



Olmsted 200

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

Issue 72

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Township Annexation Talks Led to Different Merger

Sometimes, elections are good for settling matters. Sometimes, elections leave matters very unsettled.

That was the case for Olmsted Township at the end of 1968. In two elections that year, township voters first rejected annexation to Olmsted Falls by a wide margin and then rejected annexation to West View by just a little more than 5 percent of the vote. They also rejected a 2-mill operating levy for the township.

Thus, by the end of 1968, the township was broke and uncertain of its fate.

“Olmsted Township is in a fix,” *Plain Dealer* reporter Earl Quebedeaux wrote a few days after the November 5 election. “The wolf is at its door.” The headline of his story was: “Olmsted Twp. Awaits Annexation by Pieces.”

Olmsted Twp. Awaits Annexation by Pieces

This headline appeared in the Plain Dealer on November 9, 1968, a few days after Olmsted Township residents rejected annexation to West View, as well as a 2-mill operating levy.

In the story, Richard Radigan, the township trustee who had favored annexation as long as it was all or nothing, expressed his concerns that the township would have to make big budget cuts because of the defeat of the operating levy and face piecemeal annexation attempts.

“Berea wants the part of the township on the east side of the Rocky River valley. And North Olmsted wants the half on the west side.” – former Olmsted Township Trustee Richard Radigan

“Berea wants the part of the township on the east side of the Rocky River valley,” he told the *Plain Dealer*. “And North Olmsted wants the half on the west side.”

West View Mayor Allan Mills expressed interest in pursuing a merger of West View and Olmsted Falls with

the hope the combined municipality could then annex the township. But Radigan doubted Berea and North Olmsted would stand by to let that happen. North Olmsted Mayor Ralph Christman confirmed his city was interested in annexing township land.

By December, the township faced not only a tight budget but also the resignation of six of the seven members of its police department, including the chief, as well as the resignation of Nicholas Ziegler, the township’s clerk, over a dispute with two trustees. Ziegler followed up by telling the *Plain Dealer* the township’s status was antiquated.

“It really is an outmoded form of government,” he said. “Township government has no system of checks and balances. Two of the three trustees can team up and it makes absolutely no difference what the third one thinks.”

More annexation plans appear.

Although the issue of annexation to West View seemingly had been settled in the November election, it remained a heated topic into early 1969. Trustee Fred Mauer accused annexation proponents of using scare tactics to get residents to sign petitions for annexation, and the Olmsted Citizens for Merger Committee issued a statement accusing annexation opponents of “playing the same old game of intimidation.”

By February 1969, six proposals for different types of annexation emerged – everything from another attempt to attach the entire township to West View to annexing pieces of the township to neighboring communities, as well as to annex properties on both sides of Westlawn Boulevard in West View to Berea.

All those proposals were possible because the Ohio Revised Code at the time provided three different methods for annexation – one initiated by a municipality wanting to annex land (as Olmsted Falls and West View had attempted with the township in

1968), one initiated by voters of the area to be annexed and one initiated by landowners in the area to be annexed. Soon, the county commissioners received four sets of petitions involving township land and set hearings in April and May to consider them – one to annex the entire township to West View and three to annex parts of the township to Berea. Later, the commissioners also scheduled a hearing for the Westlawn Boulevard proposal.

With all that going on, North Olmsted backed off pursuing any township land until after the county commissioners could hold their hearings.

In April 1969 – in a story headlined, “Annexation Fever Grows in Olmsted Twp. Area” – the *Plain Dealer* reported another annexation proposal had emerged. It said developer Spartico DiBenedetto had bought a Methodist boys farm with land straddling the Olmsted Township-West View border and had requested its annexation to Berea. The land was described as bounded on the north by Bagley Road, on the west by Lewis Road and Rocky River and on the south by the Penn Central Railroad tracks.

“Somewhere in Cleveland there is a balding, white-haired map-maker who bursts into tears every time he sees another annexation petition from Olmsted Township, Olmsted Falls or Westview Village.” – Plain Dealer, April 10, 1969

As the unidentified *Plain Dealer* writer described the situation, “Somewhere in Cleveland there is a balding, white-haired map-maker who bursts into tears every time he sees another annexation petition from Olmsted Township, Olmsted Falls or Westview Village.”

