



# Olmsted 200

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

Issue 32

January 1, 2016

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## Important Olmsted Family Had Roots in River Road House

*This is the beginning of a series about a family that played a big role in the development of Olmsted Falls in the 1800s and early 1900s and the places they lived and conducted business. The series will include newly uncovered information and photos that perhaps no one in Olmsted has seen for several decades.*

One of the oldest photos taken in Olmsted Falls shows a family in the backyard of their home, which also was a shop for making wagons, along what now is known as River Road. It must be one of Olmsted's oldest photos – perhaps the oldest in existence – because it shows the Peltz family, which was led by Florin – or Florian – Peltz, who died at age 52 on March 1, 1870. That means the photo likely was taken sometime in the 1860s. Considering that commercial photography became available shortly before the Civil War, there might not be any known Olmsted photo taken earlier than this one still in existence.

The photo is significant not only for its age but also because it shows the beginnings of a family that played a prominent role in Olmsted Falls during several decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and because it shows a house that still exists. In recent years, that house at 7486 River Road has been owned by Kevin Roberts, an Olmsted Falls lawyer and councilman, and his wife. (Last year, they moved out of the River Road house and into one at 7642 Columbia Road, where he also has relocated his law office. It's another historic house that he renovated. It was built by Samuel Lay, Jr., in about 1845. For more about the renovation of that house, see Issue 4 of *Olmsted 200* from September 2013.)



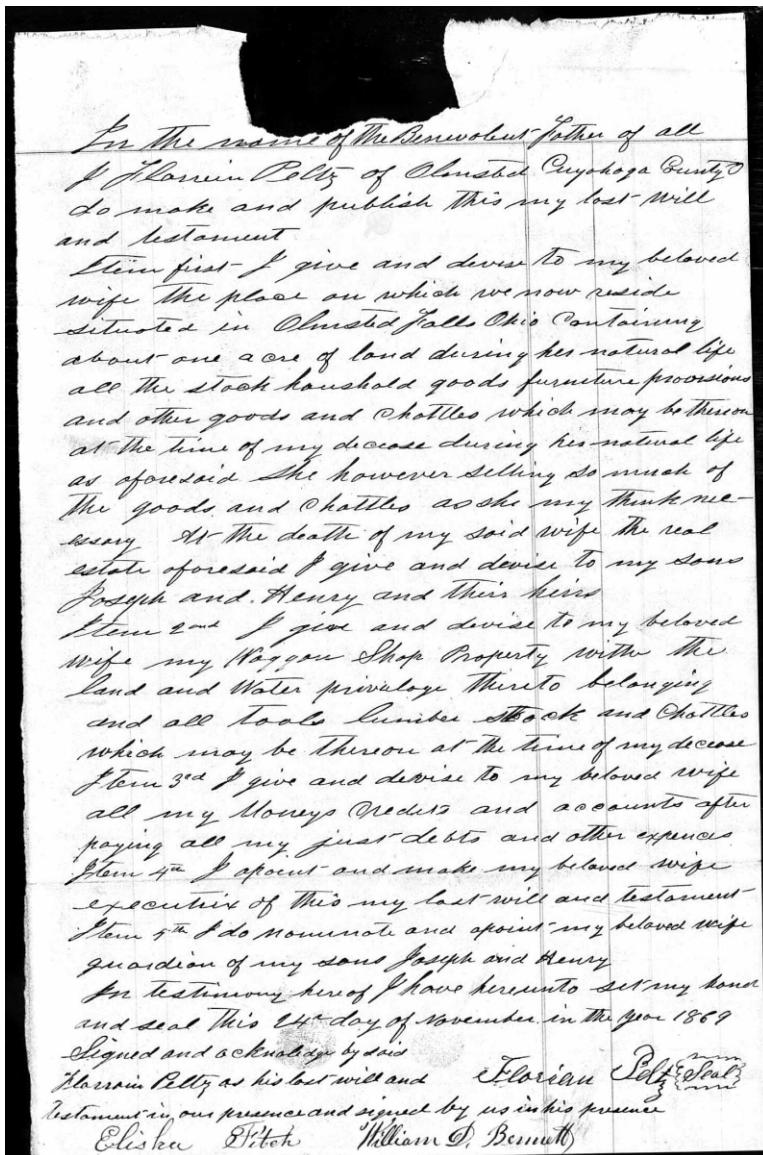
*This photo of the Peltz family has appeared many times over the years in books and newspaper articles and even as a postcard. But Doug Peltz of California believes the above print might have been made from the original negative from the 1860s. While researching his family's history, he found it in 2015 in the collection of Alice Stilwell McPeak, who also lives in California. Her grandmother was the second wife of Joseph Peltz, who was the son of Florian Peltz, the head of the family in this photo. Florian holds the wagon wheel in the center of the photo. Next to him are his younger son, Henry, and then his older son, Joseph. On the other side of Joseph is Florian's wife Magdalene. The names of others in the photo are unknown.*

