



# *Olmsted 200*

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

Issue 120

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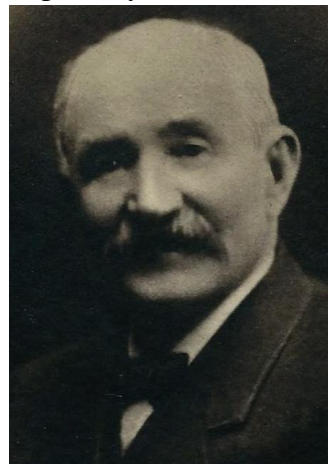
## **Gibsons Had a Fine Farm and Residence in Olmsted Township**

One benefit from studying history is that it helps us understand how things got to be the way they are. This is the story about how one piece of Olmsted Township land went from being the home of a prominent family in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to becoming a home for binational cultural heritage. In other words, it's the story about how the Gibson family farm became Lenau Park, the Donauschwaben German-American Cultural Center at 7370 Columbia Road.

Coincidentally, it began with a family with ties to two countries – not the United States and Germany but the United States and Canada. Some of the Gibson family history already has been told in *Olmsted 200*, especially in Issue 43 from December 2016, but it bears some repeating here.

The patriarch of the family was Joseph Douglas Gibson, who was born on November 15, 1836, in Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, Scotland. He lived until January 24, 1914, when he died in North Olmsted. During his 77 years, he did quite a bit of traveling and crossing borders.

About 1855, Gibson emigrated from Scotland to Canada. There, in 1862, he married Margaret



*Joseph and Margaret Gibson came to Olmsted from Scotland by way of Canada.*

McGill, who was born on November 25, 1843, in Crosshill, South Ayrshire, Scotland. She died on November 24, 1912 – one day shy of her 69<sup>th</sup> birthday. Both were buried at the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery (Turkeyfoot).

Obviously, they did not stay in Canada. Joseph and Margaret were in Wakeman, Ohio, by 1869 and showed up in Cleveland in the 1870 Census. Joseph, at least, seemed to have come to Olmsted Falls by 1872. As their great-great-grandson, Mike Gibson, has written in emails to *Olmsted 200*, Joseph seems to have moved between Olmsted Falls or Olmsted Township and Grimsby, Ontario, three or four times. Margaret likely made most, if not all, of those trips. Today, the trip between Olmsted and Grimsby, which is along Lake Ontario and not far from Niagara Falls, takes about four hours by automobile, mostly along Interstate 90, for about 258 miles. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it would have taken much longer.

“I can follow the movements back and forth between the USA and Canada of Joseph and Margaret because of the birth locations of their 11 children,” Mike Gibson wrote in an email to *Olmsted 200*. At least two of their children were born in Canada but lived most of their lives in the United States, others were born in the United States and lived in the United States, and at least two spent most of their lives in Canada.

At least eight of their sons and daughters survived to adulthood. They included: James Gibson, born in 1865; Isabella Gibson Stokes, born in 1867; Josephine Gibson Atkinson, born in 1872; Alexander Gibson, born in 1875; Jean Gibson Kennedy, born in 1878; Frances Gibson Hewitt, born in 1880; Huggetta Gibson Ayers, born in 1883; and Chester Gibson, born in 1886.

Joseph had four brothers and one sister, all of whom remained in Canada. “Their descendants have contributed quite a bit to Canadian culture,” Mike Gibson wrote.



*This postcard from perhaps the early 1900s, shows the dam across Rocky River for Damp's Mill and the lake created behind it.*

Robert Gibson, one of Joseph's brothers, operated a successful sandstone quarry in Grimsby after buying the land for it in 1866. Joseph, who worked as a stone mason, as well as a farmer and contractor, returned to Grimsby in 1879, presumably to work at his brother's quarry.

But by 1883, Joseph was back in Olmsted. That's when he built a new crescent-shaped dam across Rocky River for Damp's Mill (then Damp & Difford's Mill) to replace the dam

destroyed by a big flood early in February that year. Using locally quarried sandstone, Gibson built a dam that was 175 feet long and 13 feet high. The dam not only provided

waterpower for Damp's Mill but also created a lake that people used for swimming and boating.

