



Olmsted 200

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

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November Meteors Have Connection to Olmsted History

If the nighttime sky is dark enough and clear enough around the middle of November and you happen to see one or more meteors – or “shooting stars” – you might be witness to a portion of one of the best-known annual meteor showers. But maybe you didn’t know – until now – about that meteor shower’s connection to the family for whom Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township, as well as North Olmsted, are named.

Meteor showers occur when the Earth, in its orbit around the sun, encounters streams of particles. Those particles are left in the wake of comets in their trips from the edges of the solar system to close passes by the sun and then back to the outer realms. The Earth experiences several meteor showers of varied intensity each year. One of the best-known meteor showers is the Perseids, partly because they reliably provide an average of about one meteor each minute at their peak. It’s also partly because they occur in mid-August, when the weather is warm enough that it is comfortable for observers to stay outside for long periods in the middle of the night.



NASA released this photo of the Leonids as seen from space in 1997.



An 1889 book published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church included this depiction of the 1833 Leonid meteor storm.

The major meteor shower in mid-November is the Leonids, which are expected to peak this year on the night of November 17-18. Unfortunately, that will be just three days after a full moon, so moonlight will make it hard to see all but the brightest meteors during much of the night. In years when moonlight doesn't interfere, the Leonids usually produce 10 to 15 meteors per hour, although they sometimes are much stronger.

In fact, it was an especially strong Leonid shower in 1833 that called attention to the phenomenon of meteor showers and led to the connection with a member of the Olmsted family. The Leonids in 1833 were not just strong – they were spectacular! It was estimated that more than 100,000 – and perhaps as many as 240,000 – meteors streaked by each hour, and the storm lasted for about nine hours. People in North America east of the Rocky Mountains had the best view.

Newspapers from Canada to Jamaica carried reports about the meteor storm. Many famous

Americans, including Abraham Lincoln and abolitionists Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, referred to it years later. It reportedly led the Cheyenne tribe of Native Americans to establish a peace treaty and the Lakota tribe to reset its calendar. Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints – the Mormons – wrote in his journal that the meteor storm was an indication the second coming of Christ must be close.

It was Denison Olmsted who came up with an accurate explanation for what happened. He was one of many Olmsteds from East Hartford, Connecticut, as was Aaron Olmsted, who purchased in 1795 much of the northern half of what later became Olmsted Township. Denison Olmsted spent several weeks late in 1833 gathering information about the meteor storm. The *American Journal of Science and Arts* in January 1834 published his findings in an article titled "Observations on the Meteors of November 13th, 1833."



This illustration of the 1833 meteor storm depicts how it looked from Niagara Falls, New York. It was published by Mechanics Illustrated from a woodcut print made by an eyewitness.



Denison Olmsted determined that meteors are debris from space that enter the Earth's atmosphere.

Previously, many people thought that meteors were an atmospheric phenomenon, but Olmsted's work showed that they are an astronomical phenomenon. He determined that the meteors radiated from part of the constellation of Leo (from which the shower gets its name) and that the duration of the shower was relatively short because it had not been seen hours earlier during nighttime in Europe. Thus, he suggested that the meteors had come from a cloud of particles in space. He has been given credit for being the father of meteor science.

