
Mike and Gunilda Delaney
outside of Lutheran Church Ranch house

Kurt Kruger and Warner Kruger in their grain field (1951)
Introduction

Six townships comprise the Blakeslee, Staff, Welter, Edgewater area. Today casual reference to the "Blakeslee area" or the "Blakeslee school bus route" may indicate the entire general area. In the days when the area was first homesteaded, however, each community was distinct with its own post office, schools and community spirit.

Twenty-five years before the large influx of homesteaders, the entire area had been open range used primarily by the D-S (Davis-Hauser-Stuart) Ranch which had established its headquarters in 1880 on the headwaters of Ford Creek, 20 miles to the west. According to Granville Stuart in his book, Pioneering in Montana, the D-S ran 12,000 cattle on their range east of the Judith Mountains in 1883. This was all to change with the passage of the Enlarged Homestead Act in 1909.

Blakeslee

"So, what's this country look like?" the rapt listener inquired. "After all, Montana's a long way from Minnesota, and it'd have to be something for me to move my family that far from home."

Bill Rowland must have just shaken his head and grinned. "It's a land like no other, Dan — country a man can wrestle with, sink his teeth into — maybe win maybe lose." Dan frowned, so Bill continued, "At first glance, the land looks flat, but there are coulees, draws, hills and creeks hidden among the flats. The place has a rugged beauty all its own. I followed a rimrock that drops off into a natural basin. Another ridge covered with pines and cedar runs parallel to it farther north. There are a few good creeks, too."

"I'm a farmer, Bill. What about the soil — is it any good?"

"From what I could tell, the soil must be fertile. The grass looks good. Just sink your plow in, turn that sagebrush under, and watch the wheat grow." Now it was Dan's turn to grin.

So the talk began around the Minnesota area. and by 1910. Bill Rowland, who had homesteaded on Bear Creek, had convinced Dan Sommerfield, Pierce and Nick Wirzfeld, Lewis Insande, Jacob Kelzer, Herb Baker and Roy Greenfield to move their families to virgin land north and west of Lewistown. The early homesteaders must have surveyed the vast sweep of land with mixed emotions.

There was not much water, no trees to speak of, and few neighbors. But there were miles of relatively flat land, clean air, and a chance to begin a new life. They rolled up their sleeves, unloaded their wagons, and went to work.

First, a place to live was needed by the newcomers. Some used the native sod with its century's old web of roots to build their homes. Most, however, hauled lumber and tar paper from Lewistown, Montana, to build the small and unlovely shacks that soon dotted the area.

These would have to do until time and a crop permitted...
improvements. The elements were the friend and foe: dry months, sub-zero weeks and an occasional rainy day, but always the wind.

By 1912 a number of families from Minnesota had joined the growing community, giving it the name, Minnesota Bench.

On May 27, 1914, a post office and grocery store was started in the Charles Blakeslee home, giving the community its present name. The post office moved from home to home, depending on who was the current postmaster. The mail route ran three times a week from Grassrange to Blakeslee and then on to Staff. At first the mail was hauled by horse and wagon. Supplies as well as an occasional passenger were on board. Some of the early day mail carriers were Henry Neumann, Floyd Harris, Ray Fleharty, Frank Larn, Jim Spencer, and George Mutch. The last postmaster was Mrs. Henry Freburg, when the post office closed in 1937. The grocery store’s location also traveled from house to house with Jake Strait being the last to operate one.

The homesteaders weren’t long in learning that water was a precious thing to them. There were creeks: Duck Creek, Fords Creek, Big and Little Bear, Big Box Elder Creek and Little Box Elder. Little Box Elder Creek was also known as Brick Yard Creek. Its clay banks farther west had supplied bricks for Ft. Maginnis. However, the creeks weren’t always running, drinkable, or near ones’ homestead. These people were dryland farmers, relying on rain for their crops and gardens. Water for stock and household use had to be hauled or saved in cisterns.

John Grindy’s and William Wilke’s places boasted springs which supplied the neighbors with water for ten years or so. Then the springs began to go dry. In the late 1920’s, Mike Delaney, who had moved onto the Lutheran Church Ranch, allowed an oil well to be drilled on his place. He didn’t strike it rich, but he did hit water, which may have been just as valuable to Mike and his neighbors.

Many hauled water from this artesian well until around 1934. At this time the government drilled a water well on what had been the Allie Thomas’ place. “It was drilled to a depth of 769 feet where it hit the first Cat Creek sand and flowed 200 barrels a day. The FERA (Federal Emergency Relief Act) installed a storage tank on a ten-foot platform and a stock tank on the ground, the area being fenced by relief labor.” (W. T. 5-24-35)

Life for these pioneer homesteaders was not easy. They didn’t have much — didn’t live or eat fancy — but the land could provide. There were always berries and rabbits to be had, though larger game eventually got to be pretty scarce. The homesteaders recall the folks seemed to take this hard life in stride. After all, everyone was in the same boat. They made the best of it, helping each other through the good and bad times alike. And they did have fun.

The Ledbetter Hall was built some three miles east of the Blakeslee schoolhouse on the rim above Wild Horse basin on the Ledbetter property. It was a great place for gatherings and dances. On one occasion, the Leslie brothers, from their place farther east, wore their kilts and played their bagpipes as entertainment. The hall was the scene of plays, yearly Christmas programs, political rallies, and Fourth of July celebrations. Horses were pitted against men in a tug-of-war. Also, many picnics were held on the Burnett Ranch, then operated by George Sercie.

The Blakeslee schoolhouse itself was the center of community activities. The people gathered there for community singing. It was enjoyed so much that a Sunday school was soon organized by a Methodist missionary, the Reverend Cotton, and continued many years. There were also skating parties on the various ponds and lakes with hot cocoa or some other treat provided by the hosts when their place was the scene of the party.

A big change in people’s lives occurred when rural electrification came to the Blakeslee community in 1957. Elec-
tric pumps for wells, electric lights, appliances to ease the work load and television! By 1961 the long arm of the Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative had extended itself into area homes. At first the families shared party lines, but by 1978 the phone lines were buried and each farm had a private line.

As the years passed, many families left the area. Newcomers came, and land changed hands. The number of students dwindled and so did the amount of activity at the school as cars became the speedier mode of transportation. Older students began attending school in Grassrange or Winnett. In 1965 the Blakeslee School was closed.

Neighbors continued to get together once a month at the schoolhouse to play cards. For a number of years a Halloween party was held there to accommodate a new crop of youngsters. Finally the busy outside world won over the local get-togethers. The power was disconnected and the doors were locked on the Blakeslee schoolhouse, ending an era of closeness and struggle.

The ranches are larger now and more modern. Farm programs help the farmers and ranchers through times of drought and low prices. The hunting remains good. The people haven’t changed much either. There is still a closeness and strength of character that is the trademark of people whose kin homesteaded on the Minnesota Bench.

**Staff**

In September 1915 the Staff Post Office was established at the Fergus Company Ranch. It was named after Matt Staff who was helpful in getting the post office. Olaf Elke was the first postmaster. He was followed by George Hoyem and Al Fuhs, who were also managers of the ranch. George Mutch was the first mail carrier from Grassrange to Staff from 1918 to 1922. Frank Learn was the carrier from 1922 to 1926. They hauled the mail with horses and stayed overnight in Grassrange, coming back the next day. Frank Learn got an Overland car at the last of his term; and getting mail delivered by car was something!

From 1926-1930 Bill McEneaney took the route from Staff to Winnett three times a week. Everyone put up mailboxes and at one time there were around 27 mail sacks. In August 1933 the post office was abandoned. The mail was delivered in sacks to the mailboxes along the route. Frank Marshall, Marvin Lewis, and Olaf Elke were other mail carriers.

Some of the people who had mail boxes on the Winnett-Staff route were: Akins, Hanson, Bennett, Vogel, Colver, McDonald, Long, Hubert, Brady, Annie Morss, Crowley, Bushik, Ware, Burr, Kratochvil, Leslie, Lias, Thorsheim, Learn, Mutch, Maxey, Lewis, Brooks, Opitz, McEneaney, DeSilva, Elke, and Fuhs.

Mr. Staff, for whom the post office was named, is buried near the buildings on the Fergus County Sheep Company; and Olaf and Hannah Elke have a baby buried beside Mr. Staff. There are some other babies buried here and there on private property.

There never was a church of any denomination at either Welter or Staff. Rev. Cottom of the American Sunday School Union in Lewistown got a Sunday school started in the Welter School. It met for several summers, but soon died out as people found interests farther from home. The Brady Sunday school often joined Staff and Welter for picnics and socials. A minister once came to Taylors and baptized the Mutch, Heller, and Taylor children.

![Staff — Fergus County Sheep Co. Post Office — White log building at left]

![Bobsledding teacher and Elke children to school from Fergus County Sheep Co. Ranch]

These baptisms were never recorded and certificates were never received. Agnes (Mutch) Lindseth quipped "Maybe we are little urchins wandering in Limbo."

The Busy Bee Sewing Club was organized with the purpose of bringing some social life to the Staff and Welter communities. There were very few ladies that didn't
belong to it. The ladies met once a month in their homes. They made quilts and useable garments, such as lingerie and items to use in the home. About once a year they would have a dance at the Welter School where they raffled off the quilts and sold the garments. It was a non-profit organization, and the money was used to buy flowers for the sick or help families in need. Once they had an oyster supper at the Welter School. A lot of good social life came out of the Busy Bee Sewing Club.

For dances in the community, there were several different orchestras. Harold Gillespie from Grassrange had an orchestra and played at Welter. He played a saxophone. Bill Briggs and his daughters from Teigen played at Welter also. After that it was the Thorsheims — Bert, Margaret and Roberta. They played at Welter, Valentine, Brady, and Dovetail.

Once at a picnic on Box Elder Creek, south of Burrs, a daring lady brought her bathing suit along. After dinner the lady went behind some bushes and put on her bathing suit. There were some deep holes and the lady languished in the cool water for quite awhile. When she got out of the water to put her clothes on, they were gone!! That caused quite a commotion among parents and children. Finally one irate parent cracked down on his own son. There were really four boys involved. The poor lady and her family had already left for home. The boys finally did retrieve the clothes — but how to get them to the lady? In time, one neighbor after another passed them on, but it was about three weeks before the clothes found their rightful home.

A post office was established on the Welter homestead August 9, 1915, with Nicholas Welter as postmaster. The Welters also kept a small stock of staple supplies for the convenience of their homestead neighbors. The Welters operated the small store and post office until Mr. Welter died in 1926. The post office closed December 15, 1926.

The Welter schoolhouse, which was built in 1918, was designed for a combination school and community hall. It was made large for that purpose. A partition was installed so that in winter the smaller portion, alone, could be heated for school purposes.

Many Christmas parties, Fourth of July celebrations, as well as Sunday school and just general get-togethers were held in that building.

There are many unanswered questions about the few short years the Edgewater post office existed. It was one of the very first post offices established in what was to become Petroleum County. It opened March 16, 1900. Flatwillow had a post office in 1883 (as did Grassrange), Weede in 1901 and Valentine in 1903. Winnett's post office did not open until 1910, however.

Susie E. McMahon was the first postmaster. Nothing is known about her. Forbes Leslie settled at Edgewater on Box Elder Creek in about 1907. According to Mr. Leslie's great niece, there was a two-room log house on the property when the Leslies moved there. The building served as their home as well as the post office. The post office closed on March 29, 1908, and the building itself was heavily damaged in a flood in 1913. (See also LESLIE — Blakeslee)
More than a dozen school districts governed the many halls of learning of this area. In the Blakeslee area the first school was held in a tar paper shack which Pete Wirzfeld contributed. Alice Greenfield was the teacher. Then in 1916, Wick Junkin granted a lifetime easement on some of his land and the Blakeslee school building, which still sits on the original site, was built.

Warner Kruger wrote concerning the construction of the school. (W. T. 5-4-72) "I might add of the community pride these early settlers had. They all agreed to take teams to Lewistown, buy the lumber, haul it, and build the school. Going to Lewistown in those days, in itself, was quite an undertaking. The road into this lower country was 50 miles, via Gillette, over the mountains. Teams were doubled to eight head to pull one wagon up the steep grade. The whole trip took about five or six days — camping out at night both ways, going and returning.

"The day the lumber arrived everyone in the community dropped what they were doing, and all assembled on the present spot to put the school together. It cost $500.00.

"Putting the building up took just five days. The wives made a big picnic out of the affair, so stacks of food were brought for everyone, and what a gay time!"

A Mr. Rankin was the first teacher in this new location, and as many as 40 pupils attended — exceeding the number of available desks at times.

To the east, near the Neumann place, a second school was built in 1915 by Charles McBroom and Alfred "Allie" Thomas. This was in sight of the "Three Buttes," a familiar landmark of the area, and was known as the Neumann or Three Buttes School.

Indicative of the process used to decrease the size of some school districts while adding new small districts, Fergus County courthouse records reveal the following circumstance:

Blakeslee School (1957) George Dengel, Teacher; Mark Lewis, Jack Munski, Linda Munski, Linda Lewis, Twila Bassett; Vicki Bassett, Bonnie Tuss, Linda Delaney

Weller School: Teacher, Mary Fleharty; Roberta Thorsheim, Blanch Alexander, Margaret Thorsheim, Dorothy Burr; Harold McCollum, Billy Marshall, Evelyn Lewis, Floyd Lewis, Marvin Lewis, Donna Marshall (1931)

In 1917 a very small district comprised of only 15 sections of land was created. Children listed as pupils of the Bear Creek School of this new District #175 were Albert, Forrest, Ray, Harold and Earl Fleharty; Pearl, Grant, Rhea, Walter and Opal Heald; George, Leo and Robert Vogli; and Raymond Strait. School was held there in only 1917 and 1918. In 1921 this district was abandoned and
the land was attached to nearby Districts #130, #174 and #176.

There may have been home schools and other community schools which are not mentioned here, but the following list of districts, dates of creation, and names of schools (at the same or nearby sites) was gathered from official records and memories of former residents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District No.</th>
<th>Date Created</th>
<th>School Names</th>
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<td>4</td>
<td>9-24-1918</td>
<td>Remley, Bengston, Wilson, Shale Ridge</td>
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<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>4-10-1919</td>
<td>Hailstone</td>
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<tr>
<td>130</td>
<td>6-2-1914</td>
<td>Christenson, Devine</td>
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<td>153</td>
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<td>Box Elder, Burr, Leslie, Welter, Mountain View</td>
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<td>155</td>
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<td>Reed, Lakeview, Davis, Peckham</td>
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<td>174</td>
<td>2-10-1917</td>
<td>Minnesota Bench, Blakeslee, Wild Horse Lake</td>
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<td>175</td>
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<td>192</td>
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<td>Sunnyside, Spike, Staff (at two locations)</td>
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<tr>
<td>195</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Plainview</td>
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Blakeslee School about 1922: Clayton Kruger, Allen boy, Bill Hedman, Gwendolyn Allen; Waltz girl, Edla Freburg, Ella DeSilva, Jeannette Hedman, Mrs. Allen; Ernest Freburg, Emil Freburg, Chester Kruger, ?, Henry Hedman, Christine Hedman, ?, Myrtle Freburg

Weltor or Mountain View schoolhouse. Built large for use as community hall, also.

Blakeslee School (1928 or 1929) Teacher: Mary Botch (later Mrs. Earl Fleharty), Emil Freburg; Earl Bassett, Evelyn Strait, Dale Bassett, Chester Kruger
War House Lake Irrigation Projects

The Winnett Irrigation Company was incorporated on February 1, 1911. The purpose of the organization was to construct an irrigation project which would water the lands on both the north and south sides of the Buffalo Creek valley and some of the Box Elder Creek valley. Though the majority of lands to be irrigated lay outside the Blakeslee — Staff — Welter — Edgewater area, the construction of the dam and its canals was within the bounds of the district.

Mr. Abraham Hogeland, an official of the United States land office in Lewistown, Montana, was the original engineer. He was succeeded first by John P. Algie, then J. Edwin Miller, and finally Fred W. Akins completed the project.

The first president of the association was Walter J. Winnett, succeeded by Jefferson H. Akins. The treasurer was George J. Wiedeman. Vice-presidents were Mr. Hobensack, retired Lewistown capitalist; John E. Ford, Ned C. Hardy, C. M. Branch and J. W. Vogel. Secretaries were Rudolph von Tobel, J. Rudolph Miller and E. H. Holmboe. Thirty-two stockholder-entrymein held ownership in the association. Many of them filed land claims under the desert act and many of the lands were held by absentee owners — largely Lewistown businessmen and women. Because of the number of married women's names found on the original deeds, one can not help but speculate that these businessmen had already used their homestead rights elsewhere and wanting to participate in this investment venture, had their wives file on the land. (See also BRUSH CREEK — Introduction)

One share of stock was issued for each acre filed; 10,500 shares in all. Fees were assessed on the shares to finance the project. There was no government aid. The cost was originally estimated at $7.50 per acre though the total cost eventually reached $18.00 per acre.

The proposal called for the diversion of water from Fords Creek and Buffalo Creek into War House Butte Lake. War House Lake is a natural lake bed which had drawn the attention of many through the years because of its potential for water storage. According to a letter written by Bill Vogel, "Some of the landmarks in Petroleum County were named by Walter J. Winnett. He lived with Indians for some time, and the dome-shaped butte by the lake resembled a big tepee where the Indians planned their raids on other tribes. He named the butte War House Butte, and the lake War House Lake. He also named Wild Horse Lake and Buffalo Creek. Little Bear Lake was named after Chief Little Bear, a friend of Walter Winnett."

Construction began in 1912 and in 1916 a celebration marked the completion of the project. Water was channeled from a dam on Fords Creek to War House Lake via an intake canal approximately six miles long with a bottom width of 30 feet. It was necessary to cross Fords Creek with this canal, and a modern metal flume of the largest cross section of any flume in the state was built for the purpose. The flume was 850 feet long, carried on a wooden trestle.

Water from War House Lake was then ditched into Little Bear Lake, two miles to the east. A ditch from Little Bear Lake watered the north side of the Buffalo Creek valley, and the main south ditch from War House Lake wound its way for almost twenty miles to the south and east. The total length of the company's ditches was about 55 miles.

From 1917 to about 1924 the project flourished. Quoting from an article Mr. Vogel wrote for the Winnett Times in 1942, "Now followed the golden age of the projects. Beginning with the heavy storage in 1917 up to 1924, there was never less than 10 feet of water at the conduit opening, and often as much as 14 feet. The lake became a vast hatchery for fish, which in the spring were taken by wagon loads when they ran up the intake canals. The ranches under the project were dotted with big stacks of alfalfa and stocked with high grade milch and beef cattle and some sheep. There were hundreds of fat hogs grunting in feed lots."

Gradually, however, an accumulation of problems and circumstances led to the decline of the entire project. Ditches did not have proper upkeep, wasted water produced alkaline seeps, dwindling rainfall lowered water levels, and noxious weeds began to thrive. In 1926 the lake was drained. The outside money which had supported the project dried up as well. Tenants began to leave and the nation-wide depression took an additional toll.

In 1935 application was made to the State Water Conservation Board for approval of a proposal to repair and renovate the intake ditches and the dam. The application was approved. The Civilian Conservation Corps provided the work force under the direction of the State Soil Conservation Service. The State Water Conservation Board furnished the heavy equipment. A large supply canal 40 feet wide at the bottom and 10 feet deep, three and one-half miles long was constructed. A flume was no longer necessary. A massive reinforced concrete headgate structure with the latest improved steel radial gates was installed. The project was completed in July 1937.

Although some lands have been irrigated through the years, the anticipated irrigation potential did not materialize.

CCC Boys on War House Butte
AFFLERBACH, John F. (Sec 6-16-25) John F. Afflerbach homesteaded on the ridge north and west of the Beedle place. He was a deputy U. S. marshal. It was reported that he went to the Missouri breaks in the Crooked Creek area, and never came back. His buggy was later found in Lewistown. A Ruth Afflerbach attended the Blakeslee School. (See also AFFLERBACH — Winnett)

ALLEN, Nathan (Sec 12-17-24) Allens were early homesteaders. Two children are remembered — a daughter, Gwendolyn, and a son. Mrs. Allen was a popular teacher of the Blakeslee School in the early 1920s. (See also KRUGER, Warner)

ANDERSON (Sec 1,9,21-17-24) The Anderson family — Julia (Sec 9), Ernest (Sec 21), Andrew (Sec 1), and John (Sec 21), lived north of the Lawrence Kruger place. Their land is now owned by Krugers. The Anderson house was moved to the Henry Freburg place and made a part of the present Don and Myrtle Fleharty home.

