



# Olmsted 200

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

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## Grand Pacific Junction Saved Buildings That Were Close to Falling Down

If Clint Williams had not created Grand Pacific Junction in the early 1990s, certain buildings might have survived – even if some other redevelopment effort had occurred in that section of downtown Olmsted Falls. But the continued existence of other buildings would have been more doubtful. Without the establishment of Grand Pacific Junction, other uses might have been found for the former Simmerers’ Sons Hardware (now the Grand Pacific Hotel), the Depositors Building and even the former Simmerer and Peltz houses. But Williams said in a July 24 interview that several other buildings

were in such bad shape that they probably would not have lasted another couple of years if he had not renovated them.

“You’d say tear them down,” he said about their condition when he acquired them in late 1989.

One such building is the Granary, which now is home to Shamrock & Rose Creations, the Celtic gift shop at 25576 Mill Street. As the name suggests, it once was a



*The Granary now houses Shamrock & Rose Creations, the Celtic gift shop.*

store for grain, as well as flour and feed. But in its later years before the development of Grand Pacific Junction, it was nothing more than a storage building. By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was in bad shape. If it had caught on fire or been torn down, it could have been forgotten quickly.



Williams said the walls of the building were leaning, but at least it was intact. Proof of its condition is in a photo that now hangs inside the Shamrock &

*This is how the Granary looked before its renovation as part of Grand Pacific Junction. A framed copy of this photo now hangs inside Shamrock & Rose Creations.*



*Another photo of the Granary from a Grand Pacific Junction video shows its deteriorated condition prior to renovation. Photo courtesy of Clint Williams*

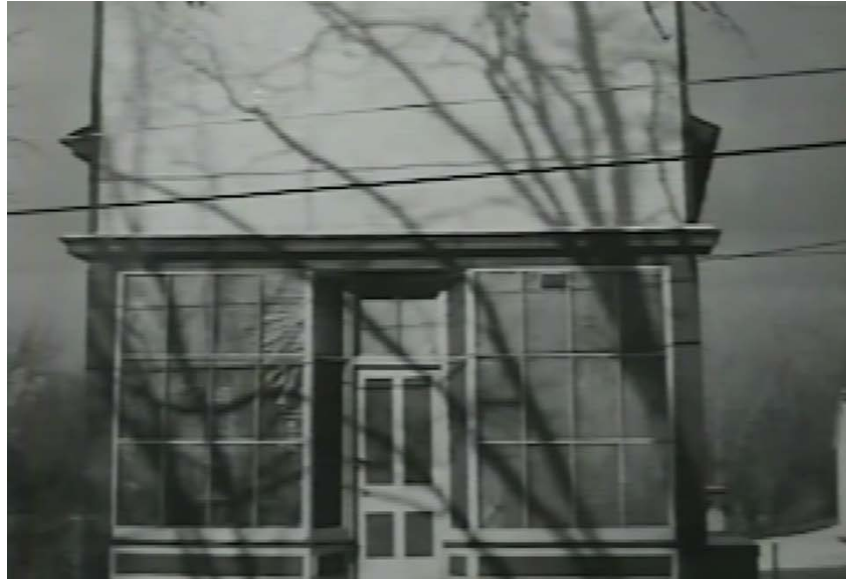
Rose. The photo shows such distinctive features as the building’s flat storefront and a dormer on the roof, but its siding was uneven, it had not received a good coat of paint in years, and the roof showed signs of needing to be repaired. In other words, it was not very pretty and not very inviting for anyone who might have wanted to put it to better use – at least not anyone other than Williams.

platforms for the convenience of horse and buggy customers.” Williams said he’s not sure why hay was stored that way because there was room to hold only about 10 bales at a time, but that’s the way it was done.

Publications from Grand Pacific Junction describe the building as having a post-and-beam construction. “The original grain bins are still intact on the second floor,” GPJ pamphlets say. “Hay was also stored above the drop-through trap doors to the first floor landing

Among the changes made to the building when it was renovated was the addition of a porch with a roof at the front entrance and the addition of a second entrance with its own covered porch near the rear of the eastern side, as well as side windows. Williams kept the building in the location where he found it, but he said it seemed to have been

moved there earlier from somewhere else. For example, he said, it was on a cement block foundation that looked as though it was built about in the 1930s. Posts in the building also indicated to him the building had been raised higher than it originally was.



*This photo shows the Granary during its renovation. Photo courtesy of Clint Williams.*

Exactly when the Granary was built is less clear. Grand Pacific Junction publications place its

construction as early as 1870, but Williams, who has sold many buildings in the area over several decades as owner of a real estate company, said that was just his best guess.

*“There were no dates for that at all. I just estimated them based on my experience with buildings and my historical knowledge of our fine community.” – Clint Williams*

“There were no dates for that at all,” he said. “I just estimated them based on my experience with buildings and my historical knowledge of our fine community.”

One reason it has been hard to pin down the years such

buildings were constructed is that they weren’t prominent enough to have had their construction noted in local newspapers.



