photos became very popular and resulted in documentation of American history that many people still collect today.

A question that is still unanswered is why the partnership between Joseph Peltz and Philip Simmerer broke up two decades after it began. Lately, Doug Peltz believes he is getting closer to answering that question. The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will share what he has found, as well as more of the old photos of his ancestors.

Wedding Chapel Was Church before It Was a Masonic Lodge

When developer Clint Williams first got the idea for Grand Pacific Junction in the late 1980s, he looked at the old buildings in the section bounded by Columbia Road, Mill Street, Plum Creek and the railroad tracks and saw that he had “everything to make a town, except a schoolhouse and a church.” He had a hotel, bank building, a jail and a variety of storefronts. Over the years, Grand Pacific Junction expanded beyond that core to include other buildings to the north and south. Williams never got a schoolhouse, but he said, “I did acquire the church, so I have a church in my town now – the Wedding Chapel.”

Although many people from Olmsted recall that the building now known as the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel previously served as the Masonic Lodge, it began in the mid-1800s as a church. It also did double duty as a town hall for many years.



This is how the old building looked during much of the 20th century after it lost its steeple.

The building was constructed to be the Methodist Episcopal Church in Olmsted Falls. In his *History of Cuyahoga County, Ohio*, published in 1879, Crisfield Johnson wrote that Methodists had preached in Olmsted during the early days of the township, but it was in 1843 that the first Methodist society was organized in Olmsted Falls. “From that time forward services were punctually held, and in 1851 the present framed church building was erected,” Johnson wrote.

In 1856, Olmsted Township trustees made the basement of the church their town hall. Olmsted Falls was a more central location for the seat of township government than the previous location in the Union Church in the northern part of the township about where Butternut Ridge Road and Cedar Point Road meet Columbia Road in what now is North Olmsted. (Because township government was located there in the early years, it was known as Town House Corners.)

In 1889, the Methodists extensively renovated the church. An item in the *Berea Advertiser* of November 29, 1889, reported:

The M.E. church society feel considerably elated over the new church – or the old one modernized. The building is hardly recognizable with its changed appearance. Inside and out, and it will certainly add new life to the church people. They held services in the Congregational church while their building was being fitted up. The re-opening will take place on Sunday morning, Dec. 8, with a discourse from President Stubbs of Berea. Rev. Mr. Poole is doing excellent work in addition to his studies and receives the highest praise. There are two memorial windows in the church front with the inscription “Lester Bradford and wife.”

More than 20 years later, in 1910, the structure suffered an unplanned change when a big storm blew the steeple off of the front of the building. It opened a wide



The 1910 storm knocked the steeple right off of the church. Bricks were stacked in front of the church because they were being used to pave Columbia Road at the time.

section of the roof. The congregation fixed the roof but did not rebuild the steeple, so that change remained permanent – at least for eight decades.

The Methodist Episcopal Church was located across the street from the Congregational Church. For many years, the churches held combined services in the Methodist Church and Sunday school classes in the Congregational Church.

In 1917, the two churches merged to become Olmsted Community Church. They continued to use both buildings until the 1950s, when the current Olmsted Community Church was built. The Congregational Church was replaced with a parking lot, but the Methodist Church survived, because the Masonic Lodge bought it for \$25,000 in 1956 to use as a meeting hall.

This side view provides another perspective of the Methodist Episcopal Church right after it lost its steeple in the 1910 storm.



The souvenir program for the Olmsted Falls Homecoming in 1939 included this photo of the church. At that time, it was one of two buildings used by the Olmsted Community Church following the merger of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Congregational Church in 1917. The former Congregational Church, directly across the street, was used for Sunday school and other purposes.

The Masons used the building for more than four decades, but by the end of the 20th century, the lodge was not as vital as it had been. Like many fraternal organizations, the group lost members and had trouble getting new ones, so the Olmsted Falls lodge merged with the Berea lodge. “They couldn’t pay the taxes,” Clint Williams said. “Now, fraternal orders are being excused from paying taxes, you know, like a school or something. But you got to be in business for a hundred years to get that. So nobody’s going to start one up and get the deductible.”

One lodge member, who happened to also be a real estate agent, contacted Williams in the late 1990s and asked him to look at the building. “They wanted me to appraise it,” he said. “I appraised it, gave them a price and so forth. It was about three and a half years later they called and said, ‘Clint, we’re ready.... We’re going to merge with Berea.’ So I said, ‘What do you want?’”

According to records available from the official government website of Cuyahoga County, Williams acquired the building on March 5, 2001, for \$165,000.

“When I buy those, I don’t like mortgages,” he said. “So what I do, I give them a third down this year, a third on the anniversary date and a third [one year later] so that at the end of two years they got all their money. Well, they were happy with that, and I’m happy with that. That gives me time to collect the money as I go. I don’t like banks.”

But Williams spent much more money remodeling the building into the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel. “That was about a half-a-million-dollar job to redo that one,” he said, adding that the building was not in good condition when he acquired it from the Masons. “It was very poor because they didn’t have money to do anything.”

