Olmsted 200

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

Contents

Township Borders Changed Many Times over 200 Years

In the beginning more than two centuries ago, Olmsted Township – decades before it took the Olmsted name – was a simple square with five miles on each side for a total area of 25 square miles. However, it did not take long for the township to start changing shape. Many more changes followed over the decades. Neighboring municipalities have nibbled away at the township so much that only portions of its original borders on the west and the south remain – and that's somewhat because Lorain County is on the other side. On all other sides, the boundary line zigzags like a drawing on an Etch-a-Sketch.

Since last December's story about how North Olmsted broke away from the township and became a separate village at the beginning of 1909, *Olmsted 200* has recounted how the border has changed many times – and sometimes failed to change – through annexation, merger and incorporation efforts. The series concludes with a consideration of how the map has changed from the early 19th century to the early 21st century.

Cuyahoga County was once part of the Western Reserve, a section of northeastern Ohio extending 120 miles west of the Pennsylvania border that Connecticut claimed well after the United States became an independent nation. One consequence of being part of the Western Reserve was the size of the townships. In most of Ohio, townships were laid out to have six miles on each side, but General Moses Cleaveland, the man sent by Connecticut to survey the Western Reserve, created townships with five miles on each side.
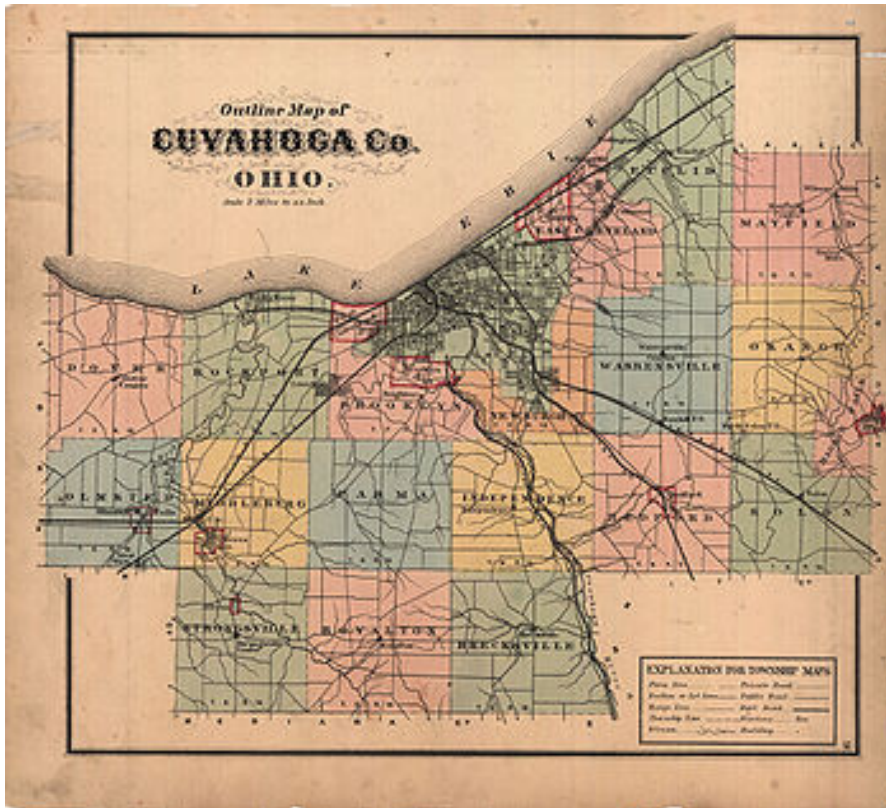
By the time this Cuyahoga County map was made in 1874, Cleveland and several other communities, including Olmsted Falls and Berea, had incorporated as municipalities. Other changes also had been made in some township boundaries, but most of the county's original townships still existed more or less intact.

