



Olmsted 200

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

Issue 98

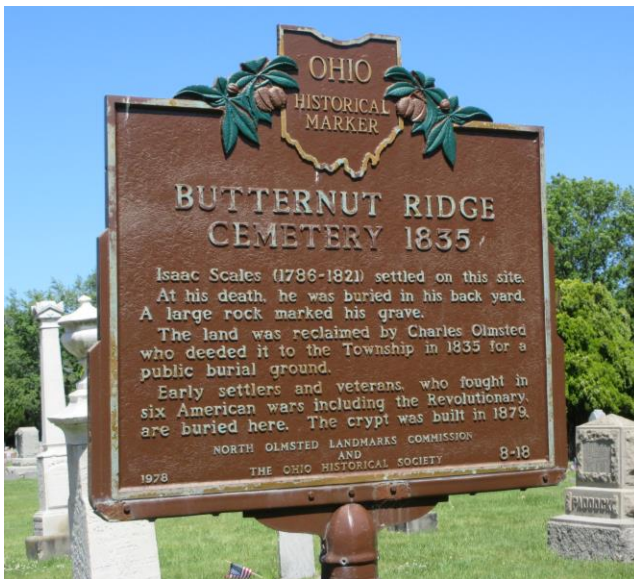
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Olmsted's First Cemetery Began 200 Years Ago

Up until this month in 1821, Olmsted Township – then informally called Kingston Township – did not have a cemetery. In the six years since the first settlers of European descent moved into the township, there had been burials, but they weren't on land dedicated as a cemetery.



Although land for Butternut Ridge Cemetery was set aside for that purpose in 1835, its first burial occurred 200 years ago this month.

The first known burial in the township was for a daughter of James Geer. He and his family became the first white residents of the township after they moved in from Columbia Township in 1815. The little girl was buried on the Geer farm, which was in the area that became West View and now is the southern section of Olmsted Falls. As the *Grindstone City Advertiser* noted in its September 9, 1870, edition, "Like many other things that ought not to be, nothing marks the spot, and all traces of Olmsted's first grave is lost to the present generation."

The first recorded public burial

in the township was for Isaac Scales, who lived along the east end of Butternut Ridge and died on July 15, 1821. He was buried on the land where he had lived, and that turned out to be the first burial in what became Butternut Ridge Cemetery. Scales was born in 1786, so his age was 34 or 35 when he died. At the time, his grave was marked by only a large rock. Sometime later, a monument with his name on it was erected.

Like many of Olmsted's early settlers, Scales came from New England. His birthplace is not listed, but he was married in 1814 in Hanover, New Hampshire, to Rebecca Bean, who was born in 1791. They arrived in Olmsted in 1818, and he erected a log house along Butternut Ridge not far from Rocky River, according to the 1879 book, *History of Cuyahoga County, Ohio*, by Crisfield Johnson, who also wrote:

He and his wife lived there without neighbors about a year. As he was obliged to go to Columbia to work most of the time, Mrs. Scales had a most lonesome experience. Often she had to get up in the night, with a broom, to drive the wildcats out of the loft of her house. One day she saw a bear hugging the dog to death in the front yard. She took down the old musket from over the fireplace, but finally concluded that it would be more dangerous than the bear. The latter left the dog apparently dead, and waddled off into the woods. Poor Tray, however, recovered from the effects of his extremely bad company, but in a very dilapidated condition. Add to such events as these the frequent appearance of wandering Indians, and it must be admitted that there was enough to try a woman's nerves most severely.



Isaac and Rebecca Scales had three children: Lucia (1815), Sophronia (1818) and Isaac Jr. (1819). Several months after Isaac's death, Rebecca married Elliott Smith on February 21, 1822. She lived another 26 years until May 23, 1848. She was buried at Butternut Ridge. Five months later, on October 25, 1848, Smith took a second wife, Sarah Underhill.

Originally, only a large rock marked the grave of Isaac Scales after his 1821 burial. This monument was erected sometime later.

