



Olmsted 200

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

Issue 16

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Contents

City Clears View and Marks Site of Damp's Mill	1
New Building Rises on Site of Former Grocery	5
Completion of Deconstruction of Hall's Barn Is Delayed	6
Heritage Days Will Arrive Earlier Next Year	7
More Evidence Turns Up That 1815 Was Geer's Year for Olmsted's First Settlement	9
Still to Come	11

City Clears View and Marks Site of Damp's Mill

The Olmsted Heritage Days festival provides current and former residents of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township a good opportunity to observe their communities' history. Thanks to an event that occurred during this year's Heritage Days, it has become easier for people to observe a significant remnant of Olmsted's history, as well as to learn what it is and why it was so important.



The view of the Damp's Mill foundation is now clear. The wall, which stands 13 feet tall, once supported a two-story wooden structure.



Jim Wallace spoke at the ceremony.

On Saturday, August 16, at 3:30 p.m., Olmsted Falls Mayor Ann Marie Donegan, several city council members and others gathered at the observation deck behind Falls Family Restaurant for a ceremony to unveil a new historical plaque marking the stone foundation of Damp's Mill. That followed much work by city employees to clear out most of the trees, bushes and other plants that grew so thick in the summertime that they blocked out the view of the mill's foundation and Rocky River below.

Mayor Donegan, who presided over the ceremony, asked this writer to speak. These are the remarks delivered at that time:

One of the nice things for anyone interested in Olmsted's history is that so much of that history is still on display if you know what to look for. Down in the park, you can see the grindstones and square-cut stones left over from the quarries, as well as grooves and notches carved into stone where a railroad trestle or dams for mills were anchored. The 1876 depot still stands along the tracks near Garfield Street. And downtown Olmsted Falls is filled with buildings – many of them restored in Grand Pacific Junction – that were the stores and homes of 19th century residents.



Mayor Ann Marie Donegan listens to Jean Johnson during the ceremony.

*The way Olmsted lives with its history is one reason I was inspired to write **The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township** – with the help of Bruce Banks – and why I continue to write about it in my monthly newsletter, **Olmsted 200**.*

Mills were very important for several decades early in Olmsted's history. Damp's Mill was the most prominent of those mills here in Olmsted Falls. It operated for more than four decades beginning about



Mayor Donegan, Jean Johnson, Joan Jocke and Jim Wallace unveil the new plaque.

1870. Its two-story wooden structure towered above its stone foundation and was a prominent sight on Olmsted's modest skyline.

*The wooden structure has been gone for more than three quarters of a century, but we are fortunate that the stone foundation remains. In fact, we should thank Bruce Banks – my co-author on **The Olmsted Story** – for its preservation. In the 1980s, when Mill River Plaza and the condominiums behind it were under*

