



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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The Rados Family Ran a Fruitful Farm in Olmsted Township

The growth of housing developments over the past several decades has relegated most of the farmland that once dominated Olmsted Township to mere memories. One of the most distinctive farms that many people might remember was run by the Rados family in the northeastern part of the township at 7597 Lewis Road just south of the eastern section of Nobottom Road.

One reason it was distinctive, according to Bill Rados, who now lives in Maryland, is that it was one of the first pick-your-own produce farms in Cuyahoga County. In an email to *Olmsted 200*, he wrote that his family ran the farm for almost six decades from the years of World War II until the beginning of the 21st century, and for most of that time, they let customers pick their own strawberries, green beans, tomatoes and other crops. The Rados family got into the pick-your-own business not long after others established the practice.

“In the Depression, food prices plummeted, and farmers couldn’t get enough for their crops to cover their costs,” Rados wrote. “Consumers were desperate for affordable food and free activities. When farmers



This is one sign the Rados family used for their pick-your-own produce business. Photo courtesy of Bill Rados.



*This is another sign for the Rados family's self-pick produce farm.
Photo courtesy of Bill Rados.*

States from what is now Slovakia. Alexander first found work at a steel mill in Cleveland, but after he suffered a serious accident that involved falling 65 feet, he left the steel mill and got into farming. He and his family first farmed along Triskett Road in Cleveland. Later, they moved to what was the old Spafford farm in Riveredge Township on the other side of Rocky River from Olmsted Township. (Riveredge, which once was known as Ohio's smallest township, was later split between Brook Park and Cleveland.)

“After several years, Alexander and Katherine, along

started ‘pick your own,’ they avoided watching their crops waste away in the fields and families got fresh food and a day of fun in the fields.”

But the family’s farming operations went well beyond its pick-your-own offerings.

“The family also grew a wide variety of produce – including cabbage, eggplant, cauliflower and cucumbers – that they sold at their roadside stands and, via commission houses, to groceries and supermarkets throughout the area,” Rados wrote. “They also raised soybeans, wheat and field corn on other nearby tracts of land that they leased. But the hub of the farm was always the Lewis Road location.”

The family’s roots in America go back to the early 1900s when Alexander Rados, who was born on June 9, 1871, and his wife, Katherine, who was born November 11, 1882, immigrated to the United



This undated photo (probably from the early 1930s) shows Rados family members and friends in front of a wagon loaded with straw. On the horses, named Doc and Buck, are Martin Rados on the left and Sam Kisel on the right. Standing, left to right, are George Rados (holding hat), Paul Rados, Michael Ballas, Jim Zeman, family patriarch Alex Rados, and Steven Rados. Photo courtesy of Bill Rados.

with two of their sons – Martin and George – purchased the roughly 70-acre Lewis Road farm from Lillian Lewis Williams in May of 1943,” Bill Rados wrote. “The Lewis Road farm was usually planted in fruits and vegetables – from strawberries to sweet corn, including the ‘secret’ super-sweet hybrid variety known as Rados Special. (This brand sold at a premium – 60 cents a dozen in the 1960s, compared to 50 cents for other varieties.)”

The Radoses augmented their truck farming by growing grain crops on land leased from other families, including the Uphams, the Mitchells and the Speers, along Lewis Road in Olmsted Township and along Ruple Road in Riveredge Township.



This is the holiday light display at the old farmhouse at 7597 Lewis Road, which is now the home of Norm and Michele Rados. In 2022, it was the first-place winner in the Bright Light Battle Holiday Decorating Competition sponsored by the Olmsted Chamber of Commerce. Photo courtesy of Norm and Michele Rados.

“When they purchased the farm, the Radoses moved from Spafford Road to the house at 7597 Lewis Road,” Bill Rados wrote. “The home had been built in 1844 and has since undergone numerous improvements. It’s now owned by Norm and Michele Rados. (Norm is a nephew of Martin and George). It’s well known for its spectacular light display every holiday season.”

The property that became the Rados family farm belonged to Eastman Bradford, whose family was prominent in Olmsted, in the mid-19th century. He died in 1875.