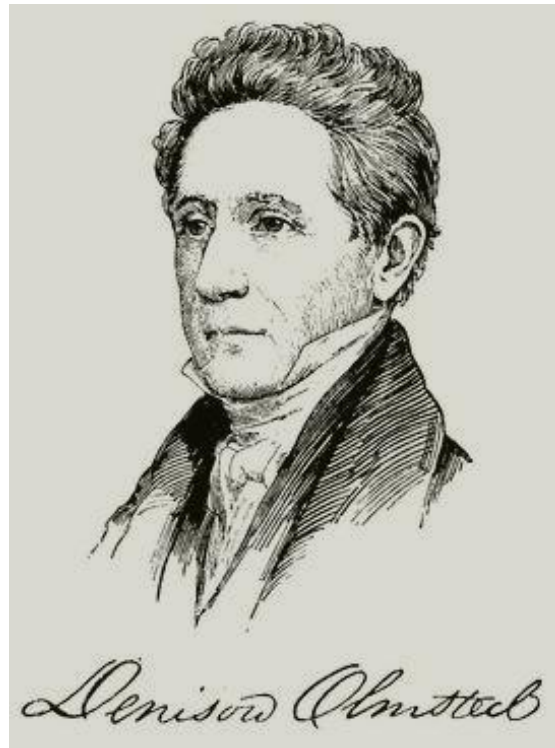
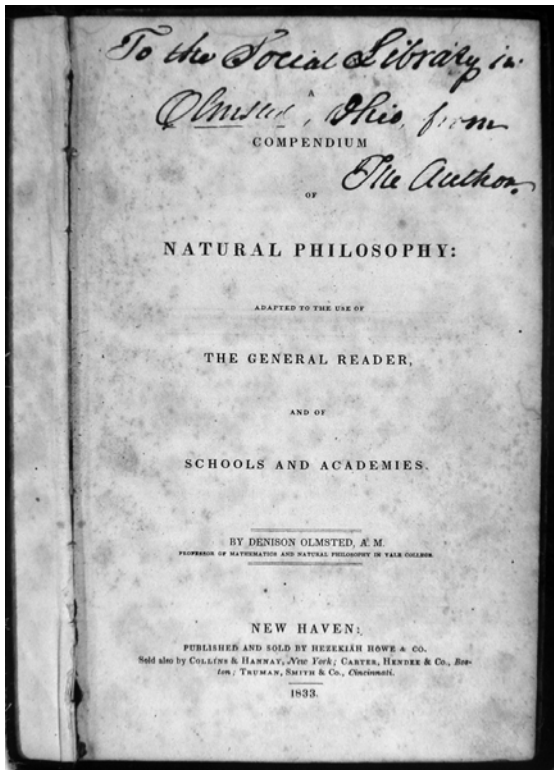
Olmsted did not live long enough to see it, but another spectacular storm of Leonids occurred 33 years later in 1866, when Europeans reported seeing hundreds of meteors per minute or thousands per hour. Strong storms of about 1,000 meteors per hour also occurred in 1867 and 1868. About that time, it was determined that the Leonids were associated with Comet Tempel-Tuttle, which has an orbital period of 33 years.

Denison Olmsted was born on June 18, 1791, in East Hartford, Connecticut. He graduated from Yale College in 1813, and then served as a tutor at Yale from 1815 to 1817. In 1817, he received an appointment to be the chairman of chemistry, minerology and geology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. While there, he conducted the nation's first state geological survey and published reports on that work in 1824 and 1825.

In 1825, Olmsted returned to Yale to be professor of mathematics and physics. In 1830, he published a theory about hailstones that received much attention and the eventual approval of meteorologists. His study of the Leonid meteor storm of 1833 was his next major work. In 1835, Olmsted and one of his colleagues, Elias Loomis, became the first American scientists to observe the return of Halley's Comet.

In 1836, Olmsted retained his position as professor of astronomy and natural philosophy while Yale assigned the field of mathematics to another professor. One subject of his studies for several years was the aurora borealis, also known as the northern lights.

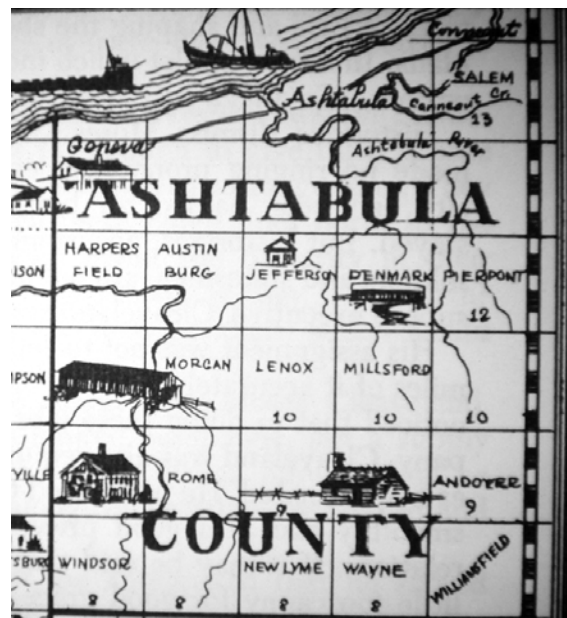
Denison Olmsted also invented various devices, including the Olmsted stove, but he generally neglected to protect his rights to them by securing patents, even though he helped others obtain patents for their inventions. He died on May 13, 1859, in New Haven, Connecticut.