BABA, Jim (Sec 7-17-27) The following bit of history was taken from the Winnett Times of 3-8-29:

"Mr. and Mrs. Jim Baba have arrived back in Petroleum County and will take up their residence on the Baba ranch north of here. Mr. Baba homesteaded in 1917 and left in 1922. After visiting and working in various sections of the country, he and his family have returned, convinced that Petroleum County is the one best bet of all. Old friends of Mr. Baba are glad to welcome him back."

BAKER, Hiram (Sec 25-17-25) Hiram and Mary Baker came away down South, from which state is not known. They were middle-aged folks. They had two grown children — Enos and Ada, who both homesteaded. Enos was married. His wife’s name was Larena.

The Bakers built a large house which was different from most of the homestead shacks. They must have seen the handwriting on the wall, because they left early. It is not known how many years they stayed, but Ada did teach the Welter School one or two terms. It’s possible they stayed ten years.

Enos Baker was a photographer. Many of the pictures of this area were taken by him. Where the Bakers went after they left is not known, but Enos and Larena later corresponded from Florida with the Mutches and other neighbors.

Several different tenants farmed the Bakers’ land, including Bill Welter and Bert Thorshieim. When Thorshieims moved over on Box Elder Creek, the Frank Marshall family moved into the first floor of the Baker house; Earl and Mary Fleharty and baby, Marilyn, moved into the second floor. They had only lived there a very short time when the house burned. The fire started in Fleharty’s apartment in storage spaces under the eaves. It was presumed it started by spontaneous combustion. Mary was teaching the Welter School.

Bert Thorshieim later bought the Baker land. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

BASSETT, Dale Dale Bassett, a son of Frank and Elda Bassett, was born in 1920. He, along with his brother Earl, boarded out during the school year. (See Earl Bassett story) Dale went to the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1936 and sent home one dollar a day. In 1938 he returned from the CCC to help with the growing number of sheep. In 1942 Dale was drafted. He returned home from the Army in 1946 and went into partnership with Earl until 1948. After he sold his share of the ranch to Earl, he moved to the river north of Winifred and then on to Oregon, California, and Lewistown, Montana. He now lives in Billings, Montana.

Dale and Bessie Roy were married in 1944. They have three sons. David (1944) lives in Mount Plasbi, Illinois, and has three children; Bob (1947) lives in Sacramento, California, and has one son: Harley (1949) lives in Council Bluffs, Iowa, and has three sons.

BASSETT, Earl (Sec 27-16-24) Earl Bassett, son of Frank and Elda Bassett, was born in July 1917. There were no schools nearby, so Earl and Dale always boarded at relatives or neighbors. In 1924-1925, Earl went to

school at Heath and Forest Grove. He boarded with his Aunt Amelia Luebke Rulby. In 1925-1926 he boarded with the McClimans and went to the Neumann School. His teacher was Mrs. Mike Delaney. She let school out early in April when Doug was born. In the year of 1926-1927, Dale and Earl boarded with the Jake Strait family and attended the Blakeslee School.

In 1927-1928 the boys attended Blakeslee but boarded with the Henry Freburg family. In 1928-1929 and 1929-1930 school years, they boarded with the Forrest Fleharty family. Earl recalls how he spent 6½ years attending school, taking time out in the spring to help his dad plant crops. One spring (1928) Miss Ada Town, who was superintendent of Petroleum County schools, came out and demanded that Earl get back to school or she would send the sheriff out! The next day Earl was back in school.

In 1931 Earl graduated from the eighth grade and was the third highest in the examination scores for the county.

Earl recalls how homesteading was a hard life. People never raised much on their places because of drought or other disasters. They had very simple lives, and everyone helped out. There were lots of chores, and much wood had to be chopped to keep houses warm and to fire the kitchen range.

In 1941, two months before Pearl Harbor, Earl was drafted. He was later given a medical discharge and, on his way home, he stopped in Illinois to visit relatives and met his future wife, Viola Mely.

Earl and Viola were married in 1944. They have four daughters. Twila (1947) is now Mrs. Roy Hildebrant of Bonduel, Wisconsin, and they have three children. Vicki (1951) is Mrs. Erick Olsen of Juneau, Alaska, and they have two children. Joy (1952) is Mrs. Gene Culver of Billings, Montana. Darlene (1959) is Mrs. James Ring of Eugene, Oregon, and they have two children.

In 1949 Earl had such a good alfalfa seed crop, he paid all his debts and bought more land. The 1950s were dry years but he had no bad luck. Earl always gained or showed profit on the ranch.

The 1960s were years spent seeing that their girls got an education. All four graduated from Montana State University.

BASSETT, H. Frank (Sec 27-16-24) Frank H. Bassett was born August 21, 1881, in Soquel, California. He came to Montana in 1912 and worked for the railroad around Glacier Park building snow sheds. These sheds were built on steep sidehills over the railroad tracks. They were constructed in a manner to allow the snow to slide over the sheds and on down the mountain, rather than build up on the tracks.

In the winter of 1912-1913, Frank trapped coyotes, skunks, wolves, etc., in the Highwood Mountains. Wolves brought a twenty-dollar bounty. In 1914 he helped build the railroad depot in Grassrange. Here he met and married Elda Luebke in January of 1915. She was born in 1893 in Wisconsin and came to Montana in 1914 with her parents, Edward and Wilhelmina Luebke.

Frank and Elda Bassett had three sons. They are: Ray (1915) died in 1920 from diphtheria; Earl (1917); and Dale (1920).

The years of 1927-1928 were wet years. In 1928 Frank’s 100 acres of wheat made 15 bushel to the acre, and wheat brought one dollar a bushel. It was the biggest crop he ever raised. In 1932 Frank and his sons got started in the sheep business. They bought some bum lambs from the Beedie Brothers. This was the year prices hit bottom. The county took their last forty acres, where the buildings and a soft-water well were located, for taxes. Frank purchased the forty acres back for twenty dollars at the tax sale. No one bid against him.

Bassett didn’t have a car during the years of 1931-1936. They drove a team and wagon 12 miles to Grassrange for supplies and the mail. Sometimes the mail would fill a gunny sack.

The year 1936 was dry and hot, in addition grasshoppers were plentiful. Even so, they purchased a new Chevrolet pickup and were buying county tax-deed land for fifty cents an acre. 1937 brought rain for the crops, and the herd of sheep was growing. The Bassetts bought a mile of Fords Creek land for three dollars and fifty cents an acre, and county land for fifty cents an acre. The years of 1939 and 1940 were also good years. Their hay production was up and lamb and wool prices were good.

After Earl and Dale were drafted, Frank couldn’t handle all the work, so he sold the sheep and leased the ranch to Joe King II. The lease ran out in the fall of 1945, and Earl and Frank were home again. They started buying cattle. Frank continued to live on the place until his death in 1979. 1979. (See also LUEBKE — Teigen)
BEAVER, Raymond  Raymond and Grace Beaver lived near the Heller property. They were both school teachers and had taught at Shawmut, Montana, and Grassrange. Raymond wanted to farm, but farming was not a productive endeavor in those days. The Beavers had no children. Mr. Beaver was one of the first persons to have a combine. Mrs. Beaver taught the Welter School one year. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

An account of Mr. Beaver’s death was printed in the Winnett Times of 11-8-29: "Raymond C. Beaver, prominent rancher residing north of Teigen in the lake country, died suddenly Friday evening from a cerebral hemorrhage. He was doing his chores at the time. His wife, watching from the house, saw him lean on the fork he was using for an instant and then fall to the ground. One of the Reed boys and Tony Brooks had just left the ranch. She shouted for them and was fortunate enough to make them hear. They returned and brought the lifeless body into the home.

"Although he had been subject to fainting spells for some years, his sudden death was a distinct shock to his wife and neighbors. He was a fine gentleman, highly educated and an accomplished musician. A host of friends regret his early demise.”

After Raymond’s death, Grace taught many years at Darby, Montana.

The date of Grace’s death is not known, but she and Raymond were both buried in Iowa.

BECKLEY, Moses (Sec 34-17-25) Moses Beckley homesteaded on what was known as the Finley Flat, three miles west of the Welter School.

There were two Beckley girls, Daisy and Hazel. When Daisy married, a news item as follows appeared in the Winnett Times of July 10, 1925: "On Thursday, July 9th, a marriage license was issued to James Post of Teigen and Daisy May Beckley of Welter, Montana. They were married by Justice of the Peace, D. Y. Wilson. A number of Winnett girls sensed the situation and the newlyweds were generously riced after the ceremony."

Hazel married John Massey of Dovetail.

BEEDIE, James (Sec 18-16-26) James Beedie was born near Glasgow, Scotland, immigrated to the United States in about 1904 and became a naturalized citizen soon thereafter. He worked with his brother, William, and owned land in the Blakeslee area. During World War I, he served as a corporal in the Army on the west coast of the United States.

James died July 3, 1955. (See also BEEDIE, William)

BEEDIE, William (Sec 17-16-25) William Beedie was born near Glasgow, Scotland, in 1886. He arrived in the United States at age 16 (1902) and herded sheep at Utica for the Waite Ranch. William applied for U. S. citizenship July 19, 1912, and became a citizen April 18, 1913.

Louise Smith, born March 14, 1894, at Mitchell, South Dakota, moved to Montana in 1914 to become the first teacher at the Teigen pioneer schoolhouse. (The schoolhouse has since been moved to Lewistown and now stands near the museum building.) While teaching at Teigen, Louise met William Beedie, and on July 20, 1915, they were married at St. Peter’s Catholic Church in Anaconda, Montana.

He filed on a homestead in 1916. (That land is now part of the old Forbes Leslie Ranch.) Both he and his brother, James, ran livery stables at Teigen and Grassrange. Bill also ranched with Forbes Wiseman on a ranch south of Grassrange for a short time.
Around 1920 the two brothers leased the John Eschleman Ranch (in 1989, the David Hedman Ranch) and formed a partnership known as Beedie Brothers. Bill and Louise lived there until his death on July 2, 1945. In 1948 Jim, Ned, Louise, Barbara and Helen (Beedie) Stingley sold the ranch to Ed Delaney and moved to Lewistown, Montana, where Helen already lived.

William and Louise raised four children — Robert, Ned, Barbara and Helen Jean.

Son Robert had been inducted into the Army (Infantry) on July 8, 1941. He was the first man from Petroleum County to be inducted, and the first to be killed in action. He died the last day of the fighting to recapture the Island of Attu, of the Aleutian Islands, in May of 1943. He was 24 years old. Earlier he had been awarded certificates of excellence with the B. A. R. 30 Caliber Rifle. He was also awarded the Purple Heart and the Silver Star for “Gallantry in Action.” His unit received the Presidential Unit Citation for its bravery and action in the service.

Ned worked in the filling station business in Lewistown for many years. He now lives at Valley Vista Manor in Lewistown, Montana. Barbara married Frank Tuss, and she and Frank make their home in Lewistown, as well. They are the parents of four children — Bill, Jerry, Nancy, and Bob. Helen Jean (Stingley) graduated from St. Joseph’s School of Nursing in Lewistown, and has been a respected nurse all of her life. Helen had five children — Martin, Jeannie, Robert, Georgianna, and Robbie.

Louise Beedie died June 1, 1980, at the age of 86.

**BLAKESLEE, Charles E.** (Sec 32,33-17-24) Charles E. Blakeslee homesteaded, in 1912, one-half mile west and one mile north of the present Blakeslee School.

The family started a post office in 1914, which was called the Blakeslee Post Office. That’s how the community got it’s name. The mail came out on a star route and went on north and east to the Staff Post Office, a distance of about ten miles.

The Blakeslees also opened a country store in their home.

According to the Grassrange Review, Charles Blakeslee disposed of his Blakeslee property and moved to Grassrange in August 1917. He took charge of the Pioneer Implement and Auto Company.

**BLASER, Albert** (Sec 9-16-25) Albert was the son of Frank Blaser and Emma J. McLean Blaser. Ann Bradford was the daughter of Charles Bradford and Grace McFarland Bradford. Albert and Anna were married in Lewistown, Montana, August 2, 1913.

Their home in the Blakeslee area was directly south of Wild Horse Lake. The land, with its problems, gave them little inducement to linger after they had proved up.

Albert and Anna returned to the East. They were divorced in 1938. Albert remarried and became the father of a son, Albert, who now lives in Sycamore, Illinois.

The son, Albert, has been busy the past several years researching his Minnesota Bench roots.

Albert Sr. died July 3, 1962, and was buried in Spokane, Washington. His wife abides there as of 1989.

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**BLASER, Francis** (Sec 8-16-25) Frank was the father of Albert, William, Allen, Earl, and Frank, and one other son. He homesteaded just one mile west of his son Albert.

An interesting circumstance of his life, while living in this area of the country, concerned his marriage. On July 8, 1913, he was granted a divorce from his wife, Emma McLean Blaser on grounds of desertion. That was practically unheard of in those days. The divorce decree was signed by Judge Roy E. Ayers of Lewistown, Montana.

Emma did not move many miles away when she deserted Frank. She married George Shipe, and became the owner of land in Sec 32-18-25. This was about ten miles north of her former home.

William Blaser homesteaded in Sec 7-16-25, just one mile west of his father’s home. Albert homesteaded to the east in Sec 9-16-25.

Frank Blaser passed away September 26, 1944. Three of the six sons, which had been born to him and Emma, preceded him in death.

The picture on the following page is of Emma and one of the Blaser sons, Allen.
died in 1987 in Los Angeles. A son, Leo, and his family live in Ventura, California. Both parents are deceased.

BUCKLER, Delbert (Sec 20-16-24) Delbert and Hattie Buckler homesteaded south of what is now the Bill Lewis place. They had four children — Blanche, Opal, Howard and Fred.

BURRE, George (Sec 9-16-26) Dorothy Burr Fall provided the following history: "George Burr and Katharyn Frahm were married in Lynd, Minnesota, on June 24, 1913. They boarded a train the same day for Lewistown, Montana, where Dad was employed as a timekeeper on the railroad. My mother had taught school for four years before being married.

‘Prior to their marriage, they purchased household furniture and had it shipped to Lewistown. Mother said afterwards how foolish that had been, as they could have gotten the same merchandise in Montana. ‘But we were young,’ she said. I can also remember her saying that their wedding was more like a funeral in that the relatives thought Montana was the end of the world and that they wouldn’t see them again for an eternity.

‘In the fall of 1913 they moved from Lewistown to the homestead which was located seventeen miles northwest of Winnett. They traveled via team and wagon and it took them about three days to make the trip. They lived in a friend’s cabin while they built their own log home, which was ready for occupancy by January of 1914. My mother said when they moved into their log cabin, they had ten cents of their money supply left. For their first Christmas, mother’s folks sent them a dressed goose that was stuffed with lard. In the lard, fresh eggs had been packed.

‘Wells were hand dug in those days and they were never able to find water on their homestead. They had to haul it from a friend’s spring and from Box Elder Creek, which was about one mile away. In about 1917, they moved from their own homestead to one belonging to Mother’s brother. It was located about two miles east of their own. This move was prompted by her brother’s going off to war and his place having an adequate supply of well water. We lived on my uncle’s homestead until our move to Havre, Montana, in 1935.

‘Five children were born to my folks between 1915 and 1930. Gordon, the oldest was born in Great Falls, Montana. Helen and Dorothy were both born on the homestead with midwives in attendance. Robert Stanley, the youngest, was born in Helena, Montana. One child was stillborn in 1917.

‘My father farmed his homestead and my uncle’s during our life there. We also ran sheep and cattle during those years. Dad was active in politics during his life in Petroleum County. He was elected as one of the first county commissioners for Petroleum County in 1924.

‘In 1930 he served as a senator from Petroleum County to the Montana State Legislature. He also served a number of terms as Secretary of the Senate during the time the legislature met. In 1934 he was appointed a field
agent for the State Land Board. In this capacity he mapped and appraised state lands all over Montana. He held that political appointive job for sixteen years.

"In 1950 the folks moved from Havre to acreage near Plains, Montana. They moved from Plains to Missoula in 1961 and from Missoula to Coal Hill, Arkansas, in 1964. They lived there until Dad's death in 1974. My mother moved back to Missoula after he died and lived there until she passed away in 1980. Both Dad and Mother are buried in Missoula.

"As I look back on my parents' life in my own 68th year of living, I think of them as courageous, industrious, and remarkable people. They always said they had wasted 22 years of their life on a dry-land homestead. However, in spite of the difficult living conditions and the hard physical labor that people of those times endured, Dad lived to the age of 84 and Mother, to the age of 88.

"They had good health for the most part of their lives and were always able to keep interested in all things and constantly busy with their own activities. They were also always ready to lend a hand to any of us, if they were able. During the hard depression years, they managed to clothe and feed us kids. Three of us were given good educations. My folks paid their own way through life and out of it as well. Their generation was surely the foundation builders of this country."

Gordon, Helen, and Dorothy all grew up and received their elementary education in the Welter area schools. Gordon attended Winnett High School two years, then quit to work in his senior year. He married Edna Youderian in Winnett in 1937.

Helen graduated from Winnett High School in 1935. She graduated from Northern Montana College in 1937. She married Charles Bailey of Havre in 1937. They had two children. Helen died in 1961.

Dorothy attended one year of high school in Winnett and completed high school in Havre. She graduated from Northern Montana College in 1940 and Montana State University in 1942. She has worked as a journalist and elementary school teacher. She married Helmer Fredrickson in Havre in 1946. He died in 1953. She married David Fall of Winnett in 1974. He passed away in the fall of 1977.

Robert lived the first five years of his life in the Welter community. He received his education in Havre and graduated from University of Montana in 1954. He married Ann Robertson and they have three daughters.

CARLSON, Edwin (Sec 30-17-25) Edwin was a bachelor who homesteaded near Duck Creek on the hill. He received his mail at the Blakeslee Post Office.

Dale and Earl Bassett remember going up to his place in the fall of 1934 to get skunks. Edwin had a root cellar out away from the house. Dale and Earl went down into the root cellar and there was a hole in the back with fresh skunk signs around it. Dale and Earl had a little dog which they would send into the hole. The dog would come out pulling the skunks by the tail, and Earl and Dale would then shoot the skunks. The smell got so bad that Dale and the dog had to go out for fresh air. They would coax the dog back down to get more skunks. The dog became blinded until they ran him through a reservoir and he got over it. They got five skunks that day, which were bringing $1.50 a piece.

Edwin moved back to Minnesota or Wisconsin in the winter of 1931-1932.

COLE, Klein Mary Anna McGlorey, the daughter of John McGlorey and Mary Meade, was born October 4, 1882. She and Klein Cole were married in Maine. They had a son, Kenneth R., who was born in Springfield, Maine, on May 6, 1905.

When Kenneth was a young boy, the family moved to Warm Springs, Montana, where Klein and Mary Anna both worked as registered nurses in the hospital.

Klein passed away while there, and Mary Anna and Kenny came to Winnett to prove up the homestead on which Klein had filed before his death. The land was located in the Minnesota Bench area.

After a few years, the Coles left the homestead and moved to Winnett where Mary Anna ran the Bachelor Cafe. She later married Hiram J. "Bud" Willard who owned a large ranch north of Winnett, Montana, in Sec 3,4-17-27. Willards left the area during the drought era and located in Missouri.

Kenny worked his way through Winnett High School, graduating with the class of 1924.

Mrs. Mary Anna McGlorey Cole Willard died at age 75 at Willow Springs, Missouri. (See also COLE — Winnett)

COLVER, George Harry The Colver family came from Iowa and were the parents of two sons, Edwin and Harold. Edwin and Harold attended the Staff School. Later the Colvers moved to an area in the Brush Creek country. (See also COLVER — Brush Creek)

COMBS, William Riley (Sec 20-16-26) The following obituary was printed in the Winnett Times of July 19, 1929: "Mrs. William Riley Combs passed quietly away at her home Monday, July 15, 1929, at the age of seventy-three years, eleven months, and twenty-five days.

