



Olmsted 200

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

Issue 96

May 1, 2021

Contents

Olmsted's Soldiers Saw Much Civil War Action	1
Olmsted Gained a Rebel	8
The First of May Was Once a Festive Day in Olmsted	9
Still to Come	11

Olmsted's Soldiers Saw Much Civil War Action

Nothing changed life so abruptly and markedly in the 19th century for Olmsted residents, as well as Americans in general, as the outbreak of the Civil War 160 years ago in 1861. Several dozen men from Olmsted joined others from across northern Ohio in leaving their homes and heading to Cleveland to join the Union Army before being sent south.

“The sons of Cuyahoga county were ready with the foremost,” Crisfield Johnson, wrote in his 1879 book, *History of Cuyahoga County, Ohio*. “From the stores and the offices of the city, from the shops of the villages, from the farms of the country, they came forward to do battle for the integrity of the nation.”

On April 22, 1861 – just 10 days after the attack on Fort Sumter in South Carolina began the war – Ohio Governor William Dennison established Camp Taylor in Cleveland, where volunteers from northern Ohio rendezvoused. Several thousand had arrived at the camp by April 27. Those from Cuyahoga County formed three companies and parts of several others that became part of the Seventh Infantry. Eventually, Cuyahoga County was represented by soldiers in 62 infantry and cavalry regiments, as well as 17 artillery batteries. Many of those units included soldiers from Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township.



Some of Olmsted's Civil War veterans were buried at the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery.

It's hard to tell the total number of Olmsted men who fought in the war, but just counting those buried in Butternut Ridge, old Chestnut Grove and St. Mary's of the Falls cemeteries, at least 87 Olmsted men served the Union cause. But that number doesn't include any who did not return from the war or those who left Olmsted after the war.

Many stories about the war went with those men to their graves, but through various records and historical accounts, we can piece together parts of the stories of some of them. Here are several.

Some of Olmsted's Civil War veterans became prominent citizens in the latter half of the 19th century, including a grist mill operator (actually, two of them), an inventor/industrialist, a lumber mill operator, and a threshing machine operator. Members of at least a few of Olmsted's early families of settlers also served in the war.

One soldier was Edward Damp, who became known after the war for operating the mill along Rocky River in Olmsted Falls that bore his name. (For more on Damp's Mill, see Issue 5 of *Olmsted 200* from October 2013 and Issue 16 from September 2014.) Before the war, he was an immigrant who was born in Somerset, England, in 1841. The 1860 Census shows that, by age 19, he resided at Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, with his mother, three older brothers and one younger brother.

Damp enlisted in the 19th Ohio Infantry Regiment on August 28, 1861, and was assigned to Company K. Although the regiment had been organized at Cleveland in April 1861, it moved to Columbus in late May, so Damp apparently joined it there. After leaving Ohio, the regiment served in Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and, eventually, Louisiana and Texas. During the war, the regiment lost 279 men, including seven officers and 104 enlisted men who were killed or mortally wounded in battle. Another six officers and 162 enlisted men died of disease.



Ed Damp operated this grist mill in Olmsted Falls for three decades after the war. The stone foundation still stands behind Mill River Plaza.

At least two historical accounts say Damp was captured by the Confederates at some time during the war and was sent to Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia. The prison, which was built before the war as a food warehouse, gained a reputation for being overcrowded and harsh. Prisoners suffered from disease and malnutrition. Many of them died there. Damp didn't, but how he left the prison is a matter of dispute.



Libby Prison looked like this in 1865.

Walter Holzworth wrote in his 1966 book of Olmsted history that Damp escaped while being transferred to another camp by jumping off a moving train. However, Bernice Offenberg wrote in her 1964 book, *Over the Years in Olmsted*, of an account of Damp's release from Libby Prison that she got from Mildred (Ferguson) Willkomm, who apparently had heard it from Damp's wife, Alice, who

died in 1910.

