



# Olmsted 200

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

Issue 56

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## St. Mary's Fire 70 Years Ago Led to Current Church

Seventy years ago in January 1948, fire changed downtown Olmsted Falls – twice. The first fire on January 19 destroyed a grocery store in a 19<sup>th</sup> century building. (See the next story for more on that.) But more significant to the life of many Olmsted residents was the fire that occurred five days later on January 24. It destroyed St. Mary of the Falls, the church that served the Roman Catholics of Olmsted Falls, Olmsted Township and West View. That church had stood in Olmsted Falls since 1858, although not always in that location. Following the fire, parishioners built the current church, which anchors the southern end of the downtown district.



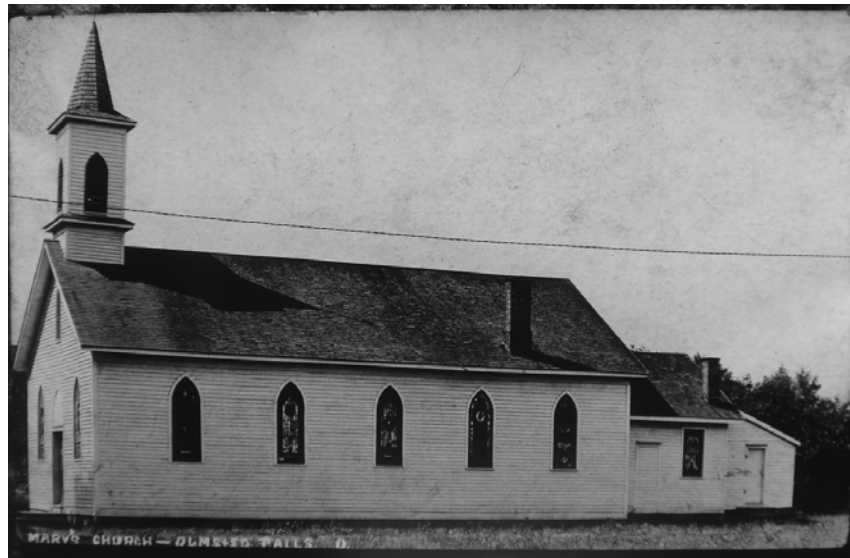
*Only a burned-out shell was left of the original building for St. Mary of the Falls Catholic Church after the January 24, 1948, fire. The building was almost 90 years old at the time, although it had not always stood in that location.*

During the first few decades after settlers began moving into Olmsted Township in 1815, Catholics were rare in the community. The Rev. Joseph Walsh, in a history of St. Mary's for the souvenir program for the Olmsted Falls Homecoming in 1939, wrote that John Reynolds and his family were the only Catholics who lived in Olmsted prior to 1849. The Catholic population increased beginning in 1849, when the building of the Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati Railroad through the West View area brought many workers, some of whom took up permanent residency in Olmsted.

"A Catholic curate, whose name is unknown, first administered to the religious needs of these early settlers," Walsh wrote. "For many years Olmsted Falls was attended from the Cathedral [in Cleveland] as a Mission. Later the further influx of Irish, German and Polish Catholics insured the life of the church in the village and demanded the formation of a parish."

Olmsted's first Catholic mass was held in the barn of Calvin Geer, who was Protestant and a member of the first family to settle in Olmsted in 1815. From 1851 to 1854, Catholics used a log schoolhouse for their services under the direction of Fathers W. O'Connor and Thomas Walsh. After that, James Hickey, an Irishman who came to Olmsted in either 1848 or 1849 to help build a bridge for the railroad across Rocky River at West View, offered his home for use as a church. Father W. Healy read mass and administered sacraments there until 1856. According to Joseph Walsh, Healy was stationed at Elyria and visited Olmsted Falls every two months.

"At this time the size of the Catholic community demanded the attention of a resident pastor," Walsh wrote. "Father Louis J. Filiere was first to serve in this capacity, and immediately founded and organized St. Mary's Church. For the first two years Mass was said in a house owned by a Richard Pollard, after which Father Filiere purchased a frame house to serve as church and pastoral residence. In 1858 he bought a lot and built a small wooden church upon it."