Bill Rados wrote that, over the years, almost every member of the Rados family played some role on their farm.

“Every summer, the house would bulge with cousins, nephews and nieces who lived in Lakewood but worked on the farm,” he said. “Because farmwork was sunup till sundown, they would often spend the season staying at the farmhouse. Anne Ballas, daughter of Alexander and Katherine, not only kept house at the farmhouse (she and her husband, Michael Ballas, lived in the house for many years) but also helped on the farm, doing planting and minding the stand. Martin’s wife, Agnes, and George’s wife, Mary, along with all their children, also contributed to the cause, with Agnes keeping the farm’s books for many years.”

In 1954, the Rados family added an irrigation pond, which Bill Rados said was “a major step forward for the farm, allowing us to provide water to the sweet corn, tomatoes,

beans, peppers, cucumbers, strawberries, melons and other fruits and vegetables that we raised. Eventually we added a second irrigation pond to meet our ‘growing’ needs.”

One example of how the Rados family marketed their business was this classified advertisement that appeared in the *Berea News* on September 27, 1956, under farm produce for sale: “TOMATOES, pick and save, \$1.50 per bushel. Excellent quality, bring container. Rados farm, Lewis Rd., Olmsted Falls, off Bagley or Cedar Point Rds. ADams 5-3707.”

In addition, the farm was the location for one of the pylons used in the 1940s for the National Air Races, which were based nearby at Cleveland Municipal Airport (now Cleveland Hopkins International Airport). [For more on the National Air Races and a map showing the location of that pylon during the final year of the races in 1949, see Issue 147 of *Olmsted 200* from August 2025.]



This Cleveland Press photo from August 25, 1954, shows Martin Rados (father of Bill) on the left and his brother, George Rados, on the right at their new irrigation pond.



These are two more signs from the Rados family farm pick-your-own operation. Photos courtesy of Bill Rados.

“Family patriarch Alexander Rados worked on the farm well into his 90s, often

putting moist cabbage leaves under his hat to help keep cool in the hot Ohio summer sun,” Bill Rados wrote. “He died in 1965 (his wife, Katherine, had passed in 1944 from complications of asthma), and Martin and George continued farming. Martin farmed until his retirement in 1972; George’s son Steve continued to farm for many more years, eventually selling the land to Ferris Kleem in 2002. Today, what was once acres and acres of sweet corn, peppers, cabbage, beans and tomatoes is now a housing development built by Ryan Homes.”



On the left, looking from Lewis Road past the Rados house (not in the photo), part of the housing development that replaced the former Rados farm can be seen. On the right is a recent photo of the house, which is now home to Norm and Michele Rados.

According to information available online, the graves of Alexander and Katherine Rados are at Sunset Memorial Park in North Olmsted. Alexander was 94 years old when he died on June 25, 1965. Katherine was 61 years old when she died on April 20, 1944.

Martin Rados was born May 11, 1912, in Cleveland and died at age 85 on October 4, 1997, at Olney in Montgomery County, Maryland. His wife, Agnes Mitchell Rados, was born on August 2, 1909, in Cleveland and died at age 84 on December 22, 1993, in Cleveland. Their graves are at Lakewood Park Cemetery in Rocky River. They had one child, William M. Rados, who was born in 1947.

George Rados was born March 17, 1911, in Cleveland. He died at age 89 on October 3, 2000. His grave is at Naples Memorial Gardens Cemetery in North Naples, Florida.

Thanks go to Bill Rados for sharing most of the information and photos for this story.

Community Center Building Got Its Start 90 Years Ago

For almost a quarter century now, the building just north of Olmsted Falls City Hall has been operated as the Olmsted Community Center, but for almost six decades before that, most of it was a school gymnasium. However, it wasn’t always there for the students. It was built more than two decades after the school it served was constructed. The effort to add the gymnasium to the school began 90 years ago.



As the Olmsted Community Center, the former school auditorium-gymnasium has hosted many activities over almost a quarter century.

students from early elementary grades through their senior year of high school. The section that now houses City Hall was built in 1916 to replace several small schoolhouses throughout Olmsted Township and the Union Schoolhouse at the Village Green that served Olmsted Falls until 1914. An addition doubled the size of the 1916 school in 1926. More than a decade later, the district added the auditorium-gymnasium with walls consisting of 12-inch-thick bricks..

