



Olmsted 200

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

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Annexation Reawakens from Time to Time

Proposals for the annexation of Olmsted Township land to one or more of its neighbors never go away for long. They keep coming back in different forms.

After the 1971 merger of Olmsted Falls and West View was completed without the proposed annexation of Olmsted Township following it, annexation talk died down for several years. But it wasn't completely dead, as was noted in the August 14, 1980, issue of *The News Sun*.

“No matter how some might like to tiptoe around that ‘sleeping dog’ of an issue – annexation of Olmsted

“No matter how some might like to tiptoe around that ‘sleeping dog’ of an issue – annexation of Olmsted Township to the City of Olmsted Falls – old bowser manages to shake off his fitful nap every so often, if only for a quick looksee before returning to a state of slumber.” – R. David Heileman

Township to the City of Olmsted Falls – old bowser manages to shake off his fitful nap every so often, if only for a quick looksee before returning to a state of slumber,” reporter R. David Heileman wrote.

The occasion of his story was a meeting some township residents had to discuss the issue that summer. Among those at the gathering was Robert Venefra, a township trustee, who conceded

he was not opposed to such an annexation the way he was in 1974, the last time it had

come up for a decision by township residents. He said one reason for the change in his position was that Olmsted Falls voters had approved a change in the city's charter that would guarantee representation on council for residents in the annexed township area. That change also provided that members of the township's fire and police departments would remain employed and an election for mayor would be held soon after the annexation.

Venefra viewed those changes as "more than fair" but said he was undecided on the issue and had the impression township residents had little desire for such a change.



This August 14, 1980, News Sun story reflected on the recurring nature of attempts to annex Olmsted Township land.

Olmsted Falls Mayor William Mahoney, who also attended the meeting, said he had the same impression about the lack of interest for annexation among township residents. However, he welcomed the possibility as good for the city and the township, as well as a way to protect the integrity of the school system from desires by North Olmsted or Berea for expansion. At that time, the school district had about 2,600 students.

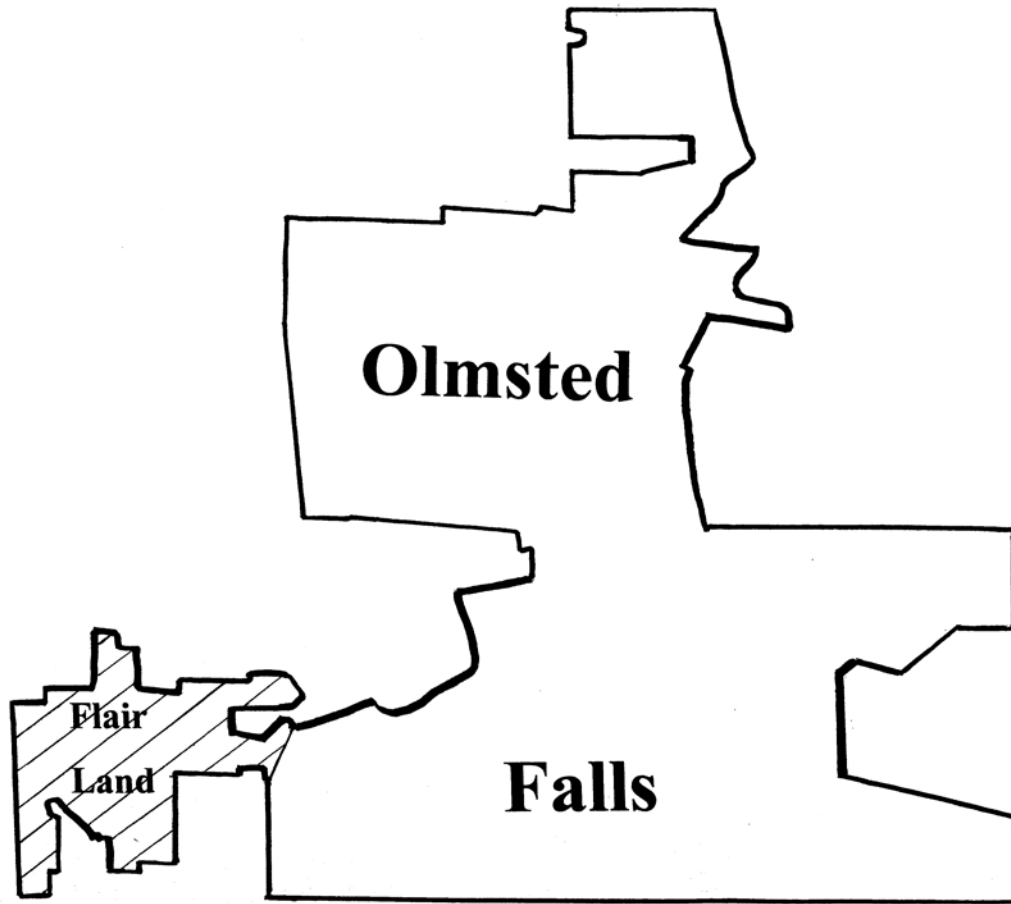
Someone else who favored the annexation of the township to the city was Jeanene Kress, who hosted the annexation discussion at her Adele Lane home. Although she conceded the issue did not have enough support in the township, she said about annexation, "I am in favor because I feel city government needs to be more representative and because there is duplication of services between the Falls and the township and because our school system operates in the two communities." That was 31 years before Kress was elected to serve as a township trustee, which she continues to do.

