

# Olmsted 200

Two Centuries and More History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township –  
First Farmed in 1814 and Settled in 1815

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## Olmsted Man Contributed Much to Airport Development

When Cleveland Municipal Airport was renamed in 1951 after William Hopkins, Cleveland's first city manager, it was to honor the man who led the drive to build the airport, which opened a century ago this month on July 1, 1925. But another man who could have been considered for such an honor was a longtime Olmsted Falls resident, Claude F. King. In several ways, he helped to make not only Cleveland's airport but also airports around the world what they are today.

King was born in Glenford, a small town in Perry County in southern Ohio on September 3, 1897. He was buried more than 98 years later in Olmsted Falls after dying on April 30, 1996, at a senior living community in Naples, Florida.

He spent more than a third of that long life – more than 33 years – working in key positions at the airport, mainly as its deputy commissioner and then its commissioner.



*Claude King, an Olmsted Falls resident, played a big role in the development of the airport.*

When he first came to the airport in 1925, he was working for the federal government with Major Jack Berry, both of them World War I veterans, to lay out airmail routes. Specifically, King was tasked with installing beacons and other lighting to guide pilots at airfields between Chicago and New York. The two of them must have made a good impression because Hopkins persuaded them to stay and lead the development of Cleveland's new airport. Berry took over as the airport's manager in 1925, and King

joined him as his deputy in 1927. (Later, their titles became commissioner and deputy commissioner.)

In an obituary the *Plain Dealer* published on May 4, 1996, reporter Olivera Perkins wrote that King's career and the growth of Cleveland Hopkins "from a muddy pasture into an international airport were inextricably linked." She wrote that the two different personalities and management styles of Berry, as airport commissioner, and King, as deputy commissioner, complemented each other well:

*Berry, who was outgoing, was known as the "front man" associated with the political dealings that would bring the airport to prominence. Mr. King, mild-mannered and detail-oriented, guided safety and technological advancement and the daily operations of Cleveland Hopkins and Burke Lakefront airports.*

King's interest in aviation began several years before Cleveland leaders considered building an airport. When the United States entered World War I, King was an engineering student at Ohio State University. He joined the Army, continued his engineering studies, became a commissioned officer and taught aerial observation. In 1928, a decade after the end of the war, King became a licensed pilot. By then, he already was working at Cleveland Municipal Airport.



*Claude King served in the Army in World War I.*



*This photo is undated, but Elsie and Claude King got married in 1920.*

After the war, he also married Elsie Marie Clark on May 12, 1920. They went on to have three sons and three daughters, although one son lived for only five months.

Under the leadership of Berry and King, Cleveland's airport became the first in the nation in 1929 to open a passenger terminal, initially to handle 250 passengers a day. Work on building the terminal began in 1927.

The terminal also included what is credited as the world's first air traffic control tower. Its windows provided operators with a 360-degree view of the airport. The city operated the control tower until the Civil

Aeronautics Authority (later the Federal Aviation Administration) took over in February 1943. The old terminal lasted until 1956, when a new terminal took over to accommodate the airport's increased use.

In aviation's early years, flying at night was restricted because pilots couldn't see the airports well enough, but King solved that problem in 1930 by inventing the first airfield lighting system. It employed a 3 million candlepower beacon to help pilots find the airport and a 1.5 billion candlepower floodlight that illuminated the airfield. When the 500,000-watt carbon arc floodlight that had been perched atop the old terminal was removed in March 1956, it went to the Smithsonian Institution.



*This postcard shows the original terminal and control tower at Cleveland Municipal Airport.*



*From the control tower and using two-way radio contact, men like these oversaw air traffic at the airport in the 1930s. Photo courtesy of Western Reserve Historical Society.*

Also in 1930, King invented and installed the first two-way radio system that made the airport the first to have air-to-ground communication.