This copy of one of Denison Olmsted's books on the left is part of the Oxcart Library, which is now housed at North Olmsted's library. The handwriting in his inscription on the title page matches his signature under his portrait to the right.

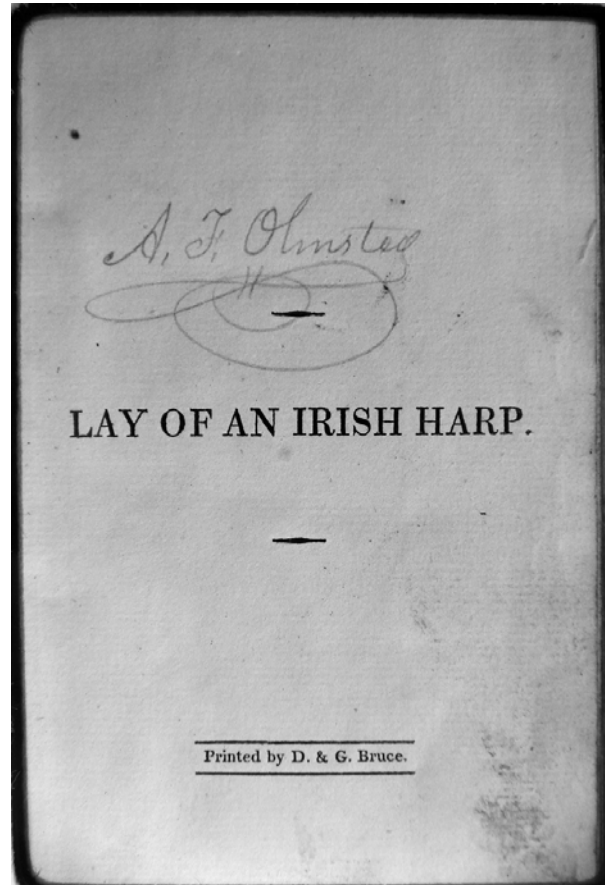
During his career, Olmsted wrote several books. One of them was *Compendium of Natural Philosophy*, which was published in 1832. A copy of that book now resides at the North Olmsted branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library because it was one of about 500 books donated to Olmsted Township by Aaron Olmsted's son, Charles Hyde Olmsted. Those books became known as the Oxcart Library because Charles Olmsted sent them by oxcart from Connecticut to Ohio to express his gratitude that residents decided to rename their township Olmsted. Although the books were wrapped in heavy blue paper, some of them suffered water damage from rain.

The township had been named Lenox, but that caused confusion with another Lenox Township in Ashtabula County. Mail intended for residents of one Lenox Township sometimes was misdirected to the other one. Orson Spencer, a resident



Ashtabula County has a Lenox Township right in the middle.

of the Lenox Township in Cuyahoga County got fed up with that, so he suggested naming the township Olmsted after Aaron Olmsted, the original purchaser of a large portion of the township in the 1795 auction held by the Connecticut Land Company. He wrote to Charles Hyde Olmsted to ask if that would be acceptable. That is when Charles Olmsted made the offer to reward the township for the renaming by sending books for a library.



The remaining books from the Oxcart Library can be found in a display case in one corner of the North Olmsted branch of the Cuyahoga County Public Library, as seen on the left. Above is the title page of a book written and signed by Aaron Franklin Olmsted, son of Aaron Olmsted and brother of Charles Hyde Olmsted, who included the book in the oxcart full of books he sent from Connecticut.

Township residents agreed to the name change in 1829 and held the first election under the Olmsted Township name in 1830. The fact that Charles Olmsted included an 1832 book by his relative, Denison Olmsted, shows that it took him at least a couple of years to gather the books together and prepare them for shipment. On the title page of his book, Denison Olmsted wrote: "To the Social Library in Olmsted, Ohio, from The Author." That wasn't the only book authored by an Olmsted family member that was included in the Oxcart Library. Another book, *Lay of an Irish Harp*, was written and

signed by Aaron Franklin Olmsted, son of Aaron and brother of Charles. Both of those books are among about 150 books remaining from the Oxcart Library that are housed in a display case in a corner of the North Olmsted library.

