



Olmsted 200

Two Centuries and More History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township –
First Farmed in 1814 and Settled in 1815

Issue 106

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Olmsted's Bending Works Moved On and Then Out

All seemed to be going well for Edward Kidney, the prominent entrepreneur and inventor in Olmsted Falls, in 1890 until suddenly it wasn't.

His Cleveland Bending Works, which made various curved wooden parts for wagons and buggies behind his house on River Street (now River Road), was doing such good business that he spent much of 1890 traveling around Ohio and neighboring states just to acquire enough timber to keep it going. Then late that summer, his factory burned down. The loss was estimated at \$16,000. That's equivalent to about \$480,000 in today's dollars according to online inflation calculators.

Insurance covered only \$4,000 of Kidney's loss. That could have been the end of the bending works, but the Olmsted Falls column in the September 5, 1890, edition of the *Berea Advertiser* included this item: "The bending works will be rebuilt." Work began soon and progressed swiftly.

"The brick masons completed their work on the new bending building Wednesday. 30 men still at work," the *Advertiser* reported on September 26.

The October 17, 1890, edition brought this news: "Mr. Kidney's bending works started up this week, just twenty-nine days after the workmen began the work. It seems incredulous to think that two such structures with the vast amount of machinery, every wheel of which had to be made to order, could be built, set up and started in less than a month. Verily, Ed is a pusher."



This undated photo shows the bending works' buildings with the pond in front, as a note on the right side of the photo points out. Photo courtesy of Bruce Banks.

The new factory consisted of two buildings. One was 54 feet by 40 feet with two stories. The other was 40 feet by 80 feet with a story and a half. Kidney pumped water from the river into the plant by using a hydraulic ram, which was a type of cyclic pump that would lift water to a higher level. With the new factory, Kidney added bicycle rims to his line of products.

By this time, Kidney's new business partner was Gus Leutkemeyer. As early as 1888, items in the *Advertiser* indicated that Leutkemeyer, who came from Cleveland, was a frequent visitor to the Kidney home before he became a business partner. Kidney's wife, Angeline, also played a prominent role in the business.

"Mrs. Kidney did the bookkeeping and paid the wages to the workmen who came to the house for their pay," Bernice Offenbergs wrote in her 1964 book, *Over the Years in Olmsted*. "They had an order from China in about 1897 for a wagon. In due time all parts of a wagon were crated and the requested order was sent to China."

Offenberg was a granddaughter of Ed and Angeline Kidney. She was born in 1890, the year the bending works burned down and was rebuilt. In her book, she gave this description of seeing the bending works as a child:

When I was seven years old my grandfather (E.W. Kidney) let me stand in the open doorway at the north side of The Cleveland Bending Works and watch the men work at the machines. First I noticed the belts moving in the ceiling coming from the engine room. Then I noticed a barrel in about the center of the room that was spinning around.

A man stopped and opened it and took out spindles – this is the way they finished them. They were used in buggie [sic] seats. Probably all parts of the wheels for buggies and wagons were finished in this manner.

In the southwest corner of the shop an elevator came down from the second floor and men loaded finished products into a hand car that was on tracks which led to the storage room which was about twenty feet from the shop on the southwest. The storage room was a brick building with a track running through the center of the building.

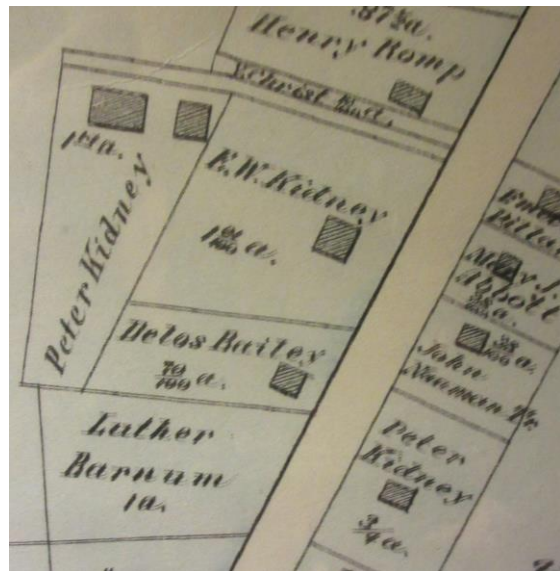
I used to stand at the edge of the Kidney backyard and watch the men at work on the band saw. You could hear it all over town. It was out of doors. The sawdust was used to fire the furnace in the engine room Frank Gallagher was the engineer.

