



Olmsted 200

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

Issue 149

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Turnpike Brought Millions through Olmsted over 70 Years

Many millions of motorists have passed through the Olmsted communities over the past seven decades, and most of them didn't realize it. They have done so by traveling on the Ohio Turnpike, which has very little signage indicating which communities it crosses. It was 70 years ago this month – on October 1, 1955 – that most of the roadway, including the portion in Olmsted Township and what then was the Village of Westview (now the southern half of the City of Olmsted Falls), opened to traffic.



This is the entrance to the Ohio Turnpike at Strongsville, heading east, as seen on August 11, 2024.

Ironically, the portion passing through the Olmsted communities is the portion Olmsted residents travel the least. That's because, when they travel to and from locations to the west, they most likely enter or leave the turnpike in North Ridgeville, and when they travel to and from locations to the east, they most likely enter or leave the turnpike in Strongsville. The section between those interchanges passes through Olmsted, but Olmsted residents tend not to pass through on it.

Although Ohio had nothing like the turnpike when it was being planned, it had a good example of what was possible directly to the east. The Pennsylvania Turnpike opened on October 1, 1940, and became known as America's first superhighway.

Plans for the Ohio Turnpike began in the late 1940s. In 1947, Ralph Winter, a state senator from Lodi in Medina County, introduced legislation to build a roadway like the Pennsylvania Turnpike using private financing. In 1949, the Ohio General Assembly authorized the creation of the Ohio Turnpike Commission with the goal of creating a system of superhighways.

The original plan was to build five such superhighways to connect various parts of the state going north-south and east-west. The one going east-west across the northern end of Ohio was just the first one to get authorized. The second one planned to be built was supposed to go from Cincinnati in the southwestern corner of the state to Conneaut in the northeastern corner with a branch to Toledo. James Shocknessy, chairman of the Turnpike Commission, suggested in 1956 that the second superhighway might be called the Ohio Throughway to distinguish it from the Ohio Turnpike.

The state did not have to build that or the other three toll roads because of the Federal Highway Act of 1956 that established the Interstate Highway System, which provided that the federal government would pay 90 percent of construction costs while the states provided the other 10 percent for new superhighways.

Interstates 70, 71 and 75 roughly followed the expected routes for three of the new toll roads the state had planned to build. Another highway that was not built would have passed east-west through Ohio between the turnpike and I-70. Under the Interstate Highway System, most of the turnpike eventually was designated as I-80, although the portion from the Indiana border to near Elyria is also designated as part of I-90, and the section from North Jackson to the Pennsylvania border is part of I-76.

The Ohio Turnpike Commission issued \$326 million in revenue bonds in 1952 to build a 241-mile toll road running from the connection with the Pennsylvania Turnpike on Ohio's eastern border to the Indiana border on the west. Indiana later built the Indiana Toll Road to connect with the Ohio Turnpike and connect farther west to the Chicago Skyway.

At the time it was built, the Ohio Turnpike was the biggest construction project in the state's history. When construction was at its maximum level, the project employed 10,000 workers and more than 2,300 bulldozers, graders, loaders and other heavy machines.

The project broke ground on the road's eastern end on October 27, 1952, and took 38 months to complete. Although the new highway was expected to bring economic



James Shocknessy became the first chairman of the Ohio Turnpike Commission in 1949 and served until his death on July 15, 1976. The state later named the highway the James W. Shocknessy Ohio Turnpike.



This bridge carries Stearns Road over the turnpike. At the time of this photo on May 29, 2023, the bridge was closed for repairs.

benefits to communities along its route, not all of them welcomed it. For example, early in 1954, Elyria fought with the state to keep the turnpike outside of city limits.

At about the same time, residents of Columbia Road, Lindbergh Boulevard and Adams Street in Westview complained that blasting to prepare the right-of-way for the turnpike had caused cracks in their homes and damage to their wells.

