



# Olmsted 200

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

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## Simmerers' Longevity Kept Them Prominent in Olmsted

*This is the fifth part of a series about the Peltz and Simmerer families. The series began in Issue 32 in January. It includes some recently uncovered photos.*

More than a century ago, it was easy to find plenty of people with the names Peltz and Simmerer around Olmsted Falls. Now, those names are relegated to history and some lettering on buildings at Grand Pacific Junction. So what happened to the Simmerers and the Peltzes after brothers-in-law Joseph Peltz and Philip Simmerer ended their business partnership in 1912-1913 and went their separate ways?

Of course, the Simmerers retained an important place in Olmsted life for several more decades by running their hardware store in what now is called the Grand Pacific Hotel. Philip Simmerer spent most of his 99 years of life working there, and three of his four sons kept the store going until each of them passed normal retirement age.

*In 1938, Hardware Age magazine published the page at the right to honor Philip Simmerer, who reached age 73 that year, for half a century in the hardware business. Who would have guessed then that he would spend another quarter century working at his hardware store in Olmsted Falls?*





*This photo of the Simmerer family was taken when Russell, born in November 1905, was still an infant. He sits in the lap of his mother, Margaret. On the right, his brother, Carleton, stands between the legs of his father, Philip. The other siblings are, from left, Oscar, Clarence and Pearl.*

Philip and Margaret Simmerer had five children, four sons and one daughter. The three sons who joined their father in the hardware business were Clarence, Oscar and Russell. Pearl, the daughter, died when she was a teenager. The other son, Carleton, got away from Olmsted Falls by working in the paint industry in a career that took him to Chicago before he came back to Cleveland. Carleton and his wife, Esther, were responsible in 1980 for compiling the Simmerer family history, which provides much of the following information.

Clarence Michael Simmerer was born on September 30, 1889, when his parents still lived in the

house at 7486 River Road, where Joseph Peltz had grown up. On June 27, 1912, Clarence married Cynthia Mellenbrook, who had grown up on a farm south of Olmsted Falls. They built a brick house at 8184 Columbia Road in 1925 and lived there for the next several decades. They had a daughter, Ruth, who was born in 1913, and a son, Bernard, who was born in 1916.

After going through elementary school in Olmsted Falls and two years of high school in Berea, Clarence ran a coal yard in which his father had bought an interest in 1898 and owned solely from 1900 until selling it in 1913. It was in 1913, after dissolving his partnership with Peltz, that Philip Simmerer brought two of his sons, Clarence and Oscar, into the hardware business, which then was named P. Simmerer and Sons. Clarence stayed with the store until it closed in 1971, when he turned 85 – 20 years past the age when most people then retired.

Oscar Joseph Simmerer was born on March 2, 1892. After elementary school in Olmsted Falls and two years of high school, he studied business administration for two years at Baldwin-Wallace College. On June 2, 1914, he married Gladys Burt, who grew up nearby. They had two daughters: Ethel, who was born in 1915, and Martha Jane, who was born in 1918.

Although Oscar initially worked for his father at the coal yard and in the hardware store, he later took a job as a file clerk with the New York Central Railroad. He traveled into Cleveland and back each day on the commuter train known as the “Plug.” But during the Great Depression, the railroad laid him off, so he returned to the hardware store to work as a bookkeeper and clerk until he became a partner in P. Simmerer & Sons in 1951. He was 79 when the store closed 20 years later.

The third child of Philip and Margaret Simmerer was their only daughter, Pearl Amelia Simmerer. She was born on May 22, 1895, in the new home the Simmerers built in 1894. That house now is part of Grand Pacific Junction. Shortly after her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, Pearl became ill. She died on June 10, 1910. The cause was cited as spiral meningitis, which was believed to have been caused by a contaminated well at the school on the Village Green.



*This photo taken in 1963, about a year before Philip Simmerer's death, shows him (second from left) with the three sons who joined him in the hardware business.*

The fourth child, Carleton Frederick Simmerer, was born on April 9, 1904. He was the first Simmerer to graduate from high school in Olmsted Falls – the new school built in 1916 that now serves as City Hall. During his senior year, he was captain and center of the high school basketball team, which won the championship of the Cuyahoga County Class B tournament and brought the school its first trophy. He also was president of his senior class and the valedictorian. He majored in chemistry at Oberlin College, where he graduated in 1926.