The Bending Works had three teams of horses, a pair of bays, a pair of sorrels and a pair of dapple grays. They hauled logs from the woods and finished products to the depot.

As the 1890s wore on, Kidney and Leutkemeyer found it increasingly hard to obtain the types of timber – oak, ash and hickory – in the volume they needed anywhere close to Olmsted Falls. Walter Holzworth wrote in his 1966 book of Olmsted history that they “employed scouts to search the country side for suitable timber, a part of which was shipped here by rail from Huron County.” But inability to find enough timber hindered the factory’s operations.

Offenberg indicated it was that dwindling output that prompted Kidney’s son, Norris, who had been a foreman in the factory, to move to Michigan to operate his wife’s parents’ farm.

“In 1900 the rumor that Ed Kidney might transfer his whole operation to Tennessee caused concern in Olmsted Falls,” Offenberg wrote. “In June he took a crew of his best employees to that State to work on his newly purchased steam boat. It was 125 feet long, with a 25-foot beam and a very light draft that enabled it to navigate on the Tennessee River. It was equipped with a saw mill outfit. Evidently his purpose was to saw hard wood lumber along the river and have it shipped to Olmsted.”



This section of an 1892 Olmsted Falls map shows the buildings of Ed Kidney’s Cleveland Bending Works at the upper left, although it identifies the owner of the lot they are on as his father, Peter Kidney, who died in 1886. Closer to the road, then called River Street, was Ed Kidney’s house. Across the street at the lower right was Peter Kidney’s house, where Ed Kidney grew up.

Those Tennessee ventures might have made such items as these in the *Advertiser* about Ed Kidney's whereabouts and activities of special interest to Olmsted readers:

- May 18, 1900: "E.W. Kidney is home from the south."
- July 6, 1900: "Mr. Ed Kidney has returned from Tennessee, where he has been getting out timber for their factory. He is somewhat tanned."
- July 13, 1900: "The Bending Works have started up again."

But as Offenbergh wrote, a news report in July 1900 "stated that E.W. Kidney was moving to Memphis, Tennessee where he would take charge of a newly organized bending works for another company." His partner, Gus Leutkemeyer, was reported to be taking some of the equipment from the Olmsted Falls factory to Angola, Indiana. However, that didn't happen at that time, as further items in the *Advertiser* indicated:

- October 19, 1900: "The bending works have resumed operations after a ten days' shut down for repairs."
- October 26, 1900: "There are ten teams drawing logs for the Bending Co. and more are wanted."
- October 26, 1900: "Mrs. E.W. Kidney left for Danville, Tenn. Last Friday."
- November 23, 1900: "E.W. Kidney and wife have returned from the south."



Metropolis, Illinois, claims to be the home of Superman because of its name, but Cleveland also claims that distinction as the home of Superman's creators.

- November 23, 1900: "The bending works are running night and day."

Meanwhile, in 1900, Kidney invented steel bows to replace the wooden bows that had been used in making buggy tops.

Nevertheless, the report that Kidney and Leutkemeyer would split and both would move away eventually became true.

"E.W. Kidney formerly of the bending works has moved his family to Memphis, Tennessee, where he will take charge of the New Bending Works by another Company," the *Advertiser* reported on July 26, 1901. Leutkemeyer moved the equipment from the bending works in Olmsted Falls to Metropolis in Massac County, Illinois, across the Ohio River from Paducah, Kentucky.

In the August 2, 1901, edition, the *Advertiser*

reported these two items:

- “The bending works are to be removed from here to Illinois the first of August.”
- “There is a fine chance here for some good manufacturing company to start a business in the buildings which were used for the bending works by Mr. Ed Kidney and later by Leutkemeyer.”

