



Some places stick with you.

# Omar Chapel

is one of those places.

Photos and text by Missy G. Flinn

**Driving down Ohio Route 4** from Milan to Columbus through vast ice-covered fields and blinding blue sky, I was struck by a small white Greek Revival chapel and its adjoining cemetery. I drove along for a while toward Attica, then turned around and went back to check it out and take pictures of its stark beauty.

A year and a half later, still enchanted by the chapel, I contacted Larry A. Lepard, Omar Chapel Association secretary and historian, to reflect on my visit and find out more about the chapel and cemetery. As we talked about the chapel as a place of sanctuary throughout its history, Larry shared stories of how this tiny church in the middle of nowhere is a place that people truly cherish.



(ABOVE) "From the time the church closed in 1911," said Larry Lepard, "the 1842 building has never fallen into disrepair. There's never been any theft or vandalism. There's always been an organization that has taken care of it."

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OMAR CHAPEL ASSOCIATION



(FAR LEFT) In 1917 two people wrote letters to the descendants of the original settlers all over the United States and asked for money to restore the cemetery. They used the money to clean up the cemetery and reset some of the stones.

(LEFT) The sign on the building read, "open to all who wish to pause here." So I paused.

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### OMAR CHAPEL



408 Ohio Route 4, Attica  
[omarohio.blogspot.com](http://omarohio.blogspot.com)

**LAL:** People have a strong attachment to the building, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Omar Chapel Association has received numerous donations and several large bequests that have been used to maintain the chapel. About 10 years ago there was even a man from southwest Ohio who drove three hours each way to paint the chapel every weekend until it was done.

**MGF:** *How did the chapel become an official Underground Railroad site?*

**LAL:** Ohio Route 4 was one of the main routes to Canada. The granddaughter of the owner of the Omar Inn just south of the chapel recalled that escaped slaves were hidden in the cellar and livery stable of the inn on their way to Sandusky—and freedom. Confederate prisoners on the way to the Johnson’s Island prison camp were kept there overnight as well. The Underground Railroad Commission put one sign in each county along the route. Since the inn is no longer standing, Omar Chapel was chosen as the only authenticated place for the Seneca County site.

**MGF:** *How’s the chapel used now?*

**LAL:** It’s used for Memorial Day services, family memorial services and funerals, and one wedding. It’s just here as a place for meditation. The guest book has been signed by people from all over the United States and a couple foreign countries.

There is one person who goes to the chapel to meditate in the middle of the night. After the Sheriff’s Department came out and questioned him a few times, the Omar Chapel Association gave him a letter stating he could be there overnight. He goes there frequently, and he always leaves different kinds of notes. He is kind of a lookout for it, too. He calls me if he sees anything wrong.





**(LEFT)** A bequest from an Attica couple paid for repairing the windows. The windows were replicated by an Amish craftsman who reused every piece of existing glass.

**(LEFT BOTTOM)** I stayed and took pictures of the stark beauty of the place.

**(RIGHT BOTTOM)** Reed Township and Attica have an interesting history dating back to 1826, after Congress had concluded the treaties with the Indians and the “Congress Lands” west of the Western Reserve had been declared open for settlement. “To me,” said Larry Lepard, “this is a place where recent generations can connect with the past and appreciate it.”



#### **FIND OUT MORE**

Larry A. Lepard maintains the Omar Chapel blog site, which is a great source for pictures and histories from people who have shared their recollections and research. He also gives tours of the cemetery to small groups. Contact him at [lalepard@msn.com](mailto:lalepard@msn.com).