

Founded in 1879, Decatur County and communities rich in history

Decatur County serves as the home of the Last Indian Raid on Kansas soil, home to Sappa Park and shelter house, brick streets, antique stores and much more.

The county which was founded in 1879 has changed a lot over the last 128 years, although one thing has remained the same. Decatur County has remained an agriculture community with most people making a living in some way from the land.

Oberlin, which is the county seat, was incorporated as a city in 1885. The city started out with the name Westfield. The city had two stores, a log hotel and blacksmith shop.

When the people of Westfield decided that they wanted to expand they had to buy land from John A. Rodehaver's family who requested the city be named Oberlin, after his hometown in Ohio.

Oberlin was the first place in the county to have a school, court and post office.

Today downtown Oberlin boasts restaurants, a hardware store, antique stores, banks, a jewelry store, clothing store, two drug stores, doctor's offices, implement dealers, beauty shops and more.

At the south end of Main Street is the county museum named for the Last Indian Raid which happened on Sept. 29, 1878.

The raid led by Dull Knife and Little Wolf,

two Northern Cheyenne chiefs happened when a small group and the two chiefs had escaped from an Oklahoma reservation. The tribes, which had been moved there after the Battle of Little Big Horn, wanted to go home.

Thirty-nine settlers were killed, including 18 in Decatur County, before the group was rounded up.

The event is remembered through artifacts at the museum and a monument in Oberlin's cemetery, on U.S. 36.

Although named for the Indian raid, the museum has much more to offer. The museum has 14 historic outbuildings including a country schoolhouse, filling station, sod house, grocery, train depot, blacksmith shop, livery, land office, the old Bohemian Hall, St. Mark's Church, jail, doctor's office and two display buildings.

The museum is growing. In the last six years the board, through donations, has been able to move two buildings, the Bohemian Hall and St. Mark's, in from the country and Norcatur, respectively.

The hall, refurbished with insulation, bathrooms and a kitchen, is available for reunions, dances and meetings. It is used for gymnastics practice each week.

The county, which was named for Commodore Stephen Decatur, a prominent leader in the War of 1812, was created by an act of Legisla-

ture in 1873. Not until Nov. 1, 1879 was a convention of voters held in the county. At that time four men were selected to be the temporary county clerk and commissioners. They served two years and then a special election was held.

At the time Decatur County had 2,561 people living here.

Although Oberlin is at just about the center of the county, Decatur County also includes smaller cities including Jennings, Dresden, Norcatur, Traer, Kanona, Cedar Bluffs and Leoville.

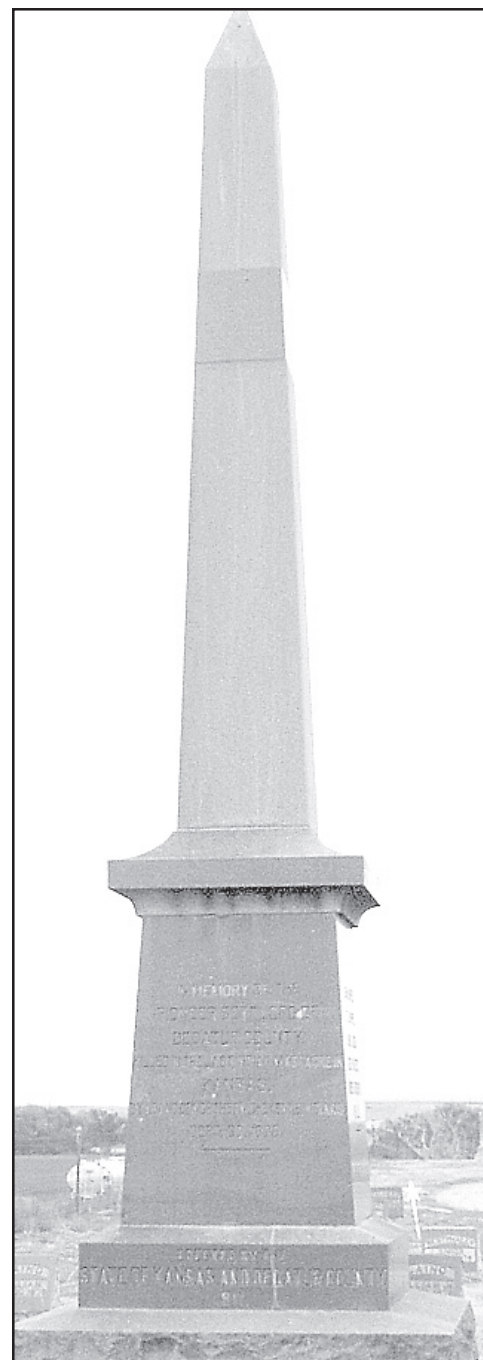
Kids of all ages can get an education in the county. It used to be that there were over 100 country schools that students would walk to. When they got older then they would come to town for high school.

Later the country schools closed, yet Jennings, Norcatur and Oberlin still had elementary and high schools. The schools in both Jennings and Norcatur closed leaving the Oberlin Elementary School and Decatur Community High School.

Visitors and newcomers can find plenty to do in the county from the fair to shows to hunting.

The area has a wide variety of wildlife including both white tail and mule deer, coyotes, pheasants, quail, turkey and bobcats. There are hunting seasons for both deer and birds yearly.

Welcome to Oberlin and Decatur County.



AT THE OBERLIN CITY CEMETERY headstones (above) near the monument (right) remind people of those who were killed in the Last Indian Raid on Kansas soil. — Herald file photos



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