SCHOOLS
1. Brown - 1
2. Brown - 2
3. Cat Creek
4. Follette (Knapp, Rogge)
5. Hough (Jitney)
6. Original Cat Creek (Shay)
Church at the Cat Creek Basin (Shay) School on September 16, 1917. (L to R) Floyd 'Lone Eagle' Maine, Sylvia Thomas, George Holt, Pearl Shay, Leone Pribble, Ginevra Van Tassell, I. E. Thomas, Flora Thomas, Reverend George Maine. (Children) Maxine Cox, Irene Cox, Juanita Shay

Sunday school at the new Shay schoolhouse in April 1926

(Front row) Bill Armagost, Ben Stone, Bartley, Bill Peden (Back row) Ritchie, George Burke, Lou Sonlag, Ira Pierson
Cat Creek Basin

The creek known as Cat Creek has a very illusive history on early Montana maps. It is almost as though the cartographers knew a Cat Creek existed but could not decide where to place it. W. W. DeLacy’s 1870 map of the Montana territory places Cat Creek between Blood Creek and Dovetail Creek. (Mr. DeLacy was commissioned to prepare a map of Montana for the first legislature of the Territory of Montana in 1865 and over a period of five or six years he prepared several territorial maps. Cat Creek is not on the 1865 map.)

In 1875 William Ludlow was assigned by the U. S. Corps of Engineers to do a general reconnaissance of the area from Carroll, Montana, to Yellowstone Park. The map he submitted with his report in 1876 again shows Cat Creek between Blood Creek and Dovetail Creek with some small tributaries near Dovetail Butte. It more closely resembles today’s Dovetail Creek, and Dovetail Creek appears as today’s Drag Creek!

In 1897 Harry King of the General Land Office in Helena prepared a map of the State of Montana again showing Cat Creek between Dovetail and Blood Creeks but he also has Lodge Pole Creek directly across the Musselshell rather than north of present Dovetail Creek.

It was not until after the turn of the century that Cat Creek found its place on the maps as we know it today. For those whose geography of the Musselshell drainage is sketchy, the sequence of streams flowing into the Musselshell from the west, starting at Highway 200 and going north, is as follows: Cat Creek, Cottonwood Creek (often Wood Creek on the early maps), Biggett Coulee, Blood Creek, Dovetail Creek, Drag Creek, and Crooked Creek.

The area referred to as the Cat Creek Basin in the 1910-1920 era is now often called the Shay community; the area to the southeast, the Jitney community. Any casual reference today to Cat Creek usually signifies the old oil town or the area immediately surrounding the oil field. Interestingly enough, this area might very well have been named Frantz or Frantville. Several old papers refer to the oil community in this manner and a voting district called the Frantz Precinct existed well into the 1930s.

On March 30, 1917, a special Easter edition of the Winnett Times was issued. Among the feature articles was a history of the Cat Creek Basin written by Floyd Maine. Floyd was a young aspiring writer who had homesteaded in the basin in 1910. Excerpts from his account follow.

“The Cat Creek Basin proper consists of a strip of fertile valley land about six miles long by four miles wide, containing approximately 16,000 acres... On the north it emerges into the bad lands, while on the east, south and west are found the more broken and rolling prairies.

“The first permanent settlers locating in the basin first looked over this beautiful and fertile valley on April 6th, 1910, from the hill overlooking it on the west. The three home-seekers were George E. Holt, Walter Shay and Orville Sweet... They staked out their squatter’s claims of 160 acres by means of a rude compass and 100 feet of baling wire. As this part of the country was in its virgin state and still unsurveyed, they were compelled to hunt for the nearest of the old township stakes, some six miles away, and run lines to their chosen claims, in order to get the approximate number of the section.

“After completing this crude survey, they each started a log cabin on their respective claims, hauling the logs from the bad lands, five miles to the north, with a team they borrowed from a ranchman 15 miles away, which was the nearest neighbor they knew of.