Kress, Venefra and Mahoney had good reason to believe township voters would not agree to annexation. The local Independent Citizens Advisory Committee had distributed a survey to every home in the township in the spring and summer of 1979 that revealed about 73 percent of residents opposed annexation to Olmsted Falls. Thus, no serious attempts to annex the whole township to Olmsted Falls came up for several years.

Annexation issue returned with a Flair.

However, soon after that informal meeting to talk about annexation, a new annexation proposal arose. Flair Corporation revealed it was seeking to have about 200 acres of township land annexed to Olmsted Falls for the development of multi-family and single-family housing under its subsidiary, LaBelle Harbour Developments. The

company had wanted to build housing there for several years. In 1978 township trustees approved the rezoning that would have allowed for the housing development, but township voters then rejected the zoning changes in a referendum by a wide margin. That left Flair with land it considered to be undevelopable.



The land the Flair Corporation wanted to annex to Olmsted Falls was connected to the city by a small section of Usher Road.

By early 1981, Olmsted Township Trustee Robert Venefra reportedly said the township was “fighting an uphill battle” to prevent the annexation of what then was said to be 180 acres – about 3 percent of the total area of the township – west of Usher Road, south of Schady Road, north of Sprague Road and well east of Stearns Road to the city. He said that after the county commissioners held a hearing on the annexation issue in late February. One reason the township’s position was so weak was a change in state law that removed the requirement that a landowner had to live on township land proposed for annexation to a neighboring city.

In May 1981, Cuyahoga County Commissioners Virgil Brown and Vincent Campanella held an outdoor meeting on a portion of the land near Usher Road with township residents opposed to the annexation. Township officials argued the annexation would create awkward boundaries because the land was contiguous with Olmsted Falls only along a small section of Usher Road. Nearby residents opposed to the annexation complained that the proposed development would deprive them of the township’s

“country atmosphere” and the annexation could be the beginning of dividing the township up among neighboring cities.

The county commissioners delayed a decision on the matter three times before voting two to one to reject the annexation request on June 15, 1981. That pleased Donna Haluscak of the Independent Citizens Advisory Committee, a group of township residents opposed to the annexation. Flair appealed the decision on June 22, but almost two years later in April 1983, Common Pleas Judge James Sweeney ruled against the company. Venefra said he was “ecstatic” about that, adding that he would prefer any annexation attempt of the township to be all or nothing, not just parts of the township.

But that wasn’t the end of the matter. On February 6, 1984, the Ohio Court of Appeals, Eighth District, overturned the lower court’s ruling. Olmsted Falls Mayor David Fortier reacted to the new ruling by pushing for annexation of the entire township. Venefra said that would be OK with him as long as township residents favored it. But when about 150 residents of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township met at the high school that April, those who did most of the talking opposed it.

