



# Olmsted 200

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

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## New School Opened One Century Ago

One of the most significant buildings in Olmsted's history went into use 100 years ago this month. But it would have been hard to tell that from news reports of the time.

In September 1916, students began attending the new school that had been built at the corner of Dutch Road (which later was renamed Bagley Road) and Division Street (which was renamed Mapleway Drive in the 1950s). It replaced five small school buildings scattered around Olmsted Township, as well as the Union Schoolhouse on the Village Green in Olmsted Falls. (Use of the Union Schoolhouse, which was built in 1873-1874, actually had to be discontinued for classes in 1914 because it became structurally unsafe, although the building was used for various other purposes until it was torn down in 1960.)



*The original portion of the school, now Olmsted Falls City Hall, shows the 1916 date of its construction above one doorway.*

By building the new school, the school district – then called the Olmsted Township Rural School District – became the first in Cuyahoga County to consolidate all of its students into one school and retire smaller schools, including one-room schools. It also offered Olmsted students the opportunity for the first time to attend four years of high school without commuting to neighboring communities, such as Berea and Elyria.

Construction of the new school was the result of a narrow vote – 146 to 138 – in November 1915 by Olmsted residents in favor of a \$65,000 bond issue. Leading up to that vote, the local newspaper, the *Berea Enterprise*, published an artist’s depiction of the proposed school with a long article about it, as well as a long piece written by Cuyahoga County School Superintendent A.G. Yawberg on the benefits of teaching all of the district’s students, which totaled about 300 then, in one big school. (For more on that, see Issue 30 of *Olmsted 200* from November 2015.)

Thus, a reader might have expected a big article in the newspaper about the opening of the school in September 1916. But that reader would have been disappointed. An *Olmsted 200* review of copies of the *Berea Enterprise* on microfilm from August 1916 through May 1917 revealed hardly a mention of the new school. The regular Olmsted Falls column in the paper included just one item in the September 15 edition that indicated the school year started late: “On account of the ‘kid wagons’ not getting here the schools did not open last Monday.”



*This undated photo seems to have been taken shortly after the school was built in 1916.*

The kid wagons were the forerunners of school buses. They were covered, wooden wagons pulled by horses. (For more about the kid wagons and the school buses



*The building served as a school for almost eight decades.*

that replaced them, see Issue 5 of *Olmsted 200* from October 2013.) The wagons were needed to carry all students who lived more than a mile from the school and all first-grade students. Presumably the eight kid wagons arrived soon after that and classes began in the new school because the *Enterprise* made no more mention of the wagons – or the school – in the following weeks and months with the exception of this item in the December 29 edition: “Three of the ‘kid wagons’ failed to

get through the snow last Friday.” The scarcity of reports about the school might be an indication that the school had few problems – or a lack of interest by a Berea-based newspaper.

The size of the school doubled in 1926 with the construction of an addition on the west side. A gymnasium was added in 1938, and seven more classrooms were added in a western wing in 1948. With those expansions, the building served as the district’s sole school for almost four decades until post-World War II population growth led to the construction of several more schools. It went on serving as a school for another four decades before being replaced and repurposed.

After a new high school opened in 1968, the old school became a middle



*This aerial photo shows the 1916 school in the center, the 1926 addition to its immediate left, the 1948 addition to the left of that and the 1938 gymnasium above them.*



*This photo shows an interior wall a few years ago before remodeling.*

school with grades six through eight and served in that capacity for almost three decades until the district built the current middle school, which opened in 1996. The school district sold the old school in 1997. The 1916 and 1926 sections became Olmsted Falls City Hall, the 1938 gymnasium became the Olmsted Community Center, and the 1948 wing became a day care facility. Thus, a building that went into service one century ago this month with little notice still serves the community.

## **Olmsted Falls Incorporated 160 Years Ago**

Here's a notable anniversary that slipped by earlier this year: Olmsted Falls turned 160 in April as an incorporated community. It was on April 7, 1856, when Olmsted Falls became a village and the first incorporated community carved out of the original Olmsted Township.

