



# Olmsted 200

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

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Issue 63

August 1, 2018

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## “New” High School Is 50 Years Old

Half a century ago, the United States was in the midst of a race to choose a new president while “Hello, I Love You” by the Doors and “People Got to Be Free” by the Rascals were the new songs topping the Top 40 charts. Meanwhile in August 1968, the biggest new thing in Olmsted was the high school that was being finished on the south side of Bagley Road just a little west of Fitch Road. It was the first new high school in the school district in more than half a century and the first one built to be solely a high school and not contain classrooms for lower grades.



*This is what Olmsted Falls High School looked like in recent years before the latest round of construction to expand it.*

The new high school had been a long time coming. In 1916, the school district serving Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township became the first in Cuyahoga County to eliminate one- and two-room schoolhouses by building a new school to house all students from first grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Kindergarten was added later. That school at the

corner of Bagley Road and Division Street (later Mapleway Drive) served the district well for many years, although it did not remain adequate for long. It was doubled in size a decade later, had a gymnasium added in 1938 and had new wings with several more classrooms added in the early 1950s.

But during the post-World War II Baby Boom, even that expanded building no longer was enough. During the 1950s, more than 800 homes were built in Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. More than 700 more were built in the 1960s. That meant many more students for the school district with the growth beginning in the lowest grades and moving up. As early as the fall of 1948, the *Berea Enterprise* reported school enrollment had increased by 160 over the previous year and more than 100 students were in first grade alone. In 1953, the district began construction of Falls Elementary School, which opened on September 8, 1954. Within a few years, the district built Fitch Elementary School, which served more than 600 students from kindergarten through sixth grade when it opened in September 1958.

As the Baby Boomers grew older and progressed to higher grades, members of the Olmsted Falls Board of Education – Vernon McRae, Thalia Miller, Phyllis Conger, Wilbert Leutner and Robert Essig – as well as Superintendent Loren Early and others in the district realized in the early 1960s it was time to consider building a new high school. They sought advice from consultants, the Educational Research Council of Greater Cleveland and the Ohio Department of Education before putting a bond issue on the ballot in 1964 and getting it approved with strong support.



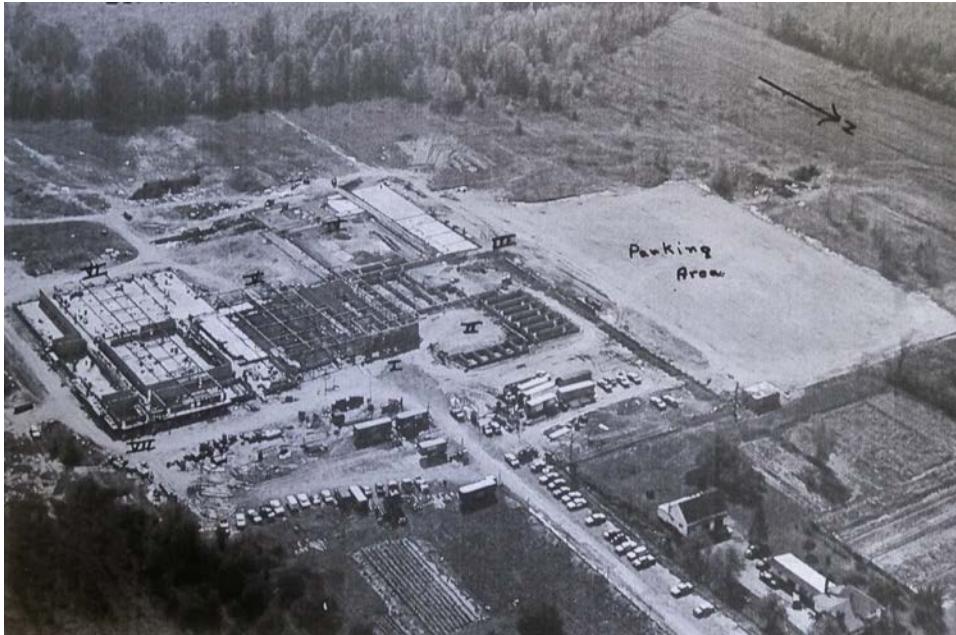
*Donald Cobb*

In 1965, the district made plans to build the new school on 47 acres along Bagley Road. The school was designed to eventually accommodate about 1,500 students. This was at a time when graduating classes had yet to exceed 200 students. Thus, the school could have handled almost twice as many students as were in the high school grades of nine through 12 at that time.