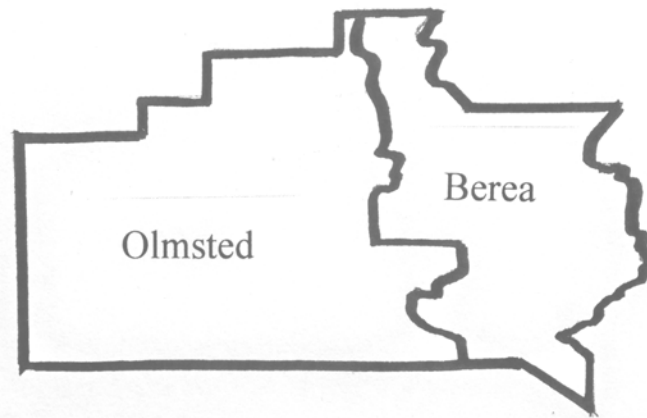
The county commissioners held their hearings but delayed a decision. In July, supporters of the petition to annex the entire township to West View changed their request. In hopes of improving the outcome, they chose to exclude the portions proposed for annexation to Berea and seek annexation of the rest of the township to West View.

“We found the conflict between the petitions has placed the commissioners in a very unenviable position,” Jennie Veinfortner, a Cook Road resident and a leader of the West View annexation effort, told the *Plain Dealer*. “We feel this leaves the commissioners with only one choice. I’m sure they will approve our request.”

They didn’t. On July 14, 1969, the Cuyahoga County commissioners rejected the five annexation plans submitted to them. They rejected annexing the township to West View because it would have left Olmsted Falls as an isolated island inside West View. They rejected the proposals to attach parts of the eastern township to Berea because it would have created “fingers of land” belonging to Berea. They also rejected switching Westlawn Boulevard from West View to Berea without saying why.

But Commissioner Hugh Corrigan suggested the commissioners would consider seriously a plan that would attach the eastern section of the township to Berea and the rest of the township to a combined municipality of Olmsted Falls and West View.

This is what the map would have looked like under a proposal by Cuyahoga County Commissioner Hugh Corrigan to have Berea annex the eastern side of Olmsted Township and to have a combined municipality of Olmsted Falls and West View annex the rest of Olmsted Township.



Two weeks later, *Plain Dealer* reporter Judith McCluskey wrote, “Olmsted Township residents are like cornered mice surrounded by lean, hungry cats. Every southwest community bordering the township’s attractive acreage wants to annex part or all of it and most have tried this year.”

Villages consider their own merger.

Before Corrigan made his suggestion, people from Olmsted Falls and West View already had begun work on part of that scenario. On June 13, 1969, a six-member panel called the Olmsted Falls-West View Consolidation Commission – with three members from each municipality – met for the first time to consider plans for the merger of their two villages. They had hoped to put the issue on the ballot in November 1969 but couldn’t work out certain issues in time to meet the election filing deadline.

“Our commission members want to do this right, and it is a shame that we must be delayed further, but the extra time will be used wisely,” Norman Sherbert, chairman of the commission, told the *Berea News*.

They did use the extra time wisely and were able to have a merger proposal ready for the May 5, 1970, primary election ballot. Among the issues that had to be resolved was whether the merged community would be wet or dry. At the time, West View permitted bars and taverns; Olmsted Falls did not. The compromise was to allow the dry part to remain dry and the wet part to remain wet, at least initially.

The commission’s proposed consolidated community would cover 3.47 square miles with an estimated population of about 4,900, which was just shy of the 5,000 residents needed to become a city. At the time, Olmsted Falls covered 1.52 square miles with a population of about 2,400, and West View covered 1.95 square miles with a population of about 2,500. Olmsted Township covered 10.42 square miles with a

population of about 7,000 – large enough to be a city if it were a municipality instead of a township.

Although it was generally called a merger, it technically was an annexation of Olmsted Falls to West View. But even though West View was the village that would acquire its neighbor, it was agreed the new consolidated community would be called Olmsted Falls.

The voters of both villages approved the merger, but then new complications arose. The merger contract they had drawn up called for the villages to become one on January 1, 1971, but some people wondered if wording on the May 5 ballot actually meant the merger became effective as soon as voters approved it – or May 25, when election results were certified.