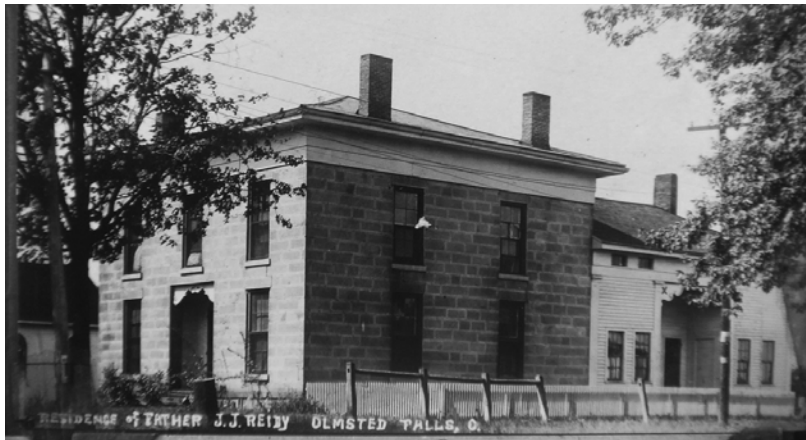
*This largely was the original St. Mary's church that was built in 1858, although it was expanded after being moved to the current church site in 1873. This photo is likely from the early 1900s.*

That lot was not the site of the current St. Mary's.

The original St. Mary's site is, ironically, now the location of St. Mary's prominent Protestant counterpart, Olmsted Community Church.

As Walter Holzworth wrote in his 1966 history of Olmsted, "In 1858 this was a large knoll that sloped sharply to the river. It was this knoll that appealed to the pastor [as] a fitting place for a church and because Father Fillier [*sic*] was born, raised and educated in France, in traditional French taste, [he] planted a vineyard from his home and church to the river in the valley."

Filiere was a busy man. In addition to serving St. Mary's in Olmsted Falls, where he was stationed, he also had to attend to the needs of St. Mary's in Berea and St. Patrick's in what now is the West Park section of Cleveland. In 1862, he moved to St. Mary's in Berea but continued to serve St. Mary's in Olmsted Falls for more than a decade.



*When Father E.J. Murphy bought the current St. Mary's site in 1873, it included this stone house, which he fixed to serve as a parsonage. It remained the parsonage for several decades.*

In 1873, Father E.J. Murphy became the resident pastor at St. Mary's in Olmsted Falls. During that year, he bought several lots one-third of a mile south at what then was the corner of Columbia Street (now Columbia Road) and Hamlin Street (now Bagley Road), which is the location of the current St. Mary's. On the land

was an old stone house. Murphy repaired it and put a new slate roof on it, so it could serve as his parsonage. He also had the church building moved on log rollers from its original location to just south of the stone house.

Why did Murphy have the church moved? Well, Walsh did not say why in his 1939 account of St. Mary's history. But Bruce Banks, co-author of *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township*, believes it was because the church's original site was no longer the quiet, pastoral setting that had attracted Filiere. The quarrying of sandstone began about in 1870 nearby in what now is



*Sandstone quarrying put the original St. Mary's site next to an industrial zone.*

David Fortier River Park.

“When that commenced, there was a lot of drilling and blasting and steam engines and noise and dust,” Banks said during a historical tour of the park in 2007. “I think with time they got tired of all the noise, and in 1873, they moved St. Mary’s.”



*This postcard shows what St. Mary’s looked like early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Note the old stone house on the right that served as the parsonage.*

Father Murphy did not let the moving of the building interrupt the business of the church. While it was being moved on rollers down the street, Murphy baptized an infant, Rose O’Connell, inside the church. She was Mrs. Rose Walkden and 93 years old when Holzworth’s book came out in 1966. He wrote that she “surmised that baptism in a church on rollers may have been a blessing for a long and active life.”

After the building was moved, Murphy had it enlarged almost to the size it was when the church burned in 1948. “The generosity of the



*This pre-1948 aerial photo of the corner of Columbia Road and Bagley Road shows St. Mary’s parsonage at the corner and the church building just south of it.*

parishioners, many of whom were employed at the stone quarries or on the railroad, enabled Father Murphy to make these improvements and also to open a parish school in a school building purchased from the village,” Walsh wrote. “The subsequent national financial panic forced the parish to close the school.”