"Mary Cornelia Owens was born July 20, 1855, at Bloomfield, Indiana. She was married to Riley Combs on December 24, 1875, at Medoc, Missouri. To this union five children were born. The oldest child died when about fourteen months of age. The surviving children are S. F. Combs of Vegreville. Alberta, Canada; H. E. Combs of Rathdum, Idaho; L. Millard of Anacortes, Washington; Laura E. Bridger of Winnett. The husband survives the deceased.

"The family lived in Missouri, Kansas, and Washington, until they came to Montana in 1916, where they have resided until the death of Mrs. Combs.

"Those present for the funeral were Mr. Combs, Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Combs, Mrs. Laura Bridger and daughter Eileen and son Aubrey Moore. The deceased was loved by all who knew her and had lived a religious life since girlhood."
COX, Charles (Sec 14-16-26) Charles and Lillian Cox were the parents of at least three children — George (1915), Goldie (1918) and Edward (1919).

COX, Perry (Sec 3-17-24) Perry Cox, son of Samuel and Alice Cox of Grassrange, was born in Princeton, Minnesota. He married Jenny J. Griffith of Blakeslee in 1915. Perry and Jennie Cox homesteaded north of the Blakeslee schoolhouse. Jennie was remembered as being a red-haired, jolly person who played the violin. She was an early teacher at the Blakeslee School, living in the nearby Wescott house while she taught. Jennie owned land in Sec 8-17-24.

CROWLEY, Mike (W. T. 7-6-1931) "Mike Crowley’s ranch house burned to the ground last Saturday. Mr. Crowley’s ranch is in the Welter country. The fire is of unknown origin and started while Mr. Crowley was in the barn getting things ready to move to Winnett. He had removed most of his goods from the house and loaded them into a truck preparing to move into Winnett for the winter season and was in the barn getting goods ready to take with him when he noticed smoke pouring from the house. The building burned quickly, destroying everything he had not moved into the truck. No insurance was carried on the building or household goods."

CULLINGTON, David H. David was an auctioneer. He also ran the county road patrol. He built the road which is south of the Three Buttes in the Blakeslee area. His buildings were located south of the Three Buttes, east of the road, and at the edge of the timber. David was killed when blasting caps exploded in his pocket.


DAUM, Gene Gene and Velma Daum worked for Douglas Delaney after Doug and Oleta moved to the Roy Ayers place in 1967. Daums lived on the old Lutheran Church Ranch which had been the original Delaney Ranch.

Gene was the son of Jacob and Emma Daum. (See also DAUM — Flatwillow) and Velma was the daughter of Joe and Phyllis (Rukavina) Johnson. (See also JOHNSTON — RUKAVINA — Musselshell River) Gene and Velma’s two children, Brad and Terri, attended the Blakeslee School.

Daums later moved to the original Roy Ayers Ranch. Velma served as clerk of the Grassrange School District until Daums purchased the Clark store in Grassrange.

Brad and Terri both graduated from Grassrange High School. Brad is now teacher and coach at Winifred High School. He and wife, Patti, are parents of a daughter. Terri married Dale Myers of Grassrange. They live in Bozeman, Montana.

DAUM, Richard Dick Daum and his wife lived on the Skibby Ranch (formerly the Forbes Leslie Ranch) while Dick ran the ranch for Ed Skibby. Skibbys had moved to Lewistown and hired the ranch work done. Daums were hired after Kaufmans had left and were there until Munskis came.

DELANEY, Douglas Douglas was the oldest son of Michael and Gunilda Delaney. He was born and raised in the Blakeslee area and graduated from Winnett High School in 1944. Doug and his brother, Dick, built up a fine ranch. When they dissolved their partnership, Doug took over the original home place, or "church ranch" as it was sometimes referred to.

Doug married Oleta Miller. They had four children: Lynda Marie (1949) who married Doug Galvin, a speech and history teacher in Rock Springs, Wyoming; Sharon Oleta (1952) who married Vic Westphal and has two children, Trevor and Jenny; Michael Robert "Mike" (1954) who married Debbie Wilkinson, and has two children, Michael and Annie; and Debra Diann (1960) who married Marc Mullowney, a mechanical engineer in Butte, Montana. They have three children — Kate, Sara and Jessica.

Mike, Deb, Michael and Anne Delaney (1988)
Douglas served two terms (from 1956 to 1962) as a Petroleum County Commissioner. In 1967 he purchased the Donald Ayers Ranch west of Grassrange. He and his family lived there for a number of years while Gene Daum lived on the home (or church) ranch as his hired man. When Doug retired and moved to Lewistown, Montana, Sharon and Vic moved to the Ayers ranch. Mike and Debbie now ranch and raise horses on the home (or church) ranch. Mike was elected trustee of the Winnet School District in April 1989.

DELANEY, Milton Richard (Sec 1-16-25) "Dick" Delaney married Georgia Dupea and they have two children — Jane (1953) and Joe (1955). Jane married Jerry Nunn and they live with their two sons, Randy and Cal, on the old Forbes Leslie Ranch. Joe married Barbara Farnes. They have three children — Justin, Tacoma and Toby. They own and operate the old Fraser Ranch east of Grassrange.

The entire family have been enthusiastic participants in pack trips, wagon trains and other horse-oriented events. The Great Montana Centennial Cattle Drive provided an ideal setting for a family outing. Joe was appointed Fergus County centennial cattle drive chairman, and Dick was named Petroleum County chairman of the event.

Mike and Gunilda Delaney (1959)

DELANEY, Michael Robert Michael Delaney Sr. was born January 7, 1893 in St. Joseph, Missouri. He married Gunilda Riese on July 21, 1921. She was born on March 1, 1900, in West Prairie, Wisconsin. They moved to Petroleum County in 1925 to live on the Minnesota Bench where they ran the Lutheran Church Ranch.

Sometimes churches were willed or given property, and occasionally they bought up more land. They hired managers who could operate the farm or ranch for them. Mike Delaney was one of these managers. He eventually bought the Lutheran Church Ranch.

Mike and Gunilda had two sons — Douglas (1926), and Milton Richard (1927) — and one daughter, Mary Helen (1935).

In 1925-26 Gunilda taught at the Neumann School. Later she was a teacher at the Three Buttes School. When the Delaney children were the only ones going to school, the ranch bunkhouse became the classroom. Dances were often held at the ranch for the neighbors.

Mike Delaney died suddenly at the age of 67 in Lewistown, where he had retired in 1951. He served as a Petroleum County Commissioner for 12 years, beginning January 1, 1939.

Milton (Dick) and Doug bought the original ranch from their mother. Later they acquired the old Fergus County Sheep Ranch, buying out Toby Machler's interest in 1946, and H. C. Belcher's share in 1955. The brothers then dissolved the partnership, with Doug having the home place and Dick taking over the old sheep company ranch.

Dick Delaney ready to 'move 'em out' after an overnight camp in the Bull Mountains during the 1989 Centennial Cattle Drive.

Dick and Georgia, their two children and their families, as well as Dick's out-of-state sister, Mary, and her husband, took part in the week-long affair. Barb Delaney's summary of the event probably speaks for hundreds of other Montana participants.

"On September 4, 1989, one of the most spectacular events since the Battle of the Little Big Horn, hit Montana. The Great Montana Centennial Cattle Drive from Roundup to Billings headed out and finished six days later without a problem.

"There were a herd of cattle, a bunch of horses, and a pile of people — a whole lot of fun! The people came from all over the United States and several foreign countries to help celebrate Montana's birthday, and it was great to have them, but it was the Montanans who made the Drive as Great as it was! The locals from the Winnett and Grassrange areas were in the Yellow Circle and won the Best Circle Award.'

"It was a privilege to be part of the greatest event in the best part of the best state in the greatest country in the world.'
DESILVA, Burl (Sec 19-17-25) Burl DeSilva and Pearl Pitcher were married August 31, 1913, at Oswego, Kansas. They started for Montana in covered wagons and arrived three months later. Burl's dad, Lincoln, and mother, Ada, and their three youngest children, Joseph, Grace, and Ella accompanied them on the trip. Burl and Pearl homesteaded 12 miles north of Teigen, 1½ miles north of Wild Horse Lake and about 2½ miles south of the Fergus County Sheep Ranch. They had three children — Chester, born September 4, 1914, on the homestead; Elma, born January 17, 1916, on the homestead; and Virgil, born February 25, 1917. The DeSilva children attended the Blakeslee, Beede, Box Elder, and Staff schools over a period of time.

Chester was married twice and had seven children — one lives in Texas, and the other six live in Oklahoma. He has 19 grandchildren and seven great grandchildren. Chester died June 14, 1978, at Commerce, Oklahoma.

Elma married Chester Brown on March 11, 1934. They are now living at Whitefish, Montana. They had two children — Toody, who lives at Whitefish; and Jerry, who married Bobi Thompson and is living at Havre, Montana. Elma and Chester Brown have five grandchildren.

Virgil DeSilva was killed on the way to school one day in October of 1928. The three children were riding in an old jalopy. As they crossed a bridge that had no sides on it, the car skidded on some ice and overturned into the creek. Virgil tried to escape by opening the car door and jumping, but the car rolled on him. Virgil is buried in the Winnett Cemetery.

Burl died in March of 1966. Pearl died in November of 1986 in Commerce, Oklahoma. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

DESILVA, Lincoln (Sec 24-17-24) Lincoln DeSilva was born near Dodgeville, Wisconsin, March 12, 1861. When just a young boy he moved with his parents to a farm near Alberton, Iowa. There he grew to manhood and married Ada Stiles in 1885. He farmed in Iowa for a number of years, later moving to Enid, Oklahoma.

In about 1912 he and his family moved to Montana, driving through in a covered wagon, and settled in the Staff area. Son Burl homesteaded or secured land in Sec 19-17-25. Son Joe located in Sec 3-18-28 of the Dovetail country. The Lincoln DeSilvas were also the parents of four daughters — Olive, LaVera, Grace and Ella. Memories of residents would lead one to believe that Olive and LaVera, at least, may not have accompanied the family on their westward journey.

Lincoln and family farmed in the area that became Petroleum County until about 1933, when they moved to Whitefish, Montana. Lincoln died October 10, 1941. From the Winnett Times obituary of 10-24-1941, we read: "He was a kind father, a devout student of the Bible, and active in church work." Lincoln was survived by the widow, four daughters, two sons, one brother and one sister. He was buried in Enid, Oklahoma.

DEVINE, Herbert (Sec 6-17-24) See DEVINE, Wilson

DEVINE, William (Sec 8-17-24) See DEVINE, Wilson

DEVINE, Wilson Everett (Sec 7-17-24) Laura Agnes Devine Davidson contributed the following interesting history of her family and their neighbors who lived in the Blakeslee area in the northwest corner of Petroleum County:

"My mother, Evalina 'Eva' Hassinger, was born in Day County, South Dakota in 1888. When her mother died in 1910, she, along with her sister, Minnie, and her father, Jacob, came to Montana to homestead.

"The women were merely getting their father away from brooding over the loss of his wife, and had no intention of remaining permanently. They had to freight their belongings and lumber for their shacks from Lewistown over Gillette's Pass in the Judiths because the spur of the Milwaukee Railroad had not yet been run to Roy, which by that point did not yet exist.

"My father, Wilson Everett Devine (known as Everett, but often using his initials, as in his brand), was born in 1893 in Indiana and came to Montana in 1912 to assist two married brothers, Herbert and Will (not the one with same initials who lived in Lewistown, and may still have relatives there) who intended to homestead. They urged him to file a claim, which they would then add to their holdings when he returned east. The Devines were able to get a boxcar to transport their homestead belongings to Hilger.

"Unfortunately, my mother and Herb and Will Devine homesteaded on flat land that proved of little value. Minnie Hassinger homesteaded on the north side of a long sand ridge just south of Mother's sagebrush flat, and Everett homesteaded on the south side of the same ridge.
That proved a godsend in that the sand ridge was more productive, and on father’s land, a cold water well — hard water of 42 degrees Fahrenheit — was drilled from the sandstone, about 40 feet deep. It proved good drinking water for about 40 head of stock, a number of neighbors, and the oil wildcatters of the 1920s.

“My folks farmed about four hundred acres of land and had 1400 acres under fence. They ran stock on the wide open range to the east and northeast. They figured they got their feed and seed back one year out of three. Tornadoes twice destroyed their barns.

“An anticipated oil well was drilled on Russell Rowland’s land in Sec 18-17-24 in the early 1920s. It was on the south bank of the Little Box Elder and came in as the Rowland No. 1 artesian water gusher. That water well helped us ride out the last few years there, in that it kept water holes full here and there along the creek. Until then the cattle had run on the range north of us and had watered in Bear Creek. (Some old maps listed it as Dog Creek.) In drouth, it did not have assured water holes.

“My uncle, Will Devine, left after proving up and returned to Indiana. Uncle Herbert Devine took over the Churchwell homestead just the other side of MacJannetts. Uncle Herb’s wife was Elva. They had four children — Louise, Verl, Pearl, and Herbert Jr. — all born in Petroleum County. They left for the Plum Creek Ranch, which Herb managed for years for Cook Reynolds. He eventually bought the ranch which was in the breaks of the Judith River not far from Lewistown, Montana. Jess Warren, a bachelor, moved onto the Churchwell homestead after the Herb Devines left.

“The homestead just east of us, which we also operated under fence, had been taken about the same times (1910-1912) as my parents’ by Asa "Jack" Woodward. Their house burned down in 1925 or 1926, and they left the area. Later they managed the Red Barn Ranch in the foothills of Black Butte. His wife was Marie, and they had a son, Blaine, about three years younger than I., and a daughter, Theresa, a baby when they left. They had other children later. When Marie died, Jack married again.

“Russell Rowland stayed on the homestead with his Grandmother Elliman keeping house for him. He had a real bunkerhouse, perhaps the only one in the area. She was a very fine lady whose library of books supplemented those my parents had each brought west. This helped with the education of my sister and me.

“Petroleum County was not a nice word in our house. My parents objected to being included in the new county, but my father couldn’t withstand a good sales pitch, and I know he signed one of the numerous petitions for division. I was in Blakeslee School when this was fought out in 1924. There were petitions for and petitions against and petitions against the petitions against!

“I remember that one of the sales pitches was that taxes would be lowered, as the oil fields near Winnett would pay all the county expenses. I remember vividly that our taxes had been $300 the year before division, and our first year in Petroleum they were $600.

“But it was on the education angle that my parents finally waged war. Little Box Elder was often not fordable. The iron bridge at Sand Rock Spring was between a gumbo flat (which was impassable in wet weather) and an area of quicksand and bog at the top of the plateau. Also there was no direct road to Winnett, which was 40 miles away. We were oriented towards Roy, 17 miles northwest because of these road problems.

“Fortunately the county superintendent of Fergus County was Mrs. Hart, and her sister, Amanda Swift, was first county superintendent of Petroleum County, and they managed to get our district declared a joint school district so that Christenson School in Fergus County really paid our board and other expenses. We each finished elementary school in six years, three of those in what is now Petroleum County.

“My second year in school, Ruth and I boarded with Alley Thomases a little west of Blakeslee School. The next year, Perry Cox and my father fixed up an old homestead shack kitty-corner from the schoolhouse to live in during the school year. Jenny Cox and my mother rode herd on Harley and Merle Cox and my sister, Ruth. And me, each taking three-week turns. The Coxes had a three-year-old daughter also, and after moving away again, had other children. Perry and Jenny had homesteaded five miles east on Little Bear Creek.

“Coxes had each homesteaded but moved away before I remember and came back for only one year to try again. Then they left for the Judith Basin and later lived between us and Roy.

“The third year in Petroleum was the one after Blakeslee. Lillian Heard of North Dakota had been the teacher and was induced by our school board to return to teach just Ruth and me in a fixed-up MacJannett homestead shack. Because of Montana laws at the time, one had to hold school in one’s district every five years or be attached to the adjoining district, and the two or three other people paying taxes in the district were willing to provide a school for just the two of us to keep from being adjoined to the more expensive Roy school district.

“When we started high school, Winnett officials tried to convince my parents that we must attend Winnett, but that would have meant our boarding there all year, and for two years they yielded our appointment money to Roy. Then they refused, but the merchants (school officials) of Roy agreed to let us attend for free.

“We were then in the drouth — 1929 being the last crop until the late 1930s in our little Big Dry. The Depression was on, and my parents had always done their shopping and selling in Roy. Besides, Ruth and I were involved scholastically, and I was very involved in school activities. My only contact with Winnett High School was playing first-string basketball against them! We all stood in awe of one girl from Winnett, who could make every shot. She was a great forward.

“We left just after my high school graduation in May
1933 to live on Mother's parents' homestead in eastern South Dakota, where the dustbowl began five days after our arrival. I forgot to say that 51 percent of our cattle died the spring of 1932 in Montana, and that my father was seriously injured in a haying accident in the fall in the Judith Basin, where he had gone to make a grubstake for the winter — fractured skull. After we left, the house burned down. There is nothing left of the farmstead except the reinforced concrete foundation for the barn and the pump.

"While several of the more hardy homesteaders left and returned, often to leave again, over the 1920s and 1930s, my parents were the last original ones of this small section of the 'Big Dry' (as the ranchers in the foothills of the Judiths called this area) to leave. They were married in 1914 and left in 1933. My older sister and only sibling, Ruth Devine Wahl, was born in 1915, and I, Laura Agnes Devine Davidson (called Laura Agnes until I finished the University of Minnesota in 1940) was born in 1917.

"My parents retired in 1946 and lived in Salem, Oregon, where Mother died in 1947. My father died in 1975 in nearby Dallas, Oregon. My sister died in Paris, Texas, where her late husband had managed the Ford Tractor Training Center, he dying in 1984, and she in 1985. After 47 years of marriage, I am now alone. I had lived in Missoula, Montana, from 1946 to 1948 when my then husband was a student at the university. Ruth taught school for several years after attending Winona, Minnesota, college. I worked as a newspaper reporter for about six years after graduating from the University of Minnesota in 1940. Ruth had 3 daughters, and I, two."

**DIXON, Alexander** (Sec 14-16-24) Al Dixon was a sheepman who came from the Becket area. He and his wife, Hattie, rented the place Earl Bassett now owns. Earl worked for him in 1932-34, helping lamb and trail sheep around the country.

Dixons had one daughter, Josephine Margret, who went to school in Lewistown and graduated around 1932 or 1933. Al left in 1936 and moved to Townsend, Montana. He was a Spanish-American War veteran. (See also DIXON — Cat Creek)

**EGGERS, Martin and Ralph** (Sec 21-16-27) The Eggers came from Washington and homesteaded east of the Luebke place on the shale ridge. They lived in a log cabin and farmed for a living. In 1930 they moved to the Grogan place west of War House Lake and east of Eagle Butte.

In the fall of 1933, Martin went to the Lewistown hospital for an operation. After the operation, he got out of bed, pulled his stitches out, and bled to death. Their mother, Sophia, moved to Lewistown, Montana, in 1936 to live with her daughter, but moved back in 1937.

The Grogan place sold to the government in 1937 and Ralph and his mother moved to the John Devault place, southeast of the Luebke place next to Antelope Butte.

Ralph and his mother died in 1940 during harvest time. It is believed Ralph died from botulism poisoning. He was found on the bed. His mother, blind and virtually helpless, died shortly after from the heat and lack of food and water. She was found under the bed. Dale Bassett considered this to be the worst tragedy of the community.

**EIKE, Olaf** Olaf Eike, son of Mr. and Mrs. Osten Eike, was born in Skortvig, Norway, February 10, 1883. His family fished and farmed for a living. Olaf was a fine young skater, and the children skated to school.

Olaf had made enough money at the age of 19 to buy a ticket for passage to the United States of America. In 1910 he came via Liverpool, England, to New York. He traveled to Bower Brothers' sheep ranch at a place called Oka, near present day Judith Gap, Montana. There Olaf worked as camp tender to the Bower Brothers' many bands of sheep.

When the Fergus County Sheep Company was formed in the Staff area in 1910, Olaf was chosen as manager. (See also FERGUS COUNTY SHEEP RANCH) He also took out his own homestead on Bear Creek.

Olaf's wife, Hannah M. Kroft, was born in Brooten, Min-
nesota. She came to what is now Petroleum County and homesteaded on Box Elder Creek. Olaf was appointed postmaster when the post office at Staff was established on September 20, 1915. He served in that capacity for many years.

