



Olmsted 200

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

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Olmsted Community Church Marks Centennial of Unification

It was 100 years ago this month that many of the Protestants in Olmsted Falls took a step that would have long-lasting effects on the community. In January 1917, members of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Congregational Church merged their congregations to form the Olmsted Community Church. The building that now bears that name came along a few decades later, and the merger made it possible.



Today's Olmsted Community Church, seen here during a snowfall, is the result of the merger 100 years ago.

That merger brought together two of the oldest churches in Olmsted. They had operated across the street from each other since the middle of the 19th century. They often worked together by holding joint services and Sunday school classes.

As the Rev. Arthur C. Decker of the Olmsted Community Church wrote in an article about his church in the souvenir program for the 1939

Olmsted Falls Homecoming, “the churches merged their resources and their hopes and under the leadership of one minister launched an experiment in church union which has grown more and more successful with the years.”



This house at 7674 Columbia Road was the home of Chauncey and Nancy Mead, when 18 people met there in 1835 to form the Congregational Church, a predecessor of the Olmsted Community Church.

The older of the two churches was the Congregational Church. Records show that 18 Olmsted residents met on April 16, 1835, in the home of Chauncey and Nancy Mead to organize a Congregational society. According to records quoted by Decker:

Agreeable to previous notice a number of persons belonging to Congregational Churches in other places met and presented letters with a view to the organization of a new church. Rev. B.B. Drake of Brooklyn being present, opened the meeting with prayer. The Confession of Faith, Covenant and Articles of Practice, recommended by the Cleveland Presbytery, were then read and discussed. Rev. J. Keyes of Dover, being present, assisted in the examination of the following members of churches with reference to the new organization mentioned above: Mrs. Mary Ann Fitch, Mrs. Jerusha Loomis, Mrs. Cynthia House, from Manchester, Conn.; Mr. Abner Nelson, Mrs. Catherine Nelson, Sylvester Nelson, Sumner Nelson from Florida, Mass.; William Wood, Mrs. Mary Ann Wood, Mrs. Emelin Spencer, from East Hartford, Conn.; Mrs. Rachel Wait from Parma, N.Y.; Mrs. Lydia Cune, Mr. Chauncey Mead, Mrs. Nancy Mead from Harpersville, Ohio; Jotham Howe, Anna S. Howe from Brattleborough, Vt.; Mrs. Harriet Dryden from Dover, Vt.; Mrs. Esther Kennedy from East Hartford, Conn.

That list of founding members is an indication that most of the early residents of Olmsted had moved to Ohio from New England. The Congregational Church's organization in 1835 occurred just 20 years after James Geer and his family and then members of the Stearns family, just in from Vermont, moved in during 1815 to become the first settlers in the township (which was not yet named Olmsted). It also is interesting to note that a few of those early members of the Congregational Church had come from East Hartford, Connecticut, which was the hometown of Aaron Olmsted and his family for whom Olmsted Township and subsequently Olmsted Falls were named.

One other note of explanation should be made about that quotation from the early records of the Congregational Church. The reference to the Rev. J. Keyes being from Dover did not refer to the Dover, Ohio, in Tuscarawas County that is adjacent to New Philadelphia. It surely meant the Dover Township that was directly north of Olmsted Township. Bay Village, Westlake and a portion of North Olmsted were formed out of Dover Township. Also, Walter Holzworth, in his 1966 book on Olmsted history, wrote that Dover Township had had a Congregational Church as early as 1811, and that church spawned not only the church in Olmsted but also others in Brecksville and Strongsville.



This photo of the Congregational Church shows it next to the old Town Hall, which was built by Olmsted Township in 1882-1883 and stood until Olmsted Falls replaced it in 1940 with a new Village Hall, which now houses the Moosehead restaurant. The photo seems to have been taken early in the 1900s or perhaps even earlier.