The township formed the Olmsted Library Company to handle the books of the Oxcart Library. Several residents shared the responsibility of caring for the books and lending them to others.



Next to the display case containing the Oxcart Library books at the North Olmsted library is a mural depicting what the ox-pulled cart full of books might have looked like traveling from Connecticut to Ohio.

The Oxcart Library has been called “the first publicly-owned library in the Western Reserve,” and the Ohio Historical Marker along Butternut Ridge Road in front of the North Olmsted library makes that claim. (Unfortunately, it spells Aaron Olmsted’s last name wrong by putting an erroneous “a” in it.) Other libraries had previously been established in northeastern Ohio – 22 of them by one count. They included the Librarian Society of Cleveland (1811), the Mentor Library Company (1819), the Library Association of Eldridge (1825) and the Poland Reading Room (1826), but apparently they didn’t meet the same definition of being owned by the public.



The historical marker on Butternut Ridge misspells Aaron Olmsted’s last name in commemorating the Oxcart Library.

Thanks go to Bruce Banks for photos of the title pages of the books by Denison Olmsted and Aaron Franklin Olmsted, as well as the photo of the map showing Lenox Township in Ashtabula County.

Sesquicentennial Coin Turns Up

In May 2014, Issue 12 of *Olmsted 200* ran a story about the sesquicentennial celebration that Olmsted Falls, Olmsted Township and West View (now part of Olmsted Falls) held in July 1964. That story noted that an official sesquicentennial coin was made available at National City Bank and asked if anyone still had one of those coins.

No one responded to that request at the time, but one of those coins recently showed up in an online auction, and *Olmsted 200* promptly acquired it. So now we know what it looks like.



The sesquicentennial coin is slightly smaller than a Kennedy half-dollar, center. On the left is the side with the Union Schoolhouse. On the right is the other side.

The coin is gold-colored and just three millimeters smaller than a Kennedy half-dollar. One side depicts the Union Schoolhouse that stood on the Village Green from 1873 until 1960 and the wording: “OLMSTED FALLS DISTRICT SCHOOL.” Because the school had been torn down just four years before the sesquicentennial celebration, it still was a fresh memory for many Olmsted residents.

The other side of the coin says, from top to bottom:

OLMSTED-WESTVIEW
REDEEMABLE
FOR
50¢
IN TRADE
AT NATIONAL CITY BANK
OLMSTED FALLS BRANCH
ON OR BEFORE JULY 12,
1964
1814-1964

Of course, as has been noted before in *Olmsted 200*, 1964 would have been one year early for Olmsted's sesquicentennial because that was only 149 years after the first settlers moved into what became Olmsted Township. But for decades, Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township have marked their founding as 1814, when Columbia Township resident James Geer planted a small crop of corn across the border. It was in 1815 that he and his family (as well as the Stearns family) moved into Olmsted Township.

Other souvenirs of the sesquicentennial celebration that have yet to turn up were related to a competition in which Olmsted men competed in a beard-growing contest. They called themselves Brothers of the Brush and had buttons saying they were members of that group. Others who chose to remain clean-shaven were expected to buy "permits to shave." If anyone comes up with either one of the buttons or one of those permits, *Olmsted 200* would like to publish a photo.

Did Peltzes Move to California for Their Health?

In the series of stories about the Peltz and Simmerer families that ran in *Olmsted 200* earlier this year (Issues 32 through 37 from January through June), it was noted that longtime Olmsted Falls merchant Joseph Peltz and his second wife, Minnie, moved to southern California in 1920, but the reason why they moved was not apparent. However, some items in the local newspaper, the *Berea Enterprise*, from 100 years ago might offer a clue.

From November 1916 through at least May 1917, the paper's Olmsted Falls column included several items indicating both Joseph and Minnie Peltz had health problems. For example, the November 17, 1916, issue of the *Enterprise* included this item: "Jos. Peltz, who has been very sick, is some better. Mrs. Jos. Peltz is confined to her bed with rheumatism."