In May 1984, the township sought a legal injunction to prevent Olmsted Falls from going forward with the annexation of the Flair land. The township’s argument was that the land was not really adjacent to Olmsted Falls and that attaching it to the city would isolate a section of the township from the rest of the township. But before a judge could rule on the matter, the township trustees chose in July 1984 to withdraw their case because attorneys told them they had little chance of success.

Although that seemed to clear the way for Olmsted Falls to annex the Flair land, nothing was simple in this matter. On October 8, 1984, members of city council voted four to three to reject the annexation. Yet Mayor Fortier was not ready to give up on it. In late 1985, he sought creation of a committee with five members from the Falls and five from the township to consider the annexation of the entire township to the city. But that proposal ran into opposition from the township, and then on February 21, 1986, Fortier lost his life when a truck hit his car in Lorain County.

La Belle Harbour OK’d by trustees

The Flair Corporation came close in 1987 to being able to develop its land without annexing it to Olmsted Falls, as this News Sun headline indicates.

Early in 1987, Flair Corporation tried again to develop its land, then up to 201 acres, by making a new proposal to the township. Instead of 90 single-family units and 370 multi-family units, the company wanted to build 90 single-family units and 654 townhouses. Nearby residents expressed concerns about possible flooding problems and a tertiary sewage treatment plant, as well as opposition to the townhouses, but in June 1987, the Olmsted Township Zoning Board voted three to two to approve the company’s plans.

“It will help our tax base, help the present residents get water and maybe sewers and not harm our school system,” board member Al Arlo told the *News Sun* about his decision to vote for the development.

About a month later, the township trustees gave their approval. They expected the township to receive \$202,896 and the school system to receive \$708,337 in tax revenues from the LaBelle Harbour development. But that didn’t sit well with many township residents. More than 300 of them signed petitions to put the issue on the November 1987 ballot, repeating what happened several years earlier. As the election approached, Trustee Robert Stackhouse predicted that if voters rejected the rezoning needed for the development, “the builder will seek annexation to Olmsted Falls and the residents of this area will have the townhouses anyway.”

That wasn’t the only issue on the ballot that November affecting the township’s future. Voters in both Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls were asked to decide whether to authorize creation of a commission to consider the possibility of making the two communities one. It was to be similar to the commission that led to the merger of Olmsted Falls and West View in 1971. A majority of Olmsted Falls voters approved that issue, but township voters opposed it by close to a two-to-one ratio: 1,612 to 897. Supporters blamed a lack of publicity for the issue’s defeat.

Stackhouse, who won re-election as a trustee, said he wished for an end of attempts to annex township land to neighboring cities. “Annexation is like a cancer,” he told the *News Sun*. “It seems to want to grow and the perpetrators say to hell with the people. They just want to grab, grab, grab.”

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And what happened to the issue of rezoning the land for the Flair Corporation’s LaBelle Harbour development? Township voters opposed it, too. Then, within the next few months, Flair officials asked the Cuyahoga County commissioners to annex the land to Olmsted Falls, as Stackhouse had predicted before the election.

Gregory Engelking, the chairman of the township’s zoning commission hoped Olmsted Falls City Council would again reject the proposed annexation. He also made this prediction reported in the *News Sun*: “If Olmsted Falls does accept this development, they just blow any chances of a future merger with the township. This will do nothing but widen the gap of the two communities.”

By May 1988, Olmsted Falls City Council agreed to the annexation of what then was 206 acres of the Flair land. The county commissioners held a hearing on the matter on May 8. On June 6, 1988, the commissioners approved the annexation after their attorney advised them that Flair had met all the legal requirements for it. The township

appeal of that decision was unsuccessful. Late that November, city council voted five to two to approve the annexation.

Thus, a decade after Flair first attempted to get its land rezoned by the township, it succeeded in its second attempt to annex the land to Olmsted Falls and clear the way for its planned development. But while the communities went back and forth on that front, another suitor emerged for another piece land on a different side of Olmsted Township in the 1980s. The result had bigger effects on all the communities involved. That story will be told next month in *Olmsted 200*.

