



Olmsted 200

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

Issue 89

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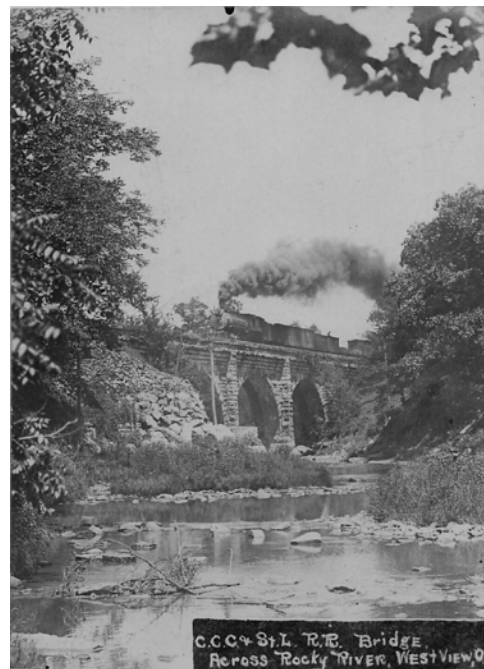
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Living with the Railroads Wasn't Easy in Olmsted

During the 19th century, a railroad could be both a boon and a bane for a community. Olmsted residents were no different from those of many other railroad towns in welcoming the trains for the commerce and connections they provided while also loathing them for the troubles they caused.

Walter Holzworth wrote in his 1966 book about Olmsted history that problems existed from as soon as the two railroads began using the tracks they built through Olmsted in the mid-1800s. As he put it, the slogan of railroad managers seemed to be: “Watch out for the trains.” In other words, they put the responsibility for safety around the tracks on residents rather than the railroads themselves. However, as time went on, the railroads “quite reluctantly” made improvements along their routes, Holzworth wrote.

”At first it was fencing along the right-of-way for most of the Township was considered open range country, then the building of cattle guards at crossings to prevent cattle

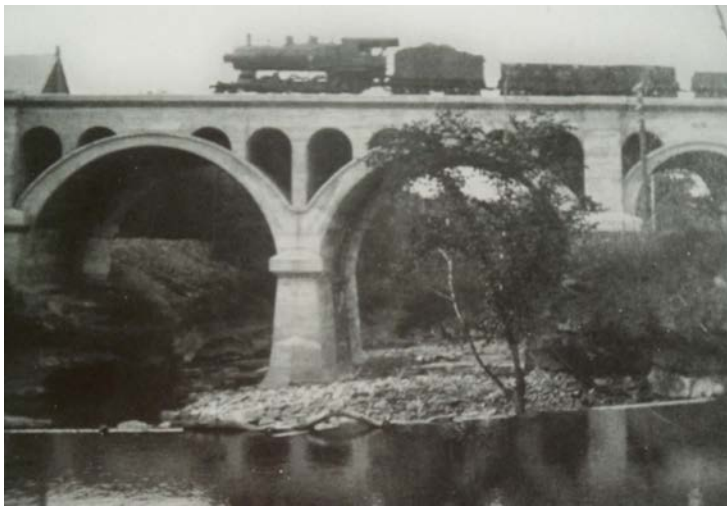


This photograph from a postcard in circulation about 1910 shows a train passing over the railroad bridge over Rocky River at West View.

driven or straying across the tracks to get on the railroad right-of-way,” he said. “The railroad[s] had thoughtfully installed a wedge shaped contrivance called cow catchers on their locomotives, more to prevent derailling of locomotives than humane concern for [farmers’] livestock.”

Another problem caused by the coal-burning engines was that they spewed thick black smoke that caused despair for “the housewife hanging out the newly washed clothes,” Holzworth wrote. “Yet there was something majestic about those belching and puffing iron horses with a shrill contralto whistle that the diesel with their fog horn warning can not match.”

In the 1880s, the local newspaper ran articles from someone who went by the pen name “Aunt Jerusha,” who possibly was Jerusha Loomis, mother of Olmsted Falls



This photo of a train on the railroad bridge over Rocky River at Olmsted Falls was taken sometime after the bridge was rebuilt in 1909.

merchant Newton P. Loomis. She recalled earlier times when the railroads used wood-burning engines with high wheels and bulging smokestacks that pulled trains of a few small cars each. She wrote that, when residents heard the high-pitched whistle in the distance, they would wait to see the engine called the “Jenny Lind” come out of the woods and pass by.