One of the first improvements Williams made was to spend \$40,000 redoing the heating and air conditioning system. “I walked in the downstairs basement,” he said. “They got the exposed heating ducts all over the ceilings and down the posts, a furnace in the back room.”



Other changes included installation of new hardwood flooring, all new light fixtures, and removal of about 75 dark blue theater seats.

This is how Clint Williams renovated the sanctuary of the former church to serve as the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel. He removed 75 theater seats.

“We re-drywalled the whole ceiling,” Williams said. “It had acoustical tile on it. We left it there [and] went right over it with drywall. Had to do a new roof, a new steeple. There was no steeple on it when I bought it.”

After he put a new steeple on top of the building, Williams had to find a church bell to put in it. So he and his late wife, Carol, drove up to an antique shop they liked near Chautauqua, New York. But the first time they went, the shop was closed. Two months later, they returned and found a sign saying the shop had moved a mile down the road.

“So we drove down the road a mile,” he said. “I pull in. Here’s a church bell. It’s got a big crack in it. I’m in the car. I said, ‘Aw, geez, just what I could have used.’ That guy had \$2,350 on it. I go over. I pick up the tag on it. The guy comes and said, ‘I’ll take \$1,500.’ By the time I got there, I realized somebody took a magic marker and put a

crack on it. I was so damned excited. I said, 'I'll take it, I'll take it.' It had the lever on it, the cradle for it, everything.”

Williams arranged to have the bell transported from upstate New York to Olmsted Falls, where he had a crane put it up in the steeple. Then he had an electrician run conduit from the bell tower down to a room at the top of the stairs. “So we got heavy rope, nylon



The back patio of the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel overlooks Plum Creek

rope,” he said. “It has a lever on the top. So we ran this rope back down into what we call the bell ringer’s room now. We put ‘bell ringer’s room’ on the door, and put a couple of knots in the rope, of course. So every time I show the chapel now, I ring the bell. In winter time, it’s tough. That sucker gets all froze up. That grease is really not very smooth in the wintertime. But after you ring it a couple of times, you get it rocking, then it’s not so bad.”

displayed three artists’ renderings of the building going back to probably the 1940s. Another decoration he has added is an old wedding certificate that says: “1880, Randolph, Ohio, Methodist Episcopal Church.” He found that in the antique shop that once operated in the Waring Homestead where the French restaurant, Le Bistro du Beaujolais, now is located.

“I had to find something that said Methodist Episcopal,” Williams said. “Actually, I screwed it to the wall so somebody don’t take it.”

In the coat room of the Wedding Chapel, Williams has



This is what the building looks like since it had its steeple restored and became the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel.

More Olmsted Residents Came from Mayflower Voyagers

One testament to the fact that many of Olmsted's early settlers came from New England is that more than a few could trace their ancestry back to the pilgrims who came to America in 1620 on the Mayflower. Issue 33 of *Olmsted 200* included comments from Jeff Sigworth about his ancestors in the Bradford family who descended from the Mayflower pilgrims. That prompted another reader to write about an Olmsted ancestor with a Mayflower connection.

"Our grandmother, Welthy Stearns Hall, was a Mayflower descendant, also," Barbara Hanno wrote. "She descended from John Howland and Elizabeth Tilley through her mother, Welthy Morgan Usher.

"John's claim to fame was that he fell off the boat in mid-ocean and was, fortunately, pulled back on. I am sure there are many Mayflower descendants in Olmsted – there are millions of them now." – Barbara Hanno

Hanno added that Welthy Hall's husband was Charles Thomas Hall, the brother of John Hall, whose barn was razed last year near the entrance to The Renaissance along John Road. "No Mayflower there, that I know of," she wrote. "They came straight from England to Ohio.

We have a description of their journey through the Erie Canal."

Last year, Hanno and Helen Shaw contributed information for an article about another of their Olmsted ancestors, J.R. Shaw, who worked as a photographer in Olmsted Falls and Berea from about 1868 until 1884 before he moved to Nebraska. He was their great grandfather. That story can be found in Issue 22 of *Olmsted 200* from March 2015.

Reader Offers Answer to Division Question

Another *Olmsted 200* reader has helped solve a mystery that was posed in last month's issue – or at least gotten closer to an answer to the mystery. The question posed in last month's issue was: Does anyone know when the name of Division Street was changed to Mapleway Drive?

Kitty Ellis provided this response:

I really enjoy reading your articles. This morning I read your inquiry for Division Street, which was of particular interest to me since I recall having to re-learn the street name as a child.

Mom and dad bought the property as 7644 Division Street back in 1951. Looking through the Cuyahoga County Records website, I pulled a few property deeds of old neighbors whose last names I recall. I think we can,

at least, narrow your search down to a single year. In February of 1956, DairyPak bought the property known then as Division Street. One year later, in February of 1957, an old neighbor bought their property as Mapleway Drive.

Many longtime Olmsted residents and former residents recall that DairyPak was the original name for the milk carton factory on Mapleway Drive that became Evergreen Packaging in 2007.



