



# Olmsted 200

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

Issue 110

July 1, 2022

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## Karl Knuth Brought Sprinkles of Success to Olmsted

As stories in recent issues of *Olmsted 200* have shown, many Olmsted residents from the mid-1800s forward have been inventors who received patents for their creations.



*Karl Knuth made Olmsted Falls his home and many lawns greener.*

However, in some cases, it hasn't been clear what became of their inventions. That's not the case for Karl John Knuth, who received patents in the 1930s for lawn sprinklers, which he used and sold. He also helped establish a modern plumbing code for the Village of Olmsted Falls.

Knuth was born 139 years ago this month on July 8, 1883, in Cleveland. Records indicate he moved with his family to Medina County sometime before he turned seven years old and remained there through his early 20s. Although he married Lettie May Eddy on November 15, 1905, in Cleveland, their address was listed as Medina when their daughter, Dorothy May Knuth, the first of their seven children, was born on May 20, 1906. However, by the time their second child, Harold, was born on July 17, 1908, they were back in Cleveland. (Harold died in 1910 before he reached his second birthday.) The rest of their children seemed to have all been born in Cuyahoga County.



*Lettie May Eddy married Karl Knuth in 1905.*

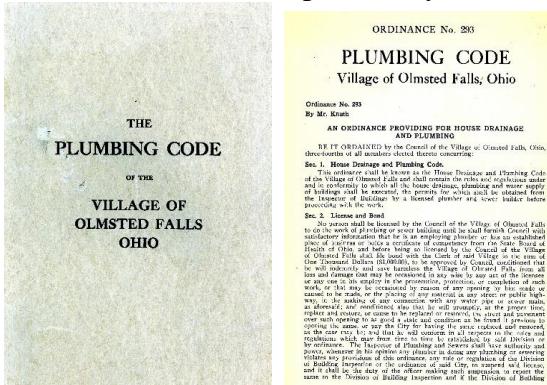
After high school, Karl Knuth served as an apprentice with a plumbing and heating company. He learned his trade well enough that he was able to set up his own



*Karl Knuth, left, operated his heating and plumbing shop, above, at 14508 Detroit Road in Lakewood in the early 1900s.*

On June 15, 1932, Knuth filed an application for a patent for a lawn sprinkler he had invented. Less than a year later, on May 2, 1933, the U.S. Patent Office granted him Patent Number 1,906,621. It wasn't the first lawn sprinkler system. That was invented in 1871, but Knuth's new design used lower volumes of water and allowed homeowners to hook it up to their existing service connections.

In his application, he said his invention was aimed at solving the difficulty that subterranean lawn sprinkling systems had in operating "when the grass is permitted to grow over the spray jet or spreader or when earth and other foreign matter accumulates within the recess in which the spray heads are located and thereby cause the opening to become obstructed." He said his invention would solve that problem and minimize maintenance costs for sprinkler systems.



*Knuth helped Olmsted Falls develop a modern plumbing code.*

on the roofs of many commercial buildings its interiors more pleasant in the summer.

business at 14508 Detroit Road in Lakewood.

In 1926, Karl and Lettie Knuth bought the big house at 25615 Bagley (now owned by Saint Mary of the Falls Catholic Church) in Olmsted Falls and moved their family there. Knuth then used his expertise in plumbing to help Olmsted Falls develop a modern plumbing code, which the village council adopted as Ordinance No. 293.



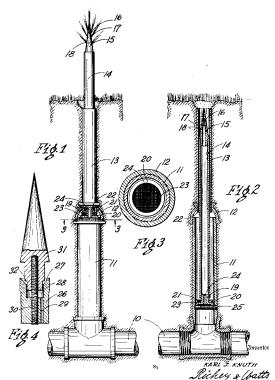
*This house at 25615 Bagley Road, Olmsted Falls, became the Knuth home in the 1920s.*

"Another object of the invention is to provide a sprinkling head which is constructed for bodily movement and penetration through and above the matted grass or other obstructions which tend to impede the operation of the sprinkler," the application stated.

Also in 1933, Knuth founded the Niagara Irrigation Company based in Olmsted Falls. One of his first systems was installed in front of his family's home on Bagley Road. The system also was installed to cool the roofs and make the buildings'

May 2, 1933.  
K. J. KNUTH  
LAWN SPRINKLER  
Filed June 15, 1932

1,906,621



The Niagara Irrigation Co.  
Olmsted Falls, O.