The former Congregational Church had a bit more vegetation around it when this photo was taken in 1939. By then, it was one of two buildings used by the Olmsted Community Church as a result of the 1917 merger of the Congregational Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church. This photo appeared in the souvenir program for the 1939 Olmsted Falls Homecoming, along with the Rev. Arthur C. Decker's essay on the history of the Olmsted Community Church.

Decker further wrote that, when the Rev. Keyes consecrated in prayer the 18 people who met in the Mead home in 1835 and they gave their consent to the Confession



This painting, which is displayed inside the Olmsted Community Church, shows the former Congregational Church across the street from the former Methodist Episcopal Church. Next to it is the Olmsted Falls Village Hall built in 1940. Thus, the time of the painting was in either the 1940s or early 1950s before the former Congregational Church was torn down.

located directly across the street – now Columbia Road but formerly known as Columbia Street – from the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Methodist Society was organized in Olmsted Falls in 1843. In 1852, the Rev. Hiram Humphrey, who was in charge of the Berea Circuit of the North Ohio Conference, appointed nine men to be trustees of the church in Olmsted. Also in 1852, George C. Knight proposed to erect a church building, and 44 members signed an agreement to contribute funds for the project. On April 1, 1853, 37 members signed a note for \$1,141.45 to ensure financial support for the new church building. The total cost of the building was \$1,555.

For many years, church and state came together at that location

of Faith, they constituted “The First Congregational Church of Olmsted.” Later, they “were received under the care of the Cleveland Presbytery,” Decker wrote.

In 1848, the congregation built a permanent home in the form of a church that stood on what now is the parking lot between the Olmsted Community Church and the Moosehead restaurant. That building lasted more than a century. In 1884, the congregation added a church bell obtained from Strongsville. Holtzworth wrote that the belfry holding the bell likely was built about that time.

As noted earlier, the Congregational Church was



It is hard to say what the basement of the Methodist Episcopal Church looked like in the mid-1800s, when township and village offices were located there, but this is how it looks now as part of the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel.

after township officials moved into the basement of the church. Previously, the township trustees and other township officials had operated out of the Union Church, which was at the corner of Butternut Ridge Road and Cedar Point Road – then known as “Town House Corners” – in the northeastern section of Olmsted Township. But in 1849, township offices moved into Olmsted Falls, which was more centrally located in the township. In his 1879 *History of Cuyahoga County, Ohio*, Criswell Johnson wrote that the township purchased the basement of the



In 1910, a big storm blew the steeple off of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Methodist Episcopal Church in 1856 “for a town house, at a cost of two hundred and fifty dollars.” Also in 1856, Olmsted Falls incorporated as a village, and village officials conducted their business out of shared quarters in the basement of the church. Government offices finally moved out of the church basement in 1883 after the township built a Town Hall across the street and just south of the Congregational Church.

This is another view of the Methodist Episcopal Church after it lost its steeple in the 1910 storm. The building did not get another steeple until after developer Clint Williams bought it in 2001 and restored the building as the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel.

Congregational Church, “Old records tell of periods of lethargy and then of renewed interest. Chiefly it is a story of struggle and determination. There was no settled Pastor for any length of time.”

Other accounts indicate the same could have been said about the Methodist Episcopal Church. In fact, a historical account written for an Olmsted Community Church dedication ceremony in 1960 said this about both churches: “From the early days of their existence, through the World War I era, these two groups found survival difficult and had leadership of only limited means, having been served during this period by a group of student pastors. This period extended from 1852 to 1916.”

Over the years, both the Congregational Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church struggled to keep up membership and employ pastors. In 1939, Decker wrote in regard to the

This photo of the Methodist Episcopal Church building seems to have been taken in the early 1900s, sometime after the roof was repaired from the 1910 storm damage that knocked off the steeple but before the 1939 photo shown below.



At times, the two churches shared services, Sunday schools and pastors. A few decades after the Methodist Episcopal Church was built, members decided to upgrade it. That led to a period of sharing between the two churches, followed by separation.



This 1939 photo shows what seems to be a cupola on the top of the church building where the steeple had been before the 1910 storm.

work in addition to his studies and receives the highest praise. There are two memorial windows in the church front with the inscription 'Lester Bradford and wife.'"

