



# *Olmsted 200*

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

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## **Contents**

Hamlin: He Loathed Slavery and Laid Out Olmsted Falls	1
Olmsted Falls Holds First Election	6
Poor People Found Refuge in Township Eight Decades Ago	7
Story Answers a Longtime Murder Mystery	9
Still to Come	11

## **Hamlin: He Loathed Slavery and Laid Out Olmsted Falls**

The Civil War began 160 years ago this month, but Olmsted residents had been engaged in the struggle against slavery long before Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861.

“Olmsted was decidedly anti-slavery and there were many very strong anti-slavery advocates voicing their hatred of slavery,” Walter Holzworth wrote in his 1966 book on Olmsted history. “It was a topic in Lyceums and Churches.”

It also was the main topic of a weekly newspaper that started publishing from Olmsted Falls in 1846, 15 years before the Civil War began. *The True Democrat* was both anti-slavery and pro-Whig Party, as was its initial editor and co-founder, Edward Stowe Hamlin. He was better known for his long and varied career elsewhere in Ohio and nationally, but he was quite influential on the development of Olmsted Falls despite spending relatively little of his long life in the community.

Although Hamlin was associated more with Elyria and Lorain County, records indicate he owned quite a bit of land in Olmsted Falls. An 1841 Cuyahoga County tax list shows he owned at least two pieces of Olmsted land, one covering 500 acres and one covering 125 acres. That was 15 years before Olmsted Falls was incorporated as a village in 1856, so all those acres still were Olmsted Township land. In fact, the local post office didn’t change its name from Norris Falls to Olmsted Falls until 1845. Also, 1841 was early enough in Olmsted’s history that 717 acres of township land still belonged to Charles Olmsted. He was the son of Aaron Olmsted, the Connecticut sea captain whose

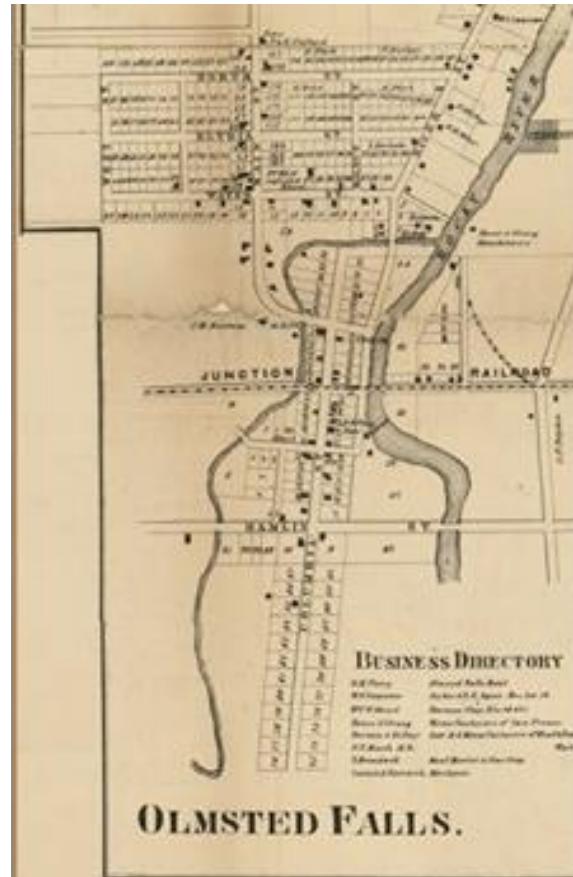
bid for about half of the township's land in a 1795 auction eventually led to having the township (and subsequently Olmsted Falls and North Olmsted) carry the family's name.

Holzworth wrote that Hamlin's land covered much of what now is considered the downtown district of Olmsted Falls. He was credited with laying out the streets and lots in that area in 1843. A plat of the town from that time was in the custody of the Olmsted Falls library when Holzworth wrote his book in the mid-1960s.