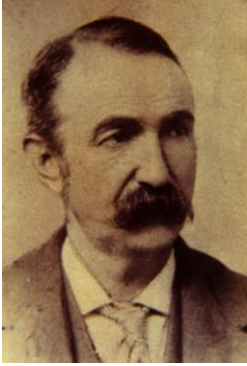
According to Offenberg, Willkomm said "that when Ed Damp was let out of Libby Prison with the other prisoners after the Civil War was over they came to a field of squash and as they were half starved to death they ate some of it raw. Then they built a fire and roasted some of it, which tasted the best to them of anything they had ever eaten in their lives before. Mrs. Damp told Mrs. Willkomm that she could not cook squash that tasted as good to Mr. Damp as the roasted squash eaten by him without salt or butter."

Oddly though, ace researcher David Kennedy of Olmsted Falls recently conducted an exhaustive search through online records of Civil War prisoners of war looking for a mention of Damp. Despite checking every surname that began with "D," he found nothing about Edward Damp. Perhaps that just means the records were not complete or not accurate. Elsewhere, Kennedy found Damp was listed in one record as serving three years in the war and just two years and four months in another record. "Does the discrepancy have to do with his prison time?" Kennedy wondered.

No matter how he got out of Libby Prison – or whether he was even there – records show Damp was mustered out of service on October 24, 1865, more than six months after Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union Lieutenant General Ulysses Grant at Appomattox Court House.

By the 1870 Census, when he was 29, Ed Damp resided at Medina, Ohio, with his occupation listed as grist miller. By 1876, he had moved to Olmsted Falls, where he bought a grist mill from Colonel H.N. Whitbeck, another Civil War veteran who was said to have been "badly crippled" during the war. Damp operated the mill for three decades until he sold it in 1906. Ed Damp died suddenly in his home in Olmsted Falls on September 18, 1913. He was buried at old Chestnut Grove Cemetery.

Another man named Edward who played a prominent role in Olmsted Falls after serving in the Civil War was the son of early settlers Peter and Asenath Kidney, who moved to Olmsted Township from upstate New York in 1833. Although other sources differ on when he was born, his headstone at the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery has his birthdate as January 22, 1842. If that's right, then he was 20 years old when he enlisted on August 9, 1862, in the Union Army. Seven days before that, he married 15-year-old Angeline Hewitt Broady of Elyria.



This was Edward Kidney well after the war.

Kidney served as a private in the 19th Independent Battery of the Ohio Light Artillery. He participated in the Siege of Knoxville from November 17 to December 4, 1863, the Siege of Atlanta (under General William Sherman) from July 22 to September 2, 1864, and the Battle of Nashville on December 15 and 16, 1864. It is believed that he was wounded in that last battle. In her book, Offenberger wrote that he ended up in a hospital in central Ohio.

“Mr. Asa Sabin of Olmsted Falls went to Columbus, Ohio, to bring his son home from the army hospital,” she wrote. “Edward Kidney was in the next bed at this hospital. Mr. Sabin obtained permission to bring him home with his son. Edward Kidney had been very sick with cholera and had a bullet wound in his hip that would not heal. Mr. Sabin brought them home by train and took Edward to Peter Kidney’s home. His own mother did not know him as he was just a shadow of his former self. They had a consultation of doctors who said he would not live a year but he outlived all three of these doctors. About twenty years later his bullet wound had not healed. He had some skin grafted on the wound. The skin was taken from his son Archer who was eleven years old at that time. The wound healed and never bothered him again.”

Records show Kidney was discharged from his artillery unit on June 6, 1865, after two years and 10 months of service as a private. After the war, he started a bending works at the site of a factory for cheese boxes and wooden buckets his father had established a few decades earlier. The bending works became one of the largest manufacturers of felloes and other curved wagon parts in the decades before automobiles replaced wagons and buggies. Kidney also was an inventor of such devices as water filters. *Olmsted 200* plans to publish a story early in 2022 about Kidney’s life as an entrepreneur and inventor. He died October 23, 1921, in Erie County, Ohio.

Olmsted’s Civil War veterans also included two men named Thomas Stokes, both of whom were natives of England. Thomas C. Stokes, who was born on February 18, 1843, was so proud of his war service that he helped found Post 643 of the veterans’ group Grand Army of the Republic and offered the upper floor of his 1887 building, which is now a residence at 7835 Columbia Road, for use as the GAR’s meeting hall.