*These photos taken a few weeks ago show the Granary as it looks today, a quarter century after its renovation.*



*The Warehouse, which houses A Time to Spa, now looks like this, but it was in bad shape when Clint Williams acquired it in 1989.*

architecture that was popular around the turn of the century,” Grand Pacific Junction publications say. Of course, that is a reference to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

When Williams acquired the Warehouse, it was in even worse shape than the Granary. He said it also was leaning to the side. He did not move the Warehouse but did raise it up and put it on a new foundation. The building now houses A Time to Spa at 25556 Mill Street.

The next installment of *Olmsted 200*'s series of articles on the buildings of Grand Pacific Junction will consider the Livery Stable, which now houses Clementine's and Falls Ice Cream, and the Carriage House, which was one of only two of the original Grand Pacific Junction buildings that Williams moved during the renovation process.



*This is another recent photo of the Warehouse.*

Likewise, the date when the Granary's next-door neighbor, the Warehouse, was built has been hard to determine. A sign on the front of the building says "circa 1897," but Williams now estimates its construction date as early as 1880. However, Grand Pacific Junction pamphlets say the building originally was a warehouse for Simmerers' Hardware. If that is so, it likely was built later because Joseph Peltz and Philip Simmerer did not move their hardware business into the nearby building now called the Grand Pacific Hotel until 1893.

"It is a good example of the flat storefront

## John Hall's Barn Site: Watch This Space

As was noted in Issue 26 of *Olmsted 200*, the site along John Road in Olmsted Township where John Hall's 1880 barn once stood had remained unfinished one year after Razing Cleveland had deconstructed the barn. Two weeks after that issue came out, Sandy Skerda, executive director of The Renaissance, which owns the property, provided this update on plans for the site:

*Sometime in the next few weeks, the foundation stone will be removed and the space will be backfilled and seeded for grass. The corner stone will remain and some of the foundation stone will be used as benches on the space. Once done, we will decide on additional plant material.*

*We are very pleased to be using local landscaper, Bruno's Landscaping, located right here in Olmsted Township.*

Officials of The Renaissance decided by early 2014 that they could not afford to repair the barn after receiving estimates that fixing it could cost more than \$200,000, so they engaged Razing Cleveland to dismantle it in May of that year. All along, they promised that the site would be turned into a park-like setting that commemorated the barn, including use of the foundation stone that Hall carved with his initials and the date: "J.H. 1880."

So watch that space and this space for more information and photos. For more on the barn, see several past issues of *Olmsted 200*.



*This is what was left of the foundation of John Hall's barn several weeks ago. The stone with "J.H. 1880." is just below the center of the photo. That stone and a few others are to remain as the site is landscaped for a park-like setting that memorializes the barn. The barn was dismantled last year after standing for 134 years.*

## Bicentennial: Stearns Family Entered Olmsted 200 Years Ago

This year marks not only 200 years since the first settlers moved into the township that later took the Olmsted name but also the year when members of the second family of settlers arrived. The first settlers were James Geer and his family who made a short move across the border from Columbia Township after Geer built a new cabin for them. But the second group of settlers, members of the Stearns family, came from much farther: Vermont.

(Although Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township celebrated their bicentennial last year, the only action toward settlement that occurred in the township in 1814 was that Geer, who still lived then in Columbia Township, planted a small crop of corn at the site where he later built his cabin in 1815.)

It isn't known exactly when in 1815 the Geers moved into the township. Nor is the date known when Elijah Stearns and his son, David Johnson Stearns, arrived, but they most likely traveled during the warm-weather months, so they probably had set foot in the township by this time of year. Crisfield Johnson, whose 1879 *History of Cuyahoga County, Ohio*, contains the earliest available history of Olmsted Township, noted that the Stearnses came to select land to settle on.

“The senior Mr. Stearns had a large family of boys, and was desirous to obtain an extensive tract of land for their use,” he wrote. “He selected and purchased a thousand and two acres on Butternut Ridge, in the northwest part of the

township, at two dollars per acre. Of this it was arranged that D.J. Stearns was to have a hundred and fifty acres.”

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– Crisfield Johnson

As Walter Holzworth noted in his 1966 history of Olmsted, the land that Elijah Stearns selected was in the northwestern part of the township about where Stearns Road and Lorain Road now meet in North Olmsted. The property extended west to the border with what now is North Ridgeville. “Old maps show several unconnected parcels of Stearns property, so it seemed like he selected several pieces which totaled up to 1000 acres,” Holzworth wrote.

Elijah Stearns, who was born in Massachusetts, had served in the Revolutionary War and rose to the level of lieutenant. Elijah's father, Eliphalet Stearns, had been born in

England, but he also fought with the Americans for independence from England as a captain in the war.

Johnson noted that David Stearns was 21 years old at that time he visited Ohio with his father and had “a constitution remarkably well fitted to bear the hardships of frontier life.” Stearns turned 22 on August 24, 1815, so that is another indication that he had arrived in what became Olmsted Township before late summer. The township at that time had the informal, but not legal, name of Kingston.