Later items in the *Advertiser* told of the step-by-step exodus of bending works employees from Olmsted Falls to Illinois:

- September 6, 1901, Olmsted Falls: “August Berlitz will start for Metropolis, Illinois, where he will be employed by the Cleveland Bending Works, who have built new works there, shipping a portion of the machinery from the bending works here, which, however, are still running.”
- September 13, 1901: “Mrs. Bohn expects to move to Ill. in a few weeks where her husband is in business in the Bending Works for Mr. Leutkemeyer.”
- December 13, 1901: “Frank Gallagher will go to Metropolis, Illinois, where he will be employed by the Cleveland Bending Works.”

Thanks to labor unrest at several factories in Metropolis in 1902, a report from the Illinois State Board of Arbitration provides some insight into the size of the bending works Leutkemeyer had set up in Metropolis:



This old postcard photo shows the Massac County Courthouse in Metropolis, Illinois.

At the plant of the Cleveland Bending company, manufacturers of wood buggy stock, H.C. Bowen, general superintendent, stated that under good trade conditions his company employed 90 men, but that at that time about 40 or 45 men were at work in the plant and that no more were needed. Seventeen men and boys had quit on the 16th of June. He declared that there was no discrimination against union men.

A 1955 book, *History of Massac County* by George W. May, gives some clues about why Leutkemeyer might have chosen to relocate the bending works to southern Illinois:

“As timber was basic to industry in the nineteenth century so it continued in the twentieth. Metropolis is one of the three outstanding workworking centers of the State. Good rail and water transportation facilities have also helped.”

Although the company might have kept the name Cleveland Bending Works initially after its move, a brief mention of it in May’s book indicates that the name did not

last, but the company did: “The Metropolis Bending Company was organized in 1903. At one time it could say that it was the world’s largest bender making wooden bows for buggies, automobiles and airplanes.”

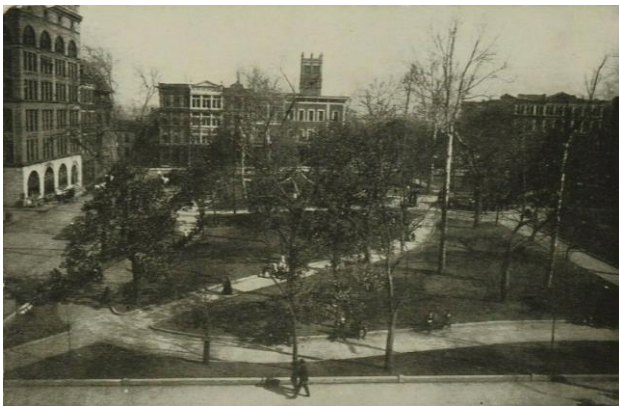
The Metropolis Bending Company lasted decades, at least into the mid-1900s. It formed a subsidiary, Fort Massac Chair Company. In addition to chairs, it made stepstools and, in 1930, it began making folding bridge tables.



To the left is one example of a chair made by the Fort Massac Chair Company. As it says on the bottom, seen above, it came from Metropolis, Illinois, but its corporate lineage began in Olmsted Falls.

Offenberg wrote that Ed Kidney took two sons, a son-in-law and their families with him to Memphis, but the “climate did not agree with them. Mr. Kidney sold out in 1904 and came back to Olmsted Falls and retired. His hobby was perpetual motion, which he had patented. He sold some shares at \$2.50 per share but it did not have enough power. Edward Kidney invented a water purifier and cooler system that was used on steamboats. He received a royalty on his invention for years.”

Kidney’s wife, Angeline, died on August 10, 1910. Edward survived another decade until he died at age 79 on October 23, 1921, in Erie County. He was buried in the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery (Turkeyfoot) in Olmsted Falls.



At far left, an old postcard photo shows Court Square in Memphis in the early 1900s, when Ed Kidney moved there. Next to it is Kidney’s gravestone at old Chestnut Grove.

Other than Kidney’s home at 7562 River Road, little is left to indicate that one of the most enterprising and inventive persons from Olmsted Falls ever made that neighborhood and much of the community bustle.