Although Isaac Scales was the first person buried on the Butternut Ridge property, it didn't become a public cemetery right away. He apparently did not have clear title to his land because Charles Hyde Olmsted, who managed the land inherited from his father, Aaron Olmsted, reclaimed it. In October 1835, Olmsted turned the land over to trustees for use as the first cemetery for what, by then, was called Olmsted Township.

The cemetery became a point of pride for local residents in following decades. In its August 12, 1870, edition, the *Advertiser* called the cemetery, which was 49 years old

by then, “one of the most beautiful ‘cities of the dead’ to be found in any country place.” Referring to cemetery land at the time when Scales was buried, the newspaper wrote “it was then almost a forest of trees; now it is a forest of tombstones and monuments, there being fourteen of the latter costing from fifty to five hundred dollars each. Its many shade trees, and its beautiful location, makes it seem truly the resting place of the dead.”

That *Advertiser* story said that Scales had drowned in the Black River, but in its August 26, 1870, edition, the newspaper ran this letter to the editor correcting that account:

In your issue of two weeks ago, a correspondent from Butternut Ridge stated that the first body interred in the Ridge cemetery, was that of a person drowned in Black River. This is a mistake. Mr. Isaac Scales – the one your correspondent meant – died of a lingering complaint. To substantiate my statement, I refer to Mr. D.J. Stearns, of Butternut Ridge, who was one of three who took care of I.S. during his sickness.



This monument for Sanford Fitch was erected October 8, 1870, at Butternut Ridge Cemetery more than a year after he died August 19, 1869, in Wellington. It then was one of the most expensive monuments at the cemetery.

columnist wrote several days later:

That item was identified as coming from a grandson of Isaac Scales with the initial, “O.”

In a subsequent column from the *Advertiser* for October 14, 1870, the Butternut Ridge correspondent welcomed the erection of “large and costly monuments” along with “neat and tasteful tombstones” at the cemetery. The writer said, if that trend would continue, “our cemetery will certainly become what it now bids fair to be, the most beautiful and attractive country burial place on the Western Reserve.”

At the time that column was written, the latest monument that had been added to the cemetery was for Sanford Fitch. Although he was one of six Fitch brothers from East Windsor, Connecticut, who chose to settle in Olmsted Township in 1831, he moved in 1847 to Wadsworth, then LaGrange and finally to Wellington, where he died on August 19, 1869. Soon after his death, he was buried in Butternut Ridge Cemetery, but it took more than a year for his family to get the monument erected on Saturday October 8, 1870. About that monument, the

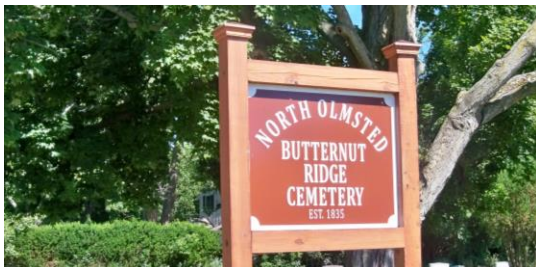
It is a grand and imposing structure of fine Italian marble, fourteen feet high, and rather overlooks all the other monuments in the yard, being several feet higher than any of them. The cost is said to be something over five hundred dollars. Beside the monument, two small marble head-stones mark the graves of father and son. This son, twelve years of age, whose death occurred many years ago, seems to be the only one lost in a large family of brothers and sisters.

Until the middle of the 19th century, Butternut Ridge was the only public cemetery in Olmsted Township. Therefore, more early settlers from around the township were buried there than anywhere else. A second cemetery, called Turkeyfoot, was started on the outskirts of Olmsted Falls in 1854, although it took until after the Civil War for it to begin to rival Butternut Ridge Cemetery. The township's third cemetery was started in 1874 by St. Mary's of the Falls Catholic Church for its parishioners. It was located along Irish Road, which is now known as Bagley Road, east of Olmsted Falls in a section of former Olmsted Township land that was annexed by Berea in 1987.