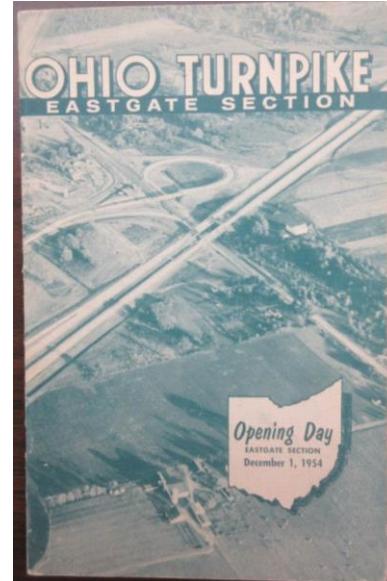
Another snag in the progress of building the turnpike in Olmsted Township occurred in the fall of 1954 when Cuyahoga County Engineer Albert Porter refused to accept the newly built bridge carrying Usher Road over the turnpike because it lacked guardrails. He expressed concern that during slippery weather conditions vehicles might skid off the approaches to the bridge and crash down onto the turnpike.

The new bridge was 218 feet long and 24 feet wide, curb to curb, according to a story in the *Plain Dealer* on November 24, 1954. Next to the bridge were four-foot-wide sidewalks on each side, which Porter's office insisted on for the safety of children walking to and from school.

The *Berea Enterprise* on November 26, 1954, reported that Porter was refusing to accept a total of 19 bridges over the turnpike in Cuyahoga County, including the one on Usher Road, "until they are fully ready for use from a safety standpoint." Motorists had to use detours for five months to get around the bridge construction on Usher Road. Meanwhile, bridges on Stearns Road and Jennings Road in Olmsted Township were nearing completion.

Within weeks, guardrails were installed along the Usher Road bridge – and presumably other bridges over the turnpike – because that issue disappeared from the newspapers.

Officials initially hoped the entire turnpike would be ready by December 1, 1954. That wasn't possible, but they did open the first 22-mile section on that date. That was partly to relieve congestion from traffic that emptied off the Pennsylvania Turnpike onto local roads on the Ohio side of the border. The first section, which ran east



This program was used when the first section of the Ohio Turnpike, just west of the Pennsylvania border, opened to traffic on December 1, 1954.

of Ohio Route 18 near Youngstown to the Pennsylvania border, opened with a snowplow and an Ohio Highway Patrol cruiser leading a caravan of more than 1,000 motorists following a dedication ceremony.

Cleveland area newspapers regularly reported on the progress of the project, not only because it passed through Cuyahoga County and neighboring counties, but also because the state decided to place the highway's administration building on land that then straddled the Berea-Strongsville border. (Berea later annexed that section of Strongsville.)



The Ohio Turnpike Commission's administration building is located at 682 Prospect Street on the south end of Berea.

One of the biggest local stories early in 1955 was the project's battle with Berea to get municipal water service for the administration building. In its January 6, 1955, edition, the *Berea News* ran a story at the top of its front page with the headline: "Council Says 'No' Again to Turnpike Water Plea." This was the first paragraph of the story:

At a meeting Monday night Berea City Council stood as staunchly as the dam across Baldwin Lake against the blandishments of the Ohio Turnpike Commission which attempted to woo it away from its previous refusal to grant water for the turnpike administration building.

A representative of the Turnpike Commission, D.C. Dunlap, used an economic development argument to try to get council members to budge on the issue.

"I can't get over the idea that the turnpike administration building is going to be an asset to Berea," the newspaper quoted him as saying. "Between 110 and 125 high-grade employees will work there, half of whom might be employed from Berea. In addition, considerable business will come out of that building for Berea."

Left unsaid in that remark was that nearby Westview, Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township also were likely to benefit from having the turnpike administration building nearby because some of their residents might find jobs there or new employees of the turnpike might move to those communities after taking jobs at the administration building. For example, the first manager of operations and maintenance for the turnpike, Russell Deetz, and his family moved into a new home at 8920 Lindbergh Boulevard in Westview.

