



Olmsted 200

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

Issue 88

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Other Railroads Planned for Olmsted Went Nowhere

Every now and then, someone will look south from the bridge that carries Bagley Road over Rocky River in Olmsted Falls and wonder what the story is behind two bridge piers that stand on each side of the river without the bridge they were meant to hold. The



These pillars were built for a bridge to carry trains over Rocky River for a railroad that was never built.

simple version of the story is that those piers stand as silent reminders of one of the railroad projects proposed for Olmsted that never came to fruition.

That project was planned in the early 1900s by the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad. As early as 1879, the P&LE operated a line connecting Pittsburgh with Youngstown. The route planned later to go through Olmsted would have connected Pittsburgh to Lorain. That would have allowed the railroad fulfill the ambitions of its name by going from Pittsburgh to a port on Lake Erie.

According to a legal notice published in the June 24, 1904, edition of the *Berea Advertiser*, the railroad was seeking a 150-foot-wide right-of-way through Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls. Walter Holzworth, in his 1966 book about Olmsted history, wrote that the right-of-way would have taken the railroad through Olmsted Falls across Columbia Road just south of Bagley Road, and

then diagonally across Bagley. From there it would have gone through part of the property that became the site of the school built in 1916 that now serves as Olmsted Falls City Hall. Holzworth said the right-of-way would have cut right through the section that became the school's football field. From there, the railroad would have gone northwest across Cook Road and Lorain Road to Avon.

The June 1904 legal notice was about a court battle the railroad was having with heirs to a piece of Olmsted Township property as the company attempted to complete assembling its route. Holzworth wrote its land agents' activities "stirred up a heap of controversy about proper land values for the right-of-way and the damages incurred." But that wasn't the only dispute the railroad faced. In the November 18, 1904, edition of the *Advertiser*, the Olmsted Falls column included this item:



The P&LE logo would have been a common sight passing through Olmsted if the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad had built its planned tracks through the community. This logo was on a train car at the Age of Steam Roundhouse near Sugarcreek.

The courts will decide whether the village of Olmsted Falls may eliminate grade crossings on the new Lake Erie & Pittsburg [sic] railroad, which passes through the town.

An admitted statement of facts was filed in common pleas court Saturday morning, and in this the railway claims it is impracticable for it to cross the village streets in any way save at grade. The village disputed this, however, and joins in the prayer to the court to settle the dispute.

Reading between the lines, that seems to indicate the village wanted the railroad to use bridges to go above (or perhaps below) the streets it crossed. It's not clear how that dispute was resolved or whether it was.

"Construction was started and hundreds of white and colored laborers were barracked in two separate labor camps, one on Pollard's farm on Cook Road, and the other on Columbia just south of Bagley," Holzworth wrote. "Suddenly Olmsted became a lusty boom town with this influx of workmen."

Work on the railroad included erecting piers for two bridges, one to cross Rocky River in Olmsted Falls, and another to take the trains over Lorain Road in the section of Olmsted Township that soon would become North Olmsted.

"Enterprising Phil Simmerer and several others saw an opportunity to profit by this construction and supplied teams of horses and teamsters to help evacuate the road

bed,” Holzworth wrote. “But this boom was short lived. Construction ceased and puzzled citizens were asking what happened.”

In the September 1, 1905, edition of the *Advertiser*, the Olmsted Falls column included this item: “John Owen, of Galesburg, Ill., has been in and around Olmsted looking over what has been done on the new Ry. that was supposed to be in running order by this time between Lorain and Pittsburg [sic]. The wonderful prophets who predicted a new Ry. got beautifully left. What next Ye Prophets.”

Within a few months, the questions had been replaced by rumors, such as this in the December 8, 1905, edition of the *Advertiser*: “It is rumored about town that the L.E. & P.R.R., running through our town, has been purchased by the Lake Shore Ry., and if it is a fact, it is no doubt but the road will, in the near future, be completed. At any rate it will be waited for with a great deal of anxiety.”