Olmsted Township was originally known officially as Township 6, Range 15. Unofficially, it was called by such names as Plum Creek Township and Kingston Township until it was organized in 1823 as a civil township. That's the most basic level of government in Ohio. At that time, it took the name Lenox Township for reasons that are unclear. It was still a perfect square until 1825, when the Ohio legislature decided to split the township in two between the newly formed Lorain County on the west and Cuyahoga County on the east. Perhaps the reason for that split can be found somewhere in legislative records in Columbus, but for now, it has been lost.

A more complete story about that split can be found in Issue 49 of *Olmsted 200* from June 2017, but in short, residents of the township – about 400 at that time – didn't like being divided between two counties. In January 1827, the Ohio General Assembly put the township back together in Cuyahoga County. Two years later, the township changed its name to avoid confusion, as well as misdirected mail, with a Lenox Township in Ashtabula County. It was then, in 1829, that it became Olmsted Township in honor of the Connecticut sea captain, Aaron Olmsted, who had purchased a larger portion of the

This 1826 map of the former Western Reserve shows how Lenox Township (later Olmsted Township) was split between Lorain and Cuyahoga counties.

township than anyone else in a 1795 auction held by the Connecticut Land Company.

Olmsted Township went back to being a perfect five-by-five square – for a while. Just how long it remained intact isn't clear, but it lost a little wedge of land in its northwestern corner by the middle of the century. An 1852 map created by Harris H. Blackmore, an architect and civil engineer, and published by Stoddart & Everett of Cleveland, reveals the change, although it is so small that it is easy to miss without looking closely. The boundary apparently was changed to keep a road running through Dover Township (now Bay Village, Westlake and part of North Olmsted) within Dover until it reached the Lorain County line. That northeast-to-southwest road seems to be in the place where Center Ridge Road, also known as Ohio Route 20, now runs.


In a quick look at this portion (left) of an 1852 Cuyahoga County map created by Harris H. Blackmore, it might seem as though Olmsted Township still was a perfect square, but that wasn't so. A closer examination of the northwestern corner of the township, as shown in the enlargement (lower left), reveals that a small wedge of land had been taken away from Olmsted Township and given to Dover Township, apparently to prevent a small stretch of road from crossing the township boundary while the road was still in the county.

The border did not stay that way for very long. By the time another map produced by civil engineer G.M. Hopkins Jr. and published by S.M. Mathews of Philadelphia came out in 1858, the bite out of Olmsted Township's northwestern corner had expanded from a little wedge to a square. That cutout remained a square until sometime around the turn of the 20th century.
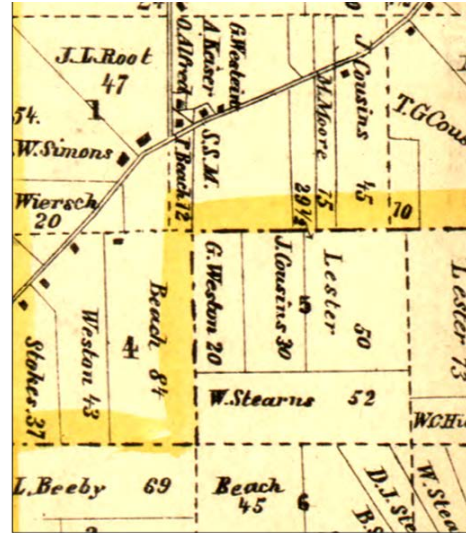
The 1858 map produced by G.M. Hopkins Jr. shows Olmsted Township (left) with a square block, rather than a wedge, removed from its northwestern corner. That section is enlarged on the right. But missing from the map is any indication that the Village of Olmsted Falls had been incorporated in the central part of Olmsted Township in 1856.