The railroads affected Olmsted in many ways. In Olmsted Falls, where the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern

Railway ran through the middle of the village, one of those effects included raising the level of Columbia Street (now Columbia Road). This item ran in Berea’s *Grindstone City Advertiser* on September 1, 1871: “The work of grading the L.S. & M.S.R.R. at this place, is going forward rapidly; the track will be raised about four feet through the village, so that when the wagon road is raised to the same level as the R.R. it will be a very pretty street and the buildings which are now so much above the street, will then be on a level.”

However, many newspaper items about the railroads tended to be about accidents along the tracks. Not everyone watched out for the trains, as the railroads wanted. Holzworth wrote that the railroads complained about people who used the tracks as convenient paths for residents “who took to track walking in preference to the mud roads.”

One item about people being on train tracks (in this case, the Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati and Indianapolis Railroad) when they shouldn't have been appeared in the West View column of the *Advertiser* on September 8, 1871:

A man was killed by the cars running over him in this place, Tuesday the 5th, at about 2 P.M. His name was Thomas Cody, one of Clough's quarrymen. He was seen at Olmsted Station, on the C.C.C. & I.R.R. in the forenoon, in one of the groceries, and seemed to have been drinking. His wife came down here with a little boy, about eight years old, to meet her husband; and they were seen together but a few minutes before the fatal accident. The little boy was found beside its father, and the mother was found over the fence in the woods near by, fast asleep by a tree, dead drunk. She had with her a basket, and in it were found a bottle of whiskey and a jug of beer. The man and his wife have been in the habit of drinking a little for some time.

The engineer of the train saw the man on the track, but thought it was one of the repair men until it was too late. He whistled down brakes and reversed his engine, but the train did not stop till the engine and four cars passed over him. One leg was broken, and the other was cut off just above the hip. He did not seem to be conscious of anything after he was hit, but gasped a few times and died.

The Coroner held an inquest on his body to-day, and the verdict was: "Killed while in a state of intoxication, by the cars."

Although that was one of the most awful examples, there were plenty more stories in subsequent years about people on the tracks who lost their lives to trains. Here are several of them:

- From the September 5, 1873, *Advertiser* – A train killed a 73-year-old German man named George Miller who came out of an Olmsted Falls saloon apparently intoxicated and decided to walk along the tracks to Toledo. He went only a short distance before a train hit him.
- From the July 29, 1880, *Advertiser* – The crew of an LS&MS train found the body of an unknown man about three and a half miles west of Olmsted Falls. Township trustees interred the body in Turkeyfoot Cemetery. J.T. Barnum, the ticket agent at the Olmsted Falls Depot,



Some of the fatal train accidents occurred not far from the Olmsted Falls Depot, seen here in an August 23, 2010, photo.

gave this description of the victim: “The man was apparently about 30 years of age, light complexion and sandy hair, blue coat, dark pants and vest, dark shirt, knit undershirt, buckle shoes, cotton socks, black hat; \$1.85 and a dime song book were the only article found in his clothes. He probably was riding between freight cars and fell under the wheels.”

- From the May 28, 1886, *Advertiser* – “The news of the terrible death of little Pearl Osborn, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. A. Osborn, threw the community into consternation. On Friday, May 21, while returning from her father’s store, accompanied by two companions, in crossing the railroad track, she was struck and run over by a hand car, in charge of workmen while running at full speed. Her injuries were about the spine from the effects of which she died at 6 p.m., one hour after the accident.”
- From the same issue of the paper – A railroad worker named Thomas Boyle, who had recently moved with his family to Olmsted from Pennsylvania, was returning from work when he was struck by a westbound freight train and died of his injuries several hours later.
- From the April 21, 1899, *Advertiser* – “The Lake Shore & Michigan Southern passenger train No. 27 struck and instantly killed Mrs. Susan Pettitt. She had been calling on friends and was returning home. On hearing the train approach from the rear, she became confused and stepped directly in front of it. She was thrown about sixty feet. Her left foot was cut off and one arm was broken. The back of her head was also cut. Mrs. Pettitt was 71 years of age.”

