



Olmsted 200

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

Issue 39

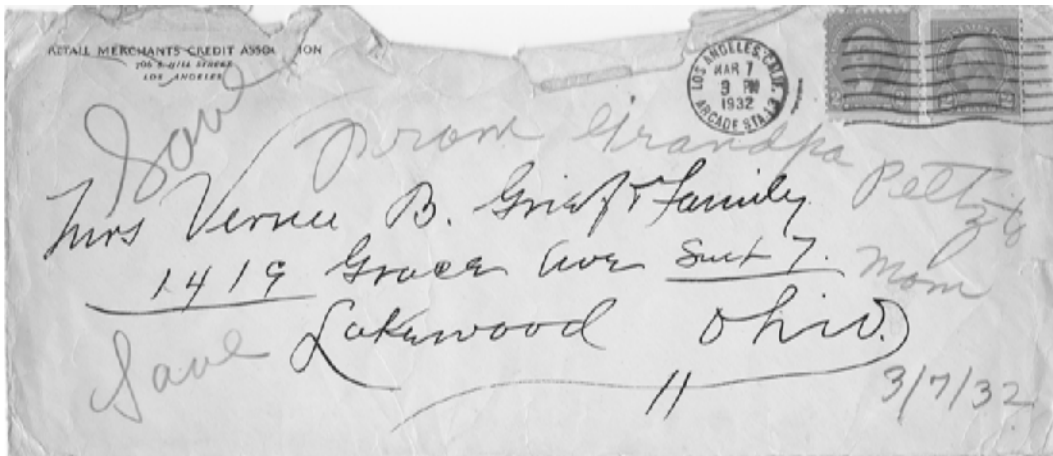
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Letters Reveal Aspects of Former Olmsted Residents' Lives

Joseph Peltz, who once was a partner of Philip Simmerer in running the hardware store in what now is known as the Grand Pacific Hotel, has been gone for several decades, but new information keeps turning up about him. That's thanks mainly to the work of Doug Peltz, his great-great-grandson, who has put much effort in the past few years into researching his family's history. The latest items he has acquired are two letters from the 1930s, one written by Joseph Peltz and the other by his widow, Minnie, shortly after his death.

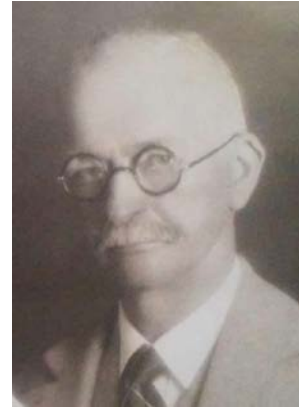


This is the envelope for the letter that Joseph Peltz sent in 1932 from California to his daughter, Verna Greif, in Lakewood.

The recipient of both letters was Joseph's daughter, Verna Greif, who then lived in Lakewood. Doug Peltz obtained them from her great-grandchildren.

Joseph Peltz was 75 years old when he wrote his letter on March 6, 1932. That was a dozen years after he and Minnie had moved to Los Angeles from Olmsted Falls.

"It is very difficult to read the handwriting, but I studied his handwriting and eventually managed to decipher most of it," Doug wrote in an email this summer. "It was so interesting for me to read this and get a glimpse into his personality and thinking. He mentions Julius in a few places as well, which was of particular personal interest to me, since Julius is such an enigma."



Joseph Peltz

Julius, was Joseph's son and Doug's great-grandfather. A copy of his high school diploma hangs in a hallway at Olmsted Falls City Hall. Julius earned a degree in engineering at the Case School of Applied Science, which became part of Case-Western Reserve University. He worked for a Cleveland company before becoming the superintendent of Lakewood's water department in 1916. But in the 1920s, he developed mental illness. By 1930, he was living in a sanitarium in Cleveland, leaving his wife Myrtle to raise their five children on her own.

*Eagle Rock Sunday Feb 6/
32*
My Dear Beloved Children and All:-
It may seem strange
for your dear kind old Grand Father
to make this great effort to pen this letter
upon this beautiful day of Sunshine & Calif.
Wh. H.
This is the opening of the five-page letter that Joseph Peltz wrote to his daughter in 1932.

