



Olmsted 200

Two Centuries and More History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township –
First Farmed in 1814 and Settled in 1815

Issue 139

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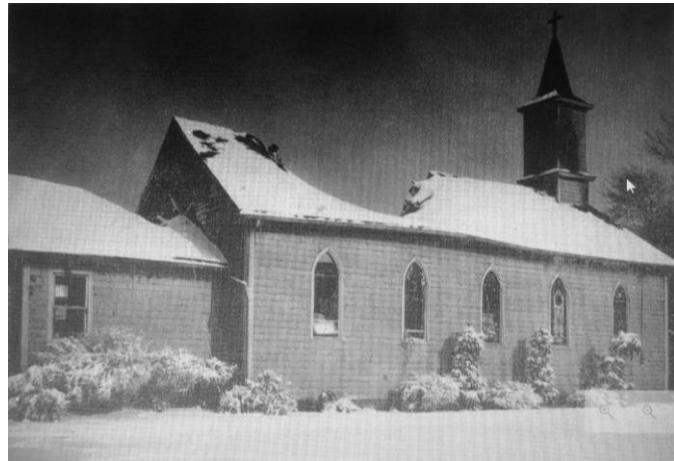
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Downtown Olmsted Has Had Religious Bookends for 65 Years

As 1959 came to an end 65 years ago, Olmsted residents were able to go into their holiday observances in the two churches that serve as bookends for downtown Olmsted Falls shortly after the structures were finished in their current forms. Both St. Mary of the Falls, the local Roman Catholic church, and Olmsted Community Church, its Protestant counterpart, completed rebuilding projects that had begun several years earlier.

For St. Mary, it was the culmination of a project that began more than a decade earlier following the January 24, 1948, fire that destroyed a building that had served the community for about 90 years. Father Louis Filiere, a native of France and the first priest assigned to be a resident pastor in Olmsted Falls, bought a lot on the northern end of the downtown area in 1857 and had a small wooden church built on it. (It was about where the current Olmsted Community Church was built a century later.) In 1873, Filiere's successor, Father E.J. Murphy, had the church moved down the street to St. Mary's current location, perhaps to get away from the quarrying that started in 1870 at what now is David Fortier River Park. The church remained in its new location for 75 years until the 1948 fire.



This was St. Mary of the Falls after the 1948 fire, as shown in a 1957 church publication.



This was St. Mary's building before the fire, as shown in a 1957 church publication.

After the old church building was destroyed, the parish faced the task of building a new church. The old church was insured for \$10,000, but the cost of replacing it was estimated to be from \$50,000 to \$75,000. The campaign to raise funds for the new building began on March 12, 1948. Under leadership from Father Joseph Walsh, who had served as pastor since October 1937, the parishioners decided to

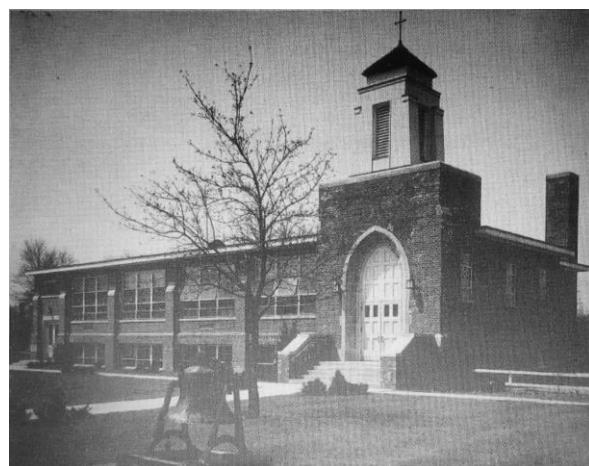
build both a church and a school using brick and stone.

The groundbreaking ceremony occurred on Sunday, September 5, 1948, a bit less than eight months after the fire. Construction was completed almost a year later in August 1949. The parish held a dedication ceremony for its new church on May 20, 1950. However, it wasn't enough for St. Mary's congregation, which was growing.

About the facilities built in 1948-1949, a 1957 church publication titled *100 Years of Service to God and His People* said that, "because of lack of money, it was necessary to limit the building to bare necessities in size, equipment, and architecture." It did not take long for St. Mary to start expanding. In 1951, the parish acquired a house from Martin Bilsky and remodeled it to be the Sisters' Convent to serve as a home for the nuns who had been living in temporary quarters in the school.