St. Mary of the Falls did not always have a resident pastor. Father James Cullen and then Father J.T. Carroll followed Murphy, but then the church became a mission of St. Mary’s in Berea for many years. Eventually, St. Mary of the Falls regained having a resident pastor.

“St. Mary’s of the Falls has grown steadily,” Walsh wrote in 1939. “It now comprises about one hundred families. It extends to West View and to parts of Columbia Station and North Olmsted.”

Walsh also wrote, “Many improvements for the good of the parish are anticipated in the near future.” Little did he know then that, within nine years, he would have to lead the parish in replacing the old church building.

The fire broke out on a cold night. According to accounts in *The Berea Enterprise*, it was discovered about 1:15 a.m. on Saturday, January 24, 1948. It broke out in the furnace room. The cause was attributed to an overheated furnace.

“Firemen thought they had the blaze under control at 3:15 but it broke out at 3:45,” the *Enterprise* reported. “At 5:30 everything was under control, but the front of the church broke out and it was 7 before it was out.” The Olmsted Falls Fire Department received assistance from the Berea and Olmsted Township fire departments.

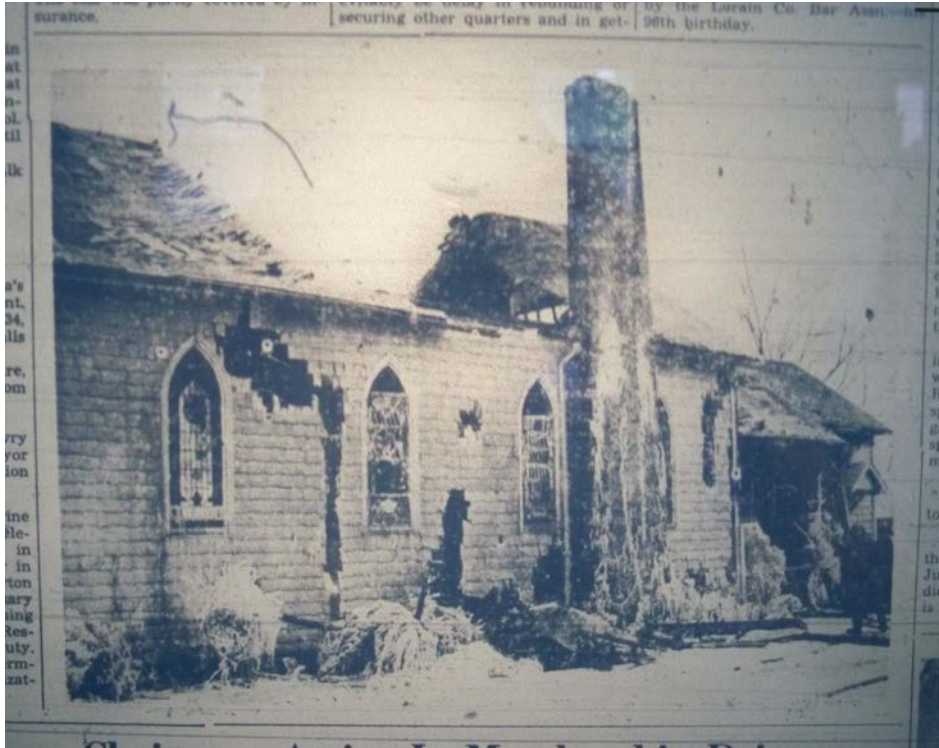
The newspaper further wrote, “The fire swept from the back of the building to the front and into the steeple. The middle of the roof fell in.”

Damage was estimated at \$25,000. The church was insured for \$10,000. The replacement cost was estimated to range from \$50,000 to \$75,000.



*The front of the church still stood, but it clearly was charred from the fire.*





*The newspaper, The Berea Enterprise, ran this photo of St. Mary's after the January 24, 1948, fire. It shows that the fire went through the entire building. The damage caused the roof to collapse in the middle.*

Shortly after the fire, St. Mary's held its 8:00 and 10:30 Sunday morning services half a mile west in the auditorium of the public school (which now serves as Olmsted Falls City Hall). That also was the location for children's catechism at 2:00 on Saturday afternoons. Daily masses were held in St. Mary's rectory chapel.