The reason Berea officials were reluctant to provide municipal water to the administration building was that they were afraid their water system couldn't handle the additional load in the face of a potential drought. During the previous summer in 1954, water had to be released from Hinckley Dam to relieve a water shortage in Berea.

However, city officials reversed their opposition to providing water service by late January 1955, and the turnpike's administration building, which included Berea sandstone in its construction, took its place at the south end of Berea with not just the 110 to 125 employees that Dunlap had suggested but almost 400 employees. In a story on July 19, 1956, reporter Alice Thomas of the *Berea News* described the building this way:

The modern building contains spacious administrative offices, a financial division with more than 40 employees, a legal department, engineering offices, a department of information and research, and a section where toll tickets are processed and stored. It has patrol headquarters and a large radio message room.

As summer turned to fall in 1955, many people were eager to see all of the turnpike opened. In its September 22, 1955, edition, the *Berea News* reported about big plans for the opening, which was then just nine days away:

A 100-car caravan, loaded with celebrities, will swing down the Ohio Turnpike Oct. 1 to open the strip of modern, concrete highway to its first official traffic.

The lead convertible will be driven by Harry Albacker, magician, who will drive the 475 mile round-trip blindfolded and handcuffed.

Albacker, a magician who took his act across the country and to other parts of the world, lived in Lorain during the 1950s. The *Berea News* story offered no explanation how Albacker would drive blindfolded and handcuffed – nor how the Ohio Highway Patrol regarded such a stunt. However, the story went on to say that the celebrities scheduled to be present for the event included Harry Truman, John Ringling North, Senator Joseph McCarthy, Bob Hope, Tony Curtis, Janet Leigh, Elizabeth Taylor, Michael Wilding, Peter Lind Hayes, Mary Healy, Bill Gordon, Bill Randle, Marilyn Monroe, Dorothy Kilgallen, Walter Reuther, Drew Pearson, Hank Greenburg and the Cleveland Indians.

“The caravan will leave the Hotel Antlers in Lorain at 8 A.M. and will enter Interchange 8 about 9 A.M.,” the story said. “It will be on the \$326,000,000 highway approximately nine hours.”



Magician Harry Albacker reportedly was scheduled to drive the length of the turnpike blindfolded and handcuffed on the road's opening day, but it's not clear whether he did so.

Subsequent newspaper stories after the opening of the turnpike failed to mention any of those celebrities or Albacker, so it's not clear whether they were present for the first day of operation of the entire turnpike.

In its September 29, 1955, edition – just two days away from the big opening day – the *Berea News* referred to the opening the previous December of the first 22 miles of the Ohio Turnpike when it reported:

The opening of the Eastgate Section marked the first joining of two major state turnpikes and hence the first actual link in an interstate network of modern toll roads. Together, the 241-mile Ohio Turnpike and the 360-mile Pennsylvania Turnpike offer a 601-mile continuous superhighway between the Ohio-Indiana line and the Delaware River northeast of Philadelphia.



On September 29, 1955, two days before the turnpike's opening, the Plain Dealer, proclaimed the highway as a "Magnificent Dream Come True" in the headline leading a special section of coverage of the turnpike.

The story went on to note that the completion of the Indiana Toll Road, which then was under construction, and the pending joining of the Pennsylvania Turnpike to the New Jersey Turnpike after construction of a bridge over the Delaware River would realize "the vision of a New York-to-Chicago superhighway." Further, it said, "This 812-mile chain of turnpikes should be completely linked by late 1956."

According to the *Plain Dealer*, the opening of the full Ohio Turnpike was a dramatic event. Officials, including Ohio Governor Frank Lausche, gathered at the toll plaza nearest to the Indiana border under a harvest moon on the evening of September 30, 1955. At 11:59 p.m., James Shocknessy, the chairman of the Turnpike Commission, used a two-way radio system to call the senior toll collectors at all the interchanges.