That issue also included this item: “If the new rail road through our town is completed in the near future, it will be a fine chance for some of our young men to get better positions on the new road.”



More train cars looking like this likely would pass through Olmsted if the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad had not abandoned the tracks it had planned more than a century ago. This one was seen this summer at the Age of Steam Roundhouse near Sugarcreek, Ohio.

Three weeks later, the Olmsted Falls column in the *Advertiser* for December 29, 1905, included two more related items. One said, “The people of Olmsted will surely appreciate an electric street railway out of this place.” The other said, “And now there is rumor that the Lake Erie & Pittsburg is to be made into an electric system.”

By early 1906, hopes for having the new railroad seemed to turn to despair over its being unfinished. A story in the January 26, 1906, edition of the *Advertiser* referred to trouble the railroad faced “over an overhead bridge on Butternut Ridge-rd, in Olmsted township.” The story further said that R.L. Stearns had filed a complaint with county commissioners on behalf of property owners “stating that it is now almost impossible to use that part of the roadway because of this structure. The complaint that the approaches to the bridge have been washed away, and, aside from dangerous holes, it is impossible for more than one vehicle to cross the bridge at a time.”

After noting that the matter had been referred to Cuyahoga County Solicitor C.W. Stage, the *Advertiser* reported that “an effort will be made to ascertain whether the road is going to be built, and if so how soon the railroad company will make arrangements to put the highway in good condition. If the road is not going to be built the commissioners

need to know it so they can make fil's and put the road in the same shape that it was before the railroad came this way."

In addition, the story said, "So far as can be learned the construction of the road now depends upon whether the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern will purchase it following violation of agreements between the New York Central and Erie systems."

As far as can be determined by *Olmsted 200*, the newspaper never reported on how that dispute was resolved. Within a few months, the *Advertiser* instead was again expressing optimism the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie tracks would be laid through Olmsted. On March 30, 1906, the Olmsted Falls column included this item: "Mr. Geo. Singleton, of Girard, Pa, was in Olmsted over Sunday and Monday in the interest of our new R.R. that is soon to be finished."

But it never was finished. In his Olmsted history book, Holzworth wrote: "The muck land of Abram Lake at Berea sank the project in a bottomless swamp and it was abandoned."

In his 1970 book about the history of Berea and Middleburgh Township, *Men of Grit and Greatness*, Holzworth provided a better explanation about why Lake Abram was such an obstacle. It wasn't simply the Lake Abram Marsh that now remains as part of Metroparks' Big Creek Reservation in Middleburg Heights. Instead, he wrote, more than a century ago, it was a shallow wetland that was "like a huge saucer

without banks" that generally was north of Bagley Road, east of Eastland Road and south of Sheldon Road, but it sometimes expanded beyond those rough boundaries. He wrote that the marshes surrounding it were "a haven for wild fowl, infested with wolves and wild cats; a place to avoid traveling through."

About the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad's efforts to build train tracks there, Holzworth wrote: "Much of the railway from Lorain to Berea was in the various stages [of] construction. The attempt to make a road bed across the muck became their doom. Thousands of loads of clay, stones and other fill material were dumped into the muck only to sink and push up more real estate to properties bordering it."



By the time this postcard was in use about 1913, the P&LE Railroad project had been scrapped for several years, but the unused bridge piers still were deemed worthy to be pictured on the card.

Holzworth wrote in his Olmsted history book that, after the railroad abandoned its project, “Much of the railroad right-of-way reverted to the original owners, but the largest stretch was acquired by The Illuminating Company for a right-of-way for a high tension



As late as 1920, this color postcard showed the abandoned bridge piers. The inaccurate title under the photo is: “Piers of the New P.&L.E. R.R. Bridge, Olmsted Falls, Ohio.”

line.” As a result, high-tension electrical lines still mark part of the path the railroad intended to take through Olmsted. As noted earlier, the bridge piers on each side of Rocky River also are still reminders of the railroad that never was. Even though the bridge they were meant to hold was not built, those two piers and a third one nearby were featured for several more years on postcards from Olmsted Falls.