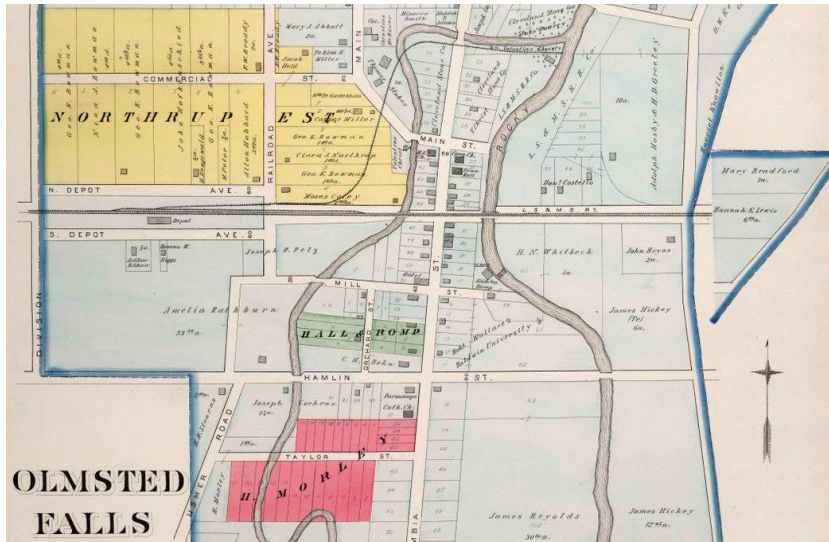
"It included the present area around Columbia, Mills, and Orchard Streets, and along Bagley Road then called Hamlin Street," Holzworth wrote. "The site of the Town hall [now home to the Moosehead restaurant], the churches, and the present Library are within the boundaries of the town of Olmsted. The northern boundary was a line that ran due east and west at approximately Elm Street."

That 1843 map of Olmsted Falls also bore the signature of Hamlin, confirming his approval of the survey work and its description. The main east-west street in Olmsted Falls kept the name Hamlin Street well into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. But the Hamlin Street name applied only within the village limits from Rocky River on the east to Division Street (now Mapleway Drive) on the west. Its westward extension into Olmsted Township was called Dutch Road, while the extension to the east toward Berea, which was built much later, was called Irish Road. Eventually in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they all were united under the designation Bagley Road, which was named for Abijah Bagley, a resident of Berea in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Why Hamlin and his partners decided to establish their new newspaper, *The True Democrat*, in Olmsted Falls in 1846 isn't clear. It would have made more sense to locate it in Elyria, where Hamlin had more of a history, or Cleveland, which was the hub of activity for the region. Not only was Olmsted Falls a nascent community whose streets Hamlin had laid out a just few years earlier, but it also was several years away from being served by a railroad and didn't even have a direct road to Berea yet. That probably made circulating the newspaper quite a task.



*This is not the map that Edward Hamlin signed in 1843 and Walter Holzworth saw at the library in the mid-1960s, but it was created in 1850, so it shows the streets and lots Hamlin laid out for Olmsted Falls several years earlier. Note that the main east-west street was Hamlin Street.*



*This portion of an 1892 Olmsted Falls map still shows Hamlin Street and many of the lots Edward Hamlin had laid out half a century earlier. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the lots remained, but Hamlin Street became part of Bagley Road, running through southwestern Cuyahoga County.*

Perhaps establishing the newspaper in Olmsted Falls had something to do with one of his partners in the venture, Gilbert Loomis, who had been a resident of the community for more than a decade. He had come to Olmsted in 1834 with his brother, Newton, and their mother to join their father and two older brothers who had settled in the community in 1832. Newton is better known in Olmsted history as the longtime proprietor of a general store on land he bought from Hamlin. Newton Loomis's house, after being moved twice, became the Olmsted Falls library from 1955 until 2013.

Hamlin's other partner in *The True Democrat* was Ezra Stevens. He and Hamlin both served as editors of the paper, according to the Library of Congress. Research has not uncovered any other connection Stevens might have had to Olmsted Falls.