“Those who desired the more elaborate comfort of a plank floor and door, hauled their lumber from Lewistown, 75 miles away, requiring from four to six days to cross the mountains. These log cabins were covered with split poles and the cracks between the logs and roof poles were daubed with mud and the roof covered with a foot or more of sod to keep out the rains.

“A few weeks later, on April 22nd (1910) the three busy inhabitants of the valley saw a white covered wagon slowly descending the trail from the west. As this was the first traveler they had seen since their arrival, they went to welcome the driver and were not a little surprised to find the party consisted of a man and his wife and 14-year-old son from Indiana. These new arrivals proved to be Mr. and Mrs. Israel Thomas and son, Sylva. After a few days they, too, chose a site and proceeded to construct their humble home of logs. During this time they lived in a tent and picketed their team and one cow near their camp until they could get wire and posts enough to fence in a small lot of one-half acre for cow pasture. This was the first fence of any description in the neighborhood. A few days later they plowed up two acres of prairie sod, the first furrows ever made in the basin. This was planted with garden seed of various kinds. So it is a fact that I. E. Thomas built the first fence, plowed the first furrow and gathered the first garden yield ever seen in Cat Creek Basin.

“With the wake of these six new home builders and even before any of them had completed their cabins, others found their way to this promising settlement. One day in October, while visiting the Winnett Ranch, the writer and his friend, Neal Pratt, overheard ‘Big Ed’ Fleury and a group of French-Indian cowboys telling of some ‘honyockers’ which were camped in the Cat Creek Basin about 15 miles northeast of the Winnett Ranch. They were debating of their intentions and expressed much doubt if these tenderfeet ‘nesters’ would ever survive the coming winter without starving to death, trying to farm in a country fit only for cattle and sheep range.

“We borrowed a couple of cow ponies and trailed over
the 15 miles of rolling sagebrush land. During all this four hours’ ride we never saw a sign of a house or man. Several herds of cattle and horses were passed and a number of antelope and coyotes were seen in the distance. At last we raised to a sage-covered hill and suddenly before us loomed up a beautiful stretch of valley land . . . and in the valley we counted three partly constructed log cabins and a tent . . . During the summer and fall of 1910 five others besides Neal and myself came here and located. They were B. A. Elkin, Harry Knapp, Roy Shay, Mr. Freeman and Chris Crowell.

"It is well to note here that on Sunday, August 9th, the first sermon ever preached in eastern Fergus County was held in the unfinished home of I. E. Thomas by Rev. S. F. Beer. The total attendance was eight.

"It would take too long to describe in detail the experience of our first winter spent in this trackless expanse of Montana plains. We visited each other much, and often the entire group would gather at one place to spend the day. For a pastime we played games, told stories, read books and hunted game. Deer and antelope often varied our daily rations of bacon, beef, sage hens and jackrabbits. We were neighborly by dire circumstance as well as choice. If one person ran out of something, his neighbors were always willing to share with him; and this was no rare occurrence, as our nearest store was 45 miles away. I remember of one fellow making the 90-mile round trip on horseback after 50 pounds of groceries for myself and neighbors.

"After the warm spring days came, we again began the activities of our home making. We all took much pride in our new home and the size of our settlement. . . . By late spring our settlers increased to nearly double — among the new members were John Shay and family, Rogge brothers, John Dunphy, Fred Follette and Rev. George W. Maine, who in April 1911 preached the second sermon ever preached in eastern Fergus County. This was also delivered at the Thomas home.

"The settlers began to plow a few acres on their claims, which they put into garden and grain. I. E. Thomas sowed the first acre and a half of fall wheat ever grown in the basin. The following fall, everyone who had sown grain cut and stacked it for hay. The one and one-half acres of fall wheat struggled along through the summer until at harvest time it was the curiosity and joy of the community. Every new arrival was taken to see the fine sample prospect of wheat. When it was fully ripe, the owner cut the entire crop with a cradle, and his wife and son helped tie it by hand.