Partly because of the airport's leading role in aviation under the leadership of Berry and King and partly because it had plenty of room on its periphery, the federal government chose its western end for a laboratory for the National

Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) in 1941. During World War II, the lab conducted research on airplanes that contributed to the war effort. After the war, as the nation looked toward exploring outer space, the lab in 1958 became the Lewis Research Center for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The center played an important role in putting astronauts on the moon in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1999, it was renamed the John H. Glenn Research Center at Lewis Field in honor of the Ohioan who became the first American to orbit Earth.

In the years after World War II, airline travel increased so much that the airport needed a bigger terminal by the early 1950s. Construction began in 1953, but before that, *Architectural Forum* in November 1952 praised its design for providing the “best

circulation pattern of any large United States airport.” The magazine said it was “surprisingly close to the theoretical best described and recommended by the Civil Aeronautics Administration.” Work on two concourses, A and B, was completed in 1956 under King’s watch. The new terminal had about 48,000 square feet – quite an expansion from the old terminal’s 4,000 square feet.

Along with the new terminal came another innovation credited to King. It was the electronic information board that displayed flight information for all airlines.

For almost three decades, the airport operated under the same leadership with Berry as commissioner and King as deputy commissioner, but that changed in 1954 with the retirement of Berry. He had suffered from health problems for years. As early as late 1932, just seven years after the airport opened, Berry announced plans to retire, citing health reasons.

“Seven days a week of work for that long a time will get you sooner or later,” Berry told the *Plain Dealer*. “Few people realize that a working day at the airport is about sixteen hours long.”

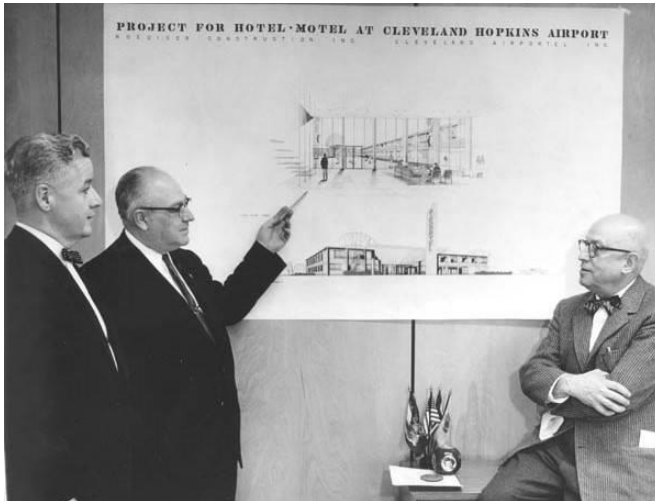
However, there were reports that the main reason he left then was political – the election of Ray Miller as Cleveland’s mayor. The *Plain Dealer* later reported: “Berry resigned rather than agree to accept City Hall dictation on airport workers, his friends said. Five months after he was back on the job. City Hall had discovered that the airport needed Berry more than City Hall needed the few jobs at the airport.”



*In this July 2, 1954, photo, retiring Commissioner Jack Berry congratulates his deputy and successor, Claude King. From the left are city ports director William Rogers, King, Berry, and Cleveland Mayor Anthony Celebrezze. Photo courtesy of Michael Schwartz Library, Cleveland State University.*

However, in 1952, as he advocated for building the new terminal, he was diagnosed with a coronary thrombosis and ordered to get complete rest. Although he returned to his job a year later, he still suffered from heart problems, so King assumed responsibility for running the airport and seeing that the new terminal was built for a few years while Berry retained the title of commissioner. In September 1955, a little more than a year after Berry and his wife retired to Bradenton, Florida, he died.





*This March 22, 1957, photo shows King pointing to a sketch of the planned Sky Haven Hotel at the airport. To the left is Evan Hamilton and to the right is A.P. Goulder, both officials of Sky Haven. Photo courtesy of the Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland State University.*

It's notable that, despite all of King's important duties of running and expanding one of the largest airports in the nation during the mid-1950s, he also served as the chairman of the building committee for the Olmsted Community Church as the current church building was planned and constructed. At the time, he and his wife lived at 8153 Columbia Road in Olmsted Falls – a site now occupied by Mill River Plaza.