In the fall of 1878, township trustees gave Turkeyfoot the formal name Chestnut Grove Cemetery, as they improved it with walks and a drive, but Turkeyfoot remains an informal name still in use today. In 1879, the trustees paid \$1,000 for the erection of a vault at Butternut Ridge. In 1887, they arranged to have one built at Chestnut Grove. Eventually, Chestnut Grove outgrew the original Turkeyfoot land and expanded to land along Lewis Road that once was covered with greenhouses. The cemetery is operated jointly by Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls. Butternut Ridge Cemetery became part of North Olmsted, when it incorporated as a village in 1909.



Olmsted Township trustees had this vault built at Butternut Ridge Cemetery in 1879. They had a similar one built at Chestnut Grove Cemetery (Turkeyfoot) in 1887.



Many of the earliest residents of Olmsted Township were buried at Butternut Ridge Cemetery, which had its first burial 200 years ago this month.

David Kennedy of Olmsted Falls contributed research for this story.

Olmsted's First Road Resulted from Holiday Observance

Picnics and fireworks are common means of celebrating Independence Day for Olmsted residents in the 21st century, but the first two men of European descent to settle in Olmsted Township chose a much different way to mark the holiday 205 years ago – the 40th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. They built a road.

It wasn't much of a road at first, just a pathway through the woods, but it was the beginning of what became Butternut Ridge Road, the first east-west road through the township and one that is still in use today.



You wouldn't know by looking at it, but Butternut Ridge Road is a lasting memento of the nation's 40th anniversary of independence. More than two centuries after two of the earliest settlers in Olmsted Township cleared its path, the road, now in North Olmsted, still is used today.

The two men involved were James Geer and David Johnson Stearns. Geer and his family had become the township's first settlers in 1815, when they moved from the northern edge of Columbia Township to the southern edge of Olmsted Township, although it didn't take the Olmsted name until more than a decade later. (Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls date their founding to 1814, when Geer planted of a small crop of corn in Olmsted Township while still living in Columbia Township.)

Stearns had traveled in 1815 with his father, Elijah Stearns, to check out the 1,002 acres of northwestern Olmsted Township land Elijah was buying for David and his other sons at a price of two dollars an acre from the estate of Aaron Olmsted. David Stearns was to get 150 acres of the land. He stayed there long enough in 1815 to clear a small part of the land, before returning to Vermont, as his father had done earlier.

"In 1816, having perfected the purchase of his land, he came back to Kingston to reside upon it," Crisfield Johnson wrote about David Stearns in his 1879 book, *History of Cuyahoga County, Ohio*. One of his brothers, Alva (or Alvah), and a friend, Asa Knapp, came with him, but they stayed just long enough to help him build a log house. One other man, Daniel Bunnell, moved from Columbia Township to Olmsted Township in the spring of 1816, so James Geer and David Stearns were two of only three adult white men living in the township by the middle of that year.

“The Fourth of July, 1816, was celebrated by Mr. Stearns, assisted by Mr. Geer, in clearing out the ‘ridge road’ from Rocky river, along Butternut Ridge, toward the home of the former,” Johnson wrote. “They worked from sunrise till sunset, cutting out the saplings so as to make a passable pathway, for a distance of two miles.”

Johnson’s source in 1879 for that story apparently was Stearns himself. Referring to the return of Stearns to the township in 1816, Johnson said he “was then an active, enterprising young man of twenty-one, with a constitution remarkably well fitted to bear the hardships of frontier life, as is shown by the fact that after passing through the whole pioneer period of Olmsted’s existence, and after residing sixty-three years in the township, he still survives, at the age of eighty-five, in a conditional of remarkable physical vigor, and of undiminished mental power.”



This drawing of David Stearns was included in Crisfield Johnson’s 1879 book of Cuyahoga County history.



Butternut Ridge Road, now in North Olmsted, was the first road in Olmsted Township.

The western part of the original Butternut Ridge Road later became part of Lorain Road. As more people moved to Olmsted Township after 1816, they built more roads. Unlike Butternut Ridge Road, most of the other roads took on the names of people who lived along them, such as Fitch, Cook and Usher. Among those others who moved to the township in the early years were five brothers of David Stearns who also settled on land their father had bought for them. Thus, one of the roads built south from the original Butternut Ridge Road was named Stearns Road.