"Mr. Thomas invented an ‘arm-strong’ grain separator, which consisted of a wagon box and a flail. With the help of his family and a few curious neighbors, the entire crop was flailed out in three days and measured just 42 bushels from one and one-half acres. This 42 bushels was distributed among all the neighbors in the basin. This may well be said to be the beginning of the wheat-growing industry of Cat Creek Basin.

"During the fall of 1912 we cut some 300 acres of grain in the basin, which was threshed by George Ingebo (a homesteader in the Petrolia area to the south), the first machine ever in the country, with a total yield of about 6500 bushels.

"By the spring of 1913 the basin proper was all taken up and settlers were now taking up the rolling land adjoining us . . . everyone was making all the improvements possible and new and larger fields of breaking could be seen in every direction. In the following fall a very creditable amount of grain was threshed.

"The spring of 1914 made the basin look something like a neighborhood of real farmers. By this time the Rogge brothers, Shays, I. E. Thomas, Clark Barber, Maine Ranch, Dunphy and Follette each had grain fields of 80 acres or over. That year something like 28,000 bushels of grain was threshed from 1100 acres. During the fall of 1914 there were over 1500 acres of fall wheat sown, while the next spring 800 acres were sown to spring crop, making a total of 2300 acres harvested in the basin in 1915, from which we threshed 62,000 bushels of grain, an average of 27 bushels per acre for the entire basin, while several fields made from 40 to 45 bushels per acre . . .

Many of the ranchers in the basin the past two years have specialized in one certain phase of farming. The Rogge brothers now grow hundreds of bushels of corn annually and at present are feeding several carloads of hogs. I. E. Thomas, William Cutright, John Dunphy and Maine Ranch have had good success in raising alfalfa and several varieties of Dent corn. Several farmers have also grown flax with success.

"We are safe in saying that for the past two years the Cat Creek Basin has produced more grain than any other territory of equal size in eastern Fergus County, and with the coming of the new railroad, it is soon destined to become one of the leading agricultural centers of Montana."

The early glow of optimism expressed by Floyd Maine was short-lived, however. The winter of 1918-19 was extremely harsh. The country was in the midst of World War I and the flu epidemic devastated many homes. By the time oil was discovered in the Cat Creek oil field in 1920, some families had already returned to their former homes. Had it not been for the excitement of the oil find (bolstered by the infusion of cash money from oil leases), the exodus would have been greater.
Cat Creek Cemetery

One of the first Cat Creek Basin homesteaders, Walter Shay, died on May 1, 1912. He was buried on his homestead — partly because, as the Shay history indicates, the family wanted to be assured his land would not be lost since he had not completed his homestead requirements. The family was advised to bury him on his land. As the need arose, other neighborhood families buried their loved ones on the same plat.

In 1923 John and Mary Shay deeded 1 1/8 acres of land to the Cat Creek Cemetery Association. Lone Eagle (Floyd S. Maine) was named as president of the association. James Hunter was named secretary and Benjamin Barber was named treasurer. The first written minutes in the association minute book are from September 4, 1926. They read: "At James Hunter sale a new board of trustees was duly elected to take the place of the old board. Floyd Maine, president, has resigned; James Hunter, secretary, resigned; B. C. Barber, treasurer, moved out of the country. Roy Shay elected president, L. H. Manuel elected secretary, H. J. Knapp elected treasurer." LeRoy Manuel continued as secretary until 1960 when the records were discontinued.

Lots were sold for $10.00 each and the money was used to fence the acreage, buy casket straps, purchase a record book, ink, and paper for a blueprint. Harry Knapp volunteered to make a blueprint.

On February 27, 1930, the cemetery was incorporated under the official name of Cat Creek Cemetery Association. Regular minutes were kept, sometimes only to record the election of a new slate of officers. A typical entry reads: "A special meeting was called on May 2, 1938, for the purpose of electing a new president as Roy Shay had moved from the county. Frank Bastian was duly elected to fill out the unexpired term. Carroll and Merle Manuel were given $1.50 to remove thistles out of the fence around cemetery. Balance in treasury $4.88."