"Our school was over-crowded from the beginning, and in 1952 the garage behind the convent was remodeled into a class-room," the centennial publication stated. "As we all know, this relief was only temporary. Our parish has continued to grow, and now we are again faced with the obligation to build."

Thus, in 1957, St. Mary's parishioners began a new fundraising campaign to expand both the new church and its school. Walsh wrote in the centennial publication that expansion was a necessity.

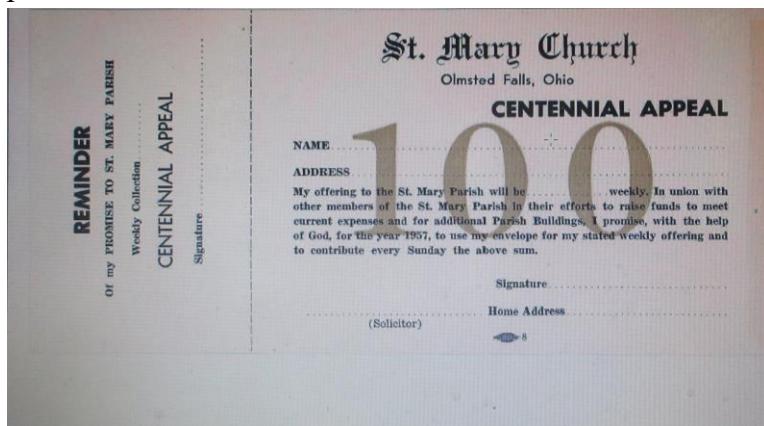


This was St. Mary's school as it looked in the 1957 church publication.

“We now have a dangerous condition in our school,” he said. “It is crowded to the extent that it is a strain on our nuns and teachers to safeguard our children and to give them the attention they need and deserve. We have been forced to rent two additional classrooms at St. Mary’s in Berea in addition to the space available in our own buildings. Our church is too small, and we have no hall for meetings or recreational activities. We need a larger church, additional school-rooms and a meeting hall which could serve also as a lunch-room for our children. Add to these needs our \$150,000 debt and you can see our situation.”

From 1949, when the new church and school went into operation, until 1957, the number of registered families rose from 210 to 512, and the number of children enrolled in the school rose from 89 to 352, including 96 who were sent to the classrooms at St. Mary’s in Berea. Walsh said he was “somewhat reluctant” to appeal further to the congregation’s charity, but he saw no other course.

“Sheer necessity dictates that we unite to do something,” he wrote. “We can build the new facilities that we need if we have the proper financial rating. In order to get that financial rating, we must increase the income of our church to a level which would indicate our ability to repay the present and additional debt over approximately a 20 year period.”



This is the Centennial Appeal form that St. Mary used in 1957 to get parishioners to promise to increase their weekly offerings to raise funds for the expansion of the church and school facilities beyond those built in 1948-1949 following the fire.

That could be accomplished, Walsh said, if every wage earner in the parish would make a regular weekly offering equal to two hours of wages. He said he was sending out two parishioners to visit with their fellow members to explain the church’s plans. Those plans were to raise \$150,000 to retire St. Mary’s existing debt, \$250,000 to expand the church and another \$150,000 to expand the school. Raising that much required parishioners to more than double their Sunday offerings. In 1957, St. Mary’s operating cost was estimated at \$45,400, which averaged \$873.08 per week.