However, that 1858 map failed to show another piece that had been carved out of Olmsted Township two years earlier. On April 7, 1856, Olmsted Falls became incorporated as a village, the first municipality created out of the township. In 1857, the village doubled in size by annexing a little unincorporated hamlet to the north that was known as Plum Creek. That might indicate that Hopkins created the Olmsted Township portion of the map before Olmsted Falls became a village, which could mean the section removed from the northwestern corner of the township changed from a wedge to a square sometime between 1852, when the previous map was published, and early 1856. The village did show up on subsequent maps, such as those produced in 1874 by two companies.
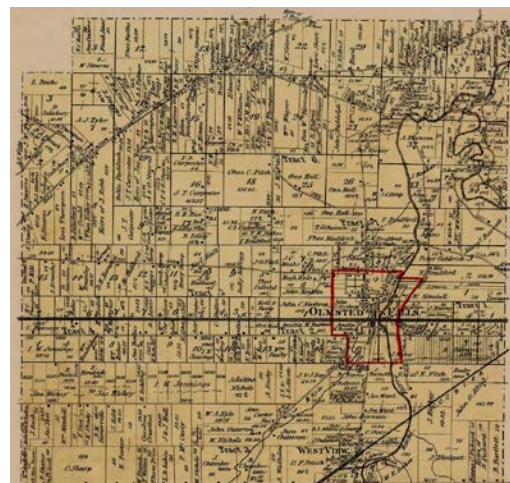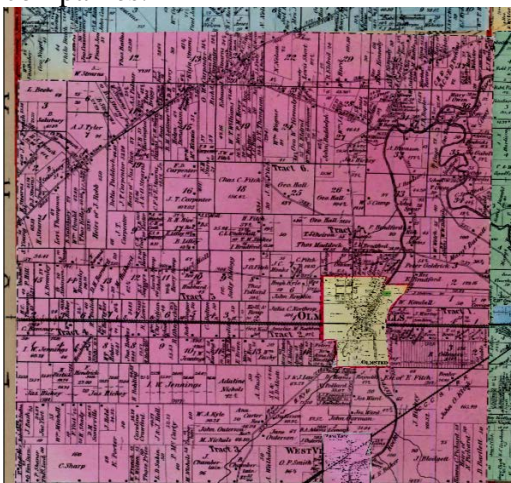
The G.M. Hopkins Co. map (left) and one by civil engineer D.J. Lake, published by Titus, Simmons & Titus – both in 1874 – show Olmsted Falls within Olmsted Township.
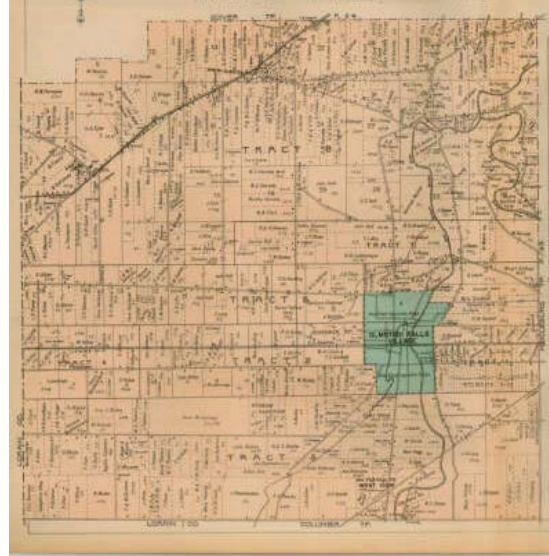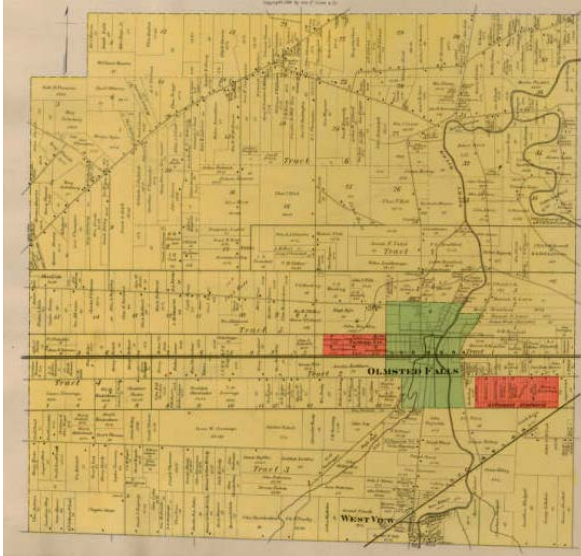
The 1892 George F. Cram Company map (left) shows no further changes in the borders of Olmsted Township, but a little more than a decade later, H.B. Stranahan & Co. put out a map (right) in 1903 showing the section cut out of the northwestern corner of the township had grown to make the border stair-stepped in that section.