The village was very tiny in the beginning. Only 26 residents voted in the first election. Of course, the number of voters likely would have been twice as many if women had been allowed to vote back then.

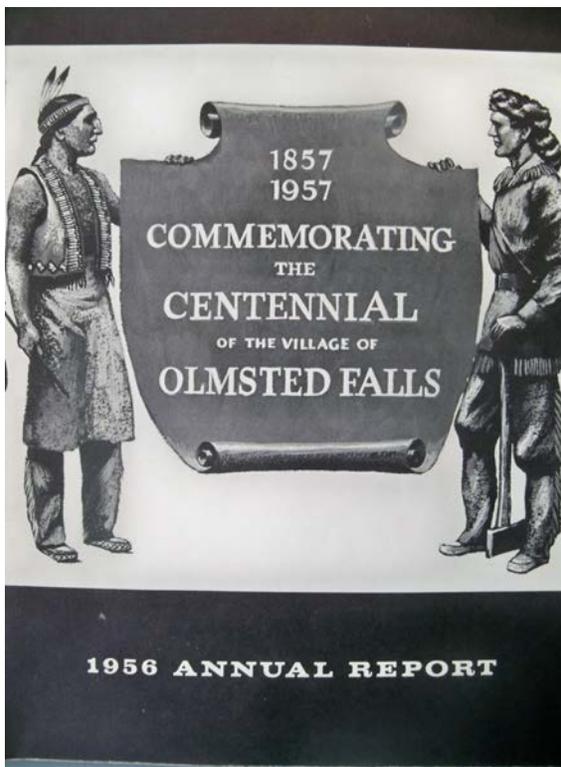
The name Olmsted Falls had been used since 1845, when the local post office changed its name from Norris Falls. That was 16 years after the township took on the name Olmsted Township in 1829 after using the name Lenox Township for a number of years.

The village's first mayor was Thomas Brown, who became the operator of the Grand Pacific Hotel in the late 1850s when it really was a hotel (rather than a reception hall, as it is now). That was shortly after the building was moved across the river, apparently on the newly built railroad bridge, from what then was Seminary Road, now Lewis Road. Brown served as mayor only one year. A few years later, he disappeared while on a journey to Cleveland to deposit money in a bank. He apparently was attacked by robbers because years later his skeleton was found in a ravine with a bullet hole in the skull.

Along with Brown, five men served on the village's first council and one served as the village recorder. Among the council members was Newton P. Loomis, who built the 1834 house that served from the mid-1950s to 2013 as the public library. By the time it was used as a library, the house had been moved to the west side of Main Street, but that was its third location. Loomis had built it farther south along what is now Columbia Road.

The council used the basement of the Methodist Episcopal Church (now the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel) for conducting village business. That also was the same place where Olmsted Township trustees met to handle the township's affairs.

In 1857, one year after incorporation, Olmsted Falls doubled in size by annexing the small hamlet to the north that was known as Plum Creek, which included the area from south of the current Elm Street to about where Cook Road is now.



*The village's annual report for 1956 bore a cover that incorrectly labeled the year ahead as time for the centennial of Olmsted Falls, although the village actually turned 100 in 1956. Also, the depiction of a Native American with a frontiersman was an anachronism because the Native Americans had been gone for decades by the time Olmsted Falls incorporated.*

Unfortunately, someone many years later chose 1857, rather than 1856, as the beginning of the Village of Olmsted Falls. Thus, it made the village seem one year younger than it was. Olmsted Falls celebrated its centennial in 1957, which was one year late.

