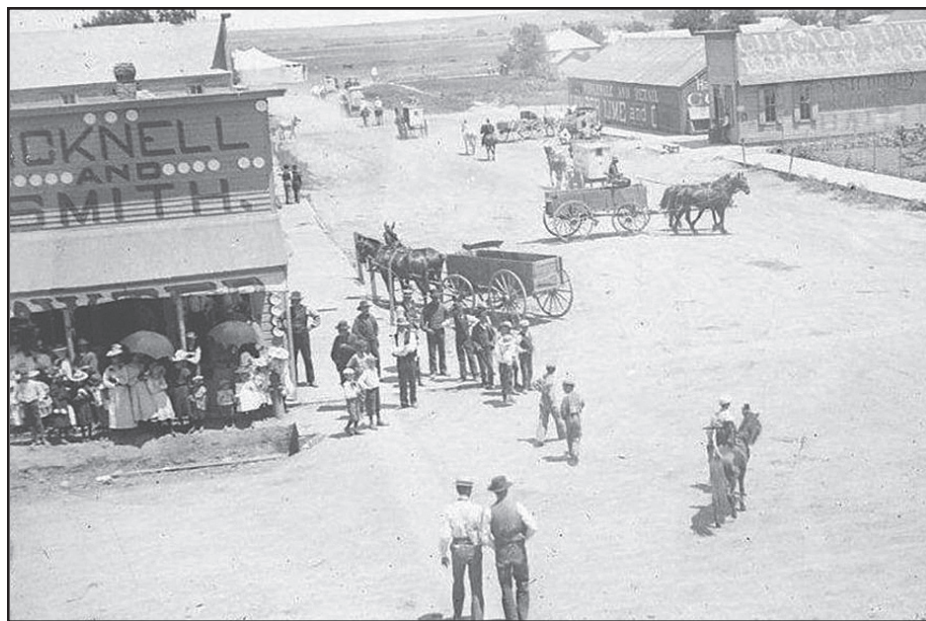


# Oberlin City grew



**OBERLIN ALLEN**, above with bicycle, was the first child born in Oberlin. His parents were Mr. and Mrs. J.W. (Cap) Allen. Early downtown Oberlin (below) showed the horse and buggy as the main mode of transportation.



Nestled in the Sappa Valley sits the City of Oberlin which is the Decatur County Seat.

While the town started out slowly, it quickly grew with businesses built and opened and a lot of firsts for the city.

In April 1874, the north 100 acres of the Rodehaver's settlement was platted and the town was named Westfield.

A year later, the first wedding was held when Calvin Gay, 65 married Maggie Robinson, 15.

In 1877, the town's first blacksmith had opened and the first school house was built.

Charles A. Stowell was the first postmaster at the Sappa post office. He was succeeded by John A. Rodehaver.

In 1878 the town's name was changed to Oberlin. That spring G. Webb Bertram opened the first law office. In the same year the first frame house was built by George Colby.

A.W. Bariteau, the first doctor, built the first drug store in 1878.

Oberlin was on its way, with businesses opening every year and the town continuing to grow.

By spring, a second drug store had opened, run by Maddox and Sons.

On Jan. 7, 1879 Oberlin Earl Allen was the town's first white child born. His father, Capt. Justin W. Allen, was the city's first mayor.

That same year the Rodehavers built the Oberlin House and R.A. Marks put in the first lumber yard.

As Oberlin continued to grow and people moved in, the first county government was organized.

Decatur County was formed in 1879, with the first election the following year. The Bank of Oberlin was started in 1886 by Mr. Marks.

The Decatur County history book states that as late as 1880 buffalo meat could still be purchased in most of any quantity for seven cents a pound.

"As the country became more thickly settled, the buffalo hunters pushed farther and farther west in following the diminishing herds. In the wake of the hunters, another industry was born, an industry which entailed long, hard hours for little pay, but an industry which enabled many settlers to remain on their claims during the lean years of drouth and adversities."

That work was collecting the buffalo bones

that had been left behind by people who killed just for the hides.

According to the history book that work brought hundreds of dollars to the county.

"During the drouth of 1880 teams were on the trails leading to the railroad with loads of bones every day. These bones were sold for \$8 per ton. The bones were shipped east and used for fertilizer."

Another lucrative job was catching and selling the wild horses that roamed the prairies. The horses were shipped to the eastern market and sold as high as \$15 to \$25 per head.

The book states that as the land was broken the wild horses were driven out.

"The Board of County commissioners passed a resolution on April 9, 1880, known as the 'Herd Law', prohibiting all meat cattle, horses, mules, asses, swine and sheep from running at large. Decatur was passing the first stages of the frontier. Cattlemen were giving way to the agriculturist."

In 1881, the U.S. Land Office arrived, which helped the county population continue to grow. All homestead claims had to be registered at the office.

While there were many saloons, two drug stores, lawyers and more, there was still no church. The first one to be opened was Presbyterian. The church was dedicated on August 9, 1883.

By 1885, Oberlin was incorporated as a city and there was a legal notice printed *The Eye*, a weekly newspaper.

It's been 125 years since the incorporation of Oberlin and things have changed a lot.

People have moved in and others have moved out. Main Street swelled with businesses.

Some survived while others were not able to make it.

Homes built only 15 years after the city was incorporated stand today, many with large porches and lots of history.

Walking down Main Street people can see the history including seeing spots where coal used to be dumped into the basements of store fronts.

Pictures from 125 years ago show dirt streets, no canopies and wooden sidewalks.

Since the beginning of 2010, community members have celebrated the past 125 years of history or the Quasiquintennial.



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