The Pittsburgh and Lake Erie project got the furthest of any of Olmsted’s unbuilt railroads, but it

wasn’t the first to be proposed and then abandoned. In 1885, a company called the Olmsted Falls and Lake Erie Road of Cuyahoga County began with capital of \$100,000. Holzworth wrote that, according to the corporation papers filed at the Ohio Secretary of State’s Office, the company planned to build a railroad north from the Olmsted Falls Depot to Lake Erie at the mouth of Rocky River.

The men who incorporated the company included Jeremiah LeDuke, Neal Norton, M.M. Hobart, J.B. Buxton and T. Brady. LeDuke operated one of the quarries in what now is David Fortier River Park in Olmsted Falls. He also was a contractor in railroad construction. Norton was a contractor from Rockport Township (which became Lakewood, Rocky River and the West Park section of Cleveland) who built many roads, sewers and waterlines. Holzworth did not provide any background information for Hobart, Buxton and Brady, but he did have more to say about the first two:

Grading contracting was no business for a mild and soft spoken operator to risk a bid. LeDuke and Norton were made of the mettle, that in later years they became somewhat of a legend in the memories of thousands of laborers who at one time or another were in their employ.

The Olmsted Railroad that never developed was only one of their joint ventures. In March 1885 they contracted to built [sic] a railroad from Delphos, Ohio to Cairo, Illinois, a distance of 400 miles. It was not reported as to their success.

Likewise, Holzworth did not say why the Olmsted Falls and Lake Erie railroad was never built. Perhaps demand was insufficient for another railroad to connect Olmsted Falls to a port on Lake Erie when it already was connected to Cleveland.

The other railroad that could have been built through Olmsted but wasn't would have been an electric interurban line. Many residents of Olmsted Falls and the central part of Olmsted Township desired such service after seeing Berea and other nearby communities benefit from the quick connections "street railways" provided to and from Cleveland and other destinations. They were especially envious of residents of northern Olmsted Township who benefited from the Cleveland-to-Elyria interurban railway built near Butternut Ridge in the 1890s. Although residents of that part of the township had felt alienated from the rest of Olmsted for years, the east-west connections provided by the interurban line furthered that sense of division and contributed to their decision to break away and create the new Village of North Olmsted in 1908 and 1909. (For more on that, see Issue 67 of *Olmsted 200* for December 2018.)

This car from the Cleveland and Southwestern Railway, photographed in Medina, was typical of the type from the interurban railways that connected Berea and other neighboring communities to each other but never to Olmsted Falls. The photo is courtesy of the Medina County District Library Collection of the Cleveland Memory Project of the Cleveland State University Library.



The businessmen involved in establishing the interurban railway through northern Olmsted Township included Alson Pomeroy. In his Olmsted history book, Holzworth wrote that Pomeroy's acquaintances in Olmsted Falls "kept asking him about the possibility of constructing a line through the village on toward Wellington. Such a road was just what was needed for Olmsted to keep pace with Berea." Pomeroy reportedly pointed to his hat, indicating he had such a railway in mind.

In 1903, those who wanted the interurban line had reason to get their hopes up as the proposed right-of-way for the tracks was surveyed. Holzworth wrote that the line would have run close to the Village Hall (where the Moosehead restaurant now stands) and then west from there through the village, apparently parallel to and a bit north of the existing Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway.

"Stakes were driven and townsfolks waited in eager anticipation for a railroad that never came," Holzworth wrote.

That anticipation lingered for years, as evidenced by items in the *Berea Advertiser*. The Olmsted Falls column in December 29, 1905, edition included this item: "The people of Olmsted will surely appreciate an electric street railway out of this place."