Despite the lack of a church building, the parish went ahead with other business, such as celebrating Father Walsh's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of becoming a priest. On Sunday evening, February 22, St. Mary's borrowed the school auditorium for an open house to honor Walsh.

Almost seven weeks after the fire, on Friday, March 12, a committee of 25 men, including four members of Olmsted Falls Village Council, started a campaign to raise funds to build a new church. "According to Rev. Jos. P. Walsh, pastor, who recently celebrated his Silver Jubilee as a priest, it will be a church and school combination of brick and stone construction," the *Enterprise* reported. "The immediate plan is to build a four-room school with the chapel in the basement. The church proper and rectory will be added later."

An eight-member committee was designated to solicit gifts from inside and outside the parish. The committee also sought memorial contributions for such features as the stations of the cross, the baptismal font, candlestick holders, vestments and statues that could be dedicated to contributors' loved ones. By March 22, the first phase of the fundraising campaign had brought in \$27,804, although a few parishioners had not yet been heard from. As Lenten season came to a close, fundraising benefits on behalf of the church began to be scheduled. For example, the West View Rosary Society of St.

Adalbert's Church in Berea held a bingo party April 8 at the village hall in West View. A dance and card party sponsored by the St. Mary's of the Falls Altar and Rosary Society were scheduled for April 16 at Olmsted Falls High School. Hugh Quinn donated the services of his orchestra, the Mad Hatters, for the dance.

On Sunday morning, September 5, 1948, St. Mary's held a public groundbreaking ceremony for its combination church and school. Father Walsh turned the first spade of dirt. Among the others who participated in the groundbreaking was Gertrude Barnum, a former organist at the church whose father had helped to build the original church nine decades earlier. J. Ellsworth Potter was the architect. The church chose R.S. Ursprung Co. for the construction of the new building.

St. Mary's new parochial school went into operation in 1949. The Sisters of St. Joseph staffed it. Enrollment had increased enough by 1958 that St. Mary's had two portable, former wartime barracks moved from Christ the King Parish in East Cleveland to become new classrooms for the primary grades. St. Mary of the Falls School began an all-day kindergarten program in 1987. In 1997, construction of a new school building began. Today, St. Mary's has classes for pre-school through eighth grade.

On Saturday, May 20, 1950, 28 months after the fire that destroyed the original church building, St. Mary's held a dedication ceremony for its new building. Bishop Edward Francis Hoban of Cleveland, assisted by the Right Rev. Albert Murphy, pastor at St. Ignatius High School, presided over the dedication. Holzworth called the new St. Mary's "one of the finest church buildings" for a parish of its size. It cost about \$150,000.

Of course, St. Mary's of the Falls has gone through some changes since 1950, but the building completed then is essentially the church that has anchored the southern end of downtown Olmsted Falls for almost seven decades. Within a decade after the dedication of St. Mary's, the current Olmsted Community Church was completed on the original site of St. Mary's. It anchors the northern end of downtown with a similar steeple. It's not recorded in the official history of the Community Church that the beautiful new St. Mary's building provided inspiration for the new Community Church building, but it's not unreasonable to think that the Protestants might have wanted to keep up with their Catholic neighbors. In any case, the two churches provide handsome bookends for the downtown district.



*Historian Walter Holzworth called the new St. Mary of the Falls "one of the finest church buildings" of its kind.*





*St. Mary's has expanded over the years to include additional facilities at the southwestern corner of Columbia and Bagley roads. Among the amenities on the grounds is a pavilion suitable for picnics and other outdoor events.*



## Other Fire in 1948 Ruined Fenderbosch Grocery

The other fire in January 1948 would have been the biggest news in Olmsted Falls that month if St. Mary's had not burned down in the same week. On Monday afternoon, January 19, fire broke out in the grocery store owned by brothers Robert and Richard Fenderbosch. *The Berea Enterprise* reported that the fire ruined the interior and destroyed the stock of the store. The loss was estimated at \$25,000.