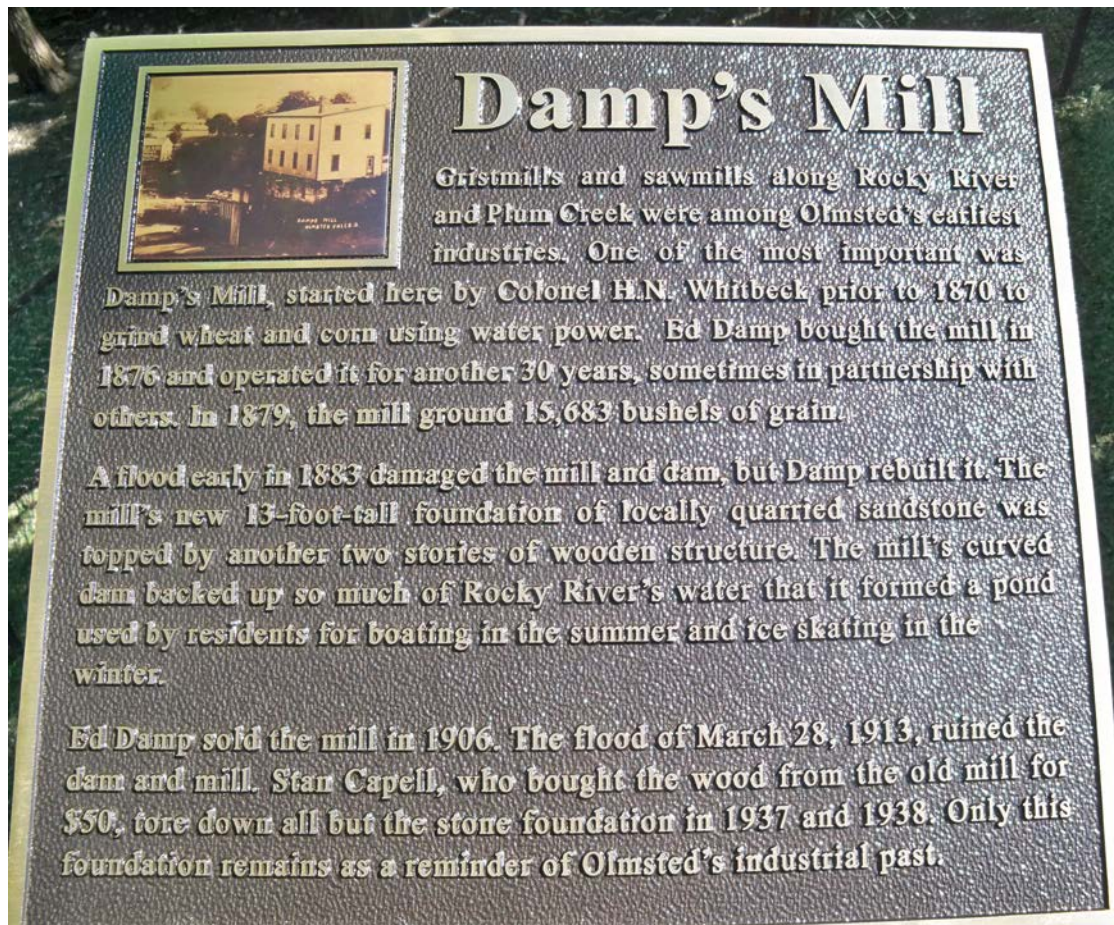
construction, Bruce persuaded those building it not to remove the Damp's Mill foundation. In a similar way, when the third, and current, Water Street Bridge was being built in 1990, he helped persuade the county to leave standing part of one of the stone pillars that helped support the original bridge that was built in 1864 and destroyed by the March 1913 flood.

Unfortunately in recent years, it was almost impossible to catch a glimpse of the Damp's Mill foundation during the warm weather months because of the vegetation that grew and blocked the view. Only when the leaves were down could the foundation be viewed easily. Also, nothing was here to identify to visitors the significance of the foundation. So early this year, I suggested to Mayor Donegan that a good project for Olmsted's bicentennial would be to keep the vegetation trimmed and place a historical marker here. Government doesn't always move swiftly, but it did in this case. In this year marking 200 years since James Geer planted a modest crop of corn in what became Olmsted Township and later Olmsted Falls – and 199 years since Geer and his family became Olmsted's first settlers – we have this fine marker and a beautiful view of the Damp's Mill foundation and the river beyond it.

*At the beginning of **The Olmsted Story**, I wrote: "In Olmsted...the past is present... And the past is a present, a gift that keeps giving to current and future generations." We now have a new gift – a present – that can help us appreciate Olmsted's past.*

To be clear, that comment to Mayor Donegan last February about clearing the view of the Damp's Mill foundation and putting up a plaque was not the first time someone had made such a suggestion. But the mayor and other city officials deserve credit for seizing the idea and making it happen within half a year.

Jean Johnson, president of the Historical Society of Olmsted Falls, and Joan Jocke, a member of the organization who has taken an active role in preserving Olmsted's history, also spoke at the ceremony, and Bruce Banks was in attendance.



