

# Olmsted 200

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

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## Tavern Tunnel – Was It Part of the Underground Railroad?

Stories that Olmsted was part of the Underground Railroad in the years before the Civil War have been plentiful, but few people have offered physical evidence that the railroad once ran through the community. One exception to that was Jan Kennedy, who opened her home at 9303 Columbia Road to *Olmsted 200* to reveal a secret door that once led to an underground room that apparently served as a hiding place for people who had escaped slavery in the South while they headed for freedom in Canada. (For that story, see Issue 125 of *Olmsted 200* from October 2023.)

Now comes another account about an Olmsted location that might have been part of the Underground Railroad. At least, it originally was in Olmsted Township, but it has been part of Berea for the past 40 years since that city annexed a corridor of township land along Bagley Road east of Lewis Road. The story comes from Lee Fenrich, who recalled being part of a construction crew that did some work at the old Suds Maguire's Tavern on the northeast corner of Bagley Road and Lewis Road.



“We built the bar inside, and there was a trap door right in the middle of the room to go down in the cellar,” he said. “And that’s where [the owner] kept all the beer

*Lee Fenrich believes he once found a former Underground Railroad tunnel in Olmsted.*



*The old Suds Maguire's Tavern might have had part of the Underground Railroad in its cellar.*

“They were regulars,” he said. “They came in all the time. I asked them one night, ‘Go down in your basement and look and see if you can find some kind of trap door coming this way.’ And they came in the next time all excited because they said, ‘There is one! There is one!’ I mean I think they thought that they could sneak into the bar at night, but the road was in there by then, and they didn’t go anywhere. They just stopped. But it was almost directly in line with the one from Suds. It was that maroon-colored house across the street on the corner of Bagley and Lewis – right across from Suds on Bagley Road.”

Much has changed since then, so it’s unlikely any such evidence of the Underground Railroad still exists. When Bagley Road was widened in 1995, the old Suds Macguire’s was torn down. The new establishment in a strip mall that carries on the Suds Macguire name is run by a nephew of the earlier owner, according to information on its website. The house that was across the street also is gone.

But Fenrich is confident that, when he worked at the old Suds Maguire’s many years ago, he saw what was then left of a part of the Underground Railroad.

“If I had a guess, I would say yes because it aimed right across the street to [the house],” he said. “I can’t imagine why there would be another door in a coal bin. It didn’t

kegs and everything, but there was a coal bin down there, and inside the coal bin was another door that led across the street aimed out towards Bagley Road.”

Fenrich said he had heard rumors about the Underground Railroad, so he wondered if that door had anything to do with it. Fortunately, he knew who he could ask for more information about what might or might not have been there.

“There were three girls that rented the house across the street, and



*More than a century ago, the saloon at the corner of what now is Bagley Road and Lewis Road was known as the Blue Hen. It might have had a tunnel connecting it to a house across the road.*

go outside. The coal bin was under the road. It went in that direction. There was another outside door from Lewis, where they probably brought the coal in, so it was not the coal bin door.”

In his 1966 book about Olmsted history, *Township 6, Range 15*, Walter Holzworth wrote that the old Suds Maguire’s was Olmsted’s oldest existing tavern at the time. He indicated that it was the successor to an old saloon that had been known as the Blue Hen.

Fenrich believes that’s true. He said he has an old photograph of the Blue Hen and thinks it had the same front door that the old Suds Maguire’s did.



*This is the rear of Jan Kennedy’s house at 9303 Columbia Road. Below the ground was a chamber that might have been used to hide fugitives from the South during the years of the Underground Railroad.*

In addition, Fenrich has some direct knowledge about the formerly secret room under Kennedy’s house because he was asked years ago to put an addition on the back of the house.

“When I went out to put the addition on, I started digging, and I ran into concrete, and I thought it was a cistern or a well of some sort,” he said. “We dug and dug, and everywhere I went, it was nothing but concrete.”

Fenrich said other workers claimed to have seen a

door to the underground chamber, but he didn’t see it himself.

“But all I know is it was way bigger than a cistern would be, and it didn’t have water in it,” he said. “It had some residue on the bottom like it was leaking but not like it was filled with water at any point. There were no pipes coming out of it or anything like that. It was just a big concrete block.”

