

# A mercantile for a new century

## The Williams Company Store brings old and new together under one roof

By Janet Preus

janet.preus@fergusfallsjournal.com

Nearly 100 years ago a new mercantile store opened in the thriving community of Ottertail.

Now a more contemporary variety of goods fill the shelves and the building has seen improvements, but The Williams Company Store has preserved delightful bits of history for its customers.

"This is where the onions were stored," proprietor Pam Williams said, pointing to a corner by the front window. "You can still smell them."

A black circle in the aged wooden plank floor defines the precise location of the old barber chair.

A rise in the floor was deemed too interesting to be a flaw, and survived renovation, begun in 2001.

"An older Ottertail resident came in to see if the bump in the floor was still there."

It is, and the spot where the pickle barrels sat is a darker, richer color.

Her curiosity piqued by an old photo, Williams stripped the siding off on the outside of the building to expose the 100-year-old boards of the original storefront.

"I saw a picture and I figured the old "Gunsmoke" look was underneath it," said Williams.

The original mercantile offered an undertaker's ser-



Journal photo by Janet Preus

Owner Pam Williams offers a contemporary line of merchandise in the historic Brutlag's Mercantile building in Ottertail. The store has been in operation there almost constantly since opening in 1904.

### OTTERTAIL

vices in the back, and a coffin showroom upstairs.

"...which is now my guestroom," she said.

Williams has turned the entire upper floor into an apartment.

Customers today enter under decorative kites floating above the front door. The store also offers unique jewelry, metal baskets and plant holders, hand-cut glycerin soaps, table accessories, and more.

There are candles of every size from fat pillars to skinny "les petites folies," for a spectacular birthday cake.

Gourmet foods and all manner of kitchen equipment to use them is, appropriately enough, displayed near the coffee shop counter.

While gourmands browse

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Company Store

the cabernet biscuits, killer mudd brownie mixes, or pickled asparagus, others may prefer to dive into a hand-dipped ice cream cone, or tasty sandwich, or sip a fresh-ground coffee.

Williams is familiar with retail and the area; she owned End of the Rainbow, a Fergus Falls business, from 1975 to 1985.