Post Offices

As Mr. Maine mentioned, the nearest post office in 1910 was Weede where a post office had opened in 1901. Winnett's post office opened in 1910 soon after the settlers arrived, and in 1911 a post office opened at Smith a few miles to the south. In 1913 a post office was established at Ashley to the north. It wasn't until 1916 that a post office opened to serve those on the southeast of the basin, however. This new post office was named Jitney. It was in the home of Thomas J. Norton but was soon moved to the Hough homestead. The following is a list of the Jitney postmasters:

T.J. Norton (Sec. 2, 3-14-29) February 26, 1916
O. K. Hough (Sec 34, 35-15-29) unknown — 1924
Ernest Hoermann (Sec 29-15-29) 1924 — 1928
Editha Smith (Sec 25-15-28) 1928 — 1934

Walter Piotrowski served as mail carrier. After the Cat Creek Post Office was established in 1922, the Cat Creek carrier carried the Jitney mail en route to Winnett.

The Cat Creek Post Office received official designation in the oil field on May 11, 1922, with Orville Canfield as postmaster. In 1963 the post office was converted to a rural station administratively attached to the Winnett Post Office. Through the years the postmasters have been:

Orville Canfield 1922-1927
Nelle Johnson 1927-1947
Florence Elke 1947-1949
Maryanna Meserve 1949-1952
Florence Elke 1952-1962
Judy Bevis 1962-1972
Roxie Elke 1972-

Some of the mail carriers have been J. W. Bowers; Len Hoyle, Al Hoyle, Art Winnett, Charles "Bob" Aikens, John McDonald, Pearl Mart, John Swansen, Lester Bevis, John Phillips, and Jim Johnke.

Schools

The two townships (15N-28E and 15N-29E) which encompass most of the general Cat Creek area were a part of District #26 (Flatwillow) until District #159 was formed in February 1916. District #159 became the Winnett Elementary School District and included both these townships as well.

The first Cat Creek School was opened in Charlie Wortman's cabin about one mile north of Thomases in 1912, with Grace Miller as teacher. Grace boarded at the Thomases. According to Floyd Maine, "On November 11, 1912, our day school was established in an abandoned log house. Miss Grace Miller being the first teacher. During the following winter she organized a literary society among the settlers, and many a pleasant Friday evening was spent in merriment when the thermometer ran below the zero line."

Stella Manuel remembers school being held the next year in Walter Shay's cabin. (Walter died the year before.) In 1914, Mr. Maine goes on to say, "We built our first regular schoolhouse, Miss Ginevra Van Tassell being the first to teach in our new building. (See picture of log school at beginning of chapter.) In 1919 a school site
was purchased from the Shay family in Sec 10-15-28. A very fine new building was built complete with a basement. The basement served as a snug warm teacherage. (Pictured at beginning of chapter.) After a school was opened in the Cat Creek oil field, this school became known as the Original Cat Creek or Shay School.

About 1915 a school known as the Hough or the Jitney School was established. Mrs. Hough had taught in her own home for part of one year; but Miss Ginevra Van Tassell was hired to teach in the new school, and she taught until the spring of 1920 when the school closed. Some of the students who attended were Danny Ricks, Dortha Norton, Ralph Sanford, Erve Hunt, Walter Talbot and Dow Hough.

The Follette or Rogge School opened a couple of miles northwest of the Jitney School in 1921 with Clara Goddard as teacher. Some of the students in this school were Mary Rogge, Irma Knapp, Dova Hoermann, Dorothy Smith, Avery Ashley, and a little later, the Manuels, Bailey’s and Carsons. In 1924 the California Oil Company drilled seven wells about four miles west of the main Cat Creek oil field. A small settlement of people lived at the camp and these children were bussed to the Follette School. Some of the families were the Scotts, Severences, Alberts, Vorhees, and Andersons. In 1930 the California Company had closed. Irma Knapp and Dorothy Smith graduated from the eighth grade in 1930 and the Knapp children transferred to the Winnett schools leaving only the Manuel children to attend the school. When the Follette School closed in the spring of 1930, it did not open again.