Also in 1965, Donald Cobb came to the school district to take over as superintendent. Although he had been happy as the superintendent of schools in Doylestown, Ohio, he said the opportunity to build a high school lured him to Olmsted. He stayed as superintendent for 14 years.

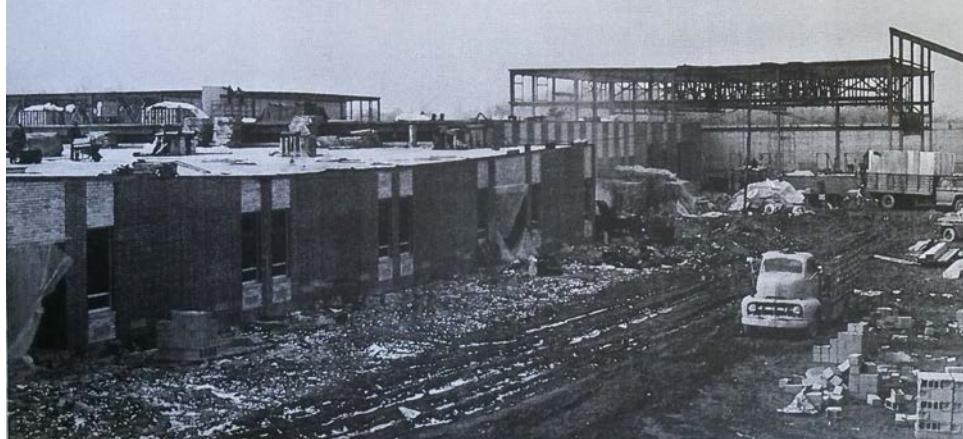
Construction of the school began in May 1967. According to an Ohio Department of Education sign erected during the construction, the project cost a total of \$2,831,381.84 with \$1,273,833.12 of that in local funds and \$1,557,548.72 in state funds. However, by the time the school was finished, the total costs were reported to be \$3,101,063. Of that, \$1,496,147 came from local funds, \$1,557,548 from state funds and \$47,368 from federal funds.

The Martini Construction Company was the general contractor. Scott, Kluth, Schaefer & Associates handled the architecture.



*This aerial photo shows the high school construction site about five months after work began to build the new school. The photo was taken on October 15, 1967.*

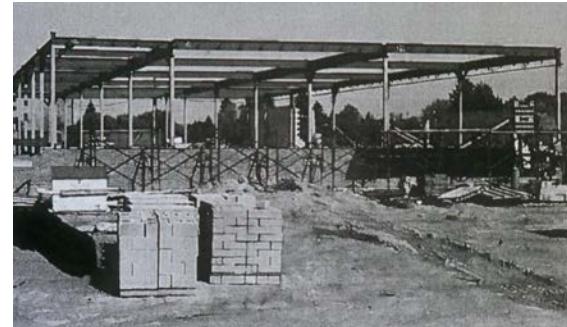
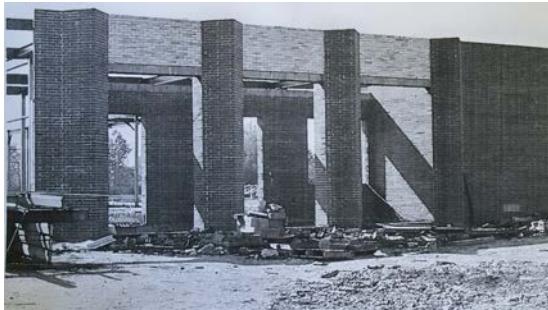
*This photo shows the academic wing already under roof. The auditorium (right) and gym (rear left) did not have walls yet.*



The school was not quite finished but was ready enough in time to welcome about 1,200 students and 47 teachers for the 1968-1969 school year. Wing A, which contained the academic classrooms, and Wing B with the library, cafeteria and offices were finished first. Final work on Wing C, containing the auditorium and music rooms, and Wing D, containing the gymnasium, shops and art rooms, came later.