EFFICIENT -- ECONOMICAL  
"Niagara" Mist House  
Water Without Waste

SPRINKLING EQUIPMENT FOR  
LAWNS AND GARDENS

OLMSTED FALLS, O.

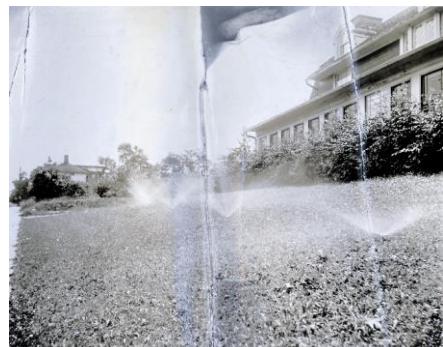
To the left is the drawing of the sprinkler from Knuth's 1933 patent. His business card, above, had a picture of Niagara Falls and an address in Olmsted Falls.

property, saves fussing with a hose, makes you proud of your lawn, reduces water bills and gives even distribution of water," the flier said. "Think of using fourteen 'Niagara' sprinkler heads on the **REGULAR 3/4 HOUSE SERVICE LINE** at one time, on ordinary water pressure, covering the average front yard by just turning a valve and knowing that the

consumption of water is no more than is used with an ordinary garden hose."

"Sprinkling with a Hose is as out of date as driving a Horse and Buggy" was the title of a sales flier from the company. The flier explained the company was named for Niagara Falls because foliage got greener the closer it was to the mist from the falls. The Niagara sprinkler system thus brought the mist of Niagara Falls efficiently and economically to any homeowner's yard.

"Niagara" lawn sprinkling systems enhance the value of your



These photos show Knuth's sprinkler system in operation.

More than four decades later, when lawn sprinkling systems were ubiquitous across North America, Canadian musician Joni Mitchell released an album, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, with a title song of the same name in 1975. It's unlikely that Mitchell ever had heard of Karl Knuth, but his work, along with that of subsequent developers of sprinkler systems, made them common enough for listeners understand what that

"hissing" was all about.



Knuth also marketed his sprinklers for rooftop use to keep buildings cool in the summertime.

His 1933 patent was not the end of Knuth's inventiveness. On March 6, 1934, he filed for another patent for a sprinkler system. He said it would provide a sprinkler assembly that "is self-flushing and capable of long life without requiring constant attention, is made up of parts to which access may be readily obtained at any time desired and which may be made at a relatively low cost in comparison with the high quality type of sprinkler produced by the assembly."

Other features of Knuth's new invention included interchangeable heads to switch from spraying in all directions to restricting the spray in any direction, the ability to "withstand the impact of heavy ground-surface traffic without damage," and the ability to keep "harmful dirt and dust particles" out of the sprinkler head.

On August 11, 1936, the U.S. Patent Office granted Knuth Patent Number 2,050,659.

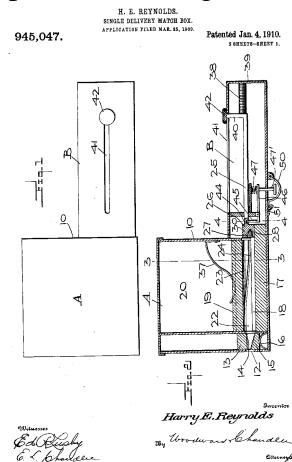
Unfortunately, he had little time to enjoy that success. On September 23, 1936, Karl Knuth died from pneumonia at age 53. His plumbing store in Lakewood and the Niagara Irrigation Company shut down. His widow moved from Olmsted Falls to Lakewood.

We can only wonder what more Knuth might have done for North American lawns with another decade or two of life.

*Thanks go to Ken Knuth, Karl's grandson, for providing many of the illustrations and much of the information for this story. David Kennedy also helped with other parts of the research.*

## Olmsted Inventors Created Matchbox, Mailbox and Other Box

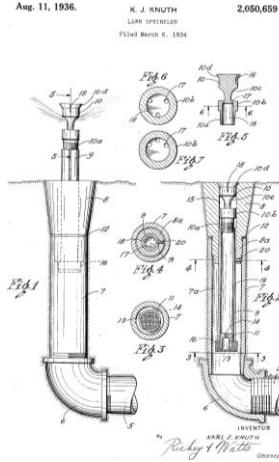
Karl Knuth stood out as an Olmsted-based inventor who put his creations to work in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but he wasn't the only Olmsted resident who received patents back then. On March 25, 1909, Harry E. Reynolds of Olmsted Falls filed for a patent for a single-delivery matchbox.