Items in the Olmsted Falls column of the *Berea Advertiser* chronicled the progress of the construction of the new dam in 1883:

- May 10: "Damp & Difford are receiving stone for their new dam."
- May 24: "Mr. Jos. Gibson is building Damp & Diffords' dam. It is made of Berea stone and will be 3½ ft. wide at the base. Its cost will be between \$2000 and \$2500."
- August 9: "The dam is finished. And with its completion the flouring mill stones start whirling, although business is not expected to be opened until next Monday. The present dam is built on the site of the old one, destroyed by the February flood, and is a fine structure of its kind. It is 13 ft. high, 175 ft. long, 3½ ft. at base, 2 ft. at top and is built of Berea stone. As it has a solid foundation and none but the best workmanship used, Damp & Difford will own in the future, as they have in the past, the best water power on Rocky river."

That dam lasted almost 30 years until March 1913, when another big flood destroyed it. When Rocky River's water level is low, the base stones for the dam Joseph Gibson built in 1883 still can be seen curving across the river. Another reminder of Gibson's time on that project can be found on the east bank of the river,



*The base stones for the former dam still curve across Rocky River.*



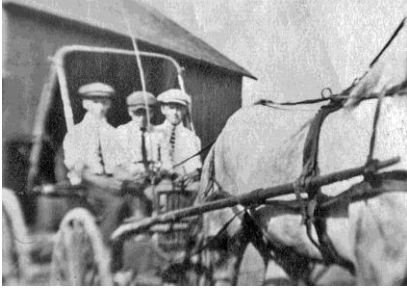
*Joseph Gibson carved his name on a rock on the east bank of Rocky River in 1883. Photo courtesy of Tom Atkinson.*

where he carved "J. Gibson '83" into the stone.

It seems that Joseph Gibson bought the farm along what is now Columbia Road across from Nobottom Road sometime in the 1870s, perhaps as early as 1872. It shows up with his name on it just north of Olmsted Falls on an 1876 map of Olmsted Township.

A yellow note written by Mike Gibson's father, William Hugh Gibson, indicates that three of Joseph and Margaret Gibson's children – Josephine in 1872, Alexander in 1875 and Jean in 1878 – were born in a small cabin on the farm in a orchard near Minnie Creek, and the next two –





*This photo was taken on the Gibson farm about 1910.  
Photo courtesy of Mike Gibson.*

Frances in 1880 and Hughetta in 1883 – were born in Canada. A photo Mike Gibson shared of Minnie Creek running through the farm in 1915 was published last month in Issue 119 of *Olmsted* 200.

After returning from Canada in 1883, Joseph Gibson worked on more than just the dam for Damp's Mill. He also built a bigger house on his Olmsted Township farm. The June 14, 1883, edition of the *Berea Advertiser* included this item: "Mr. Jos. Gibson builds a new residence on his place shortly." That new residence seems to have been completed by the beginning of

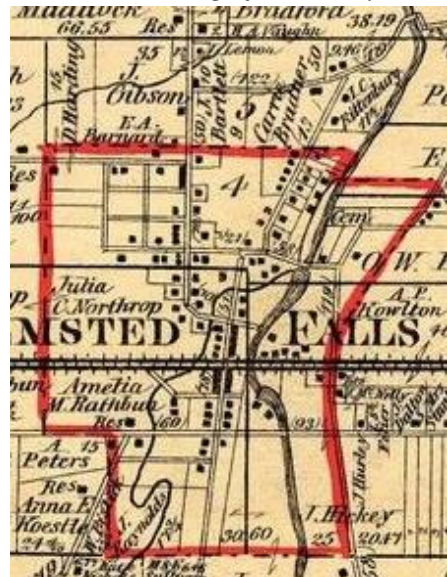
1884, because the Olmsted Falls column in the *Advertiser* for January 10, 1884, included this item:

*Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Gibson were surprised by their friends, numbering a hundred or more, and treated to a "house-warming" on last Friday evening. Those who have attended a "house-warming" know more of its character than the writer. It was certainly an excellent night to warm a house, which fact can be attested to by Mr. Thos. Stokes, who, after searching the township for a barrel of oysters, went to Berea and obtained them, with the thermometer between 10 and 15 below. Mr. Gibson has just completed one of the finest residences in Olmsted, always makes his influence felt on the side of right, and is held in the highest respect by the community. It is regretted that the severe weather prevented the invitation from being more general, as many of his friends knew nothing of it. A very pleasant evening was passed.*

That house lasted about a century until it was replaced by a current structure at Lenau Park.