*This is the backside of the house at 7486 River Road that once belonged to the family of Florian Peltz in the 1800s. This photo was taken in August 2015 from about the same viewpoint as the 1860s photo shown above. Obviously, the house was expanded and altered several times over the past century and a half.*



Although histories of Olmsted, such as Walter Holzworth's 1966 book, referred to the patriarch of the Peltz family as Florin, evidence found in 2015 by one of his descendants, Doug Peltz, indicates that his first name likely was Florian. According to Holzworth, he was born in 1818. Although Holzworth did not indicate where Peltz was born, the obituary written by L.B. Adams for the March 4, 1870, edition of Berea's *Grindstone City Advertiser* referred to Peltz as "one of our honest, industrious German citizens." Adams also wrote, "He has for several months been confined in his room with consumption. He was 52 years of age, and leaves a wife and three children."

Doug Peltz, who is Florian Peltz's great-great-great-grandson and the only one to carry on the Peltz name, believes Florian is the correct spelling of his ancestor's first name because last July he found a copy of his last will and testament online. "Notably, he signed his name FLORIAN, not Florin," Doug Peltz wrote. "I've seen both variants, so it was nice to see which one he apparently preferred. Also, this was written in November 1869, just four months before his death at age 52."



*To the left is the last will and testament for Florian Peltz. It was filed in probate court in Cleveland on April 2, 1870, about a month after his death. It confirms the spelling of his first name was not "Florin," as had been recorded in some histories of Olmsted. Thanks to Doug Peltz for finding and sharing this document.*

After he discovered the correct spelling of Florian Peltz's first name, Doug Peltz tried to solve the mystery of where Florian was buried. It would have been reasonable to find the grave at the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery, also known as Turkeyfoot. Other Peltz graves are there, but not Florian's. Searching an online database with the last name of Peltz and a death year of 1870, Doug found reports

of a grave for “Gloria” Peltz at St. Mary’s Cemetery in Berea. That’s the St. Mary’s Cemetery along North Depot Street belonging to the St. Mary’s Church on Kraft Street in Berea, not the cemetery belonging to St. Mary’s of the Falls along Bagley Road in the corridor that Berea annexed from Olmsted Township in the 1980s.

The person who listed the grave for “Gloria” Peltz found it in 2003, but a search of the cemetery in August 2015 did not yield a gravestone with that name. (Neither did a search of the cemetery on Bagley Road.) However, many of the stones in the cemetery along North Depot Street were so weathered that it was difficult to read the names. Perhaps that is why the person who found the grave in 2003 thought it read “Gloria” instead of “Florian.” Doug Peltz wrote, “So I’m willing to bet anything that that’s Florian’s grave.”