During the Great Depression, \$45,000 went a long way, but the auditorium-gymnasium cost much more than that. A story in the October 1, 1937, edition of the *Berea Enterprise* said the facility, which was then under construction, was expected to cost \$84,665. Making up most of the difference between that total and the \$45,000 from the bond issue was \$38,099 in federal funds from the Public Works Administration, which was a New Deal agency that helped build many public works projects around the country. The *Enterprise* story reported that Olmsted Falls was one of 213 school districts in Ohio to receive PWA funds at that time.

The new auditorium-gymnasium went into operation in 1938. For almost the next six decades, it hosted basketball games and other sports events, school lunches and assemblies, and many other activities. But the range of students

On September 3, 1935, a legal ad appeared in local newspapers notifying readers of a special election scheduled for October 1 to consider whether the local school district should be allowed to issue \$45,000 worth of bonds “for the purpose of constructing auditorium-gymnasium to the high school, as provided by law.” The school board had made the decision to seek the bond issue to expand the school at its August 20, 1935, meeting.

Although it commonly was referred to as the “high school,” it was then the district’s only school, serving



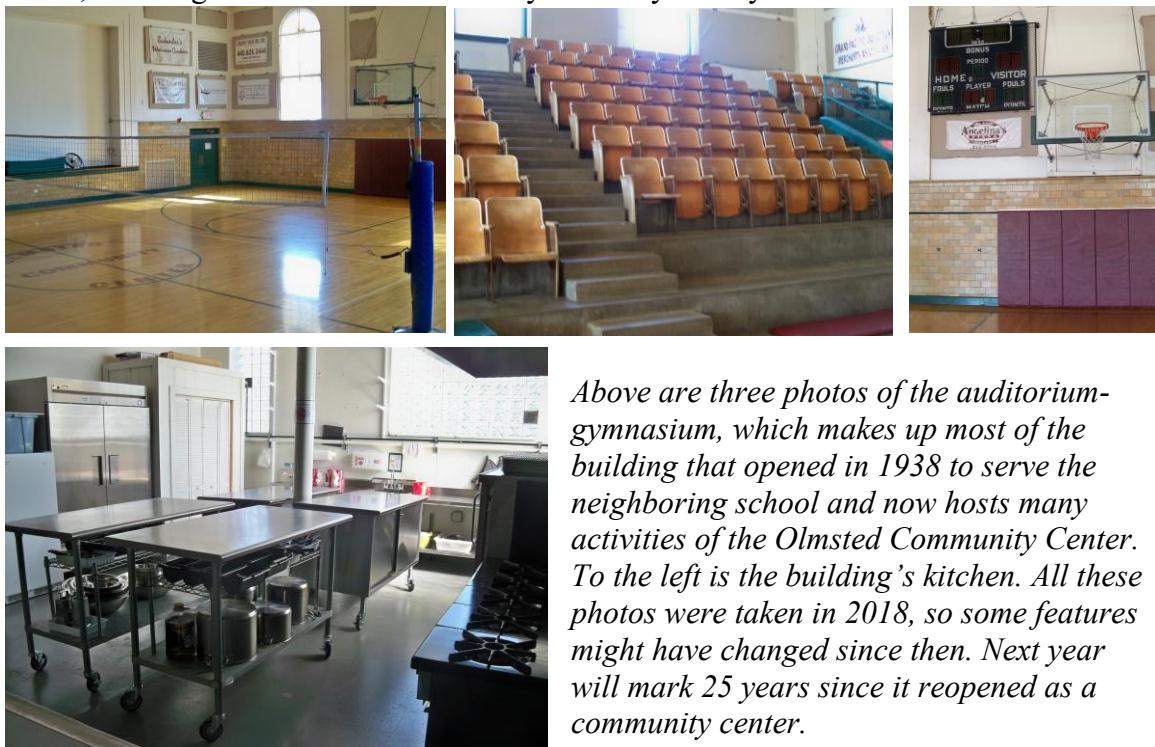
This aerial photo from the 1955 Senorio, the high school yearbook, shows the auditorium-gymnasium, 17 years after it was built, just north of the main school building. To the left is Falls Elementary School, which opened in September 1954.

it served changed over the decades. Elementary students received their own schools in the 1950s and 1960s. After the current high school opened in 1968, the old school became Olmsted Falls Middle School. It remained a school for students in sixth through eighth grades until a new middle school opened in 1996.

