

Decatur

Canopies, brick streets visiting antique stores,



A statue of a pioneer family stands guard facing all four directions at the top of Penn Avenue in Oberlin.

Nestled in the heart of the Sappa Valley, Oberlin the seat of Decatur County, is just a short jaunt off U.S. 36 and filled with history, antique stores and a thriving downtown.

The county formed 134 years ago in April 1874 started with 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.

Decatur County and Oberlin started to boom, with more people moving in and businesses opening. Main Street offered stores, shops, hotels and an opera house.

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 and a newspaper. With the redbrick 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.

The Last Indian Raid Museum sits at the south end of the main street, Penn Avenue.

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.

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 through Decatur and Rawlins counties and into Nebraska.

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.

The museum continues to grow with two buildings moved in the last seven years. The first one was the Bohemian Hall from south of Oberlin and the second St. Mark's Lutheran Church from Norcatour.

The museum has refurbished the hall, an old lodge building and it can be rented out for reunions, dances and meetings.

Up the street 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. Visitors stay in rooms decorated in Victorian furniture and antiques.

History is all around Oberlin, even on the buildings downtown.

On top of the Hirsch and Pratt law offices there are two tombstones. The markers, which face east, can be seen from the street. The building was once

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