In his will, Peltz left all of his belongings, including his “Waggon Shop Property” to his wife, Magdalene Bezner Peltz. Holzworth wrote that Mrs. Peltz was born on July 28, 1820, in Hoger (or quite likely Höger) in the Württemberg region of Germany. Holzworth wrote that she arrived in America in 1854. Florian and Magdalene Peltz had two sons, Joseph and Henry, as well as two daughters who died in infancy. Joseph was the only one of his generation of the Peltz family to reach adulthood. Henry died just a few years after his father on July 22, 1873. Here is how that death was reported in the *Advertiser*:

*LAST Tuesday 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.*

Joseph went on to become one of the most prominent businessmen in Olmsted Falls. (*Olmsted 200* will have more on his life in next month’s issue.) His mother, Magdalene, lived a long life. She died at age 87 on November 22, 1907, according to Holzworth.



*This gravestone in St. Mary’s Cemetery along North Depot Street in Berea is probably not that of Florian Peltz, but it shows how weathered many stones are in that cemetery, making them hard to read.*

## House retains many indications of its history.



*This is the front of the former Peltz house at 7486 River Road.*

One way Roberts could tell which parts were added onto the house is that the sandstone foundation is different. The sandstone looks newer underneath the kitchen that was added. “The rest of the house is more like field stone,” Roberts said. “It came from the local quarry, that kind of thing. There’s a difference in the stone.”

The house has two chimneys. Roberts said the white one is the original one. He said the original house had a T-shape. About 20 of the windows still have glass from the 1800s. That glass has a wavy surface and is not as smooth as modern glass windows.

“There’s an old hearth in the basement,” Roberts said. “The hearthstone has two big holes, one on each side, that are about 10 inches in diameter. I’m pretty sure that’s where they put a bellows to get the heat going. And the chimney’s really big.” The chimney is big enough that Roberts said a slender person “could actually squeeze down that chimney like Santa Claus.”

Reminders of the past are not just visual. “Sometimes, it smells like horses in the summer on

In the years since Kevin Roberts and his wife bought the former Peltz house in 1993, he learned much about its history. For example, he found underneath shingles in the garage some of the clapboard siding of the original house with apparently its original, lead-based paint. He also has figured out which parts were added onto the house over the decades. They include a kitchen in the rear and a sun room on the side. The garage seems to have been added in the 1920s, he said.



*Some of window panes have been in the house since the 1800s. The surface is not as smooth as modern glass.*

a hot day. The smell is still in the wood,” Roberts said. “It is amazing. It’s been a long time. We find horseshoes around here. We find lots of old nails, square handmade nails, hand-cut nails. We’ve dug around the yard a lot of places and found a lot of shards of pottery and bottles. And there’s an old cistern right here around the side of the garage.... They used it as a trash dump, so there are bottles in there. We started digging. We found some bottles down to, I think, the 1920s.”



*This cistern next to the garage contains bottles and other objects dating back at least to the 1920s and probably earlier. The left photo shows it with its cover on, the right photo with it off.*

Nearby is another, bigger cistern that actually goes under the side wall of the house. Roberts estimates it is 10 to 11 feet deep. “It’s fed by the gutters,” he said. “The downspout will feed it, and it has the usual brick wall between them, which acts as a kind of filter. So when the clean water gets to the brick, it rolls over the top. It’s a pretty rudimentary way of doing things.”



*This bigger cistern gathers runoff rainwater.*

Pointing to the northern end of the property, Roberts said they found lots of rubbish in that area. “It seems to be that they had like a little pit over here like a rubbish pit,” he said. “Then there’s another one down at the bottom of the property. But [Elisha] Fitch used to own the back there, all in the back and the whole pasture.”

Roberts added that Elisha Fitch signed Florian Peltz’s will as a witness.

“Yeah, it’s an interesting house,” he said.

Roberts took great interest in what he found when the entire roof was removed in the fall of 2008 right down to the bare wood. Pointing to photos he took at the time, he said, “These are wide plank boards. They’re like original growth timber, and they appear to be chestnut, and they’re like rough-sawn chestnut. They’re probably 25-35 inches wide.”