In 1879, when Johnson’s book was published, Stearns was 85 years old going on 86. It described him as being “in a condition of remarkable physical vigor, and of undiminished mental power.” Thus, Stearns seems to have been an important source of information for Johnson.

“It was expected that the proprietors would send a surveyor to lay out the land, and D.J. Stearns waited awhile for his arrival, in the meantime clearing off a small piece of land,” Johnson wrote. Stearns then returned to Vermont until the sale of the land he and his father had selected in Ohio was completed. Thus, even though Elijah and David Stearns had arrived in the township in 1815, the township still did not have any permanent residents other than the Geer family by the end of that year.



*This is the depiction of David Johnson Stearns in Crisfield Johnson’s book.*

“In 1816, having perfected the purchase of his land, he came back to Kingston to reside upon it,” Johnson wrote about David Stearns. “He was accompanied by his brother Alva[h] and by Asa Knapp, but they only remained long enough to help him put up a log house and make a beginning in the woods.”

At the time of his writing, Johnson noted that David Stearns still had a note showing that he had paid \$334 to the trustees of the estate of Aaron Olmsted, who had bought most of the northern part of the township in a 1795 auction by the Connecticut Land Company. That note represented just one of four payments that Stearns made to the Olmsted family to buy his land. Aaron Olmsted had died in 1806.

But Stearns did more than buy land from the Olmsted estate; he also helped the Olmsteds sell their Ohio land. As Johnson described it, Stearns had a “sub-agency under Judge Kirkland, the agent of the proprietors, to sell their land. He, however, had sold only two lots when the owners stopped the sale.”

Other Stearns brothers followed him to Ohio – Alvah, Vespacian, Elliot, Elijah and Asaph. All of them married and had children. Thus, it is no surprise that one of the major roads in Olmsted is named Stearns.

In 1819, David Stearns married Polly Barnum, daughter of John Barnum, who had come from Fernsburg, Vermont, and settled in what now is North Ridgeville (then Ridgeville Township). The Stearns-Barnum wedding was believed to have been the second wedding in the township later named Olmsted. They had eight children.

When the township was organized in 1823 as a civil township with the name Lenox, David Stearns was elected to serve as clerk. In 1831, he was elected to be a township trustee. He served in that position for two years. Later, he acted as assessor for one year.

“Politically he has always been a Democrat,” Johnson wrote. “In religion he is a Universalist, having been a member of that church sixteen years. Mr. Stearns remains a fair representative of pioneer days, contented to have been a successful farmer, free from ostentation, and devoted to the best interests of the people around him. Being in fair health and good spirits, he enjoys life even in his old age, and the burden of his eighty-six years, rests very lightly upon him.”

David Stearns died September 25, 1883, at the age of 90 – 68 years after he and his father first visited Olmsted and 67 years after he settled there.

## Olmsted Celebrates Heritage with Parades

It’s almost time for one of those small-town American traditions that Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township long have been good at pulling off – the parade. Newspapers going back to the late 1800s noted a number of times that parades for



*Mayor Ann Marie Donegan waves to spectators during this year’s Independence Day parade*

holidays and other celebrations were big attractions in Olmsted. That tradition continues in 21<sup>st</sup> century Olmsted.

The biggest parade of the year usually is the one that opens Olmsted Heritage Days each August. This year it is scheduled for the evening of August 6. The theme is “Lights, Camera, Action,” celebrating the “Golden Age” of movies and television. The parade is scheduled to begin



at 6:30 p.m. going east on Bagley Road, north on Brookside Drive, east on Water Street and then south on Columbia Road to Grand Pacific Junction.

Last month, Olmsted Falls was fortunate to have a beautiful, sunny day for its Independence Day parade that went past Grand Pacific Junction to the Village Green, where the city gave away ice cream and cookies.



*Olmsted Township Trustees Tiffany Fischbach, Sherri Lippus and Jeanene Kress drive by during the Independence Day parade.*



*These two photos show the Independence Day parade heading north on Columbia Road near Grand Pacific Junction. The Heritage Days parade will go the opposite direction and end at Grand Pacific Junction.*



*After the Independence Day parade, people gathered at the Village Green for an ice cream social.*

For information about Olmsted Heritage Days, go to the festival's website: <http://www.olmstedheritagedays.com>. Heritage Days will run from the evening of Thursday, August 6, through the afternoon of Sunday, August 9. The website includes a schedule of activities as well as information about the Citywide Garage Sale on August 6 and 7. Among the scheduled activities is a historic walking tour of Olmsted Falls led by Bruce Banks, co-author of *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township*. That will be held on Sunday, August 9, beginning at 1:30 at the Charles A. Harding Memorial Bridge.

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will consider the Livery Stable and the Carriage House in the series about the buildings of Grand Pacific Junction. Among the other stories will be one about how an error relating to the history of Olmsted Falls is getting corrected in a prominent location in the community.

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. 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).

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."

*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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