Other Olmsted residents suffered losses of livestock to the trains. For example, the August 14, 1879, edition of the paper included this item: “A cow owned by Mr. F. Dougherty [*sic*] ran into the express (No. 5) on the L.S. & M.S. Ry. Monday evening – a dead cow.” The newspaper’s editor wanted to know more about that incident and added

this comment: “Will our reporter explain more fully about the *dead cow* that ran into the express?”



This is another view of the railroad bridge over Rocky River at West View from a postcard from the early 1900s.

Another item in that edition reported: “Seven calves owned by Mr. O.W. Kendall, strayed from his premises last week. Three were killed by the cars and the others bruised.”

However, judging by an item in the Olmsted Falls column of the newspaper for March 14, 1892, residents sometimes got justice in cases against the railroads: “The suit

of John Gorman against the Big Four Railroad for killing several head of cattle at West View, has been on trial in Common Pleas Court during the past week. A large number of witnesses from West View and Olmsted Falls were in attendance. Verdict for plaintiff.”

As Holzworth wrote, the railroads were reluctant to install safety features along their tracks, but eventually they would. In 1889, residents of Olmsted Falls began a push to get the LS&MS Railway to install gates at the Columbia Street crossing. An item in the November 29, 1889, issue of the *Advertiser* stated simply: “Sign the petition for gates at R.R. crossing.” That apparently was effective because the April 18, 1890, edition of the paper had this item: “The railroad has provided gates for the crossing.”

Almost a decade later, Olmsted residents wanted more. The October 14, 1898, edition of the *Advertiser* included this item: “We understand the council of Olmsted Falls passed an ordinance last night compelling the L.S. & M.S. R.R. to put a man on Columbia street crossing at night. Bully for Olmsted Falls council.”

Yet other newspaper items indicated how much Olmsted residents depended on the trains by noting when service improved or declined. For example, an item in the January 22, 1886, *Advertiser* said the LS&MS Railway’s decision to allow the Number 3 westbound train to stop at Olmsted Falls at 7:09 a.m. and the Number 2 eastbound train to stop at 9:00 p.m. was greeted: “with pleasure by all Olmstedians as the removal of those trains was a great inconvenience to the town.” However, four years later, the paper reported that eastbound evening train no longer would stop at Olmsted Falls.

In 1892, the January 8 edition of the paper brought this news: “Olmsted Falls is now well accommodated with trains since the Cleveland, Lorain & Wheeling trains run over the Lake Shore track from Elyria to Cleveland.” That item included a schedule showing trains then stopped six times a day going east from 6:57 a.m. until 6:23 p.m. and six times going west from 6:20 a.m. until 5:16 p.m.



Olmsted residents might not have had any shares of the Cleveland, Lorain and Wheeling Railway, such as this one issued in 1898, but they received a good share of its trains when they began using tracks through Olmsted in 1892,

In addition to giving Olmsted residents connections to the rest of the world, the railroads helped the local population grow. Many men who came to Olmsted to work on the railroads stayed and made their homes in the community. Holzworth also wrote: “Railroad maintenance and depot and station duties gave jobs to many.”

Other railroad workers were transient and spent time in Olmsted only while working on the local sections of track. They rarely made news, but here is an exception from the May 5, 1893, edition of the *Advertiser*: “Olmsted Falls is getting to be notorious.

We have actually had a strike right in our midst – about 13 of our laborers working on this railroad section quit work yesterday a.m. They demand a raise of ten cents per day.”

In the 20th century, Olmsted residents became less dependent on the railroad for transportation, but they still had plenty of problems with trains. *Olmsted 200* will consider those matters in next month’s issue. The next issue also will include a story about an ill-fated gang that attempted to hold up the Olmsted Falls Depot and the Olmsted residents who tracked them down and brought them to justice.

Unbuilt Railroad’s Identity Went Down Wrong Track

The railroad that wasn’t built through Olmsted in the early 1900s turns out not to be the one mentioned in Issue 88 of *Olmsted 200*. It also turns out that the identity of the railroad has been a matter of confusion almost since its beginning.