*Harry Reynolds got a patent for this style of a single-delivery matchbox*

"This invention relates to single delivery match boxes, and has for its object to provide a novel device adapted to deliver a single match and ignite the match at the same time," his application states. "Another object is to provide a novel safety device adapted to obviate the liability of more than one match becoming engaged at one time, and to prevent the accidental ignition of matches which are not to be delivered."

Reynolds might have intended his invention to improve upon an early matchbook design patented in the early 1890s by a cigar-smoking Pennsylvania lawyer, Joshua Pusey. Unlike later matchbooks, Pusey put the striking surface for the matches on the inside, which made it easy for all the matches to go up in flame when one was struck. The Diamond Match Company, which acquired Pusey's patent, later put the striking surface on the outside of the matchbook, solving the same problem



*This drawing was part of Knuth's 1936 patent.*

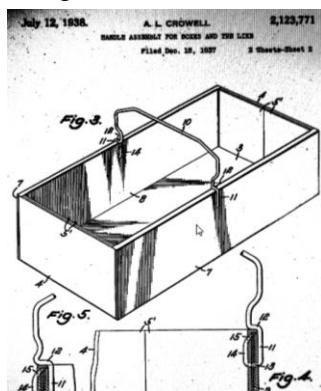
Reynolds sought to fix. Diamond, which was based in Barberton, Ohio, was the country's largest manufacturer of matches in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. On January 4, 1910, the U.S. Patent Office granted a patent to Reynolds for his invention.

Although Walter Holzworth did not mention Harry Reynolds in his 1966 book of Olmsted history, he did write that members of a family named Reynolds were among Olmsted's first Catholics in the mid-1800s when the railroads arrived. It's not clear whether Harry Reynolds was part of that family.

One of the shortest patent applications was filed on February 4, 1935, by Herman Hahn of Olmsted Falls. It was for an "ornamental Design for a Combined Mail Box and Support Therefor," according to the text of the application, which required only four short paragraphs. Little text was necessary because the essence of the invention was entirely in the illustrations. They show a decorative post for the mailbox with a depiction of Uncle Sam holding it.

Just as the text of the application was brief, so was the time the U.S. Patent Office took to handle it. Merely 78 days after the application was filed, the government granted Hahn a patent on April 23, 1935 – good for 14 years.

A recent search on Ebay turned up a newspaper photo from Clearwater, Florida, showing an Uncle Sam mailbox and support system almost exactly like the drawing in Hahn's patent application. One difference is that the Uncle Sam is smiling. Another is that the mailbox post is simpler and less decorative than the one in the patent application. Otherwise, it looks as though it could have been produced from Hahn's design.



was enough of a change because he got his patent on July 12, 1938.

On July 17, 1940, Gordon H. Mutersbuagh of Olmsted Falls and Walter J. Harper of Lakewood filed for a patent for a “process for coating pipes and the like.” They assigned their patent to the Glidden Company, which was founded in Cleveland in 1875 but now is part of PPG Industries, based in Pittsburgh.



*Gordon Mutersbaugh helped Glidden get a pipe-coating patent.*

“The present invention relates to the coating of pipes and similar elongated or other articles and particularly relates to a process whereby smoother more uniform coating which dries at least in part by oxidation may be applied to such articles,” their application stated. “It is a primary object of this invention to provide a process whereby a drying oil type coating may be applied to pipes and the like, while improving the uniformity and smoothness of the dried coating.”

Mutersbaugh and Harper received their patent on December 8, 1942, one year after the United States entered World War II. It was the second patent for Mutersbaugh, but when he received his first one in 1932 for an improvement in nitrocellulose lacquers, he was a resident of Rocky River. He shared that patent with three other men, and it also was assigned to the Glidden Company.