Soon after the school district sold the old school in the fall of 1997 to FirstNorth Corporation of Cleveland for \$225,000, plans began to form for repurposing it, such as making the oldest part of the building the Olmsted Falls City Hall. That happened in 2001 after the building was refurbished. The two western wings added to the building in 1949 became a daycare center.

A nonprofit organization led by John Hawkins paid \$135,000 for the 1938 addition with the auditorium-gymnasium and turned it into the Olmsted Community Center, which was dedicated on January 21, 2001. Since then, it has hosted many sports, exercise and other activities for the community.

Over the past two dozen years, the building has received hundreds of thousands of dollars of upgrades, including new wiring, heating and cooling systems, ceilings and floors, allowing it to serve the community for many more years.



Above are three photos of the auditorium-gymnasium, which makes up most of the building that opened in 1938 to serve the neighboring school and now hosts many activities of the Olmsted Community Center. To the left is the building's kitchen. All these photos were taken in 2018, so some features might have changed since then. Next year will mark 25 years since it reopened as a community center.

Road Was Nixed but Township's Northern End Still Changed

Many roads have been built in Olmsted Township over the past several decades – mostly in housing developments – but it was 40 years ago this month that the township learned it would not get a new road connecting it to North Olmsted. However, other changes were ahead for that northern end of the township.



Canterbury Road runs along Springvale Golf Course a short distance south of Butternut Ridge Road in North Olmsted today before it curves to the right into a housing development.

Back in 1985, there was a good possibility that Canterbury Road, which ran south from Butternut Ridge Road to the ballroom at North Olmsted's Springvale Golf Course, was going to be extended to connect either with John Road in Olmsted Township or to the township boundary, which was north of John Road. At that time, the Renaissance Retirement Campus was still in the planning stage. The Eliza Jennings organization intended to build it on the north side of John Road on 62 acres of the 164 acres at the site of Homelinks Golf Course.

Some John Road residents were concerned that their two-lane road was insufficient to accommodate the added traffic that would result from building the Renaissance. They pressed to have Canterbury extended to give some of that traffic another way in and out.

A decade earlier, another development was proposed for the same location. It would have been a \$35 million complex of condominiums and apartments. But the Regional Planning Commission decided that extending Canterbury Road to at least the township line should be a condition for proceeding with the project. Although the project did not proceed, it did get the golf course property rezoned for multi-family residences. The proposed extension of Canterbury Road didn't come up again until plans for the Renaissance were announced.



On the left is the entrance to the Renaissance along John Road. On the right is the view farther in from the entrance.

Although the Eliza Jennings organization went to the township's zoning board in October 1984, it was in May 1985 that it announced its plans for the first portion of a \$22 million retirement community with 75 townhouses and 75 apartments. It wanted to have a groundbreaking in September 1986. Township officials didn't see the need to require the

extension of Canterbury Road because a retirement community was expected to result in much less traffic on John Road than a complex of condominiums and apartments.

Some John Road residents did not agree with that assessment and held out for the Canterbury Road extension. But the Cuyahoga County prosecutor's office seemed to have put an end to the push for the extension by issuing an opinion 40 years ago this month in September 1985 that it wasn't necessary.

"The present project is significantly different from the original and involves only construction in the township," Thomas Gill, an assistant prosecuting attorney, wrote in a letter to the township's zoning commission. "Further, the original stipulation did not require Canterbury to be improved through the township but only to the township boundary."

Although the township's boundary with North Olmsted lay well north of John Road, it would not have taken much more effort to extend Canterbury Road all the way to John Road. So, even if that didn't happen right away, it could have happened eventually. That might not have meant a big change in traffic patterns in Olmsted Township, but it's interesting to consider what John Road would have been like with another connection to North Olmsted. It would have connected with Butternut Ridge Road a short distance west of Kennedy Ridge Road, which leads to the Great Northern Mall. That might have resulted in much traffic.