Olmsted Was the Center of Celebration in 1869

Olmsted Falls was the place to be for Independence Day in 1869. So many people attended the holiday festivities that the number of people in the village swelled tenfold that day. Census data show Olmsted Falls had a population of 383 in 1870, so it probably had close to that one year earlier. But so many people came to town from several neighboring communities that they numbered in the thousands.

This account of that day from a Berean appeared in the *Grindstone City Advertiser* on July 10, 1869:

CELEBRATION AT OLMSTED – Early on the morning of the Fourth our usually quiet village was all astir and our citizens busy making

final preperations [sic] for departure for Olmsted Falls, where according to previous arrangement we were to join the citizens of that and adjacent villages in commemorating our national birth day. The procession was formed about eight A.M. headed by the Berea Cornet Band and Marshal Band, followed by the Union car containing thirty six beautiful young ladies dressed in white personating the different States. Then came a wagon tastefully ornamented, containing one of the presses from the GRINDSTONE CITY ADVERTISER office. Then followed a procession of carriages nearly a mile in length. The Delegation arrived at Olmsted about eleven A.M. where they found awaiting them Delegations from Columbia, Strongsville, Rockport, Dover, Liverpool, Ridgeville and Eaton. The number of people being estimated between four and five thousand. It was the largest celebration ever held in that part of the country. The village was decorated with flags and streamers and gave its guests a hearty reception. As soon as all the Delegations had arrived a procession was formed over two miles in length under the direction of Gen. W.W. Mead of Olmsted, Chief Marshal, and his assistants. Olmsted also furnished a union car. The procession moved through the village to a beautiful spot known as Turkey Foot Grove, situated on the bank of Rocky River. The crowd assembled in front of the speakers stand and the exercises were opened by the singing of the national hymn "America," by the entire audience. Then followed the reading of the Declaration of Independence by Dr. John Wheeler of Berea. After, music by one of the bands, W.C. McFarland Esq. of Cleveland, Orator of the day, was introduced. This address was eloquent and appropriate and listened to with strict attention with frequent outbursts of applause. After music and the Benediction, came dinner in true picnic style, except there was a table for prominent guests, as usual this part of the ceremonies had not been neglected, and the supply was abundant and to spare. A large platform had been prepared for the lovers of dancing, the music being furnished by Shermans band from Cleveland. Others promenaded, chatted and gossiped as their tastes inclined, and all passed off pleasantly and happily, until about five o'clock, when a severe storm of wind and rain came up which sent the picnics [sic] flying for shelter in every direction, a good many were wet to the skin but all seemed to take it good humoredly. Thus ended the glorious Fourth. Long may it wave.

Note that it took the procession from Berea three hours to reach Olmsted Falls. In 1869, a direct road between the communities – now known as Bagley Road – had not yet been built. The Bereans most likely entered Olmsted Falls over the first Water Street Bridge, which was built in 1864.

Thanks go to David Kennedy for his research through old newspapers, which led to uncovering information for this story.

Hudson Fitch Survived South's Worst POW Camp

Among the Olmsted residents who served in the Civil War was a member of the Fitch family who enlisted before he was 18 years old, survived the South's deadliest prisoner-of-war camp and went on to show his pride as a veteran for the rest of his life, which he spent mostly in Toledo. His story is told in a 1917 book, *A History of Northwest Ohio*, by Nevin Otto Winter:

Strangers in Toledo often comment admiringly upon the trim, erect military figure of a man who wears a khaki uniform and goes about with the alert bearing and vigor of a true soldier and shows all the zest and enthusiasm of a man between fifty and sixty years. It is not without considerable surprise that they on inquiry learn that this is Col. Hudson Fitch, a man now past seventy, and with a record as a gallant soldier in the Civil war. In fact he is one of the youngest of the old veterans of that struggle, and in spite of forty years' continuous official responsibility in railroad affairs carries the burden of years and business with no signs of diminishing strength or zeal.

Hudson Arthur Fitch was born on January 12, 1846, in Olmsted Township to Smith Webster Fitch and Sabra Maria Fitch, who were first cousins. Two weeks before his 18th birthday, he enlisted as a private in the 125th Ohio Infantry. Several months later, his unit participated in the Atlanta campaign led by Union General William Sherman in northern Georgia. That campaign led to the surrender of Atlanta to Sherman's forces in September 1864 but not before the Confederates captured Fitch on August 26, 1864.