That had the opposite effect of another error that seems to have been made in 1939, when a writer first used 1814 as the beginning of the settlement of Olmsted Township. (For more on that, see Issue 14 of *Olmsted 200* from July 2014.) As has been noted previously in *Olmsted 200*, 1815 was the year the first settlers of European descent moved into the township. The only thing that happened in 1814 was that James Geer, who still lived in Columbia Township, planted a small crop of corn across the border on land that became Olmsted Township (and later West View and even later Olmsted Falls). However, since 1939, both Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls have claimed 1814 as the year they began, seeming to be older than if they dated their beginning from when settlers moved in.

Olmsted Falls was just the first incorporated community to split off territory from Olmsted Township. Later, North

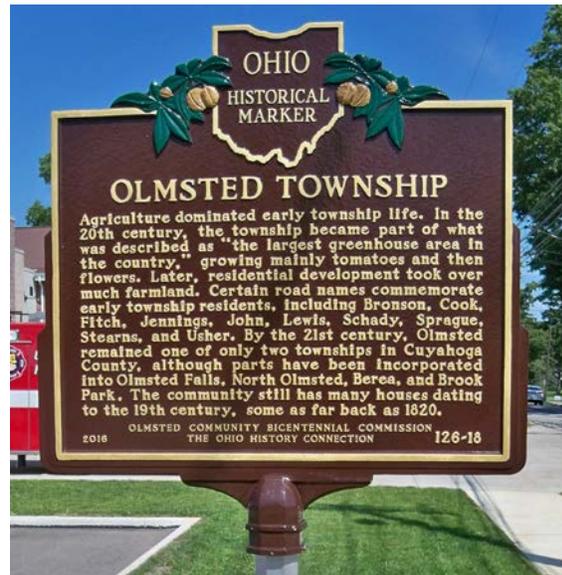
Olmsted incorporated in 1909 from the northern section of Olmsted Township and a smaller portion of southern Dover Township. In 1927, West View incorporated in the southeastern corner of the township. In 1971, West View and Olmsted Falls merged and soon became a city. Over the years, Olmsted Township has lost other territory through annexation to Olmsted Falls, North Olmsted, Berea and even Brook Park.

## Olmsted Township Unveils Historical Marker

A new Ohio Historical Marker located along Fitch Road near the corner of Cook Road and next to Township Hall tells the story of Olmsted Township.

“This is a great time for us to celebrate Olmsted Township, a unique opportunity because often all we’re doing is just taking care of the business of the day,” Olmsted Township Trustee Jeanene Kress said on August 27 during the ceremony to unveil the marker.

The marker and a similar marker for Olmsted Falls that was unveiled on Memorial Day at the Village Green were among the final projects for the Olmsted Community Bicentennial Commission, which was formed a few years ago to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. Although the original plan was for one side of both markers to be the same and the other sides different, the markers are similar, not identical, on one side about early Olmsted history.



*This is the south side of the new marker.*



the bicentennial celebration to be a big event, and it was a big event for which the commission raised more than \$75,000. Not all of that money was used up on the

Sewah Studios, Inc., in Marietta, Ohio, produced the markers. It has produced historical markers for all 50 states and several foreign countries, according to the company’s website.

“This is a history-making event, and you’re all part of Olmsted Township’s history now,” Garry Thompson, president of the commission and an Olmsted Falls city councilman, said. He noted that Scott Ross, a former township trustee who served on the commission, said he wanted

celebration that was held on July 4, 2014, when Thompson said commission members talked about doing something more.

“We said, you know, it would be really nice if we could leave something commemorative, something memorable, because when all this is said and done, probably five minutes from now or maybe five years from now, nobody’s going to remember what happened here today,” he said. “There may be some photographs. There may be something that goes in the archives, maybe a video or something. Who knows? But we needed something to remember the history, something to mark this point in time.”

Thus, the commission decided to use some of its remaining funds for an Ohio Historical Marker for each community. No tax dollars were used, Thompson emphasized. Instead, he said, the markers were paid for by donations to the commission from businesses and individuals.

