



# Olmsted 200

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

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## Olmsted's Vita-Mix Got Its Start a Century Ago

Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township can boast about having good schools, historic buildings, nice homes and beautiful parks, but unlike many of their neighboring communities, they can't lay claim to having much industry, unless you count what is left of a once-bigger greenhouse industry. A notable exception is a company with an international reputation with a world headquarters that sits serenely in Olmsted Township right on the border with Olmsted Falls.

That company is Vita-Mix Corporation. The company settled in Olmsted Township in the 1940s, but it had its beginnings a century ago in 1921 with William Grover Barnard, a man with a knack for salesmanship. But he also had a knack for many vocations. Back in West Point, Illinois, where he lived in the early 1900s, he worked as mayor, undertaker, railroad station agent, banker and real estate agent. That's according to his great-granddaughter, Jodi Berg, current president and chief executive officer of Vita-Mix Corporation, who wrote about him in the introduction to her 2015 book, *The Vitamix Cookbook*.

However, not everything went well for William Barnard. Investments in real estate turned sour because of a drop in land values that cost him about \$10,000 back when that was big money. But his misfortune in real estate eventually became good fortune for the Olmsted community



*This photo shows William Grover Barnard and wife Claire with sons Bill and Louie.*



Greetings from WEST POINT, Illinois

*This early 1900s postcard indicates West Point, Illinois, was a very rural place when William Barnard lived there.*

do well even as the 1920s turned into the Great Depression of the 1930s.

“Even in tight times, my great-grandfather was able to demonstrate that the value was well worth what one would spend,” she wrote. “This cornerstone is foundational to this day.”

As they grew up, Barnard brought his sons, William Barnard Jr. – known as Bill – and Louie Barnard, into the business. They traveled across the country selling their goods, which did not yet include a blender. But that was coming, and so was a move to Ohio.



*These postcards show the Great Lakes Exposition of 1936 and 1937. The left one shows the main entrance, which was just two blocks from Cleveland's Public Square. The seven central pylons were 70 feet high. Those on the sides were 30 feet high. On the far right was Public Auditorium. The right postcard shows an aerial view. Between Municipal Stadium and Lake Erie was the Horticulture Building and gardens. To the left of the stadium was the Hall of Progress and the Automotive Building. At the extreme left was the amusement area and the Streets of the World international village. The exposition covered 135 acres.*

Why would a traveling family from Illinois choose to settle down in Ohio? The Great Lakes Exposition in Cleveland is why. Much like a world fair, the expo covered 135 acres on the Cleveland lakefront with art galleries, botanical gardens, sideshows,

and the many people who would become owners and devotees of Vitamix blenders. To recover from his losses, Barnard became a traveling salesman in 1921 selling – and demonstrating – small housewares. The main product that helped him rebuild his fortune was a 25-cent can opener that provided a cleaner cut than the other can openers at the time.

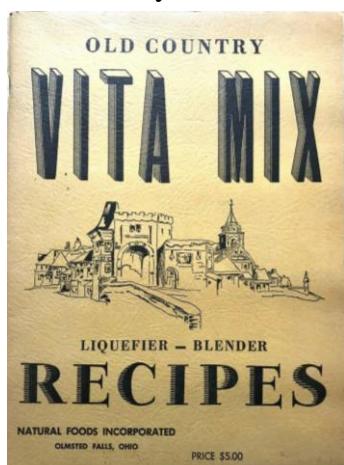
Berg wrote that her great-grandfather, known to family and friends as Papa Barnard, was an entertainer who showed passion for his products, which helped him

rides and more. The Barnards spent two summers demonstrating their products there in 1936 and 1937.

“During their time at the Expo, the Barnard family fell in love with the hardworking people of northeast Ohio,” Berg wrote in her book. “Deciding it was the best place to grow their families and their business, they moved to this great city in 1937, just after the Expo finished.”

By then, the Barnards had developed an interest in improving health through diet, particularly with whole foods rather than processed foods, which were steadily increasing their presence in Americans meals. Among the health food advocates who caught their interest was Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, one of the creators of corn flakes and brother of W.K. Kellogg, who established the cereal company that would carry the family name.

Key elements of the Barnards’ future – and the reason Vita-Mix became what it is and where it is – came together on the Cleveland lakefront. Those elements were: 1) a family of talented salesmen skilled in peddling kitchen wares; 2) their interest in promoting wellness through a diet of whole foods; and 3) their attraction to Cleveland. And then, there was one more element. At the expo, they were introduced to a new product, a blender, and they realized they could use it to help people put more fruits and vegetables into their diets.