This brass plaque stands by the observation deck overlooking Rocky River behind Falls Family Restaurant and next to Mill River Plaza.

Back when the mill was in operation, Mill Street (which got its name for obvious reasons) extended across Columbia Road (then Columbia Street) and curved to go past the mill. In a 1982 interview with Banks, Charles Bonsey, who once served as the mayor of Olmsted Falls, recalled visiting the mill as a boy. "We used to watch the mill go around, shell the corn and grind feed for farmers and flour," he said.

For more information on Damp's Mill, see "Damp's Mill Was an Olmsted Falls Landmark," which Banks wrote for Issue 5 of *Olmsted 200*. That issue was published October 1, 2013.

Thanks to Jane Gardner for help with the photos from the ceremony.

New Building Rises on Site of Former Grocery



Barnum's Market operated in the mid-20th century along Columbia Road.

It has been almost half a century since Barnum's Market in Olmsted Falls burned down, and Clint Williams figured that was long enough. He said he got tired of seeing nothing developed on the site at 8061 Columbia Road, just south of the railroad tracks, since the fire destroyed the grocery in the 1960s, so he decided to do something about it.

Falls that had been sitting like that for 50 years. It looked terrible. We needed someone to go in there and clean it up, so I decided to clean it up and put up a replica of an 1880 railroad depot. It's by the railroad tracks. It fits very well. It's going to be a gorgeous building when it's finished."

"I had the opportunity to purchase it," Williams said last week. "I just thought it was time to clean up that section of Olmsted



Construction proceeded rapidly on the building during August.

The 1960s fire left only the store's basement, which has been used for many years for an auto body shop that will remain there. The top of that basement – the former floor of the grocery – remained an empty slab for almost five decades. As a longtime real estate company owner and the developer of Grand Pacific Junction, Williams has much experience in getting new uses out of properties that others have ignored. The new building will have almost 3,000 square feet of retail or office space.



This is an artist's conception of what the new building will look like.

In his past work at Grand Pacific Junction, Williams moved a few buildings but generally limited himself to renovating those that had been in existence since the 1800s or early 1900s. A notable exception was his construction of the Grand Pacific Wedding Garden, but even that incorporated use of the TeGrotenhuis house – nicknamed the "Doll House" for

its small size – which was built about 1860. The structure being erected at the former Barnum's location is the first new building for Williams in downtown Olmsted Falls, although it will have an old look.

Because of that attempt to make an old-style building, it will take a few more months to complete it.

“There’s a lot of hand work on this building, because when you make a replica, you’ve got to make all the brackets for a railroad,” Williams said. “They’re all hand made. I got to have somebody make all these up, so it takes a little longer. You’ve got to be as exacting as you can when you do this.”

The building should be completed sometime before Christmas, he said. By making a replica of an 1880s depot, Williams figures it should go well with other railroad-related structures at Grand Pacific Junction, such as the B&O Depot, the 1922 Vulcan locomotive and the red caboose. He said he doesn’t want to talk about what he is spending on the project, because that doesn’t have any bearing on what he is doing with the property.

“We’ve pretty much done the downtown area in Olmsted Falls,” Williams said. “This project, I thought, needed to be done very badly, and that’s why I decided to do this one. The city was very much in favor of doing it and very helpful.”

Completion of Deconstruction of Hall’s Barn Is Delayed

Almost all of the wooden parts that once made up the barn that John Hall built in 1880 in Olmsted Township are gone now, but the stone foundation remains standing near the entrance to The Renaissance on John Road. Holly Reed of Razing Cleveland, which handled the deconstruction project for the Eliza Jennings organization, said this past week that most of the foundation is scheduled to be removed during September.



Only the stone foundation of John Hall’s barn remains, and it won’t be there much longer.