The December 6 issue of the paper included a reminder from the Rev. F.W. Poole that the Methodist Episcopal Church would reopen for services two days later. "The church has undergone a complete remodeling and now presents a neat and attractive appearance."

An item in the November 29, 1889, edition of the *Berea Advertiser* said: "The M.E. church society feel considerably elated over their new church – or the old one modernized. The building is hardly recognizable with its changed appearance inside and out, and it will certainly add new life to the church people. They held services in the Congregational church while their building was being fitted up. The re-opening will take place on Sunday morning, Dec. 8, with a discourse from President Stubbs of Berea. Rev. Mr. Poole is doing excellent

In February 1890, items in the *Advertiser* indicated that the two congregations were going their separate ways after the renovation of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Instead of having a joint “Union Sunday School,” they had gone back to holding separate Sunday school classes. “The discussion of the split has awakened considerable interest and both schools are better attended than the Union,” the paper reported.



This is how the sanctuary of the former Methodist Episcopal Church looks since being renovated as the Grand Pacific Wedding Chapel. The building served as a church for a little more than a century and then 45 years as the Olmsted Masonic Lodge until it took on its current use.

However, the split did not last. Within 15 years, members of the two churches began considering a permanent union. The *Berea Enterprise* reported in its January 29, 1915, edition: “The Reverends Rothrock and Luce addressed the Olmsted Falls people in the M.E. Church Sunday, concerning the contemplated federation of the churches.”

One week later, the February 5 paper said: “Union services were held in the Cong’l church Sunday evening, Dr. Johnson of Oberlin presiding. Next Sunday evening union service will be at the Methodist church. Dr. Snider will preach. Everybody welcome.” That issue also included this item: “A great deal of thought and hard work is being put on the Community Church proposition. It is a good thing. Help it along.”

The churches continued to work together. In its June 11, 1915, edition, the *Enterprise* reported: “The M.E. and Cong’l Sunday Schools will hold a union Children’s day service in the Cong’l, Sunday morning at 11, eastern time. A special collection will be taken.”

Talk of merging the churches occurred during a period during in which unification was a prominent subject in Olmsted. In June 1915, Olmsted Falls merged its village school district into the Olmsted Township Rural School District. That led to a decision by voters in November 1915 to build one school to serve all the students in the

village and township. That new school opened in September 1916. The building now serves as Olmsted Falls City Hall. (For more on the merger of the two school districts and the construction of the consolidated school, see *Olmsted 200* Issue 25 from June 2015 for “Olmsted Marks Century of School Consolidation” and Issue 40 from September 2016 for “New School Opened One Century Ago.”) It is not recorded whether the movement to merge school districts and build a single school to serve all students influenced the movement toward the merger of churches, but it certainly didn’t hurt to have such talk in the air.

Late in 1916, each church appointed a committee to study unification. The Congregational Church appointed: James Scroggie, W.H.C. Towler, B.H. Jacobs, Philip Simmerer, Mrs. W.B. Maynard and Mrs. E.C. Holton. Those representing the Methodist Episcopal Church included: L.L. Partch, T. TeGrotenhuis, Albert Hammon, E.R. Miller, Harry Stearns and Mrs. S.W. Jennings. They developed “Articles Governing the Federation of the Methodist and Congregational Churches of Olmsted Falls, Ohio,” which the congregations adopted in January 1917.

“This action was a revolutionary step in its day and one observed by religious leaders for years to come as a truly pioneering Christian cooperative moment,” a 1960 account of the church’s history said.

The *Olmsted Community Church 1964-65 Yearbook and Directory* offered this explanation for the merger: “By 1917, the adults, many of them products of the joint church school, decided they were more united as a people under God than they were divided by two different denominations. The Olmsted Community Church was born.”