Shortly after that, Carleton got a job with the Sherwin-Williams Company in Chicago. After 10 years, he became a sales representative in 1936 for the Titanium Pigment Corporation, a subsidiary of National Lead Company, which later became NL Industries. In 1955, he was transferred to Cleveland, where he retired in 1969.

While in Chicago, Carleton married Esther Kline of Champaign, Illinois. They had four children: Margaret Elizabeth, born on June 12, 1934; Philip Edward, born on September 24, 1936; Carolyn Esther, born on August 29, 1941; and Marcia Jean, born on December 7, 1942.

As co-author of the Simmerer Family Genealogy, Carleton took the liberty to include his own musings about what life would be like in 100 years (2080): “I do not know what the future political situation will be. I feel we will be doing more in space, and will be utilizing solar energy. I don’t think there will be any gasoline – all petroleum reserves will have been used. I don’t know what will be used instead. It is very possible

that a nuclear war could occur, which would wipe out half of the population or more, but there are isolated sections of the world which would not be affected. The human race has survived many other things.”

The final child of Philip and Margaret Simmerer was Russell John Simmerer, who was born on November 10, 1905. After he graduated from high school in Olmsted Falls in 1925, his father offered him a job in the hardware store. But before he took the job, he went to Coyne Electrical School in Chicago to take a 13-week course, which



*Esther and Carleton Simmerer compiled the family's history.*

allowed him to do electrical work for his father and others. Later, he became a partner in the hardware business, which changed its name to P. Simmerer's Sons in 1945. He was almost 66 when the store closed in 1971.



*Three Simmerer brothers kept the hardware store going until 1971.*

On August 29, 1928, Russell married Helen Guscott, the daughter of the manager of the United Farmers' Exchange in Olmsted Falls. Initially, they lived in an apartment above the hardware store. Later, they bought a house on Brookside Drive. They had two children: John Philip, who was born on September 20, 1933, and Marilyn, who was born on May 19, 1941. From the late 1940s until 1969, Helen Simmerer worked as a first-grade teacher in the Olmsted Falls school system. She died in 1974. On October 23, 1976, Russell married Irma Saukkonen, daughter of Finnish immigrants who lived in Maple Heights.

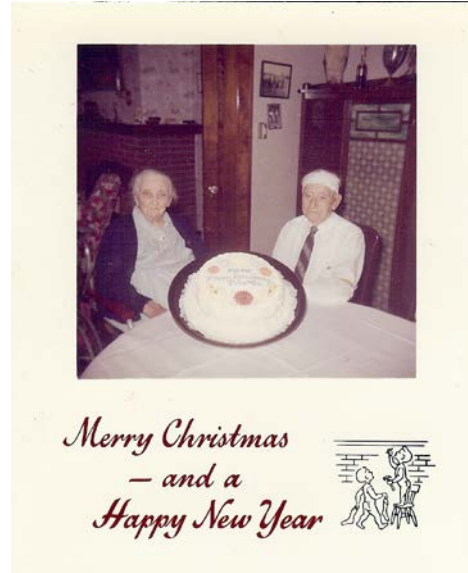


*These two photos show Margaret and Philip Simmerer late in their lives.*

As the youngest of the Simmerer brothers, Russell was the last one to go. When he died in April 2003, he was 97 years old, so he lived almost as long as his father did. Oscar, the second oldest, was the first to die on March 1, 1982, one day short of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Clarence, the oldest, died a few months later in July 1982 about two months away from his 93<sup>rd</sup> birthday. Carleton died March 7, 1987, about a month shy of his 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

Some Simmerers have remained in northeastern Ohio, but others have scattered around the country.

The Peltz family has been gone even longer from Olmsted Falls, but Olmsted keeps drawing them back. The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will have more about the Peltzes, especially about one branch of the family with an especially interesting tie to their Olmsted ancestors.