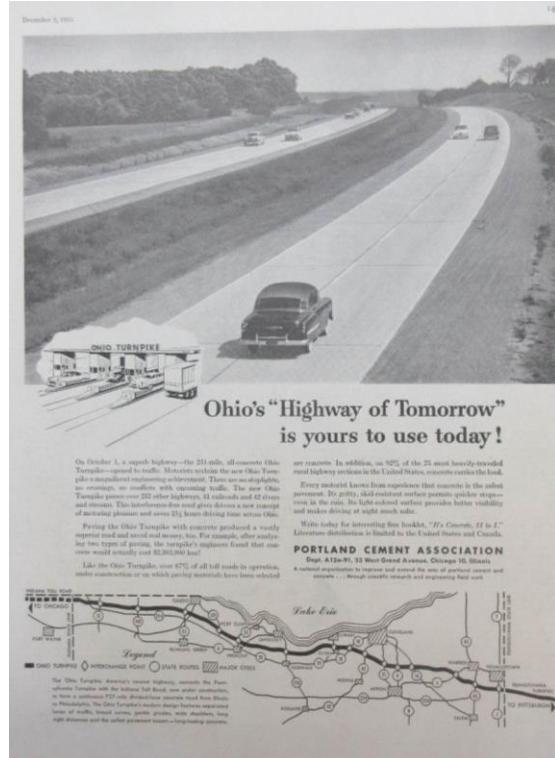
"Remove all barricades," Lausche told them at 12:01 a.m. "Open the gates."

The program for that ceremony referred to the Ohio Turnpike as "America's safest, most modern expressway."

And so began the public use of the turnpike across its 13-county corridor in northern Ohio. Building it had required the state to buy 1,636 parcels of land for the highway itself, another 3,955 for drainage, county road relocation and facilities, and more to prevent billboards from being erected close to the turnpike.

The *Toledo Blade* reported that the first member of the public to enter the turnpike right after midnight on October 1, 1955, as a toll-paying driver was Mrs. Nina Johnson, a housewife from Angola, Indiana, who had arrived by four o'clock the previous afternoon to line up for that privilege. It's not known who the first toll-paying driver was to pass through the section of the turnpike that passes through the Olmsted communities. The total traffic on the turnpike on that day was 44,000 vehicles.

When the Turnpike Commission met the following July at its new administration building, Shocknessy gave a glowing report of its success, as reported by the *Berea News* on July 19, 1956.



Governor Frank Lausche presided over the opening of the Ohio Turnpike right after midnight on October 1, 1955.

"The Ohio Turnpike is about to become the bonanza originally expected," he said. "The first eight days of July brought in tolls averaging \$60,000 a day. The average for June was \$50,000 daily. The success of the Ohio Turnpike as a venture in high finance and modern transportation is assured."

During 1956, the turnpike's first full year of operation, it reported use by about 10 million cars and trucks. By 2012, the annual usage was almost 50 million vehicles.

Over its seven decades of operation, the Ohio Turnpike has become like a neighbor to Olmsted residents that they barely notice. However, some people living near the turnpike have complained about noise from the highway, especially after it was widened to add a third lane in each direction. That work to widen the

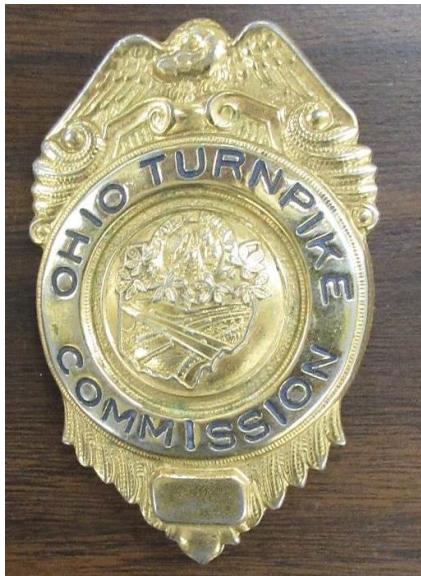
Two months after the turnpike opened, the Portland Cement Association cited Ohio's "Highway of Tomorrow" in this ad as an example of how cement could make superior highways at lower cost.

turnpike began in 1996 and wasn't finished until 2014, but the expansion reached the Olmsted communities several years earlier than that.