In the January 26, 1906, edition, the *Advertiser* said this:

One of the prettiest suburban villages in the vicinity of Cleveland is Olmsted Falls. It is really romantic and picturesque along the river and very attractive as a residence town. All it needs is a street railway to bring it into prominence. We have no doubt that a direct line connecting Berea, Olmsted Falls, Elyria and Lorain would be a paying investment.

The Olmsted Falls column in the February 2, 1906, edition included two items about the desire for an interurban railway. One listed the three things Olmsted Falls needed were a street railway, “a good brick road” and a barber shop. The second item said: “There is every prospect now that we are to have in the very near future a street railway running from Elyria or Grafton through Columbia Center and West View down to Reynolds corner then to Berea over the Irish road.” Irish Road was the name then used for what now is the section of Bagley Road between Olmsted Falls and Berea.

Such speculation about an interurban railway occurred about the same time Olmsted residents were waiting for progress on the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad project. Thus, they went from expecting Olmsted Falls to become the center of a web of railroad activity to realizing they would have only the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern tracks that had been built more than half a century earlier.

In next month’s issue, *Olmsted 200* will explore what it has been like for Olmsted residents to live with the railroads.

Olmsted Created a Swimming Hole 90 Years Ago

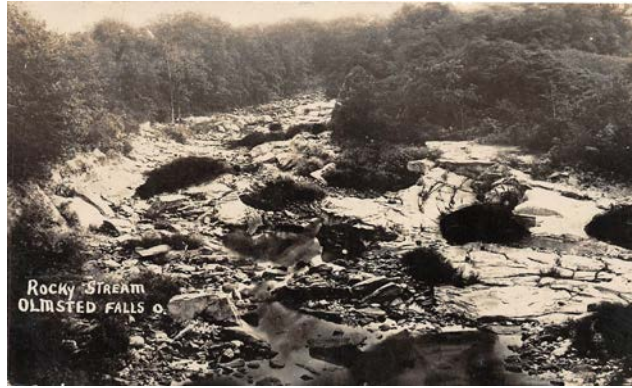
Ninety years ago this month, the Village of Olmsted Falls added a permanent feature to the community park along Rocky River near the mouth of Plum Creek. It was a dam to back up enough of the river’s water to form a swimming hole in the summer and a skating pond in the winter. Although it’s no longer used for those purposes, the dam still forms the familiar waterfall at that location.



This mid-1950s postcard, called “Quiet Beauty in the Park,” shows the dam built along Rocky River in 1930 to form a swimming hole and ice skating rink. Note the stepping stones on top to allow people to walk from one side of the river to the other when the water level was not high.

The creation of the dam apparently came about quickly, judging by references to it in the *Berea Enterprise*, the weekly newspaper that served the area at that time. On August 15, 1930, the Olmsted Falls column included this three-sentence item: “The

playground equipment in the village park was installed through the efforts of Kiwanis members. The next thing proposed is a swimming pool. The site has not yet been picked.” It’s not clear whether the village park referred to in that item was the Village Green or the park along Rocky River and Plum Creek.



This postcard from about 1909, called “Rocky Stream,” seems to show what Rocky River looked like from the Water Street Bridge before the dam was built in 1930.

Two weeks later in the August 29 edition of the paper, the Olmsted Falls column included this item: “Mayor Scroggie, councilmen and the village engineer met Tuesday night to discuss the new dam site. It will give a place to swim and a fine skating rink, lighted through efforts of the council.”

That item went on to say the Kiwanis Club had leased a lot on Cook Road to establish another skating pond for which the council would supply lights and water. Thus, even though the country was still in the first year of the Great Depression, community leaders were devoting notable attention to providing residents with recreational facilities. (Later in the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration contributed to that effort by using sandstone blocks and grindstones left over from the quarries that formerly operated there to make shelters, steps and the stone bridge over Plum Creek. See Issue 85 of *Olmsted 200* from June for more on that.)