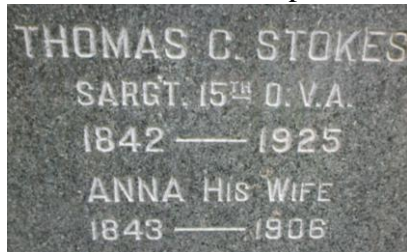
Stokes enlisted in the service on January 22, 1862. He entered Ohio’s 15th Light Artillery Battery on February 1, 1862, as a private and later was promoted to sergeant. He was mustered out of service on June 20, 1865, when his unit was disbanded. During his three years and five months with the regiment, it saw much action. That included battles at: Shiloh, Tennessee; Coldwater, Vicksburg, Jackson, Meridian, Enterprise and Quitman, Mississippi; and Kennesaw Mountain and Savannah, Georgia. Historian Crisfield Johnson wrote that the regiment also “did some brilliant work in a skirmish near Grand Junction, Tenn.”

To the left is the flag for the Grand Army of the Republic post Thomas C. Stokes helped found after the war. To the right is Stokes in front of his house decorated with flags and bunting. The house still stands at 7865 Columbia Road.



After the war, Thomas C. Stokes joined the sawmill business established perhaps as early as 1864 at the waterfalls along Plum Creek between what now are Main Street and Columbia Road. It might have been built earlier by someone else, but by 1870, brothers Sylvester and Levi Alcott owned it. In 1873, the Alcotts added a planer that turned rough-cut lumber into finished planks. In the 1870s, Stokes was a partner with the Alcotts. In 1882, Sylvester Alcott died. In January 1883, Stokes bought out Levi Sylvester's interest to become the mill's sole owner. He operated it into the 20th century. While he let the GAR post use the upper floor of his 1887 building for a meeting hall, he

used the lower level to store lumber and other building materials. Stokes died on February 26, 1925, in Olmsted Falls. He was buried at old Chestnut Grove Cemetery.



The headstone at the upper left for Thomas C. Stokes is at old Chestnut Grove Cemetery. The other two for Thomas M. Stokes are at Butternut Ridge Cemetery. (Find more on Thomas C. Stokes in Issues 50 and 51.)

The other Stokes, Thomas M. Stokes, was born November 13, 1844, in Dover, England. He came to America with his parents in 1851. They settled on a farm in Olmsted Township along Fitch Road between what's now called Cook Road and John Road.

A few months shy of his 18th birthday, Tom Stokes enlisted in company B of the 103rd Regiment of the Ohio Infantry on August 15, 1862. His regiment fought in several battles in Tennessee in 1863 and 1864. Stokes was wounded in battle at Resaca, Georgia, on May 14, 1864, but was able to return to duty. He was mustered out of service on June 12, 1865, in Raleigh, North Carolina.

When he entered the war, his occupation was listed as quarryman. That was several years before the quarries in Olmsted Falls and West View opened, so perhaps he worked at a quarry in Berea. However, after the war, he was known for operating one of the first threshing machines in Olmsted Township. According to Holzworth, Stokes also

was known as one of the “most colorful characters” around Olmsted. He died either February 7 or February 8 (sources differ), 1914. He was buried at Butternut Ridge Cemetery.

Among Olmsted’s Civil War veterans were a few members of the Stearns and Fitch families, who were among Olmsted Township’s earliest settlers. Members of the Stearns family were second only to James Geer and his family, who became the first settlers of European descent in the township in 1815. The Elijah Stearns who went to war in 1862 was the grandson of the original Elijah Stearns of Vermont who bought 1,000 acres in northwestern Olmsted Township for his six sons, including the second Elijah, who was the father of the Elijah who served in the Civil War.



The Elijah Stearns who fought in the Civil War was buried at Butternut Ridge.

The third Elijah Stearns was born April 12, 1842. Thus, the Civil War began on his 19th birthday. He enlisted on August 30, 1862, in the 15th Independent Battery of the Ohio Light Artillery. He was mustered out of service on June 20, 1865. Not much information seems to be available about his life after the war, but he was listed on an 1890 disability report as having a general disability with an added remark that says either “body used up” or “badly used up.” Nevertheless, he lasted more than three decades longer. Stearns died February 2, 1922. He was buried at Butternut Ridge Cemetery.