When finished, the school had an auditorium that could hold 800 people and a gymnasium that could hold 2,200 people for such occasions as graduation ceremonies. At the time, it was said the state did not always fund auditoriums in new school but made an exception for Olmsted Falls High School. The library was built to hold about 12,000 books.

The building covered 134,774 square feet on what by then was 54 acres of land – several more acres than what the school board originally had planned on.



*These photos from the time of construction show: the main entrance (top left), and sites for the gymnasium, shop area and home economics area (top right), the heating plant, kitchen and rear entrance (bottom left) and the cafeteria and library (bottom right).*

*Walls for the academic wing were just going up when this photo was shot. It was taken from the rear of the building.*



Back then, the school year began on the Wednesday after Labor Day, so September 4 was the first day of school. The Class of 1969 was the first to graduate from the new school. The Class of 1972 was the first to go all four years through the new school. Except for certain classes like band, shop and home economics when they were in junior high school, members of the Class of 1972 missed attending the old high school, which became a middle school after the new high school opened. Beginning with the Class of 1973, students in grades six through eight attended the old school before going on to the new high school. That lasted until 1996, when the new Olmsted Falls Middle

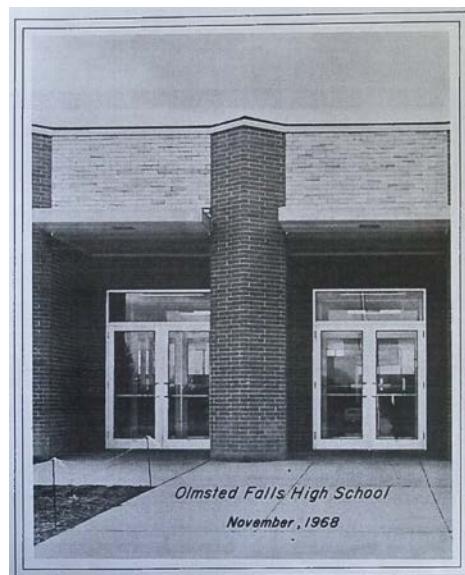
School on Bagley Road west of the high school opened. The old school started in 1916 then became Olmsted Falls City Hall and Community Center, as well as a pre-school.

Construction of a football field and other athletic venues came well after the new high school opened. Initially, the high school continued to play football games at the field by the old school along Mapleway Drive.

A dedication ceremony for the new high school was scheduled for November 3, 1968, but it had to be postponed because the delivery of bleachers for the gymnasium was delayed. It was rescheduled for Sunday, November 24, at two o'clock with an address by Thomas Quirk, the state's assistant superintendent of public instruction.

“What was a few short years ago deemed by many an impossibility is now a reality,” school board members – then including Vernon McRae, Thalia Miller, Donald Faus, Judy Nichols and Kenneth Gill – said in the program for the dedication ceremony. “We have the new high school our community so sorely needed, and a beautiful and wonderful school it is.”

*When the high school opened in 1968, the school board consisted of, from left to right, Judy Nichols, Kenneth Gill, Thalia Miller, Vernon McRae (president) and Donald Faus.*



*This photo of the entrance of the high school appeared on the dedication ceremony's program.*



*Principal Gordon Boddy*

Principal Gordon Boddy said planning for school buildings at the time often overlooked input from teachers. “This has not been the case in planning our new building,” he said in the dedication program. “Our teachers have been involved from the very first. The administration and architects have worked with members of every department. As a result the influence of the thinking of our teachers is evident in all areas of our school. This approach will do much to assure the continued improvement of education at Olmsted Falls High School.”