“Razing Cleveland is working with two different collaborators, at this time, to determine suitable time frames for removal and sale of all available stone (with the exception of the marker stone and approximately 6 stones to be held by Razing Cleveland for the future park),” Reed wrote in an email update on the project. “While we had originally scheduled this removal for end of June, beginning of July, the progress was held back due to summer scheduling.”

The plan is to backfill and seed the property, she said, but Razing Cleveland determined that seeding the property during summer weather could prove to be difficult, so that also pushed completion of the project later than anticipated. Reed said seeding the grass during the fall would be best and should make the grounds better to work with next spring for creation of the green space – or park project – that will make use of the marker

stone that says “J.H. 1880,” as well as six other stones that will commemorate the barn. She said discussions about the design for that green space have not begun yet.

When Razing Cleveland dismantles a building, the company works to find new uses for the materials. Reed said she will provide Eliza Jennings executives with a list of end-users. But she has shared one example of what an “end-user has done to bring life back to some of the beam material from the Hall Farm Barn,” as she put it. David Shafron, owner and custom wood designer at Darbynwoods, purchased dimensional oak and siding, as well as some of the oak beam materials from the barn and created custom-made outdoor patio furniture for what Reed described as “a very happy customer.”



Oak from the 1880 barn now is part of 21st century patio furniture. Photo courtesy of Holly Reed.

Heritage Days Will Arrive Earlier Next Year

Olmsted Heritage Days in 2015 – 200 years since settlement of Olmsted began – will be held on the second weekend of August rather than its traditional time of the month’s third weekend. Shawn Jeffery, president of the Grand Pacific Junction Merchants Association, said the change in dates is a result of an earlier opening to the school year and a decision by the Cuyahoga County Fair in Berea to change the weekend the fair will be scheduled next year. Heritage Days will begin on Thursday, August 6, and run through Sunday, August 9.



Jim and Joyce Boddy reprised their roles as town crier and escort.

Jeffery, who operates Shamrock & Rose Creations, the Celtic goods shop, said anyone wanting to get on the Heritage Days schedule will have to contact her by June 1.

This year’s festival was blessed with sunny weather and comfortable temperatures. The only rain came on the morning of Sunday, August 17. That was a bit inconvenient for people who attended the Kiwanis Club’s annual Breakfast on the Bridge, but fortunately, it’s a covered bridge. The rain cleared out by noon – in time for the Heritage Days activities that afternoon at Grand Pacific Junction.

Here are some photos from this year’s Heritage Days, beginning with the annual parade on Thursday, August 14.



Young German-Americans from the Donauschabens danced on Columbia Road.



A truck was one of several representatives of Olmsted Township in the parade.



People lined the streets, including Columbia Road in front of the Grand Pacific Hotel, for the parade.



Clint Williams and Jim Boddy let a young girl pull a winning entry for the daily Butter Churn Drawing for a \$100 bill.



Guitarist-singers Jim and Eroc performed with help from a percussionist at the Grand Pacific Wedding Garden.



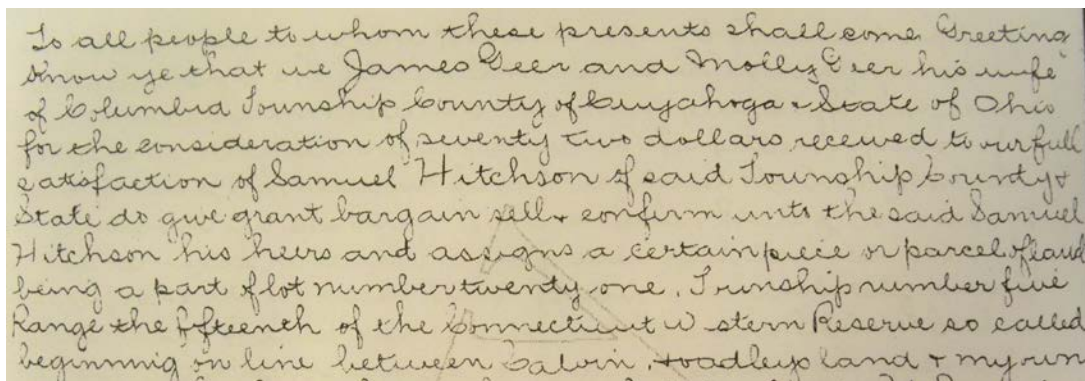
Lights at Shamrock & Rose Creations burned late into the evening.