But all that work at the airport eventually wore him out. In 1958, four years after assuming the title of airport commissioner – which included overseeing both Hopkins Airport and the Lakefront Airport (named in 1958 for former Mayor Thomas Burke, although naming it after Jack Berry was considered) – and more than three decades after becoming one of the city's two top airport officials, King announced he wanted to retire at the end of the year. The *Plain Dealer* reported: "The commissioner said he wanted to get away from the 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week grind of running the airport." His salary then was \$12,312 a year.

By the time he left, King had helped place Cleveland's airport ahead of others in the nation and, in some cases, the world with

such innovations as a passenger terminal with a control tower, tower-to-airplane two-way communications, airfield lighting for nighttime operations, and the electronic display board with information on all commercial flights. It's likely that others might have come up with such innovations eventually, but thanks to King, Cleveland had them first. It's hard to imagine an airport today without those assets.



*Claude and Elsie King, along with a son who died in infancy, are buried at the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery (Turkeyfoot) in Olmsted Falls.*

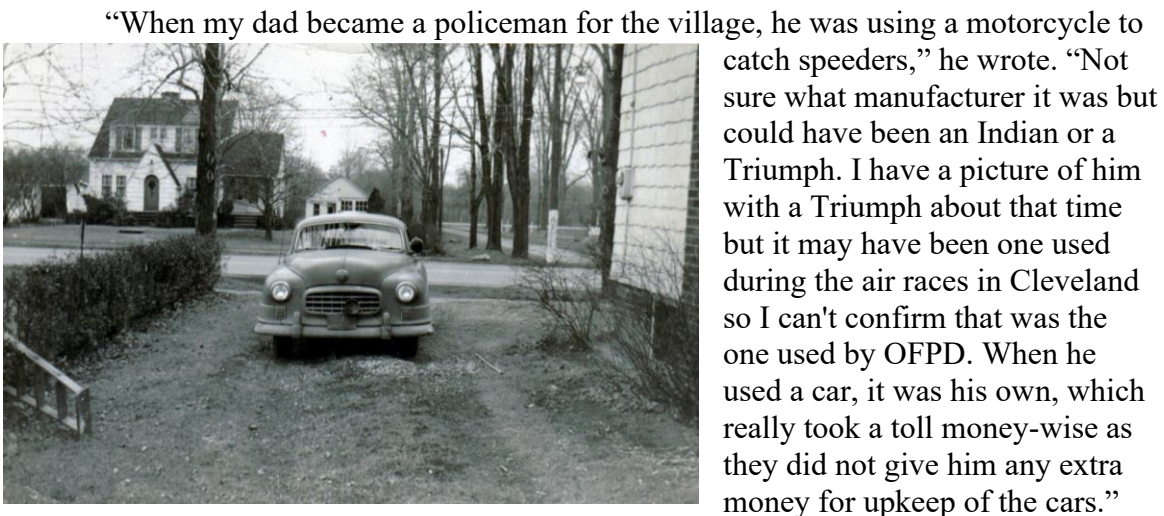
Like Berry, King and his wife retired to Florida. They chose Naples. Elsie, who was born November 13, 1900, died on August 22, 1993. Claude died on April 30, 1998 – about 17 months shy of living a full century. Their bodies were interred in the old Chestnut Grove Cemetery (Turkeyfoot) in Olmsted Falls.

Issue 147 of *Olmsted 200* next month will explore more of Olmsted's love-hate relationship with the airport.

*Thanks for help with this story go to Jim Boddy and Ross Bassett.*

## **The First Olmsted Falls Police Chief Used His Own Wheels**

The story in Issue 145 of *Olmsted 200* about how citizens had to raise money in the 1950s to buy police cruisers for Olmsted Township evoked a response from Denny Shirer, whose father, Donald Shirer, was police chief of Olmsted Falls during most of the 1940s and 1950s. Back then, Olmsted Township was hindered by a state law that prohibited townships from using taxpayer money to buy police vehicles. As an incorporated village, Olmsted Falls did not face that obstacle, but as Denny Shirer explained in an email, the situation in the village was not much better.