John Sanders, the assistant principal, added the new building “provides an atmosphere conducive to academic achievement. Such a fine facility instills pride in our students and generates school spirit.”

Superintendent Cobb wrote, “The construction of the new Olmsted Falls High School marks another milestone in the continued improvement and expansion of the educational opportunities for the youth of our school district. This structure was designed to provide for the needs of today and meet the challenge of education in the Twenty-first Century.” He apparently was right about providing for the needs of the time, but Cobb did not foresee how much more the school district would grow and require the high school facilities to be expanded in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Olmsted 200* will have more on that next month.



Asst. Principal John Sanders

One interesting item in the school in its early years was a 49-star United States flag that had flown over the U.S. Capitol in 1959 during the months after Alaska was admitted to the union and before Hawaii became a state. Congressman William Minshall presented it to the school during a student assembly. For years, it hung at the front of the cafeteria.



*Before recent construction began to expand the high school, this is how it looked with the auditorium in the foreground.*

Next month, Olmsted 200 will consider how Olmsted Falls High School is being expanded to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century education and the growth in the student population since it opened half a century ago.

*Many thanks go to Tim Atkinson for his assistance in acquiring archival photos of Olmsted Falls High School from the time of its construction.*

## Two-Decade-Old Covered Bridge Took Decades to Happen

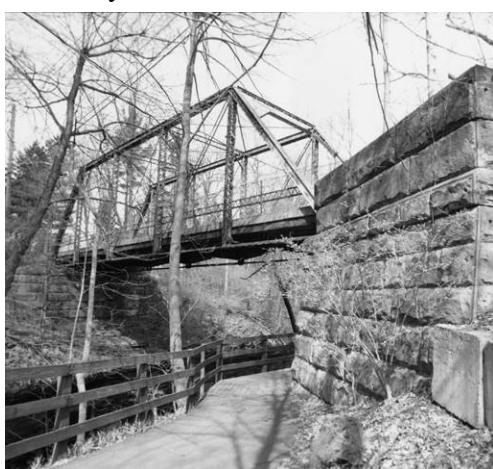
One reason Olmsted Falls is a picturesque community is that it has many old buildings, particularly in Grand Pacific Junction, that have been renovated to look new again. But one of the community's most photographed venues is a relatively young structure built in an old style. Twenty years ago this month, the Charles A. Harding Memorial Bridge opened. Before it was built, the community struggled for more than a quarter century to figure out what to do about its aging predecessor.



*The steel bridge built in the early 1900s carried traffic on Main Street and over Plum Creek for several decades until it deteriorated too much. The above photo is from 1986. The one to the right is from 1983.*



The previous steel bridge was built apparently in 1904, although some reports over the years dated it to 1907 or 1908. It replaced an earlier bridge that crossed over not only Plum Creek but also a railroad spur that was used to carry sandstone out of the quarries that operated in what now is David Fortier River Park.



*This photo of the bridge from 1997 shows the walking trail underneath.*

The bridge was not essential to the traffic flow in Olmsted Falls, but it gave motorists a nice shortcut between the section of Columbia Road in the downtown business district and Water Street, bypassing the curve on Columbia Road.

The first indication of problems with the bridge came when the Ohio Department of Highways inspected it on June 18, 1972, and

changed its condition from good to critical. The inspection report found 60 percent metal loss in the steel support beams and listed them in critical condition. It also listed the masonry wing walls in critical condition. The report found the reinforced concrete deck slab, a steel end post and masonry back walls to be in poor condition. It listed the steel railings and vertical web members as being in fair condition, while the steel arch alignment was still in good condition.

“Because of its narrow width, its age and deteriorating condition, the bridge should be placed on a priority list for replacement,” the inspectors recommended. “If it is to be continued in service, the deteriorated components should be repaired as a temporary measure.”

