



THE BANK OF OBERLIN (above) at the corner of Hall Street and Penn Avenue on a busy day in the early years in Oberlin. The building, completed 125 years ago, now houses the LandMark Inn and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



SETTING A TABLE in the Teller Room at the LandMark Inn in Oberlin, was owner Gary Anderson. He entertained with a party recently to honor the 125th anniversary of the building, which was built as the Bank of Oberlin in 1886.

LandMark Inn celebrates 125 years with party

By MARY LOU OLSON

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One of Oberlin's oldest buildings, now the LandMark Inn, was built 125 years ago, in 1886, by pioneer developer R.A. Marks, and owner Gary Anderson marked the occasion with a "birthday party" for the building earlier this month.

The historical significance of the structure is tied closely to the development of Oberlin, according to research done on downtown Oberlin by Mr. Anderson. Robert Alexander Marks, a Canadian, moved here in the fall of 1878 from Beloit, just after the Last Indian Raid. He purchased a mercantile store located at the site of the former Green Lantern Cafe at 177 S. Penn Ave. The store, the second business in Oberlin, had been owned by Small H. Bullard, but housed the Van Wormer Grocery.

Dr. Bariteau had a small stock of drugs over "Bullard & Wilson" at the time of the raid. Bullard sold his stock to J.W. Allen and Sons and then left with many others following the 1878 raid.

Mr. Marks began a mercantile and lumber yard at that site and carried a line of general merchandise. The lumber yard extended to the corner of Hall and Penn. He opened the Bank of Oberlin in 1880 at the mercantile site, then began building the building on the corner at 189 S. Penn in the late spring of 1886. The bank moved into the structure in September 1886.

A story in *The Oberlin Herald* on July 8, 1886 said, "Work has been delayed somewhat on account of running out of brick." Then the paper reported on July 22, "Work completed on Bank of Oberlin and the interior furnishings are being rapidly pushed forward." By Sept. 2, the newspaper reported, "The office furniture for the Bank of Oberlin has arrived and is being put in place."

The building was described in *The Oberlin Eye* on Sept. 23, 1886, after its completion, "This is the prettiest building in the city and elicits words of praise from the many who see the city. Such buildings, beautiful, permanent, durable, are of incalculable value to Oberlin."

Although there were several land offices at the time, it is recorded that the U.S. Land Office moved into the former Bank of Oberlin building when the bank moved to its new corner building in October 1886.

The same newspaper reported, "The Oberlin Land Office is overrun



HOLIDAY SHOPPERS MET at the historic LandMark Inn for lunch in the Teller Room earlier this month. Woodwork and the ceiling wainscoting are all original to the building, says owner Gary Anderson. — Herald staff photo by Carolyn Plotts

with work, and the weary officials sigh as they note that the work increases."

In a special promotional issue published in 1886, *The Oberlin Opinion* called Oberlin the "Queen City of Northwest Kansas."

Financial disaster led to the closing of the bank and a takeover by the county. On Feb. 10, 1896, after the "Bust of 1894," a proposal to Edward Smith was to settle the county's claim against bank for back taxes with the county to pay \$6,000 cash and up to \$4,000 in dividends from the sale of bank assets.

On April 16, 1896, the commissioners accepted the building in lieu of a \$4,000 settlement. Mr. Marks stuck around, later serving as Oberlin's postmaster and as Decatur County register of deeds. Marks Avenue is named for him.

Mr. Anderson said the building became the Decatur County courthouse. It remained a government facility for more than 30 years, until 1927, when the present courthouse was completed.

Over the years, the building also housed the town's telephone exchange office, an art studio, and the accounting firm of Arthur J. Dowling. For many years, the north building, now occupied by the Oberlin Mercantile Co., was occupied by Olson Shoe Shop, owned and operated by Nathan and Effie Olson, parents of Esther Carlson and Dorothy Jackson of Oberlin.

In 1990, Mr. Anderson bought the derelict building from the Dowling estate. A complete restoration

culminated in May 1996, when the LandMark Inn opened as a bed and breakfast and restaurant.

Workmen brought the building back to its original splendor, duplicating original Victorian period details. The east room of the inn's bedrooms on the second floor is called "The Judge's Chamber," since it was occupied by the judge when the building served as a courthouse.

An antique collector for many years, Mr. Anderson has furnished all seven bedrooms with Victorian pieces.

Since the building formerly housed an early land office and R.A. Marks built the structure, Mr. Anderson said, he named his new business the LandMark Inn.

The business also features a retail facility, Oberlin Mercantile, next door, along with the restaurant in the Teller Room. Amenities offered to guests include breakfast and access to a sauna, an exercise room and a parlor with a fireplace.

The building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1995 for its architectural significance as an Italianate commercial building, said Mr. Anderson, so the restoration had to meet strict criteria. The only things truly original to the interior, however, are the woodwork and the wainscoting on the ceilings.

To learn more about the business, go to www.landmarkinn.com or call (785) 475-2340.