Raymond Moley Made a Mark on Olmsted and the Nation

Who was the most famous person to come from Olmsted Falls? You might get several answers to that question, but for many years during the middle of the 20th century, the most common answer likely would have been Raymond Moley. He was a key figure in the establishment of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and even was credited with coining the term "New Deal," but that came after he played important roles in education and electrification in his hometown.

A reminder of the prominent role he played nationally came 70 years ago this month in June 1949, when he gave the commencement address for graduates of Baldwin-Wallace College in a ceremony held in Metropolitan Park. The subject of his speech was: "Is Self-Reliance a Lost Art?" It's not clear how he answered that question, but he had plenty of life experiences to draw upon.

Some biographies of Moley call him a Berean because he was born in Berea on September 27, 1886, and lived there in early childhood, but he was raised mostly in Olmsted Falls. As a young adult, he became locally prominent before he became nationally known.

His grandparents were Hypolite Moley, who was born in France but met his wife, Mary Ann Kane Moley, while living in Dublin, Ireland. They came to America in 1847 and initially settled in New York before locating in Cleveland. They moved to Olmsted Falls in 1863 in the middle of the Civil War. According to Walter Holzworth's 1966 book on Olmsted history, Hypolite Moley contributed to the war effort in two ways. One was to use his French military training to prepare young recruits for service. The other was to make Union Army uniforms in a tailor shop that



Moley's store was located along what now is Columbia Road just south of the railroad tracks. This undated photo shows the site after the store burned down. Barnum's grocery store later stood on the site until it burned down in the 1960s. A replica of a 19th century train station built by Clint Williams – home to Pinot's Palette – stands there now.

employed 25 women under a government contract. In an 1874 business directory for Olmsted Falls, he was still listed as a tailor and a dealer in ready-made clothing. He died in 1886, the year of Raymond's birth. His wife died in 1916.

Among their four sons was Felix, who was commonly known as Phil. He worked in his father's tailor shop and store and went on to spend six decades selling clothes in either Olmsted Falls or Berea or both before his death in 1925 at age 79. In 1872, he married Agnes Fairchild of Berea.

One of their five children was Raymond, who was born when the family lived in Berea. In 1893, the family moved to Olmsted Falls, where Raymond was educated in the Union Schoolhouse that stood on the Village Green from 1873 until 1960. The school had two classrooms on the ground floor, one for grades one through three and one for grades four through six, and one in the big room on the second floor for the next four grades.

"Some called it a high school but it was by modern standards only the grades from the seventh to the tenth inclusive," Moley wrote in a biographical sketch on January 21, 1966, for inclusion in Holzworth's book. "I was able to skip the sixth grade."

After he graduated from the school in 1902, Moley entered Baldwin University, where he took preparatory classes for two years to complete his high school education, which he couldn't do in Olmsted Falls. In 1904, he took a job teaching eight grades of students in a one-room school along Kennedy Ridge in northern Olmsted Township (just a few years before that section of the township broke away to form North Olmsted). After a year of teaching, he returned to Baldwin University. Because he had taken some classes while teaching, he skipped ahead to the senior class, so he graduated in 1906 with a degree of Bachelor of Philosophy. As he wrote, that was "a degree which was given to students who had not taken Greek."



This portrait of Raymond Moley was taken when he was a young adult.

Raymond Moley went back to the Olmsted Falls school to teach students in seventh and eighth grades for one year before the school board appointed him to be superintendent. "I might add to remind the present generation of the vanishing value of the dollar that my salary on Kennedy Ridge was \$35 a month, as the fourth teacher in Olmsted Falls it was \$45 a month," he wrote. "In my new job in the fall of 1907 I received \$70 a month."

By the time Moley became superintendent, the school had added another year of instruction but the state still recognized it as having only two high school grades. The school board would pay tuition for those students who wanted to complete their high

school education by studying in Berea, so Moley persuaded the board to let him try to establish “a real high school in Olmsted Falls” and keep that tuition money at home.