Another Stearns family Civil War veteran buried at Butternut Ridge was Gardner Orletson Stearns, who also was a grandson of the first Elijah Stearns. He started and ended his life in northeastern Ohio, but by 1860, he had moved to Utica, Wisconsin, so he served in the war in the 31st Regiment of the Wisconsin Infantry. He was born on March 6, 1827, so by the time he enlisted on August 9, 1862, he was 35 years old, which was older than many of the other recruits. His regiment saw much action in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina.

With just a few weeks left in the war, the regiment engaged in the Battle of Bentonville in North Carolina. It was the last battle between the forces of Union Major General William Sherman and Confederate General Joseph Johnston. It was a costly battle for Gardner Stearns. He was shot in his right arm, which subsequently was amputated at the shoulder joint, according to an 1890 disability report. He was discharged because of his wounds on June 15, 1865, but the war was over by then.

After the war, Stearns returned to Olmsted Township, but by 1873, he moved to Cleveland, where he remained the rest of his life. According to Cleveland city directories, he worked at the waterworks as an inspector, laborer and collector during the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s. He died in Cleveland on October 5, 1898.

Among the members of the Fitch family who served in the war were two cousins. They were grandsons of Thaddeus Fitch, whose six sons moved from East Windsor, Connecticut, to Olmsted Township in 1831. Both cousins served in the same unit, the

150th Regiment of the Ohio Infantry, which was organized at Cleveland on May 5, 1864, for 100 days of service.

The older of the two, John G. Fitch, was born in Vernon, Connecticut, on June 27, 1829, as the son of Chauncey and Anna (Loomis) Fitch. His mother died in New York on their way to Olmsted. John arrived in Olmsted Township with his father and other family members on Christmas Day 1831. He was almost 35 years old when he entered the 150th Regiment as a second lieutenant, the rank he kept throughout his service.

His younger cousin was Herbert Fitch, who was born April 6, 1845, to Eli and Sabra Cady Fitch. They settled along what now is Lewis Road. (See Issue 53 of *Olmsted 200* from October 2017 for a story about that family of Fitches and their home.) Herbert's middle name was Olmstead, which is spelled differently from the name of the family for whom Olmsted Township was named, although he apparently was born there. When Herbert Fitch entered the military, he was a month past his 19th birthday. He remained a private throughout his service.



Herbert Fitch's gravestone can be found at the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery.

The regiment left on May 7 for Washington, D.C., and spent its entire time serving in a series of forts that surrounded and defended the capital. The little action the regiment saw was merely a skirmish with Confederate General Jubal Early's troops near Fort Stevens on the outskirts of the city on July 10-11, 1864, in an unsuccessful Confederate effort to invade Washington.

John Fitch died on August 10, 1910, at age 81. Herbert Fitch died on July 11, 1915, at age 70. Both were buried at old Chestnut Grove Cemetery.

Another soldier buried at old Chestnut Grove was Hiram Albert Vaughn, whose gravestone lists him as a drummer for Company E of the 65th Regiment of the Ohio Infantry. He was born on August 18, 1843, at Spencer in Medina County, so he was 18 when enlisted on November 12, 1861. That December, the regiment went to Kentucky. Early in 1862, the regiment fought in the Battle of Shiloh in Tennessee and then the Siege of Corinth, Mississippi, before going to Missouri, Memphis and then Alabama. But Vaughn's service with the regiment was cut short. On June 24, 1862, he was discharged because of disability, but it's not clear from records available online what his disability was. By then, he had been transferred to Camp Chase in Columbus.



As his headstone says, Hiram Vaughn served as a drummer in the war.

However, his disability did not prevent Vaughn from further service in the Union

Army. Later – it's not clear when – he joined the Fifth Veteran Reserve Corps. From April 1863 to March 1864, it was known as the Invalid Corps before it received a more respectable name. It consisted of men deemed unfit for active duty who still wanted to serve the Union cause somehow. Guard duty, patrol duty and enforcement of the draft were among the assignments they received. By performing such light duty, they freed up other soldiers who were more able-bodied to serve in combat roles.