The chamber was plenty big enough that people could have hidden in it, Fenrich said.

“Yeah, easily,” he said. “Part of the addition is on it because it was solid as a rock. It’s not going anywhere.”

Fenrich added, “The addition is still standing solid as a rock, so I guess it worked.”

It's possible other Olmsted buildings still show evidence of use during the Underground Railroad. It's also possible that such evidence has long been erased, just as redevelopment along Bagley Road wiped out evidence of the tavern tunnel. However, anyone who knows of such evidence is invited to share it with *Olmsted 200*.

## Olmsted Native Was a Traffic Cop Pioneer in Cleveland

Police in the United States have been using motorcycles for well more than a century now. The Cleveland Police Department wasn't the first department in the country to start using them, but it was one of the early ones when it put its first motorcycle on the streets in 1910 – and an Olmsted Township native was the first one to do it.

But being Cleveland's first motorcycle cop wasn't the only way in which James Arthur Crawford was a pioneer in traffic control methods. According to his September 5, 1941, obituary in the *Plain Dealer*, "He served as the force's first bicycle policeman, as its first mounted patrolman and as the first policeman to use a motorcycle. He also led the way in the establishment of the department's traffic bureau, of which he was the only member in 1910."



*This was James Arthur Crawford as a motorcycle patrolman, a role he pioneered for the Cleveland Police Department in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

Although the obituary said Crawford was 65 years old when he died on September 4, 1941, other records say he was born on July 28, 1878, to parents living in Olmsted Township, so he would have been 63 when he died. Thus, in 1910, the year he began Cleveland's motorcycle patrols, he turned 32. By then, he had been working for the Cleveland Police for seven years. Here is more about him from his obituary:

*When he joined the force in 1903 Mr. Crawford was the state bicycle racing champion, and for his first eight years he toured his beats on his bike. When the motorcycle came into use he was assigned to ride*

*one to apprehend motorists and horse-and-buggy enthusiasts who violated the traffic laws.*

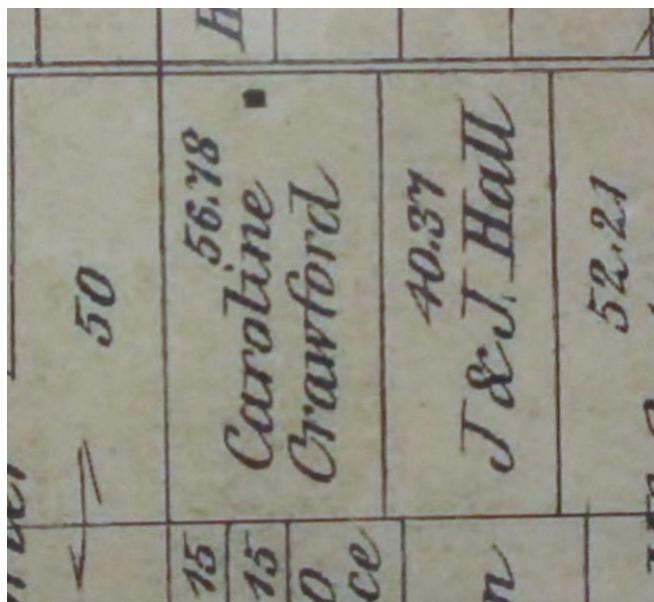
*He was also the first patrolman assigned to the mounted division, and for several years rode his horse in the downtown area. As traffic congestion developed with the greater use of automobiles he was selected to operate the traffic bureau at the old Central Police Station on Champlain Street.*

*There each day he would lecture to violators on the “golden rule” of the traffic code. Later, when the bureau was enlarged and the late Edward J. Donahue was made its head, Mr. Crawford served as his assistant.*

*In 1927, after 24 years’ service on the force, Mr. Crawford was retired on pension. He lived at 1438 E. 85th Street until he suffered a cerebral hemorrhage recently.*

Crawford’s father, also named James, and his brother, Robert, and two other brothers came from Ireland and arrived in Olmsted Township in 1865. In March 1866, James Crawford was one of three men who found the body of Rosa Colvin in the woods near her Olmsted Township home. Both James and Robert Crawford testified in the

murder trial of the woman’s husband, Willaim Colvin, and his friend, Robert Miller. The story made headlines not only in the Cleveland newspapers but also elsewhere in the United States and Canada. (For more on that, see Issue 94 of *Olmsted 200* from March 2021.)