An 1892 map published by the George F. Cram Company reveals the borders of Olmsted Township had not changed since 1874. The next change shows up in a 1903 map published by H.B. Stranahan & Co. It shows the bite out of the northwestern corner had grown with another block removed in a stair-step fashion. That section went to Dover Township, which became Dover Village in 1911 and then Westlake in 1940. The reason for the change is not clear, but it perhaps was related to commerce or other aspects of life along Center Ridge Road.

The next change occurred at the beginning of 1909, when the northern part of Olmsted Township joined with a small section of southeastern Dover Township to incorporate as the Village of North Olmsted. The northern border of Olmsted Township took on an even more stair-stepped appearance. A 1914 map from G.M. Hopkins & Co. shows that new border and how it made Olmsted Township significantly smaller than before.
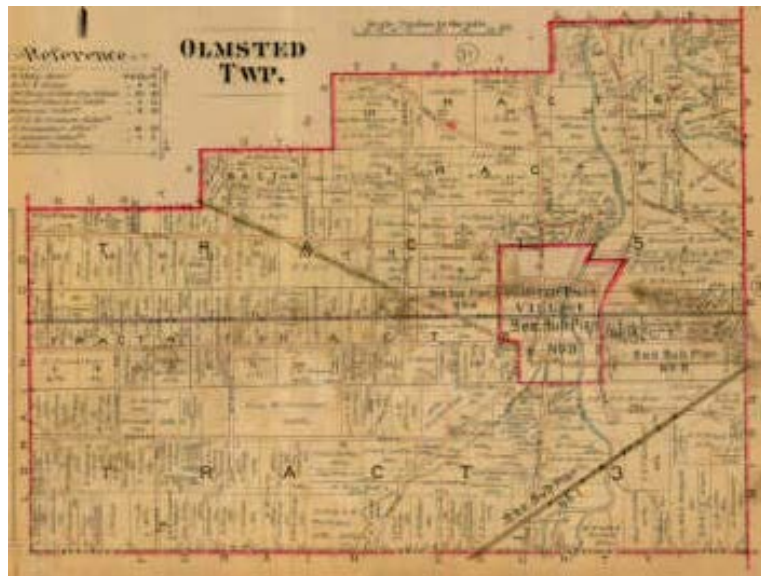
Olmsted Township's new border after the incorporation of North Olmsted shows up in this 1914 map from G.M. Hopkins & Co. Olmsted Falls still retained the shape it had had since 1857.

Early in the 20th century, sometime in the teens or early twenties, a small section of northeastern Olmsted Township east of Rocky River became part of the Village of Brook Park, which incorporated in 1914. The transfer began when Olmsted's school district determined that it was too hard to transport students from that hilly corner of the township to the new consolidated school (now Olmsted Falls City Hall) built along Bagley Road in 1916 and back home. The school district boundary changed first, and then the area was added to the Village of Brook Park, where residents felt more connection than with the rest of Olmsted Township.

However, after residents of that area became upset over a bitter local election, they broke away from Brook Park in 1926 to form Riveredge Township. But that section of Riveredge Township again became part of Brook Park in 1950. (Another section north of Hopkins Airport continued as Riveredge Township a few more decades but eventually was divided between Cleveland and Fairview Park in 1992.)