Another issue was about how to fill the new community's offices. The plan was for the new council to have six members with three from Olmsted Falls and three from West View. Three West View council members would resign to make way for those from Olmsted Falls, and they would draw lots to determine the lengths of their terms. But lawyers for West View and the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections contended that the three council members from Olmsted Falls would be able to serve out only the unexpired terms of the members from West View they would replace.

The merger plan also called for creating new offices for mayor, clerk and treasurer, who would be elected in the November 1970 election. However, under Ohio law at the time, municipal officials were supposed to be elected to full terms only in odd-numbered years, not even-numbered years like 1970.

It took a declaratory order by a Common Pleas Court judge to sort all that out. The Olmsted Falls-West View merger went through as planned. The new, larger Village of Olmsted Falls emerged on January 1, 1971, with Allan Mills as mayor.



Signs such as this one disappeared after West View and Olmsted Falls merged in 1971. This photo of it is courtesy of Bill Anderer, who says it hangs on the inside of his garage door.

Results of the 1970 Census showed the community's population was more than originally suspected. It was close to 5,500 – big enough to become a city – but state officials agreed to let Olmsted Falls remain a village until issues of setting up the new government could be worked out.

In the May 4, 1971, election, village residents elected 15 people to serve on a commission to develop a new charter for Olmsted Falls.

In May 1972, Mayor Mills asked state officials to allow Olmsted Falls to become a city. They agreed. Olmsted Falls soon became Ohio's 231st city. Mills said that removed much "bureaucratic red tape," such as the need to get state permits to put up traffic signals. City status also protected Olmsted Falls from having any part of its territory annexed to a neighboring community.

Another advantage of city status was it allowed the Olmsted Falls Local School District to become the Olmsted Falls City School District in 1975. That gave district officials more autonomy. The district no longer had to answer to the county board of education.

What did not change was talk of annexing all or parts Olmsted Township to Olmsted Falls or other neighboring communities. *Olmsted 200* will have more on other annexation attempts next month.

German Letter Responded to Misfortune in Olmsted Falls

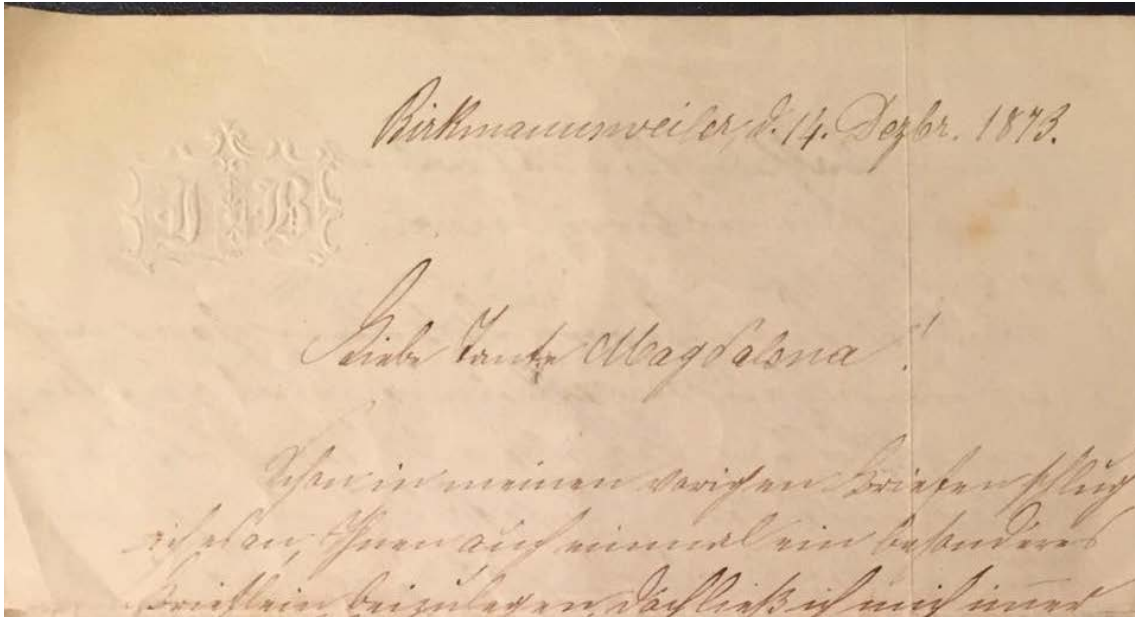
Olmsted Falls is a good community for a historian because so many clues to its history are in plain sight – including restored buildings downtown and the carved blocks and millstones in the park that were left over from the quarries that once operated there, as well as dozens of old photos that have been passed on over the decades. But sometimes, clues to the community's history are found thousands of miles away.