*Caroline Crawford’s property is shown on this 1876 Olmsted Township map south of what now is called Schady Road. The dark square at the top marks what presumably was the Crawford family residence.*

six children. James Arthur Crawford was the fourth of them.

The elder James Crawford married Caroline Bender, a native of either Germany or Switzerland, in 1867. An 1876 Olmsted Township map shows a rectangular plot of land in Caroline Crawford’s name just south of what now is Schady Road across from where Stearns Road now meets it. It was in her name because she inherited it from her father, John G. Bender, who died sometime before 1870. From 1868 to 1884, James and Caroline Crawford had

In his obituary, which called him “a native of Olmsted Falls,” James Arthur Crawford’s survivors were listed as his wife, Anna, as well as a daughter, Miss Lillian Crawford of Los Angeles, and two sons, Howard and James. His body was buried at Lake View Cemetery in Cleveland.

*Thanks go to Roger Crawford of Pullman, Washington, for most of the information and photos for this story. He is the great-grandson of James Arthur Crawford. His father, Glenn, was the son of James and Anna Crawford’s son, Howard.*

## Old Olmsted School Was Quite a Bargain

It’s hard to imagine from the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when school buildings cost tens of millions of dollars, that a two-story school building could be built for less than \$10,000. However, Olmsted Falls had such a building that is still within the memory of many older Olmsted residents and former residents.

Anyone who can remember the Union Schoolhouse that stood on the Village Green until the community tore it down in 1960 has seen such a building.

An item that appeared in the Olmsted column of Berea’s *Grindstone City Advertiser* 150 years ago this month on April 22, 1875, confirms that building and furnishing the school, which opened for classes in February 1874 – nine months after work on it began – cost little more than \$9,600 in total. Here is what the newspaper reported:

*Mr. J.G. Fitch who was Clerk of the Board of Education during the construction of our new School Building has furnished us with an itemized account of the cost of said building, which we gladly publish for the information of many that are interested:*

<i>For land extension of school lot.....</i>	<i>100.00</i>
<i>Plans and Specifications.....</i>	<i>100.00</i>
<i>Removing old School Building.....</i>	<i>72.70</i>
<i>School Building.....</i>	<i>8,165.22</i>
<i>Seats, Desks and Blackboards.....</i>	<i>767.64</i>
<i>Lightning rods.....</i>	<i>100.00</i>



*This photo shows the Union Schoolhouse not long after it was built in 1873-1874. It cost the community a little more than \$9,600.*

*Photo courtesy of Mike Gibson.*

<i>Stoves, pipes and fixtures</i> .....	<i>153.07</i>
<i>Window shades</i> .....	<i>59.44</i>
<i>Outbuildings, grading and fencing</i> .....	<i>92.21</i>
<i>Total Cost</i> .....	<i>\$9,610.28</i>

*The above account shows the entire cost of the building which we think falls considerably below the expectations of the majority of the people. Be that as it may we have a building of which we may well feel proud, and we believe that the Board of Education deserve the thanks of the tax payers of this village for their exertions in getting the work done as cheaply and economically as good work could possibly be done.*

That seems to indicate that the cost of the building was even lower than what most people expected in the 1870s. The cost of the building itself was less than \$8,200, and the cost of everything else associated with it was less than \$1,500.

The building served as a school for 40 years. It seems the community got its money's worth from it.

By contrast, the cost of the current high school, which opened in 1968, was \$3,101,063, including \$1,496,147 in local funds, \$1,557,548 in state funds and \$47,368 in federal funds. It was expanded and renovated 50 years later at a total cost of \$21.9 million.

## April Was a Month of Changes in Olmsted 150 Years Ago

Two notable events occurred in the community life of Olmsted Falls 150 years ago this month.