The Andersonville Prison camp in central Georgia, where Hudson Fitch of Olmsted Township was sent in 1864, was considered the South's deadliest prisoner-of-war camp.

The Confederates sent Fitch to the Andersonville Prison in central Georgia. The prison, which operated from February 1864 until April 1865, was a dreadful, unsanitary

place. It was filled with prisoners to four times its capacity and was constantly short on food and water. Almost 13,000 of the about 45,000 Union prisoners who were held there died. Scurvy, diarrhea and dysentery were the main causes of death.

Fortunately for Fitch, he survived. Winter's book indicates he returned to his Union regiment in a prisoner exchange. He then stayed with the unit until he was mustered out of service at Camp Irwin in Texas in September 1865.



Nevin Winter wrote about Hudson Fitch in his 1917 book on northwestern Ohio history.

However, even though the book refers to him as "Colonel Fitch," there is no record indicating he achieved that rank during the war. Perhaps that was just an honorary title he acquired later. Winter's book also indicates that Fitch was promoted to sergeant shortly after his enlistment, "and his faithful performance of duty led to his promotion to the rank of first sergeant and later to second lieutenant." But that's not what his military record shows. It reveals Fitch served as a private during most of the war. He was promoted to first sergeant on September 1, 1865, just 24 days before his service ended.

No matter what rank he achieved during the war, he demonstrated his pride in being a veteran the rest of his life. "For many years he has been a prominent member of Volunteer Post No. 175, Grand Army of the Republic, at Toledo, has always taken an active interest in military affairs, and again and again has been honored on military and public occasions," Winter wrote. "He was commander of the last Memorial day parade in Toledo in 1916."

Soon after the war, Fitch returned to northeastern Ohio. On November 11, 1868, he married Mary Odell, who grew up in Twinsburg but was living in Cleveland at the time. They were married in Cleveland and lived there until 1880. They had one son, Otis, who was born in 1876 and died in 1888 just two months shy of his 12th birthday.

Fitch had been a store clerk and bookkeeper before the war and immediately after the war, but in 1875, he took a job with the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railroad. That was the railroad with tracks running right through the middle of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township, but Fitch worked in Cleveland. In October 1880, he took a job with the Toledo & Ohio Central Railway. A few months later, in January 1881, when that company moved its headquarters from Columbus to Toledo, he moved to Toledo, where he stayed the rest of his life. He worked as traffic manager for that railroad, as well as the Zanesville & Western Railroad, until the New York Central took over early in the 20th century.

Winter's book credits Fitch with being civic-minded, fond of sports and horses, and quite fit:

For years Colonel Fitch's street dress has been a khaki suit of military cut, and that garb heightens the military character of his figure, which is still erect for all his seventy years and he is a man nearly six feet in height, splendidly proportioned physically and of such bearing as to give denial to his real years. For a long time he has spent his vacations in the West, riding about with cowboys, sleeping on the ground at night, and otherwise roughing it, and from this experience has drawn in new life and vigor.

Mary Fitch died at age 72 in 1918, the year after Winter's book was published. Hudson Fitch lived another decade. He died July 9, 1928, at age 82. His body was returned to Cleveland, where he was buried at Lake View Cemetery.

It should be noted that the Hudson Fitch who lived his later years in Toledo was not the only person with that name who grew up in Olmsted Township. The other Hudson Fitch was more than 17 years older. He was born September 30, 1828, in Vernon, Connecticut. In 1831, he moved to Olmsted Township with parents, Chester and Betsey. Chester was one of the six Fitch brothers who relocated from Connecticut to Olmsted Township that year. In 1887, that Hudson Fitch moved to Nebraska. He died in Farnam, Nebraska, on April 14, 1915, at age 86.