Late in 1907, he went to Gray’s Armory in Cleveland, where the state superintendent of schools was giving a speech to teachers. After the speech, Moley followed him to the dressing room off stage and got him to agree that Olmsted Falls could be recognized as having a three-year high school if it would set up a school library and establish courses in Latin and physics. Moley then held a concert at the school to raise money for a small library. He got the school board to agree to fund the purchase of equipment for teaching physics. The woman who taught the seventh and eighth grades was able to teach Latin. Moley himself taught 14 classes each day, including high school English, physics and botany.

“The latter I had never studied but that was no obstacle for I did my home work,” Moley wrote. “And so we were officially recognized with a nice certificate from the State of Ohio.”

During his term as superintendent, classes graduated from the three-year high school in 1908 and 1909. In 1909, Olmsted Township’s school district, which was still separate from Olmsted Falls, needed a superintendent for its set of one-room and two-room schools, and the school board offered Moley the job.

“I agreed to add that to my duties in Olmsted Falls if the township would require their schools, six in number, to teach one Saturday in the month so that I could visit them,” he wrote. “This I accomplished by driving to the various district schools every Saturday.”

Moley received 10 dollars a month for serving as the township’s superintendent and another six dollars a month serving as village clerk for Olmsted Falls. With that money added to his salary as superintendent in Olmsted Falls, his total monthly income in the fall of 1909 became 86 dollars.

That didn’t last long, however. A bad cough that began that September was diagnosed as tuberculosis in December 1909 by doctors in Berea and Cleveland. After Christmas, Moley went to a sanitarium in Silver City, New Mexico, to recuperate. By June 1910, he was well enough to return to Olmsted Falls for the summer. “A single afternoon of tennis ripped open the scars and I had the job of getting well all over again,” Moley wrote. “This time I went to Denver where I remained eleven months until August, 1911. That ended my teaching career in Olmsted Falls.”

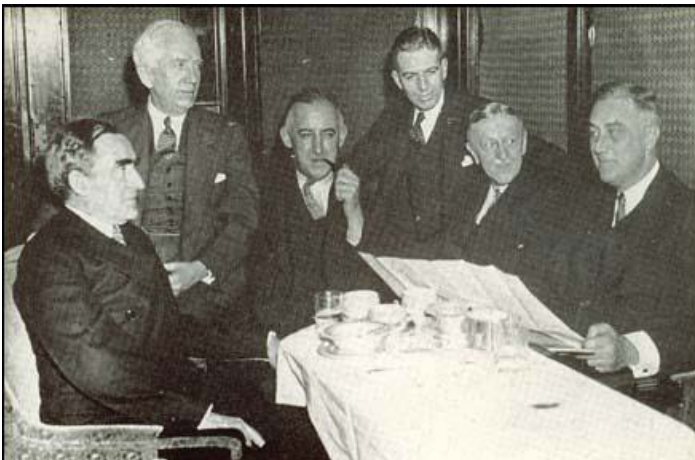
When he returned to Olmsted Falls in 1911, Moley set his sights on getting elected as mayor. At the time, village residents were sharply divided between those who commuted to work in Cleveland and the so-called “natives.” Moley was the candidate of the natives. His opponent, Edward Holton, worked for a Cleveland corporation. Moley won and worked with a council consisting of four natives, including his father, one commuter and a neutral member.

During his term as mayor, the village passed a bond issue and used the money to fund construction of a distribution system to bring electricity to Olmsted Falls. Moley negotiated what he called “a very favorable contract” for electric power from a subsidiary of a company that had built a generating plant in Lorain and was eager to move into the territory of the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company.

“I like to believe that the establishment of a recognized high school and the bringing of electric service to the Village were my contributions to a community which had meant so much to me and had been so generous in the opportunities for a happy and productive life which it offered,” Moley wrote. “This is my modest contribution to the annals of a great small town.”

Moley declined to run for re-election as mayor because, in 1912, he took a teaching position at West High School in Cleveland. He subsequently moved out of Olmsted Falls. He earned a master’s degree from Oberlin College in 1913 and a doctorate from Columbia University in 1918.