In the fall of 2006, Olmsted Falls, Berea, Strongsville and North Royalton banded together under the slogan "Working Together to Make a Difference" to seek some relief from the highway noise. That followed a study conducted by the Ohio Department of Transportation about the problem. The three cities set up a series of public meetings, one in each community, to allow residents to express their concerns and find out what might be done.



As this photo taken in Mahoning County shows, most of the Ohio Turnpike is designated as Interstate 80, but the easternmost section is part of I-76. Photo courtesy of Mary Louise King.



This badge was used by Ohio Turnpike Commission officials for many years.

Kathi Lowry, a member of Olmsted Falls City Council at the time, was especially concerned about the noise because her backyard was adjacent to the turnpike. As reported in the *News Sun*, she said the noise had increased not only with the recent addition of a lane on each side of the turnpike but also a concrete median barrier that reflected and magnified noise from the traffic. She also noted that the number of passenger cars was five times greater than when the turnpike opened five decades earlier, and the number of trucks using it was 11 times greater.

In 2007, the legislature required the Turnpike Commission to test noise-mitigation systems. In 2008, the commission hired TranSystems of Cleveland to study the noise problem and evaluate systems to alleviate it. The company determined that 67 areas along the turnpike had houses, schools or other buildings close enough to the highway that noise was

in the range of 67 to 70 decibels. That is about as loud as a vacuum cleaner. The cost of adding noise barriers in those areas was estimated to be \$39 million.

By 2014, ODOT and the Turnpike Commission agreed to spend \$5 million on a Turnpike Mitigation Program in Cuyahoga County and other places along the turnpike. That included plans to spend \$3.6 million to erect barriers in Olmsted Township, Olmsted Falls, Strongsville, North Royalton and Hudson by 2017. Eventually, about 240,000



The turnpike is visible from many places in Olmsted, such as here through the chain link fence along the Columbia Road bridge over it, but it generally goes unnoticed by residents most of the time.

over the turnpike so the bridge could be widened. That work, which included adding sidewalks on both sides, ended in August 2024.

Otherwise, millions of motorists pass through the Olmsted communities each year with little notice from the motorists or Olmsted residents.

square feet of noise barriers – 14 separate barrier walls – were built in those communities.

According to 2014 news reports, ODOT provided \$962,500 to Olmsted Falls to build sound barriers along the turnpike, and the city planned to contribute \$37,500 to the project for a total of \$1 million. The construction of half a mile of barriers to protect residents along Redwood Drive was scheduled for 2016.

From time to time, work related to the turnpike interrupts life in Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township. One example was the 16-month closure of the Stearns Road bridge





Many thanks go to Dave Miller, who worked for the Turnpike Commission for 31 years, for sharing his collection of turnpike memorabilia seen here and in the photos at the bottom of pages 3, 6, 7 and 9. Thanks also go to the Berea Historical Society and Mary Louise King for help with this story.

Readers Share Memories of a Farm and a Golf Course

Many readers responded to Issue 148 of *Olmsted 200* with fond memories of the Rados family's farm on Lewis Road that offered pick-your-own fruits and vegetables for several decades. Another responded with photos of The Links golf course from just before housing developments replaced it.

"While in school my brother and I picked 2QT baskets of strawberries for them," Bill Anderer wrote about the Rados farm. "For each heaping basket we picked we got \$.10. The strawberries were very big, so it didn't take long to fill each basket."

Dottie Rigo wrote, "Our family went to Rados at least weekly. Best strawberries, asparagus and corn around!"

Likewise, Jennifer McRae wrote, "Loved the place... Mom made the best strawberry jam from the berries that we picked."

John Guenther recalled, "They farmed next to my grandparents' farm (where I grew up) on Lewis. Great memories. 10 acres of wheat and corn on one side of our home and several acres of green peppers (of all things) behind our home."