Another change in Olmsted Township's shape occurred in 1927, when the southeastern section incorporated as the Village of West View – sometimes identified with one word, "Westview." (About three decades later, West View ceded half a square mile of territory to Berea. That changed West View's eastern border and subsequently the border of Olmsted Falls after West View and Olmsted Falls united at the beginning of 1971.)
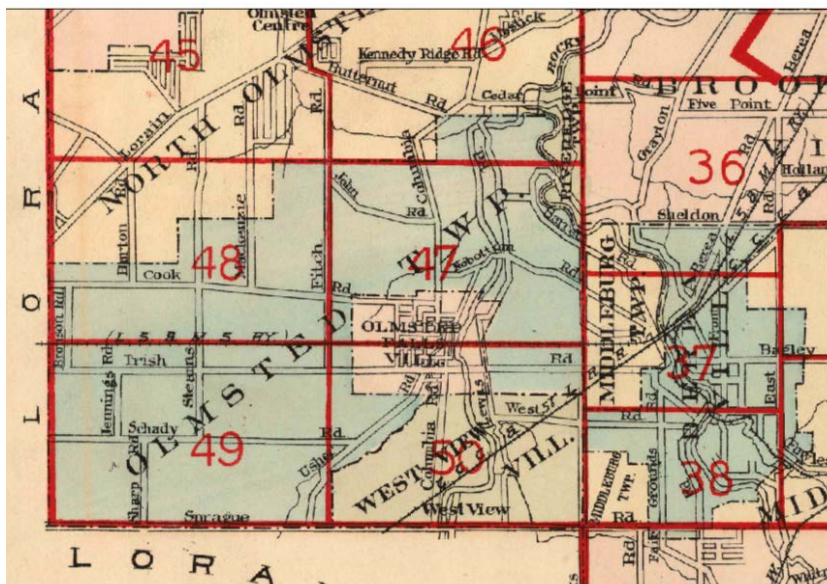
This 1927 map from G.M. Hopkins Co. of Philadelphia shows the Village of West View, which had incorporated that year from the southeastern corner of Olmsted Township. It also showed the township bordered on the northeast by Riveredge Township, which was created a year earlier.
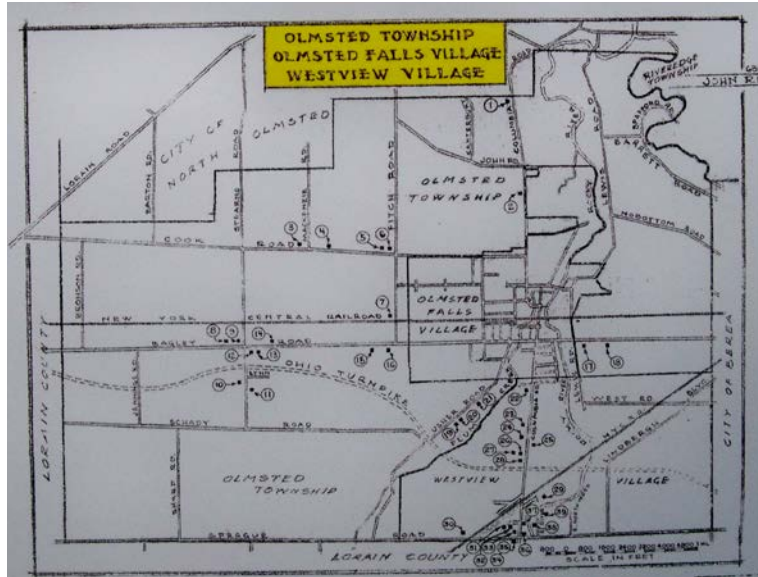
In 1953, Olmsted Falls annexed a 30-acre section of Olmsted Township onto the northeastern corner of the village. That brought the border of the township with Olmsted Falls up to the southern edge of Sunset Memorial Park, across from where John Road meets Columbia Road. It was the biggest addition to Olmsted Falls since 1857, when the village, created one year earlier, annexed the little hamlet of Plum Creek. The change showed up in a map produced as a souvenir for the 1954 Olmsted Falls Homecoming by the Acme Blue Company (as told in a story in Issue 23 of *Olmsted 200* from April 2015). A reproduction of that map was issued in 2015 for sale at Olmsted Heritage Days to
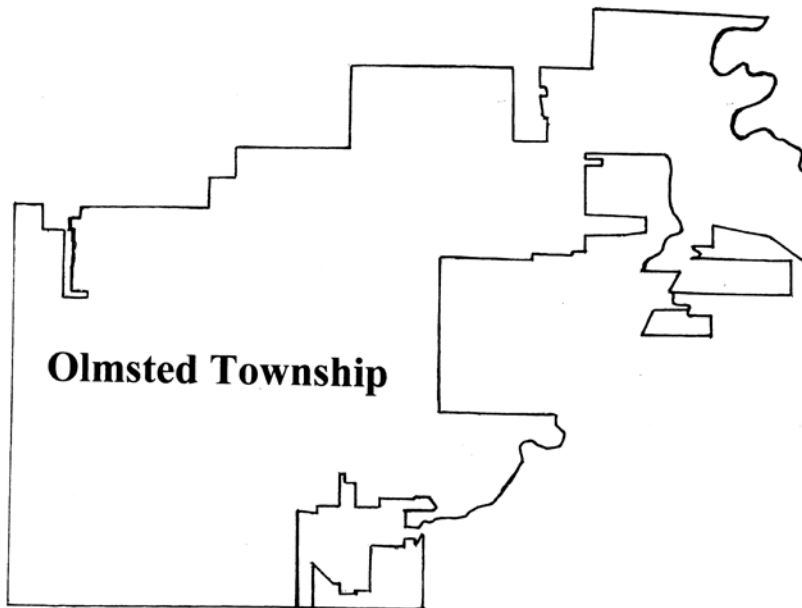
benefit the Olmsted Falls Alumni Association (as explained in stories in Issue 28 from September 2015 and Issue 29 from October 2015).