Despite having "one of the finest residences in Olmsted," as the *Advertiser* columnist put it, Joseph and Margaret Gibson returned to Canada – this time, Toronto – from about 1897 until 1905, according to Mike Gibson. However, they were back in Olmsted when the 1910 Census was taken.

After Joseph and Margaret died, ownership of the farm passed on to their son, Alexander Sandysen Gibson, and his wife, Maude Dailey Gibson, who were Mike Gibson's great-grandparents. They sold it in 1917 and moved to Columbia Station.



*This 1876 map shows Joseph Gibson's farm to the left of center near the top, above the border of Olmsted Falls.*



The story of the farm is less clear after that, but during much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was owned by the Ritter family. Eventually, the house at Ritter Farm was used for catering and receptions. But the fate of the farm changed in the 1970s. That part of its story will be told next month in Issue 121 of *Olmsted 200*.

This photo of the house on the Gibson farm, above, was taken in about 1905. To the right is a photo of Harold Gibson, a son of Alex and Maude Gibson and one of the grandsons of Joseph and Margaret Gibson, with a cow on the Gibson farm in 1915. That was two years before the family sold the farm and moved to Columbia Station. These two photos and the one below are courtesy of Mike Gibson, who lives in Oregon but spent most of his childhood years in Olmsted Falls.



REGISTRATION CARD	
1. NAME Alex Gibson	2. GRADE A1787
3. PRESENT HOME ADDRESS Rt. 2, Columbia Station, Ohio	4. DATE OF BIRTH July 2, 1875
5. RACE White	6. U. S. CITIZEN Natural Born
7. PRESENT OCCUPATION Farmer	8. EMPLOYER'S NAME None
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT None	10. NEAREST NEIGHBOR None
11. I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE AND SIGNATURE OF NAME Alex Gibson	

REGISTRAR'S REPORT	
DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRANT	
HEIGHT Tall Medium Short	BUILD Slender Medium Stout
21. 22. 23.	24. 25. 26.
27. Has person lost arm, leg, hand, eye, or is he otherwise physically disqualified? (Specify)	
28. I certify that my answers are true; that the person registered has read and has read to him his own answers; that I have witnessed his signature to same, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:	
Date of Registration 12 Sept 1918	
LOCAL BOARD FOR LORAIN COUNTY, ELYRIA, OHIO.	
(The stamp of the Local Board having jurisdiction of the area in which the registrant has his permanent home shall be placed in this space)	

This is a copy of Alex Gibson's World War I draft registration card. It shows that he registered on September 12, 1918, just two months before the end of the war on November 11, 1918. It also shows he was living in Columbia Station at the time. That was one year after he and his wife, Maude, sold the Gibson family farm in Olmsted Township.



28 October 1950 at Ritter / Gibson House  
Wedding Reception for Bruce Atkinson

The children of Arthur and Josephine Gibson Atkinson

Back  
Chester Arthur, Bruce Gibson, Wallace Gordon, Ira Robert  
Front  
Margaret Josephine Atkinson Parker  
Grace Jean Atkinson Shane-Wadstrom  
Helen Gordon Atkinson Rauscher  
Una Nora Atkinson Bauer  
Zella Atkinson Foley



*As seen here, members of the Gibson and Atkinson families gathered on October 28, 1950, for a reception following Bruce Atkinson's wedding. They did so at the former Gibson family house, which by then was on the Ritter Farm, in Olmsted Township. The Gibson and Atkinson families were united on November 25, 1891, when Arthur Atkinson married Josephine Gibson, daughter of Joseph and Margaret Gibson. Photo courtesy of Tom Atkinson.*



*To the left is a photo taken in 1976 of the house Joseph Gibson built in 1883. During much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was used for catering and receptions as part of Ritter Farm. It was torn down in the 1980s. Photo courtesy of Mike Gibson.*

*Thanks go to both Mike Gibson and Tom Atkinson for photos and information used in this story.*

## **Readers React to Township Anniversary and Church Feud**

Among those who reacted to the story in Issue 119 of *Olmsted 200* about the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of a civil government in Olmsted Township was Lisa Zver, one of the current township trustees.



*Olmsted Township's population has grown 40 times in 200 years.*

"Love the article!" she wrote in an email.

However, Zver offered an update on the township's population. The story referred to the finding in the 2020 Census that the township had 14,406 residents.