Sherrie Kaye wrote, "We used to get our veggies, pick our own strawberries and purchase our Christmas trees [there]."



The Rados farmhouse still stands at 7597 Lewis Road.

Jim Jenkins remembered, “Fresh sweet corn for 65 cents a dozen. Whatta deal!”

Mark Peeper said, “I seem to remember mom sayin’ we had to STOP eating more strawberries than we put in the basket, or they were gonna chase us off.”

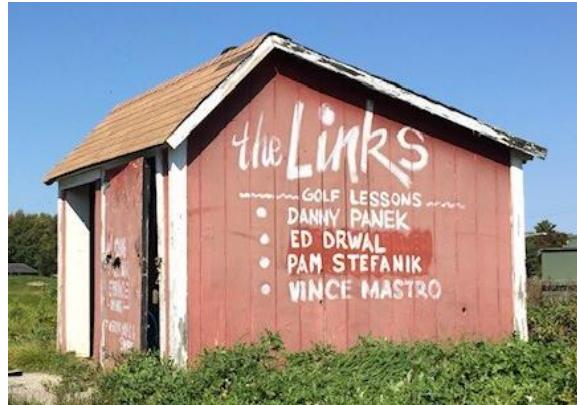
Owen Minnis recalled, “My mom and grandma used to take my sister and I there for PYO blueberries, and my preschool class at the community church went pumpkin picking there at least once.”

Debbie Lee said simply, “Loved Rados farms.”

Annette Lawrie Dunwoodie Rozell recalled, “We lived next to the original Rados Farm House on Lewis Rd. and our 5 acres had the whole farm behind us.... It was a great place for my 4 kids to grow up.”

“Yep,” Joanne Berger DuMound wrote. “Loved picking strawberries there with my husband. Great memories.”

Another story in that same issue prompted Ross Bassett to share several photos he took of The Links along John Road in October 2020 before the golf course was replaced with housing. Here are several of them.





Waring Homestead Is Transformed Again

What would William Waring think of the house he built almost two centuries ago in Olmsted Falls if he could see it now? He likely would be pleased that it's still standing but surprised to see what it has become.

As *Olmsted 200* reported in Issue 140 in January 2025, the house at 8134 Columbia Road at the corner of Mill Street has gone through another in a series of renovations since it was converted decades ago from being a residence to housing commercial operations. It is now the Twin Bean Café, which serves gourmet coffee and organic food, under the ownership of Julia George.



This is how the Waring Homestead looks now in its new form as the Twin Bean Café.

a charity devoted to improving the quality of life of individuals with developmental disabilities, Down syndrome and autism.

An extensive account of the building's history can be found in the story in *Olmsted 200* Issue 140, but briefly, Waring is believed to have built the house in about

Although her father, Tony George, who oversaw renovation of the facility, had hoped it would be ready for business last winter, the work took several months longer, so the café opened instead in September.

Julia George was one of a set of triplets with two brothers. One of them, Mike, had Down syndrome and died several years ago from leukemia. Tony George said some of the proceeds from the café go to Awakening Angels,

1830. It served as a residence throughout the rest of the 19th century and most of the 20th century. Late in the 20th century, it became an antique store. In the 21st century, it has housed a series of restaurants, including Le Bistro du Beaujolais, then Bistro on the Falls, and now Twin Bean Café. Although the building has been extensively renovated, some of its original wooden beams are still exposed in its first-floor dining room. The café also offers dining space on the second floor, unlike its predecessors.



Above left is the serving counter at Twin Bean Café. Above right is a photo that hangs in the café of the late Mike George, the brother of café operator Julia George and her inspiration for sharing café proceeds with Awakening Angels, a charity that helps individuals with developmental disabilities, Down syndrome and autism. To the right is the dining area on the second floor of Twin Bean Café.



Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about a proposal from Cleveland that sparked efforts eight decades ago that could have resulted in Olmsted Township no longer being a township. It also will include stories about oil fever in the Olmsted communities and the bustling operation of local sandstone quarries 150 years ago.

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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