Since then, mainly in the 1980s and 1990s, Berea, North Olmsted and Olmsted Falls all have taken bits and pieces from the township, as noted in recent issues of *Olmsted 200*. That has left the township with perhaps the most unusual shape of any community in Cuyahoga County with many zigzags in its border. Two small parts of the township look like isolated islands separated

This portion of a 2015 reproduction of a 1954 map by the Acme Blue Company shows how Olmsted Falls took another section from Olmsted Township east of Columbia Road.

from the rest of the township. However, Olmsted Township Trustee Jeanene Kress insists they are not separate but rather are connected by thin lines of township land. One of those almost-islands is a section along Sprague Road. It's what was left after Olmsted Falls annexed about 200 acres of land owned by the Flair Corporation in 1988. The other is an almost rectangular piece of land between Olmsted Falls and Berea. That's the location of the new Chestnut Grove Cemetery, which is jointly administered by Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township.

So that's how Olmsted Township evolved from a square covering 25 square miles at the beginning of the 19th century to its current weirdly shaped territory of about 10 square miles – about 40 percent of its original size. Are the borders settled now? Only time will tell.

Olmsted Township has an odd shape today.

Olmsted Got Its Name 190 Years Ago

Before this year ends, it's worth noting 2019 is an interesting anniversary year for Olmsted Township, Olmsted Falls and North Olmsted. It was 190 years ago in 1829 that Lenox Township became Olmsted Township.

The township was named Lenox in 1823 when it went from being just a survey township to being organized as a civil township, meaning it took on the full authority of township government under Ohio law. That meant electing three trustees, a clerk and a treasurer. It also meant the township could collect and spend money, as well as pass ordinances.

Although Olmsted Township (and subsequently Olmsted Falls and North Olmsted) abandoned the Lenox name in 1829, one place where that name still is used in an acknowledgement of the community's history is on Falls-Lenox Primary School. Falls Elementary School opened in 1954. Lenox Elementary School opened in 1961. A 28,000-square-foot addition in 1992 linked them to form the current school.

Unfortunately, the name Lenox Township proved to be confusing because another Lenox Township existed in Ashtabula County. That led to mail mix-ups and other problems. Orson Spencer, a resident of the Lenox Township in Cuyahoga County became tired of dealing with those problems, so he proposed a name change. He suggested Olmsted because Captain Aaron Olmsted won the rights to purchase almost half of the township, which was more than anyone else, in an auction held by the Connecticut Land Company in 1795.
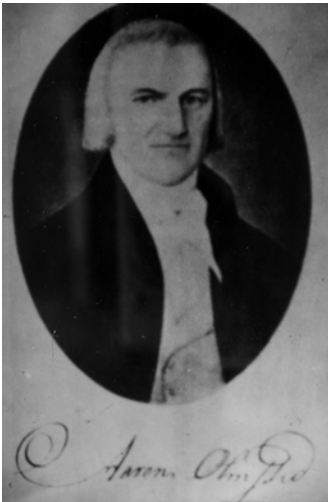
When he bid for township land, Aaron Olmsted did not know the township would take his name.

