Olwell takes time out to think about current, possible projects in future

**Artist travels, captures Cajun heritage**

By Becky Tilson  
*Staff Writer*

Since Sue Olwell moved to Carencro 15 years ago, she has traveled the back roads and bayous of Acadiana photographing and painting visual landmarks of the Cajun heritage.

The photographs mainly serve as detailed maps for the mixed-media painting style she has developed over the past two-and-a-half years.

During that time she transformed a lifetime of sketching into a self-taught style which she has used to record most of the historic landmarks around Carencro.

Her work is described as “mixed media” because she details her watercolor paintings with pen and ink.

“I’m completely untrained,” Olwell said. “It just works for me.”

With a degree in home economics, Olwell taught kindergarten for 15 years in Miami, Florida.

But her mother always encouraged her to study art because of her talent for drawing.

“I just didn’t think it was a way to make a living,” she said.

Without setting out to do so, Olwell has begun to sell her watercolor paintings of old houses, barns and churches.

“I love studying the history of the old families here. That’s what got me started painting. The history here is so rich.”

Sue Olwell

“I’d been painting just for pleasure and I had a roomful of pictures. My friend from New England said, ‘Let me take these home and sell them.’ And she did,” Olwell said.

When Olwell began painting old barns and houses she also began to study the history of the old Cajun families and their culture.

“I love studying the history of the old families here. That’s what got me started painting,” she said.

The history here is so rich.”

Olwell says she has to “ration herself to paint four days and take care of the domestic front the other three.”

She and Jim, her husband of 39 years, use some of his time home from work offshore to travel the countryside photographing new subjects for Olwell’s paintings.

“Of all that, I guess the sketch is the most time consuming,” she said.

“Putting the paint on is easy,” Olwell said, “but the sketch may take several days to complete.”