The grocery had been established sometime in the late 1800s by Robert and Richard's



*Before the January 19, 1948, fire, the grocery owned by the Fenderbosches looked like this.*



grandfather, Herman Fenderbosch, who was better known as the owner of a saloon a bit farther north at what now is 7990 Columbia Road (current location of Millstone Merchantile). In 1900, he sold his interest in the store to his son-in-law, Arthur Dodd. When Herman retired in 1904, his son Henry took over his saloon business. But that did not last long because Olmsted Falls voted to go dry and close its saloons in 1908. Henry Fenderbosch then joined Dodd, his brother-in-law, in the grocery business. Henry bought out Dodd in 1914. At that time, the Fenderbosch store was one of only two fully stocked grocery and meat stores in Olmsted Falls, according to historian Walter Holzworth. Walter Locke operated the other grocery.

After Henry Fenderbosch died on February 23, 1943, the store remained vacant until his sons, Richard and Robert, reopened it in 1947, just eight months before the fire occurred. Their mother, Mary, owned the building.

“Richard and his bride of six months occupied a second floor apartment, and a sister, husband and two children occupied rooms in a wing adjoining,” the newspaper reported. “Both apartments were damaged.”

At the time, Robert Fenderbosch was chief of the Olmsted Falls Fire Department. The *Enterprise* reported that the department was unable to put out the fire with its equipment, so fire departments were called in from Berea and Olmsted Township to help.

“The fire started at about 4:30 p.m. in the basement of a first floor washroom,” the newspaper reported. “It was 8 p.m. before the fire was completely out.... The stock was destroyed, and all the living rooms were damaged.”

The Fenderbosches built a new building on the site of the one that burned. Walter Holzworth, in his 1966 history of Olmsted, wrote, “This was the first mercantile building erected since [Henry] Schritz built his Nash Agency [for automobiles] in the 1930’s.

When the Fenderbosch brothers went out of business several years later, the West View Appliance store operated by Tom Kucklick moved from West View into the Fenderbosch building.”



*The Fenderbosch brothers put this building on the site where fire damaged their grocery store on January 19, 1948.*

In the early 1970s, Clint Williams bought the building. He operated the appliance store for a while after Kucklick retired. Then he put a wall down the middle and used half the building as the Olmsted Falls office of Clint Williams Realty until

1978, when he converted the former Schady's Shell service station at the corner of Water Street and Columbia Road into his real estate office.

Eventually, Williams rented out the building the Fenderbosches built to the owners of different insurance agencies. The northern side at 8020 Columbia Road houses an Allstate Insurance office, while the other half at 8022 Columbia Road houses a Farmers Insurance office.



*This house at 7885 Brookside Drive once was connected to the Fenderbosch family's grocery store on Columbia Road. After the January 1948 fire that ruined the grocery, this portion of the building was moved to Brookside Drive to become a home for Richard Fenderbosch and his family. Bruce Banks took this photo several years ago, before subsequent owners made changes, which included the addition of a covered front porch.*

However, not all of the Fenderbosch grocery building that burned in January 1948 is gone. The section of the building that had served as a residence was not damaged as badly as the grocery section. The residential section (seen on the right side in the first photo in this story) was moved to 7885 Brookside Drive, where it became the home of Richard and Susanne Fenderbosch and their family. Richard Fenderbosch died in 1995. His widow, Susanne, continued to live there for the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The house was sold outside the family early in 2001.

NOTE: In his 1966 book of Olmsted history, Walter Holzworth gave the date of the fire at the Fenderbosches' grocery as January

19, 1949. However, newspaper coverage of the fire clearly shows it occurred in 1948. Unfortunately, the date error was picked up by subsequent histories of the community, including *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township*, which was published in 2010.

## **Township Roads Got New Speed Limits 60 Years Ago**

Anyone who has received a speeding ticket on an Olmsted Township road in the past six decades can thank – or blame – actions the township trustees initiated early in 1958. That January, at their first meeting of the year, the trustees decided to work with the Cuyahoga County engineer's office to establish speed limits on roads described by William Gilligan, chairman of the trustees, as “narrow and unsuited for the 60 mile an hour limit now in force.” Back then, the default speed limit for rural roads outside of municipalities was 60 miles an hour.