Olaf was replaced by Mr. Hoyem on the Fergus County Sheep Ranch in 1926. A year later, however, Olaf once again was hired as manager of the company. He stayed until 1932 when the Union Bank took over the property and A. H. Fuhs was appointed manager.

Mother Hannah died in 1931 and was buried in Minnesota. Olaf bought the Abe Helleland place for taxes, and he and some of the children lived there until 1939. He became mail carrier on a route from Winnet to Valen-
tine to Dovetail and back to Winnett. The route was a tough one as the roads had very little gravel.

In 1939 Olaf moved to Winnett where he lived in the Northern Hotel for a time. Eventually he moved a house to the property just behind the hotel for his retirement home. He died in December of 1963 and was buried in the Winnett Cemetery.

The Elkes had five children — Olaf Lyle, Robert John, George Hjalmar, Rose Jean and Charles. Charles died in infancy. Rose Jean became Jean Crawford and the mother of Robert Edward and Carla Jean Crawford. George, after serving his country in World War II, married and had two sons, Charles and Paul. George died in 1971. Robert and Lyle have histories written in the Cat Creek chapter.

**Fergus County Sheep Company**

In 1910 the Fergus County Sheep Company was organized for the purpose of acquiring the properties of Alphonso Jackman and P. T. McDermott, who were situated on Box Elder and Bear Creeks in Fergus County, Montana.

The property included 4200 acres of land ($50,000); 11,800 sheep ($45,000); equipment, including horses, wagons, machinery ($6000); 800 tons of hay ($4000); and $5000 cash for operating expenses.

The purchase price was to be provided by selling $25,000 worth of bonds and issuing $85,000 in stock. Projected net earning for the year of 1910 was $16,800.

The stocks and bonds were sold, and Olaf Elke, with his background experience in handling sheep, was hired as manager. He held that position until 1926 when Mr. Hoyem was named manager for a year. Olaf was hired again, however, and served from 1927 to 1932.

At that time the ranch, now consisting of 36,000 acres, was taken over by the Union Bank of Helena, Montana.

Albert H. Fuhs was placed in charge.

Dominic "Toby" Machler and Clifford Belcher later purchased the ranch. In 1946 Toby Machler sold his interest to the Delaney Brothers — Doug and Dick. In 1955 Delaneys also purchased Cliff Belcher's share. Milton R. 'Dick' is now sole owner.

The old Staff Post Office building still stands among the other structures on the Delaney Ranch.

Cooks at the Fergus County Sheep Ranch were Annie Kruger, Mrs. R. P. (Nettie) Wallace, and Opal Buckler Junkin. Chore hired men were Wellington D. Junkin and Bush. Herders on the ranch were Bill Ming, Torval Bow, Sam Olson, Jonas Olson, Jack Elke (Olaf's cousin), Paul Lervick, Peter Loite, "Big Ole" Elke, Andrew Hauge, Chris Austed, Burt Hartwick (Olaf's cousin), Henry Samsal (Olaf's brother-in-law), John Hedman, Carl Hedman, Bill Hedman, Karl Sikveland, Tony Brooks, Jess Brooks. A mechanic was Oscar Thompson.
**FISHER, John** John lived in the Hoosier Bench area of the Blakeslee country — so called because of those from Indiana who settled there. John was one of the excellent fiddlers of the community.

**FLEHARTY, Cliff** Cliff Fleharty married and moved to a ranch several miles north, and later ran a restaurant in Winifred, Montana. They had two sons, Russell and Buster, and two daughters, Doris and Bobby.

Cliff Fleharty died January 13, 1951 and was buried in the Lewistown Cemetery.

**FLEHARTY, Earl** (Sec 20-17-24) Earl Fleharty married Mary Botch, a school teacher, in 1928. (See also FLEHARTY, Earl — Petrolia)
FLEHARTY, Forrest
Forrest Fleharty married Edla Freburg in 1924. They lived in the hills near Forest Grove, Montana, for one and one-half years. Then they moved to the original Fleharty homestead, where their daughter, Hazel, and son, Roy, were born. Dr. Hazel Freed, of Grassrange, went to their home to deliver both children.

When Jake Strait died, the Forrest Fleharty family moved to his place and took care of the post office for two years. In 1936 they moved to Iowa and lived on a farm south of Mount Etna for two years. They bought the Fleharty homestead near Lincoln Center, Iowa, and lived there until 1978, when they retired and moved to Corning, Iowa, where they now reside.

The Fleharty’s daughter, Hazel, married Edward Maeder. They have four sons. Roy and wife, Shirley, also had four sons. One died. Both families live in Iowa.

While living in the Blakeslee community, all of the Fleharty boys enjoyed playing pranks on one another, and would also combine forces in beguiling their friends.

One Halloween evening a group of young people gathered at a neighborhood home and were entertained by the telling of ghost stories. When it was time for the party to end, one of the boys was reluctant to strike out in the dark to return home. The ghost stories had really put a chill in his spine.

Forrest Fleharty, a somewhat braver soul, gallantly volunteered to accompany his frightened friend home.

The two went their way and had just gotten around a hill when two figures, clad in white sheets and riding horses, came swooping down after them. Terrified and gasping for breath, the boys finally made it through the door of home.

Forrest's friend was shaking badly and could hardly talk through his chattering teeth. Forrest feigned uncontrolled fear. His friend did not know that Forrest had been the perpetrator of the entire episode.

FLEHARTY, Harold
Harold Fleharty, son of Henry and Mae Fleharty, and his wife, Marie, had two sons and a daughter, Jo Ann. Harold died in 1984 and was buried in Quincy, Iowa.

FLEHARTY, Henry
Henry and Mae Fleharty came from Iowa to live west of Blakeslee. They later moved to the Jones place with their sons Jake, Cliff, Forrest, Ray, Harold and Earl.

Each of the boys, along with their father, played some musical instrument, and were said to drive their mother “up the wall” with all their noise.

Mrs. Fleharty was known to bake bread every other day for her seven men.

FLEHARTY, Jake
Jake Fleharty, a son of Henry Fleharty, married Gladys McBroom. They lived on the Jones place. Gladys' parents had lived on the Hoosier Bench west of Blakeslee. It was so named because several settled there from Indiana.

Jake and Gladys moved from the Jones place to the Barney place, four miles south of Becket. In 1940 they bought the present home place east of Becket, where they lived until they retired in Grassrange.

They had two children, Edith and Robert.

Jake was known as one who enjoyed pranks. One, as remembered by his minister, was a “fish story” involving Jake and his son, Bob. The two went fishing and there was a wager made as to who would catch the largest fish. Each presented their best specimen, with Bob’s fish being...
longer, but Jake's weighing more. Jake was declared the winner. Later, Bob found himself the victim of his father's joke when he cleaned the fish and found "mysteriously-placed" gravel in Jake's fish!

Jake and Gladys moved from Grassrange to Roundup in 1969 to be near their daughter, Edith.

At this writing Gladys is living in Roundup with grandson Gary and his wife. Jake passed away in the fall of 1983 and was buried in the Grassrange Cemetery.

Edith Fleharty married Al Nelson. They were the parents of two sons, Gary and Mark. Bob Fleharty married Eva Johnson and they have two sons, Mike and Monty. Bob and Eva took over his parents' place when Jake retired.

FLEHARTY, Ray (Sec 34-17-24) Ray Fleharty, son of Henry Fleharty, married Myrtle Freburg in 1935. They lived in Iowa for one year, and returned to live on a ranch just west of the Petroleum County line. They were living there when son, Don, was born on December 12, 1941, in St. Joseph's Hospital in Lewistown.

They moved to Iowa again to live on Ray's folks' place in 1945 and stayed for three years.

In 1948 they moved to Myrtle's parents' home place in the Blakeslee community. Her parents had sold the place to Charles Kananen, who sold it back to Myrtle and Ray. They also acquired land in the mountains south and west of Forestgrove. This made fine summer pasture for their range stock.

Ray and Myrtle were mail carriers of the Blakeslee route for approximately twenty years. On May 10, 1963, Ray was loading sawdust at a sawmill when he died suddenly of a massive heart attack.

Don, then 22 years of age, assumed the responsibility of running the family ranch. He and his mother still live on the original Freburg homestead. Don attended all eight grades at the Blakeslee country school and graduated in 1960 from Grassrange High School.

FREBURG, Emil Emil Freburg, son of Henry and Anna Freburg, was born September 24, 1915, in St. Joseph's Hospital in Lewistown, Montana. He attended eight years of grade school at the Blakeslee School.

In 1942 he enlisted in the Army, and served overseas. He served for three years and three months in the Communication Corps.

After his return to the states, Emil married Marian Rodekuhr, daughter of a former Blakeslee area homesteader. They had two children, Patricia Jo (1951) and Scott Alan (1958).

Emil worked in Montgomery Ward's store in Lewistown from 1946 to 1949. He moved to Akeley, Minnesota, where he ran a bulk dairy farm for several years. He later managed the Montgomery Ward store in Walker, Minnesota, until retirement.

Emil and Marian now live in Winter Haven, Florida.

FREBURG, Ernest Ernest Freburg, son of Henry and Anna Freburg, had all of his elementary schooling at the Blakeslee School. He attended Grassrange High School for two years and the next two years at Winnett High School where he graduated. After graduation he worked for Rasmussen's store of Winnett, and Seute's grocery store of Lewistown until 1935. He then went to work on ranches for about a year.

Ernest and Ethel N. Curtis were married on October 24, 1936. They were parents of a daughter, Mavis, born October 27, 1937.

Ernest worked at Van Dyke's store in Harlowton, Montana, until the summer of 1937 when the family moved to Winnett to work for George Waldrop in the Winnett Mercantile.

Ernest lost his wife, Ethel, in October of 1939. From June of 1940 to November of 1948 he worked for Elmer and Rex Eager in the Eager Mercantile. On June 29, 1942, Ernest Freburg married Ruth Hodges. (See also FREBURG — Winnett)
FREBURG, Henry (Sec 34-17-24) Henry Freburg and Anna Carlson both emigrated from Sweden. They were married in Anaconda, Montana, on July 29, 1905.

In 1911 Henry took up a homestead on the Minnesota Bench, one-half mile east of the present schoolhouse. He spent his first year there building a two-room house with an attic.

In 1912 his wife, Anna, and three children — Edla, Ernest, and Myrtle, joined him from Anaconda. Their ages were five years, three years, and ten months respectively. Their brother, Emil, was born in 1915.

Edla went to school in a tar-papered shack north of the present Blakeslee schoolhouse, when she was six years old. She attended the Blakeslee School after it was built. For one year, she cared for the children of Jennie Cox, the school teacher. She married Forrest Fleharty.

Myrtle Freburg also attended the Blakeslee School, and Grassrange High School for two years. The next two years were spent at Winnett where she graduated. After three years of nursing school in Bozeman, Myrtle graduated as a registered nurse. She was a special nurse until she married Ray Fleharty in 1935.

The Freburgs later moved to Lewistown, Montana, where they lived for some time. Henry died in June of 1947, Anna, in September of 1962.

FUHS, A. H. (Al) A. H. (Al) Fuhs was an early manager of the Fergus County Sheep Ranch, which is now owned by Dick Delaney.

Fuhs later bought the ranch on which Mark Lewis lives. Al and his family lived in that area for a number of years before retiring.

Upon Al’s death, LeRoy Long leased the ranch from the Fuhs estate from 1951 to 1974. The property was sold to William and Mark Lewis in 1974.

GREENFIELD, Alice (Sec 34-17-24) Alice Greenfield and her son, Roy, and nephew, Bertice, all homesteaded — Roy in Sec 35-17-24, and Bertice in Sec 13-16-24. Alice was the first teacher of the first Minnesota Bench School.

Warner Kruger wrote of her (W. T. 5-4-72): “She had gone through hardships, one of losing her husband, one of losing a boy in a hunting accident. Women those days just took the bit in their hands and took off — in this case, to a new land.”

She married a local farmer, Dan Sommerfield. When the Winnett School District #159 was created in 1916, Alice Sommerfield was chosen as clerk. She and Dan had moved to Winnett to make their home.

Roy married a daughter of an area homesteader, A. O. Yeager. They later moved to Anaconda, Montana.

Bertice was the third teacher of the Blakeslee School. He continued as an excellent teacher in many schools of what later became Petroleum County. (See also KRUGER, Warner — Blakeslee; GREENFIELD — Winnett)

GRINDY, Elmer (Sec 11-16-24 and Sec 28-17-27) Elmer Grindy was born in Duluth, Minnesota, on April 1, 1891. He came to Montana with his father and two brothers in about 1912 or 1913 and took up two tracts of land.

On February 14, 1917, he married Gracia Clyde Rowland. Gracia’s parents homesteaded about 10 miles southeast of Roy, Montana, not far from the Petroleum County line. Her father, William Rowland, also operated a creamery in Grassrange for a time. Like the Grindys, the Rowlands had come to Montana from Minnesota.

Gracia was an experienced and respected school teacher. Warner Kruger, one of her pupils when she taught the Blakeslee School, wrote fondly of “Gracious Gracia.”

“This fine person,” he said. “wore the latest fashions, not the hobble skirt, but very effeminate indeed. She was the very essence of feminine regality, tall (and just that) very regal. She wore a smile constantly, however she had perfect control of the students. I know, because I became the wearer of a dunce hat on a stool as a result of her rigidity. ... It seems every new teacher we had had some special quality.

“Miss Rowland’s case she was quite lively, therefore took time out to teach both adults and children home talent plays. We would practice well, and then put the play on. The little old house just bulged with people that night. Some of the bachelors took a great interest in act-
ing. I’m sure they didn’t realize that they had such latent talent. Of course the usual dance followed and how everyone danced: then a big midnight supper.

"Gracia was a perfectionist with grammar. When she taught the parts of speech, you never forgot them!"

Elmer and Gracia had five children, four of whom were born before they left Montana in 1929 — Ruth (1917), Jean (1918) Lois (1919), John (1926) — and Donna born in Minnesota in 1936.

Elmer and Gracia bought Gracia’s parents’ homestead in 1921 and made their home in the area until 1929, when they returned to Minnesota where they lived until World War II. During the war, Elmer spent three years in defense work at Pearl Harbor and the family lived in Lewistown, Montana. Later they made their home in California.

After Elmer’s death in 1957, Gracia returned to Montana where she again taught several small country schools. She died in 1974.

Ruth became a registered nurse. She and her husband, Grant Viertel, made their home in Lewistown, Montana, where Ruth served as supervisor of the Montana State Center for the Aged for a number of years. Jean made her home in California until her death in 1960. Until 1969, Lois and her husband, Vic Reinemer, lived in Washington, D. C., where Vic held several important political appointments. John graduated from the University of Montana with a degree in education. He was a school administrator in California until his retirement.

GRINDY, Henry (Sec 27-17-24) Henry, son of John Grindy, settled in the Blakeslee country and also owned land adjoining his father’s in Sec 28-17-27 of the Ashley area. In 1929 Henry sold his 280 acres of Blakeslee property to Elmer.

Residents of the area recall that Henry was a very jovial person who radiated cheer. He played the fiddle and was labeled as the best dancer of the old-fashioned Norwegian dance called the “Hulling.” All of the Grindy men were known as excellent dancers.

Henry returned to Minnesota in 1929 and died shortly thereafter from tuberculosis.

GRINDY, John (Sec 22-17-24 and Sec 28-17-27) John Grindy owned property in both the Blakeslee and the Ashley communities but there is no evidence to indicate he ever lived in the area northwest of Ashley.

John and his wife, Christine Strandemoor Grindy, were the parents of 13 children, five of whom died young. The surviving children were: Emma (1882), Noel (1884), Henry (1886), Elmer (1891), Clarence (1893), Albin (1895), Franklin (1902), and Clifford (1903).

John and two of his sons, Henry and Elmer, came to Montana from Minnesota in the mid teens to take up land. Records indicate a younger son, Franklin, went to the Blakeslee School. Warner Kruger relates an amusing story concerning Franklin and the school teacher who was to become his sister-in-law.

The teacher Gracia Rowland, according to Warner, "had the daintiest handkerchiefs. They seemed to be only about four inches square. One day Franklin Grindy whispered to me, 'No wonder she only blows her nose on one side; the handkerchief is too small for her whole nose!'"

After completing school, Franklin drove the Grassrange-Staff stage for a time. In 1923 Franklin returned to Minnesota where he was engaged in the creamery business. He died in 1970.

John Grindy died of pneumonia in his homestead cabin in 1921.

GRINER, Francis (Sec 1-16-26) Frank and Caroline Griner homesteaded south of Kratochvils and northeast of Burrs. The Griners stayed as long as most homesteaders. They had five children — Lillian, Robert, Homer, Evelyn, and Elleen. The three oldest children went to the Box Elder School. They were like all homesteaders in that they took an active part in the community affairs.

When they left, they built a house on the back of their truck. They put the children in the back and went to their destination. Some thought it strange, but they got to where they were going and settled in the western part of the state. Robert died a few years ago, according to his obituary in the Great Falls Tribune. The family still lives in the Libby, Kalispell, and Coeur d’Alene areas. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

GROGAN, Patrick (Sec 26-16-24) Patrick Grogan came from Ireland and met his future wife, Rose, in New York City. Rose worked as a maid, and Patrick drove a horse and buggy for the rich people of New York City.

They came to Montana around 1914-1915 and homesteaded west of War House Lake, near Eagle Butte. There were two sons: Joe, who later had a place near Grassrange, and Francis.

When Patrick died, Rose and the boys moved.

HAILSTONE, David (Sec 15-17-26) Hailstones were the dairy people of the area as evidenced by the Winnett Times news article of September 22, 1922. "Of unusual interest is the sale of the Dave Hailstone herd of dairy cattle which will be held at the Winnett stockyards Saturday, September 30. This herd is the result of 12 years of careful breeding, and the head of the herd, Grand View Beets Hengerveld, is a grandson of the $25,000 bull, Johanna McKinley Segis, who has 67 A. R. O. daughters to his credit.

"For some time past Mr. Hailstone has had the reputation of receiving the largest cream check from this shipping point. Here is considered an opportunity to secure the foundation of a good dairy herd."

Children of David and Rhoda Hailstone as remembered were: William, Margaret, Laura and Dorothy.

HANSON, Erick (Sec 25-16-26) See HANSON — Winnett
HARRIS, Floyd  Floyd Harris, son of David and Louise Harris, married Lorraine Lenling in 1938. He met Lorraine when she lived with her mother on the Thomas place. Her mother was a housekeeper for Jess Warren.

Floyd and Lorraine lived on the McElman’s homestead until 1943. Floyd bought the Neumann place from his grandparents in 1942, but did not move there until a year later. Some of the homesteads Floyd leased included: Wyman, Savage, Packard, Seymour, Smith, Caraway, Hank Neumann, Anna Brandt, Norman, and Thomas. Later he purchased the Osterberg’s land.


Loretta recalls that during her grade school years, their five miles to the Blakeslee School could be very bad due to mud or snow. Her dad would have to come for her by horseback at those times. She remembered a special treat once when their neighbor, John Fisher, came after her in his 1930 Model A Ford.

Floyd hauled water from the Blakeslee well from 1938 to 1952, when they drilled their own well. What a thrill it was to see water coming up out of the ground!

Floyd was a mail carrier from Grassrange to Blakeslee. Lorraine is deceased. Floyd married Barbara Hill in 1973. He sold the ranch to Douglas Delaney and now lives in Grassrange.

HEDMAN, Johan A.  (Sec 2-16-24) Johan “John” and Emma Hedman and children — Jeanette, Christine, Helma, Carl, John, and William — came to the United States from Norway in 1912. They lived near Lewistown, Montana, before homesteading in the Blakeslee area in 1914. Henry was the only child born in the United States.

Christine graduated from Grassrange High School and then took up nursing at Bozeman, Montana, where she worked for many years.

Golden Anniversary of David and Louise Harris (1966)
Back: Henry, Florence, Caroline, Julius, Otto, Martha and Fred;
Front: Anna Brandt, Elsie Callewaert, Louise Harris, Sarah Newmann, David Harris

HASSINGER, Wilhemina “Minnie”  (Sec 7-17-24)
See DEVINE, Wilson
married Ed Siefert. They had three children — Shirley, and twins Edward and Edwina. Christine lived in the Bozeman area until her death in the spring of 1988.

Jeanette married Ralph Borshiem and lived in Great Falls, Montana. They had two children, Gene and Richard. Jeanette passed away in the fall of 1981.