After being published as a weekly newspaper from Olmsted Falls for several months in 1846, *The True Democrat* moved to Cleveland at the beginning of 1847 and became a daily newspaper. The first issue of the *Daily True Democrat* was published on January 12, 1847.

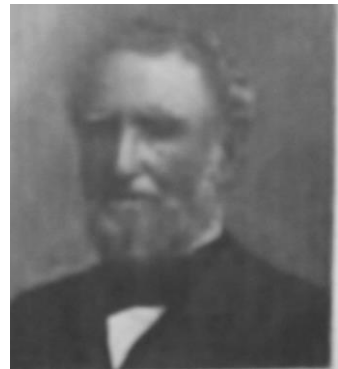
That apparently helped the paper get noticed more. At least, its articles seemed to get picked up more by other newspapers of the time – especially those with similar anti-slavery sympathies. For example, a newspaper called the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* of New Lisbon, Ohio, quoted from *The True Democrat* in an article from July 2, 1847, about whether the Whig Party should choose General Zachary Taylor as its candidate for president in 1848. He was popular among many Americans for his role in the Mexican-American War but not with many anti-slavery Whigs in northern states, such as the editors of *The True Democrat*, who wrote (as reproduced in the *Bugle*):

*We have washed our hand of slavery, and will never stain them.  
Our eyes are not to be blinded by the dazzle of military glory, in the cause  
of truth and freedom.... We shall keep on the even tenor of our way, and  
keep our eyes fixed upon the mark of the high calling of Liberty, Justice  
and the Constitution.*

Perhaps Hamlin wrote those words. Although he was a Whig, Hamlin supported former President Martin Van Buren, the nominee of the Free-Soil Party, in the election of 1848 (which Zachary Taylor won). Hamlin participated in the Free Soil Party's convention in Buffalo, New York, in 1848 and was a member of the Committee on Resolutions. But halfway through that presidential campaign, Hamlin left the *Daily True Democrat* in the hands of T. Gillman Turner. Eventually, the paper merged with the *Daily Forest City* to form the *Daily Forest City Democrat*, which later became the *Cleveland Morning Leader*, which was one of the city's major newspapers in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1848, Hamlin started another weekly newspaper, *The Ohio Standard*, in Columbus. It lasted until 1851, although it suspended publication for several months in 1849.

One of his contemporaries in the 1840s wrote about Hamlin's writings that "their chief aim and purpose were to induce the Whigs of Ohio to pledge themselves never to vote for a slaveholder for President. The views and arguments were striking and original, and presented with a lucidity of style and such fervor and eloquence as rarely occurs in political writings. They were copied into all the local papers – entered into and eagerly read in every household. Never, since the days of the Federalist, did any political writings have such an effect upon the minds of those to whom they were addressed."



His newspaper ventures were just one small part of Hamlin's active life. He was born in Hillsdale, Columbia County, New York, on July 6, 1808. In 1830, he settled with his father in Elyria, Ohio. He was admitted to the bar in 1831, found a partner and formed the law firm of Bliss and Hamlin. From 1833 to 1835, Hamlin served as Lorain County's prosecuting attorney. He moved to Cleveland in 1837 for a short time but returned to Lorain County. After being an unsuccessful Whig candidate for Congress, Hamlin subsequently was elected to the House of Representatives to fill a vacancy caused by a death. But he served in Congress only from October 8, 1844, to March 3, 1845. While there, he gave a speech on January 9, 1845, on the annexation of Texas to the United States.

*Despite much research, this hazy picture was the only one found showing Edward Hamlin. No date for it is available.*

One person who knew him wrote of Hamlin, "He had natural diplomatic qualities, and few men could surpass him in political intrigue."

Frank Le Blond, a two-term Democratic congressman from Ohio, said of Hamlin, "He was one of the brainiest and shrewdest men I ever knew; could plan and perfect schemes of the greatest magnitude; his intellectual qualities were of the highest order."

Descriptions of Hamlin depicted him as handsome with a small stature, a forcible public speaker and a “delightful conversationalist.” He was blessed with good health. Even when he was in his eighties, he was said to be very active with an agile mind and not a single gray hair.