*No known photo exists of the building when it was a hotel, but this is what it looked like decades later as the Peltz & Simmerer Hardware. It was a hardware store for almost eight decades.*

The first was an ownership change at the village's hotel, as reported by Berea's *Grindstone City Advertiser* in its April 15, 1875, edition: "The Olmsted Falls Hotel has changed hands. W.S. Carpenter has again taken possession."

The hotel was a former seminary that had been built on the east side of Rocky River along what was called Seminary Road – later renamed Lewis Road. Sometime in the 1850s, it was rolled across the railroad bridge and repositioned in downtown Olmsted Falls. Thomas Brown, the first mayor of Olmsted

Falls, was the hotel's original proprietor. He called it the Grand Pacific Hotel. After Carpenter acquired it, he renamed it the Hotel DeCarpenter, but he sold it in 1877 to Frank Dougherty, who named it the Dougherty Hotel. He paid \$2,000 for it.

The other notable event that occurred 150 years ago this month was the death of a resident who had lived in Olmsted almost since settlers of European descent started moving in. Here is how the *Advertiser* reported it:

*Died on Saturday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1875, Mr. Eastman Bradford, aged 58 years. Mr. Bradford was one of the oldest settlers of the township of Olmsted. He was born in Brecksville and moved with his parents to Olmsted in the year 1820, and has since resided very near the place where his parents first settled. He had been in poor health for several years, but had been able to attend to his busines [sic] about his farm until within a few months before his death.*

*He was a member of the Order of Odd Fellows and was buried with the ceremonies of that order. A large number of people were present to pay their respects to one who has always been highly respected by all who knew him.*

Eastman Bradford and his brother, Lester, in the mid-1800s operated a brick-making factory north of where the original Chestnut Grove Cemetery, also called Turkeyfoot, is located. Their bricks, which had no holes in them, were used to build some houses in Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. The most prominent one still in existence is the house at 8008 Columbia Road in the center of the business district in Olmsted Falls. More information about the Bradford brothers' brick-making operations and the rest of the family's activities can be found in Issue 118 of *Olmsted 200* from March 2023.



*The house at 8008 Columbia Road, seen in this 2010 photo, was made from bricks that came from the factory that Eastman and Lester Bradford operated in the middle of the 1800s.*

Eastman Bradford also was one of a group of nine men who helped organize the Methodist Episcopal Church in Olmsted Falls in 1852. The church building was constructed in 1853 for a cost of \$1,555, and Bradford served as one of the church's first five trustees. That building now is the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel.

## Readers Respond with Recollections of Grover Imhoff

The lead story in Issue 141 of *Olmsted 200* from this past February evoked memories from readers who knew Grover Imhoff. The story told about his role in dismantling the Big Red Mill along Plum Creek and his service as school superintendent that was cut short.

“Cool!” Jane Michelini wrote. “Grover Imhoff was my Grandfather, John, my Dad. Grandpa had a millstone used as a table in his back yard. Later it was moved to my Aunt and Uncle’s in Connecticut (don’t know how that was managed).”

Her reference to John Imhoff, her father, was because he also was mentioned in the story and was included in one photo.

The story told about how Grover Imhoff’s service as school superintendent lasted only a few years because three of the five local school board members on May 1, 1924, voted against renewing his contract.

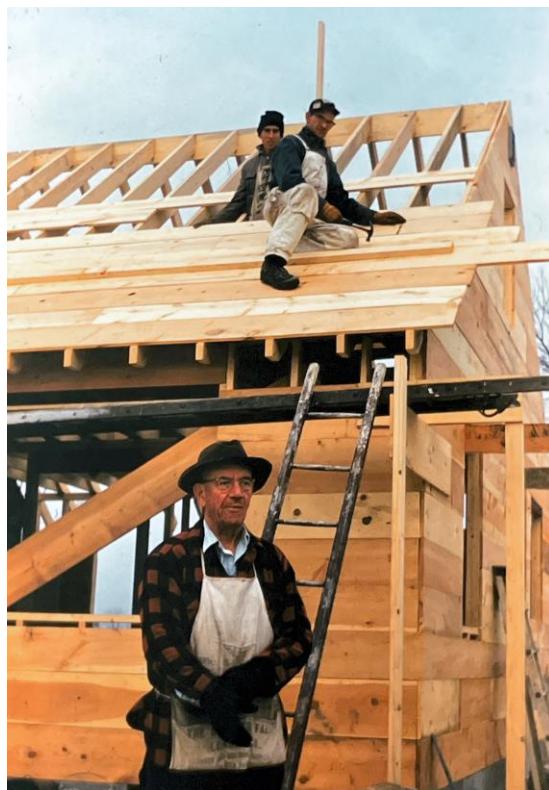
According to Walter Holzworth in his 1966 Olmsted history book, *Township 6, Range 15*, the school board ousted Imhoff after some residents complained that the school system was spending too much money. Michelini said she heard a very different reason why he did not continue as superintendent.