Thanks go to David Kennedy for help with research for this story and Bruce Banks for the photo of the Cleveland Bending Works buildings.

Factory Switched to Lamps and Stoves

The dismantling of the bending works in the early 1900s left a hole in business life of Olmsted Falls. That hole was filled eventually, but only briefly.

The community had considered Ed Kidney to be a good employer for decades, as this item in the Olmsted Falls column of the *Berea Advertiser* for January 4, 1889, indicated: “The employees of Mr. E.W. Kidney surprised him New Year’s evening by calling in a body and presenting him a pair of gloves and to Mrs. Kidney a silk muffler. They were invited to the dining room where an oyster supper was served.”

Thus, more than a decade later, after Kidney left for Tennessee and his former partner, Gus Leutkemeyer, transferred the operations of the bending works to Metropolis, Illinois, people in Olmsted Falls turned their hope to the possibility that some other industrialist might make use of the factory along River Street.



After the Cleveland Bending Works moved out, Wallace Manufacturing Company and then Alright Manufacturing moved into the factory buildings behind Ed Kidney’s River Street home in Olmsted Falls in the early 1900s. This photo was used on a postcard from that time.

“There is a fine chance here for some good manufacturing company to start a business in the buildings which were used for the bending works by Mr. Ed Kidney and later by Leutkemeyer,” the *Advertiser* suggested on August 2, 1901.

The timeline for what happened after that is murky, but two companies did move into the former Kidney factory buildings. The first was the Wallace Manufacturing Company, which made gasoline-fueled streetlamps, lanterns and other appliances. The company, owned by Charles Wallace, was expected to employ about 30 men. The second was Alright Manufacturing, which made stoves, bicycles and other products.

“The activity of these two companies were followed with great interest,” Walter Holzworth wrote in his 1966 Olmsted history book. “Rumors of expansion gave high hope. Rumors of curtailment brought gloom.”

As an example of such gloom, Holzworth cited this news item from 1904: “The Alright Manufacturing Co. of Olmsted Falls is considering moving to Shelby, Ohio. If this should be the case Olmsted Falls will be hard hit by unemployment and rents will tumble.”

In 1905, the talk about town was that Alright was going broke, Holzworth wrote, but Olmsted residents found cheer in 1906 by this newspaper item: “The Alright Manufacturing Co. is being absorbed by the Wallace Manufacturing Company and is planning to employ 50 men and boys.”

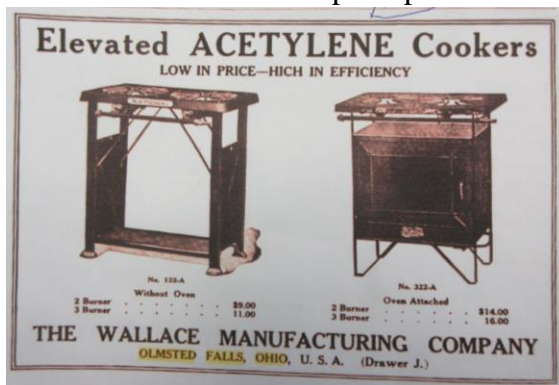


The Wallace Manufacturing Company ran this ad in a trade magazine called Acelyene Journal.

Holzworth wrote that the factory then “promised to develop into a great industry that would take over this most beautiful section of the village, but this promise or threat was short lived. The company folded up shortly after.”

Again, the timeline is murky, but the March 27, 1908, edition of the *Advertiser* reported: “The Wallace Mfg. Co. have reopened and are doing a prosperous business.”

How long the company lasted after that is not clear, but it wasn’t long. By 1913, when a newspaper item in the February 20 edition of the *Berea Enterprise* (the sole local weekly paper after the *Advertiser* folded in 1909) referred to the Wallace factory, it was in the past tense, noting that local grocer Arthur Dodd was “putting in his supply of ice, cut from the old Wallace plant pond.”



These two ads show the types of appliances the Wallace Manufacturing Company made at its factory in Olmsted Falls.