In the letter to Verna, Joseph mentioned that he and his first wife, Anna Simmerer Peltz, had spent several thousands of dollars on Julius's college education. He said they "did it with a kindly thought & heart for his future welfare. We knew that he was not a strong husky son like his cousin Simmerer Boys." He added that his "heart is sick with sorrows" over the problems Julius had.

"Well Dear Daughter...I hope you still call to see Dear Brother Julius and hope he is improving in his condition," Joseph wrote. "It is so sad to write him a personal letter. I sent him several letters when he was first taken with trouble but I never got any thanks or praise as they claimed they could not read my letters with all the education higher [they have]. Also [I] send him lots California literature or reading matter. Whether he got it or not or the waste basket, it all was sent with a good motive at heart."

From an Olmsted perspective, it is interesting to note that the Peltzes were in contact with other former Olmsted Falls residents who had moved to southern California. In his letter, Joseph said they had gone to South Pasadena that Sunday to the home of Gertrude Mead and Minnie Bennett Meacher. While they were there, other former Olmsted Falls neighbors, Hattie Lay and her sister Mary, came by. Then Gertrude Lay and her two daughters arrived.

“Your father was the senior of the happy crowd,” Joseph said. But he added that a sad note had come since then about the death of Gertrude Mead’s sister Mary, who had lived out there for several years. He said his wife planned to attend the funeral, but he couldn’t because he had to make a trip to the bank at the same time.

The references to the Lay sisters and the Mead sisters indicate that Joseph and Minnie Peltz were not alone in moving from Olmsted Falls to the Los Angeles area early in the 20th century. Enough former Olmsted residents were there for them to have small reunions.

The Lays and Meads came from two families who were prominent in Olmsted Falls during the 1800s but largely disappeared from the community in the 1900s. As evidenced by Joseph Peltz’s letter, Olmsted lost at least a few of them to California.

Hattie and Mary Lay, who never married and worked as school teachers, were two of the four daughters of John Lay and the former Pamela Barnum. John Lay served as mayor of Olmsted Falls at least twice and Pamela came from one of the earliest families to settle in the community. One of John’s brothers, Joseph, was a successful inventor and manufacturer. John and Joseph once operated a factory that made wooden rakes, scythes and other farm implements. After John left the business, Joseph switched products to brooms and snow shovels. By 1885, the factory was so busy that it had trouble keeping up with demand. In 1897, Joseph Lay moved to Ridgeville, Indiana, to run what became the country’s largest broom factory, and several Olmsted residents followed him there. John Lay died in 1893.

Mary and Gertrude Mead were daughters of W.W. Mead, who moved to Olmsted Falls with his parents in 1835. W.W. Mead operated a harness shop where the Clint Williams Realty office is now located at the corner of Water Street and Columbia Road. Mary was the daughter of W.W. Mead’s first wife, Hannah Howe. Gertrude was the daughter of his second wife, Julia Fitch.

In another section of the letter, Joseph Peltz refers to the mild weather he had heard his friends and relatives back in Ohio were having that winter, but he warned that winter wasn’t over in Ohio yet. That led him to recall 1881, when he was courting his first wife, Anna. It is hard to read, but he seems to indicate there was heavy snow in northeastern Ohio that year as late as April 22. Because of “snow piled up over the fences,” he had to let some of the rail fence down to get to Rockport (around where

Brook Park Road is now) to see his sweetheart. “[H]ow was that for going sparking?” he asked. Joseph and Anna married the following September.

Minnie Peltz wrote her letter on July 6, 1938, shortly after Joseph’s death in late June. She explained to Verna how her father’s health deteriorated over a period of weeks and then told her about his funeral. She said many people had sent get well letters when he was sick and then sympathy letters after his death, but one exception stood out for her.



Minnie Peltz

“And the Olmsted Falls Oddfellow Lodge are the only ones that have never sent a word,” Minnie wrote. “He was a member for so many years, paid his dues sometimes when it was not so easy. [The Odd Fellows] never sent a word or a thing to him or me. But [they sent] letters when they wanted money. It made him feel bad for they were practically all old neighbors and so called friends. He dropped them 2 years ago.”