“There’s so much that can be said after 200 years, but there’s only room for 150 words on each marker,” Thompson said. “So you have to be very careful in picking those words, and you have to say the most



*Two Bicentennial Commission members, Scott Ross, a former trustee, and Paul Stibich, an Olmsted Falls councilman, unveiled the marker.*

with the least. So please take a moment after it’s unveiled to reflect on the *Reader’s Digest* version of the Olmsted heritage.”

Thompson said he reflected on the Latin phrase, “E pluribus unum,” which means “out of many, one,” and is found on American coins.

“It struck me that that’s what brings us here today: to commemorate the brave men and women who have gone before us in the formation of this great Olmsted Township – families with last names such as Stearns,



*Garry Thompson, Becki Trivison, Lisa Zver, Scott Ross and Paul Stibich posed with the marker.*

Fitch, Usher, Bronson, Cook, John, Jennings, Sprague and Lewis, just to name a few,” he said. “And over the last 200-plus years, people of many races, religions, languages and ancestry have all traveled to the tract of land known as Township 6, Range 15...to become the proud community known today as Olmsted Township. Thus, we are all one community from many. E pluribus unum, Olmsted.”



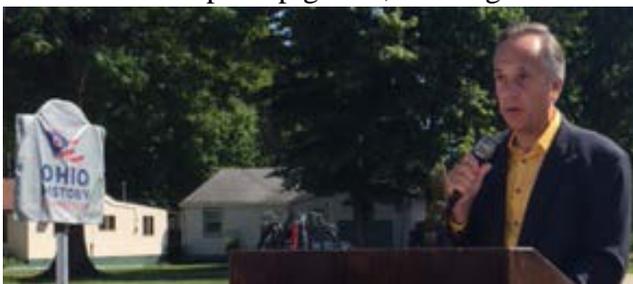
*The marker was still covered when Bruce Banks used an 1834 Olmsted map to illustrate his remarks.*

The co-authors of *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township*, Bruce Banks and Jim Wallace, spoke about events in Olmsted Township’s history beyond what could be summarized on the new marker. Banks, who lives in the township, told about how seven early settlers from New England set out from Cleveland in the early 1800s with oxen-pulled sleds on an eight-day trip through the wilderness to Columbia Township several years before anyone settled in Olmsted Township (which then was called Township 6, Range 15).

“It was not only a dangerous trip to travel but it was also a dangerous place to live here,” he said. “Olmsted Township had the resources that attracted settlers. We had fine-grain Berea sandstone, which was ideal for gristmills, as well as building materials to make dams on our rivers – the West Branch of the Rocky River, Plum Creek and Minnie Creek, which is by All Saints Church. We became an ideal place for settlers to live after the Geers made their home here in 1815 on the eastern edge of Olmsted Township.”

As he spoke, Banks referred to a framed reproduction of an 1834 map of Olmsted.

“The most prolific mill builder in our township was Lemuel Hoadley, who had built mills along the West Branch of the Rocky River,” he said. “His brother, Calvin, ran the mill in Columbia Township that Lemuel built. A total of seven mills were built in our township in the 1800s, which gave rise to grinding grain, sawing lumber, grinding local shale to make a paint pigment, forming iron tools using water-powered trip hammers –



*Jim Wallace spoke about why Olmsted Township deserves an Ohio Historical Marker. Photo by Mary Louise King.*

which helped develop the local industry and support our growing population of our home, Olmsted Township.”

Wallace, who composed words on the marker and wording for the statement of significance included in the application to the state to get the marker, talked about other aspects of Olmsted history.