That yearbook also explained the philosophy that governed the merger and church operations:

Two requirements guarded the formation of the Community Church and have guided it since. First, the church must provide worship of evangelical character. While this means that the “Good News” of what God has done in Jesus Christ must be proclaimed, it also means that each individual must make his own response to God. We have no required creed which all must accept.

The second requirement is that the church must be an interdenominational church. This means that our church governs its own affairs and maintains no binding ties with any one denomination, even though we participate in fellowship with some. Our missionary help goes partly to individual projects, partly to Methodist missions, and partly to missions of the United Church of Christ. But we are and remain an interdenominational church attempting to minister to the needs of all Protestants in this area. It has been our experience that people of various denominational backgrounds have been able to worship and work wholeheartedly together in our Community Church.

After the 1917 merger, the united congregation used the sanctuary of the former Methodist church for worship services and the former Congregational church for Sunday school classes and as a community house. The church built a parsonage on Brookside Drive in 1924.

The merger seemed to have the desired effect of creating one stronger church out of two weaker ones. “Today the church with a membership of 415, has two well equipped buildings for worship and social purposes,” Decker wrote in 1939. “It can adequately support a resident pastor and does a fair share of missionary work through its Benevolence Fund.”

Although the merger occurred in 1917, it took until June 2, 1923, for the new Olmsted Community Church to file articles of incorporation with the Ohio Secretary of State’s Office. In 1949, a title to all church property was vested in the name of the Olmsted Community Church.

The Olmsted Community Church operated as one church with two buildings for a few decades after the merger. But time for another change came in the 1950s. That story will come in Issue 45 of *Olmsted 200* in February.

Farmers’ Institute Was Popular in Olmsted 100 Years Ago

Many people in Olmsted Township and, to a lesser extent, Olmsted Falls were engaged in agriculture 100 years ago. In the middle of the winter, when farming activities were minimal, farm families took time to improve their education through a farmers’ institute associated with Olmsted Grange #1619.

In 1917, the institute was held on January 22 and 23 with activities for both men and women. Articles in the Berea Enterprise said that the speakers included Pearl Dorsey, who was described as a “rural community social leader,” and J.L. Buchanan, who raised Percheron and Morgan horses, cattle and swine in Carroll County.

Dorsey’s lecture topics included “Menu Building,” “Bossy and Her Gilt Edge Products,” “Preparedness for the Home Maker,” “The Girl and Her Opportunities,” and “The House by the Side of the Road.” Buchanan’s topics included “Value of the Manure Crop,” “Water in the House – Why Not?” and “Concrete on the Farm and How to Make It.”

The article about Buchanan quoted him as saying, “On Liberty Hall Stock Farm I am producing from two to four times what I did fifteen years ago through the use of modern methods and equipment.”

Neither article indicated where in Olmsted the farmers’ institute would be held, but shortly after the Grange formed in 1904, it began meeting in the Odd Fellows Hall, which is the building now occupied by Taqueria Junction, so that was likely where people met for the institute.

WILL SPEAK AT OLMSTED INSTITUTE

JANUARY 22 AND 23, 1917



PEARL DORSEY.

EXPERIENCED IN RURAL COMMUNITY LIFE WORK

Brings Results of Broad Training and
Personal Work.

Results of extensive training are incorporated in the lectures of Pearl Dorsey, who will speak at the farmers' institute.

Life on the farm, work as a rural community social leader and more than a dozen seasons spent in farmers' institute work, together with training received at several colleges, afford her abundant material from which to select. Her lectures include "Menu Building;" "Bossy and Her Gilt Edge Products;" "Preparedness for the Home Maker;" "The Girl and Her Opportunities" and "The House by the Side of the Road."

WILL SPEAK AT OLMSTED INSTITUTE

JANUARY 22 AND 23, 1917



J. L. BUCHANAN, Carroll County.

RAISED PRIZE CATTLE, SWINE AND PERCHERONS

Spending Twelfth Winter as Farmers' Institute Lecturer.

Twelve years before the public as a farmers' institute lecturer and forty-three years on the farm indicate what J. L. Buchanan of Carroll county, who will lecture at the coming farmers' institute, has to offer.