Joseph Peltz’s friends from the Olmsted Falls Masons apparently did better. Minnie wrote that the lodge worked with a lodge near where the Peltzes lived in California to send him a silver medal to mark the 50th anniversary since he joined the Masons. She said Masons had her tell him to go to the California lodge without telling him why “and when he came home he almost cried he was so pleased.” She said Joseph showed the medal to everyone who visited them.

Then in apparent reference to the slight by the Odd Fellows, Minnie wrote: “You can show this to Phil if you want to. He is not to blame of course for he doesn’t go often.” The Phil she referred to was apparently Phil Simmerer, Joseph’s former partner. The Odd Fellows building in Olmsted Falls was only a few doors down from Simmerer’s hardware store. (What was the Odd Fellows building became the Olmsted Grange Hall for much of the 20th century. It now is home to the Mexican food restaurant, Taqueria Junction.)

*rough copy not for mono July 6, 38. For your mono in 20 years you know
Dear Daughter: I will try to write you to night and tell
you all about Dad. that I can, and start from way back, you
know he hurt his back why he quit work, he was trying to
open one of the big Office windows and it stuck, well he
did not feel very good for several weeks but it gradually left
him - I h. seemed all right. That was the last day of May he
This is the beginning of the 1938 letter that Minnie Peltz sent to Verna Peltz Greif. In it,
she refers to Joseph, Verna’s father, as “Dady.” She also wrote her final comments
around the edges of the page, which is why some words are upside down at the top and
running down the left side.*

For more about the Peltz and Simmerer families and the effects they had on Olmsted Falls, see the six-part series that ran in *Olmsted 200* from January through June 2016 in Issues 32 through 37.

Local Historian Once Explored Olmsted's Cave

After the story about caves in Olmsted Falls appeared in Issue 39 of *Olmsted 200* last month, one response came in from Bruce Banks, who shared some personal knowledge. Banks has devoted much time over the past few decades to investigating Olmsted's history and he is the co-author of *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township*.



For decades, Bruce Banks has given illustrated talks about Olmsted history. This photo is from his presentation at the Grand Pacific Hotel on August 17, 2013, during Olmsted Heritage Days.

“I thought I would tell you that I have been in the cave that started below the Water Street bridge,” he wrote. “The people building the foundation for the current bridge notified me and I went in prior to the completion of the bridge. It was a very narrow opening and I slid down a 45 degree slope to the sandstone opening. I was worried about being able to get back out so I tied a rope around my feet and had my son stay outside to pull me out. The cave was very shallow in height [so] I had to crawl on my belly. There was a lot of dried silt on the bottom. I could not see how far it went but it headed in the direction of the Village Green.”

That description fits with older stories about the cave before it was sealed up. For example, one story about the cave from the 1880s said, “The entrance was under Water Street Bridge on the west side of the river. When they were in the cave at the farthest end at the west they could hear William Mead at work pounding rivets into harnesses on an anvil in his Harness shop, which was located where Schady's Shell Service Station is today on Columbia Road.” That description was part of the excerpt from Bernice Offenbergs' 1964 book, *Over the Years in Olmsted*, which was in last month's issue of *Olmsted 200*. Since that book came out, the former Shell station was renovated to become the Olmsted Falls office for Clint Williams Realty.



This spot where the bridge along Water Street connects to the west bank of the West Branch of Rocky River is about where the entrance to a cave once was.

Banks concluded his description of his spelunking adventure by saying, “It was so tight that I could not turn around to get out so my son pulled me out.” He might have been the last person to go into the cave. The bridge that carries Water Street over the West Branch of Rocky River was replaced in 1990. Since then, the entrance to the cave has been sealed.

Olmsted Township Will Mark Its History This Month



Township Hall will be the site for the new Ohio Historical Marker.

Olmsted Township plans to celebrate its history on August 27 with the dedication of a new Ohio Historical Marker near Township Hall at the corner of Fitch Road and Cook Road. The ceremony will begin at 11:00 that morning.

This will be the second dedication of an Ohio Historical Marker for the Olmsted communities this year. Olmsted Falls incorporated the unveiling of a similar marker into Memorial Day festivities. The city’s marker is located

along Columbia Road at the Village Green.