Here are some of his remarks:

*So why does Olmsted Township deserve its own Ohio Historical Marker? Well, more so than most communities in the Cleveland area, Olmsted Township still wears its history. Right here, we are at the corner of Fitch Road and Cook Road, which bear the names of early settlers. So do other roads, including Stearns, McKenzie, Lewis, Usher, Jennings, Sprague and Bronson. And John Road was named after John Hall, whose barn stood from 1880 until it was torn down just two years ago.*

*Now as Bruce indicated, early settlers did not immediately see the value of this township. Every other township around it was settled earlier. Even in 1814, the year which Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls claim for their foundation, no settler lived in this township. All that happened that year was that James Geer, who still lived in Columbia Township, planted a meager crop of corn across the border. It wasn't until 1815, after the end of the War of 1812, when Geer and his family moved into a new cabin to become the township's first settlers. Members of the Stearns family arrived later in 1815. More settlers, of course, trickled in after that. Most of them came from New England, which is why many of the older buildings around Olmsted look like those in New England.*

*Although Olmsted Township was late in being settled, it later became a regional leader in education. In the 1830s, the township became home to the first publicly owned circulating library in northeastern Ohio. That was thanks to a gift of 500 books sent by oxcart by Charles Olmsted from Connecticut. It was in gratitude to residents for changing the name from Lenox Township to Olmsted Township. That was in recognition that his late father, Aaron, had bought about half of the township when the Connecticut Land Company put it up for auction in 1795. Now, another historical marker along Butternut Ridge Road in North Olmsted commemorates the Oxcart Library. Unfortunately, it includes an "a" in the Olmsted name that never belonged there.*

*Another way the township was in the forefront of education in the area occurred a century ago. After Olmsted Falls merged its village school system into the township's rural school district, the result was the first district in Cuyahoga County to abandon small, independent schools – some of them with only one room – and put all of its students into one new school. That building still serves as Olmsted Falls City Hall. It first went into use 100 years ago next month.*

*Olmsted Township was largely an agricultural community throughout most of its history. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it became part of a greenhouse industry that was called "the largest territory of glass in the country." Several of those greenhouses remain in business, and Olmsted*

*Township is rare in Cuyahoga County in having a few traditional farms still in operation.*

*In fact, the community's status as a township with 10 square miles of its original size is also rare in Cuyahoga County, which is Ohio's most urban county. The only other existing township in the county is Chagrin Falls Township with only half a square mile. This is another example of how Olmsted holds onto its historical ties longer than other communities in the region.*

*Because Olmsted Township, like Olmsted Falls, was late to be touched by the post-World War II development that swept through Cleveland's suburbs, the community has many houses dating well back into the 1800s that still serve as homes. Perhaps the oldest is the house at the corner of Columbia and Nobottom roads now owned by Bill and Marty Richner. It was expanded many times over the years, but the original section of that house started as a cabin built by John Adams in 1820.*

*This Township Hall, where the historical marker now stands, represents the last in a series of buildings that have housed township government. It also represents the modesty of the Great Depression because it was built in 1939.*

*In addition, Olmsted Township has a connection to a first in the broadcasting industry. It happened in 1949, when television was new. William Barnard, owner of Natural Food, Incorporated, which had moved to the township one year earlier, bought a half-hour of time on WEWS, Channel 5. He used it to pitch his company's brand of high-end food blenders known as Vitamix. Some people in the direct marketing industry have called that the first infomercial. As we know, Vitamix is still going strong today with its headquarters in Olmsted Township. And infomercials also are going strong. Whether you love them or hate them, perhaps you can take some pride in knowing they started with an Olmsted Township company.*

*Thus, Olmsted Township still wears its history even though it has gone through many changes in recent years with new housing developments, new businesses and new schools. It undoubtedly will go through many more changes in the years ahead. That is all the more reason for us to dedicate this marker to remind present and future residents and visitors about the past two centuries of Olmsted Township history.*

Becki Trivison, program coordinator for the Ohio Historical Markers program at the Ohio History Connection, said learning that Vitamix is a local company was worth her trip from Columbus for the marker ceremony. "I love when I learn new things like



*Trustees Jeanene Kress and Lisa Zver also spoke.*

that, and when I learn that a major company was started right here in Ohio that just makes me more proud to be from Ohio,” she said.