Research by David Kennedy resulted in finding the account of the younger Hudson Fitch's story in Winter's 1917 book. Further research by him resulted in more information shared here about Fitch's life. Kennedy also provided much of the research for the Civil War stories about Hiram Hubbard and the Soldiers' Aid Society that appeared in Issue 97 of Olmsted 200. Credits for those contributions were mistakenly left out of that issue.

Former Resident Offers Further Thoughts on Hiram Hubbard

In last month's issue, *Olmsted 200* explored the possibility that a folk song called "Hiram Hubbard" might have had some connection to the Hiram Hubbard who spent part of his boyhood in Olmsted Falls, even though he was not executed in the Civil War as the subject of the song was. Kevin Roberts, who formerly owned the property at 7622 Columbia Road where Hubbard once lived, suggested the story. Now, he offers two potential reasons Hubbard's name might have been attached to the song:

One is: "His name has a sing song, up down quality to it; it is easier to sing his name than say, 'Jebediah Copperthwaite.'"

The other is: "As a Union officer, the rebels wanted to hold him accountable for ordering some wartime action or execution that they thought was unjustified under the

laws of war, and he was therefore a ‘murderer,’ but they could not capture him and just made up the song, i.e., it’s all a big revenge fantasy song from the minds of the rebels.”

Roberts, who now lives in Connecticut, also offered a bit of his own family’s Civil War history. He wrote that his paternal grandfather’s family was from Tennessee.

“His father’s side of the family fought for the Union, and his mother’s side for the Confederacy, though both sides were living in Tennessee,” Roberts wrote. “After the war, my great-great-grandfather was gunned down while out plowing, in vengeance for siding with the North during the War. I am sure many OF residents have family histories going back to the Civil War worth exploring.”



Kevin Roberts lived in and oversaw restoration of this house at 7622 Columbia Road. A title search revealed the property once was home to Hiram Hubbard. This photo is courtesy of Kevin Roberts.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include the story of an Olmsted Falls home that was created out of an almost century-old stable 75 years ago.

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.

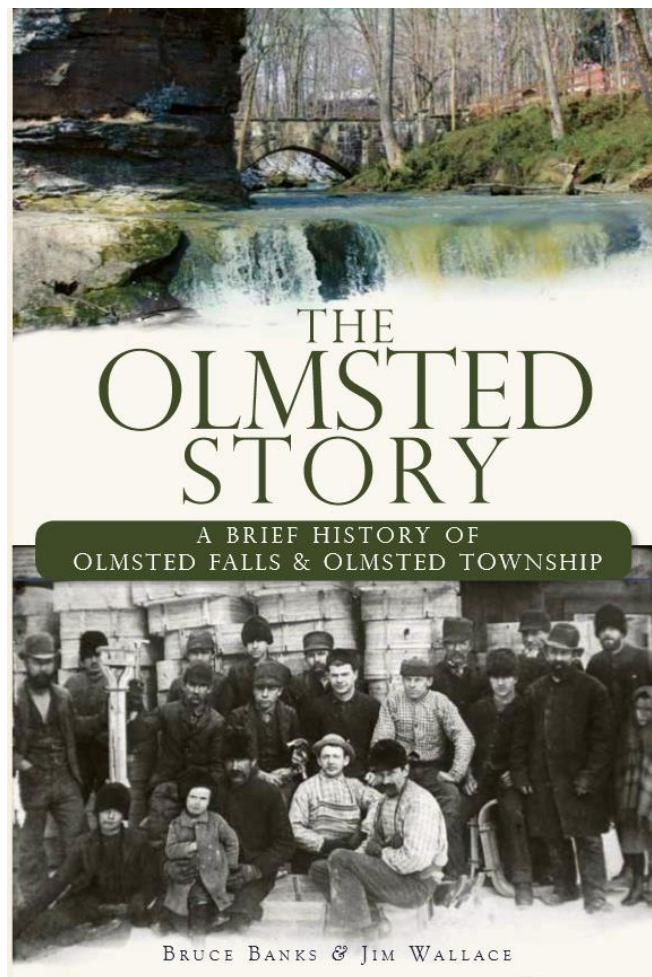
Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted’s history that you would like to have pulled out of *Olmsted 200*’s extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information or photos about the community’s history that you would like to share.

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.



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