*This is the 1949 Nash sedan that Police Chief Donald Shirer used to patrol the streets of Olmsted Falls. Denny Shirer notes that it had a siren and red light in place of a spotlight. The photo, which is courtesy of Denny Shirer, was taken in the Shirers' driveway on Columbia Road. In the background is the home of the Jenkins family who lived across the street and next to the Village Green. The park's driveway and tennis courts can be seen on the right.*

appointment, Shirer served the village as street supervisor, building inspector and traffic

“When my dad became a policeman for the village, he was using a motorcycle to catch speeders,” he wrote. “Not sure what manufacturer it was but could have been an Indian or a Triumph. I have a picture of him with a Triumph about that time but it may have been one used during the air races in Cleveland so I can't confirm that was the one used by OFPD. When he used a car, it was his own, which really took a toll money-wise as they did not give him any extra money for upkeep of the cars.”

Walter Holzworth wrote in his 1966 Olmsted history book, *Township 6 Range 15*, that Donald Shirer became the first person appointed by the mayor to be police chief of Olmsted Falls after a new state law in 1940 ended the practice of electing village marshals. Prior to his

officer. When Mayor Charles Bonsey appointed Shirer to be the police chief, the arrangement was that he would be paid \$1,500 per year. He also would use his own vehicle with the village reimbursing him for mileage.

“For the most part he had paid his own way in fines collected on convictions made,” Holzworth wrote. “In consideration of a salary considerably larger than that of any former marshall *[sic]*, Donald Shirer established an efficient police department, employing scientific methods, such as lie detectors and other modern gadgets to detect crime and enforce law and order.”

Denny Shirer recalled that his father owned a black 1938 Buick sedan that he used as a police vehicle in his early years as chief with canvas signs tied to the doors with “POLICE” painted on them.

“He then used a 1942 Dodge 2 door until he bought an ugly brown 4 door Nash which didn't last long as it wouldn't start when it got wet but was used as his police cruiser until he purchased a 1949 Nash Airflyte,” Denny Shirer wrote. “Later that year the village bought its first official police car, a ‘49 Ford Interceptor which had a flat head V8.”

That 1949 Ford Interceptor with the V8 engine apparently was an earlier version of the 1955 Ford Interceptor that was pictured in Issue 145 of *Olmsted* 200.

“The patrolmen on the force continued to use their own vehicles in addition to the one owned by the village,” Denny Shirer wrote. “Each had their own police radios in them, thanks to my dad, and each had an official call sign. The first village police car that I remember, as I wasn't born until 1951, was a 1956 Ford Interceptor which replaced the 1949 Ford. Later cars were all Fords. It wasn't until sometime after I moved to Canton in 1972 that the village would buy more than one car and stopped patrolmen from using their own vehicles.”



*In this photo, Police Chief Donald Shirer and Harry Powers (who succeeded Shirer as police chief in October 1961) stand next to the village's 1956 Ford Interceptor. Again, the Jenkins house is in the background.*

Denny Shirer has one more photo in his collection of a police car in Olmsted Falls, but he is not sure whether the village ever used it for police work. The photo shows a 1929 Ford with police lights and a siren on display in front of Village Hall. Because of



the firetruck in the background, Shirer believes the photo was taken some time in the late 1940s or early 1950s.



*This photo shows a 1929 Ford with police lights and siren in front of Village Hall apparently in the 1940s or 1950s. Denny Shirer, who provided all the photos for this story, doesn't know if this automobile was used to police the streets of Olmsted Falls or just for parades by the village's former constable, Ed Baird.*

"Maybe this was a car used by constable Ed Baird and brought out for parades," he wrote. According to Walter Holzworth, Baird was the village's last elected marshal before state law changed in 1940 to have mayors appoint police chiefs instead of having village residents elect marshals.