Spencer's first move was to get the permission of the Olmsted family. Aaron Olmsted had died in 1806, so Spencer wrote to his son, Charles Hyde Olmsted. Not only did Olmsted like the idea, but he promised to send the township enough books to start a community library, which was a rare thing for an Ohio township to have back then. He subsequently sent about 500 books from Connecticut by oxcart. Thus, those books became known as the Oxcart Library. About 150 of them still exist in a bookcase in the North Olmsted Branch of the Cuyahoga County Library.

If not for Spencer's efforts 190 years ago, Olmsted Township – and everything subsequently named Olmsted in the area – would not be Olmsted. Whether the Lenox name still would be in use is another matter, but the name Olmsted would have no special significance in Cuyahoga County.

The surviving Oxcart Library books are displayed in a bookcase at the North Olmsted library next to a mural depicting their journey from Connecticut.

More stories about the naming of Olmsted can be found in Issue 42 of *Olmsted 200* from November 2016 and Issue 65 from October 2018.

If not for the change made in 1829, the names Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls would not be in use today.

Mystery Photo from Olmsted Falls Turns Up

It's easy to get clues about the history of Olmsted Falls just by looking at its old buildings downtown or walking through the park, where millstones and blocks from the former sandstone quarries lie strewn about or serve as parts of a bridge, shelters, tables and steps created by the Works Progress Administration in the Great Depression. But artifacts from Olmsted's past can turn up just about anywhere, as one did recently.

Doug Peltz, a Californian who is a descendant of both the Peltz and Simmerer families of Olmsted Falls, has found many photos and other items from his family's past that he has shared with *Olmsted 200* several times. Recently, he found an artifact that doesn't seem to have any connection to his family, but he acquired it anyhow and is now sharing it with *Olmsted 200* leaders.

"I found this portrait for sale for $1.50 on eBay so I picked it up," Peltz wrote. "It has no name on it but it was taken in Olmsted Falls. I wonder if your readers or anyone in the historical society might recognize it. If it's anyone's family member I'll be glad to send it to them! It doesn't look like family to me. But it would always be interesting if it turned out to be a relation of mine!"

The back of the photo says it was taken by J.R. Shaw, who was the subject of a story in Issue 22 of *Olmsted 200* from March 2015. He operated a photography studio in Olmsted Falls at the southwest corner of Columbia Road and Cook Road from 1874 to 1888, as well as one in Berea. Later, he moved to Nebraska.

Barbara Hanno and Helen Shaw, both descendants of J.R. Shaw, helped with the Issue 22 story about J.R. Shaw. *Olmsted 200* asked them if they might recognize the boy in the photo.

This is the unidentified boy in the photo taken in Olmsted Falls in the late 1800s by J.R. Shaw.

"I have no idea who the child is, but I would love to have the photo simply because it was taken by my great-grandfather," Helen Shaw wrote. "I will also compare it to the photos I do have of JR's children and let you know if it may be one of them. I have often thought of putting an ad it an Olmsted area newspaper saying I would like to have any photos taken by JR or at least a copy of the front & back."

The back of the photo has this identification of the man who photographed the boy.

Shaw said many members of her "extended collateral family" still live in the Olmsted area, so she planned to ask them if they might recognize the boy in the photo. She noted that some of J.R. Shaw's children moved to Wyoming after he moved to Nebraska.

Her sister also was pleased to learn about the photo. "This is so awesome!!" Barbara Hanno wrote. "I don't see a family resemblance in the boy, though. We should check Ebay from time to time."