“Grandpa, it is said, objected to some farmers pulling their children out of school to work,” she wrote. “Apparently he pulled some right back and this was not popular.”

Michelini also wrote that Imhoff’s headstone at his grave in Shelby, Ohio, includes this quotation from *The Deserted Village* by Oliver Goldsmith: “Yet he was kind, or if severe in aught, The love he bore, to learning was in fault.”

Another reader, Jim Boddy, shared other memories of Grover Imhoff.

“In 1959, the house across the street from us burned down,” Boddy, who grew up along Cook Road, wrote. “The couple that lived there with their three sons were deaf mutes. [They] had no insurance and no money to rebuild. People all over town donated towards the cause and Grover Imhoff (a man of many talents) drew up plans and



*This photo shows Grover Imhoff standing in front of the house at 25792 Cook Road as he led the effort to rebuild it after a 1959 fire. Photo courtesy of Jim Boddy.*

up along Cook Road, wrote. “The couple that lived there with their three sons were deaf mutes. [They] had no insurance and no money to rebuild. People all over town donated towards the cause and Grover Imhoff (a man of many talents) drew up plans and

orchestrated the rebuilding. He worked tirelessly, and without pay, until it was completed.”



*These are two more photos of the rebuilding of the house at 25792 Cook Road that Grover Imhoff led. Photos courtesy of Jim Boddy.*

The house that burned down was at 25792 Cook Road.

“If I recall, a PD [*Plain Dealer*] employee was coming home late at night and saw the fire, stopped and the parents were frantic in the front yard,” Boddy wrote. “They guided the Good Samaritan to a bedroom window and somehow motioned that their baby was inside. He proceeded to enter and rescue the child. The oldest boy was away, and the middle child was with me and my parents camping at East Harbor State Park. He was 9 and I was 8. As we pulled into our driveway, he started crying. We were looking at our house, and he was looking at his.”

The house was sold in about 1993 and has since been remodeled, he wrote, so it bears no resemblance to the way it previously looked.

## **Blacksmith Shop Occupied Corner of Cook and Columbia**

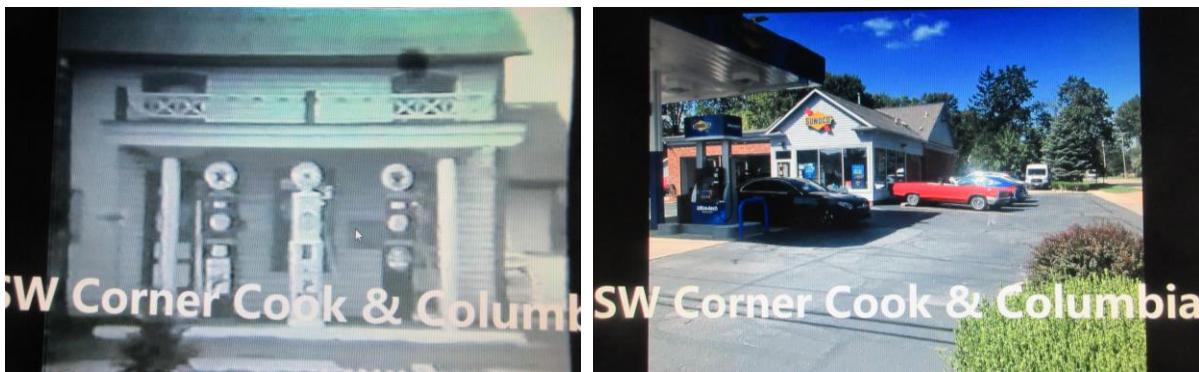
The series of *Olmsted 200* stories that ran from January 2024 through September 2024 – Issues 128 through 136 – about the 1936 film of Olmsted Falls to which Jim Boddy added a soundtrack of commentary and music prompted many reactions from readers and those who saw the film. But one response for which *Olmsted 200* has not found room until now comes through Boddy from Dave Simon, owner of the Sunoco gas station at the southwest corner of Cook Road and Columbia Road.

