



DOWNTOWN OBERLIN IN 1924 is depicted in a large mural on the west wall of Town Square dining room at the Decatur County Good Samaritan Center. Painted by Jeanette Diederich of Oberlin, it shows many of the original businesses.

derich of Oberlin, it shows many of the original businesses.

— Photos by Anita Hirsch



CAREFULLY TOUCHING up one of the farmstead murals she painted at Decatur County Good Samaritan Center is Artist Jeanette Diederich, above. The Standard Service Station, below, was located at 141 E. Commercial and was owned and operated for many years by P. W. "Bus" Page. It is also on the west wall of the dining room.



Woman brings memories to life with murals

By MARYLOU OLSON

Although an Oberlin woman says she will never be in the art history books, Jeanette Diederich says she hopes she will be remembered for years to come for her works of art.

One of her most recent projects was painting a scene of Penn Avenue in Oberlin from 1924 as a mural on the west wall of the Town Square dining room at Decatur County Good Samaritan Center in Oberlin. It is just one of several she has completed there.

"This mural project at the Good Sam was a feat in itself," Mrs. Diederich said. "It took me 281 hours to complete the north and east walls and a portion of the west wall. I didn't even keep track of the time spent on the 1924 street scene on the west wall, which features cars, a marching band, the land grant office, three-story department store, Hayes Hardware, original street lamps, the old grade school and stand pipe and much more."

The filling station on the west wall brings back memories to many who remember when it was owned and operated by P. W. "Bus" Page, father of Mary Ann Erickson of Oberlin.

Other scenes in the room include scenes from Sappa Park, 1906 Norcatuar, Jennings, Dresden, Kanona, Cedar Bluffs, Leoville and Lyle, the Bohemian Hall, Prairie Chapel, several homesteads, the first sod house in Decatur County, Elephant Rock, St Mark's Lutheran Church, St. John's Lutheran Cemetery and looking over it all is a road leading to Jesus.

"The paintings themselves weren't the most fun," she said, "but watching the faces of the residents as I painted was a real joy. They would come out every day to see what else was done. I miss that part the most. That's who it was really for — the residents. They see their folks' homesteads and they think it's terribly important."

The former Jeanette Wurm, daughter of "Swede" and Iris Wurm, Mrs. Diederich said that she remembers always wanting to draw from a young age up throughout



ST. MARK'S LUTHERAN CHURCH of Norcatuar is painted on one of Jeanette Diederich's murals at the Decatur County Good Samaritan Center.

her senior year in high school. She said her earliest drawings were on the chalkboard at Oberlin Grade School. She said that her teachers liked her drawings so much that they allowed her to draw on the boards and keep them up.

"I really enjoyed drawing horses, but wasn't very good at it," she said. "The one I remember best is the drawing I did of Jesus in Gethsemane."

She carried out her talent in high school when she did all of the drawings and characterizations for the year book her senior year. She also competed when they had a contest for signs for the Last Indian Raid Museum.

"Although I didn't win the contest, the museum called and asked me to do the four Last Indian Raid signs and I was paid \$25," she said.

Other works have included paintings for the Decatur County Fair and other events on downtown windows, which required her working on the inside and printing the letters backwards.

She said that after she graduated in 1956, she desperately wanted to go to art school, but money-wise,

that was out of the question. She said she married at 19 and had four children. They lived in Salina and she attended Vo-Tech school in 1970. While in school, she also worked for a newspaper production company. She majored in commercial art during the day and took watercolor classes at night, in addition to caring for her family.

During the past 30-plus years she has done many paintings, which included demolition derby cars, oil paintings for private owners, a commissioned painting for the Smolan, Kan., church, penciled drawings and untold number of paintings, which have ranged from homesteads to Hawaiian sunsets on objects, most of which were gifts.

Besides her love for painting, Mrs. Diederich decorates cakes and bakes phenomenal dinner rolls and cinnamon rolls.

At present, she said she has two murals commissioned in Oberlin — the United Church and the Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

Of Mrs. Diederich's talent, she says, "God created my hands and for my gift of drawing I am very thankful to Him."