*Major Lorenzo Carter was the grandfather of both of Edward Hamlin's wives.*

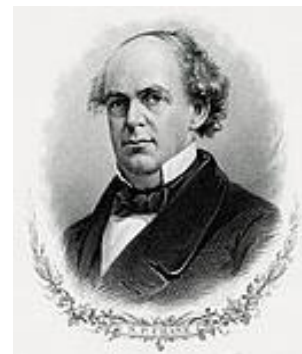
Hamlin was married twice. The first time was in 1833 or 1834 (records differ) to Lucretia Laura Miles, a granddaughter of Cleveland's first permanent white settler, Major Lorenzo Carter. Her father was Common Pleas Court Judge Erastus Miles. She and Hamlin had four children. She died June 7, 1848, at age 29 or 30 when Hamlin was still editing *The True Democrat*.

A decade later on November 2, 1858, Hamlin married Lucretia's half-sister, Mary Elizabeth Strong, who was 29 at the time. They also had four children together. She lived until she was almost 80 years old in 1909, which was more than a century after Hamlin's birth.

Beginning in 1849, Hamlin served three years as president of the Ohio Board of Public Works. Because of his work on that board and his role with *The Ohio Standard*, it would have seemed logical that he resided in Columbus in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the 1850 Census shows him at age 42 as a resident of Olmsted along with other family members. However, none of the biographies of Hamlin mention his residence in Olmsted, so perhaps he did not stay there long.

After his service on the Board of Public Works, Hamlin received a new position through a special act of the legislature to serve as an attorney for the state in arranging water leases for canals and for collecting and readjusting water rents. He then could have become attorney general of Ohio. Gov. Salmon Chase offered him the appointment in 1855, but Hamlin declined it.

Hamlin had a long friendship with Chase, who had represented Ohio in the U.S. Senate from 1849 until 1855. In fact, Hamlin was credited with brokering a deal with Democrats that resulted in the legislature's selection of Chase to be senator. (At that time, state legislatures chose U.S. senators, not popular elections.) Chase started in politics as a member of the Liberty party before helping to form the Free Soil Party and eventually joining the Republican Party. He lost a bid for the Republican nomination for president in 1860 to Abraham Lincoln and then went on to serve as Lincoln's secretary of the Treasury until 1864, when he took an appointment to serve as chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, where he served until his death in 1873. A 1903 publication by the American Historical Association that included Chase's



*This portrait of Salmon Chase as secretary of the Treasury is from the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.*





*Edward Hamlin's grave is in Cedar Grove Cemetery at Williamsburg, Virginia.*

diary and correspondence reprinted at least 14 letters he sent to Hamlin from December 1849 to December 1850.

While he was in Ohio, Hamlin helped plan several canals and railroads. He also served as the attorney for the Cincinnati, Indianapolis & Lafayette Railroad.

Hamlin did not remain in Ohio after the Civil War. The 1880 Census listed him and his family with his second wife, Mary, as residents of Austerlitz, New York. That means he had returned to his birthplace. Austerlitz was formed in 1818 from parts of Hillsdale, Chatham and Canaan, and Hillsdale was where Hamlin was born in 1808, 10 years before the merger.

In 1884, Hamlin moved to Williamsburg, Virginia, to supervise extensive land holdings he had acquired in that area. He was in Washington, D.C., on November 23, 1894, when he died at age 86 from an injury received from an African-American man. It was an ironic end for a man who had devoted so much of his life to freeing blacks from slavery. He was buried at Cedar Grove Cemetery at Williamsburg.

*This story was largely made possible through extensive research through historical records by David Kennedy of Olmsted Falls.*

## **Olmsted Falls Holds First Election**

Five years before the start of the Civil War – and 165 years ago this month – Olmsted Falls held its first election as an incorporated village. Incorporation took an act of the legislature and a few years to get done.