As longtime *Olmsted 200* readers know, some of those clues have been dug up by Doug Peltz, a San Francisco resident and descendant of Peltz family members who lived in Olmsted Falls up until about a century ago. In the past few years, his research has yielded information and photos about his Olmsted ancestors that he has shared with *Olmsted 200* readers. His research has led him to a relative who also lives in California, as well as to Minnesota, where a branch of the Peltz family settled, and to Germany, where the family originated before immigrating to the United States in the mid-1800s.

The latest subject of his research is a letter written in German from Jakob Bezner to Maria Magdalena Peltz, Doug's great-great-great-grandmother. She came to America in 1854, one year before she married Florian Peltz. They made their home and operated a wagon wheel shop in the house that still stands at 7486 River Road in Olmsted Falls.

Although he acquired the letter last year, it took a while before Doug Peltz could learn what it says.

"Indeed it is an old letter," Peltz wrote recently. "The handwriting is incredibly difficult to read, written in a very old-fashioned German script – nearly unintelligible, even for a modern German-speaker!"



This is the top of the 1873 letter from Jakob Bezner in Germany to his Aunt Magdalana Peltz in Olmsted Falls with his embossed initials in the upper-left corner.

What he could read without the help of a translator was it was written on December 14, 1873, to his great-great-great-grandmother from her nephew, Jakob Bezner, whose initials, “J.B.,” are beautifully embossed in the corner of the stationery. He lived in Birkmannsweiler in Württemberg, which is now part of the third-largest German state, Baden-Württemberg.

Doug Peltz obtained the letter from Alice Stilwell McPeak. She was the daughter of Minnie Stilwell Peltz, the second wife of his great-great-grandfather, Joseph Peltz. Joseph and Minnie moved from Olmsted Falls to Los Angeles in 1920. Four years ago, Doug found McPeak in Penryn, California, which was just two hours from his home in San Francisco. She was 84 years old at the time and shared stories of Joseph, Minnie and other Peltzes, as well as old photographs, including photos of the Olmsted Falls drugstore Joseph Peltz ran before and after he partnered with brother-in-law Philip Simmerer to run a hardware store in the building now known as the Grand Pacific Hotel.

“Somewhere around here is a very old letter, handwritten in German,” McPeak told Doug at the time. “I believe it belonged to Grandpa Peltz.” Disappointed that she couldn’t find it, she said, “I know it will turn up!”

It did turn up last year, when McPeak was packing up her belongings for her move from California to her new home in Vancouver, Washington. “Found it!” she told Doug Peltz in a text message with a big smile emoticon before sending it to him.

“Pause for a moment and reflect on the extraordinary journey of this letter, for it is clearly a letter of great significance,” he wrote. “Not only did it cross an enormous span of distance, but it crossed an enormous span of time as well. I don’t just mean the fact that it survived to present day (which is extraordinary!). Think about it: this letter

was meaningful enough, that Joseph saved it, even after his mother died (1907), and saw fit to bring it with him as an old man, all the way to California (1920), where it had remained ever since, and now resides in my home in San Francisco (thank you, dear Alice!!!).”

At long last, Peltz has had the letter transcribed and then translated. “Why do you think this letter was something Joseph saved and even cherished?” he asked. “This letter was clearly special. So what happened to our family in 1873?”

Answering his own questions, he wrote, “Recall that in the old photograph of our family shared by Alice, we see Florian standing proudly with a wagon wheel (he was a carriage maker), his wife Maria Magdalena to his left, and standing in between them, two young boys.” In that photo, which apparently was taken in the 1860s, the taller of the two boys is Joseph. The smaller boy is his brother, Henry Peltz.



This portion of the 1860s photo shows Florian Peltz holding the wagon wheel. To the left of him are his sons Henry and Joseph and then his wife, Magdalena, who received the 1873 letter from her nephew.