About the photo, she added, "It's quite a treasure."

If any reader has any idea who the boy in the photo might have been, *Olmsted 200* would be glad to share that information with Peltz, Shaw and Hanno, as well as the rest of the readers. Please send any responses to: wallacestar@hotmail.com.

For more photos and other information shared by Doug Peltz, see *Olmsted 200* Issue 25 from June 2015, Issue 33 from February 2016, Issue 34 from March 2016, Issue 35 from April 2016, Issue 37 from June 2016, Issue 38 from July 2016, Issue 39 from August 2016, Issue 44 from January 2017, Issue 69 from February 2019 and Issue 72 from May 2019.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will start a series of stories about something that happened 150 years ago that turned out to be one of the most significant developments in Olmsted history – the beginning of sandstone quarries.

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, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Michigan, Wisconsin, New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut 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://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. 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. 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 Village Bean in Olmsted Falls and the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.*
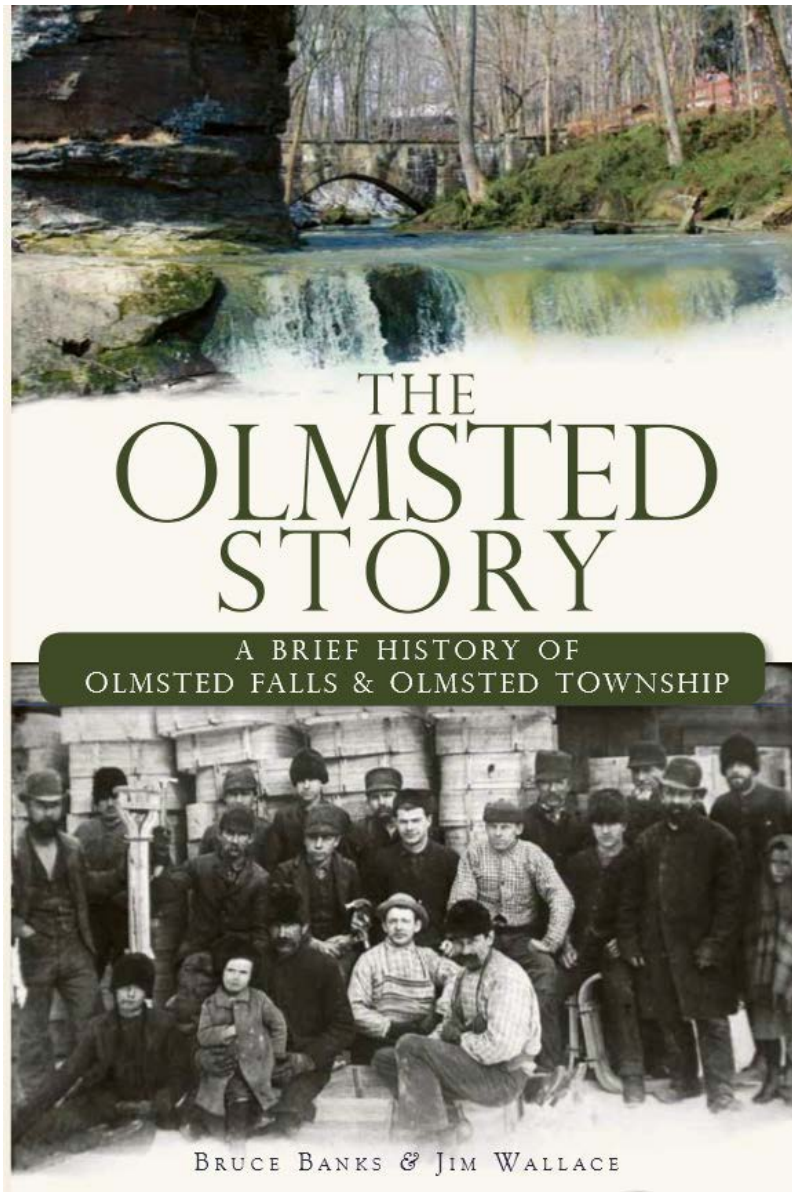
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