*These photos show the wide plank boards that were revealed when the roof was removed in the fall of 2008. Photos courtesy of Kevin Roberts.*

Those plank boards are still there, Roberts said. “From the weight, color and appearance of the wood, especially the clear, smooth grain, I believe these are all planks from original growth chestnut,” he said. That’s important, because almost all of the American chestnut trees that once were very common in the eastern United States died as a result of a fungal infection known as chestnut blight. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an estimated 4 billion trees died from it.

“The whole house is post-and-beam, and the basement’s all local stone, and it’s all handmade,” Roberts said. “You can tell. Every time we open up a wall, you can see the posts.”

### **Former mayor once lived there.**

Of course, the house had other owners and occupants since it was in the hands of the Peltz family. Philip Simmerer, who went into business with his brother-in-law, Joseph Peltz, late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was said to have lived in the River Road house for a while before he built his own house between Joseph Peltz’s house (now home to Mary’s Hair Salon) and their hardware store (now the Grand Pacific Hotel). Simmerer reportedly rode a velocipede, an early bicycle, to work from the old Peltz house on River Road.

Another significant occupant of the house was David Fortier, who served as a councilman and then as mayor of Olmsted Falls. He took office as mayor in January 1984. But his term and his life were cut short when he died in a car accident on Route 252 in Columbia Township on February 21, 1986. A speeding truck that crossed the centerline hit Fortier’s car going the other way. Fortier was only 38 years old. The city’s David Fortier River Park was named in his memory.

Fortier was a chemistry teacher at Brunswick High School. He also was an active bicyclist who founded a bicycling group, Tour Around the South Shore of Lake Erie, or TASSLE. “It’s kind of funny,” Roberts said. “So many people who lived here had things

to do with bicycles or wheels. It was a wagon wheel shop, and then Simmerer used to ride to work on this big velocipede. He used to ride his bike, and then Fortier was a biker, and I've been a biker, too."

Roberts and his wife bought the house in 1993 from the estate of Fortier's mother, Una. He said Una Fortier's daughter "basically stuck a sign on here and said best offer in three weeks gets it. I think we were the only people."

Una Fortier lived in the house for a long time, Roberts said, and she apparently had little money to put into it, so it needed work when the Robertses took possession. "Like, the kitchen sink used to discharge right into the backyard somewhere," he said. "Nobody could find a septic tank – nobody." Even a man who had worked on many of the septic systems in the area for three decades couldn't find a septic tank.

"We finally found the septic tank underneath the garage floor, under the concrete garage floor," Roberts said. "[They] poured concrete right over it. The last record of that septic tank was from 1938. So we had to put in a whole new system."

The house also had wallpaper that Roberts said seemed to go back to 1912. A photo of the house that he has seen stashed away at City Hall shows it with a split-rail fence in front. That photo was taken before a porch was added. Roberts believes it was taken in the 1920s. He said it seems the garage also was built in the 1920s using old carriage doors that might have come from a stable. On a wall of the garage, he found notations about when the owner changed the tires on his automobile. "It would say, 'Changed the tires on Dodge 1922, 1923,'" Roberts said. "There's a lot of history here, lot of bad maintenance."

Not only was there bad maintenance, but at least one change to the house could have been dangerous. "There was a big, old gas tank up in the ceiling because there weren't any gas stations," Roberts said. "It was like a 100-gallon tank right underneath the rafters."

Because Roberts thought having a large tank for gasoline in the garage wasn't very safe, he had it taken down. That's when he discovered huge snakeskins up in those rafters.

