

# JOURNAL

Edited by Alyson Borgerding

OUR PEOPLE, OUR TIME, OUR STATE

## A FUTURE IN HISTORY

HOW A SMALL FARMING COMMUNITY STAYED INTACT BY  
BECOMING A MUSEUM — OF SORTS.

ELIZABETH TOWNSHIP IS A MUSEUM WITHOUT THE ADMISSION FEE, THE GUIDES, THE CAFETERIA OR THE plaques explaining the exhibits. That's because the township's entire 20,000 acres of farmland and farmhouses *is* the museum: In March 1997, it was put on the National Register of Historic Places.

Only about 500 families are scattered throughout the township, which lies north of Dayton and west of Springfield near Interstates 75 and 70 in Miami County. The museum — er, acreage — is about as close to a rural nineteenth-century farm community as anybody will see on the eve of the twenty-first century. But Elizabeth Township narrowly missed going the way of many of Ohio's farming communities. A few years ago, an interstate highway was scheduled to be paved over the land — until it was stopped by Carol Mumford and about a dozen residents.

Mumford first heard the news at a county farm bureau meeting one autumn evening in 1994. The Miami Valley Regional Planning Committee wanted to link I-675 to I-75, swallowing up Elizabeth Township in the process. The freeway would bring more people to the area, Mumford figured, and that could mean a greater need for retail and housing developments.

It was then that Mumford and a dozen neighbors formed the Elizabeth Township Preservation Committee to protect the township's seven one-room schoolhouses that still stand, the largest barn east of the Mississippi — a mammoth monument built in the early twentieth century — and a house that was used as a station in the Underground Railroad. Mumford also rallied area residents and produced an anti-interstate petition with 2,000 signatures. The Miami Valley Regional Planning Committee retreated, promising to take the freeway off their 20-year plan. But, Mumford recalls, "we just kind of looked around the township, and we thought, 'We've got beautiful homes, we've



ELIZABETH TOWNSHIP residents, including Carol Mumford (second from right in front row) stand in front of the township's oldest house, built in 1812.

got farms, we've got generations here, and this could happen again. What can we do to protect ourselves?"

### Towns *on* Display

**Elizabeth Township** is the largest area in Ohio to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places, but it isn't the only community. Three other notable neighborhoods include:

**Addyston** The houses and stores were built by Addyston Pipe & Steel. The Hamilton County company no longer exists, but its legacy, the town, still retains an 1890s flavor.

**Shaker Heights** The affluent Cleveland suburb of more than 2,000 buildings has been largely untouched since the 1920s.

**Kelleys Island** The entire island is a remarkably intact example of a small Lake Erie community, circa late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.



GLACIAL GROOVES  
on Kelleys Island

Mumford had heard of the National Register of Historic Places and hoped that if Elizabeth Township could be put on the list, then perhaps the land would be protected from the freeway — forever. But despite the land's historical stature and inclusion on the register, the Ohio Historic Preservation Office's Glenn Harper warns, "the National Register by itself does not prevent that highway from being constructed, and in fact, it would not surprise me to see the same

proposal come up again.” If it does, it will be log-jammed in paperwork for years — no federally funded project, such as an interstate, can be built on historically recognized land without a review process.

The township hasn’t changed much since it was put on the register — that’s the idea, of course. But there does seem to be a new sense of pride among the people. Mumford and a friend are writing a book about the township’s history and signs announce to visitors that the township is a National Historic site.

The township is hardly a tourist Mecca, but visitors do come to see the 1818 grist mill and its nearby 1831 sawmill. Both were built and operated by Carol Mumford’s ancestors, and today, she and her husband, Dewey, give group tours.

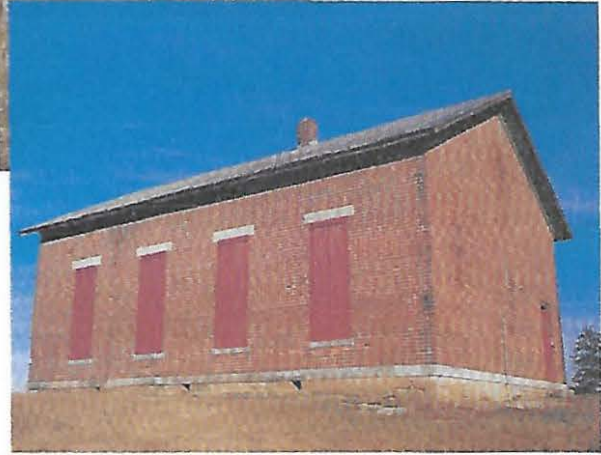
Of course, plastic and concrete mini-malls *still* could overrun Elizabeth Township. “But why would they want to?” wonders Mumford, smiling. “There’s no main road.”

— by Geoff Williams

For information about visiting Elizabeth Township, call Carol or Dewey Mumford at 937/339-3093. Group tours carry a \$10 admission fee per person; groups of more than 10 are \$7 per person.



**VILLAGE LANDMARKS:**  
The sign welcoming visitors to Elizabeth Township (left) and one of the township’s one-room schoolhouses (below).



Photos by Brian Swartz