*This is one of the early recipe books from the company. An earlier one had a similar cover but it did not have the Vita Mix name on it. In fact, only one page used the Vita Mix name.*



*Dr. John Harvey Kellogg was among the health food experts who influenced the Barnards.*

The blender the Barnards encountered at the Great Lakes Expo was a European import that could handle soft foods and liquids, but the Barnards envisioned something stronger. With the help of a friend with an engineering background, they created the first Vita Mix blender. Bill Barnard’s father-in-law, Frank Pellett, a naturalist, suggested the name. “Vita” is Latin for “life,” and mix is what the blender did.

In 1939, the Barnards opened a health food store, where they sold the blender, along with vitamins, supplements and whole foods. The family business, which previously had been called Barnard Sales, became the Natural Food Institute, although later legal documents listed it as Natural Foods, Incorporated. The Vita Mix blender emerged as the star. It was ideal for the type of live demonstrations that the Barnards had polished over many years of sales on the road.

Early publications from Natural Foods, Incorporated,

called *Old Country Recipes* included pages expressing the company's philosophy about proper nutrition preceding the recipes. The wording seems as though it came right out of one of Papa Barnard's live demonstrations.

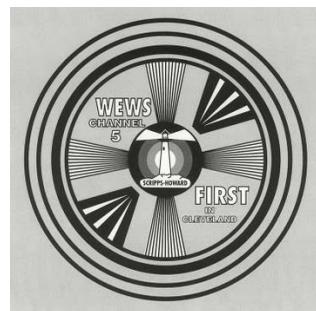


*This is the Vita-Mix Corporation's world headquarters at 8615 Usher Road. It includes, on the right, the wooden house built by Bill Barnard for his family in the 1940s.*

Even though Cleveland had lured the Barnards to northeastern Ohio, Bill Barnard longed for a rural life. That's why, according to Berg, he bought 12 acres in Olmsted Township in 1942. There, he built a simple wooden house with knotty pine walls, which still stands in front of the company's headquarters at 8615 Usher Road. In 1948, the business moved there, too.

The Barnards were ahead of their time in advocating the eating of whole foods, including plenty of fruits and vegetables, rather than processed foods, and in the sales and use of powerful, high-speed blenders. Then, not long after relocating their company to Olmsted Township, they broke new ground in selling by creating the first television infomercial on Ohio's first TV station, WEWS. It was Bill Barnard who persuaded his father in 1949 to take his sales pitch to TV over his father's initial doubts.

*In its early years, WEWS on Channel 5 used this test pattern that boasted it was the first television station in Cleveland. In fact, when it went on the air on December 17, 1947, WEWS was the first television station in Ohio and the 16<sup>th</sup> in the country. A couple of years later, the station broadcast the first infomercial showing William Barnard demonstrating the Vita Mix blender.*



Barnard performed live for the few infomercials, which were broadcast not only in Cleveland but also in other cities. In 1950, he recorded the infomercial, so it could run more often and reach more people. That version still can be seen on YouTube. It runs a little more than 27 minutes. It begins with a slide saying it came from the Natural Foods Institute of Olmsted Falls, Ohio, and then one with the title of the film, "Home Miracles for 1950." Following that is a slide saying it stars W.G. Barnard, who was identified as an author, lecturer and food specialist. After 25 seconds of that introduction, Barnard appears standing behind a Vita Mix blender with an assortment of foods and liquids to put into it.



*William Barnard pointed at the audience several times during his pioneering infomercial for Vita Mix.*

“With health, we have wealth,” Barnard says less than a minute into the infomercial. “We’re the richest person on earth. Without health, you’re a miserable failure.”

From there, he goes on to show the blender, which had a motor that went from 8,000 to 14,000 revolutions per minute. Barnard begins the demonstration using a stainless-steel container, which was standard with Vitamix blenders then, but for the purpose of the demonstration, he switches to one made of glass, so viewers can see what’s happening inside. He also holds up a booklet with 500 recipes for foods that could be made with the Vita Mix. The demonstration is still entertaining more than 70 years later.

That venture into early television went well. The first time it aired, viewers started calling about halfway through, and the calls kept coming in until late that night.

In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the company grew steadily. In 1955, Bill Barnard took over leadership of Natural Foods, Incorporated, from his father. According to documents on file at the Ohio Secretary of State’s Office, he changed the name of the company to NF Incorporated, effective December 31, 1964, but that lasted only 18 months. He changed it to The Vita Mix Corporation effective June 30, 1966. (Later records filed in 2002 indicate the company name dropped the definite article and acquired a hyphen to become Vita-Mix Corporation. However, over the years, the name on the blenders became Vitamix with no hyphen or space in the middle.)