*A photo of Margaret and Philip Simmerer with an anniversary cake appeared on one of their holiday cards.*



*Descendants of Carleton Simmerer have preserved a few heirlooms from Carleton's parents. On the left is a buggy seat now used as a stand for a flat-screen television. Below it is a wooden sled. Both reportedly came from a barn on Philip Simmerer's property. Perhaps that was the Livery Stable that now houses Clementine's and Falls Ice Cream at Grand Pacific Junction. On the right is a clock that had been in the home of Philip and Margaret Simmerer.*

Thanks go again to Doug Peltz, a descendent of both the Peltz and Simmerer families, for sharing the Simmerer Family Genealogy from 1980, some of the photos and other information used here.



## B&O Depot Arrived Late at the Junction

*This is the latest in a series of stories about the history of buildings at Grand Pacific Junction. The series began in Issue 21 in February 2015.*

Not all of the historic buildings at Grand Pacific Junction started out in their current locations, but most of them were there when developer Clint Williams acquired the properties. The notable exception is the old railroad depot that now stands at 25596 Mill Street between the Granary (which houses Shamrock and Rose Creations) and the parking lot.

It was built in 1895 to be the Berea depot for the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, although it was located outside of Berea in the section of Middleburgh Township that now is Middleburg Heights. In the early 1960s, Gerald Brookins acquired the depot and moved it to Trolleyville, U.S.A., his museum and collection of old streetcars at Columbia Mobile Home Park in Olmsted Township. (See story below.)



*This is what the depot looked like in December 2008 after being moved to Grand Pacific Junction and after the top was reattached to the bottom.*

After Columbia Park came under new ownership, Trolleyville, U.S.A., was dismantled. The streetcars went elsewhere, and Williams seized the opportunity to acquire the depot in 2008 to move it a mile down Columbia Road to Grand Pacific Junction.

It was a short trip, but the depot didn't make it in one piece. The building was too tall to get under the utility

wires hanging over Columbia Road. Williams had to have the top of the depot cut off just above the windows, so the building could be hauled by trucks in two pieces. It took about three hours in December 2008 to get it to Grand Pacific Junction, where it was reassembled. Initially after arriving at its new location, the depot sat high on blocks. Early in 2009, it was lowered into a hole that had been dug for it. That spring and summer, Williams had it renovated and repainted from white with gray trim to dark red with green trim.



*In the photo to the left from December 28, 2008, the depot sat high on blocks waiting to be lowered into the hole dug for it at Grand Pacific Junction. The photo on the right was taken March 28, 2009, after the depot was set into the ground in its permanent position.*



*To the left is another view of the depot from March 28, 2009. It still bore the white paint with gray trim that it wore when it was at Trolleyville, U.S.A. Clint Williams later added steps and railings to the outside, renovated the inside and painted it dark red with green trim to convert it from a depot to a shop that added to the amenities at Grand Pacific Junction.*

Williams didn't have a tenant for the depot when he acquired it, but he was quoted in the *News Sun* at the time as saying, in a reference to the movie *Field of Dreams*, "If you build it, they will come."

*Restored and repainted, the depot took its place among the shops at Grand Pacific Junction at 25596 Mill Street. The building currently is home to the Nifty Dog Shop, which specializes in travel kits for dogs.*







*This set of signs (above) represents the depot's three locations. Although it was a depot for Berea, it was built in what then was Middleburgh Township (now Middleburg Heights).*

It took a while for a merchant to move into the depot, so Williams decorated it inside with the types of items that likely would have been found in a B&O depot about a century ago, including an old-fashioned telephone, a telegraph, a manual typewriter and a floor safe. Eventually, merchants moved in. A few years ago, it housed a gift shop called Crooked River Creations. Now, it is home to the Nifty Dog Shop, which sells dog treats and accessories, particularly travel kits for dogs.