More Evidence Turns Up That 1815 Was Geer's Year for Olmsted's First Settlement

Since the July issue of *Olmsted 200*, readers have called attention to more documents with information about the settlement of Olmsted.

One of those documents is the copy of a deed uncovered by Anne Radney for a plot of land in Columbia Township sold by James and Molly Geer to Samuel Hitchson. The sale was dated April 12, 1815, but it wasn't recorded by Cuyahoga County Recorder Horace Perry until September 26 of that year. (Columbia Township was in Cuyahoga County back then.) The deed identifies the Geers as being residents of Columbia Township. That's important because it establishes that they were still living in Columbia as late as April 1815 and could not have settled in what became Olmsted Township in 1814, the year Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls have claimed as the year they were founded.

As has been noted in *Olmsted 200* before, the only recorded activity in Olmsted during 1814 was that James Geer grew a small crop of corn on the land he and his family moved onto one year later. If the Geers had not moved across the border the year after the planting of the corn, Olmsted's claim to 1814 as the year of its founding would be even more tenuous than it is now.



The 1815 deed identifies James and Molly Geer as residents of Columbia Township, contrary to some claims that they became Olmsted's first settlers in 1814.

The land in the deed is described as being next to that of Calvin Hoadley, who – along with his brother, Lemuel – built the original mill that stood along Rocky River where Gibbs Butcher Block is located now. That would make sense, because the land the Geers settled on in 1815 was described by historian Crisfield Johnson in 1879, and later by others, as being next to Rocky River. Presumably, Geer simply moved across the township line from where he and his family had been living in Columbia Township. He and his wife probably sold the Columbia land to Hitchson about the same time they bought their Olmsted land. So far a copy of the deed to the Olmsted land hasn't been found, but the search continues.

As the lead article in the July issue of *Olmsted 200* suggested, it seems the claim that Olmsted was founded in 1814 is the result of imprecise wording in an essay about Olmsted's history in the souvenir program for the Olmsted Falls Homecoming of 1939. Because that program was still readily available for many years after 1939, someone latched onto 1814 as the founding date instead of 1815.

The July article put the blame on the 1939 program for the change in the date considered as Olmsted's founding, partly because no documents before then had claimed 1814 as anything more than the year when Geer planted his corn and stated that 1815 was the year of settlement. A source not considered when that article was written was a 1924 book, *A History of Cuyahoga County and the City of Cleveland*, written by William R. Coates. In the chapter about the history of Olmsted Township, Coates seemed to have paralleled what Johnson wrote in 1879 by saying that Geer did not take the step of moving into Olmsted until after the conclusion of the War of 1812. Although the treaty settling the war was signed in Europe at the end of 1814, America did not get the news until early in 1815. Here is how Coates put it:

The outcome of war is never certain and this one had its effect on the minds of those who were to take part in the creation of a new civilization in New Connecticut. The start was made in this township while the war was raging. It was a timid beginning. It was a try out of the possibilities of the soil and might or might not be permanent. James Geer, while a resident of Columbia, which is now in Lorain County, made the initiative start this way. Instead of making a clearing in the usual way, cutting and burning the trees and building his log house, he slipped over from Columbia, girdled a tract of timber, cut out the underbrush on land which was afterwards known as the Browning farm, and planted corn, raising what he could among the trees.... After peace was declared he came in boldly, put up a small log house and moved his family there, they being the first settlers and first permanent residents.

The New Connecticut that Coates referred to was better known as Connecticut's Western Reserve, the section of northeastern Ohio that Connecticut claimed in the early years of the United States.