Despite his wartime disability, Vaughn went on to work as a carpenter after the war. He also was married four times. His first marriage to Lucina Bradford occurred on December 10, 1865, when he was 22. His fourth marriage occurred on September 9, 1922, when he was 79. Hiram Vaughn died seven months later, on April 13, 1923.

David Kennedy of Olmsted Falls deserves big thanks for extensive research that contributed much information for this story that might otherwise have been missed.

Olmsted Gained a Rebel

Not every Civil War veteran buried in Olmsted's cemeteries was a Union soldier. At least one man who was interred in the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery, also known as Turkeyfoot, had fought for the Confederacy.

As his name suggests, Dominique Simon was believed to have been a Frenchman. However, Ancestry.com lists his place of birth in 1820 as Luxembourg, France, so that raises the issue of whether he was from France or Luxembourg. Although Luxembourg was under French rule before the defeat of Napoleon in 1814, the powers of Europe separated it from France in 1815. Nevertheless, French remains one of the three principal languages of Luxembourg today, so perhaps Simon was a Frenchman who was born in Luxembourg. However, the 1870 Census, which shows him living in Olmsted, lists his place of birth as Germany. Perhaps that's because Luxembourg was considered part of the German Confederation after 1815. But no matter which side of the border he was born on, he apparently was ethnically French.



This is an artist's depiction of Camp Chase in Columbus.

That could be why, when he came to America, he settled in Louisiana, which retained much of its French heritage even after France sold it to the United States in what was known as the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Not much is known about Simon's life there before the Civil War, except that he was a resident of Orleans Parish.

During the war, records indicate, he entered Company D of the 13th Regiment of the Louisiana Infantry. He was listed as wounded and hospitalized July 28, 1864. Records after the war indicated he had a shell wound to his hand. Six months later, on December 25, 1864, he was listed as captured by the Union in Pulaski, Tennessee. In February 1865, Simon was sent from Nashville to a military prison at Louisville, but he didn't stay long before he

was sent on to Camp Chase in Columbus, Ohio. Records aren't clear, but it is believed he was then sent to Johnson's Island, a prisoner-of-war camp in Sandusky Bay. At the end of the war, he was released on May 13, 1865, after swearing an oath of allegiance to the United States. Records show he had a dark complexion, dark hair, blue eyes and a height of five feet and five-and-a-half inches.

According to information gathered by the Historical Society of Olmsted Falls, Simon intended to head back to Louisiana by train, but he got off the train at Olmsted Falls, met a young lady and decided to stay. He married a woman named Dora Bruce, who was born in Germany in 1847, so she was 27 years younger than him. They had 10 children together, from the time he was 48 in 1868 until he was 69 in 1889. Census records show he worked as a blacksmith in Olmsted Township. His service records show he also did some blacksmithing during the war. He died on October 22, 1897, at age 77.



Dominique Simon received this headstone 116 years after he died.

Simon then was buried in old Chestnut Grove Cemetery. Although it sometimes took as much as a few decades for the Union veterans buried there to get proper headstones, it took more than a century for Simon to get a good headstone that reflected his service in the Confederate Army. The Historical Society of Olmsted Falls saw to that in a special ceremony on August 18, 2013. During the ceremony, a small bit of Louisiana dirt sent by Confederate re-enactors was put on Simon's grave.

Again, research by David Kennedy made this a better and more complete story than it would have been without his help. Bill Eichenberg of the Historical Society of Olmsted Falls also helped by finding the date for the dedication of Simon's headstone.

The First of May Was Once a Festive Day in Olmsted

"Mayday," the distress call, as used in many old movies, is likely better known in the United States at this time than May Day, the holiday celebrated on the first of May.



Girls dance around a maypole in the 1940s at the school in Olmsted Falls. All photos in this story are courtesy of Mike Gibson.

But photographs from the 1940s that recently turned up indicate May Day once was observed in Olmsted Falls with a grand celebration.