John, William and Henry lived in the Crooked Creek area. Carl stayed for a while, then he moved to the Harlowton, Montana area.

John Sr. died on the home place in 1942. His wife, Emma, then moved to Winnett where she lived until her death in the early 1960s.

John Jr. and his son David returned to the Blakeslee area in 1967, when John bought the Don Deyoe place. When John retired, he moved to Grassrange. He died in August of 1977.

David, his wife Judy, and their children, Brett and Johnna, still live on the ranch.

John’s wife, Margaret, now resides in Winnett. All members of the Johan Hedman family are now deceased. (See also HEDMAN — Dovetail and Winnett)

HELLELAND, Abraham (Sec 19-17-25) Abe Helleland homesteaded about a mile south of the Fergus County Sheep Ranch. He was a native of Norway. Not too much is remembered of Abe; but he was jolly and full of fun. When he left, he went to Alaska. He kept in touch with some of his former neighbors for awhile. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

HELLER, Arthur Arthur and Minnie Heller and their two children, Newman and Marion, moved from Wisconsin to the south end of the Welter community where they homesteaded. Their land was very poor. It was high on a plateau and very rocky — really unfit to make a living. Mr. Heller was crippled from having broken a leg that never healed properly. Newman and Marion went to the Box Elder School and later Marion went to the Welter School. The Hellers were always cheerful, however, and attended all the community affairs.

Mrs. Heller always liked to take pictures. Some of them appear in this history. Mrs. Heller belonged to the Busy Bee Sewing Club, where she took an active part. As the dry years worsened and Mr. Heller’s leg got worse, they returned to Wisconsin. Marion married there, but Newman returned to Montana where he later married Jean Hagen. Arthur died not too long after returning to Wisconsin. Minnie did live long enough to return to visit, but later died. Newman is also deceased. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

HOFSVANG, Charles A. (Sec 20-17-24) A family by the name of Hofsvang lived west of the Lawrence Kruger Ranch. Their children attended the Blakeslee School.

HOLLENBECK The Hollenbecks came to the Minnesota Bench from Saco, Montana, in 1912. The father had been killed shortly before. and Mrs. Hollenbeck came to file on 160 acres in the Blakeslee area, about four miles from the school.

The move entailed driving herself and three children across the frozen Missouri River in a wagon pulled by a pair of broncos.

The children either drove the hack or rode horses back and forth to school. Everett was one of the children (See also KRUGER — Blakeslee)

HOTTENSTEIN, Mary Miller Mary Miller, the daughter of Gabriel and Sarah Miller, was born October 11, 1867, in Maquoketa, Iowa. She attended schools there, and on May 26, 1886, was married to Penrose Hottenstein in Maquoketa.

They came to Moore, Montana, where they made their home until 1929.

From that time on, she lived with her daughter, Mrs. Willis Walker, wherever Mrs. Walker resided — either in the Blakeslee community or at Winnett.

Mary died in Lewistown October 30, 1949, after an illness of two years, and was buried in the Moore Cemetery beside her husband.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Penrose, and one son, Lonnie P. Hottenstein, who was killed in action in France on October 3, 1918, in World War I. Two daughters, Mrs. Willis (Laura) Walker of the Blakeslee community, and Ruth Davis of Hennessy, Oklahoma, and one son, Forrest Hottenstein of Bremerton, Washington, survived her.

HUSTED, James, Mary, William (Sec 17-17-24) James, Mary and William Husted owned all owned land north of the Delaney water well, where many Blakeslee families got their water. Husted children listed on the school census were Ona, Fern and Leslie.

IMSANDE, Lewis (Sec 28-17-24) The Lewis Imandes homesteaded in 1910. They then moved to the Chippewa area. John Kelzer bought the Imsand place.

INGALLS, Albert (Sec 32-17-26) Mrs. Ingalls was a cousin of Mrs. Vern Johns.

JELINEK, John E. (Sec 27-16-24) John Jelinek owned land north of the Earl Bassett place and the land is now owned by Earl.

He was married and had one son, George, and a daughter, Margaret (See also JELINEK — Flatwillow and Petrolia).

JOHNS, Vern P. The family left the community when oil was brought in at Cat Creek. They often came back and visited the Mutch family. (See JOHNS — Winnett)

JOHNSON, John (Sec 32-17-26) John Johnson, his wife, and their son Paul, and his wife, Elsie, homesteaded about two miles east of the Welter School. Paul and Elsie had two sons, Leo and Vane. Leo attended the Welter School for a short time. The Johnsons stayed as long as the average homesteader. The elder Johnsons went back to California.

When oil was struck in Cat Creek, Paul and Elsie moved to Winnett. Paul went to work in the oil fields. Elsie died very young. Paul returned to California to be near his
parents. Paul returned for a centennial in 1964 in Winnett and renewed acquaintances and reminisced of the homesteading days. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

**JONES, Jesse** (Sec 34-17-25) Jesse Jones homesteaded on the Finley Flat. His father, Frank Jones (Sec 25-15-27) proved up on his land. He then stayed in Lewistown and worked in the brickyard. Someone always stayed on the homestead, however.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Jones had five children — Jesse, LeRoy, Arthur, Edna, and Blanch. Arthur is the only one who ever went to school at Welte. In winter Jesse also worked in the brickyard in Lewistown. Just how long they lived on the homestead is not known. They finally all left and moved to Lewistown. Arthur often came back and visited the Mutches. The Joneses always had a car, which was "really something" in those days. Once at a celebration at the Welte School, Jesse Jones took some of the kids for a ride. Later some boys were overheard to say that they went so fast that they "couldn't see the fence posts!" That was in about 1920. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

**JONES, Martin, Walter, Jesse** (Sec 32-17-24)
Martin Jones homesteaded in 1911. Walter H. and Jesse also homesteaded on nearby property.

**JOSLYN, Harold** Harold Joslyn was a teacher, probably the same individual as the teacher mentioned in Warner Kruger's school memories. (See also KRUGER, Warner)

**JUNKIN, Wick** Wick Junkin settled near Blakeslee in 1911. The Blakeslee School was built on land given in a lifetime easement by Wick Junkin.

Myrtle Fleharty remembers a play performed there in which Junkin played the part of the blackest Negro. She remembers the play, as they used her doll for the baby.

Junkin's property was sold to Warner Kruger.

**KANANEN, Charles** (Sec 34-17-24) Charles Kananen owned the Freburg family homestead for a time when the Henry Freburgs retired and moved to Grassrange. Charles sold the ranch to the Ray Fleharty family in 1948.

The Kananens and two of their sons now live in Roy, Montana. A daughter lives north of Malta, Montana.

**KAUFMAN, Rolly** Rolly and Kari Kaufman and their family worked on the old Forbes Leslie Ranch for Ed Skibby for several years in the early 1950s. He now (1989) lives in the Malta, Montana area.

The Kaufmans and the Roy Longs car pooled in taking their children over the ten mile road trip to the Blakeslee School — often a slippery trip in wet weather.

**KELLEY, Mark** (Sec 15-17-26) Mark Kelley was born in about 1876 in Nebraska. Electa Griffin was born about 1876 or 1877 near Springfield, Illinois. Mark and Electa were married in 1899. They had two children — Lucy E., born November 24, 1901, in North Bend, Washington; and George, born September 22, 1902, in Fall City, Washington.

Mark and Electa "Lettie" came to Montana from North Bend, Washington, in 1914 and filed on a homestead. Lucy was 13 and George (known better by "Bud") was 11 at the time. They farmed about 16 miles north of Winnett. They sold out in 1928 and moved to Teigen, Montana, where they ran the little store, post office, and gas station. Mark was also the mail carrier. He met the train six days a week as it came from Lewistown and again as it returned from Winnett with mail and supplies.

Lettie died in 1935 or 1936. In 1937 Mark married Jennie Meserve. They continued running the store until Mark passed away in December 1940. Both Lettie and Mark were buried in Lewistown. Jenny left Telgen and moved to Spokane, Washington. She passed away at the age of 101 in about 1977. George Kelley passed away in 1956 and was buried in Marysville, Washington.

Lucy married Marvin Lewis in 1921. They had six children — Evelyn (Brown), Marvin, Floyd, Lester, Robert, and Shirley (Cather). Marvin Lewis died September 14, 1975. Lucy is living in Choteau, Montana, with her daughter, Evelyn Brown. (Submitted by Evelyn Brown)
KELZER, Jacob (Sec 29-17-24) Jake Kelzer came to the Minnesota Bench and homesteaded in 1910. He bought L. H. Imsande’s place. He and his wife, Catherine Sullivan, lived close to the first Blakeslee post office.

He was a very hard-working farmer, and Kate was a friendly person who had cookies and refreshments for anyone who dropped in. She had the most beautifully polished cook stove one could ever find.

They retired to Lewistown where she died before Jake did. Jake spent his last days in the old St. Joseph’s Hospital in Lewistown.

KLINGENBERG, Adolph (Sec 10-16-24) Adolph Klingenberg homesteaded between the Earl Bassett and Bill Lewis places. The land is now government land. He ran a little dairy.

He was married and had one daughter who married Warner Kruger in 1923.

Adolph moved in the 1920s.

KOSTORYZ, Frances Francis Kostoryz taught the 1938-1939 school term of the Welter School. A small building in the corner of the yard of the Forbes Leslie Ranch served as both teacherage and classroom. The only pupils were the two daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Forbes Leslie Jr. Mrs. Frances McDaniel was the county superintendent at that time.

KRATOCHVIL, Vaclav “Jim” (Sec 4-16-26) Jim and Mary Kratochvil came from Czechoslovakia or Bohemia to Chicago where they lived for a time until they came to Montana to homestead at Welter. The Kratochvils had no children, but a nephew of Mary’s lived with them and attended high school in Winnett. His name was Eddie Cervenka. Mary’s mother used to visit them. It isn’t known where she came from, but her name was Mrs. Ctibor. Mary was a very good cook and always took part in community affairs.

Once a neighbor’s dog came to Kratochvils and he wouldn’t leave, so Jim swore at him in Bohemian. The dog left and they never saw him again! The dry years and the depression forced Jim and Mary to leave. They moved to Lewistown. Jim died many years before Mary. Mary died in a nursing home in her 90’s. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

When Petroleum County was in the process of withdrawing from Fergus County. Jim presented his thoughts on the subject, according to an article in the Winnett Times of 10-24-24:

“At the county division meeting at the Welter School, Jim Kratochvil, an old timer of that vicinity whom all know and respect, was called upon by his neighbors to tell about the tax situation on his land in Judith Basin County.

“Mr. Kratochvil stated that he owns 160 acres of land in Judith Basin County. Before Judith Basin County was segregated from Fergus County, he paid $85.00 annual taxes on his quarter section; and for the last two years in Judith Basin, his taxes were only $47.00 annually.

“Mr. Kratochvil stated that he was ready to show his tax receipts to any doubter. That he is a strong booster for Petroleum County goes without saying.”

KRUGER, Herman (Sec 34-17-24) The inundation of Minnesotans to the area in the early 1900s afforded the nickname “Minnesota Bench” to the expanse of relatively high, flat ground, lying in all directions from the present day Blakeslee School.

Two sets of Krugers represented some of those Minnesota refugees seeking the wide open spaces. William and Hilda Kruger homesteaded west of the present schoolhouse: his brother Herman and Annie Kruger, east thereof, both families in 1912.

Herman, a huge man, was an aggressive farmer and owned the first tractor in the area. He and Annie raised two sons, Clayton and Chester. All took an east wind in 1930 and set the plow down again on Ross Fork Creek, west of Lewistown, Montana. The Judith Basin soil, being far more suitable for farming, rewarded them. Herman and Annie lived at Ross Fork until they retired and moved to Lewistown.

Annie, born in March of 1891, now lives with son, Clayton, in Washington. Herman was laid in the soil in 1970.

There was a lot of excitement at the Herman Kruger home one sunny spring day. The Krugers and Freburgs were very close neighbors. Often the children, Ernest and Emil Freburg, and Clayton and Chester Kruger, played together.

On this particular day in about 1921, Ernest and Clayton decided to roam over the prairie. They had hoped to get away from their little brothers, who were about six years younger. They took a run for it, but sure enough, looking back, there came those “bratty” little kids!

The older boys increased their speed. After a time they looked back. They could only see one little boy standing by a well, and he was yelling!

Clayton and Ernest hurried back. Chester had opened the rectangular board lid of the well and probably in trying to replace it, both the boy and the lid fell into the well.
Chester was down in the well still hanging on to the lid! Mr. Kruger was planting corn in a nearby field, and was quickly summoned. He seized a pole and shinnied down it to where he could grab Chester, who was already blue with cold. The little boy was still clinging to the lid which kept him from sinking into about ten feet of water.

The rescue was completed and all concerned were overwhelmed with joy! Chester suffered no ill effects.

Only after all that did anyone realize that Mr. Kruger, in thinking only of his son, and being in an awkward position as he talked to the boy, had lost control of his dentures. They were at the bottom of the well and the well had to be bailed out to retrieve them.

**KRUGER, Lawrence** Lawrence was the son of William Kruger. He had returned with his parents to Minnesota as a young man after living in the Blakeslee area. He married Eleanor Westerlund, who made a monumental transition from the city of St. Paul to the wind-swept Montana prairie.

Undaunted by hardship, she and Lawrence held their own and raised Yvonne, Gary, Curtis and Kraig. The children all attended the Blakeslee School. Curtis met an untimely death by drowning at age 16 in 1956.

After raising their children, the Krugers retired to the town of Grassrange where they lived until death. Lawrence died in 1987. Eleanor in 1988. They and Curtis were buried in the Grassrange Cemetery.

Son Kraig and his wife, Recie, with daughters Nicole, Erin and Sarah, next lived on the Lawrence Kruger place atop the Bench.

**KRUGER, Warner** Warner, like his brother, Lawrence, also returned in later life to the area where he had lived as a boy. He farmed the former William Kruger place. He was an environmentalist and believed strongly in supporting the preservation of land and wildlife. He planted many trees.

He was the father of three daughters — Jeanne, JoAnn and Karen. His only son, Kurt, a fine singer, died in mid life. Warner died in 1984. His ashes, as well as those of his son, were spread to the wind in the surrounding area.

Warner did a lot of writing in the Winnett Times through the years. The following are excerpts from an article he wrote in May of 1972 which concerned early school days and teachers in the Blakeslee area.

"When Bert Greenfield came to teach, everyone wanted to go to school. He being only a year or two older than some of the children, everyone had a ball.

"Mr. Greenfield dressed quite well, even wore a carat diamond ring. He would hold up his hands to look at his nails. I believe he even buffed them from time to time.

"When Mr. Greenfield was not looking, we boys would hold up our hands and take a look, probably only to see Montana prairie soil under the nails, as if to imitate Mr. Greenfield. Sometimes we would get caught, then write 'Hands' a thousand times. We didn’t repeat the comedy.

"Mr. Greenfield was likeable, to some of the girls close to his age especially.

"The reader will wonder why there were so many children at almost young manhood or womanhood. These same children had missed quite a lot of school while their parents were migrating into the country, they grew, as do all children. J. P. McBroome was over six feet tall, Julius Neumann was six feet or so.

"Therefore, a school full of children, from first graders almost to men, made quite a group. The teacher had to set the little ones up front, when it should have been the tall ones, as they were the ones to be watched. I say this because the older ones were always pulling jokes on the girls. One fat boy brought a big frog to school. The frog got loose in the aisle and jumped all the way to the teacher’s desk before it stopped. Of course the school was a riot, but it was easy for the teacher to find out who had brought the frog, as the same boy brought a small garter snake to school before and put it in the ink well of a big freckle-faced girl. The snake got out of the ink well and wiggled ink all over her desk. His name, Marvin Thomas, deceased. Thus we ran the gamut of going to school with Mr. Greenfield.

"There is much to write about this next teacher, a one-legged man, Mr. Jerry Joslyn (Records indicate he may have been Harold Joslyn.) Anyone that was to become a student under him could count themselves very lucky. As an added chore for the teacher he or she had to build the fire on chilly days — kindling, pitch knots, etc. We would bring our lunch pails in behind the stove to thaw, as it sometimes froze out in the cloak room. The Union Leader tobacco bucket made a good lunch pail, once the smell
got washed away. It had two handles; also a gallon syrup pail was used by some.

"Pretty slim lunches those days, everyone was poor, but no one seemed to mind. Mr. Joslyn had taken a homestead close to Black Butte. He drove a pair of paints this distance every morning, the weather permitting. At that time the prairies had very few fences so when Mr. Joslyn got hitched to sort of a 4-wheel rig, he'd stretch those paints down this big long flat towards school. His harness had no breeching and he used to say, 'I don't want to stop, so I have no use for the breeching.'

"When he swung his outfit into the schoolyard, generally on two wheels, he would throw the lines on the ground; the two paints having been saddle horses, had previous training to stand with reins on the ground, stopped dead still and stood on the one spot, when Mr. Joslyn would unhitch them at recess.

"He was a dedicated teacher; if a child was willing to learn, Mr. Joslyn took extra care to teach one, and some that didn't.

"This teacher was a jewel among the teaching profession. He, himself, had been schooled thoroughly, due to his handicap. He seemed to put everything into whatever subject he was teaching. A strong believer in discipline, he had a small piece of harness lying on his desk, and he didn't hesitate to use it. None of us ever felt the tug, we just knew Mr. Joslyn would use it if he had occasion.

"With a school of 36 children, all the grades, it was miraculous how he arranged his curriculum. The smaller grades were taught first thing in the morning. I might add we always sang at 9 a.m. We would sing our State song "Montana" as loud as we could. I'm sure we outdid the coyotes we usually heard at night. How sweet the sounds of the prairie, both by day and night.

"Mrs. Nate Allen, a small person, soft voice, the warmest brown eyes, they twinkled, very jolly and again her teaching method, always gentle. It was the time of year when we would all get in our wagons and go berry picking for chokecherries, wild currants, gooseberries, some June berries. Of course this turned into a picnic.

"During Mrs. Allen's period of teaching, people began to think of Sunday school and some religious training. We had no regular ministers. I remember a colored minister rode into the school one Sunday with a guitar across his back. He was quite tall, in fact so tall that when he rode his burro, his feet almost touched the ground on each side. How he would preach and sing! When he preached, Daddy McBroom would say, 'Amen,' all through the sermon; when the minister sang, great tears would roll down his ebony cheeks. He would take the meagre earnings for his sermon and ride on to the next community.

"During Mrs. Allen's term debates were held, as this had become one of the community's meetings of interest, current events and such. Some homesteaders were well read, a Mr. Charles Ludwig Nelson was one. He could talk hours on Europe. Mr. Nelson had worked in the coal mines for many years. His underground life made him hairless, he never had to shave or have haircuts. He was spotlessly clean. Slept on a pole bed and read into the night lying on such.

"This was about the time everyone played Whist, great get-togetherness, to play cards.

"Miss Laura Hottenstein, married to the late Willis Walker, had taught a year somewhere between Miss Rowland's and Mr. Joslyn's terms. To our good fortune, another gentle teacher. Just a slip of a girl, extremely pretty, wore a great deal of perfumery. Naturally the girls were kept guessing as to the cologne she wore any morning.

"Mrs. Walker was quite thorough in her methods, so thorough we often got only half way through a subject and would therefore have to take up the subject the following day.

"The Music. I want to touch on the music. One homesteader, Mr. Lew Melius, was the fiddler. My father played the organ. Wirzfeld the slide. It was sweet waltzes, quadrilles, square dances. The caller, a Mr. William Shanks, was good at waltz quadrilles. John Rodekuhr, the squares. Shanks was the fashionplate of the community. He would wear a swallow-tailed coat, black string tie, ruffled shirt, black hat. He looked like a Mississippi River boat gambler. He would sing the entire waltz changes to be made during the dance. He was a tyrant in sheep's clothing with all his gallantry. He could curtsy and bow almost to the floor when he asked a lady for a dance. Truly as smooth as silk. I forgot to mention his handlebar mustache that he always stroked when he appeared before a lady.

"Some Children. I add a few observations here of some of the children at the time. Ruth Afferbach always wore high laced boots for fear of rattlesnakes. Alice Welch rode a buckskin horse, quite tall, but the horse had a growth on his left front knee that Alice used to use as the stirrup to get on. She rode from the then-called Wilkie place, some five miles, and rode bareback.