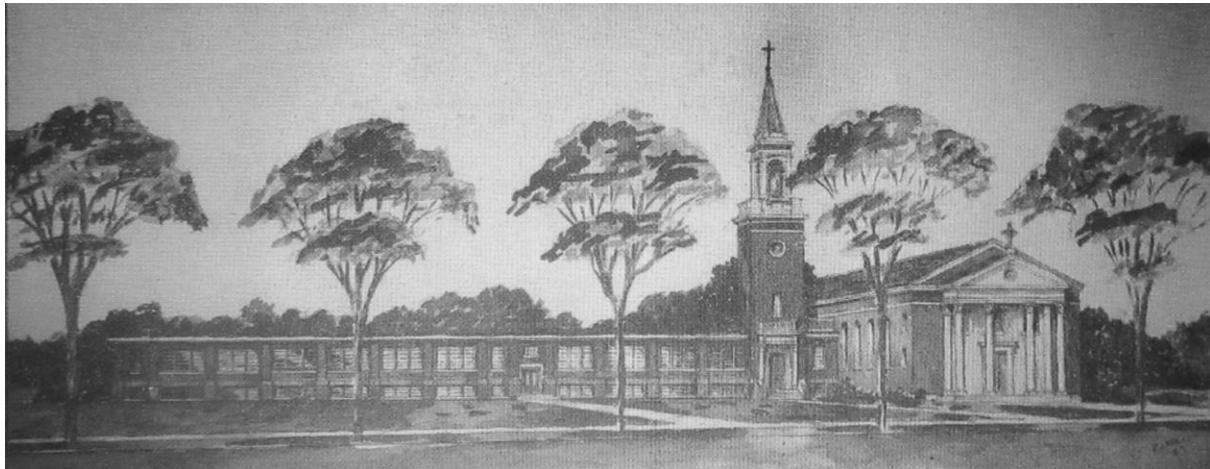
Ralph Jocke Jr., a 1971 graduate of Olmsted Falls High School whose family lived just down the road from the church at 9254 Columbia Road, wrote in an email to *Olmsted 200* that he still has boyhood memories of that fundraising campaign.

“I do not know how much my parents contributed toward the construction of the new church and the school expansion,” he said. “I recall Father Walsh coming to our house and sitting at the kitchen table with my parents discussing the need for money to build the new church.”

Thus, Walsh did not leave the visit to the Jocke home to one of the two parishioners assigned to that task but did it himself. Perhaps that was because of a special relationship that Jocke wrote about:

When I was a kid Father Walsh was the ultimate figure of authority. I do not remember my parents having many conversations with him. However, because my father ran a part-time auto repair business, somehow we wound up doing the oil changes and tuneups on Father Walsh’s car. All the work was done for free. However, every once in a while Father Walsh would give my father a bottle of altar wine to show his appreciation.

*Receiving such a gift was a big deal. I remember the bottles had plain white labels with only the letters D.O.M. printed in large black script. I also remember my father opening and enjoying the wine with great reverence, after all this was holy stuff. My mother was afraid to drink it. I found out in later years that D.O.M. is Latin for *Deo Opt Max* which means “to God, most good, most great.”*



This was the architects’ rendering of what the expanded St. Mary of the Falls would look like from J. Ellsworth Potter & Associates of Cleveland.

The evidence that the fundraising effort was a success is that the new facilities were built within a couple of years. The date on the church’s cornerstone is 1959.

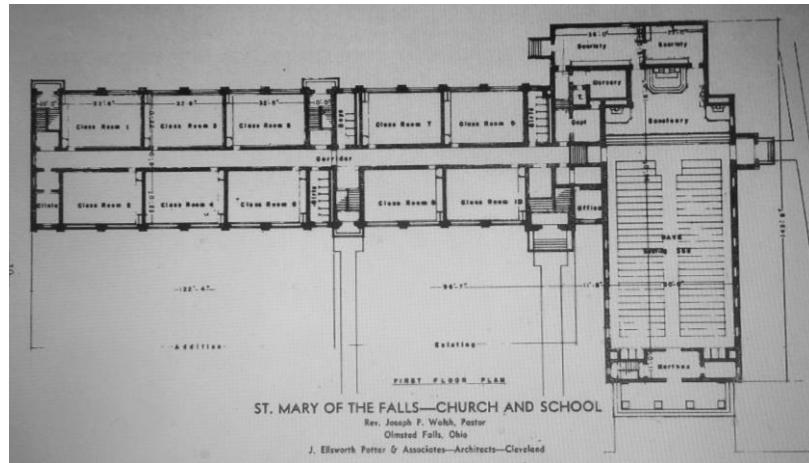
Jocke wrote that he remembers being about seven years old and asking his mother, Joan (Kaskey) Jocke, what things their family’s contributions had paid for in the new church.

“My mother (who had a sense of humor) pointed to one of the Stations of the Cross, which are large ornate plaques showing stages in the crucifixion of Jesus that are spaced along the walls of the church,” he wrote. “She pointed to the Station of the Cross entitled ‘Jesus falls the second time’ while carrying the cross, and told me we had paid for that. I remember telling her that was not a very good use of the money. The retelling of that incident in later years always brought a good laugh.”

Although the new building was mostly complete by the end of 1959, Jocke wrote that one finishing touch was completed the following year.