The photos were among some Mike Gibson found in a box of Kodak snapshots from his grandmother, Helen Staten, who lived at 7435 River Road. Gibson, who has contributed photos to *Olmsted 200* before, spent most of his early years

in Olmsted Falls until his family moved to California just before his senior year of high school. He now lives in Oregon.



On the left, boys walk past the maypole. On the right, girls form two pyramids.

The photos all seem to have been taken on the grounds of what then was the single school that served Olmsted Falls, Olmsted Township and West View. Part of that school is now Olmsted Falls City Hall at the corner of Bagley Road and Mapleway Drive. The gymnasium is now the Olmsted Community Center. Gibson believes the year of the photos was 1944.



On the left, teenage girls in white dresses led by two young girls and trailed by a young boy approach the maypole. On the right, they turn to head away from it.

A few of the photos show a maypole with ribbons attached to it. In one, about a dozen girls are dancing around the pole. Each has a ribbon in her hand. Another shows a group of boys walking or marching in a line near the maypole but not around it. Yet another shows two groups of girls in pyramid formations.

Other photos show a procession of 10 teenage girls in long, white dresses led by two young girls holding baskets and trailed by a young boy. In the end, they all are seated on a small stage.



On the left, the group reaches the stage. On the right, they sit on the stage.

One photo shows a single girl holding flowers. Gibson said that is his mother, Jean Elizabeth Staten, who married his father, William Hugh Gibson, a 1943 Olmsted Falls High School graduate, on August 3, 1946.



This is Jean Elizabeth Staten, Mike Gibson's mother, as she was dressed perhaps as the May Queen of Olmsted Falls.

"I have always thought that my mother was May Queen in May 1944 – the year she graduated from Olmsted Falls High," Gibson wrote. "But I can't say for sure. The other May Day photos...don't seem to include my mother. Therefore, I can't be sure of the year. I do know that the photos were all taken by either my grandfather or grandmother Staten. I have the original prints."

As a traditional spring holiday for centuries, May Day is still celebrated in many European countries with dancing, singing and cake. In England, May Day celebrations include the crowning of a May queen and dancing around a maypole with the dancers holding onto ribbons connected to the pole. The earliest celebrations with maypoles go back to the 14th century and became firm traditions in southern England in the 15th century. May Day celebrations in America often followed the English tradition. The celebration of May 1 as International Workers' Day appropriated some of the

May Day spring festival traditions, but that aspect of the day was downplayed in the United States, especially in the Red Scare years of the Cold War following World War II. That could be one reason why traditional May Day celebrations also faded away during the latter half of the 20th century.

Thanks go to Mike Gibson for sharing his photos and the information about them.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about a onetime Olmsted Falls resident who might have become the subject of a Civil War-era folksong that has been recorded by Bob Dylan and other performers, as well as other stories 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. *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.

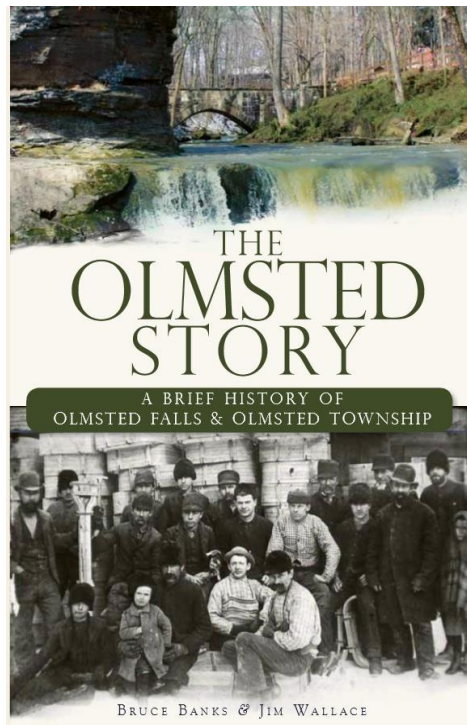
Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted's history that you would like to have pulled out of *Olmsted*

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. 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.

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.



Olmsted 200 is copyright © 2021 by Jim Wallace. All rights reserved.