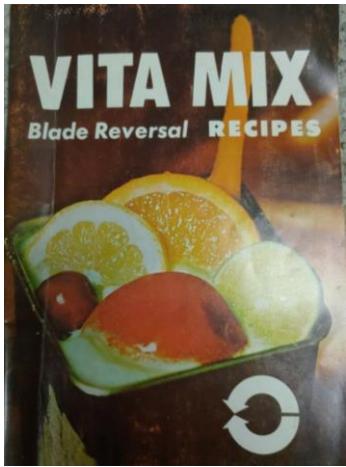
The name changes came after Papa Barnard, who was born in 1887, died in 1964.

The name wasn’t all that changed. Over the years, the company developed various models of Vitamix blenders with different features. The 3600, which was introduced in 1969, was notable for being the first one that could make hundreds of foods ranging from hot soup to ice cream, as well as grind grain and knead bread dough.

The company also offered models, including the 3600, in which the blades could be reversed instantly at either high or low speed without harming the motor or bearings. In 1971, The Vita Mix Corporation published a book, *Vita Mix Blade Reversal Recipes*, compiled by Ruth Mona Barnard, the wife of Bill Barnard. The book stated: “Instant Blade Reversal Means.....364 MPH Head-On



*The Vita Mix 3600 had more power and versatility than previous models.*



*Vita Mix put out this book in 1971 with recipes for blade reversal blenders.*

became chief executive officer in December 1981 and served in that position until January 2010. His brother, William Grover Barnard III – known as Grove – served as president from 1985 until he retired in 1999. From October 1999 until December 2008, John served as president.



*This is how William G. Barnard III was shown with other freshmen in Olmsted Falls High School's 1950 Senorio. Although his nickname was Grove, the yearbook identified him as Bill Barnard.*

The company currently is in the hands of the family's fourth generation. Following work in the hospitality industry, Jodi Berg, who is John Barnard's daughter, joined Vita-Mix in 1997. After initially leading the international division (when the



*Vita-Mix President and CEO Jodi Berg participated in the 2013 dedication of the new Olmsted Falls library with a community meeting room named for William Grover Barnard III.*

Collision Impact." In other words, food traveling at 182 miles per hour would suddenly meet blades going 182 miles per hour the other way when their direction was reversed.

Another notable blender was the Mix'n Machine, which was introduced in 1985. It was the company's the first commercial-grade blender. Since then, commercial-grade Vitamix machines have come to be the preferred blenders in many restaurants.

The third generation of the Barnard family moved into top leadership positions in the 1980s. One of Bill's sons, John,



*The Mix'n Machine was Vita Mix's first commercial-grade blender.*

blenders were sold in only a small number of countries), she moved on to be head of operations, then the household division and then the commercial division. When her father asked her to replace him, she asked for two years to prepare. In 2007, she became vice president. In 2009, she took over as president. In 2011, Berg also assumed the role of chief executive officer.

By 2001, the company was growing so much that its 37,000-square-foot headquarters was no longer big enough. Vita-Mix began an expansion project to add 63,000 square feet to the facility at its 22-acre Olmsted Township site.

The company has expressed its intention to keep its headquarters in Olmsted Township, but when Vita-Mix needed to expand again, it opened an operations

facility in Strongsville for assembling, packaging and shipping blenders in 2013. By June 2014, the company completed another project at its headquarters to expand the engineering department, as well as conference and meeting space, with a three-story addition, along with an expanded parking lot. Meanwhile, the company also opened a 45,000-square-foot call center in Strongsville.

By September 2016, Vita-Mix Corporation was reported to have 1,300 employees, including sales representatives, and was selling its blenders in 140 countries.

In 2020, the company that has spent several decades selling blenders to help people make food added a new product to help them get rid of what they have left. The Vitamix FoodCycler FC-50 is a food waste recycler that transforms food scraps into a nutrient-rich soil additive. It reduces the composting process from weeks or months to just hours.



*These are vintage blenders Vita-Mix displayed at the 2014 Cornerstone Festival. From left, they are the Vita Mix Kitchen Center 2200, Vita-Mixer Maxi-4000 and Vitamatic 500.*

Although the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been a time of great growth for the Vita-Mix Corporation, it has suffered a few setbacks. For example, in February 2006, K-Tec Incorporated, which makes the rival Blendtec blenders, sued Vita-Mix for patent infringement over blending containers. K-Tec charged that Vita-Mix's MP and XP containers copied five-sided containers developed for Blendtec. Vita-Mix contended the containers, which were sold in limited quantities for use with commercial-grade blenders, were based on its own designs and patents that predated those of K-Tec.