Within a month, the Rocky River dam was completed. The Olmsted Falls column of the *Enterprise* on September 26, 1930, included this simple item: “The river dam is completely finished.” By then, it probably was too late in the year for residents to take advantage of the new swimming hole, but they seemed to take plenty advantage of it in subsequent years.

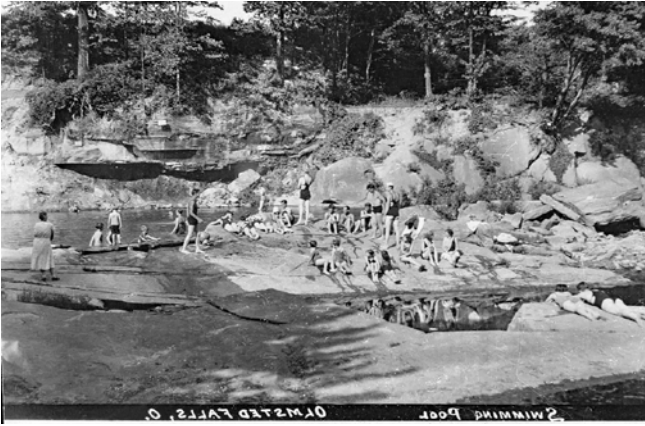
In its October 3, 1930, edition, the *Enterprise* had more to say on the subject:

Olmsted Falls is to be congratulated on having officials who see the possibilities in the development of the natural beauty spots in the village.

The erection of a dam across Rocky River in the park property has added considerably to the already beautiful place by making an artificial lake some 600 feet in length. The dam will be used for skating in winter and swimming and boating in summer.

A part of the flooded area has been carefully leveled to afford a wading beach for the children, and the river channel itself is six feet deep.

The building of the dam took two weeks, and it was done entirely by local labor.



This view, labeled Swimming Pool and showing many sunbathers, is from a postcard that often pops up in accounts of Olmsted history. But Mike Gibson, who provided this version, concluded that the view on the postcard was backward, so he turned it around to fix it.

bank on the west side of the river a bit south of the dam. The holes used to attach the diving board and the outlines of where the board sat on the rock still can be seen, although any diving ended many decades ago. In fact, high water sometime in the past moved a big rock to a spot in the river that would prevent any safe diving.

Living up to its name, Rocky River is filled with rocks of all shapes and sizes, so swimming in it might have been a questionable activity even when it was allowed and encouraged by the village government. Eventually, however, municipal officials decided to prohibit swimming in the river.

Although that ordinance has not always been strictly enforced, it was backed up for years by a metal sign posted on a tree along the bank. That sign has been there so long that the tree has grown around it, so that it is barely visible and certainly is not legible.

The dam no longer holds back enough water to form a big pool of water behind it, but it does create a distinctive straight waterfall that contributes to the picturesque scene

For many years after that, the pond formed by the water the dam backed up became a popular recreational spot for Olmsted residents. One postcard showing people wading and sunbathing there was even labeled “Swimming Pool Olmsted Falls, O.” In addition to creating a pool of water behind it, the dam also was topped by stepping stones to allow people to walk across it even as water flowed over the dam between the stepping stones, at least when the level of the river was not too high.

At some point, a diving board was attached to the rock along the



This view from another mid-20th century postcard provides a good view of the water backed up behind the dam.

near the smaller falls at the mouth of Plum Creek. It might seem as though it always has been that way, although it has been there only for 90 years.



Look closely at the left photo to see a small portion of the sign prohibiting swimming that has not yet been covered by the tree bark. The right photo shows where a diving board once was attached. Both photos are courtesy of Bruce Banks.

Here is a more current view of the falls created by the 1930 dam in what now is called David Fortier River Park. This photo was taken October 6, 2019.