*Before a merchant moved in, Clint Williams decorated the depot with a stove (left), safe (above right) and telegraph key and manual typewriter (below right), such as those that might have been found in a train depot a century ago. Outside the depot is an old wagon loaded with wooden trunks and a barrel, representing some of the cargo that would have moved through an old depot in those days.*

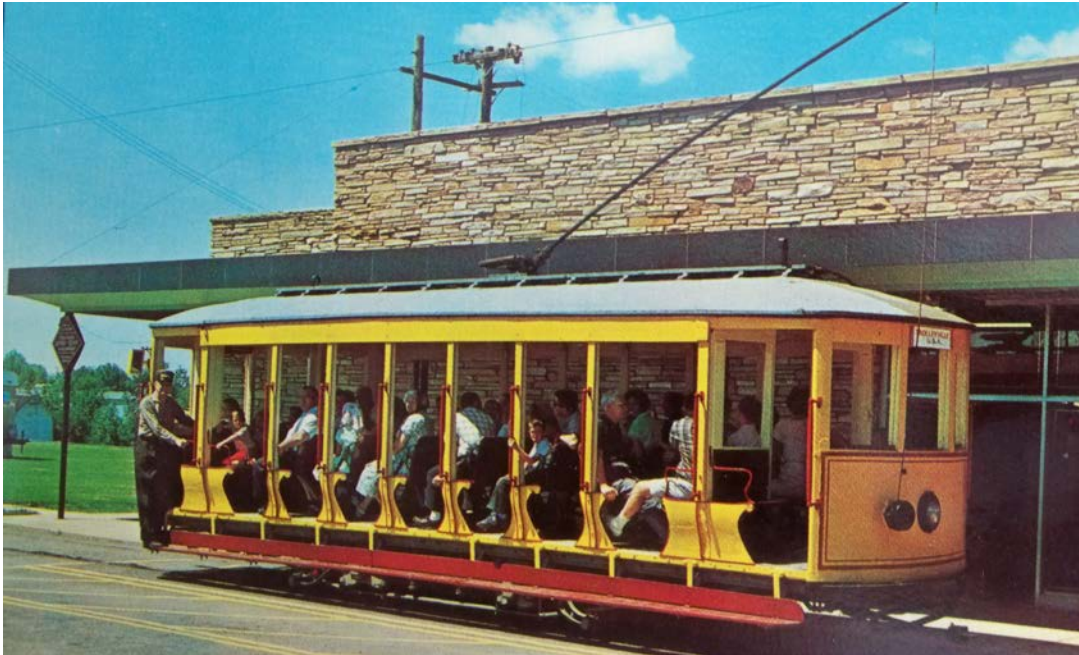




## Trolleyville, U.S.A., Kept Streetcars Running in Olmsted

Trolleyville, U.S.A., located in Olmsted Township, gave northeastern Ohio residents and many tourists the opportunity for about half a century to see and ride the types of streetcars that once were common on the streets of Cleveland and many other cities. It was the creation of streetcar fan Gerald Brookins, who had enough money to buy them and enough land on which they could run.

In January 1954, Cleveland discontinued its use of streetcars with ceremonies and final rides for those who cared about them. Brookins cared quite a bit about them. He took hundreds of photos of their final trips along Madison Avenue to and from Public Square. Brookins had fond memories of riding streetcars as a young man. He was riding a trolley when he met Alice Cawrse, the woman he married. Also, his father once had worked as a motorman for the streetcar system.



*This postcard from about half a century ago, shows one of the Trolleyville, U.S.A., streetcars outside the shopping center, where Gerald Brookins housed his museum and sold tickets for rides. The back of the postcard says: "ALL ABOARD FOR YESTERDAY! An exhilarating open-air trolley ride awaits an excited group about to depart from the trolley depot. Old #9 stirs up nostalgia of a by-gone era to visitors at Trolleyville, U.S.A., 7100 Columbia Road, State Route 252, Olmsted Falls, Ohio, near Gate #9 Ohio Turnpike. 16 historical trolleys on display."*

After Brookins learned that the trolleys were going to be scrapped, he bought four streetcars that had been used in the Shaker Rapid system and brought them to Olmsted Township. One year earlier in 1953, he had begun developing the Columbia Mobile Home Park and the shopping center that was known at different times either as Town and Country Villa Shopping Center or Columbia Park Shopping Center at 7100 Columbia Road in Olmsted Township. Columbia Park had fewer than 100 mobile homes when

Brookins started moving the streetcars in, so he had room to set up tracks and other facilities for them. However, initially, he left the first few just to sit in the open until he could put them into operation.

