

HISTORY AND HERITAGE FROM GUEST COLUMNISTS

Southwest City Corner Cafe and More

GUEST COLUMNIST
Katrina Hine

Treasure can be found in unexpected places, often hiding in plain sight along the main streets of McDonald County.

The McDonald County Historical Society hopes to reveal those treasures hidden throughout the county. This issue takes a journey to Southwest City where business owners have taken pride in maintaining some of the older buildings on Main Street.

Built on the rough and tumble edge of Indian Territory, the town emerged around 1842 with the first settlement. It is a wonder that Southwest City exists at all since much of the town succumbed to two major fires. The first in 1892, destroying 12 buildings and another in the 1900's, burning four blocks of Main Street.

David and Cheryl Wetzel love Southwest City, so investing in their community is second nature. The Wetzel's own two other businesses in the community but Corner Café & More was a dream becoming reality.



The Sanborn Map Company documented structures throughout the town for fire insurance purposes, revealing in 1894 that the site was home to a pool hall with a barber shop in the tiny alley structure next to the building. Bertha Nichols recalled from her childhood that the

little alley structure at one time even housed a bear.

This location was one of the few to have insurance, allowing it to be rebuilt when fire destroyed much of the town. The old maps show a vacant building in 1902 and just a lot by 1914. According to the 1970 Centennial edition, "Southwest City at 100", prohibition may have played a part in the vacancy, going from Honey Creek Saloon to the site of a town well and hitching posts.



O.L. Wilson built the current building in 1922, operating a drugstore until his retirement in 1949. His son-in-law Bob Teabow ran the store until it was sold to Glen Robinson in 1961.

The Wetzel's purchased the building on the corner of Main and Cherokee in 1995, with hopes of restoring the interior and opening something unique in the community. Health challenges seemed to interrupt their dreams for the building until one day David said, "We aren't getting any younger.

If we want to do this, let's

get started!" Work began in October 2014, surprisingly the old metal ceiling was in good condition and the lath and plaster walls required minimal repairs before fresh paint breathed new life into the open room.

Cheryl has gathered artifacts over the years, many with ties to Southwest City. The original display counter returned to its first home. Various items, such as chairs from the old Queen Mercantile shoe department hang on the wall, as does an old shotgun from a 1930's robbery donated by Bill Ralston's son. An old pew from the Baptist Church sits along one wall while the original Rexall Drug sign and scores of pictures from Southwest City grace other walls.

"I like history," Cheryl states, "If I had a lot of money I would restore every old building in town." Old pictures featuring each of their parents add a personal touch. An old railroad lantern hangs on the wall that belonged to her Dad who did railroad demolition.

"I love Southwest City and like other communities in the county, it has a lot to offer, especially if more old buildings were restored." Travelers have come from Garfield, Ark. and Tulsa, Okla. just to see the restored old building. The carefully selected gifts

add to the charm of the café, which boasts deli soups, sandwiches and fresh pastries. As new life gives meaning to old structures, it also brings new interest among younger generations seeking a link to the past.