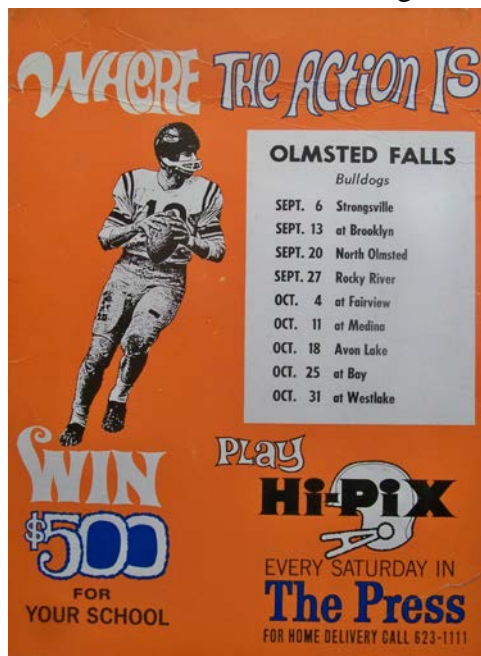
Bulldogs Football Isn't What It Used to Be

In this pandemic year of 2020, when major collegiate sports conferences such as the Big 10 have scrapped their fall seasons, it was far from certain until late in the summer whether the Olmsted Falls Bulldogs would have a football season. Barring any late changes, which are quite possible in this tumultuous year, the Bulldogs are expected to have a shortened, six-game regular season against such Southwestern Conference opponents as Midview, Avon, North Olmsted, North Ridgeville, Amherst and Avon Lake.

The uncertainty of this football season also comes at a time when the Southwestern Conference is in the midst of a shakeup. Longtime members North Olmsted and Westlake announced early this year they intend to join the Great Lakes Conference next year.

Lakewood made the same move in time for the current school year. Meanwhile, Elyria announced early this year it will join the Southwestern Conference next year.

The situation was much different half a century ago in 1970. That was in the midst of a 22-year stretch beginning in 1964 in which the Southwestern Conference remained stable with eight members: Avon Lake, Bay Village, Fairview, Medina, North Olmsted, Olmsted Falls, Rocky River and Westlake. That didn't change until 1986, when Medina departed for the Pioneer Conference and Amherst took its place. Since then, the Southwestern Conference has gone through a series of changes.



This poster was put out in 1970 by the Cleveland Press for its Hi-Pix Contest. It is courtesy of Susan (Kalamajka) Ramer and the Kalamajka family

North Olmsted, 22 to 15 to Rocky River, 37 to 14 to Fairview, 24 to 17 to Medina, eight to six to Avon Lake and 36 to zero to Bay Village, the Bulldogs found some magic on Halloween and beat Westlake 34 to 14. After experiencing almost two full seasons of losses, the crowd at that game erupted and stormed the field as though the Bulldogs had just won the Super Bowl.

It was a memorable evening in Olmsted Falls 50 years ago.

Thanks go to Susan (Kalamajka) Ramer and the Kalamajka family for sharing the 1970 football poster and the memories it evokes.

In the 1970 football season, not only was the conference stable, but its schedule had been set for months. As a poster put out by the *Cleveland Press* for its Hi-Pix contest shows, Olmsted Falls began that season September 6 with non-conference games against Strongsville and Brooklyn followed by games against every other Southwestern Conference team, ending on October 31, Halloween. That year, the games still were played on the field near the former high school along Mapleway Drive because the field at the new high school had not been built yet.

Back then, Olmsted Falls did not have a strong football team, but it had a good excuse. It was the only AA high school in a conference filled with AAA teams. In other words, Olmsted Falls had the fewest students of any school in the conference.

In 1969, the Bulldogs were winless. In 1970, they did a bit better. After losing 32 to 14 to Strongsville, 21 to 14 to Brooklyn, 20 to six to

Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include a story about the benefits and disadvantages Olmsted residents had in living with the railroads.

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 the Angelina's Pizza in Olmsted Falls and the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.

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