

County boasts of antiques, Indian raid

By **KIMBERLY DAVIS**

The Oberlin Herald

Full of antique stores, activities and small town charm, Oberlin, the county seat, is nestled in the heart of the Sappa Valley in Decatur County.

With businesses all along U.S. 36 through Oberlin, the downtown is just a short jaunt off the highway with more businesses, restaurants and other attractions to offer including the Last Indian Raid Museum.

The museum is named for the last Indian raid on Kansas soil led by Dull Knife and Little Wolf, two Northern Cheyenne chiefs, on Sept. 29, 1878.

The two war chiefs and a small group of men, women and children escaped from an Oklahoma reservation. The people, who had been moved there after the Battle of Little Big Horn, wanted to return home to the Black Hills.

No one knows why the fugitives started to kill settlers but before the soldiers caught up with them, 39 settlers were killed, including 18 in Decatur County.

At the museum the raid is remembered through artifacts and a video showing the route of the Indians up from Oklahoma into Decatur and Rawlins counties and into Nebraska.

The museum includes a sod house, church, jail, land office, old Bohemian Hall, former St. Mark's Lutheran Church, the main building, Addleman schoolhouse, filling station, grocery store, train depot, blacksmith shop, livery, print shop and gift shop.

At the Oberlin Cemetery, off U.S. 36 east of town, a monument stands tall in remembrance of the raid. Surrounding the monument are the graves of the men and boys, who were killed in the raid.

Recently the museum board was able to purchase the building to the north of the old office, allowing more space for genealogy storage and a new front office in the new building.



ON THE BRICK STREETS, a Koshare Indian Dancer showed off his moves during the 50th Anniversary celebration of the Last Indian Raid Museum in October.

— Photo by Kimberly Davis

Decatur County formed April 1874 started with just a few families living in dugouts and soddies.

In 1875 Oberlin became a city. In 1881, the U.S. Land Office opened, bringing more people into the city

and county.

Over the years Decatur County and Oberlin have changed, as has Main Street in Oberlin.

Today downtown boasts a women's clothing store, antique shops, a grocery, two drug stores, a hardware store, a jewelry store, several banks and lending institutions, real estate offices, a flower shop, a coffee shop, implement dealers and a newspaper.

With the red brick streets Oberlin has adopted the slogan "Where Friends Meet on Brick Streets."

People out shopping or walking often stop to talk to friends, catching up on news and family.

Around 35 years ago far-sighted merchants put canopies up over the downtown sidewalks.

Today, people can shop in the rain and snow, remaining dry, protected by the canopies.

Music fills the air from speakers under the canopies. People can look in the store windows while listening to a variety of tunes from seasonal to country to modern to oldies and even local artists.

Another attraction on Main Street besides the Last Indian Raid Museum is the LandMark Inn and Oberlin Mercantile. The building was formerly a bank and courthouse, before owner Gary Anderson, bought the building, built the addition on the back and opened it as a bed and breakfast. Mr. Anderson said he started work on the main building in 1990 and opened in 1996.

Visitors stay in rooms decorated with Victorian furniture and antiques. Mr. Anderson serves lunch in the Teller Room from Monday through Friday, dinner Thursday through Saturday night and holds brunch buffets several Sundays a month.

He also serves an international buffet from Mexican to French to Chinese food for dinner one Tuesday a month.

At the intersection of U.S. 36 and U.S. 83 sits The Gateway civic center, which was built in the early '90s. The town pulled together to raise money to build the center, which is where the Oberlin Arts and Humanities Commission brings in singers, instrumentalists, artists and comedians to the Morgan Theater.

The Gateway arena is place for home shows, farm equipment expos, dinners for 50 to several hundred or just a quick game of basketball. A walking track with exercise equipment provides a bad weather spot for health-minded citizens.

In June the museum hosts the annual Summerfest and Car Show downtown, drawing in antique vehicles from Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado.

During the first weekend in October the museum holds Mini Sapa Day to commemorate the opening of the facility and Indian raid, with a pancake feed, vendors, games and free entrance to the museum.

The same weekend, the Mini-Sappa Antique Thresher and Engine group holds Mini-Sappa Days at the fairground.

During the two-day event the group demonstrates how things used to be done on the farm and shows off cars, trucks and equipment.

Norcatour, which is just off of U.S. 36 on the Norton/Decatur County line, claims fame being the hometown of Eldon Auker, a former major-league pitcher who struck out Babe Ruth. There is a park in the heart of the town named for him.

Jennings, south of U.S. 36 on K-383, is a Czech immigrant community.

Each year the city holds the annual Fireman's Fun Day, with a parade, games, food and entrance to the Czech Museum. The money raised goes to the volunteer fire department in the city.



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