The top left photo shows the front of the new Ohio Historical Marker for Olmsted Falls that stands along Columbia Road near the Village Green. The community dedicated the marker during a Memorial Day ceremony. The bottom left photo shows the reverse side of the marker. Last year was the 200th anniversary of when the first settlers, James Geer and his family, moved into what became Olmsted Township. So a committee from the city and the township developed plans for two markers that would share wording on one side but be different for the city and township on the other side. On August 27, the township will dedicate its marker at Township Hall.



More than a year ago, a committee from both Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township applied for a pair of markers, one for the city and one for the township. Because of their shared history, the idea was to have the same wording on one side of each marker but different wording appropriate for each community on the reverse. During May and June of 2015, the wording was tweaked with some help from outside the committee before each community submitted its application to the state. Each application had to contain a statement of significance to justify the requested marker.

Why should Olmsted Township have its own marker? Well, here is what one person suggested for the statement of significance in the township's application:

More so than most communities in the Cleveland area, Olmsted Township still wears its history. That history dates back more than two centuries from the early days of the Western Reserve when northeastern Ohio was divided into townships through the first settlements after the War of 1812, the building of roads and railroads, the consolidation of schools, the development of agriculture from a meager corn crop in 1814 to the growth of greenhouses in the 20th century. The name Olmsted itself commemorates the sea captain who bought much of the township from the Connecticut Land Company in 1795. Most of the township's main roads bear the names of early settlers. Successors to the railroads that cut through Olmsted in 1849 and 1853 still operate. Olmsted Township was the site of northeastern Ohio's first publicly owned circulating library (commemorated by a historical marker nearby in North Olmsted). A century ago, when Olmsted Falls merged its village school system into the township's rural school district, the result was the first district in Cuyahoga County to abandon small, independent schools and put all its students into one new school (a building that still serves as municipal offices and a community center).

Largely an agricultural community throughout most of its history, Olmsted Township, along with Olmsted Falls, became part of a greenhouse industry that was called "the largest territory of glass in the country" in the 20th century. Several of those greenhouses remain in business, and Olmsted Township is rare in Cuyahoga County in having traditional farms still in operation. In fact, the community's status as a township with 10 square miles of its original size is rare in Ohio's most urban county, where only one other township (Chagrin Falls Township with only half a square mile) exists, and is another example of how Olmsted holds onto its historical ties longer than other communities in the region. Because Olmsted Township, like Olmsted Falls, was less touched by the post-World War II development that swept through Cleveland's suburbs, the community still has many houses dating back as far as 1820 that serve as homes. The Township Hall, where the historical marker will stand, represents the last in a series of buildings that have housed township

government as well as the modesty of the Great Depression when it was built (1939).

Olmsted Township still wears its history, as does Olmsted Falls. In many ways, they are one community with one school system and one ZIP code, despite two forms of government, that retain the small-town charm of their past. They deserve to celebrate and commemorate their history with a unique pair of markers that share wording on one side and tell their separate stories on the other.

Full details of the ceremony on August 27 were still unresolved at the time of publication for this issue of *Olmsted 200*. The next issue will have a story about the dedication and photos from it.

Heritage Days Will Celebrate Olmsted for the 25th Time



Jim Boddy, as the town crier, and his wife Joyce, as his escort, keep visitors informed about Heritage Days events.

Since 1992, the best time of year to celebrate Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township has been during the annual Olmsted Heritage Days celebration. The 25th annual festival is scheduled for Thursday, August 4, though Sunday, August 7.

Most Heritage Days activities occur at Grand Pacific Junction, but the festival is not confined to that location. The so-called “City Wide Garage Sale” on Thursday and Friday includes sites not only throughout the city but also throughout the township. The parade traditionally begins in the township and ends in the city. Other locations away from Grand Pacific Junction with Heritage Days events include the Olmsted Falls Depot on Garfield Street, where the Cuyahoga Valley & West Shore Model Railroad Club will hold an open house, and the Charles A. Harding Memorial Bridge, where the Olmsted Kiwanis Club will hold Breakfast on the Bridge on Sunday

morning. The Heritage Days schedule is available at Grand Pacific Junction and at: <http://nebula.wsimg.com/aa8dc1afe5f21fc55d9ecdd0c210de0d?AccessKeyId=F3ADB5EB094D7D60D3BD&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>.