When the Cleveland began removing trolley poles and overhead wires from what had been the Clifton Boulevard line later in the 1950s, Brookins bought some of them. Then, he built three and a half miles of track to run through his mobile home park. Later, he set up a small museum about streetcars in one of the shopping center storefronts, where visitors could buy tickets for trolley rides. He acquired more and more streetcars from as far away as Switzerland, England and Mexico, as well as the former B&O Railroad depot that had served Berea (although it actually was located in Middleburg Heights). He placed the depot at the opposite end of the tracks (toward Fitch Road) from the museum. He also built a car barn to store the trolleys when they weren't in use.



*This postcard says:  
“THE OLD AND NEW  
MEET AT COLUMBIA  
PARK. This scene shows the  
only place in the world  
where charming old-time  
trolleys provide  
transportation for residents  
of an ultra-modern mobile  
home park located at  
Trolleyville, U.S.A., 7100*

*Columbia Road, State Route 252, Olmsted Falls, Ohio, near Gate #9 Ohio Turnpike. 16  
historical trolleys on display.”*

Brookins called his streetcar system the Columbia Park and Southwestern. He established the Gerald E. Brookins Museum of Electric Railways as a nonprofit, educational corporation to collect tax-deductible contributions to help fund the streetcar operation. According to the *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, “In 1995, the nonprofit museum was supported by donations and ticket sales to its numerous annual events, which include the Christmas Festival of Lights, jazz festival, Halloween party for kids, and murder mystery productions which, combined, placed patron traffic at more than 10,000.”

By then, however, Gerald Brookins was long gone. He died in January 1983. In his obituary, the *Plain Dealer* said that Trolleyville, U.S.A., had 27 streetcars. After Brookins died, his son operated Trolleyville, U.S.A. But in 2001, the Brookins family sold Columbia Park. The new owner didn't want the streetcars and gave the family five years to get rid of them. Trolleyville, U.S.A., closed in 2002.

*This postcard says:  
 “LIGHTWEIGHT  
 INTERURBAN CAR  
 NO. 303. This gaily  
 colored car once raced  
 through the Fox River  
 Valley in Illinois. Built  
 in 1923 by the St. Louis  
 Car Co. for the Aurora,  
 Elgin & Fox River  
 Electric line, the car  
 was sold in 1935 to the  
 Shaker Heights Rapid*



*Transit and was the last interurban car in regular service in Ohio. It can be seen at  
 Gerald E. Brookins' Trolleyville, U.S.A., 7100 Columbia Road, State Route 252, Olmsted  
 Falls, Ohio, near Gate #9 Ohio Turnpike. 16 historical trolleys on display.”*

A nonprofit group called Lake Shore Electric Railway Inc. formed to acquire and preserve the collection. The organization moved the streetcars, which then were said to number 31, to a warehouse in downtown Cleveland in 2006. The plan was to operate a short trolley line and museum near the lakefront, but the subsequent economic recession

hurt the project. In 2009, the streetcars were sold at auction. A consortium of 10 railway museums bought the trolleys and dispersed them across the country.



*To the left is an advertisement for Trolleyville, U.S.A., that ran in the program for sesquicentennial celebration held by Olmsted Falls, Olmsted Township and West View in the summer of 1964. Note that the phone number was given as AD 5-4725. AD stood for “Adams,” so the prefix for Olmsted often was called “ADams 5.” That combination of letters and digits was common in the United States and Canada from the 1920s until the 1960s, when all-number dialing was introduced. That change was partly as a result of the transition to direct-distance dialing, which eliminated the need to go through operators to make phone calls.*

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about what happened to the Peltzes after family members left Olmsted Falls. It also will have the next story in the



series about Grand Pacific Junction with information about not an old building but another type of historic attraction.

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 the Netherlands 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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