"The snakes would get in the garage – black rat snakes," Roberts said. "I saw these skins there. They were huge, and I pulled one out. It was completely intact. You

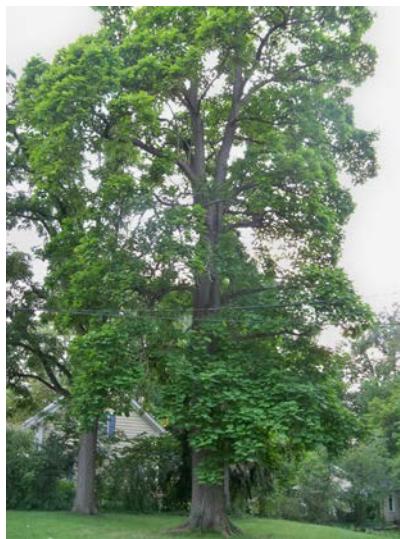


*The house is on the National Register of Historic Places.*

could see the eyeballs all the way to the tail, and we stretched it out, and it's seven feet long. We donated it to the nature center."

As Roberts cleaned out the garage, he found a big piece of rolled-up plastic that might have been used for landscape gardening. "And something moved when I got near it," he said. "I said, 'I know that snake is in there.' And I took a big garden rake, and I grabbed that roll, and I just rolled it. And it unrolled, and when it finally unrolled, this big snake flopped out into the sun. It looked like a big piece of shiny licorice, all curled up, all heaped up inside the plastic. Then it slowly uncurled and got really long. It was the one that had made that big skin. And it snuck off in the woods over there."

That wasn't the last Roberts saw of that snake. The next spring, he saw it up in a tree eating baby birds from their nest. "We were about to leave for a party," he said. "I threw some rocks at it. We came back and didn't know what happened. The next day, the snake had died. It had gorged itself. It ate three baby birds and choked to death. It was so weird."



*This northern catalpa tree is believed to be one of the largest of its species in Ohio.*

going crazy," Roberts said.

Although the snake certainly was not around at the time of Florian Peltz, the property still has a tree that Peltz might have known. Roberts said a woman from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' Division of Forestry inspected it and said it is one of the biggest northern catalpa trees in the state. Down River Road in another backyard is another tree that is 25 feet in circumference and estimated to be about 340 years old, Roberts said. It could be one of the largest red oak trees in America, he said.

"This street's so old, there's some giant trees behind these houses," Roberts said.

Many of those trees in the neighborhood, including on the property of the former Peltz house, are black walnuts, he said. "This whole yard has lots of black walnuts, lots and lots of them, and the squirrels were

## **Odd Fellows Built and Moved Junction Building**

*This is the latest in a series of stories about the histories of the buildings in Grand Pacific Junction.*

One of the fascinating aspects of Olmsted history is that a surprising number of buildings were moved from one location to another. For example, the Grand Pacific Hotel building was moved in the 1850s from Seminary Road (now Lewis Road) to its current location. The original church building for St. Mary's was moved in the 1870s

from where the Olmsted Community Church is now to near the current location of St. Mary's. And the N.P. Loomis house, which served as the public library on Main Street until the new library opened in 2013, is in its third location since Loomis built it in 1834. Those are just a few of the buildings that were moved generally long before modern, heavy-duty machinery was available to do it.



*Taqueria Junction is the latest occupant of the building, seen from the front on the left and from the rear on the right, that was built by the Odd Fellows and then became home to the Grange.*

Another Grand Pacific Junction building that stands in a different location than where it was built is the former meeting hall for the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. Many current and former Olmsted residents recall that it also served for many years as the Grange Hall. The building, which is at 8154 Columbia Road, now houses Taqueria Junction, the Mexican restaurant.

The building was constructed in 1905 on the other side of Columbia Road – the east side – and on the other side of the railroad tracks. In other words, it was located about where the parking lot for Falls Veterinary Clinic at 8017 Columbia Road now stands. It served not only as a meeting place for the



*The first and second Odd Fellows halls originally stood here next to train tracks. Photo courtesy of Bruce Banks.*

Odd Fellows but also housed merchants, such as Art Dodd's grocery store.