The county then posted signs at both end of the bridge that said, “One Lane Bridge,” “Five Ton Load Limit” and “No Thru Trucks.”



*These photos show the old steel bridge as it was being dismantled in 1997.*

In its June 25, 1972, edition, the *Plain Dealer*, wrote that the Main Street Bridge was one of five in Olmsted Falls listed in critical condition. “It has been posted with a five-ton limit since inspectors found floorbeam rivet heads nearly corroded off, cracks in the concrete deck, a collapsed wingwall and a leaning retaining wall,” the newspaper reported. The *Plain Dealer* also reported that Cuyahoga County Engineer Albert Porter said a 28-foot-wide, two-lane bridge would be built on the site in 1974 at an estimated cost of \$350,000. But that came as news to the city’s engineer, Charles McKinney, who told the paper: “I have the feeling that the bridge is not in as bad shape as it’s reputed to be. It bothers me, though, that the report on it might be put into a file and forgotten.”

The county notified Olmsted Falls that it would demolish the bridge without replacing it or it would give the city the option of taking ownership. In October 1973, city council accepted ownership of the bridge. After inspecting the bridge in October 1979, city officials said they did not believe it was about to fail. They wrote: “The first failure won’t be catastrophic unless a 20-ton load is inadvertently driven on the bridge.”

The community continued to use the bridge until January 1981, when the driver of a 13,000-pound truck ignored the warning signs. In fact, his truck tore down the load limit sign as it crossed over the bridge and damaged it. The city closed the bridge to vehicles and received an estimate that the cost of repairing the bridge would be \$297,000. However, it remained without repairs for years.

In January 1983, Richland Engineering Company studied the bridge's structural integrity and found it unable to support more than a ton, which was less than the weight of a typical passenger car. Engineers gave the city three options: minor repairs to bring it to a load limit of three to four tons for a cost of about \$23,000, major renovations costing \$240,000 for a 20-ton limit and 20 more years of use, or replacement of the bridge at a cost of \$340,000 for a 20-ton limit and 40 more years of use. Mayor William Mahoney said the city couldn't afford even minor repairs, so the city would leave it closed to all but pedestrian use.

By the mid-1980s, some residents pushed for replacing the old steel bridge with a new one for either one-lane or two-lane vehicular traffic. However, other citizens and organizations led by former Mayor David Dunn began raising money for a covered pedestrian bridge that was estimated to cost up to \$85,000. By February 1988, they had collected almost \$7,000. Dunn had sponsored two dances that attracted 300 to 400 people to raise funds. He asked in the *News Sun*, "Do people want to accent the beauty of our parks and offer a reminder of our roots with a pedestrian covered bridge or a steel vehicular shortcut to the other side?"

But Robert Kennedy, who then was mayor, said he preferred an "arch-style vehicular bridge with raised sidewalks on the sides." He thought grants might be available for the project, although getting them could take a long time.

Little more happened for several more years until November 1993, when Olmsted Falls City Council sent a letter to the county asking for the removal of the bridge because of its deteriorating condition. The county's bridge engineer, William Dobish, responded that the county was willing to tear the bridge down but wouldn't likely get to it until 1995. In the meantime, the county placed one-cubic-yard concrete block barriers at each entrance to the bridge. Certain council members suggested replacing the bridge with a prefabricated footbridge that would cost at least \$50,000.

In November 1994, council approved letting the county remove the bridge. About the same time, Dennis Mozser, president of the Kiwanis Club, said the latest plan was to replace it with a steel-supported, covered pedestrian bridge. He told the *News Sun* Kiwanis would begin selling commemorative bricks in December to fund the project, which then was estimated to cost \$80,000 to \$100,000. Council approved letting Kiwanis proceed with the project.