*Edward Holton obtained U.S. and Canadian patents for the Sherwin-Williams Company. Longtime Olmsted residents might recall seeing the “Cover the Earth” logo hanging in the window of Simmerers’ Hardware until 1971.*

Surely, Mutersbaugh was pleased to have his name on two patents, but his accomplishment paled in comparison to another Olmsted resident, Edward Clapp Holton, who received 20 patents, sometimes in cooperation with other men, in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Those patents were assigned to the Sherwin-Williams Company, which was founded in Cleveland in 1866 and remains headquartered in Cleveland.

Holton received patents, both U.S. and Canadian, over four decades from 1903, the year of the Wright Brothers’ first airplane flight, through 1935, the middle of the Great Depression. Most of them were granted when he resided in Olmsted Falls, but he was

still living in Cleveland when he received his first patent. Here is a chronological list of the patents that bear Holton’s name:

- May 26, 1903 – An improvement in the process of producing paint oils
- October 16, 1917 – A method of making insecticide
- October 23, 1917 – An improvement in insecticidal compositions
- January 29, 1918 – A method for treating polysulfid solutions
- July 2, 1918 – A Canadian patent for polysulfid solutions
- August 23, 1921 – A Canadian patent for insecticide

- November 27, 1923 – An improvement in methods of and apparatus for evaporating liquids
- January 15, 1924 – Improvements in lithopone and making it
- August 18, 1925 – Improvements in the art of making lithopone
- September 8, 1925 – Two Canadian patents for insecticide-fungicide
- March 30, 1926 – Three patents for improvements in insecticide-fungicide and the process for making it
- January 7, 1930 – Improvements in parasiticidal composition
- April 7, 1931 – Methods for producing paint, varnish and lacquer bases (The title is “Destructively-distilled Castor-oil Condensation Product and Process of Making the Same.”)
- October 6, 1931 – Two Canadian patents, one for pigment and the other for paint, varnish and lacquer base
- April 12, 1932 – A Canadian patent for a process of transposing pigments from aqueous to oil suspensions
- February 19, 1935 – A Canadian patent for paint, varnish and lacquer

That final Canadian patent came posthumously for Edward Holton, who died in December 1934 at age 67. In his 1966 Olmsted history book, Walter Holzworth wrote that Holton served on Olmsted Falls Village Council, and he was mayor in 1910 and 1911. The Holton family home was located at the southeastern corner of Columbia Road and Bagley Road, but it was torn down in 1966 to make room for a gas station.

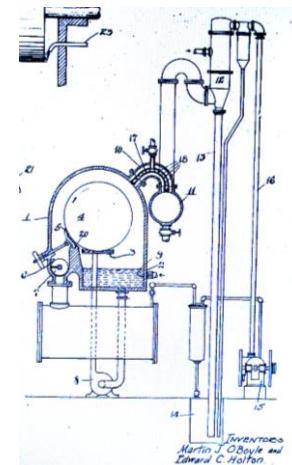
Holton's record for obtaining patents was best for any Olmsted resident solely in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, his record was eclipsed by another Olmsted resident who got his start in the 1930s and received dozens of patents through the mid-1960s. Like Holton, Theodore Alcott TeGrotenhuis received many patents in the United States. He also got German, French and British patents.

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will have the stories of TeGrotenhuis and other Olmsted inventors in the middle to late 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*This was the home of Edward Holton and his family at 8211 Columbia Road as it looked in 1949. That was 17 years before it was replaced with a gas station at the southeastern corner of Columbia and Bagley roads.*  
Photo courtesy of Jane Gardner.

*David Kennedy helped with research for this story.*



*Most of Holton's patents did not have drawings, but this one for an apparatus for evaporating liquids went with his 1923 patent.*

## Lay House Story Surprised Former Resident

The stories in last month's issue about the interesting life and complicated death of Samuel A. Lay, whose estate took decades to settle after his 1885 death, and that of his son, John, caught the interest of two men who formerly lived in the Lay houses at 7642 and 7622 Columbia Road. One of them was Kevin Roberts, a lawyer who bought the house at 7622 Columbia Road in 2013 and restored it before moving to Connecticut in 2020. (For more on that, see Issue 4 of *Olmsted 200* from September 2013.)

“Wow,” he wrote. “I had no idea the Samuel Lay House was named for Samuel the Elder, and what a lot of legal battles. It was the 1880s equivalent of a reality show. Thank you and Mr. Kennedy for all the incredible research. I think a new History of OF needs to be written.”