"Everett Hollebeck, dressed as a character out of Charlie Russell's books. He acted the part, and also had a pretty sister that yours truly would ride with, and then walk three miles to my own home."

**KRUGER, William**

William Kruger did not have the taste for farming that his brother, Herman, did. Bill made his way with livestock, and as a fur trader, he circulated throughout northern Montana and much of western Canada.

Hilda and Bill had eight children: Warner, Lawrence, Melvin, Alice, Eula, Ione, Myrel, and Helen. After little more than a decade, these Krugers left the Bench to return to Minnesota.

In the early 1930s, Lawrence (and later Warner) returned to Montana, this time to stay.

Both she and Frantz are buried at Winnett. Katy and Arthur moved to Oregon. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

**LEDBETTER, James** (Sec 9-16-25) James Ledbetter's land was just south of Wild Horse Lake. An enjoyable spot in the community was the Ledbetter Hall.

**LESLEY, Forbes** (Sec 1-16-26) Helen Leslie Bryson submitted the following: "Forbes Leslie, my great uncle, came to Montana from Scotland in about 1900. He settled near Straw, Montana, and raised sheep. When he decided to look for a different ranch, he became interested in land on Box Elder Creek near Winnett. He decided on that location, as there was a fresh-water spring on the creek close to the house. Forbes felt that the spring could supply an excellent source of drinking water for people and animals. He always said he bought the ranch, not because of the land, but because of the spring.

"He settled there about 1907. At that time the place was known as Edgewater, because there was a post office there by that name. The post office closed in 1908. Forbes ranched at that location until selling the ranch to Ed Skibby in 1943. I believe Richard Delaney now owns the ranch.

"When Forbes and his wife, Helen, moved to the ranch, there was a two-room log house, which served as their home as well as the post office. In 1913 Fords Creek overflowed its banks, and the house was badly flooded. Rather than try to clean up and repair all the damage, a new house was built farther from the creek. That house still stands. George McDonald of Lewistown built the house.

"Forbes was an excellent sheep rancher and always seemed to do the right thing. He survived pretty well during the dry years of the 1930s. Sheep would graze on land that cattle did not, and most of his hay land was right on Box Elder Creek. In 1931 he sent his sheep to
George and Elizabeth Mutch, Annie and Scottie Leslie: Bill Mutch (in back), a ranch cook, Mrs. Forbes Leslie Sr.; Mary and Helen Leslie

Lemmon, South Dakota, as apparently pasture and hay were more plentiful there. One spring, on the spur of the moment, he decided to sell all his sheep. As it turned out, it was the driest year of the period.

"He bought sheep again in the fall and was back in business. Another summer he decided to let the alfalfa crop go to seed rather than cutting it for hay. Everything went right and he had an excellent crop and prices for alfalfa seed were excellent at the time. Once again his foresight was correct. People often asked him why he raised sheep rather than cattle, and his answer was 'You always get two crops from sheep — lambs and wool.'"

"It seemed, at times, that Forbes was always planning ahead and thinking of the future. In a time when most of our neighbors were using kerosene lanterns and lamps for light, he had electric lights, even in the barns. Forbes had installed an electric generating plant, so most of the time there were electric lights. When wind chargers came on the market, he installed one. Of course, then it seemed the wind never blew, but he kept the generating plant for backup."

"In 1936 he built a dam on Box Elder Creek and was able to irrigate nearly all of his hay fields. His hired men did nearly all of the work of building the dam and irrigation ditches. He was always very proud of the job they did."

"Forbes did not homestead. However, his wife homesteaded on land about two miles west of the present ranch buildings. That land then became part of the Leslie pasture land."

"Forbes and Helen did not have any children, but they were always interested in the children in the area and were strong supporters of the Welter School, which was three miles from the ranch. Forbes saw to it that the students at Welter got a bag of candy and nuts at Christmas time. Forbes was concerned about people and often gave a helping hand, but always did it very quietly as he did not want any publicity."

"Helen passed away in December of 1938 of pneumonia."

"After Forbes sold the ranch, he retired to a small acreage about three miles east of Lewistown. In 1947 he married Ella Millsap. Forbes passed away in 1951 at age 82." (See also MILLSAP — Winnett)

**LESLIE, Forbes "Scotty"** (Sec 11-16-25) Helen Leslie Bryson contributed her family history: "My Dad, Forbes 'Scotty' Leslie came to the Winnett area from Scotland in 1914. He worked for his uncle, Forbes Leslie, on the Leslie Ranch, and then for Olaf Elke near Staff. He later homesteaded on land just east of the Leslie Ranch. I don't think he ever raised a crop on it, as the land was so rocky that grass would hardly grow on it. He eventually sold the homestead to his uncle, and it became part of the Leslie Ranch.

"In the fall of 1922, Scotty returned to Scotland for a visit. During that visit he met my mother, Annie, and they became engaged before my Dad returned to Montana in the spring of 1923."

"Scotty again worked on various ranches until 1925, when he and my uncle Alex Leslie formed a partnership and raised sheep on a ranch on Yellow Water near Grassrange.

"Annie had been unable to get into the United States because of the quota system. Scotty did some research and found that if she were married to a United States citizen, she could enter the states. Arrangements were
made for my mother to come to Toronto, Canada, as she had a sister living there.

"In November 1925, my dad traveled to Toronto and they were married. A few days after the wedding, they traveled by train across Canada, down through Sweetgrass and Shelby and arrived in Lewistown, where they were greeted by several of Dad’s friends. It is hard to think what my mother’s thoughts must have been when she arrived in this ‘primitive’ area.

"My folks and my aunt and uncle lived on Yellow Water until the partnership was dissolved in 1927. Scotty then worked for a short time there and near Lewistown for M. I. Burke. In 1928 my uncle Forbes asked Dad to come back to work for him. My folks moved to the ranch at that time and lived there until moving to Billings in 1943.

"In the summer of 1931 Forbes decided to send the sheep to South Dakota. Apparently he felt feed and pasture were more plentiful there. My folks moved, too, as my Dad was in charge of the South Dakota operation. I can remember the very cold weather, blizzards, and deep snow.

"My dad had to ride horseback three miles every morning to help the herders feed the sheep. He would not arrive back home until late in the afternoon. I was four years old and my sister, one. My mother said there was a time of six weeks when she was never away from the farm and did not see another woman in that time. We did not have chickens, so my folks bought eggs from the neighbor. Eggs were five cents per dozen then. My folks paid the neighbor ten cents, since he delivered them!

The sheep and our family returned to Montana in August of 1932, and I entered Welter School that fall. As I recall, the enrollment was 10. My sister entered first grade in 1936 with Mrs. Genevieve Brady as her teacher. Gen taught me in 4th and 5th grade. We rode horseback the three miles to school, except in the very cold weather.

"When I was a first grader, I stayed with the Mutch family during bad weather, as they lived just a short distance from the school. Other years my sister and I stayed with the teacher during the week, going home on weekends. When I was a seventh grader, my sister and I were the only two students left in the area. The teacherage was moved to the ranch and we attended school there for two years.

"In 1940 I started high school in Winnett and my sister attended grade school. My dad served many years on the Welter school board, and I can remember the board pondering many problems — nearly the same problems as school boards have now.

"My folks moved to Billings in 1943, and Dad worked for the Northern Pacific Railroad in the freight division. He retired in 1963 at the age of 70.

"My dad passed away in November 1979 at age 86. My mother passed away in 1983 at age 85. My sister, Mary Alice, is a widow and lives in Ohio, where she is a loan officer for a bank. I retired in 1988 after 30 years with Hall-Perry Machinery Co. I have been a widow since 1984.

"I have many fond memories of my days in the Winnett area and always enjoyed hearing my dad tell about the homestead days."

LEWIS, David and William (Sec 20-16-24) William W. Lewis was born on December 22, 1916, in the Lavina area. He was the eldest of seven children. William (Bill) married Dorothy Miller, a New Yorker, In 1946. They have two daughters. Linda was born in 1947. She married Don Eckland and teaches in Harlowton, Montana. They ranch in the Shawmut area. Bonnie, born in 1951, is married to Howard Tuss. They ranch near Grassrange and have two sons, Dustin and Jarrett.

David W. Lewis was born on July 6, 1924, the fifth child. He married Arclista Skurdal in 1949. They have three children. Mark, born in 1950, married Terry Pierce. They have three children. Mark, born in 1950, married Terry Pierce. She teaches in Winnett. Mark bought the A. H. Fuhs place near the Staff area. They have a daughter, Sasha, and a son, Zackery. Leslie, born in 1952, married Carol Roe. They have a son, Wiley, and a daughter, Megan. Russell, born in 1954, married Julie Whitener. He has two sons, Brandon and Barton, and they have a daughter, Emily. Julie teaches in Grassrange. Russ leases the Graber place from his father.

In 1952, Dave and Bill bought the Delbert Buckler place in the Blakeslee area. They operated under the name of Lewis Brothers. Dave’s family lived in a house that he had moved from the Lavina ranch, while Bill and his family lived in the Buckler house.

Bill and Dave did extensive dirt work on the Buckler place, building dams, leveling bottoms, and building dikes for flood irrigating.

In the spring of 1967, the Lewises bought a ranch west of the Buckler place, in Fergus County, from Bill Graber. Dave and his family moved to this ranch while Bill remained on the original ranch. Dave and Arclista were divorced and Dave married Gunda Sikveland Shaw.
LEWIS, Marvin

Marvin Lewis was born September 22, 1893 in Moline, Illinois. Lucy E. Kelley was born November 21, 1901, in North Bend, Washington. The two were married on November 25, 1921. Marvin came to a homestead northwest of Winnett in 1914. Marvin and Lucy had two daughters — Evelyn (Brown), who lives in Choteau, Montana; and Shirley (Cather), who lives in Moab, Utah. They had four sons — Marvin and Lester of Fairfield; Floyd of Summerland, British Columbia, Canada; and Bob of Antioch, California.

The Lewises lived on the Paul Johnson place and on the Welter place, better known as the Welter Post Office. Lucy and Marvin carried the mail for four years out of Winnett to Fergus County Sheep Co.

The Lewises left there in 1938 to move to Fairfield, Montana. Lucy and Marvin were school bus drivers there for 12 years and farmed till Marvin passed away on September 14, 1975, at the age of 82. Marvin is buried at Fairfield. Lucy is still able to travel. She lives with Evelyn in Choteau, Montana. Evelyn’s husband, Lester, (born in Linville, Iowa), died September 6, 1969. (Submitted by Evelyn Brown)

LIAS, William

William Smith Lias was born November 19, 1857, in Iowa. Mary Hannah Stinton was born June 21, 1866, in Iowa. The two were married on February 11, 1885. The Liases came to the Welter community from Idaho in May of 1914 and homesteaded 17 miles northwest of Winnett. They brought three grown children with them — Viola Vesta, born May 16, 1889 in Iowa; Eldia Jane, born December 3, 1899; and Clair R., born February 15, 1902, in Steele, North Dakota.

Mrs. Lias boarded school teachers and Mr. Lias graded roads to add to their income. The family went to Grassrange for groceries and supplies until the railroad came to Winnett. Homesteading days were hard on the Liases due to their age. They stuck it out, however, until they celebrated their golden wedding anniversary.

Viola married a Mr. Harris. She died and was buried in Buckley, Washington. Eldia married Harry McCollum of Grassrange, and Clair married Goldie Mae Potter of Valentine. Clair and Goldie had two children — Mae Louise, born 5-21-26 in Spokane, Washington; and Doris Marie, born 9-27-27 in Lewistown, Montana. When the other homesteaders left, the Liases moved to Corvallis, Montana. Mr. Lias died November 13, 1939. Mrs. Lias died February 23, 1953. They were both buried at Corvallis. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

LOITE, Pete

Pete and his brother homesteaded north of Wild Horse Lake mesa. Pete herded sheep for the Beedies. He left in the late 1930s or early 1940s.
LONG, LeRoy

LeRoy Long was born December 7, 1915, in Lewistown. He married Gladys D. Wicklund who was born November 4, 1914, in Minot, North Dakota. They have three children: Michael, born March 18, 1941; Pat, born a year later; and Robert, born July 18, 1952.

In 1950 Gladys moved to Winnett. renting a house from Mrs. Smith, while Roy stayed on at the King Ranch where they had been working since 1942. (See also KING — Teigen) Mike and Pat attended school in Winnett and Gladys worked at Eager Mercantile until spring. At that time, the Longs leased the Fuhs Ranch, moving out there in the spring of 1951.

They bought Fuhs’ machinery and proceeded to raise wheat and sunflower. At first they ran cows on shares for Toby Machler and Ed Skibby. The next year they ran cattle for Toby, Ted Hill and Art Meserve. The following year Rolly Kaufman’s cows were on the place, running for half the calf crop. This was quite a chore as each calf had to be earmarked as soon as it was born.

The winter of 1951-1952 was so severe that Gladys took Pat and Mike to Winnett for school where she rented a hotel room for the winter — a little crowded with two youngsters. Roy would make his way through the snowdrifts bearing milk, cream and eggs (sometimes scrambled). The family came home on weekends. They usually delivered supplies and mail to Chris and Nell Weingart, where they often stayed long enough to sample a bowl of Nell’s chili!

When Rolly and Kari Kaufman came to work for Ed Skibby in 1952, the two families took turns hauling children to the Blakeslee School.

There were some good and some bad times for the Longs on this ranch. In 1961 the summer was so dry that Roy and Pat hauled water to the cattle for seven months. This wore out a truck, but saved the cattle. Then, in 1962, the rains came, flooding everything. Haystacks floated away and bridges were washed out, but a good hay crop resulted.

Pat and Mike went to the Blakeslee School, graduating from the eighth grade there. Mike graduated from Winnett High School in 1959 and Pat in 1960. Bob went to school at the Long School which was halfway between Longs and the Skibby Ranch. It was taught by Mrs. Zelenka one year and Bill Brown, the next. Children attending were the Jerry Weingart children, Munskis from the Skibby Ranch, and Bob Long. Bob went to school from the eighth grade through high school in Winnett graduating in 1970.

After 23 years on the Fuhs Ranch, Longs bought a ranch at Toston, Montana. They sold out after four years, and now live near Lewistown above the Fish Hatchery on Spring Creek.

Mike married Peggy Hill. They have one daughter, Lisha, and live in Virginia. Pat married Linda Nagel, and they have a son, Curt, and a daughter, Michele. Pat and Linda live in Idaho. Bob lives in Lewistown, where he and his wife, the former Tracy Tuss, have two sons, Shane and Spencer, and a daughter, Stacie. Bob is on the Lewistown police force.

LONG, S. M. S. M. Long was a 1917 trustee of the Neumann School.

LUCAS, Thomas
(See 22-16-24) Thomas Lucas homesteaded on the hill south of Earl Bassett’s creek bottom. He had 200 acres. One of his children was buried there. Frank Bassett helped bury her.

MACHLER, Dominic
Dominic “Toby” Machler homesteaded on the Missouri River (See also MACHLER — Musselshell River). He later bought a ranch above Lewistown, Montana, on Beaver Creek. Toby and his two brothers, Fred and Mike, leased the Fergus County Sheep Ranch for several years and operated it as a sheep business.

In about 1939, Toby and Clifford Belcher bought the property from a Helena bank. Cliff was a Lewistown businessman who owned a grain farm near Moore, Montana, and also owned and operated the Midway Bar in Lewistown.

Toby and his wife, Rose, lived on the Fergus County Sheep Ranch for a few years until they sold to Douglas and Richard Delaney in 1946. The Delaneys bought out Belcher’s interest in 1955. Today (1989) the property is owned by Dick Delaney.

MacJANNETT, John
(See 7-17-24) See DEVINE, Wilson

MARSHALL, Frank
(See 34-18-26) Frank Marshall homesteaded in the Valentine-Dovetail area. It was rumored that he came from Canada. Young female homesteaders were easy prey for the opposite sex, so it wasn’t long until Frank found his way over to the Welter community. He married Ella Lear November 14, 1920. They had five children — Donna, Evelyn, Billie, Laura, and Burney. Little is known what Frank did for a living besides farming Ella’s homestead and carrying mail from Staff to Winnett.

The Marshalls were living in the Baker house when it burned down. After this fire, they moved a house near the Welter School so the children were close to school. They lived there several years. After Frank died in 1937, Ella moved to Winnett with the family, where she worked as a cook in Winnett restaurants. The three youngest Marshall children died young. In 1959 Ella moved to Roundup, where she passed away March 15, 1963. Donna is the only one who lives today. The Marshalls are all buried in Winnett. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

MAXEY, Albert and Joseph
(See 24-17-25) Albert and Nellie Maxey and Joe and Linnett Maxey came to their homesteads from Oklahoma. Albert and Nellie only stayed a short time. They probably proved up on their homestead and sold out to a neighbor, which was customary.

Joe and Linnett left the homestead twice — once they moved to Grassrange, and once to Winnett, but they
always returned to the farm. Joe was a good farmer. He took an interest in the community and always helped with entertainment at the Welter School. Joe was elected Petroleum County Commissioner in 1926. He worked as a carpenter and worked in a hardware while in Winnett. When the majority of the homesteaders left, Maxeys moved to Cody, Wyoming, where they acquired an irrigated farm. Linnet had a sister near Cody. The Maxeys both eventually died in Cody. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

McBROOM, Charles (Sec 9-16-24) Charles and Sarah McBroom came from the Fowler, Colorado, area in 1910-1912. The train landed them in Judith Gap, Montana. They stayed several months in Lewistown before starting for their homestead on Hoosier Bench, together with the Bill McCliman family.

Charles was a carpenter and built many homestead cabins and schoolhouses. He played the violin along with his son John on the banjo, his son Monte on the french horn and harmonica, and Allie Thomas on bass viol. The homesteaders had lots of fun in spite of bad times.


Charles and Sarah moved from their homestead in 1924 to Washington and eventually to Arizona for Sarah's health. They spent their last years in Michigan with their daughter, Mae.

McCLIMANS, William (Sec 17-16-24) William and Abella McClimans both took out homesteads south of the old Floyd Harris house. The McClimans had two daughters, Goldie and Thelma. Earl Bassett recalls Thelma was in the same grade with him in 1925-1926. Earl boarded with the McClimans while he went to the Neumann School.

W. O. McClimans was one of the first trustees of the Neumann School. The McClimans moved to Denver, Colorado, in 1927 or 1928.

McELWAIN, James and Jacob (Sec 35-16-24) The McElwain homestead was east of the Luebke place. Dale Bassett recalls seeing a child's grave, with a fence around it, being on the place.

James McElwain was a locator.

McENEANEY, William P. (Sec 6-17-25) William P. McEneaney was born May 18, 1882, in Springfield, Wisconsin. Jane Harper was born August 9, 1884, in County Donegal, Ireland. The two were married on June 19, 1907. The McEneaneys were both Irish. They lived in Washington before settling in the Staff community, 30 miles north of Winnett. The McEneaneys had five children — Philip, born 1909 in Wisconsin; Edith, born 1910 in Wisconsin; Margaret, born 1913 in Wisconsin; Alice, born 1921 in Montana; and James, born 1916 in Spokane, Washington.

Besides farming, Bill McEneaney in later years carried the mail between Staff and Winnett. The McEneaneys always enjoyed a party and often entertained at their home. The family went to Grassrange, Winnett, or Teigen to get groceries and supplies. Grocery lists were sometimes sent in with the mail carrier.

The parents were aggressive and wanted their children to get a good education. Jim McEneaney attended the Staff School for 7½ years. He spent one-half of his sixth grade year at the Grassrange School. When the children were old enough to go to high school, Mrs. McEneaney moved to Lewistown with Peggy (Margaret), Jim, and Alice, so the children could attend Fergus County High School. Edith had one year of school in Spokane. After Peggy and Jim finished high school, Mrs. McEneaney moved to Winnett where Alice graduated from high school.


The McEneaneys left the Staff community and moved to Flatwillow in 1938. Bill bought and continued to farm on the old Tom Berkin Ranch (owned by Hughes in 1985). Bill carried mail from Flatwillow to Winnett. When they retired, they moved to Roundup. Bill died February 14, 1956; and Jane, August 24, 1956. They both were buried in Menomonee, Wisconsin. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth) (See also McENEANEY — Flatwillow)

McFARLAND, Otis (Mac) At one time Otis owned the Buckler place. He married Beulah Dengel. They had five children: Jack, Mable, Blanche, Junior and another boy.