"The Township has technically over 16,000 residents, not the 14,000 published with the census," Zver wrote. "We know this as we had a company dig deeper into the population numbers in 2019, while we were developing our strategic plan. Also by the number of houses, mobile homes and apartments."

That's 40 times the population of about 400 that Olmsted Township had in the 1820s, when it was called Lenox Township.

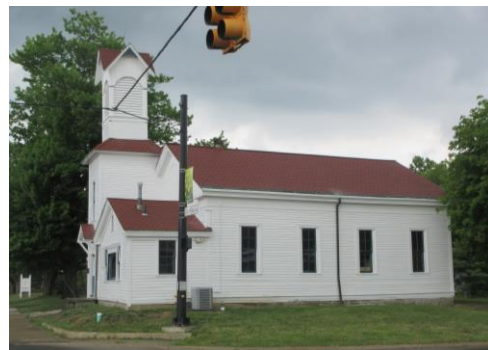
"Anyway, great article!" Zver wrote. "Thank you for publishing!"

Another reader who responded to that story was Susan (Fedirko) Manning, who grew up in Olmsted Falls and now lives in Georgia. What caught her interest was the portion of that story and another story that told about how Olmsted Township was once part of Connecticut's Western Reserve.

"Superb!" she wrote in an email. "I keep telling people that we were once part of Connecticut, known as the Western Reserve (I got my masters at CWRU). Now I finally see it in print. When I sold antiques with my mom, the furniture we would pull out of old homes, barns, by the side of the road, etc. had stylistic elements consistent with that of New England's. I took an individualized course for credit in art history at Baldwin-Wallace which took me to Lehigh University. I joined a group of professionals from around the country and during this intense three-day course, we were taught by some of the leading experts in the field."

As noted in Issue 119, the Litchfield Historical Society in Connecticut was scheduled to open an exhibit about the Western Reserve on April 21. Kevin Roberts, the former Olmsted Falls resident who now lives in Lyme, Connecticut, suggested in an email that it might be worth a trip to Connecticut by current or former Olmsted residents to see that exhibit.

Another story caught the attention of Gail Crawford Walker. It was the story in Issue 118 from March about a feud 150 years ago between two West View churches. One was the West View Wesleyan Church. The church building still stands at the corner of Columbia Road and Sprague Road at the southern end of Olmsted Falls. The other was a Methodist Episcopal church a short



*The West View Wesleyan Church has lasted much longer than its nearby rival in Columbia Township.*

distance south of there in Columbia Township on what now is East River Road.

“My mother attended one of the ‘feuding churches’ (page 8 of issue),” Walker posted on Facebook. “She was married elsewhere because, as the story goes and I was told, wedding rings were not permitted in the West View Wesleyan church. Even so, I have vague remembrances of attending services there as a child.”

## West View and Olmsted Falls Were Booming 150 Years Ago

It was 200 years ago that the civil government of Olmsted Township was set up in 1823 (eight years after the first settlers moved in), and 50 years later, both West View and Olmsted Falls experienced spurts of economic development. That’s evident from the two columns for those communities in the May 30, 1873, issue of the *Grindstone City Advertiser*.

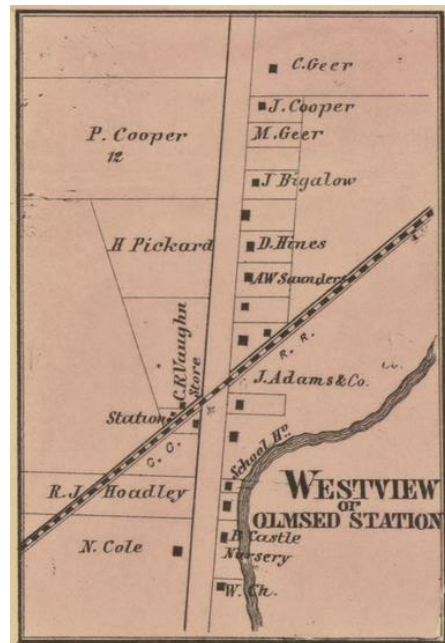
Here are a few items from the West View column:

***BUILDINGS.** – This place has taken a sudden start, and is seemingly making up for lost time. The Cheese Factory is in running order, and an excellent article of cheese is produced, the company having secured the services of Mr. Thompson to make cheese. They ship over a ton of milk per day and make the remainder into cheese. They receive daily about 46 hundred pounds of milk.*

