



Sue Scott Smith
and the

Emma Chase Café

"I've lived many places in the United States, but nothing has ever compared favorably, in the long haul, to Chase County," says Sue Scott Smith, owner of the Emma Chase Café. Sue was born in Chase County and raised in Cottonwood Falls. "I was gone for 37 years, and returned in 1999. We took over operation of the cafe in 1998, with a friend in charge."

Emma Chase is a fictional character created by the first two girls who originally opened the café in 1982. While on vacation in Missouri, Sue had her photograph taken in costume at the Old-Time Studios and let her photograph assume the Emma identity. "When folks ask if I am Emma Chase, I normally answer, 'No, but I have the hat and the dress and I can get there from here.'"

Next door to the café is the Emma Chase General Store where they sell a variety of jams, jellies, relishes, fudge, jewelry, kitchen towels and dishes. "Everything in a jar in the store is made by my staff and myself in the kitchen at the Emma Chase Café," Sue says. "And it all began with the apple butter. It's a secret family recipe!" The displays are a collection of antique cabinets, tables and an old stove, giving the place a homey feel.

At the end of the cobble-stoned Main Street is the historic Chase County courthouse, which overlooks the activities in town. Every Friday night music is performed by local and visiting musicians from Wichita, Kansas City, and as far away as Australia. "The music began the first Friday night in October of 1999," Sue says.

She and several friends were reminiscing about the barn and platform dances and music from the past. "One day [my friend] Charley said to me, 'For a quarter, I'd put a sign up sheet in the barber shop to see who'd be interested in coming to a jam session.'" So, Sue took a quarter from her pocket. On that first Friday night 12 musicians showed up and 24 people came to listen.

The next month they made soup and hosted a serve-yourself meal. It grew from there into a "Friday Night Catfish Fry at the Emma Chase Café." They make music every Friday, with the exception of Rodeo weekend. "We play outside when the weather permits, and we're inside in the wintertime," Sue says. There's a Hamburger Party every Wednesday, Antique Auto Breakfast on the second Sunday, and a Fly-In at the Cottonwood Falls Airport the fourth Saturday.

Her entrepreneurial spirit doesn't stop there. She's been hosting a Biker Breakfast at the café since 1999. She's involved in the Flint Hills Folklife Festival, the Prairie Fire Festival, the monthly Contra Dances, Second Saturday events, Chase County Christmas, Cottonwood 200 Bicycle ride and the Chase County Broomweed Festival, which follows the Winfield Blue Grass Festival so you can "wean yourself slowly" from the music.

"A couple of us locally decided that we didn't want to participate in the recession, and the Contra Dances and the Second Saturday events needed a permanent home. So, when



the courthouse offices vacated the old municipal building, I leased the building from the city," Sue says. They advertised and selected several Flint Hills artists and crafts people who had something interesting to offer. The plan was to provide a business space to folks who wanted a small business, but couldn't otherwise afford a location on Main Street, so the cooperative idea was born. They each work a couple of days a month so they don't have to hire employees, and pay a small flat monthly fee to cover rent and utilities. "It's a business on a shoestring, but it works!" Sue says. They sell antiques, quilts, clothing and other needlework, jewelry, woodcrafts and much more.

Sue has four sons who all reside in Texas. "I've taught quilting in several different places. I've owned my own quarter horse business, and worked as a secretary and bookkeeper. I went back to the university to become a Registered Nurse, and worked as a nurse in Texas for several years, as well as the Director of Nursing in a long-term health care facility. When I retired I came back home to Kansas to operate the café."

As a child, Sue was enamored with the merchants who came to town every morning to open their shops in Cottonwood Falls. She lived a half-block from downtown and watched their coming and going. "I'm thoroughly enjoying being a business person on Main Street," she says. "And I love to promote Chase County."

She also enjoys reading and sewing. "I can't resist beautiful fabric. I must touch it. And any kind of chocolate is a very close second," she said. 🍫

—B.D. THARP

For information about the Emma Chase Café and events in Chase County visit www.EmmaChaseCafe.com.