Otis left the farm and was a janitor at the Grassrange School for many years. He later moved to Washington and worked in a shipyard.
McLEAN, Jay (Sec 34-16-24) Jay McLean, known as "one-armed Jay," moved here in the early 1920s and lived west of the Luebke place and south of Frank Bassett. He was married to Genevieve and had a daughter, Effie, and a son, Otho.

Earl Bassett recalls how Genevieve got lost in a snowstorm one night on her way home from the Luebke's. Jay set a big straw pile on fire in hopes his wife would see it, but she didn't. It cleared up around midnight, and the neighbors were asked to help look for her. She was found and was all right.

In the early 1920s, Jay moved to Lewistown and operated a coal business. He adopted a son, Stanley Seaver, who worked in the oil fields at Cat Creek. His daughter, Effie Wilson, still owns oil rights on her parents' homestead in Petroleum County. She lives in Billings, Montana.

MEAD, George (Sec 17-17-26) George and Ida Mead came from Kansas and homesteaded on Dry Blood Creek. They had four grown children — Mary Gladys, Della, Imo and Bill. After a short time on the homestead, George and Ida Mead moved to Cat Creek where he worked in the oil fields. They later moved to Roy where he ran a creamery until he retired and they moved to Lewistown.

Gladys also homesteaded near her parents. She married Bert Thorsheim. (See also THORSHEIM — Blakeslee)

Della married William Trimble. They both homesteaded closer to the Valentine community. (See also TRIMBLE — Dovetail) Bill was the youngest of the Mead family. He went to work in Cat Creek in the oil fields. (See also MEAD — Cat Creek)

Imo married Ray Bowyer. They came from Kansas and homesteaded, but did not stay long and returned to Kansas City, Missouri. They had two sons, Irwin and Bruce. (Submitted by Roberta Eike)

MELIUS, Louis (Sec 4-16-24) Lou and Annie Melius lived south of Nurse Osterberg.

He was a special violin player, and played for many dances. He also had a team of gray horses he was very fond of. They turned up missing. When they came home on their own they had "Lou Melius" branded on the full length of their bodies.

Lou died of tick fever in 1931. Mrs. Melius moved to Winnett and later to Lewistown, Montana, where she lived to be over 100 years old. Their place is now part of the Earl Bassett Ranch.

MORSS, Anne (Sec 22,23-17-26) "Anne" Morss owned land about six miles east of Welter. The following news item was taken from the Winnett Times of June 27, 1930: "The younger son of Mrs. Anne Morss arrived here Tuesday from Seattle to spend the summer with his mother."

MOULTON, Charles (Sec 9-16-25) Charles was born in Unity, Maine, on September 15, 1858. Lucy Watkins was born on December 15, 1850, at Athens, Ohio. Charles came to Montana in 1879. He and Lucy were united in marriage in 1903.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Moulton homesteaded west of Forbes Leslie on Fords Creek. Little is remembered of the Moultons, except that they raised big gardens.

Mr. and Mrs. Moulton moved to Winnett when they left the Welter area. Mr. Moulton died there on October 13, 1931. Mrs. Moulton went to West Virginia for a time to be with her son, but she returned to Winnett. After Mr. Moulton died in 1931, Mrs. Moulton used to come back and visit the Mutch's. She died in Winnett in 1939. Mr. and Mrs. Moulton are buried in Winnett. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)
MUNSKI, George George Munski worked for Ed Skibby in the late 1950s. He and his wife, Caroline, had three children — Jack, Linda and Connie. The children were excellent young musicians and they entertained many local groups with their talents. Linda played the accordion and sang. Jack played the guitar, and Connie sang.

MUTCH, George (Sec 30-17-26) Agnes Mutch Lindseth presented her family history: "George Mutch came from Scotland in about 1906. He worked around the Judith Basin and south of Lewistown for many years until he raised enough money to go back to Scotland to get his bride, Elizabeth Robertson. They were married in Scotland on February 23, 1912. Two months later they landed in Lewistown, Montana. It was the same week the Titanic went down.

"Elizabeth stayed in Lewistown (or near there) with some friends while George went to the homestead to build a dugout. In June he took his bride to the dugout where they lived while George built the log cabin in which they lived until 1918.

"George Mutch had picked out his homestead before he left for Scotland. It was very good land as it was fertile and level and had a spring on it. The water level was about 20 feet below the surface of the ground.

"Up until the 'dirty thirties' there were some productive years, but there were as many that were unproductive. On a good year many people raised good gardens — melons and lots of rhubarb, which sufficed for our vitamins of today. George Mutch had a hundred hills of rhubarb which he cultivated every spring with a one-horse cultivator. He gave away a lot of it to neighbors.

"George carried the mail for four years from 1918 to 1922 from Welter. Staff and Blakeslee to Grassrange. He went twice a week, staying overnight in Grassrange. Elizabeth held down the homestead, doing chores and taking care of the children. Later Frantz Lern underbid him and carried the mail for the next four years.

"George tried raising sheep, but in those days he couldn't raise enough hay to feed the sheep all winter. The endeavor was short-lived. The Mutches always milked at least five to eight cows. They also raised chickens and turkeys. They sold cream and butter and eggs in Winnett. Income from these products didn't buy very much, but groceries and dry goods were cheap then. George and Elizabeth were 'Scotch' and lived up to their Scotch reputation. There was always something in the larder.

"The Mutches built a new house in 1918. It was a two-story house with only two bedrooms; but it was a palace compared to the little log house.

"Elizabeth Mutch took an active part in all of the social life at Welter. She was superintendent of the Sunday school and president of the Busy Bee Sewing Club at one time. Elizabeth liked to cook and was a good cook. She often had her neighbors in for Sunday dinner.

"The Mutches had three children — Elma, William, and Agnes. Elma was born in Grassrange; William and Agnes, on the homestead with a midwife. They all went to the Welter (or Mountain View) School, when school was held there. One year Elma went to the Staff School, as did Margaret Welter. Another year they went to the Box Elder School as the two schools were in the same district. Some years the community could only afford to run one school.

"Elma Mutch went to high school in Winnett for three years. She completed her high school education in Lewistown where she graduated. Bill never got to go to high school as that was in the middle of the depression. Agnes went two years in Winnett, but later finished with a correspondence course from the International Correspondence School in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

"Elma married Glen Spoon from Winnett. Agnes married Albert Lindseth at Choteau, Montana. Bill married Alice Kubernick in California. Elma has five children — Agnes, four; and Bill, two. One of Agnes' children is deceased.

"The Mutches lived a well-rounded life until the wells dried up, the springs went dry, and the creeks just disappeared. George Mutch lost a barn-granary-garage combination with fire shortly before they moved away. They
almost lost a cow and calf in the same fire. It was started by a little boy playing with matches. That little boy is 56 years old now. Elizabeth decided it was time to leave.

"In 1938 they moved to Fairfield, Montana, where the water flowed free from the Gibson Dam. George worked for the reclamation and for an elevator. Later he did yards and gardens. George died in 1953, and Elizabeth in 1965. They are both buried in the Sunset Cemetery at Fairfield."

NELSON, Charles (Sec 3-26-24) Charles Nelson took up a homestead in 1910, one-half mile south of the present Blakeslee School.

As a result of an illness as a youth, he lost all of his hair, and therefore was known to all as Baldie.

He was an avid corn grower and the community children were hired by him to pick weeds and rocks. Baldie often served them cooked raisins for dessert, a great treat!

Giving up the homestead, Baldie moved to California where he passed away. His nephew, George Beam, still owns the ranch and leases it to Don Fleharty.

NEUMANN, Edward (Sec 8-16-24) Edward and Martha Neumann came to Montana in 1912 from New Ulm, Minnesota. They built and lived in the chicken coop until they built their home in 1915. They had ten children — Alma, Louise, Harvey, Otto, Elsie, Anna, Henry, Julius, Martha and Edward.

Louise and Julius came in the winter and then, in the spring of 1913, the rest of the family came to Grassrange on an emigrant train.

Alma married George Nelson. They moved here from Marshall, Minnesota, in the spring of 1913. They lived on the John Kuhn place now owned by Bob Fleharty. They had four children — Evelyn, Lloyd, Walter and Lewis.

Louise married David Harris, who had a homestead one and one-half miles northwest of the Petroleum County west boundary. They moved to Louise's homestead. They had four children: Floyd, Alice, Frank and David B.

Anna married Gus Brandt. They lived on the place now owned by Bruce Griffith. Harvey was killed in a train accident in Great Falls in 1922 at the age of 21.

Otto resided in Lewistown and started Auto Body Top and Repair in 1924. He took the Plymouth dealership in 1928. In 1931 he started the Nash and LaFayette dealership. He stayed in this business until his retirement. Ed died from an accidental gunshot wound in 1936. He had carried the mail to the Blakeslee area.

Henry lived in Washington where he was a barber. He passed away in April of 1988. Julius moved to Murtaugh, Idaho. He and Henry both married teachers from the Three Buttes School.


OPITZ, Albert (Sec 31-18-25) Albert Opitz owned land approximately five miles north of Staff. He and his wife, Doris, lost their farm home to fire in the early 1930s. Albert was lighting a fire with crude oil.

After the fire they moved to an empty house on the Jack Duteau homestead (Sec 23-17-25). Mr. Duteau had built a fairly large house. It was about four miles south of the Opitz farm.

The Opitzes later moved to a ranch near Grassrange.

(Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)

OSTERBERG, Ida (Sec 4-16-24) Miss Osterberg lived just west of Baldie Nelson. She was a nurse and was a well-liked woman.

Myrtle Fleharty quotes Miss Osterberg as remembering the Chicago hospital officials teaching "that there was nothing as good as soap and water for fighting germs."

After Ida moved back to Chicago, Jake Strait added her house to his own.

PEDERSON, Nellye B. and Clentine (Sec 28-16-24) Nellye Pederson was a nurse. Earl Bassett reported that she helped deliver him when he was born in 1917. Nellye never married and later moved to Missoula, Montana. Her homestead was located about two miles south of Bassett's place.
Clentine (Tena) Pederson homesteaded next to her sister, Nellye. Tena married Elliot (Olie) DeLap and moved to the Forest Grove, Montana, area around 1926-1927.

**RANF, Frederick** (Sec 24-16-26) Fred Ranf was born March 21, 1883. Marie Pollman was born August 13, 1886, in Boscabell, Wisconsin. In 1909 she moved with her parents to Harlowton, Montana, where, on October 14, 1914, she was married to Frederick Charles Ranf.

Following their marriage they filed on a homestead eight miles north of Winnett and five miles southeast of Edgewater.

While living there, five children were born — August, Frederick, Marie, Orval and John. The children attended local elementary schools.

In 1929 Fred went to work for the 56 Company in the North Oil field, where he was a tool dresser. With steady employment there, he held an auction sale on his ranch to dispense with farm equipment and household goods. However, he did not sell his real estate.

The family moved to Winnett. (See also RANF — Winnett)

**REED, James** (Sec 17-15-25) James (who may have been known as Thomas) and his wife came to Montana with their five sons in about 1912. Mr. Reed and two of the sons took up land about four miles north of Teigen along the Teigen-Blakeslee road. These homesteads were located in Sec 6, 7-15-25 and Sec 31-16-25.

The sons were: Buell, Nova, Spencer, Ralph and Dean. The Reed Brothers operated two threshing rigs. They threshed grain for all of the other homesteaders in the large area.

Nova moved to Malta and worked for the A.S.C.S. Mr. Reed’s homestead is now part of the Teigen Land and Livestock Company. The Reed Brothers’ place belongs to Evert Brady. The Reeds are all deceased. None of the boys married. (See also REED — Teigen)

**RIGGS, Cleveland** "Cleve" as he was known, was born April 28, 1889, at Canyon Ferry, Montana. He was one of ten children of Mr. and Mrs. Lorenzo Riggs. He married Minnie Allumbaugh November 17, 1917, at Moore, Montana. She died in 1920.

Cleve came to Petroleum County in the 1920s or early 1930s and farmed on the Minnesota Bench. He was ditch rider for the Winnett Irrigation Company in the 1940s.

He retired in 1948 and moved into Winnett, living there until his death in January of 1962. Mrs. Edith Jewart was named as a survivor. He was buried in a Roundup, Montana, cemetery.

**RODEKUHR, John** John Rodekuhr was born on March 28, 1887, in Deer Creek, Minnesota. He married Fanny E. Horn on October 20, 1907. She was born on November 10, 1886, in Faribault, Minnesota.

The Rodekuhrs lived on the Minnesota Bench from 1911 to 1916, when they returned to Minnesota. Children born to John and Fanny were: Beatrice May, July 20, 1908; Homer Robert and Howard William, November 25, 1912; Ralph L., December 20, 1916; and Marian L., January 5, 1925, who married Emil Carl Freburg.

John and Fanny Rodekuhr homesteaded adjoining the Freburg homestead on the east. Marian Rodekuhr Freburg writes the following instance of her folks’ homesteading at Blakeslee: "My mother, father and my sister, Beatrice, came to Blakeslee as homesteaders in 1911.

"My parents, together with several other homesteaders from Deer Creek, Minnesota, were lured to this area by glowing accounts of land opened up by the new federal government homesteading laws. They all packed up all their belongings. My parents brought their team of horses, Barney and King, on the same train. They all traveled together to the Minnesota Bench and put up buildings before the cold weather.

"The following year my mother was expecting a baby..."
and, there being no prenatal care, she finally decided the due date was very near. My father hitched up Barney and King to the lumber wagon and they proceeded to Lewistown via Gillette, staying overnight in Gillette where pack rats nearly carried away their loose possessions.

The next morning, November 25, 1912, they traveled on into Lewistown, arriving there shortly before the stores closed. They went downtown to purchase materials for diapers and other necessities. Then they went to stay with some friends who lived on the banks of Spring Creek. By 9:00 p.m. the same evening, twins, Homer and Howard, were born. The babies each weighed over eight pounds. The births occurred only four or five hours after my folks’ arrival in Lewistown!

Ten days later the Rodekuhrs, with their twin sons, returned to their homestead. It would seem to me a courageous act for a woman five feet two inches tall, weighing about one hundred thirty pounds to have even survived the seemingly primitive times and hardships of homesteading days. But she lived to be 17 days short of 89 years.

The foregoing is only one of many stories my parents told of their life before I was born. It would seem they worked hard and played hard!! The two younger children, Ralph and Marian, were born after Rodekuhrs returned to their home in Minnesota.

Howard, who enjoyed this land of his birth, returned often for hunting trips. While on his last hunt, he passed away at the home of Don and Myrtle Fleharty.

SHANKS, Henry (Sec 25-16-24) Henry lived on the former Smith place. There was a scary incident in the schoolhouse at a Christmas program and party when Henry was Santa Claus. While reaching over a lighted candle to pick up a doll, his beard caught on fire!!

SHAWHAN, Hugh L. (Sec 7-16-26) Hugh Shawhan was married. He did his farming with a large steam tractor.

SIPE, Harry F. and Karl B. (Sec 30-17-24) Harry F. and Karl B. Sipe both homesteaded west of the Blakeslee schoolhouse. They sold their land to the Norwegian Lutheran Church in 1929.

SKIBBY, Ed Ed Skibby bought the Forbes Leslie Ranch in the mid-1940s. Ed was an ardent supporter of high school athletics, especially basketball. He and his wife Edna were active in Masonic and Eastern Star activities. Ed served as a Petroleum County State Representative from 1948-52. Skibbies moved to Lewistown, Montana.

SMITH, William (Sec 25-16-24) Mrs. Smith and her daughter lived three miles south and east of the Blakeslee School. Visiting and Easter egg coloring was enjoyed at the Smith home. Bill had the first radio in the community.

When Smiths left the area, Henry Shanks lived on their farm. Bill became a mechanic in the Moore, Montana, area.

SOMMERFIELD, Dan (Sec 27-17-24) Dan Sommerfield owned land that joined Herman Kruger’s place. the Sommerfield land is now owned by the Lawrence Krugers. (See also SOMMERFIELD — Winnett and GREENFIELD — Blakeslee)

SPOON, James (Sec 21-17-26) Jim Spoon homesteaded about three miles northeast of the Welter School. Jim had three sons — Roy, Walter and Glen; and one daughter, Elizabeth. Roy and his wife came later, but did not homestead. Walter and his wife came only to visit. Glen was younger and lived quite some time with his dad. Elizabeth was ill and came later, but passed away soon after coming to Montana. The Spoons all came from Pennsylvania.

There was very little tillable land on Jim’s homestead. It was presumed that he raised some cattle. How a lot of these people survived is not known. Glen eventually married Elma Mutch. They lived with Jim for awhile, then moved to the Paul Johnson place. One summer they went to Washington to pick apples.

Roy lived around Winnett on different places, but finally moved to Sandpoint, Idaho, where he and his wife lived out their lives. Glen and Elma moved to Fairfield, Montana, with a lot of other resettlers. Later they moved to Westport, Washington, where Glen worked as a commercial fisherman. They had five children — Lorraine, Monte, Lloyd, Gary, and Marilyn. Glen is deceased. Elma lives at Issaquah, Washington. Walter and his wife also lived at Westport, Washington. They are both deceased. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)
SRAIT, Jacob (Sec 33-17-24) Jake Strait homesteaded in 1912, just across the road and south of the Blakeslee School. They had four children — Mabel, Evelyn, Ralph and Hugh. Jake was one of the school’s first trustees.

When the Blakeslee family moved away, Jake and his wife, Grace, ran the post office for several years. They were the last family to run the store in the area. Jake was a victim of the dreaded spotted tick fever. The Strait family later moved to the St. Ignatius, Montana, area. The homestead is now owned by Bob Fleharty.

SULLIVAN, Mary Mary Sullivan came from Minnesota with her grown children — John, Catherine and Mayme. They all homesteaded in the area. Soon after, John, who owned land in Sec 5-15-26, and his family returned to Minnesota.

Catherine married Jake Kelzer; Mayme married Frank Brug.

SWANSON Mr. Swanson homesteaded in 1912 on land east of Herman Kruger.

TAYLOR, William (Sec 8-16-26) Catherine Taylor Barr wrote her family’s history: “A young man had a dream to come to America to make his fortune. He was also tired of the job of delivering milk to customers for his father, who was a dairy farmer. He was William Taylor, better known to his friends as ‘Billy.’ He was born at Tomhill Parish of New Deer County of Aberdeen, Scotland, on February 12, 1883. His father was James Taylor and his mother, Margaret Smith Taylor. He had five brothers and six sisters. He was the eldest son.

“Canada was the logical place to go, since Billy had cousins there. When he was in his early twenties, he and some of his friends sailed for the New World and adventure. In 1908 he came to Straw, Montana, where he had heard there was plenty of opportunity for ambitious young men.

“His first job was herding sheep for Forbes Leslie, a large sheep rancher who had several herds of sheep. Bill advanced from herder to camp tender for the herdsmen, and was kept busy keeping them in supplies and moving the camp wagons to new locations.

“Another job that he had at Straw was hauling supplies to the surveyors, who were working on the homestead plots. He spotted a nice piece of land and filed on it for himself. However, before he was able to prove up on it, he took seriously ill and landed in the hospital, one of the first patients in the then new hospital at Lewistown, Montana. Things worked out well for him in spite of being sick, because he had an opportunity to sell his homestead at a nice profit. He sold it and used the money to pay his hospital bills and put the rest into savings toward a trip back to Scotland.

“From Straw he went to Grassrange. This was about 1910. There was plenty of work there. The railroad was being surveyed, so he hauled supplies for the surveyors. The country was becoming settled and both the Great Northern and Milwaukee railroads were extending their services. The Milwaukee was building from Lewistown to Grassrange and then east to Winnett. The Great Northern, building from Lewistown to Hobson, Stanford, and Great Falls.

“More homestead sites were also being surveyed east of Grassrange, so Bill hauled supplies and helped the settlers however he could. While doing this, he found a spot to his liking next to the sheep ranch of his old friend, Forbes Leslie, who had moved there after selling out at Straw. Bill filed on the spot and later proved up on it, putting up a little one-room shack and building some fences. He now had a place to call home. He made a little extra cash showing prospective homesteaders where the available sites were located.

“While Bill was in Grassrange, he drove the stage between Grassrange and Lewistown. This was before the railroad went through. It was a two-day trip. Six horses pulled the stage. The Charters Hotel in Grassrange was his home base. Tina French worked there, and he used to
take her out once in a while.