Photos from two postcards used in last month’s story identified the piers built for a never-built bridge over Rocky River in Olmsted Falls as belonging to the P&LE – the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad. Those postcards were in circulation about 1913 and 1920, so the first of them was issued less than a decade after the railroad project was attempted and then abandoned. Subsequently, others who wrote about the project, including Walter Holzworth in his 1966 book of Olmsted history and his 1970 book of Berea history, as well as authors of later books (including *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township* from 2010), referred to the railroad as the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie.



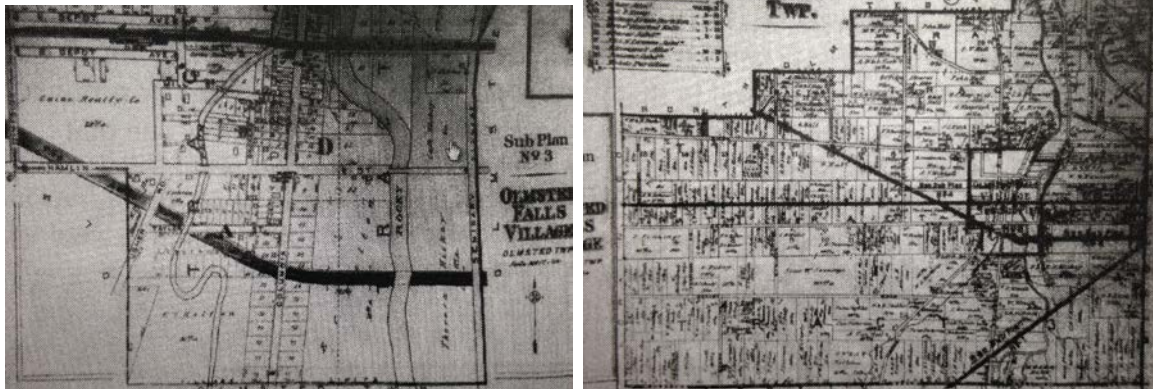
This caption on a postcard photo from about 1920 that was included in last month’s issue caught the attention of one reader who knew it was wrong because it confused the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad with the Lake Erie & Pittsburgh Railway.

Thus, *Olmsted 200* had no reason to doubt otherwise until Occhialoni Paesano wrote: “Whoever wrote the caption on the postcard was in error. This was to be the Lake Erie & Pittsburgh railroad while the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie RR was a completely different entity that ran between Pittsburgh and Youngtown.” That comment on Facebook was in reaction to the 1920 postcard photo that was posted there with a link to *Olmsted 200*.

Fortunately, Paesano provided a link to a transportation history website (<https://www.railsandtrails.com/NYC/LE&P/index.htm>) with a brief history of the Lake Erie and Pittsburgh Railway Company. That site and other sources confirm that the company was chartered in 1903 to build a railroad that would run 91 miles from Youngstown to Lorain with a 29-mile branch to Cleveland. Work was suspended in 1904. After the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway, which already had tracks running east-west through Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township, purchased the LE&P in 1905,

the LE&P became a short-line railroad between Cleveland and Brady Lake, Ohio, in Portage County. Thus, not only was the originally planned line through Olmsted abandoned but the whole venture morphed into a different one.

The Lake Erie and Pittsburgh Railway Company was chartered on April 30, 1903, but it would have been more appropriate if it had been chartered on April 1 because it essentially created an April Fools' Day joke that tripped up historians for decades. If it had been called anything else, that would not likely have happened. "Lake Erie and Pittsburgh" seemed destined to be confused with "Pittsburgh and Lake Erie," the name of a railroad built in the 1870s that connected Pittsburgh and Youngstown and operated more than a century, first independently and later as part of bigger railroad companies. Although newspaper stories about the attempted construction through Olmsted referred to the LE&P, reporters then were not always precise about proper names, so without evidence otherwise, such references were not enough to cause suspicion that the LE&P was not the same as the P&LE.



