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This painting was found along a road in Wichita and it was painted by Kristen Wagner in Liberal around 1981. The Wichita woman who has the painting wants to return it to the artist or her family. Courtesy photo

By LARRY PHILLIPS

• Leader & Times

Everyone loves a mystery, so the saying goes, and one woman in Wichita has embarked on trying to find a Liberal artist or someone in her family – all because of a painting found in a Wichita ditch.

The mystery started last November when Shirley Cummins was visited by her sister in Wichita.

“When my sister was here Thanksgiving, she was driving down Rock Road in Derby, and found the painting laying on the side of the road,” Cummins said. “She brought it back to my house, and I decided to try and find the owner or the family so that I could return it to them.”

The painting had writing on the back of the canvas and was in good condition.

“It’s Kristen Wagner’s painting,” Cummins said. “Thank goodness there was very little damage to it.”

There were other clues on the back of the piece.

“There was an entry form for the 1981 Kansas Art commission competition,” Cummins said. “It also had her high school, that she was a junior, and her principal and art teacher’s names.

“In trying to get in touch with the high school, I found out that the high school had moved because it wasn’t the same address as what was on the entry form,” she added.

Since Liberal High School relocated to its current site in 1983, Kristen would have painted the piece at the old high school at Sixth Street, between Lincoln and Grant.

If anyone knows how to locate Kristen or the Wagner family, they can contact editor Larry Phillips at the Leader & Times at 626-0840.

“I really would like to get it back to her or her family,” Cummins said.

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