The first school in the main Cat Creek oil field camp was taught in a tar-papered shack located just west of the Mid Northern camp in the east end of the field. It has not been possible to confirm if it was open in 1920, but Isabelle Fail (Schaeffer) attended school at that location in the fall of 1921. The school was moved to a more central location near the Curran Hotel in the winter and spring of 1922 with Miss Elkin as teacher. By the fall of 1922, more room was needed for the sixty or so children which Mrs. Annis

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**Follette School in 1927 with the Roy Manuel family, the Harry Knapp family, Mrs. Carson and her children, and Mrs. Irish and her daughter**

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**The Cat Creek School, grades 3, 4, 5 and 6 in 1928: (L to R) Elmer Grosser, Frances Pierson, Herschel Barber, Lorna Boston, Floyd Grosser, Gladys McVay, Anna Floy Schmidt, Jack Ihde, Robert Campbell, Homer Duffer, Allen Peters, David Fail and Billy Ihde. Teacher in back row is Miss Mary Maier.**

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**Cat Creek School (1931) with Eline Warner as teacher. Jack Ihde standing, Herschel Barber, Billy Ihde, Allen Peters, Richard Adams, Robert Campbell, Elmer Grosser, Wilma Manuel**
room, and three teachers were hired. (One of the rooms added was the former jitney school building.)

During the early years of the oil field school, a school bus transported children from the various oil camps to the main camp where the school was located.

Dorothea Hines made an interesting observation about the schoolchildren in an article she wrote for the Winnett Times a number of years ago. She said, "Instead of playing the usual schoolyard games such as marbles or hopscotch, the children had a game called 'fishing.' This required a stick, a string and a magnet and the object was to recover as much junk out of a hole as possible. (One of the most frustrating and time-consuming jobs for oil field workers could be retrieving lost pipe or tools from a well.)"

In September 1921 a new district (#198) was created from the northern portion of District #107 — the district which served the Musselshell River area including Weede and Parkinson. The new school in District #198 was variously called the Oil Camp School, the O'Dea School, the Mitchell School and, most commonly, the Brown School. Except for a brief period of time it was located at the oil camp halfway down the hill to the discovery well. Virgil Stewart is believed to have been the first teacher, followed by Belle Davis and Dorothy Bowen. (A more complete listing of teachers can be found in the appendix.) No records have been found to indicate the school operated after the 1941-42 term. In 1945 the district was officially consolidated with District #159. At one time all of the children in the Brown School were cousins (members of the Carrell families) with the exception of Alvin Fail. There were almost twenty students in the school at the time.

Cat Creek Oil Field

Scant attention was paid to the four strangers who checked into the hotel in Winnett on October 9, 1919. Too many everyday concerns plagued the people of the town and, for that matter, all of what was then eastern Fergus County. Severe drought, shortages of feed and water for livestock, poor crops and the aftermath of World War I all added to the utter discouragement of homesteaders and townspeople alike.

A U. S. Geological Survey published in 1915 describing formations favorable for the presence of coal deposits on the east slopes of the Judith Mountains indicated the structure also might favor the accumulations of oil deposits. A follow-up survey in 1918 dealt briefly with the geological formations in the Cat Creek, Flatwillow and Devil's Basin anticlines. These reports caught the eye of geologist W. P. Kerr and he became keenly interested in the oil potential of the Cat Creek structure.

Mr. Kerr, living in Melrose at the time, finally aroused the interest of some local businessmen who joined with him in the fall of 1918 in organizing the Musselshell Valley Oil Company. Mayor W. H. Herron of Melrose was president and W. P. Kerr was manager. Lack of capital hampered operations, but finally in February of 1919 the company was able to finance a test well. Mr. Kerr moved to Winnett where he opened Winnett's first oil office. He secured a large acreage of leases on the Brush Creek structure and the Cat Creek dome and engaged a local water well driller, Al Field, to drill a well with his light Keystone machine. The well was located in Section 26, Township 16, Range 27 on the Brush Creek structure, eight miles north of Winnett.