Kiwanis had plans prepared for an all-wooden bridge, but the length of the bridge would have required so many timbers for support that the view for pedestrians would

have been limited. Some people objected to that proposal after it was introduced at Falls Day in the Park in October 1994, so Kiwanis developed a new plan for a bridge that would have steel supports but otherwise would be all wooden. It was to have eight lookouts that could be covered by shutters in bad weather. Kiwanis also planned to decorate the bridge with lights, pine roping and bows during the holiday season.

By August 1995, the estimated cost for the covered bridge had increased to \$300,000. It was expected to open late in 1997. In late 1995, Olmsted Falls Kiwanis Club set up a nonprofit corporation, the Olmsted Falls Kiwanis Civic Development Foundation, to sell engraved bricks to fund the project.

By mid-1996, the old bridge still had not been removed. That June, Dobish said the removal probably would occur early in 1997. City council approved spending \$75,000 as seed money to encourage other donations for the covered bridge. Don Timmer, a covered bridge expert with Richland Engineering, had drawn up plans for a bridge with a total length of 108 feet, of which 92 feet would span Plum Creek.

By October 1996, state Representative. Rocco Colonna had \$125,000 for the bridge put into the state budget. By then, Kiwanis had raised \$11,000 through the sale of bricks at \$50 for a single brick and \$100 for a double brick. The club and the city were hoping for major donations of tens of thousands of dollars more.

In the spring of 1997, Superior Demolition and Excavating received the contract for the demolition of the bridge. Demolition began June 16.

On June 24, council approved naming the new bridge after Capt. Charles A. Harding, who died at age 29 on August 3, 1944, from wounds received in the Battle of Normandy during World War II while serving with the 612<sup>th</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion. He was a fourth-generation resident of Olmsted Falls who was an Eagle Scout and fullback on the high school football team. He graduated from Olmsted Falls High School in 1933 and then attended Baldwin-Wallace College. His sisters, Amelia and Clara Harding, who lived nearby on Columbia Road, donated \$100,000 to the project. By then, the estimated cost was \$350,000 to \$400,000.



Capt. Charles A. Harding

Although the construction of the covered, wooden bridge had been scheduled for the summer or early fall of 1997, it was delayed until 1998 while more money was raised. Mayor Tom Jones claimed it would be the only authentic all-wood covered bridge in Cuyahoga County.

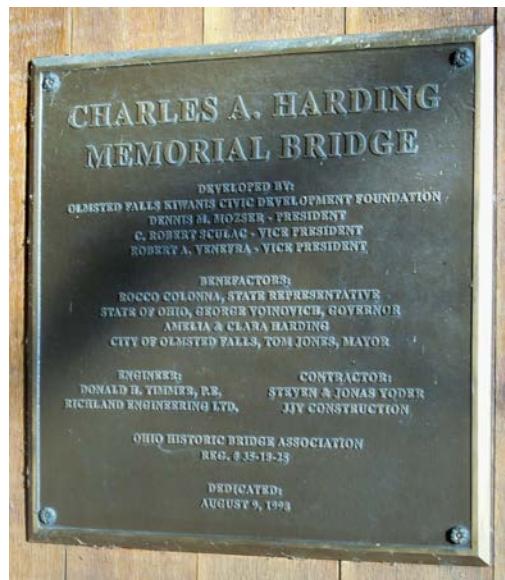
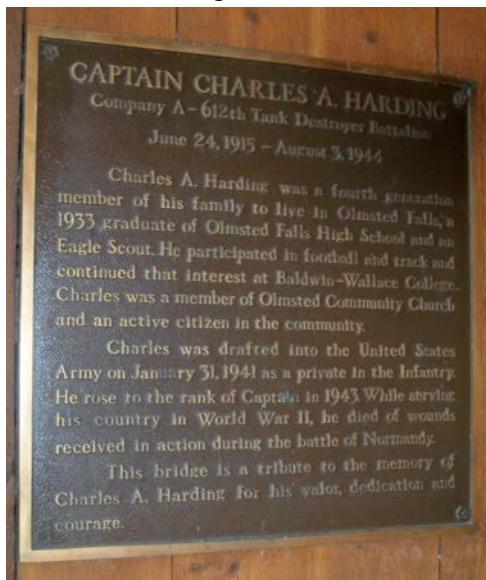
In its June 15, 1998, edition the *Plain Dealer* reported that the Harding sisters had been watching as the new bridge was erected. Amelia, a retired Olmsted Falls High