"On Liberty Hall Stock Farm I am producing from two to four times what I did fifteen years ago, through the use of modern methods and equipment," says Mr. Buchanan. Percheron and Morgan horses, of which the farm ranks among the large producers of the state, and the raising of registered cattle and swine are his specialties.

"Value of the Manure Crop," "Water in the Home—Why Not?" "Concrete on the Farm and How to Make It" are included in the list of subjects which Mr. Buchanan's lectures will treat.

These are the articles from the Berea Enterprise from 100 years ago that promoted the upcoming farmers' institute scheduled to be held in Olmsted.

Descendants Find Peltzes' Final California Destination

If longtime Olmsted Falls resident and merchant Joseph Peltz had not moved away, he likely would have been buried at the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery, also known as Turkeyfoot. He probably would have been laid to rest near the stone bench with "PELTZ" on it. But he didn't stay in Olmsted Falls. In 1920, Peltz and his second wife, Minnie, moved to Eagle Rock, California, which was incorporated into Los Angeles in 1923. He died in 1938.

For the past few years, Joseph Peltz's great-great-grandson, Doug Peltz, who lives in northern California, has been gathering every tidbit of information he can find about his ancestors. Many of his findings have been shared in the pages of *Olmsted 200*, especially in a series of Stories that ran in Issues 32 through 37 from January through June 2016. His latest investigation was the result of a trip to southern California in November.



This photo from 1948 shows the Peltz bench at old Chestnut Grove Cemetery. Next to it are Audrey Peltz, wife of Douglas "Buddy" Peltz, and their daughter, Linda. Buddy Peltz was the grandson of Joseph Peltz and grandfather of Doug Peltz.



In this photo from November, Josephine Peltz sits next to the grave of Joseph Peltz, the great-great-grandfather for whom she was named and longtime Olmsted Falls resident and merchant. Joseph was born in Olmsted Falls in 1856 and died in Los Angeles in 1938. Photo courtesy of Josephine's father, Doug Peltz..

"While passing through Los Angeles, I visited Joseph & Minnie Peltz's grave sites for the first time, and drove by the location of their two homes (in the Eagle Rock district of Los Angeles)," Doug Peltz wrote. "Sadly, both homes were knocked down; the main house was knocked down as recently as 2014. But I managed to get in touch with the previous owners, and they've shared some photos of the home with me. Alice also shared with me her childhood memories of living there, and what the neighborhood looked like then. Many of the neighbors' houses still remain."

Doug took advantage of the visit to, in a sense, bring Joseph Peltz together with his namesake, Doug's daughter, Josephine, for a photo of her sitting by the gravesite.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include the next story about the history of the Olmsted Community Church and a story about an Olmsted Falls house that has been put to new use.

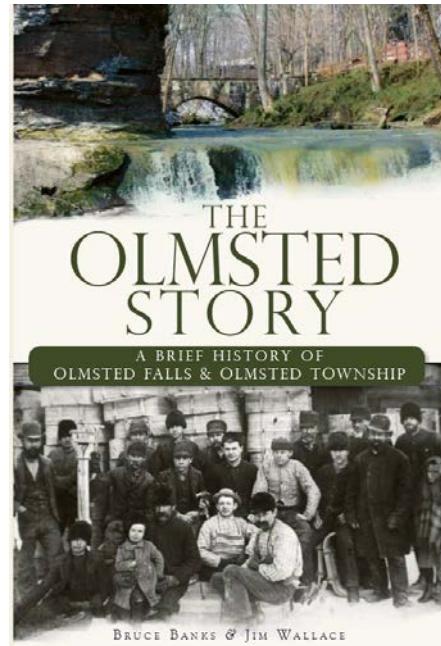
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Colorado, Arizona, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, West Virginia, Florida, New Hampshire, Massachusetts 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://www.egovlink.com/olmsted/docs/menu/home.asp> and click on "Olmsted 200."

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 Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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