All the while, Mr. Kerr continued to seek financing for a more ambitious drilling program in the Cat Creek area. He succeeded in arousing the interest of the Cosden Oil Company of Oklahoma to the extent that the company sent geologist Charles T. Lupton to Winnett to examine
the structure. Though Mr. Lupton's report was very favorable, the Cosden Company turned it down. After Cosden's refusal, however, Mr. Lupton gained the attention of Frank Frantz, ex-rough rider and ex-governor of Oklahoma, in the proposal.

Frank Frantz was chief of the land department for Cosden in Oklahoma and Texas. He and several other officials of Cosden's western division, together with brokers and bankers from Casper, Wyoming and Denver, Colorado, formed a new company — the Frantz Corporation — with $3,000,000 capitalization. The company's purpose was to take over Cosden's interests in the west and its officers picked up tentative leases Cosden held in Cat Creek along with extensive other leases in the area.

In the meantime, the Brush Creek well, which had been started by the Musselshell Valley Oil Company, hit a heavy flow of water at a depth of 600 feet and had to be abandoned. Undaunted, the Frantz Corporation sent drilling superintendent L. S. "Roxey" Lantz, drillers J. S. "Curley" Meek and Saul Alderdice, and tool dresser Fred Barnett to drill an exploration well on its newly acquired Cat Creek holdings. These men were the strangers who checked into the hotel in Winnett on October 9, 1919.

Mr. Lupton, as head geologist for the Frantz Corporation, had been forced to give up his first-choice location in the Cat Creek area because it was too far from drilling water. His second choice was close to the Musselshell River on what was known as the Charles Lease about four miles southeast of the number one spot. The well site was almost 25 miles from the railroad in Winnett. The drilling equipment brought by the crew from Wyoming had barely been unloaded from the railroad cars when one of Montana's worst early blizzards hit the area.

The road from Winnett to Cat Creek area was merely a series of tracks and trails serving the homesteaders. Ira Pierson was put in charge of establishing a useable route from Winnett to the well location. Dim tracks remain today where the original trail wound from Cat Creek through the steep hills into the river bottom. At one point it was necessary to route the road around the top of a sharp butte in a figure eight configuration to allow the heavy, long loads to maneuver the steep incline and
sharp curves.

The next step was to establish a camp. The derrick, rig, casing and drilling equipment all had to be hauled with teams and wagons from the railhead in Winnett.

A cookshack was built in Winnett and mounted on a wide set of wheels taken from a threshing machine owned by Tom Carr. A cook by the name of Scottie Spears was hired to travel with the cookhouse along with six loads of building materials and equipment, cooking along the way. It took a six-horse team to pull the cookhouse. The caravan arrived on location just in time for Thanksgiving.

To further complicate and slow the endeavor, a coal strike curtailed the number of trains (all steam powered and fired with coal) into Winnett. The coal strike also meant that coal could not be used to fire the steam engine used for the actual drilling and wood had to be substituted. If all went well, it took the freighters five days to make a round trip from Winnett to the well site and back. Hay cost $73 a ton because of the drought and early winter conditions. Many times the freighters hauled as much hay for their horses as they did payload. Hauling cost about $100 a ton, and the biggest loads weighed only a couple of tons.

Everything had to be reassembled on the site. In spite of all the adversities, on December 18, 1919, amid snow drifts and arctic weather, the Charles No. 1 was spudded in. An account published in the November 15, 1958, Montana Oil Journal, at the time of L. S. Lantz’s death, gave the details of the hardships encountered during the drilling that cold winter of 1920.

“Drilling was slow, with power provided by a wood-burning boiler, fired with cottonwood logs, purchased in the area for $8.00 a cord. It was even slower because the old drilling machine had no calf wheel. The drilling line was of the type then known as ‘rag line,’ nine strand Manila rope 2½ inches in diameter. Every time pipe was run, it was necessary to pull the tools, take them down, spool the rope, and put on wire line for lowering the pipe. Re-spooling of the big rope and reassembling of the tool strip was necessary every time drilling was resumed.