Trivison, whose family is from the east side of Cleveland, said it is important to commemorate local history. That’s what the Ohio Historical Marker program, which began in 1957, does.

in production at Sewah Studios that reflect Ohio’s unique history. And your marker that honors Olmsted’s origins and Olmsted Township joins the others.... You’re to be commended for identifying such a unique aspect in the state’s historical narrative.”

“It’s a program that enables Ohioans to preserve and share their history in a way that’s very visible for many years,” she said. “There are more than 1,500 historical markers either up around the state or currently

A letter Trivison brought from the Ohio History Connection (formerly the Ohio Historical Society) states: “The Ohio History Connection commends the Olmsted Community Bicentennial Commission for furthering the knowledge of our state’s heritage by placing an Ohio Historical Marker on August 27, 2016, that commemorates, honors and celebrates the legacy of Olmsted’s origins and Olmsted Township and the ways it developed into the community it is today.” The letter was signed by Burt Logan, executive director, and Robert Lucas, president of the board of the Ohio History Connection.



*Trustee Lisa Zver received a proclamation from Senator Tom Patton.*

The township also received a legislative proclamation from State Senator Tom Patton, who said, “This is a really great township.” Other speakers included Trustee Lisa

Zver, who served as vice president of the Bicentennial Commission, and two police chaplains, the Rev. Chris Hinckley of Olmsted Falls Baptist Church and the Rev. Charles Eduardos of All Saints Lutheran Church.



*Historian Bruce Banks (left) posed by the marker with Jim Wallace, who publishes Olmsted 200, and Mary Louise King, who helps proofread and edit Olmsted 200.*

## Williams and Others Are Honored for Heritage Days

The 25<sup>th</sup> celebration of Olmsted Heritage Days during August 4 through August 7 was a time for honors and thanks for several people, especially Clint Williams, who started Heritage Days in 1992. That was shortly after he created Grand Pacific Junction by renovating several buildings from the 1800s and early 1900s in the center of Olmsted Falls.



*At the end of Olmsted Heritage Days on August 7, Clint Williams received a series of poster-sized thank you cards signed by many people who visited Heritage Days over the weekend, the 25<sup>th</sup> time for the festival.*

Williams received a series of honors. One was a plaque from the Olmsted Heritage Days Committee and the Grand Pacific Junction Merchants Association. Another included several large posters on which visitors to the festival wrote their thanks to him over weekend. But Williams received what is likely the most enduring honor from Mayor Ann Marie Donegan and Olmsted Falls City Council. The mayor presented him with a proclamation stating that the portion of Mill Street adjacent to Grand Pacific Junction had been designated as “Williams Way.” New street signs carry that name. They match similar signs with the city’s logo that mark the National Register Historic District in downtown Olmsted Falls.



*New Williams Way signs for a portion of Mill Street match the city’s National Register Historic District signs.*



The resolution for the proclamation, which City Council approved in June, cited Williams for developing Grand Pacific Junction while retaining “a sensitive recognition

of the historic place that Grand Pacific Junction properties play in the City of Olmsted Falls.” It also noted that the Junction played a large role in helping the city get a designation for the downtown area as a National Register Historic District in 2000.

But Williams wasn't the only person honored for his role in Olmsted Heritage Days. At the end of the festival, he acknowledged Shawn Jeffery, proprietor of Shamrock & Rose Creations, the Celtic goods store, for serving nine years as president of the Grand Pacific Junction Merchants Association and leading the Olmsted Heritage Days Committee in handling much of the scheduling and arrangements for the festival. He also recognized Jim and Joyce Boddy, who ended 17 years serving as the town crier and escort for Heritage Days. Fans of Heritage Days hope others will step forward to guide the festival through the years ahead.