On April 7, 1856, 26 Olmsted Falls men cast their votes to affirm the community's new status as a village and to elect officials. They selected Thomas Brown, the proprietor of the Grand Pacific Hotel, to serve as mayor and W.S. Carpenter to serve as recorder. (In the 1870s, Carpenter took over operating the hotel, which he renamed Hotel DeCarpenter.)

The men elected to serve as members of the first Olmsted Falls Village Council included H.S. Howe, Newton Loomis, William Smith, Thomas Bradwell and George Knight. Of course, it was all men back then. It would be another 64 years before women got the right to vote, let alone get elected to public office.

One year later, in 1857, the village expanded north to what is now Cook Road (then Elyria Street) by annexing the unincorporated hamlet of Plum Creek. Walter Holzworth wrote in his 1966 book on Olmsted history that a major factor in the decision by Plum Creek residents to favor the annexation was that Olmsted Falls had a railroad

station, which was important for communities' growth at that time. Some histories of Olmsted Falls have incorrectly cited 1857 as the year it incorporated as a village. Because of that, the village itself even celebrated its centennial one year late in 1957.

In those years before the community had a village hall, municipal leaders met in the basement of the Methodist Episcopal Church (now Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel) to conduct business. Township officials began using the church basement to conduct their business in 1856, so the township and the village shared those quarters for the next few decades until the township built a new town hall, which opened in 1883, on the site now occupied by the Moosehead restaurant.



*The basement of the Methodist Episcopal Church hosted township and village officials in the mid-1800s. Above, it is seen in 2012 as a reception hall in the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel. To the left is the building as seen in the 1900s.*

## **Poor People Found Refuge in Township Eight Decades Ago**

Eighty years ago this month, the *Cleveland Press* published a photo from Olmsted Township that provides a glimpse of what life was like for some people toward the end of the Great Depression. The newspaper used the photo to illustrate a small story in its April 30, 1941, edition titled "Way Slums Grow Throughout Area." That story accompanied a much larger story, which began on the front page, about how a lack of planning had set back the development of the Cleveland area.

"For the lack of planning the Cleveland region missed the boat in 1935 and lost outright perhaps \$50,000,000 in federally financed, basic public improvements that we could all be enjoying today," that frontpage story, "Neglect of Planning Costs City

Millions” by Robert Bordner, began. “For lack of planning, Cleveland also saw a large part of another \$200,000,000 in federal funds spent on second, third and 10<sup>th</sup> rate projects here while desperately needed fundamental improvements remain undone.”

The thrust of that story was that poor planning had set the Cleveland area back markedly in comparison to competing cities like New York. The story noted that if the Cleveland area wanted to thrive, it needed to get its act together. It suggested putting more funding into the City Plan Commission, which received only \$12,000 but needed another \$10,000, and the Regional Association, which received only \$10,000 but needed at least \$50,000 each year.



*Impoverished people kneel next to a car outside a tarpaper shack on Stearns Road. This 1941 photo by Byron Filkins is from the Cleveland Press Collection of the Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University.*

The companion story about slums, which appeared on the fourth page of that edition, used the Olmsted Township photo as one of three illustrations, although it doesn’t indicate where any of the photos were taken. However, the identification for this one can be found in a collection of *Cleveland Press* photos stored in the Cleveland Memory Project from the Michael Schwartz Library at Cleveland State University. The photo, taken by Byron Filkins, is described as: “Impoverished people kneel next to a car outside a tarpaper shack on Stearns Rd.”

The three-paragraph story spends one paragraph describing each photo beginning with this paragraph referring to the Stearns Road photo:

*New slums grow up in our suburbs, above, and we taxpayers will have to build streets, sewers, water mains and furnish those people relief,*



*health services and other facilities they cannot afford, while utilities decay in other unoccupied subdivisions where we have already put them in excess of the need.*

Next to it is another brief story, “Approves Curb on Shanty Towns,” indicating the problem was a statewide concern. It said the Judiciary Committee of the Ohio House of Representatives had voted 14 to four to recommend a bill to eliminate shanty town settlements outside of incorporated municipalities. The bill was intended to give county commissioners authority to regulate construction, reconstruction or repair of dwellings in unincorporated areas for public health, safety and sanitary needs. The bill was similar to one already passed by the Ohio Senate.