It likely would have connected to John Road next to a double row of trees that separated the Homelinks and Springvale golf courses for many years (and was a great place for hunting for golf balls because they came in from both sides). That could have required the alteration of some of the fairways along the western side of Springvale, and thus, it would have shortened the overall length of the course.

By the end of 1985, the Eliza Jennings organization bought the Homelinks property and proceeded in 1986 to build the Renaissance. The initial development reconfigured the golf course to have nine fairways go around the Renaissance buildings



If Canterbury Road had been extended south to John Road, it likely could have gone through right about here, where the tee for the fifth fairway of Springvale Golf Course is located. Behind the tee is the small patch of woods that separates the golf course from John Road. To the right is the double row of trees that separates Springvale from Renaissance property where Homelinks Golf Course was located through most of the 20th century.



If Canterbury Road had been extended to John Road, the connection likely would have been on either side of these trees, which shield Springvale Golf Course from view to anyone along John Road and from Renaissance property where Homelinks Golf Course once was located.

Both Homelinks and Springvale began about a century ago in the 1920s. Springvale's ballroom opened in 1923, and it has been recognized as a historical landmark by the state of Ohio since 2007. Springvale's golf course opened in 1928, initially with just five holes instead of the 18 it now has. The golf course and ballroom were owned and operated by the Biddulph family until 1994, when the City of North Olmsted bought them – saving the ballroom from demolition and preventing the golf course from being converted to a housing development or other uses.

Plans for Homelinks were announced early in 1929. Initially, it was to be a golf course that was surrounded by new homes. Part of its pitch was that it would be a place “where every home has a golf course at its garden gate, and the definite assurance that your back yard is park land forever!”

Unfortunately, plans for Homelinks – like the plans for many other ventures made by early 1929 – were never fulfilled. The Great Depression, which began with the stock market crash in October 1929, got in the way. Homelinks eventually opened as simply an

on the north side of John Road and expanded the section of the golf course on the south side of the road from three fairways to nine. The course was renamed the Links.

That lasted until 2019, when Valore Fine Homes of Westlake began proceeding on plans to replace what was left of the golf course south of John Road with two housing developments called the Sanctuary of Olmsted and the Preserve of Olmsted – although it was replacing, not preserving, some of Olmsted's past. That ended almost nine decades of golfing there, but the neighboring golf course just on the other side of the trees has had a much different fate.



This is Springvale Ballroom, which held its first dance on May 23, 1923, five years before the golf course next to it opened its first five fairways.



John Hall's 19th century residence with ivy-covered walls served for many years as the Homelinks Golf Course clubhouse.

including one with John Hall's initials and the barn's construction date, 1880.

18-hole golf course with 15 fairways on the north side of John Road and the remaining three on the south side. For a clubhouse, the golf course repurposed the brick house that John Hall, for whom John Road is named, built in the late 1800s. The large red barn he built in 1880 was used to store equipment for tending to the golf course. The house was demolished in the late 1980s when the Renaissance was built. The barn, which was one of the most photographed buildings in Olmsted Township for many years, lasted a few decades longer, but the Renaissance decided to tear it down in 2014. All that is left are three stones on the ground at the site, the barn's construction date, 1880.

So, the proposed extension of Canterbury Road into Olmsted Township never occurred, but more sweeping changes were made over the past four decades that wiped out not only Homelinks Golf Course but also what had been the remaining ties to its history as John Hall's farm. Meanwhile neighboring Springvale Golf Course and its historical ballroom have been preserved intact.

[For more about Homelinks, see Issue 3 of *Olmsted 200* from August 2013.]



Above is the barn John Hall built in 1880. It stood for 134 years until it was torn down just a few months after this March 30, 2014, photo was taken. To the right is one of the newspaper ads that promoted the proposed Homelinks development early in 1929.



Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about the opening of the Ohio Turnpike, which was built right through the Olmsted communities, 70 years ago, as well as 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. *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.

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.

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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