“I also remember watching with my mother, the copper clad steeple being set in place on top of the new church,” he wrote. “We sat on the fender of her 1959 Ford and watched as the steeple was lowered by a large crane as the shiny new copper reflected the bright sunlight.”

Jocke said he was impressed with the ornateness of the new church. He recalled that masses were celebrated only on Sundays, not Saturdays, back then. They were scheduled for 6:00 a.m., 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., and noon. Jocke said his father preferred to avoid crowds and have time to do other activities on Sundays, so he insisted that the family should attend the 6:00 a.m. service.



This was the architects' plan for the first floor of St. Mary's church and school.

“Doing this not only avoided crowds but was an efficient use of our time because there were no time-consuming distractions like organ music or hymns sung by a choir,” he wrote. “There was only Father Walsh officiating at a mass that usually had less than 20 attendees.”

Another factor that kept the early masses short in the winter was that the church’s heat was turned off at night and turned on again just minutes before the first service, Jocke wrote. Thus, he said, worshipers didn’t bother taking off their winter coats. It was so cold on some Sundays that they could see their breath, he said, but that wasn’t the only reason for short services.

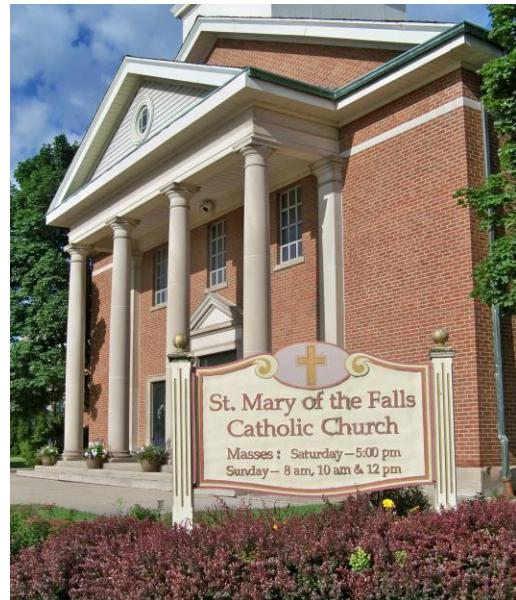
“Father Walsh was a heavy smoker, and it was sometimes apparent that he was moving things along so he could finish the mass and enjoy a cigarette,” Jocke wrote. “As soon as the mass was over everybody was out of there. Nobody hung around to talk.”

Jocke wrote that the same people usually attended the early mass each week. They include a couple families like his, as well as individuals who had just worked the night shift at the Ford Motors plant in Brook Park and other factories, he said.

“However once a year on the Sunday after prom night, there would be a few high school students who came to mass after being out all night,” Jocke said. “It was a definite change of pace to see the young ladies in their prom dresses and young men in their tuxedos at the 6 o’clock mass with us regulars.”



These are 2024 photos of St. Mary’s school and church at the corner of Columbia Road and Bagley Road.



Perhaps there was some unofficial competition between the Catholics and the Protestants, or maybe it was just coincidence, but the Olmsted Community Church also brought its rebuilding efforts to a close in 1959. Unlike the Catholics, the Protestants had not suffered the loss of their old church through a disaster like a fire, but they felt a need

for a better facility in those post-World War II years when the Baby Boom and new housing developments brought population increases to the community. (The pressure from a growing population also led to the beginning of the construction of a series of new buildings in the public school system in those years.)

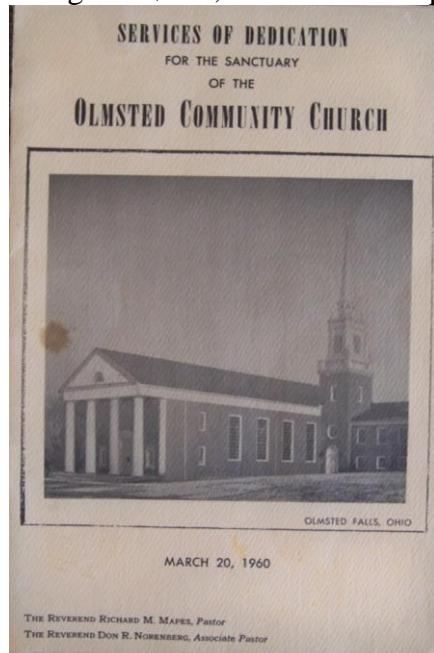


The dates above the Community Church’s sanctuary door show when its predecessors, the Congregational Church (1835) and the Methodist Episcopal Church (1843), were organized, when they merged (1917), and when the current church building was finished (1959).