"In the fall of 1910, he found he had enough money saved so that he could return to Scotland for a visit. A couple of his friends went with him. They had a great time visiting with families and renewing old acquaintances. It was while Bill was at a ball that he met the girl that he decided he wanted for his wife, namely Catherine Gray, the daughter of Thomas Gray and Catherine Yule Gray. She had one brother and one sister.

"He courted her, entertained her, and one day at 'high tea' in her home (and before asking her), he asked her parents if they would be willing to let her go with him as his wife. Since there were no objections, the young couple became engaged. This was in the spring of 1911 and it was time for Billy to return to Montana. On his way back, he took time to look for a ring. He found one, a Montana sapphire, in Aberdeen, and mailed it to Catherine from there.

"His younger brother, John, came with Bill and his friend, Billy Cameron, back to Grassrange. There was work to be done to be ready for the arrival of his bride-to-be.

"He and his brother, John, went down to the bad lands where they cut trees and had them sawed into lumber. They hauled the lumber back to the homestead and built an addition to the homestead shack that Bill called home.

"To earn necessary funds, he worked for his friend Forbes Leslie. They built a big barn at Leslies. Bill was again the dray-man, hauling the lumber for it. It was while hauling lumber that he nearly lost his life. He was crossing Box Elder Creek when his team jack-knifed. One horse went down and before Bill could get it free, it drowned. Bill thought he was going to be drowned, too, before he was able to get the rest of the struggling horses loose and out of the creek. The little creek didn't have much water in it, except in the spring or during a cloud-burst — then it would run bank full. It was during one of these high-water times that they were hauling the lumber.

"In the meantime, Catherine Gray was busy getting her trousseau together in preparation for going to America to be married. She learned from her future mother-in-law of another young couple, a Mr. and Mrs. George Mutch, who were newly married and were to be going to America to Lewistown, Montana. Arrangements were made so that she could go with them. Plans were that they would sail from Liverpool, England, on the new ship, the Titanic. Circumstances changed their plans, and they sailed for America from Glasgow, Scotland, instead. They were very shaken when they learned the Titanic had hit an iceberg and gone down!

"During the trip, Billy's future bride learned that the Mutches knew the people that she was to stay with in Lewistown (Mr. and Mrs. Bob Gray). She also learned that George Mutch had taken a homestead at Welter, a stage stop, which later became a post office and was not too far from where her home was to be.

"Bill was to meet his fiancé in Harlowton, but he wasn't there, so she rode the 'jaw-bone' to Lewistown. Such a long tiresome ride it was. She was sure he would be at the depot in Lewistown, but instead, his friend, Billy Cameron, met her. When they got to the Gray's home, there was Bill standing on the porch waiting for them. It seems there had been a severe rainstorm and the roads were terribly muddy and the going was unusually slow. He was still soaking wet when he got to the Grays.

"Catherine learned, to her surprise, that Bob Gray was a second cousin of hers. They lived on Spring Street in a house that still stands, the second one above the tracks on the north side of the street.

"The young couple were invited to another Scotch friend's, the Mr. and Mrs. Bill Gowans, for dinner. They enjoyed a fine meal and visit and later took a drive around the town. The streets were terrible — muddy and full of ruts. She was silent a while and then asked Billy, 'Are you ashamed of me, or why are we taking all the back streets?' He said, 'My dear, this is Main Street.'

"They were married at Grays' house on April 13, 1912, by the Rev. Jacob Mills. Their witnesses were Mrs. George Mutch and Billy Cameron, who stood in for Bill's brother, John, who couldn't make it to the wedding.

"It was a two-day's drive in the buggy to get from Lewistown to their home. They were overnight guests of Mr. and Mrs. Forbes Wiseman at Grassrange. They stopped for a break at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Al James after leaving Grassrange. Just before they came in sight of the house, Bill teased his very tired bride, 'What are you going to do, I don't have any place to put you.' Then they came into view of the wooden house — three rooms, kitchen, bedroom, and front room. Mrs. Mutch's first house was a sod house, so the new Mrs. Taylor felt very lucky.

"Bill plowed his fields with horses hitched to a plow. It took four horses to pull it. He planted grain and hay. He worked for Mr. Leslie part time, helping with the sheep shearing and lambing. Mr. Leslie gave Mrs. Taylor some of the lambs to raise by bottle. They had some chickens, pigs, cows, and a team of horses and a big stallion, named Colonel. Billy was pretty proud of his stallion and made some money off of him for stud fees.

"There were several young couples from Scotland on homesteads around the Taylors. They would get together on Bobby Burns' birthdays and have celebrations that would last until the wee hours of the mornings. There was no radio or TV at that time, but plenty of home-made entertainment, box socials, Halloween parties, picnics, masquerades, dances, and visiting of neighbors.

"In November of 1913, a daughter came to live with the young couple. Bill took his wife to Lewistown in September, so that she would be near a doctor when the baby came. He found a job with the Lewistown lumber company, hauling lumber, and spent time studying to take out his citizen's papers. He passed his examination and received his naturalization papers dated December 29, 1913. It was noted on the certificate that it was the 138th year of our independence.
"Going back home, they rode on the new railroad as far as Grassrange. They were to stay at the hotel overnight. It was so crowded that there were no beds left, so they opted to sleep on the floor. A lamp was left burning all night to keep others from stepping on the ones who were sleeping on the floor. The next day they went on home in their buggy.

In January of 1916, a boy was born at the homestead. Mrs. Taylor decided that since all of her neighbors had their babies at home, she would have this one at home also. A midwife came to stay with them to be there when the baby came. Mrs. Taylor didn’t know she was going to have such a difficult time. It caused her to have surgery a few years later. The baby was a big boy and they named him Robert William, after an uncle who was killed in the World War and for his daddy and grandfather. His sister had been named Catherine Margaret after her mama and two grandmothers.

The little family struggled along. Catherine wasn’t too well and finally the children were taken to the Leslie home to stay with the cook. Mrs. Safely, while Bill and Katie went with the Leslie to Mammoth Hot Springs, where there was a Dr. Townsend who later operated on Katie. When she recovered she was able to return home to her family, who were glad to have her back. The Great War was going on and things became scarce and hard to get. They ate a lot of beans and cornmeal. Wild game was plentiful and often there was sage hen, prairie chicken, or cottontail rabbit for dinner.

In the early 1920s the oil field at Cat Creek struck oil. In a short time the town of Winnett boomed. The Taylors went with Mr. Leslie in his new car to see the oil fields. While they were there, a big gusher came in, spewing black oil higher than the derrick.

They had a good garden spot at the homestead. The weather was such that they could grow most any type of garden produce. One year was better than average. There were buckets of nice peas, so Katie decided to can some. They carefully processed them and Bill tightened the lids. They were stored in the root cellar, but one day when Katie went to the cellar for something, the peas were all over. The jars had exploded. After that they dried the peas. They also had a wagon load of watermelons. Billy took them to Winnett to see if he could sell some. Everyone had melons that year, so no sales. He gave some away and brought the rest home to feed to the chickens and pigs.

"The Indians came through the homestead on their way from the Fort Belknap reservation to the Crow reservation. One day a buggy load of them stopped while Katie was in the garden. They pointed to the melons and one Indian lady was very insistent that she should have one particular one off the vine. Katie tried to explain to her that they weren’t watermelons, but citron. Nothing would do but that she have it, so Katie gave it to her. The Indian broke it on the buggy wheel and with a look of disgust when she saw it said, 'Heap &*$% no good.' She got back into the buggy and they drove off.

"The next problem facing the young family was getting the children educated. The nearest school was at Welter, ten or twelve miles away. The neighbors got together and each contributed enough money to hire a teacher to come and teach school for three months. All the children of the neighborhood from ages five to nine were enrolled in the first grade. The teacher stayed with different families a week at a time at no cost, and an abandoned homestead house was used for the school building. The next year the neighbors got together, hauled the lumber, and built a one-room school on the school section and again raised enough money among them to hire a teacher for three months. The next teacher, a Miss Ruth Omland, started staying at the different families, then asked if she could stay the rest of the time with the Taylors. She helped with the work for her room and board and she and Katie became close friends. When she went to teach another three months at the Wild Horse School near Telgen, she took little Catherine with her for an additional three months — making a total of six months of school in the second grade.

Ruth Omland later married Frank Connolly, who owned the lumber yard in the town of Kolin in the Judith Basin. Connolly’s learned of a ranch just north of Kolin that was to be up for sale. They talked the Taylors into looking at it. After looking it over and deciding that the 160-acres in the Welter country wasn’t enough on which to make a living, that school was a necessity and a problem, and that the family needed a larger house, the Taylors plunged and signed to buy the ranch. Mr. Leslie bought their homestead and they held an auction to dispose of the things they didn’t want to move to Kolin.

"In coming to America to seek his fortune, Bill Taylor was not famous in any way, but he had had an active part in the development of the Central Montana area. He came to a virgin country, saw — and helped it become settled. He lived during an era of fast changing methods of travel and communications — from horse-drawn vehicles to jet planes, from stage-carried mail to televi-
tion. He had his first ride in a Ford plane that was giving rides at a Moccasin Experiment Station Field Day. Katie had her first plane ride on a 747-jet to Los Angeles in 1974.

"Kate Taylor died on December 7, 1979, after being confined in the Central Montana Hospital Nursing Home for two years, as the result of a bad burn she received trying to take a bath.

"At this writing (1988) their descendants include: their daughter, their son, five grandsons, two granddaughters, five great-grandsons, and eight great-granddaughters. One grandson, Philip, son of Catherine, died in 1971, as a result of a service-connected disability."

**THOMAS, Alfred** Alfred "Allie" and Charlotte "Lottie" Thomas homesteaded one-fourth mile west of the present Blakeslee School in 1912. They are remembered as having the first horn and telephone radio in the area. Many people gathered there to listen.

In 1915 Allie helped Charlie McBroom build the Three Buttes School, which was across from the Neumann buildings. In 1916 they built the Blakeslee School.

Allie Thomas bought the Charles Blakeslee place. Eventually the Thomas family moved to Iowa, from whence they came. Myrtle Fleharty remembers one Halloween in the Blakeslee community when the Thomas boys put the buggy on their parents' house, harnessed the Freburg cow, and put Freburg's wagon in the pond!

Their sons were Orval (1903) and Marvin (1905).

**Henry Hedman, Orval Thomas, Lawrence Kruger, Warner Kruger, Melvin Kruger**

**THOMAS, James W.** (Sec 22-17-26) James W. Thomas, who farmed about five miles east of Welter, ended his own life by taking strychnine and then shooting himself. This rash act was due to his brooding over what was probably tough financial conditions.

**THORSHEIM, Bert** Bert Thorsheim married Mary Gladys Mead who had homesteaded near her parents in Sec 8-17-26. After their marriage, Gladys also proved up on a piece of adjoining property in Sec 9-17-26. Later Bert and Gladys bought land on Box Elder Creek where they lived until the 1940s when they sold to Alex Weingart.

Bert and Gladys had two daughters — Margaret and Roberta. They attended the local community elementary schools, and Roberta graduated from Winnett High School in 1937. The Thorsheims made up a popular dance band. Margaret played the piano. Roberta played the violin with her left hand, and Bert played the drums. They were all accomplished musicians, and their music was much in demand.

Margaret was a teacher and county superintendent of schools. (See also THORSHEIM — Winnett) She married Ralph Saylor. (See also SAYLOR — Winnett) Roberta married Lyle Elke. (See also EIKE — Cat Creek)

**TURKS, M. N.** (W. T. 6-10-21) "Mr. and Mrs. M. N. Turks, who live on the Porter place north of Winnett, were presented with a baby boy last Saturday morning. Dr. Alexander reports that all is well."

**WALKER, Willis** (Sec 20-16-25) Willis Fee Walker was born in Philadelphia, Missouri, on September 19, 1888. Laura Catherine Hottenstein was born in Maquoketa, Iowa, on July 17, 1887.

Laura Hottenstein and Willis Walker were married on December 25, 1911, at the home of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Penrose S. Hottenstein, near Anabel, Missouri. After a week's honeymoon, the couple settled down on Laura's uncle's ranch near Anabel, where Willis worked and Laura continued her teaching.

In March of 1914 the couple moved to Montana and resided eight miles southeast of Moore, Montana, until 1915 when they homesteaded north of Teigen. Their place was to be known as the Walker Ranch. Penrose was born in 1918 at Grassrange, Montana. The Walkers continued to live at the ranch until 1919, when they moved back to the Hottenstein Ranch southeast of Moore. They also lived on the Clark place in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains, the McConnell place, and the Jones place.

Earl was born in Moore. Laura continued to teach at
Laura Walker

various county schools. Willis continued to do ranch work.

In the spring of 1928 the Walker family returned to their Blakeslee homestead. It was a trip of about six days. The move was made by teams of horses and wagons. The family ate and slept under the stars as they moved. Penrose, age 10, and Earl, age 8, drove cattle under the watchful eye of Willis.

Walkers raised sheep and cattle, and all the farming was done by horse-drawn equipment. In 1940 they began adding more land to the homestead. It grew to 4280 deeded acres. Some of the land was farmed and the rest grazed. In 1946, when Earl returned from the service in World War II, Walkers bought their first tractor. However, they continued using horses at the same time for much of the work.

Walkers' nearest neighbors were the Beedies, the Reeds, Andy Eckland, and Raphael Martino.

Laura was educated in Iowa and loved teaching. She taught eleven years in Missouri and twenty-nine in Petroleum, Golden Valley and Fergus Counties in Montana. (See also KRUGER, Warner)

Some of the schools she taught were Dovetail, Wildrose, Long, Blakeslee and Lavina. For several years she was matron of the dorm in Winnett. She also was Winnett Postmaster in 1945. Laura was a Gold Star sister. Her brother, Lonnie, was killed just a few days before the end of World War I.

Willis spent most of his lifetime ranching, and working with horses, which he dearly loved. He was happiest when he was teaching his two sons, Penrose and Earl, all the skills he knew. He and Laura instilled in their boys honesty, love of family and neighbors, kindness and hard work. Their home was always open to friends and strangers alike.

Willis lived his life on the land, except for a short period of time when he helped build a section of the Jordan road with a team of horses. One winter he worked on the section gang of the railroad. In July 1971 Willis died of a heart attack at the ranch. He is buried in the family plot at Moore, Montana.

Laura remained at her ranch home until the last four months of her life, passing away on October 10, 1974. She is buried next to her husband at Moore.

Penrose spent the young part of his life at the ranch, but his love of machinery and heavy equipment led him to do construction work spring and summer. He still continued to help with the ranch repairs, calving, branding and with the farming. By his first marriage, he has a daughter, Penny, who lives in Helena, Montana, with her husband.

Penny and Ken have four sons, and Ken has a son who lives in Anaheim, California. In 1958 Penrose married Joan LaChambre Minnerly, and acquired three stepchildren. After thirteen years of working in Colstrip, Montana, as a dragline operator, he retired to Lewistown in 1983.

Earl was never married, and except for his service in the Army, he lived his entire life at the ranch. He was always willing to give a helping hand to all his friends. Earl died in May of 1975.

In January of 1987 the ranch was sold to Bob and Pat Weingart, ending seventy-one years of ownership by the Walker family.

WARDLE, Charles  Charlie and Mrs. Wardle lived on the "Davis" place, later owned by Thorsheims. It is really not known where they came from, but Mrs. Wardle had been married previous to her marriage to Mr. Wardle. A boy, Ivan Darnell, lived with them. He attended the Box Elder School.

The Wardles were good "down to earth" people and took part in community affairs. When they left, they went to Seattle, Washington. Mrs. Wardle corresponded for some time with her neighbors at Welter. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth)
WARE, Harold
Harold Ware and his mother moved to the Welter community in the late 1920s. They came from the Roy area. They moved onto a place previously owned by Jennie Meserve and her family. Shortly after the Wares moved to Welter, a widow lady, Valura Alexander, and her two daughters, Lula and Blanch, came to live with the Wares. Valura cooked part time for Forbes Leslie.

Lula and Blanch both attended the Welter School for a number of years. Harold married Valura. The Wares and Alexanders lived at Welter about ten years. Harold was a good farmer but the ravages of nature forced them to leave. During the dry years Harold, Valura and Mrs. Ware moved to St. Ignatius, Montana.

Lula married Ed Potter at Roy. Blanch married Ted Wadman, and they lived at Cut Bank, Montana. Ted passed away in 1987. Both Lula and Ed are buried in Lewistown, and Ted is buried in Cut Bank. Harold, Valura, and Mrs. Ware (Harold’s mother) are all buried at St. Ignatius.

The Wares were good neighbors and Valura was a good cook. They didn’t entertain much, but if anyone passed by at mealtime, they were given a good meal.

Lula didn’t have any children. Blanch had three. One son, Bill Wadman, lives in Cut Bank; one son, Douglas, married Mary Eager of Winnett; a daughter lives in Wyoming.

Doris Opitz was Harold Ware’s sister. The Opitz family lived at Staff. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth) (See also EAGER — Winnett, OPITZ — Blakeslee, WARE — Dovetail)

WEINGART, Gerald (See WEINGART — Dovetail)

WELTER, Nicholas
Nick and Rachel Welter came to their homestead from Lewistown. They had five children — Bill, Lucille, Katy, Florence, and Margaret. Nick operated the post office that was named after him. Everyone soon found out they had to have a supplement to their income. Some were fortunate to get a mail route, to work for sheep ranchers, or to do road work. It was a hard life for some who had no other income besides farming.

After Mr. Welter died in 1926, Mrs. Welter and Margaret moved to Grassrange. Rachel cooked at the N Bar and on various other ranches and restaurants. She was remembered as a fine cook. She was also a practical nurse. Katy married Arthur Learn. Florence married Cecil Kauth. Lucille went to California. Bill later married Vi Sinclair and lived many years at Petrolia. To my knowledge, the Welters are all alive except Bill. Florence lives in Lewistown and Margaret in Washington. (Submitted by Agnes Lindseth) (See also WELTER — Petrolia: KAUTH — Winnett)

WILKE, William (Sec 23-17-24) The William Wilke family came to homestead in the early days northeast of the Blakeslee schoolhouse, along the rimrocks. When they came, they brought a large steam engine along with their other possessions. A bridge had to be built across Box Elder Creek in order to get the engine to their home.

The Wilkes had a good spring on their property which they shared with their neighbors in the early years until it began to dwindle. Then people in the area had to haul water from the Mike Delaney Ranch.

The Wilkes had three children — Paul, Anna and one younger daughter.

WILSON, Randall (Sec 10-16-25) Mr. and Mrs. Randall Wilson homesteaded on Fords Creek south of Wild Horse Lake. (W. T. 7-4-24) “On June 30, 1924, Miss Pearl Wilson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Randall Wilson, was married to Ed Wiggins. They were married in Roundup and were accompanied there by Mrs. Randall Wilson and Miss Mable Wilson, sister of the bride, and Mr. L. Cekja.

“Both young folks grew up in the Winnett community. They planned to make their home on the ranch of the groom’s brother.”

Mrs. Randall Wilson was a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Moulton. (See also MOULTON — Blakeslee: WIGGINS — Flatwillow)

WIRZFELD, Pierce, Lillian and Nick (Sec 28-17-24) In 1910 Pete and Nick Wirzfeld homesteaded just south of what would be the Blakeslee schoolhouse. Before the present schoolhouse was built, school was held in Pete’s tar paper shack. Wirzfels were related to the Rodekuhrs.

WOODARD, Asa (See DEVINE, Wilson — Blakeslee)


“This is his first visit back here. He had visited his daughter, Mrs. Roy Greenfield, at Anaconda, Montana, and stopped over for a short visit with his old friend and neighbor, Dan Sommerfield.”
A group of Staff community people. From left: "Ben" Fuhs, Lucy Lewis, Mrs. Lias (with hat), Helen Fuhs, Mrs. Mutch (with hat), Annie Leslie, Ella Marshall (behind Marvin Lewis Jr.); Next row:Evelyn Lewis, Evelyn Marshall, Donna Marshall, Marvin Lewis Jr., Billy Marshall, Floyd Lewis, Lester Lewis; In center: Helen Leslie, Burney Marshall; Four in front are: Harry Fuhs, Martin Mutch, Bob Lewis, and Mary Leslie