These 1914 maps of Olmsted Falls (left) and Olmsted Township (right) show the proposed route of the Lake Erie and Pittsburgh Railway project that was abandoned several years before the maps were published. The right-of-way is the thick, bold line that goes east from the eastern border of the township and into Olmsted Falls, where it changes direction to the northwest and heads to the township's border with North Olmsted.

In another development, David Kennedy, whose research frequently contributes to Olmsted 200 stories, has found maps that show the proposed route of the Lake Erie and Pittsburgh Railway through Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. The maps were published by the G.M. Hopkins Company in 1914, about a decade after the railroad project was abandoned. The maps show the right-of-way crossed Rocky River in Olmsted Falls where the abandoned bridge piers still stand. At Columbia Street (now Columbia Road), the right-of-way veered to the northwest. It crossed Hamlin Street (now Bagley Road) just before it crossed Division Street (now Mapleway Drive). It continued to the northwest until it entered North Olmsted a short distance west of Stearns Road and north of Cook Road.

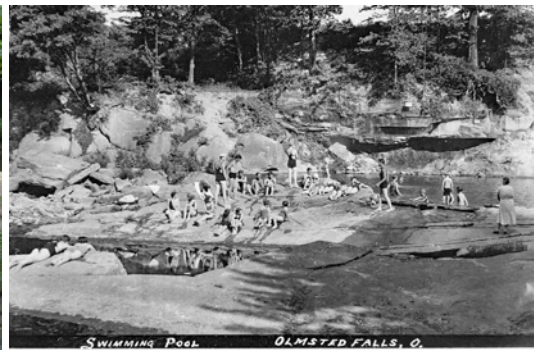
As noted in last month's story, Walter Holzworth said in his 1966 book on Olmsted history that the proposed railroad would have cut through the area that became the football field at the school built in 1916 that served as Olmsted Falls High School

until the current high school opened in 1968. However, the 1914 maps indicate that the railroad would have cut through so much of that property that it's unlikely the school board would have chosen to build the school there when the district decided to replace all of the little schools in Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township with one consolidated school. Olmsted certainly would have looked different if the railroad had been built.

One other comment about the abandoned bridge piers along Rocky River from the Lake Erie and Pittsburgh Railway project came from Patrick Carroll: "Many a time when Kevin Crooks came home on leave with my brother Mike, when they were in Marine boot camp, we used to stare up at these from Kevin's backyard, which rolled down from the right, I believe. We had bonfires and lots of beer. We kept trying to figure out a way we could rappel these and get to the top. Ahhhh, crazy youth!"

Readers Disagree on Flipping of Photo

Another story from Issue 88 that stirred readers to write was the one about the dam built along Rocky River in 1930 to form a swimming hole in summer and an ice rink in winter. Among the photos used in that issue was one from a mid-20th century postcard showing swimmers gathered near the dam, except the version published was one that reader Mike Gibson, who spent most of his youth in Olmsted Falls, had reversed. He suggested the reversed view was the correct one. However, longtime Olmsted Falls resident Jim Boddy quickly disputed Gibson's claim.



Jim Boddy took the photo on the left on September 2, 2020, in David Fortier River Park from about the same vantage point as the postcard photo from several decades ago to back up his contention that the photo on the postcard was correct. Another reader, Mike Gibson, had suggested the postcard photo was reversed but now agrees with Boddy..

"The unaltered postcard is correct," Boddy wrote. "This view is looking due east from the west side. The water is flowing right to left. Most of the kids are out on the "island," the western "anchor" of the dam. But you probably already know this."

To prove his point, Boddy soon went down to David Fortier River Park and took his own photo from the same vantage point.

"Some rocks on the east bank have been moved, from spring floods no doubt, but the biggest still remain," he wrote.

Mike Gibson then conceded. “I would bet that Jim Boddy is correct,” he wrote. “I keep looking at that photo both ways. The only way to be sure is to take the photo down to Fortier Park and try to find the location of that cameraman.” Well, that’s what Boddy did. Readers can decide for themselves.



Mike Gibson also contributed this pair of photos showing the dam along Rocky River as seen from the Water Street Bridge. The first was taken in the 1940s. The second is from 1976.