*Clint Williams (left) recognized Shawn Jeffery (center) for nine years of Heritage Days leadership and Joyce and Jim Boddy for their 17 years of serving as the festival's town crier and his escort.*

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about a former Olmsted resident who preserved images of the history of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township through his artwork. It also will have a story about ads for Olmsted businesses that ran in local newspapers 100 years ago and one about how Olmsted Falls is not the only community with a place named Turkeyfoot.

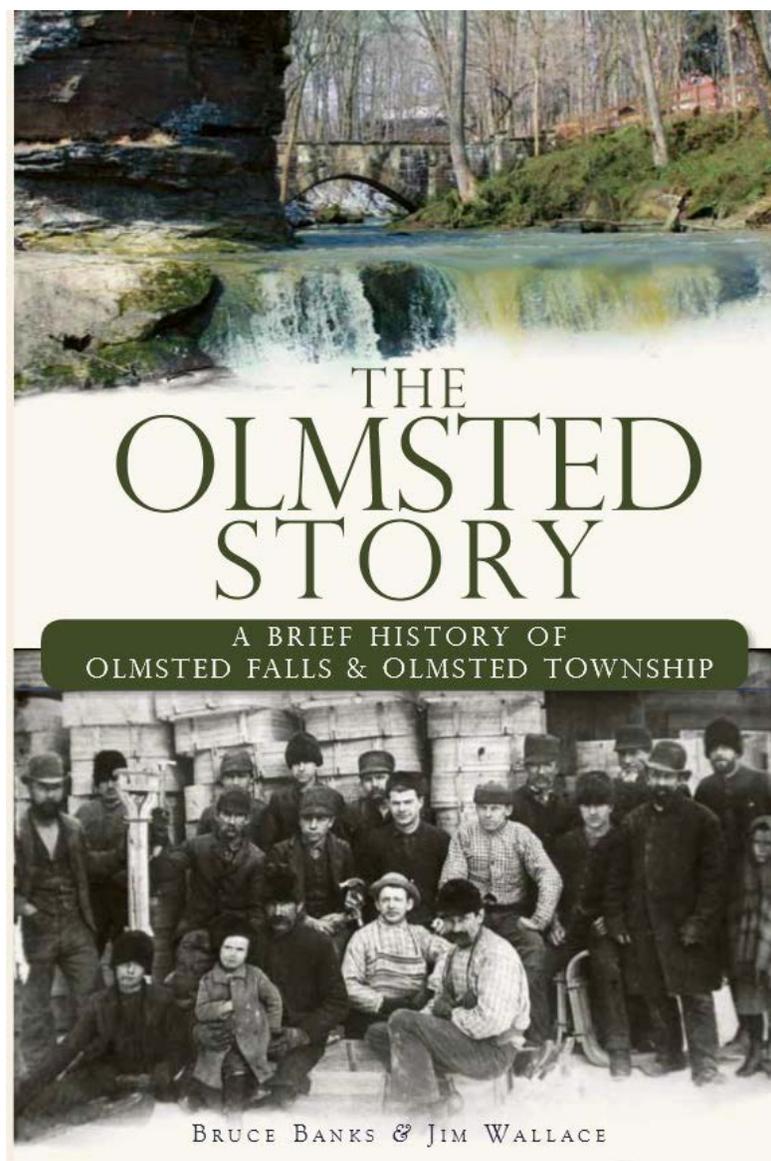
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: [wallacestar@hotmail.com](mailto:wallacestar@hotmail.com). *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Colorado, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, West Virginia, Florida, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine, as well as overseas in the Netherlands 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."

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. Thanks go to Mary Louise King for help proofreading and editing many issues. Written contributions and photos, as well as comments and questions about items in this newsletter, will be considered for publication. Send any correspondence by email to: [wallacestar@hotmail.com](mailto:wallacestar@hotmail.com).

*Olmsted 200* is written, researched and edited by Jim Wallace, who is solely responsible for its content. He is co-author (with Bruce Banks) of ***The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township***, published in 2010 by The History Press of Charleston, S.C. ***The Olmsted Story*** is available at the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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