It was the second building for the Odd Fellows at that location. The first one burned down in 1903. It reportedly caught sparks from a passing train. Apparently, the Odd Fellows did not learn a lesson from that experience because they built its replacement in the same location right next to the tracks. The upper floor was their lodge hall, and the ground floor contained the Burns and Fenderbosch farm implement store as well as a bank branch. However, a few years later in 1909, the railroad wanted to widen its bridge to add more tracks. The building then was moved down the street to its current location.



*This photo, dated August 8, 1903, shows the site where the first Odd Fellows hall burned down. It also shows one of the early automobiles in Olmsted Falls.*

Although the Olmsted Grange had used the Odd Fellows' hall for their meetings for years, the Grange became the main occupant after membership in the Odd Fellows fell off. Thus, many longtime residents or former residents of Olmsted still think of it as the Grange Hall. The Grange was a national organization that promoted the well-being of agricultural communities.



*Several years ago, the building housed Odd Fella's, a coffee shop/gift shop with a name that played off of the Odd Fellows' past.*

*This August 2010 photo shows Bruce Banks doing a WEWS TV interview on publication of *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township*.*

In 2003, the Grange was ready to sell the building and called Clint Williams, so he acquired it and made it part of Grand Pacific Junction. When he researched the title for the property, he ran into a mystery. It was listed as having two addresses: 8158 Columbia Road and 8148 Columbia Road. It took him a while, but he figured it out. "The Odd Fellows were

upstairs, and they had one address, and the Grange Hall was downstairs,” he said.

As was the case for most of the buildings Williams acquired for Grand Pacific Junction, the Odd Fellows/Grange Hall was in rough shape. “There wasn’t anything in good shape,” he said. “Didn’t have a basement floor in it, a dirt floor, leaky walls, a kitchen that was so obsolete it was pathetic. [I] took it out. Then I had a coffee shop that wanted to come in, so we set up for a coffee shop.”

One of the first things Williams did was to have the building painted thoroughly. He said it had restrooms upstairs, so he installed a new restroom downstairs that is accessible to people with disabilities, as well as a ramp that could accommodate wheelchairs.

“I think probably the most impressive thing about the whole building is the second floor has a tin ceiling – absolutely gorgeous,” Williams said. But he said the second floor can’t be open to the public because the building doesn’t have enough parking. “Everything is played into the parking,” he said. “Well, I had to get [zoning] variances on everything I did for parking. There’s just not enough parking. But in spite of it all, it works relatively well.”

Williams said the Grange gave many of its items from the building to Schuster’s Westview Gardens for display at the greenhouse, but he has other items left over from the Odd Fellows. One of them is a heart-in-hand sign that was an Odd Fellow symbol.

## Falls Fluid Once Occupied Mill Street Building

In last month’s issue of *Olmsted 200*, the series on Grand Pacific Junction buildings focused on the histories of two buildings, including one at 25561 Mill Street. That building now houses the Cutting Garden and once was home to Clementine’s restaurant. But what was in there before Grand Pacific Junction was uncertain. One reader suggested a millinery shop might have occupied the building at one time.

It’s still not known whether a millinery shop once was there, but another reader, Toby Nichols, has filled in some details about the building’s past. He wrote that his father, Richard Nichols, operated Falls Fluid Power Company there for a decade or so. It manufactured air and hydraulic cylinders.

“His company was in the building from about 1953 until he moved the factory to Berea in the early 60’s,” Nichols wrote. “It was very convenient because I would walk out of the back of the building as a child and it was a short walk into the rear of the Post



*This bottle of pop was sold at Odd Fella's*

Office which was then on Bagley Rd. Back then I could walk right into the mail sorting area in the rear and pick up the mail and give them items we were shipping. I remember Ginny and Chet. Ginny normally ran the counter, and I think Chet would sort and was our mail delivery person at our home on River Rd.”

Nichols said his father’s company had contracts with the Ford Motors plant in Brook Park to manufacture basic component parts for cars. He would deliver the parts to the plant in open trailers, he said. The company also was a distributor of valves and other air and fluid power components, he said.