That story about the dam also mentioned a metal no-swimming sign on a tree located between the river bank and Inscription Rock. The sign has been there so long that the bark of the tree has grown over it to the point it barely can be seen anymore.

“I recall that sign on the tree by the falls,” Patrick Carroll wrote. “Also on the large flat rock near the edge was always painted ‘Danger-No diving.’ When we were scouts in the '60's (Troop 659), we would have picnics and even meetings in the Boy Scout cabin (which vandals, whom I knew, burned and desecrated). I remember the metal sign was pretty... swallowed up by that tree even in 1968, but most of the lettering was still visible!”

Sometimes the Avenue Is the Wrong Street – or Drive

Olmsted 200 tries hard to make sure the facts reported each month are as accurate as possible, but sometimes it makes a wrong turn. That happened recently in Issue 87. The story about Olmsted’s second railroad made an error in the section about the Olmsted Falls Depot. Lee Willet caught it.

“Always enjoy reading the history of our little town down here in very hot Florida,” he wrote. “Minor correction. In the section talking about the train depot it mentioned it was moved from Division street now called Mapleway Ave. ??? Mapleway Drive is the correct street name and I can confirm since the Willet house



As this and other signs confirm, it’s Mapleway Drive, not Mapleway Avenue.

I lived in was located at 8278 Mapleway Drive.”

Of course, that’s right, as anyone who grew up in Olmsted should know.

Another reader, David Kennedy, suggested a similar error appeared in Issue 86, in which the story about Olmsted’s first railroad referred to the West View Depot as being located along Bronson Avenue. Kennedy, who happens to live there, wrote: “I believe my street name is Bronson Street, not Bronson Ave. Everybody says Avenue, but it is not so.”

However, he subsequently wrote: “I am finding old maps where Bronson is a Street and an Avenue.”

Well, more than old maps seem confused on the issue. Street signs also are in conflict. At the corner of Columbia Road, the sign says, “Bronson Street.” At the corner of Herb Street, the sign says, “Bronson Avenue.”



Signs at the corner of Columbia Road (left) and at the corner of Herb Street (right) disagree on whether they are located along Bronson Street or Bronson Avenue.

After *Olmsted 200* alerted Mayor James Graven to the issue, he responded that he would forward the information to the city’s service director. If that inquiry yields new information about whether Bronson is a street or an avenue, *Olmsted 200* will report on it in a future issue.

Of course, Bronson Street or Bronson Avenue in Olmsted Falls should not be confused with Bronson Road in the western end of Olmsted Township.

Other readers found a different problem with a story in Issue 88 about Olmsted Falls Bulldogs football from half a century ago. Everything was correct in the account of how the Bulldogs went winless into the final game of the season on Halloween night and pulled out their first win in two seasons – except for the year. At least two readers caught the error.

"I always enjoy your newsletters and so much to love in this one," Dottie Rigo wrote. "But we beat Westlake my senior year, so that would have been Fall 1969 since I'm a proud member of the Class of '70!"



Likewise, Barry Beeler wrote, "That is not our senior season of the class of 71 with football of 70. When you are a three year letterman and had [won] two games total, one should remember."



The 1970 edition of the Senorio confirms that the football season in which the Olmsted Falls Bulldogs achieved their first victory in two seasons was in the fall of 1969. The victory stood out so much that the staff of the yearbook included a photo of the score from the waning moments of the game against Westlake.

Indeed, the 1970 edition of the high school yearbook, the *Senorio*, includes the scores of all the games, which means they were played in the fall of 1969, when students in the Class of 1970 were seniors. That win in the final game of the season was so memorable that the *Senorio* includes a photo of the scoreboard showing the home team with 34 points and the visiting team with 14 points with 35 seconds left in the fourth quarter. The caption under the photo is: "A Lasting Memory."

Olmsted 200 welcomes corrections and any discussion that helps to set the historical record straight.

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about how living with the railroads changed for Olmsted residents in the 20th century, one about how crime didn't pay in a heist at the Olmsted Falls Depot, and another about an important election half a century ago.

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, Oklahoma, 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. Thanks also go to David Kennedy for frequently contributing research and insight for some stories. 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 Angelina's Pizza in Olmsted Falls and the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.

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