It was just one photo on an inside page of a now-defunct newspaper, but it captured an aspect of Olmsted life from just before World War II that otherwise would have been ignored and long forgotten.

## **Story Answers a Longtime Murder Mystery**

The story in last month’s issue of *Olmsted 200* about the 1866 murder of Rosa Colvin helped one reader solve a mystery from his childhood.

“Another great story about Olmsted,” Dave Shirer wrote. “When we first came to Olmsted in 1941, we lived above the hardware store. When my dad was hired as the town's policeman, we were told the story of a local murder some years before. It seems that the rooms in the building had been rearranged sometime in the past so like all curious kids, my brother Don and I poked all around the 2nd and 3rd floors looking for evidence of where the murderer was kept. We never did find it, so we ended up thinking that the whole story was made up to scare us. Good to find out that the story was true.”



*Were either of these upstairs room in the Grand Pacific Hotel where two murder suspects were held in 1866? No one knows, but Don and Dave Shirer tried to find out many years ago when they were boys..*

When Shirer and his brother poked around the building, it was at least 75 years since Rosa Colvin's body was displayed there and the initial suspects in the murder – her husband and a friend – were held in a different room. Also, the Shirer brothers were there half a century after the building ceased operating as a hotel and well more than halfway through its 78-year run as a hardware store, first under the name Peltz & Simmerer and later as Simmerer & Sons. The Shirers' youthful enthusiasm was no doubt greater than their chances of finding any signs of where the men charged with the murder or the victim's body might have been located.



*By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the former hotel was a store selling hardware, drugs and other items.*

Last month's issue also included a story about a housing development planned for 800 to 900 acres of Olmsted land in 1871 by two Cleveland lawyers named Estep and Nicola. By coincidence Nicola was also the name of the main law enforcement officer, Cuyahoga County Sheriff Felix Nicola, in the story about the Colvin murder. Or was it such a coincidence?

Auditor's Duplicate, of Taxes Assessed in <i>Olmsted</i>				Township, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, for the			
NAME OF TAXPAYER	AMOUNT	LAND	IMPROVEMENTS	TOTAL	REMARKS	DATE	BY
<i>Estep, E. J.</i>	<i>15 67 5</i>	<i>5 1/2</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>16 19 0</i>			
<i>Edmund Russell</i>	<i>6 31</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>6 62</i>			
<i>John J. J. J.</i>	<i>6 34</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>6 68</i>			
<i>John J. J. J.</i>	<i>6 34</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>6 68</i>			
<i>John J. J. J.</i>	<i>6 34</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>6 68</i>			
<i>John J. J. J.</i>	<i>6 34</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>6 68</i>			
<i>John J. J. J.</i>	<i>6 34</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>6 68</i>			
<i>John J. J. J.</i>	<i>6 34</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>6 68</i>			
<i>John J. J. J.</i>	<i>6 34</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>6 68</i>			
<i>John J. J. J.</i>	<i>6 34</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>6 68</i>			

*This copy of tax records from 1868 is a bit hard to read, but it shows that lawyer Ethan Estep owned nine and a half acres of Olmsted Township land. That was a few years before he and Felix Nicola, another lawyer who served as sheriff, acquired hundreds of acres of Olmsted land for a housing development.*

Diligent research by David Kennedy has revealed that Felix Nicola was, indeed, a lawyer before and after he served as sheriff. He also served as a revenue officer and a justice of the peace. He was born in March 1824 in Germany – either Hannover or

Prussia (sources differ) – and died November 12, 1900. His body was buried at Lake View Cemetery. In 1878, his law office was in Room 2 of the Perkins Building, 53 Jennings Avenue in Cleveland.

Ethan J. Estep also was listed as a lawyer who lived in either Cleveland or East Cleveland. Property tax lists from 1864 through 1868 show he owned nine and a half acres of Olmsted land located near the river. He was born in Ohio in or about 1820. It's not clear when he died or where his grave was located.