Long before a gas station was located at that corner, it was the site of a blacksmith’s shop. In the early 1900s, it was operated by Dalice Boner, who lived with his family on the other side of Columbia Road, which then was known as Main Street.

Sometime later in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a gas station replaced the blacksmith’s shop. That gas station went through at least two more renovations since then to become what it is today. A series of four photos shows how that corner has changed over the decades.



The left photo, which was taken about 1910, shows the blacksmith's shop. Dalice Boner, the blacksmith, is standing on the right. Next to him are his sons, Earl on the left, and Force in the middle. The right photo shows the gas station sometime in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both photos courtesy of Dave Simon.



The photo on the left here shows the gas station as seen in the 1936 film. The photo on the right, taken by Jim Boddy, shows the Sunoco station as it looks in the 21<sup>st</sup> century at that same location. Boddy put the two photos together in his version of the 1936 film.

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include stories about two members of the Fitch family, each story prompted by gravestones found by the current owners of Olmsted houses. The issue also will have a story about the passing 100 years ago of a longtime prominent Olmsted Falls merchant.

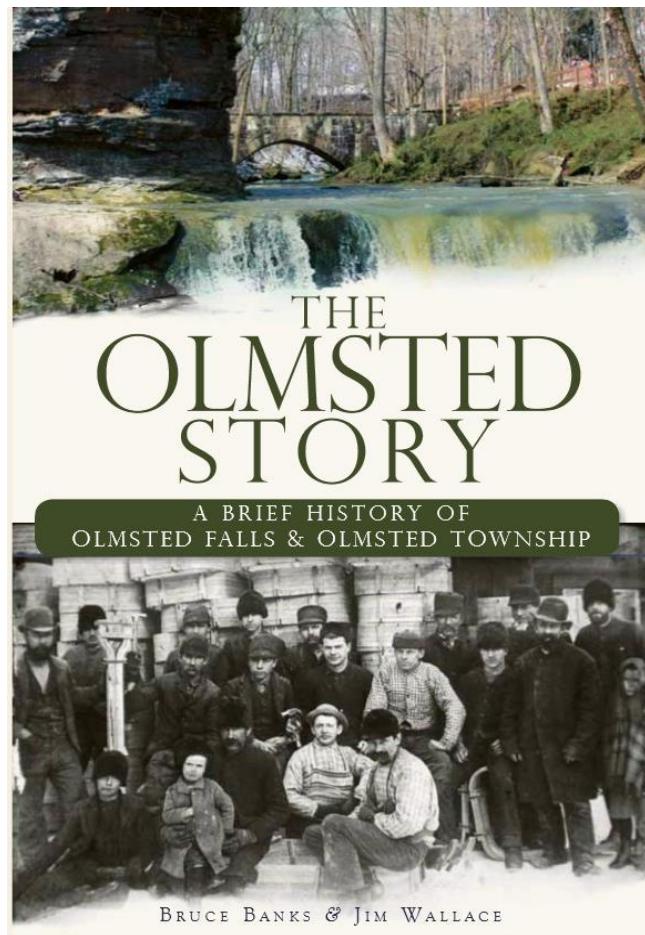
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Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. So are photos and information to share about Olmsted's history.

All issues of *Olmsted 200* are available in two online locations. One is on Olmsted Township's website at: <https://www.olmstedtownshipohio.gov/290/Past-Newsletters-Olmsted-200>. The other is the website of the City of Olmsted Falls at: [http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted\\_falls\\_history/olmsted\\_200\\_issues.php](http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted_falls_history/olmsted_200_issues.php).

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](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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