By comparison, North Olmsted didn't do much better than Olmsted Falls in providing vehicles for law enforcement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, according to Holzworth. In the early 1920s, North Olmsted bought a motorcycle for its marshal. It was replaced in 1927 by a four-cylinder Henderson motorcycle, which was replaced in 1930 by a Harley Davidson motorcycle. North Olmsted bought its first police car in 1929. In 1947, the village bought a Nash car with an emergency stretcher and a mobile telephone.

*Thanks go to Denny Shirer for the information and photos that made this story possible.*

## **So Much Has Changed – or Not Changed – Over 50 Years**

Half a century ago, Olmsted Falls was an expectant community. That is, it was expecting a significant downtown development that would have helped the community change in the way that its neighbors, such as Berea and North Olmsted, already had. In other words, it was at a potential turning point.

Unlike most other Cleveland suburbs, the downtown district of Olmsted Falls in 1975 had scarcely



*The eastern side of Columbia Road in downtown Olmsted Falls looked like this for much of the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*



changed in several decades. It still was filled with homes and commercial buildings that had been there since at least the early 1900s if not the late 1800s. The notable exceptions were the two major churches on each end of downtown – the Olmsted Community Church to the north and St. Mary of the Falls Catholic Church to the south – both of which had been rebuilt in the 1950s.

By 1975, however, it seemed as though it was time for Olmsted Falls to change. A proposed \$1 million shopping center complex was planned for the northeastern corner of Bagley and Columbia roads. In January of that year, DEM Investments announced that it wanted to build a two-level, Williamsburg-style shopping center with a grocery, a bank and several other shops.

But a little story well inside Berea's *News Sun* on July 24, 1975 – the type of story that could have been easily overlooked – tells much more in hindsight than readers might have realized then. The story reported that the whole project was delayed over a snag in getting a variance from state environmental authorities for a sewage treatment facility. That's significant, because Olmsted's struggles to upgrade its sewage treatment system held up development around the community for decades. Also, that was just the beginning of a long series of activities that determined whether Olmsted Falls would look the way it does today or more like its neighboring communities.

The 1970s ended with no new development. In December 1981, Mayor William Mahoney revealed that he had been in confidential discussions with an undisclosed entity about another development there that would have extended along the eastern side of Columbia Road all the way from Bagley Road to the railroad tracks – a total of 9.2 acres. In January 1982, Rex Associates of Olmsted Township announced plans for a development to be called "The Recentre" with a three-story office building, a bank, several shops, a recreation center, a year-round swimming pool, and walking and biking trails. It also was to have a restaurant overlooking Rocky River that would have been partially built on the foundation of the former Damp's Mill.



*If original 1982 development plans had been implemented, a restaurant overlooking Rocky River would have been built here on what once was the foundation of Damp's Mill.*

By July 1982, those plans were scaled back because the developer was unable to acquire all the needed land. Plans changed a few more times and eventually were dropped.

But interest in developing that corner persisted. In August 1986, work began on building Mill River Plaza, a shopping center facing Columbia Road, as well as condominiums overlooking the river behind it.

At about the same time, it seemed as though the western side of Columbia Road might be redeveloped in a similar way. As early as 1980, National City Bank announced plans to put a red brick “Western Reserve-style” building at the corner of Columbia Road and Mill Street. It would have displaced the former Simmerer’s Hardware – which was the once and future Grand Pacific Hotel – that was then being used as a furniture display shop, an annex of Kucklick’s Village Square Shoppe. One proposal was to move the old building farther west and turn it by 90 degrees to face Mill Street.



*This is what Mill River Plaza looks like in 2025, about four decades after it replaced old shops and homes along the eastern side of Columbia Road north of Bagley Road.*

That didn’t happen. In November 1982, a study prepared by Phillips Planning Associates recommended preserving, renovating and repurposing the old buildings on the western side of Columbia Road. The study said Olmsted Falls should not try to copy the commercial districts of North Olmsted or Berea but should instead attract specialty shops. But nothing resulted from that recommendation – at least not right away.



*It was from this viewpoint at the corner of Mill Street and Orchard Street that Clint Williams had a vision in 1989 to restore and repurpose buildings like these to create Grand Pacific Junction.*

the commercial districts of North Olmsted or Berea but should instead attract specialty shops. But nothing resulted from that recommendation – at least not right away.