Roberts also noted that, in Connecticut, he has run into many people named Lay and Fitch, surnames that were prominent in Olmsted Falls in the late 1800s and early 1900s. He now lives in Lyme, Connecticut, and the neighboring town of Essex has a historic house called the Samuel Lay House (although the Lay family who settled in Olmsted Falls came from upstate New York.)

Northeastern Ohio's Western Reserve area, which included the section that became Olmsted Township, Olmsted Falls and most of North Olmsted, was settled by people from Connecticut and other northeastern states. Roberts recommends a story in *Connecticut Explored* about how that state once used money from sales of Ohio land for funding public education. That story is available at: <https://www.ctexplored.org/west-of-eden-ohio-land-speculation-benefits-connecticut-public-schools/>.



*This house was the 1800s home of John Lay and later the 1900s home of David Shirer. It's at 7642 Columbia Road.*



*The history of Samuel Lay house at 7622 Columbia Road surprised a man who once lived there.*

The other reader who wrote was David Shirer, who lived at 7642 Columbia Road with his parents and four brothers from 1945 until he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1952. He said a school custodian known as Turk lived at 7622 Columbia Road with his extended family.

“The [Village Green] park was the local playground for many of our youthful activities including a number of community Homecoming celebrations,” Shirer wrote. “The old [Union] schoolhouse was used for a time as a youth center. I look back with fond memories on those innocent and carefree days of my youth.”

In the late 1800s that house at 7642 was the home of Olmsted Falls Mayor John Lay until he died in 1893.

## Effort to Revive Olmsted Heritage Days Suffers Setback

It was 30 years ago in August 1992 when the Olmsted communities held a new festival, Olmsted Heritage Days. Clint Williams, a longtime real estate agent, started it just a few years after he had begun restoring a group of old buildings from the 1800s and early 1900s that became Grand Pacific Junction, which revitalized downtown Olmsted Falls.



*These are the covers for the programs for three of the early Olmsted Heritage Days festivals. On the left is the third festival in 1994. In the middle is the sixth festival in 1997. On the right is the seventh festival in 1998, when the community also celebrated the opening of the Charles A. Harding Memorial Bridge along Main Street.*

Olmsted Heritage Days continued in August for 28 years with an annual parade, music, other entertainment, and garage sales throughout Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. Some Olmsted Falls High School alumni planned their class reunions for Heritage Days weekend to take advantage of the extra community activities.

That long run of festivals halted in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. There was some hope of reviving Heritage Days in 2021, but leaders in the merchant community said they didn't have enough time to plan it. Also, Williams, who died in 2019, no longer was around to be the driving force he once was behind Heritage Days.

Some people fond of the festival replaced it last August with Olmsted People's Heritage Days, a grassroots effort that put a few events scheduled for the first weekend of August together under that label. The events included a Friday evening concert by the Charles A. Harding Memorial Bridge, a kids' fair on the grounds of a church, historical tours of David Fortier River Park and downtown Olmsted Falls, and the Kiwanis Club's annual Breakfast on the Bridge that Sunday morning. In addition, people who intended to hold garage sales were encouraged to plan them for that first weekend of August, so they and their customers could benefit from concentrating activities on one weekend.

Over several months since then, Jeff Marshall, owner of Grand Pacific Popcorn Company, led a diligent effort to bring back Olmsted Heritage Days for 2022. However, by early June, he had to concede that it wouldn't happen this year. He said two things necessary before moving forward with Heritage Days again are a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization and the money to cover insurance. However, his hopes of using an existing 501(c)(3) organization were dashed, and without that, he couldn't get access to funds left over from the Grand Pacific Junction Merchants Association, which dissolved last year.

"Recently I have met with the Community Center and have figured out with them a way to make something work as far as the beginning money issues," Marshall wrote recently. "Now we will have to raise about \$20,000 to put on the event and cover expenses. Part of the money could be raised through vendors, but the rest will have to be raised outside of the event. In talking with the Community Center, we have discussed possible fundraisers for this fall and winter."

Everyone who misses Olmsted Heritage Days can wish him well and support his efforts whenever possible. "Hopefully we can make Heritage Days a reality for 2023," Marshall wrote.

In the meantime, Marshall is hoping Olmsted People's Heritage Days can serve as a placeholder for one more year. So far, another historical walk through the park and downtown Olmsted Falls is scheduled for Saturday, August 6, beginning at 10:30 a.m. in the parking lot near the former library and the covered bridge. Breakfast on the Bridge also can be incorporated under the Olmsted People's Heritage Days label, as can any other event scheduled that first weekend in August. In addition, anyone planning a garage sale is encouraged to hold it that weekend.