The Community Church was formed in 1917 through the merger of two churches that sat across the street from each other. One was the Methodist Episcopal Church in the building that now serves as the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel. The other was the Congregational Church that stood where the parking lot between the Community Church and the Moosehead restaurant now is. For decades, the members would use the former Congregational Church building for Sunday school and public meetings and use the former Methodist Episcopal Church for Sunday services. (The 1936 film of Olmsted Falls shows some people exiting the church after one of those services. Shots of that were included in Issue 132 of *Olmsted 200* from May 2024.)

In February 1954, church members began a fundraising drive that eventually brought in \$130,000 in cash and pledges. Claude F. King, a Hopkins Airport official who

developed the nation's first airport lighting system and the nation's first airport control tower, served as chairman of the church's building committee. Within a couple of years, the construction of a portion of the church known as the Christian Education Building was completed at a cost of about \$240,000. It was dedicated on Sunday, February 26, 1956.



This is the program from the dedication day for the church's sanctuary.



This 1956 photo shows Olmsted Community Church's then-new Christian Education Building.

In October 1958, the church began raising more funds to build a sanctuary on the north end of the Christian Education Building. As its cornerstone indicates, it was completed in 1959. However, the church waited until March 20, 1960, to hold the services of dedication. On that Sunday, the church held its regular 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. services, a service of dedication for children and young people at 3:00 p.m., and another service of dedication at 7:30 p.m., followed by an open house, including an inspection of the building and refreshments served by the Women's Guild in the Fellowship Hall.



Above is the cornerstone of the Olmsted Community Church. To the right is a 2024 photo of the sanctuary that was finished in 1959 and the steeple connecting it to the section finished in 1956.



Thus, by the end of 1959, 65 years ago, the two churches that anchor each end of downtown Olmsted Falls had acquired their current shapes. They complement each other with their similar architecture. At times, they also serenade people with their top-of-the-hour bells coming from both ends of the downtown district.



Just as St. Mary of the Falls and the Olmsted Community Church balance each other on opposite ends of downtown Olmsted Falls, they did the same on this commemorative blanket from a few decades ago. They also were featured on commemorative plates, pewter for St. Mary and porcelain for OCC. The St. Mary plate is courtesy of Jane Gardner.



For more on the history of St. Mary of the Falls, see Issue 56 of *Olmsted 200* from January 2018. For more on the history of the Olmsted Community Church, see Issues 44 and 45 from January and February 2017.

Thanks go to Ralph Jocke for sharing documents about St. Mary's expansion in the 1950s, as well as his memories, and to Jane Gardner for sharing the St. Mary commemorative plate.

Prohibition Agents Busted an Olmsted Roadhouse

A century ago, the United States was five years into Prohibition because of the passage of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution in 1919 and the Volstead Act that was designed to enforce it. Cleveland was a hotbed of resistance with many bars and saloons operating surreptitiously and the relative ease of smuggling in liquor across Lake Erie from Canada. That activity also went on in many suburbs, including Olmsted Falls.

On December 11, 1924, the *Plain Dealer* published a story titled “ROADHOUSE MEN HELD” and subtitled “Three Charged with Violating Prohibition Laws.” Here is the entire story:

Three roadhouse proprietors were arrested yesterday on charges of violating liquor laws by prohibition agents under Henry A. Dykeman, in charge of enforcement in Ohio and three other states. United States Attorney A.E. Bornsteen took preliminary steps to padlock the places.

The three, Joseph Amigo, owner of Maplehurst roadhouse, Center Ridge road; Jack Armstrong, owner of a roadhouse on Center Ridge road near Bradley road, and Coleman Sentenyi, who operates a roadhouse at Olmsted Falls, were held in \$5,000 bail each. Preliminary hearing was set for Dec. 17 before Commissioner Martin J. Monahen.

With just that, some questions go unanswered: Where in Olmsted Falls was the roadhouse? (And was it really in Olmsted Falls or was this a case in which a location in Olmsted Township was mistakenly identified as Olmsted Falls?) Who was Coleman Sentenyi, who doesn't show up in any accounts of Olmsted history? What happened to the roadhouse?



This saloon, the White Elephant, was located somewhere between Olmsted Falls and West View before Prohibition. There is no indication it was the roadhouse raided in 1924 during Prohibition.