School English teacher, then was 84, and Clara, a retired banking secretary, was 80. Their brother would have turned 83 in 1998 if he had survived. They recalled growing up with him on the family's Usher Road farm, as well as the hardship they suffered after Charles was wounded and was listed as missing in action for about four months.

"You have no idea how hard it is to go to work every day and not know anything about your brother," the *Plain Dealer* quoted Clara Harding as saying. The family did not receive the body for burial for four years. Paperwork suggested he initially was buried in a German cemetery. He was awarded a Bronze Star and an Oak Leaf cluster for heroic achievement in action as part of a battalion that destroyed enemy tanks. In his last letter home, dated July 31, 1944, he said he was OK but really busy.

On the day his remains arrived at the Olmsted Falls Depot, his father died. "He died of a broken heart," Clara said. She and Amelia arranged for a double funeral for their father and brother on June 14, 1949.

"This has been a hard week...stirring up all those memories of years ago," Amelia said about watching the bridge be built and recalling Charles. "But I think it's wonderful that we have such good memories, too."



These plaques inside the bridge tell the story of Charles Harding and commemorate the bridge's construction.

Amish workers helped build the covered bridge out of red oak. Late in June 1998, they helped roll it into place on its steel beams. After that, the flooring, electricity and other features were installed.

On August 6, 1998, the community held a ceremony at three o'clock in the afternoon to dedicate the Charles A. Harding Memorial Bridge. A band from the Donauschwaben German-American Cultural Center played. An invitation-only reception followed at the Donauschwabens' Lenau Park.

Over the past two decades, the bridge has become a popular spot for people to view the park and Plum Creek, as well as for photographs for wedding parties from nearby churches, the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel and the Grand Pacific Wedding Garden. In addition, every year in August, on the Sunday of Olmsted Heritage Days, the Kiwanis Club serves breakfast on the bridge.



*Since it was built, the covered bridge has become one of the most photographed sites in Olmsted Falls.*

The bridge is listed as a multiple kingpost truss span. According to the Theodore Burr Covered Bridge Society of Pennsylvania, a kingpost truss is the oldest truss design used in bridge construction. The society says a simple kingpost truss “consists of a stringer, a Kingpost (vertical beam), and two diagonals and is used primarily for the short spans of approximately twenty to thirty feet.” The multiple Kingpost type was developed for longer distances of up to 100 feet. “The design consists of one kingpost in the center with several right angle panels on each side of the center,” the society says.

*The photos of the old steel bridge from the 1980s and 1997 are from the Cuyahoga County Engineer’s Photography Collection, which is maintained by the Michael Schwartz Library at Cleveland State University. The 1983 and 1986 photos were taken by Michael A. Fuerst. The 1997 photos were taken by Thomas E. Oakley.*

## Readers Recall More about Olmsted Township Trailer Parks

Last month’s story about the controversies associated with the Columbia Park Manufactured Home Community, started by Gerald Brookins seven decades ago, evoked several responses, including two that added information to the story..

“Another great story which I truly enjoyed reading,” Lynn Rice wrote. “My family [TeGrotenhuis] owned 16 acres across from our home, which we used as a summer pasture for our 30 sheep. We had the creek for their water and lots of grazing for them. My dad sold the property to the church, and the church sold off some of the property to Brookins for further expansion in the back.”

Another response came in from Bob Miller, who disputed the sentence in the story that indicated Olmsted Township already had two trailer parks -- Foster’s Park on Cook Road and Olmsted Trailer Park on Bagley Road – in 1948, when Brookins began work on Columbia Park.