Here are subsequent items about their health:

- December 15, 1916: "Mrs. Peltz, who has been sick with rheumatism for the last six weeks is able to be around a little in the house."
- March 9, 1917: "Mr. Peltz, who was able to be up for a few days last week, has had a relapse and is again confined to the bed."
- April 6, 1917: "J.P. Peltz is improving slowly."
- April 27, 1917: "Joe Peltz is not so well."
- May 4, 1917: "Jos. Peltz is much better."
- May 25, 1917: "J.P. Peltz was able to be out on the porch last Saturday." Also: "Mrs. Joe Peltz was taken quite sick, suddenly Monday and is still confined to her bed."

Those illnesses occurred just a few years before the Peltzes moved to the Los Angeles area, so it is reasonable to speculate that they might have moved to get to a milder climate that they hoped would be more conducive to better health. Doug Peltz, the great-great-grandson of Joseph, thinks that is a plausible explanation for their move. He



Joseph Peltz seemed to be waving goodbye in this photo taken with Minnie before they left Ohio.

ran that idea by Alice Stilwell McPeak, who is Minnie's granddaughter. As a child, McPeak knew both of them, and she agrees they might have moved for health benefits, although she doesn't know for sure.

"Alice never knew the reason they moved to California – she simply hadn't asked," Doug wrote. "She certainly knew that they were from Olmsted Falls, Ohio, though. They spoke enough about it, that even at 82 years old, the first time I ever spoke with Alice, she mentioned Olmsted Falls by name. She had recalled hearing them speak of it, when she was a child."

For many years, McPeak speculated that Joseph and Minnie had moved from Ohio to be closer to Graves Stilwell, who was McPeak's father and Minnie's only child from her first marriage. He had moved in 1913 from Ohio to California, where he worked for a telephone company and as a miner.

"Alice speculated that Minnie would have desired to live closer to her son," Doug Peltz wrote. "That said, Graves lived and worked up in central California, whereas the Peltzes moved to Los Angeles in southern California. So while it would have certainly brought them to living closer to Graves, it's not obvious that this was their intention. And of course, moving away to Los Angeles would also have meant leaving behind Joseph's son, daughter, and grandchildren. Only the oldest Peltz grandchildren had any kind of relationship or recollection of Joseph. I don't believe that my grandfather recalled any memory of meeting him."

Doug Peltz's grandfather, also named Douglas but known as Buddy, was born in 1917, three years before Joseph and Minnie moved out of Ohio.

"So I think health reasons could better explain why they chose Los Angeles," Doug wrote. Further, he noted, the establishment of rail lines into Los Angeles, cheap rail fares from the East and promotions by real estate developers lured many Americans to southern California in the early 20th century. "It's possible that Los Angeles was an attractive deal to Minnie & Joseph," he wrote.

McPeak had more observations about the *Berea Enterprise* items about Joseph and Minnie's health. "Interesting that Minnie's illness is defined as rheumatism but Joseph's isn't named," she wrote. "Grandma moved slowly, used a cane when away from the house. Grandpa was fast moving, energetic, as in climbing the steps to the streetcar

and using public transport for his courier job.”

Further in regard to Joseph’s illness, McPeak wrote, “Diagnosis 100 years after the fact, I expect it was pneumonia. At that time it took weeks to recover and easily recurred. November 1916 then April 1917. They came to California in 1920. [World War I] could have delayed the move.”

In addition, McPeak wrote that Minnie had had rheumatic fever as a child.

In conclusion, it is not clear that their ill health was the reason Joseph and Minnie Peltz moved from Olmsted Falls to California in 1920, but two of their descendants agree that it seems to be as likely an explanation as any.

On another matter, Doug Peltz said that he has found old newspaper items indicating that, in addition to the property that Joseph and Minnie bought in Eagle Rock (now part of Los Angeles), California, they also purchased land in the vicinity of San Luis Obispo, California.

“I asked Alice about this and she said, ‘Oh I’d completely forgotten about that! It’s true,’” Doug wrote. “(She even recalled the name of the neighborhood in which they had purchased the land – Cambria Pines – which matched what I found in the newspaper clipping). She doesn’t know what they’d intended to do with that land, if anything. But when Minnie died, Alice’s mother inherited the land, which she then traded for a car.”