An item in the *Berea Advertiser* in July 1873 explained what happened to Henry Peltz.

Last Tuesday, (July 22), Henry Peltz, aged fifteen years, a son of Mrs. F. Peltz was killed by a pulley falling from a machine that is used for drilling wells. He was standing near looking on when the fastening gave way, and the pulley came down striking him on the back of the head, near the top, fracturing the skull and killing him almost instantly.

Doug Peltz wrote that story always has had added significance for him because “had Henry not died so tragically young, it’s likely I wouldn’t be the last one to carry on the Peltz name.” (Doug Peltz has sisters, but no brothers, and two daughters, but not a son, so he could be the last one in the family to carry on the surname.)

Here is the translation of Jakob Bezner’s 1873 letter:

Dear Aunt Magdalena, in my previous letters I had already suggested also enclosing a special note to you, but our circumstances always stopped me doing it. As Martin wrote to me that you have been set

into mourning this summer in such a horrendous manner, I can't do otherwise but to express to you my heartfelt commiseration and sympathy.

It was a hard blow for you that would easily have brought a loving mother to despair. It grieves myself, and indeed us all, particularly my father, when we look at his picture, where he has such a jovial and good-natured facial expression, and then think how he died in such a way and at his young age. It is then vital to not look downwards but to look upwards to God, who in such cases bestows consolation.

It is in the Lord that we can find soothing for our wounded, torn heart. Praise be to the Lord, who will not let even a minor injury happen to us without his blessing; we can gain comfort from the knowledge that such a hard stroke of fate does happen for a purpose, that it is God's unfathomable wisdom which directs it. Often in life, that which we consider to be the harshest of misfortunes, in the end, may turn out to be a blessing in disguise; God, even when he takes away a mother's beloved child, has nothing but good intentions for us.

Many a child may now wander in heaven – where our very own yearnings are directed – a child who, if remaining among us on earth might have turned to be a godless human, or who might have suffered from sickness for half his life, and who would have brought nothing by sorrow to his own parents. To avoid this, the Lord took these children, took them from their father's arms, from their mother's breast, even though it caused them intense pain.

Take comfort in this, my dear Aunt: remember that the Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away.

Even though when you left Germany I was but a young boy, you are in my memories. I remember, although faintly, that you visited our house shortly before your departure, and heated water on our stove to wash your clothes. I behold you in my mind as a likeness of my second sister, Caroline, who looks much like you did in the photograph taken during times past. I think ahead to spring, if I live then, I will send you my photographs.

As Martin Beck shared with me, you had the kindness to give my father the authority (proxy?) over several parcels of land, for which he will be extremely thankful. We, the children, too, are sharing our genuine gratitude for your charity and kindliness.

With the hope of receiving some lines from you, or from one of your surviving sons, I greet you from the depths of my heart.

Yours faithfully, Jacob Bezner

As a result of having that letter, Doug Peltz has been reaching out to townspeople from Magdalena Bezner Peltz's village in Germany. "I've even been in touch with a couple of Bezners, who are very likely distant relatives, though I've yet to figure out how exactly we're related," he wrote. "My hope is to be able to turn up photos in Germany sent from Olmsted Falls. It seems like a stretch, but you never know!"

Doug Peltz has determined that Jakob Bezner was the son of his great-great-great-grandmother's older brother, Johann Jakob Bezner, who stayed behind to work the farmland in Württemberg after Maria Magdalana moved to the United States.

"A German genealogist reached out to me a few weeks ago and found the church records of Magdalena and her siblings," Peltz wrote. "It indicates that Magdalena left for America, as well as her younger brother Christoph Heinrich Bezner. It does not indicate that any of the other siblings went to America. But I've not been able to find any records of Christoph Heinrich Bezner in America."

The 1900 Census showed Magdalena Peltz was then an old woman, living in the home of her son and daughter-in-law Joseph & Anna Simmerer Peltz. That home was in the house that now contains Mary's Hair Salon at 8086 Columbia Road in Grand Pacific Junction.

"We've long suspected that Magdalena did not come here alone, which would have been highly unusual at the time," Doug Peltz wrote. "Did she come with her younger brother Christoph Heinrich Bezner? If so, I can find absolutely no record of him in America, anywhere. How did she wind up in Olmsted Falls? (Florian came here in 1849, and remember, [he] came from Prussia, not Württemberg. He was Catholic, she was Protestant. We believe that Florian and Magdalena met for the first time in Ohio, not back in Europe)."