Prohibition came to Olmsted a little more than a decade after village residents had voted to go dry, although Olmsted Township remained wet until Prohibition. However, that change in Olmsted Falls came only after decades of struggles between temperance advocates and the operators of local saloons. For more on the history of Olmsted's saloons, see the series that ran on that subject in *Olmsted 200* Issues 9 through 15 from February through August 2014.

Phone Line Construction Was Dangerous in Olmsted

In the 21st century, cell phones have replaced traditional landline phones for most people. That's been quite a technological revolution in the past few decades, but there was a time when the installation of landlines was big news. That was the case 130 years ago this month when the Olmsted Falls column in the December 7, 1894, edition of the *Berea Advertiser* included three items about the building of a new line.



Predecessors to this utility pole in Olmsted Falls once were big news.

The first was about how dangerous the process was:

A new telephone line is being constructed [through] this township which adds to our boarding population about 60 men, distributed to seven or eight private families. Quite an accident occurred to two of the men digging pole holes and blasting with dynamite when they reached hard ground. It blew out the eyes and nose off of one man, who was sent to his home Saturday at Norwalk. The man handling the explosives is not seriously hurt, and is able to be around the Falls.

The second item was about another accident, although it was not about the installation of the telephone line:

A sad accident occurred to one of the telephone men while boarding a local here this morning at the crossing. He had his right foot cut off. The train was going very slow and the man slipped in his hurry. His father was telegraphed to at Sandusky, who in reply telegraphed that he would be here on first train. The injured man's foot was amputated at the ankle.

This was the third item:

Some of our town boys have hired to the telephone line which passed through here and Berea going east.

Together those items indicated that Olmsted became very lively and somewhat dangerous while the line construction crew passed through. But the excitement was brief because such items did not appear in subsequent issues of the newspaper.

However, those items could be deceptive to a casual reader who might assume that telephone service came to Olmsted in 1894 or soon after in 1895, but that wasn't the case. It took several years more before residents in Olmsted Falls and West View received telephone service in 1901. For more on that, see Issue 100 of *Olmsted 200* from September 2021.

Readers Recall Harding Sisters – and Their Brother

Last month's story about the DeRooi/DeRoy family that became the Harding family brought out several readers' memories of the last two members of the family, Amelia and Clara Harding, who lived until the early 21st century.

"They did a lot for the town during their lifetime," Tracey Antognazzi wrote on Facebook. "Amelia was the more outspoken of the two. I could always count on them to donate to the parks and recreation board events, support the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, etc. They were good, caring ladies that always did what was right for the citizens and the children of Olmsted Falls and Westview."

Jim Houston wrote on Facebook, "I cared for their trees for many years. The Sisters were very proud of their father and his trees and cared deeply for that property. It's sad to drive by that beautiful home on Columbia Road now."

Craig Barbee added this: "I really enjoyed reading about the history of the Harding family in Olmsted Falls. When I was a rookie teacher in the fall of 1969, Amelia was the chair of the English department. I think our careers overlapped for 4 years before she retired. She was certainly influential in my young life as an English teacher."

Mike Gibson, who now lives in Sonoma, California, wrote that he never had Amelia Harding for an English class, but his father did. His father also told him about Charles Harding, who became an Eagle Scout in Boy Scout Troop 201 about five years before his father joined the troop. Gibson said the renowned World War II correspondent Ernie Pyle interviewed Charles Harding about two weeks before Harding died in Normandy, and Harding appears in Pyle's 1944 book, *Brave Men*.



This century-old photo shows Amelia, Clara and Charles Harding as children. Photo courtesy of Emily Maurer, who got it from Charlene Sanford.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about the renovation and planned new use for one of the oldest buildings in Olmsted Falls, as well as other stories about Olmsted history.

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 Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin, and as well as overseas in the Netherlands, Germany 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 <https://www.olmstedtownshipohio.gov/290/Past-Newsletters-Olmsted-200>. All the issues of *Olmsted 200* also are available on the website of the City of Olmsted Falls. Find them at: http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted_falls_history/olmsted_200_issues.php. A link to *Olmsted 200* can be found on the left side of the page. On each site, 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. Thanks go to Mary Louise King for helping in proofreading and editing many issues. Thanks also go to David Kennedy for frequently contributing research and insight for some stories. 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 the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.

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