*A big thanks goes to David Kennedy for his research that revealed the information about Felix Nicola and Ethan Estep for this story.*

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include stories about Olmsted residents' participation in the Civil War and how May Day once was celebrated in Olmsted.

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

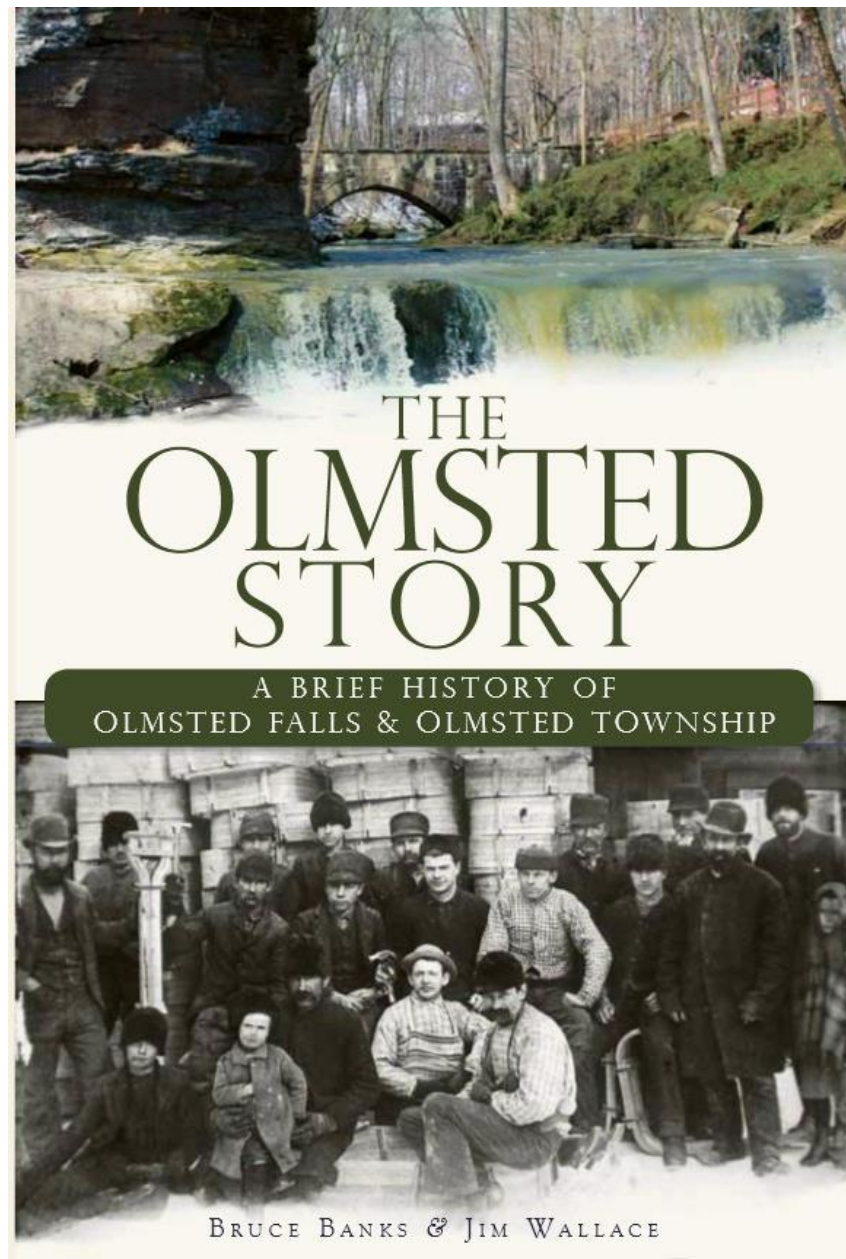
Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted's history that you would like to have pulled out of *Olmsted 200*'s extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information or photos about the community's history that you would like to share.

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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