***SHOEMAKER’S SHOP** – A Mr. Sprink from the Falls is putting up a dwelling house and shoemaker’s shop. Most of the buildings being erected are due to the public spirit of Mr. Bronson who offers to sell lots for reasonable figures.*

*– **WORK** has commenced on the new side track and the grading is progressing slowly. A bridge 100 feet in length and trussel [sic] work for 200 feet is to be built soon.*

That item about the cheese factory was a follow-up to an item in the February 7, 1873, edition of the *Advertiser* that was included in Issue 117 of *Olmsted 200*. That earlier item mentioned that two men named Tanney and Redfern planned to establish a cheese factory in the basement of their store, which was across the railroad tracks from the West View depot.



*This 1858 map (which misspells Olmsted) shows a school on the east side of the road and near the bend in Rocky River. The school built in 1880, which still stands, was placed on the opposite side of the road.*



The February 7, 1873, *Advertiser* also noted that a new quarry company was considering building a sidetrack to serve the quarry, so the item about it in the May 30 edition of the *Advertiser* also was a follow-up.

Here is another item from the West View column of the *Advertiser* from May 30, 1873: “NEW STORE. – Mr, Geo. Dryden has bought a lot of Mr. Bronson, opposite the school house, and has erected a commodious store building, 20 x 40 feet, and intends to keep a full stock on hand.”

The schoolhouse mentioned in that item was not the building that later became the West View Village Hall and now is the Emerald & Violet Studio of artist Barbara Richardson at 9722 Columbia Road because that school was built in 1880. The schoolhouse in the 1873 news item was located on the other side, the east side, of what is now Columbia Road, according to both an 1858 map (shown on page 8) and an 1874 map (which can be found on page 9 of Issue 117 of *Olmsted 200* from February).



That item about George Dryden’s store had a counterpart in the *Olmsted* column in the same issue of the newspaper: “THE name of the firm of Fitch & Dryden has changed to that of Fitch & Vaughn. Mr. Dryden sold his share in the business to Mr. A. Vaughn of this place, and is going into business in West View.”

*Shown here well after its heyday, this is the former Alcott and Stokes mill along the Plum Creek waterfalls. Photo courtesy of Mike Gibson.*

Here are other items from that *Olmsted* column in the *Advertiser*:

– *ALCOTT and Stokes have started an institution long needed here and that is a lumber yard, where people can get anything they may need in that line. They have a planing and matching machine, and intend to do their work in a satisfactory manner.*

– *WORK has commenced on the foundation of the new School house. There is quite a large pile of lumber and a very small pile of brick on the ground with which to commence the building itself, but as the weather is getting warm and the roads are dry, the pile of brick may grow as well as other things.*

– *A MR. WILLIAMS from New York State has started a grocery store in the Depot Building.*

– *MR. N.P. LOOMUS has enlarged his store room so as to make more room for more goods and of course more business.*

– *MR. DEROOI has enlarged his shop and put up a new front which adds very much to the appearance of his place of business.*

– *THE cheese factory commences operations the first of this week, an event for which many of the farmers have been patiently waiting for some time.*

The lumber yard started by brothers Sylvester and Levi Alcott and Thomas Stokes was at their sawmill, which was located along the Plum Creek waterfalls. That mill is long gone, but the building erected in 1887 by Stokes, who then was the sole owner of the sawmill, to store lumber (and serve also as a meeting hall for Civil War veterans) still stands at 7835 Columbia Road.

The new schoolhouse that was being built in 1873 was the Union Schoolhouse. It stood on the Village Green until it was torn down in 1960, but it is still fondly remembered by many people.



*When this photo appeared on an early 1900s postcard, the Union Schoolhouse still stood prominently on the Village Green, but it no longer served as a school.*

The depot building where the Mr. Williams from New York opened a grocery store was not the depot that still stands along Garfield Avenue near Brookside Drive. That depot was built in 1876. The depot referred to in the *Advertiser* story stood near the railroad crossing for Columbia Street (now Columbia Road). It was much smaller than the depot built three years later.