Further, Peltz has found out that the Martin Beck mentioned in the letter was another of Magdalana's nephews, the son of one of her younger sisters, Johanna Phillippine Catharine Bezner. Beck and his mother seem to have moved from Germany to Ohio. The wording of the letter indicates Beck already was in Ohio when the letter was written. Doug Peltz even wonders if Beck lived in Olmsted Falls and had close contact with Joseph Peltz, who was about the same age.

Doug Peltz has promised to share any notable information his research uncovers. For previous stories that have included his



Alice Stilwell McPeak and Doug Peltz posed for this photo (with a copy of The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township) when they met a few years ago.

information and photos about the Peltz and Simmerer families, see *Olmsted 200* Issues 25 from June 2015, 33 from February 2016, 34 from March 2016, 35 from April 2016, 37 from June 2016, 38 from July 2016, 39 from August 2016, 44 from January 2017 and 69 from February 2019.

More Readers Share Recollections of Schady's and Annexation

The subjects of Schady's Shell and efforts to annex Olmsted Township land in recent issues of *Olmsted 200* have spurred more readers to share their memories. Among those with memories of Schady's is Mike Lander.

"If you were a GEARHEAD or [wanted] to be GEARHEAD in the mid 1960's [Schady's] was the place to hang out," he wrote. "There was much to learn by watching the Prohaska Brothers wrench on their 1955 Chevy. Great memories."

Carolyn Smith Allen recalled Schady's and more in an email message. "I was born in Berea Hospital and delivered by Doctor [Forrest] Adams, as were my two sisters after me," she wrote. "I lived in Olmsted Falls until summer of 1959 when Cleveland Hopkins Airport expansion forced my father to relocate his flight-based operation to another airport, another city. I hated leaving my home. But I remember well Schady's Shell (where my father got his gas, I got cokes and candy, and we girls met up with our guys).

Allen's father, Eugene Roy "Joe" Smith got his pilot's license at age 14 at Youngstown's airport. Beginning at age 19, he worked as a flight instructor at SkyTech at Cleveland Hopkins Airport. He also served in the Army Air Corps.

"My father was a well-known pilot who flew yearly in the Cleveland Air Races," Allen wrote. He was a stunt pilot and flew people on chartered trips all over the United States, she said, and his aviator friends included Charles Lindbergh, Eddie Rickenbacker, Amelia Earhart, Jimmy Doolittle, Alan Shepard, John Glenn, Neil Armstrong and Gus Grissom. After he became owner of SkyTech, he relocated it to Richmond, Indiana.

Allen's first family home in Olmsted was along Fitch Road near Cook Road at the site of Miles Flanagan's dog kennel. In 1951, the family moved to 7790 Lewis Road. If Allen had not moved away, she would have been in the Olmsted Falls High School Class of 1962. She recalls Kinley Shogren, an artist who lived in the red house next to Schady's Shell. Her parents had many of his paintings in their house.

As reported in last month's issue of *Olmsted 200*, people with memories of hanging out at Schady's Shell are invited to gather at the former gas station, now the Olmsted Falls office for Clint Williams Realty, on the afternoon of Saturday, June 22, after the dedication ceremony for the new Vietnam War memorial at the Village Green.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include stories about how annexation of township land “flaired” up again in the 1980s and about one of the most prominent persons who came from Olmsted Falls.

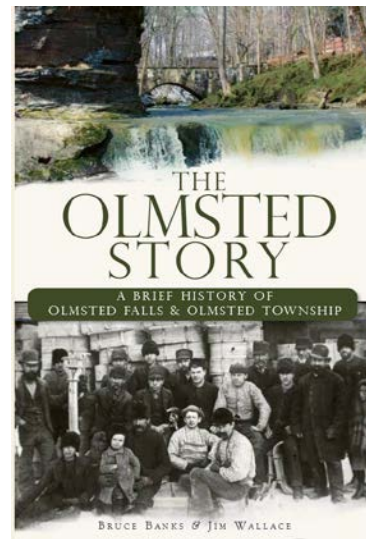
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, 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/olmsted_200_issues.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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