At the time Moley left Olmsted Falls, he was only 26, which left him plenty of time for bigger accomplishments. In 1916, he married Eva Dall and joined the faculty of Western Reserve University, where he taught political science for three years, after which he served as director of the Cleveland Foundation for four years during which he helped reform criminal justice in Cleveland. Meanwhile, in 1917, Moley became director of Americanization for the Ohio State Council of Defense. He later became chairman of the Citizens Bureau in Cleveland, which provided naturalization classes and legal aid for immigrants.



Raymond Moley is in the center of this 1932 photo of Franklin Roosevelt’s Brain Trust advisors. Others, from left, are Cary Grayson, Norman Davies, Rexford Tugwell, William Woodin and Roosevelt.

In 1923, Moley went to Columbia University in New York to become a professor of public law. From 1923 to 1931, he also served as an expert in criminal law administration for New York and other states.

Moley worked in 1928 for the election of Franklin Roosevelt as governor of New York. Roosevelt then appointed him research director of the state’s Commission on the Administration of Justice. In 1932, as Roosevelt ran for president, he called on Moley to

lead a group of university professors to advise him on national issues. The group became known as Roosevelt’s Brain Trust. Moley wrote many of Roosevelt’s campaign speeches and then served as Roosevelt’s chief strategist during his period as president-elect.

associates considered him a nervous, sensitive fellow, one whose feelings could be easily offended.”

Moley’s first marriage ended in divorce but yielded twin sons. He had a daughter with his second wife, Frances.

After he suffered a heart attack while on a trip to New York in 1974, his health remained poor. Raymond Moley died in Arizona on February 18, 1975.

Readers Who Have Never Lived in Olmsted Love It Anyway

Although most of *Olmsted 200*’s readers have lived in Olmsted Falls or Olmsted Township at some time during their lives, some people take an interest in Olmsted history because of family connections. That’s the case with Dave Simmerer of Hubbardston, Massachusetts.

“Please send my love to all my Simmerer relations out there,” he wrote recently. “At one time I attended the Simmerer Family Reunions in Seville, Ohio, quite a few times between 2005 and 2011. Met a lot of my Simmerer Family. I am hoping to renew my contact with the Ohio Simmerers.”

Of course, the Simmerer name was known well in Olmsted Falls for several decades because Philip Simmerer and then three of his four sons from 1893 to 1971 ran the hardware store in the building now known as the Grand Pacific Hotel.

In addition to the Ohio branch of the family, Dave Simmerer has maintained connections with Simmerers from Talheim and Seitingen in southern Germany. Several have visited him in New England, and he has visited them in Germany.

Another reader who has never lived in Olmsted but has family connections is Fred Peltz, great-grandson of Joseph Peltz, who was a partner in the hardware store with Philip Simmerer. His son, Doug Peltz, has been very diligent about researching his family’s history and sharing photos and information he has found with *Olmsted 200*, as was the case in last month’s story about a recently translated Peltz family letter from Germany.

“I always enjoy your newsletter but even more so when it relates directly to my family,” Fred Peltz wrote. “I am so glad Doug shared this research and story with you. We have all been quite impressed with how far our own little MysteryDoug.com has taken this quest. It was such a joy to meet and share stories with Alice Stillwell McPeak who travelled alone from California to Nags Head, NC, to join our family reunion! Who would ever dream that a simple family trip and stop by the old family cemetery [Chestnut Grove in Olmsted Falls] with a young teenager would lead to such a journey? The Peltz family bench and the missing headstone and gravesite for Joseph Peltz, the recently restored village with Peltz Simmerer Hardware in bold letters, the historic artifacts posted on the walls in the Grand [Pacific Hotel], all ignited a passion in my son who was at the

time but a few years younger than I was the last time I saw Olmsted for my Grandmother Myrtle Peltz's funeral."

Still to Come

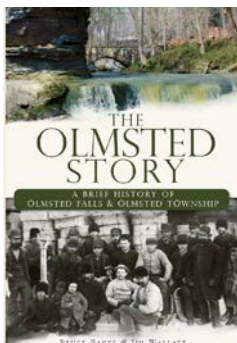
The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about how Olmsted Township lost the Bagley Road corridor to Berea and other stories about Olmsted history.

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, Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Florida, 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. 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 the Village Bean in Olmsted Falls and the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.

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