*Shoemaker Kornelius DeRooi built his shop at what then was called 59 Main Street. His son, Andrew, took over the shop in the 1890s and expanded it to be a grocery and general store. The building lasted until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the left photo was taken. Later, it was replaced by the Harding family home, which is seen on the right, and the address became 7769 Columbia Road. Photos courtesy of Bruce Banks.*

The shop of Mr. DeRooi was the one owned by Kornelius DeRooi, who made boots and shoes. He and his family were natives of Holland who arrived in Olmsted Falls in 1864. The shop was just south of Water Street at what was 59 Main Street in the 19th Century. DeRooi's son, Andrew, worked in the shop before taking it over in the 1890s. He expanded it to be a grocery and general store. Clara, the daughter of Andrew and Amelia DeRooi, married Harry Harding in 1909. They had three children – Amelia, Charles and Clara. The Hardings eventually replaced the store with a brick home. After the renaming of streets in Olmsted Falls, the address became 7769 Columbia Road. That remained the Harding family home until the last member of the family, Amelia Harding, died in 2011 at the age of 97.

It's not clear which cheese factory the 1873 Olmsted column in the *Advertiser* referred to. It might have been the same one mentioned in the West View column. Or it could have been one owned by the Carpenter family near Butternut Ridge. Or it could have been another one closer to Olmsted Falls.

## Still to Come

This issue, the 120<sup>th</sup>, marks the completion of 10 full years of *Olmsted 200*. With the help of many readers and others, *Olmsted 200* has covered many more topics about Olmsted history than was imagined when the first issue went out in June 2013. More issues are in the works.

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about how what had been the Gibson family's farm and later the Ritter Farm became Lenau Park, the Donauschwaben German-American Cultural Center in Olmsted Township.

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 Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, 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.

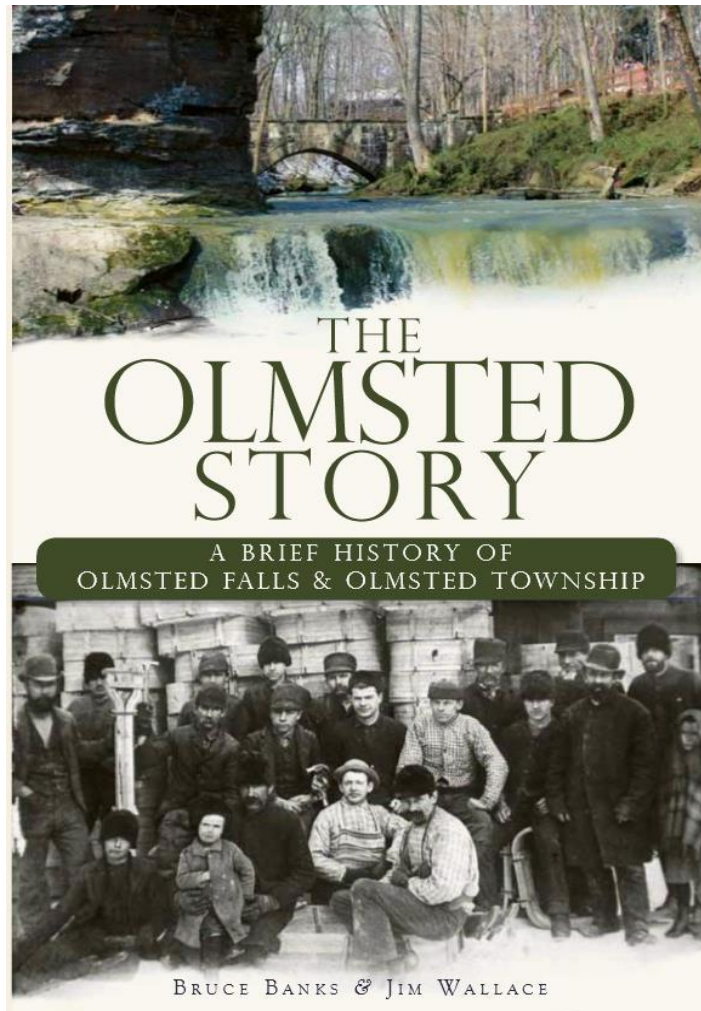
If you have missed any of the past issues of *Olmsted 200* or want to share them with someone else, all of them can be found on Olmsted Township's website. Go to <http://olmstedtownship.org/newsletters/>. A list of *Olmsted 200* issues is on the right side. Click on the number of the issue you want to 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](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](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 Angelina's Pizza in Olmsted Township and the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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