In these photos above from last year's Olmsted Heritage Days parade, the Olmsted Falls High School marching band heads for the curve on Columbia Road (left) and other units in the parade cross the railroad tracks near Grand Pacific Junction (right).



People gather all along the parade route, including the Grand Pacific Hotel, which is almost at the end of the route (center left). Children look forward to the candy tossed to them by many of the people who ride vehicles and floats or who walk in the parade. The hotel also serves as the venue for some of the concerts during Olmsted Heritage Days. One popular group has been Haywire, a band that plays



rockabilly music in the style of Buddy Holly (lower left). The group is scheduled to perform again this year in the same location from 3:00 to 5:00 Sunday afternoon at the end of the festival. Other concerts are scheduled for the Grand Pacific Wedding Gardens and the gazebo.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about the centennial of the school building that now serves as Olmsted Falls City Hall and a story about the dedication of the new Ohio Historical Marker in Olmsted Township.

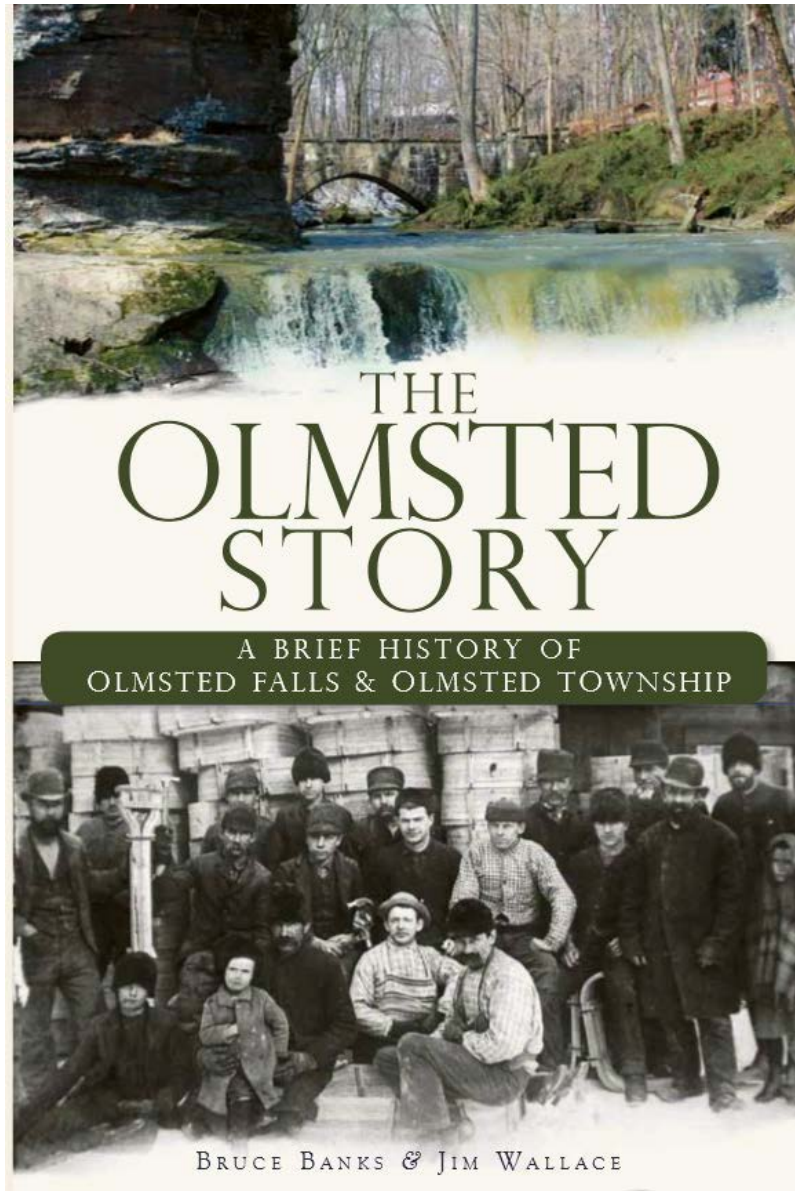
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Colorado, Texas, Washington, 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. Thanks go to Mary Louise King for help in proofreading and editing many issues. 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 the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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