Note that Coates considered what Geer did in 1814 as only tentative and not necessarily the beginning of anything permanent in Olmsted Township. Only in 1815 did Geer and his family take the bold move of settling in Olmsted Township (although it wouldn't be called Olmsted until 1829).

In other words, as late as 1924, no one seemed to claim 1814 as the year for the founding of Olmsted. That seems to give more credence to the theory that it was the wording in the 1939 homecoming program that led people to think otherwise.

Therefore, although the celebrations of Olmsted's bicentennial this year have been fun, they have marked just the 200th anniversary of Geer's corn crop. There is no reason not to have more fun in 2015 celebrating the bicentennial of Olmsted's settlement.

Thanks go to Anne Radney for finding the 1815 Columbia deed and to Tom Atkinson for finding the 1924 Coates version of Olmsted's history.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include an article about another instance in Olmsted's history when a celebration of the community's beginnings was off by a year. Also planned is an article about West View, using some recently uncovered Olmsted Township records.

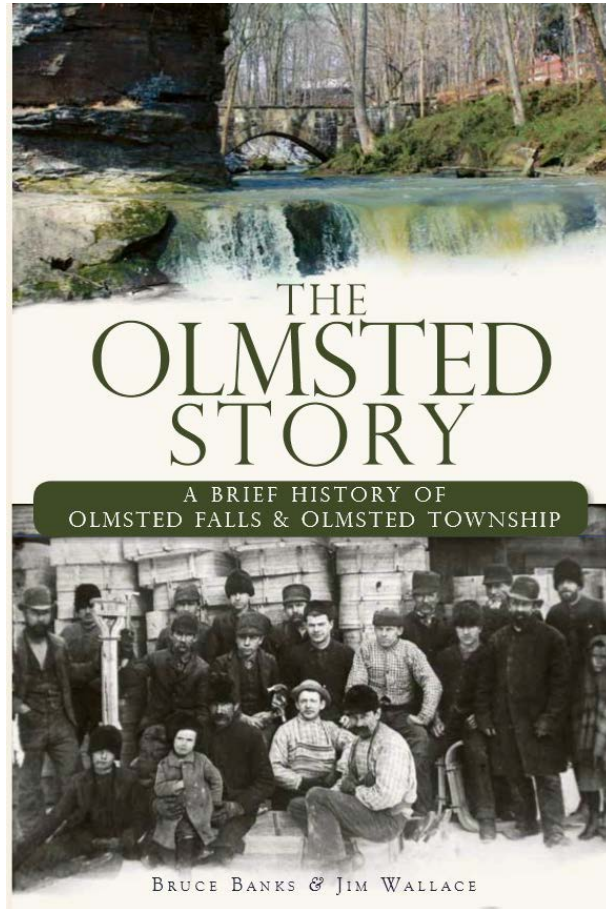
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Florida, Massachusetts and Maine, as well as in Mongolia and Japan.

Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted's history that you would like me to pull out of my extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information or photos about the community's history that you would like to share.

If you have missed any of the past issues of *Olmsted 200* or want to share them with someone else, all of them can be found on Olmsted Township's website. Go to <http://www.egovlink.com/olmsted/docs/menu/home.asp> and click on "Olmsted 200." Also, beginning with the June 1, 2014, issue, Olmsted Falls has made room on the city's website for the latest issue of *Olmsted 200*. Look for it at: <http://www.olmstedfalls.org/2008/fullnews.php?n=174>,

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. Written contributions and photos, as well as comments and questions about items in this newsletter, will be considered for publication. Send any correspondence by email to: wallacestar@hotmail.com.

Olmsted 200 is written, researched and edited by Jim Wallace, who is solely responsible for its content. He is co-author (with Bruce Banks) of ***The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township***, published in 2010 by The History Press of Charleston, S.C. ***The Olmsted Story*** is available at Clementine's Victorian Restaurant at Grand Pacific Junction and through online booksellers.



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