Eventually, the old factory must have been torn down, but it’s not clear when that happened. Nevertheless, the death of industry in that section of Olmsted Falls meant that

what Holzworth called “this most beautiful section of the village” – the neighborhood along what now is River Road – remained residential rather than industrial.

David Kennedy provided help in researching this story, including finding the ads for Wallace Manufacturing.

Old Newspaper Preserves Olmsted Serviceman’s Letter

A rare copy of an 80-year-old newspaper has brought new insight into the man who became perhaps the best-known World War II serviceman from Olmsted Falls.



This is the front page of the Olmsted Journal for October 17, 1941.

the Journal each week is read by all.”

The editor noted that Harding worked at the Bank of Berea branch in Olmsted Falls before he joined the Army. At the end of his letter, Harding identified himself as “Corp. Chuck Harding.”

Maryann Knuth Dixon recently shared photos of several pages from the *Olmsted Journal* from October 17, 1941. One of those pages includes a letter to the editor from Army Corporal Charles Harding, who was stationed at Camp Shelby near Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He was among 10 soldiers from Olmsted Falls who were serving in the 145th Infantry.

In his letter, Harding described his relief at getting through several weeks of war games and maneuvers on the other side of the Mississippi River. “We’ve been down here in the swamps of Louisiana since August 12, and now we are ready to get back to civilization,” he wrote.

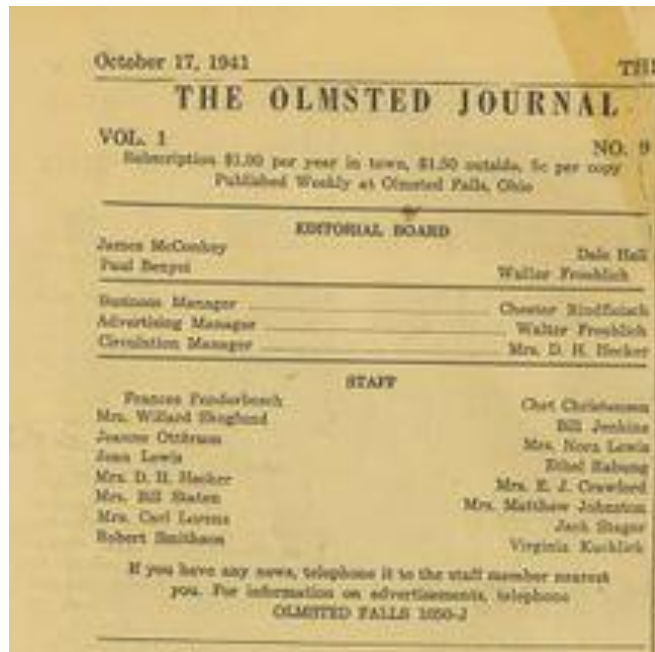
“Mom has been sending me the Journal every week, and now I sort of look forward to getting it, to keep up with the news back home.”

Harding wrote, “We are all still interested in the old town, and

The letter takes on more meaning when you realize it was published a little more than seven weeks before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, that brought the United States into World War II. Harding went on to serve in Europe with the 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion. He died at age 29 on August 3, 1944, from wounds received during the Battle of Normandy. By then, he had the rank of captain. Thanks to generous donations from his sisters, Amelia and Clara, he is known today as the namesake of the wooden bridge along Main Street in Olmsted Falls and the Olmsted Falls High School football stadium in Olmsted Township. More on Harding and other Olmsted residents who served in World War II can be found in Issue 103 of



This advertisement for the Bank of Berea appeared in the Olmsted Journal on the same page as the letter to the editor from Charles Harding, who had worked at the bank before entering the Army.



The masthead of the Olmsted Journal is hard to read as reproduced here, but it indicates about 20 people were involved in making and distributing the newspaper.

Another interesting aspect of the photos of the *Olmsted Journal* pages is that the newspaper existed. The only reference to it in any historical accounts of Olmsted is one sentence in Walter Holzworth's extensive 1966 book: "In 1940 and 1941 the paper called the 'Olmsted Journal' was published."