When this photo was taken in the mid-1950s, the school system had begun expanding beyond the buildings that now serve as Olmsted Falls City Hall and Community Center. Falls Elementary School, on the left, opened in 1954. At that time, the land across the railroad tracks to the north, at the top here, had yet to be developed for the DairyPak plant, which was built in 1957. To the east of the schools, or just beyond the right side of this photo, was Division Street. About the time that DairyPak moved in, the name of Division Street became Mapleway Drive. Was that a coincidence or did DairyPak exercise influence to get a nicer-looking address?

The information above from Ellis narrows down the time frame during which the name change occurred. It must have occurred sometime in the year from February 1956 to February 1957. Exactly when the change occurred is still a question. But that is just one of many questions. Why was the name changed? Did DairyPak have anything to do with the change or was it just a coincidence that the change occurred shortly after the company moved in? How was the new name selected? Did that change occur at the same

time that the section of Elm Street between Mapleway Drive and Brookside Drive switched from being called Commercial Street to being just another part of Elm Street? Also, a 1954 map shows that Brookside Drive was then called Brookside Avenue, so did that name change about the same time that Division Street became Mapleway Drive?

Olmsted 200 will seek the answers to those questions. If anyone knows any of the answers or can at least narrow down the possibilities, please respond to: wallacestar@hotmail.com.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include more information and photos about the Peltz and Simmerer families, the story of the Grand Pacific Junction building that once was Olmsted Falls Village Hall and photos from more than 50 years ago of an Olmsted Falls neighborhood, including one showing one of the oldest houses in the community before it was expanded.

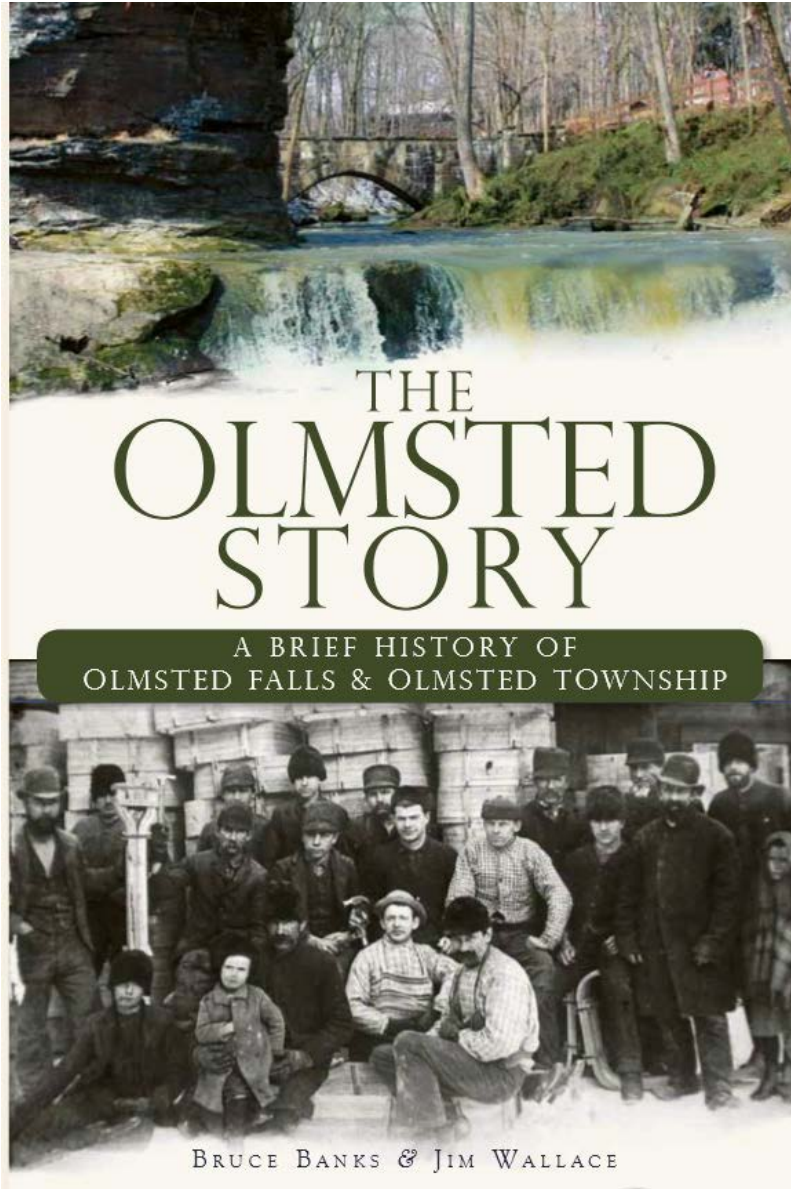
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Colorado, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, West Virginia, Florida, Massachusetts and Maine, as well as overseas 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 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://www.egovlink.com/olmsted/docs/menu/home.asp> and click on "Olmsted 200." Then click on the number of the issue you want to read.

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, the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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