In the late 1980s, when Bill Kucklick decided to close his furniture store and sell the land, which included the former Simmerer’s hardware, the Depositors Building and other buildings from the railroad tracks south to Mill Street, real estate agent Clint Williams tried to sell the

property to potential buyers. The block might have been redeveloped much like Mill River Plaza.

However, one day, Williams stood on the corner of Orchard and Mill streets, looked at the buildings and had a new vision. “I really hadn’t paid that much attention to it before, but it just kind of struck me as an old-fashioned town,” he said years later. “Then I said, ‘Maybe I ought to buy it and restore one at a time.’”

That was late in 1989. In January 1990, Williams revealed plans for Grand Pacific Junction. Although he had to overcome some opposition from the community, he eventually created the type of development called for several years earlier by the Phillips Planning study.

“So, this created first a downtown for the people to come and sit and browse and eat an ice cream cone – whatever they want to do,” Williams said.

Thus, Olmsted Falls today has Grand Pacific Junction, which grew to include more restored and repurposed buildings than Williams originally planned, as well as Mill River Plaza. The downtown district easily could have developed much differently. Half a century ago, anything was yet possible.



*These two photos from Mike Gibson show how the eastern side of Columbia Road in downtown Olmsted Falls changed over several decades. On the right is a winter scene from the 1940s. On the left is a shot that Gibson took from the same viewpoint at the corner of Mill Street and Columbia Road in 2013 that shows Mill River Plaza occupying spaces where several different shops once were located.*

## Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include more about Olmsted’s relationship with Cleveland’s airport and other stories about the history of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township.

Anyone who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: [wallacestar@hotmail.com](mailto:wallacestar@hotmail.com). *Olmsted 200* has readers Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin, and as well as overseas in the Netherlands, Germany and Japan.

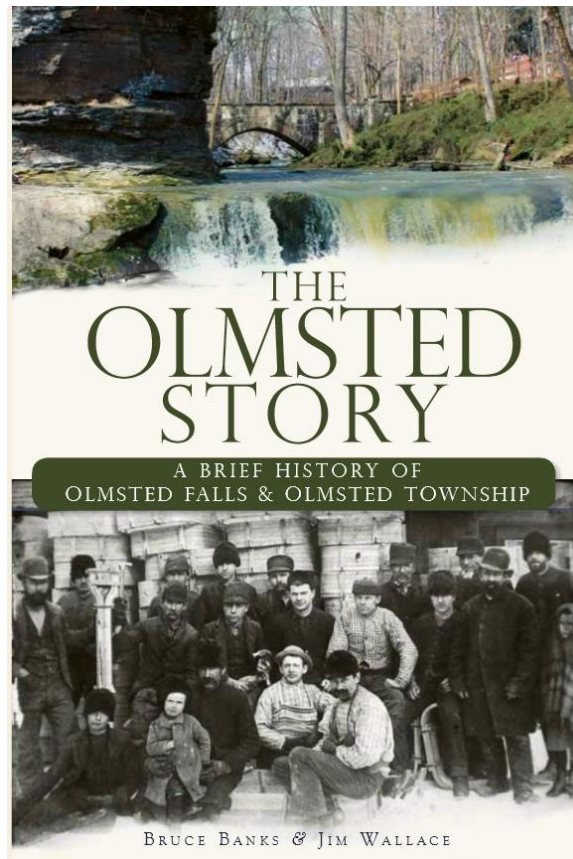


Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. So are photos and information to share about Olmsted's history.

All issues of *Olmsted 200* are available in two online locations. One is on Olmsted Township's website at: <https://www.olmstedtownshipohio.gov/290/Past-Newsletters-Olmsted-200>. The other is the website of the City of Olmsted Falls at: [http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted\\_falls\\_history/olmsted\\_200\\_issues.php](http://www.olmstedfalls.org/olmsted_falls_history/olmsted_200_issues.php).

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. Thanks go to Mary Louise King for helping 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](mailto: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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