This is how Joseph Peltz advertised his store in October 1882, a decade before he entered into a partnership with his brother-in-law, Philip Simmerer, and they moved the store across the street into the building now known as the Grand Pacific Hotel.

Chestnut Grove Will Host Veterans’ Day Ceremony

Last month’s issue of Olmsted 200 touched on the history of Chestnut Grove Cemetery, especially the use of Turkeyfoot as the unofficial name for the old cemetery.

The new Chestnut Grove Cemetery at 7789 Lewis Road will be the site of another observance of history on Friday, November 11, at 11:00 a.m. when Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township will hold their Veterans' Recognition Ceremony for Veterans' Day.

According to a notice provided by Olmsted Township Trustee Jeanene Kress, the ceremony will honor "all men and women who proudly served our country in all branches of the military." A continental breakfast and fellowship will follow the ceremony.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about a man who left a mark on Olmsted that still can be found today and about his relationship to a well-known Olmsted family.

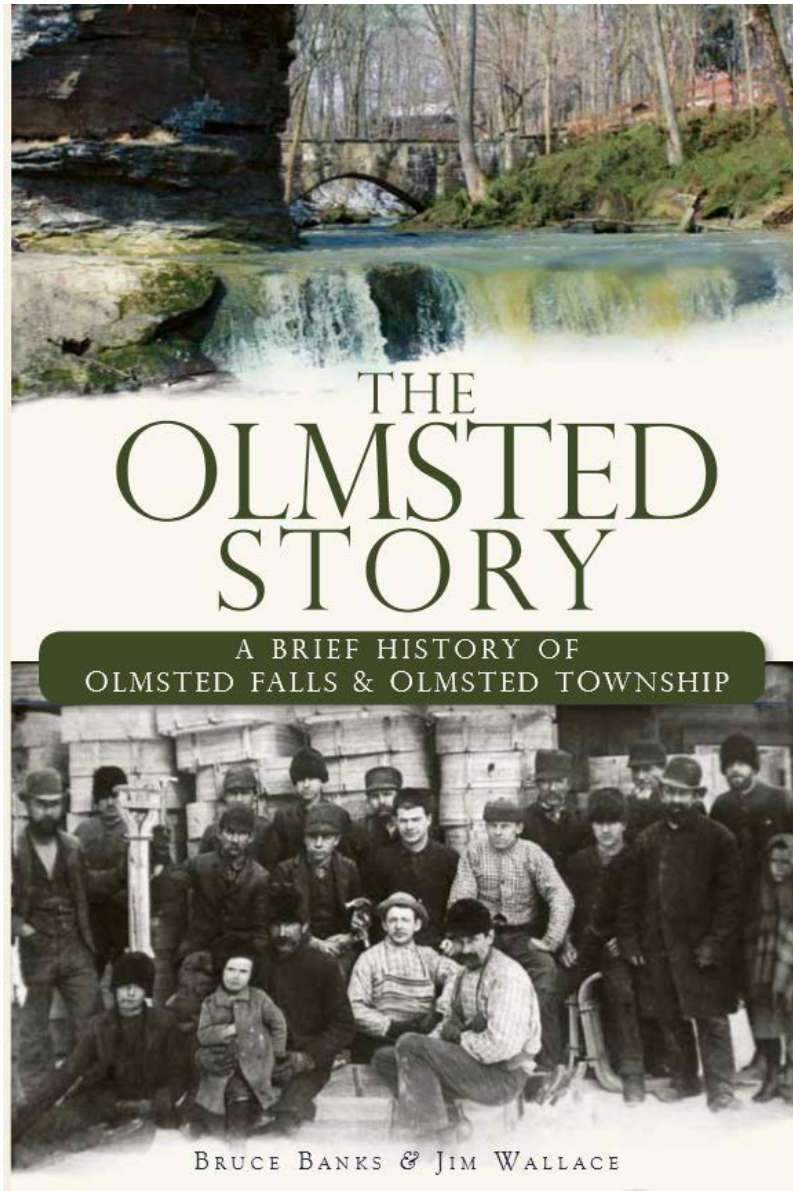
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including California, Arizona, Colorado, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, West Virginia, Florida, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine, 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://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 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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