The roads the trustees targeted for lower speed limits included: Barton, McKenzie, Schady, Usher, Barrett and Nobottom. As the *Berea News* reported on January 6, 1958, “Each of those roads now terminates in a municipality which enforces a speed limit lower than 60 miles an hour,” according to Gilligan.

Also at that early January meeting, the trustees proposed meeting with the county commissioners’ office to discuss the possibilities of widening Lewis Road and Cook Road, building shoulders along John Road, lighting 22 intersections around the township, constructing new bridges along Usher Road and Lewis Road, and cleaning township ditches.

Those changes reflect how Olmsted Township was experiencing some growth in in years following World War II.

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include more stories about the history of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township, including one about a “sporting” event that occurred in Olmsted Falls 125 years ago, even though it was illegal.

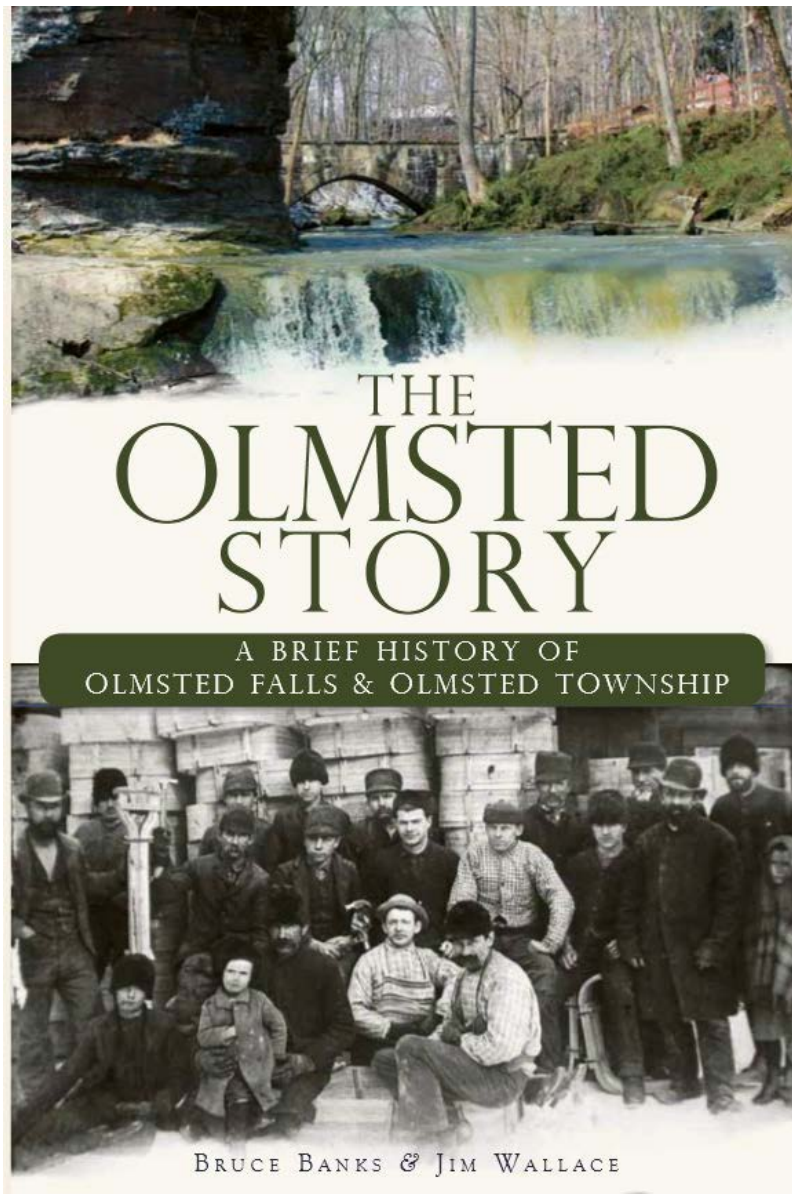
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: [wallacestar@hotmail.com](mailto:wallacestar@hotmail.com). *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, West Virginia, Florida, 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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