In June 2010, a Utah jury ruled in favor of K-Tec and awarded that company \$11 million. Vita-Mix asked the judge to reverse the decision or grant a new trial. Instead, U.S. District Judge Tena Campbell agreed with K-Tec and added \$11 million to the penalty, along with \$1.8 million in interest, for a total penalty of \$23.8 million. In September 2012, the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., affirmed the lower court ruling. That ended a six-year court battle.

In August 2013, Vita-Mix issued a voluntary recall for about 170,000 of its 64-ounce Low-Profile blending containers made between March 2012 and July 2013 because of concerns the mixing blades might break off and cause injury. That followed 18 reports of blades breaking but no injuries.

In a class action lawsuit (Linneman v. Vita-Mix) beginning in 2016, the issue was black flecks of polytetrafluoroethylene, which was used in the seals of blenders, would rub off through use and end up in the blender container. The case resulted in a settlement

covering both household blenders and commercial blenders. Owners of household blenders could receive either \$70 gift cards or blade assembly replacements; owners of commercial blenders could get only replacements. A federal district court approved the settlement in 2017, but the parties argued for the next few years over attorneys' fees.

The company issued another recall in August 2018 for 105,000 blender containers after about a dozen customers reported the containers were separating from the base, which exposed the sharp blades and cut their hands. The recall was for 20-ounce blending cups and eight-ounce blending bowls that been made by March 2018 or earlier. Vita-Mix offered to either replace the recalled containers or provide consumers with repair kits.

Despite those problems, Vitamix blenders have largely enjoyed a reputation for being the best available. Often, the only complaint expressed by reviewers and consumers tends to be that Vitamix blenders are more expensive than those of the competition. Vitamix blenders typically cost several hundred dollars, although used, reconditioned blenders can be bought for much less.

"Overall, if you have some extra money to spend and you love to cook, then treat yourself with the best blender on the market," James Brains wrote in a review for *Business Insider* on February 4, 2019. "If someone were to steal my Vitamix tomorrow, I would eventually replace it once I saved up enough money. It makes so many tedious DIY kitchen projects so much easier and inspired me to eat healthier."

Vitamix blenders also rate well for reliability. As Brains noted in his story, a review published in *Consumer Reports* on February 4, 2016, found that the likelihood of a Vitamix blender experiencing mechanical problems within the first four years of ownership was only about 6 percent, which was significantly lower than blenders for rival brands. For example, Breville blenders had a problem rate of 16 percent and Blendtec had a rate of 15 percent.

That *Consumer Reports* review also found Vitamix blenders placed highest in consumer satisfaction at 96 percent, while Blendtec placed second with a 91 percent rate

and Black & Decker came in lowest at 77 percent.



Olmsted's 2014 Cornerstone Festival included a Vitamix demonstration booth and a Farm to Table display of fruits and vegetables that could be used in Vitamix blenders.

Another example of the standing of the Vitamix brand in the modern American zeitgeist is a skit that aired in October 2014 on NBC-TV's "Saturday Night Live." It featured cast member Vanessa Bayer (who had grown up in the Cleveland suburb of Orange) and guest host Sarah Silverman with a Vitamix Pro Series 750 blender. Bayer's

character raves about the blender's ability to grind fruits, nuts and vegetables, while Silverman's character gets hung up on the \$650 price. The company took it as an honor to be included among some of "the most well-known, highly-recognized brands in the world" that had been spoofed on the show.

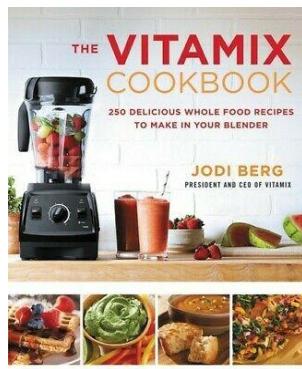
Vita-Mix Corporation has generally been considered a good corporate citizen, and it has repeatedly won awards for being a good place to work. In recent years, it also has increased its visible support for community activities. For example, the company contributed to the new Olmsted Falls Branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library, which opened in February 2013, with a community room named for William Grover Barnard III, who had just died. Vita-Mix also played a big role in the 2014 Cornerstone Festival held at Olmsted Falls Intermediate and Middle Schools to celebrate 200 years of Olmsted history, and the company has been a regular participant in the Olmsted Heritage Days parade held each August (except in the pandemic year of 2020).