If you have ideas for reviving Olmsted Heritage Days, go see Jeff Marshall at Grand Pacific Popcorn Company, and get some good popcorn while you are there.



The program for the 15<sup>th</sup> annual Olmsted Heritage Days, on the left, in 2006 had a bit of color, but by the time of the 21<sup>st</sup> annual festival in 2012, the program, on the right, was in full color.



The program for the 15<sup>th</sup> annual

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include stories about more of Olmsted's prolific inventors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and other topics about the history of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township.

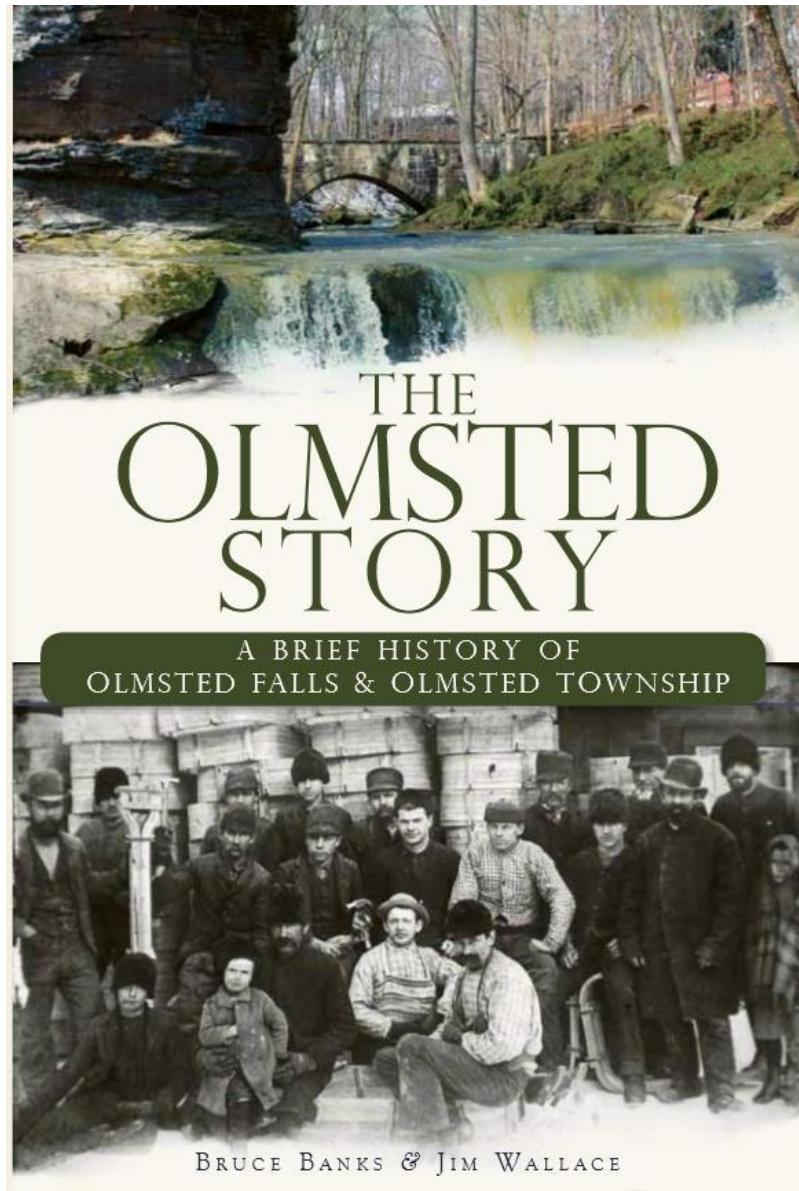
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: [wallacestar@hotmail.com](mailto:wallacestar@hotmail.com). *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, 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 <http://olmstedtownship.org/newsletters/>. A list of *Olmsted 200* issues is on the right side. Click on the number of the issue you want to read. All of 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/index.php](http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted_falls_history/index.php). A link to *Olmsted 200* can be found on the left side of the page.

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. Thanks go to Mary Louise King for help 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 Angelina's Pizza in Olmsted Falls and the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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