The pages from the October 17, 1941, edition show that was just the ninth issue. It was a weekly newspaper, so if the ninth issue was published on October 17, that would indicate that the first issue was published on August 22, 1941. Thus, Holzworth might not have remembered correctly when he said the newspaper began in 1940.

Perhaps *Olmsted Journal* did not last longer because of the rationing of many goods that went into effect after the World War II began. The cost of the paper was five cents per copy. A one-year subscription cost \$1.00 in town or \$1.50 outside of town.

Does anyone know anything more about *Olmsted Journal*, including how long it lasted? If so, please share that information with *Olmsted 200*. Any other copies also would be welcome.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include the next story in the series about Olmsted's inventors and entrepreneurs. The focus will be on a man who was considered a rival of Ed Kidney.

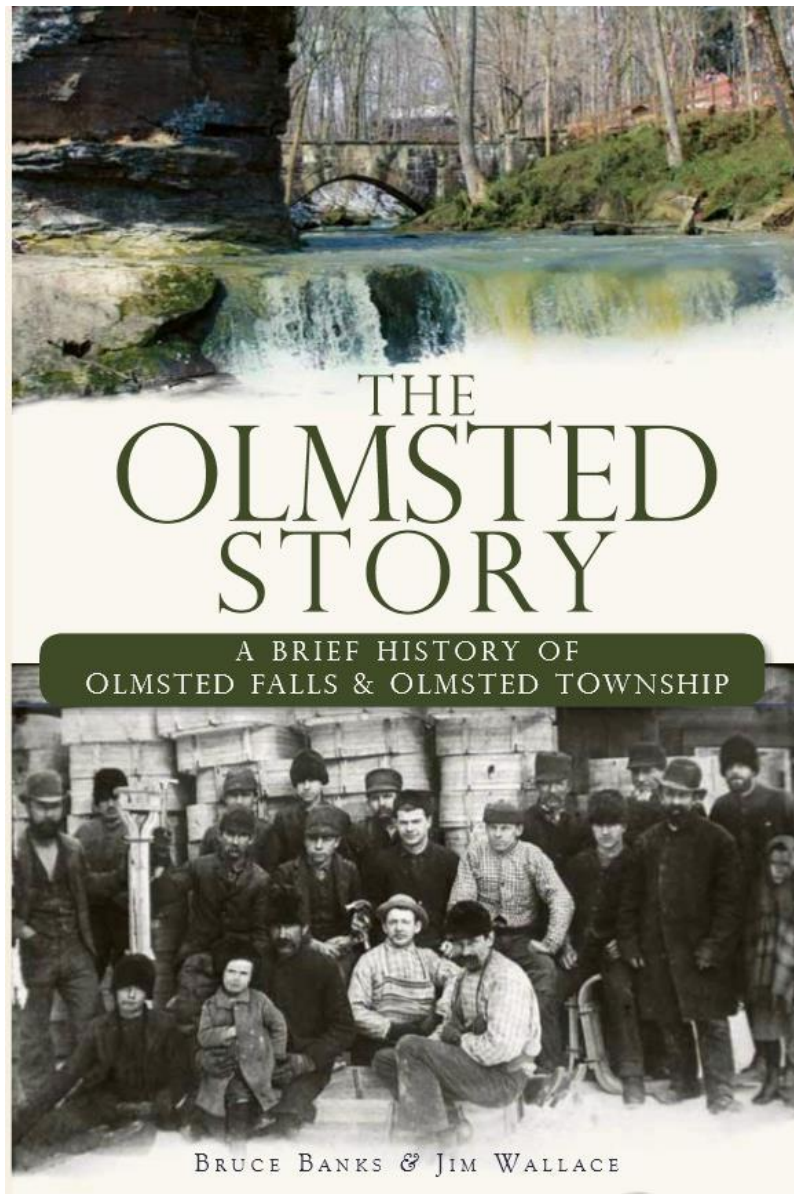
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin, and 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. 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. Thanks also go to David Kennedy for frequently contributing research and insight for some stories. 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 Angelina's Pizza in Olmsted Falls and the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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