The buildings across Mill Street were used for storage for the Simmerers’ hardware store at the time, Nichols wrote. “They looked empty but were normally full of supplies and product,” he said. After his father’s company left the building, it became a beauty shop and an upholstery shop, he wrote, but he wasn’t sure about when those shops were in there.

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include the next installment in the history of the Peltz family and will include photos of Olmsted Falls from more than a century ago that might not have been seen around Olmsted for many decades. It also will move up Columbia Road for the next story in the series about Grand Pacific Junction buildings.

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, Colorado, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, West Virginia, Florida, Massachusetts and Maine, as well as overseas in Mongolia and Japan.

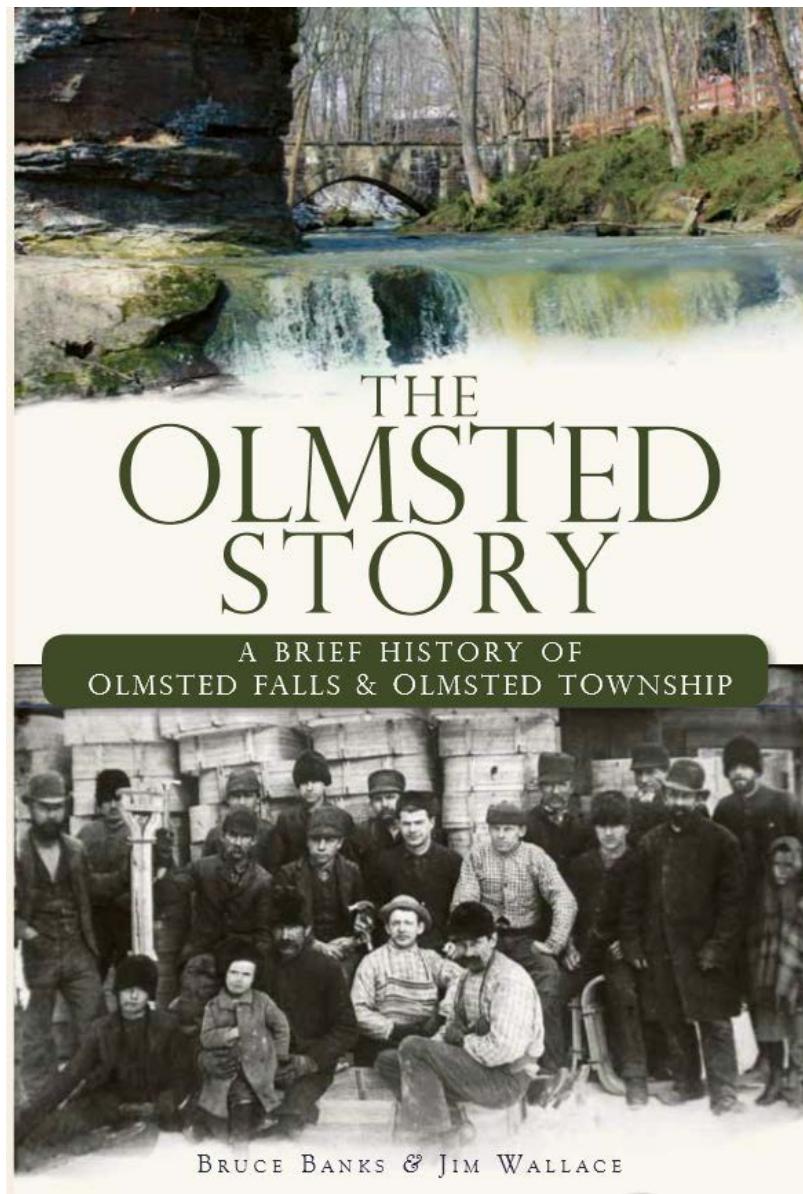
Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted’s history that you would like to have pulled out of *Olmsted 200*’s extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information or photos about the community’s history that you would like to share.

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. 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 Clementine's Victorian Restaurant at Grand Pacific Junction, the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.*



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