“My wife Mary and I were the first ones to move into the Olmsted Trailer Park on Bagley Rd. in October of 1952 when it opened,” Miller wrote. “As a result, I think the included statement about the existence of that park in 1948 must be inaccurate.”

So noted, and the correction is appreciated.

Further, Miller wrote, “I knew that we were not welcome at the time but were not aware of all that went on. We [ultimately] built a house on Water St. where we lived for 45 years. I was very active during those years having served in many offices in Kiwanis, Olmsted Community Church, and the Village including President of Council.”

Miller added, “We always loved that area and visit periodically.”

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include more about Olmsted Falls High School and a story with new information about the naming of one street in Olmsted Falls.

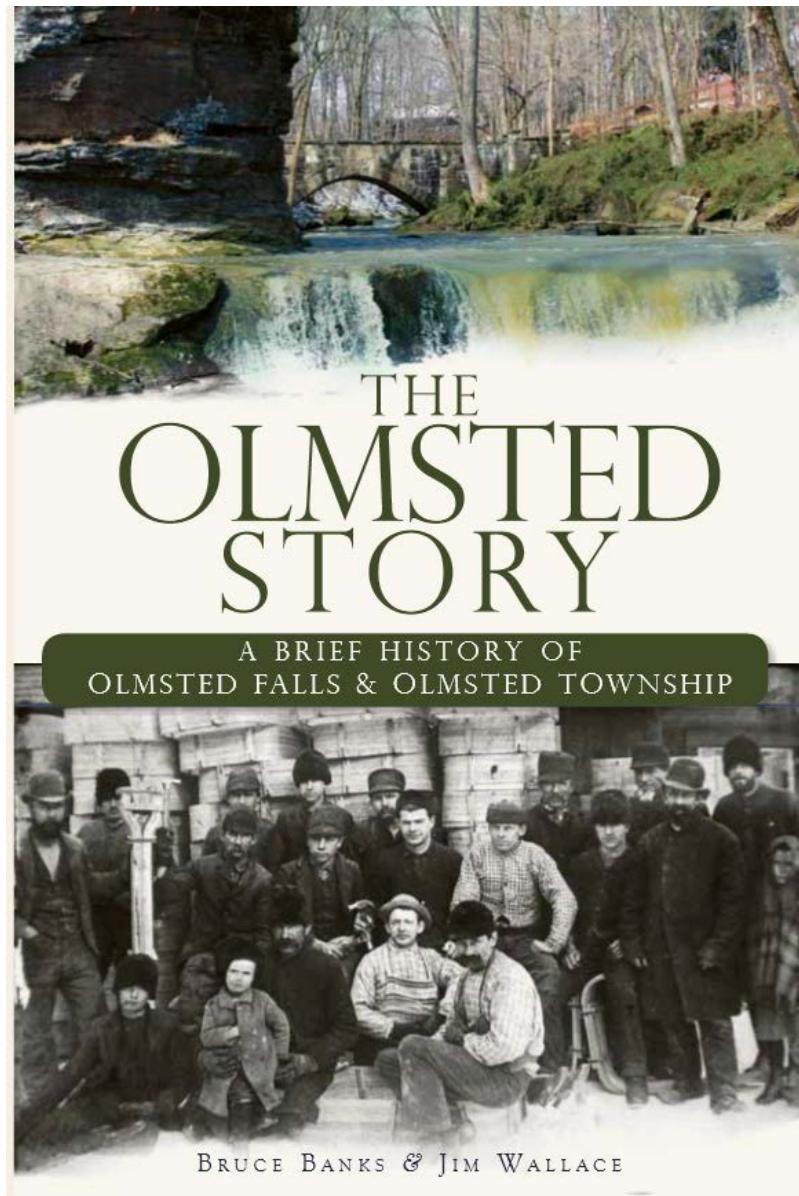
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: [wallacestar@hotmail.com](mailto:wallacestar@hotmail.com). *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, 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/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. 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 the Village Bean in Olmsted Falls and the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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