*Vita-Mix Corporation's participation in Olmsted Heritage Days parades included a float featuring the first infomercial (left) on August 15, 2013, and one depicting Bill Barnard's house next to company headquarters on August 14, 2014.*

In early 2019, the company announced a 10-year, \$200,000 partnership with the Olmsted Falls City School District. The deal includes naming rights for the high school football field, so it is Vitamix Field at Charles Harding Memorial Stadium. The company also donated \$10,000 in equipment to the district's food service program and pledged to help with the district's business, marketing and science curricula.

Thus, a company dedicated to promoting health and wellness with roots going back a century is contributing to the well-being of the Olmsted community.



*The world headquarters for Vita-Mix Corporation sits at 8615 Usher Road in Olmsted Township, as marked by the sign at left. In 2015, Jodi Berg, president and CEO, put out the cookbook on the right that includes 250 recipes and her version of company history.*

## Olmsted Falls Was Quiet 150 Years Ago

Anyone who thinks Olmsted Falls is a quiet community today should consider what it was like 150 years ago. In the February 3, 1871, edition of Berea's *Grindstone City Advertiser*, local editors L.B. Adams and A.P. Knowlton started their Olmsted column with this item:

*— OUR town seems to have received a quietus of some kind, as nothing any remarkable or exciting takes place. The day or two of sleighing was well improved.*

The next item in the column mentioned "Masonic sociables." The columnists said they understood them to be "a pleasant and profitable way of disposing of good things to eat and talk of." Following that was an item mentioning the village would have unspecified dramatic entertainment that week on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings.

Then, this was the fourth item in the column:

*— LYCEUM goes on finely, as usual, and an increasing interest is manifested. Last week the question was, "Resolved, that woman suffrage would be detrimental to the United States Government." It was discussed with some spirit by Messrs. Knowlton, Fitch, Carpenter and Monks, on affirmative; Jno. Wright, Jo. Lay and Bradford, on the negative. The discussion is to be continued this week, when a decision will be called for. The question the previous week, "Resolved, that the manufacture of alcohol is a benefit to the United States," was decided in the affirmative.*

That debate was held 49 years before women gained the right to vote with passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution in 1920.

The final item in the column was about a common streaked snake that was found alive in Charles Underhill's meadow. The columnists noted that the field was covered completely with snow and they wondered what drove "his snakeship out of his retreat, to bask on a snow bank."

These were the Olmsted ads in the local newspaper 150 years ago.

That column appeared less than two years after the *Advertiser* began covering Olmsted news on a regular basis. The Olmsted column took up less space than ads for five local merchants. They included four in Olmsted Falls: Adams & Osborn, which made tinware and stoves; N.P. Loomis, who sold general merchandise; W.W. Mead, who made harnesses, saddles and whips; and tailor H. Moley. The fifth ad was for Tanney's West View Store, which sold groceries, drugs, dry goods and newspapers.

## West View Is Gone but Not Forgotten

As the lead story in last month's *Olmsted 200* said, the name West View (also written as Westview) disappeared from maps 50 years ago, but several people responded on Facebook and in emails to say it hadn't disappeared from their memories.

The merger of the villages of West View and Olmsted Falls under the name Olmsted Falls took effect on January 1, 1971. Judy Evancho Vassel wrote to say that, when her family bought their property in May of 1971, they thought they were getting a home in West View, but by the time the house was built and they moved in during November, they realized they were in Olmsted Falls.

Not everyone liked the idea of the merger, but some accepted it better than others.

"I remember being upset that we were merging with Olmsted because I really liked the name Westview," Betty Olenick wrote. "So proud now of saying I'm from Olmsted & being an Olmsted Falls graduate."

However, Jim Allen Kwilecki had just four words for the day the villages merged: "Sad day. Freedoms lost."

But Glen DiBlasio countered: "It wasn't a hostile takeover, there wasn't an uprising or declared war. If you seek out the paperwork on the merger, you'll see signatures from both villages. Like people, statues and such, mergers must be viewed in their time period."

Others shared memories of West View from when it was still its own municipality.

"My mother was the clerk/treasurer of West View for many years," Gail Crawford Walker wrote. "I remember her sitting at our kitchen table with a huge ledger as she worked on the books."

Cindy James Petrie wrote on Facebook that she "spent many hours playing on the swings behind the village hall which was by my house I grew up in." Walker responded, "And sometimes I played with you 😊. I think there might have been a wading pool, too?"

“Yes you did,” Petrie replied. “Yes, there was a wading pool. I remember roller skating in it when it was empty cuz there weren’t any sidewalks!!!”

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about an 1866 Olmsted murder that was big news throughout northeastern Ohio and beyond.

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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