“Early in the year, the well hit. Not the hoped-for oil, but an artesian water well, in the First Cat Creek sand, flowing more than 200 barrels of steaming ‘warm’ water daily, that soon froze in the sub-zero temperature to form a miniature glacier on and around the rig. There was nothing to do but attempt to ream down and carry the eight-inch pipe through the water sand for a shut-off and this was done.

“The pipe was run in the hole, one 20-foot joint at a time, with the ‘stabbing’ operation complicated by the fine pipe threads of the period, and by the necessity of standing in flowing water and fighting it while making the connection. As soon as connections were made, the water flowed over the top of the new joint of pipe.

“The crew then fought to ream down an additional 20 feet so another joint of pipe could be set. Re-spooling the frozen drilling rope, reassembling the tools and trying to get ‘drilling action,’ with the soggy line, while water flowed on and around them.

“The procedure used by the crew in running pipe was unvarying. One man, selected in a manner not now clear, was chosen as ‘dry man.’ He stood aloof from the deluge and ran the engine. The others fought the water, which came from the hole with a temperature far above freezing, and as soon as a pipe connection had been made, raced madly to the cookhouse, as their clothing froze on them in the sub-zero temperature. In all, 10 joints of 20-foot fine-thread pipe was run, and the water was shut off.”

On February 19, 1920, the well reached the Second Cat
Creek sand with a promising show of oil. The drilling crew had strict orders to notify officials of the Frantz Corporation about an oil strike before any news leaked to the public. Much government land was involved and the Frantz people wanted to be able to tie-up the leases before an "oil rush" developed. This was of such importance to them that they had a pre-arranged code worked out with the drilling crew. They knew that information would have to be sent by telegram — not a very private means of communication.

Under the agreed upon code "trees grow tall" indicated a big well; "trees grow small" meant a small well; if the trees didn't grow, there wasn't a well: "Come ye men of war" meant "bring a number of men." The telegram which was sent read "PINE TREES GROW TALL HERE, COME YE MEN OF WAR."

Rumors flew during the weekend of February 21 and 22. No outsiders were allowed near the well, and this only added to the speculation. On Monday, C. T. Lupton, Glen Kahle, J. W. Clayton, O. A. Greybeal, J. W. McKinn, Edward J. McMahon and Eugene McCarthy, all officers of the Frantz Corporation, arrived on the scene to witness the official bringing in of the oil. On February 25, a special edition of the Winnett Times ran with headlines: "FRANTZ WELL IN WITH BIG PRODUCTION."

There was a fury of activity as other companies scrambled for leases and bought, traded and maneuvered for the right to drill. On April 2, 1920, the Winnett Times reported that equipment was being moved to four locations of the Frantz Corporation. Complete rigs or parts of machinery for sinking wells had been placed on the ground in the three previous days. Twenty-two four-horse teams left Winnett on March 28 with supplies for Frantz' wells!

Other companies were also hauling rigs and equipment to sites they had obtained. Interestingly enough, all of the sites mentioned in the April 2 Winnett Times article were located in Township 15, Range 29, known as the West Camp (today's Cat Creek). They were reported to be "rigging up," and pipes for water and fuel oil were being laid from the discovery well to the new location in Sec. 14-15-29. This was the location Mr. Lupton had considered to be his "first choice" when the discovery well on the river was drilled.

The well was spudded in on April 24, and on May 18 it was brought in with a flow of about 200 barrels daily from the First Cat Creek sand — this was about four times as large a flow as the discovery well and from the shallower sand which had produced water in the discovery well.

The excitement of the first discovery was dwarfed by the new strike! Oil fever swept eastern Fergus County like wildfire. With no storage facilities available, oil flowed into a coulee where people from all over the countryside came to look at it. This would be considered an environmental nightmare today! The oil was of such high gravity it could be used directly in tractors and even Model T's, and it was free to all comers. Tanks were immediately constructed, and during the summer Frantz Corporation laid a two-inch pipeline to Winnett. On August 28, 1920, the first oil flowed through the line into storage tanks installed in Winnett. The next day three tank cars of oil left by rail for refineries in Wyoming. Almost immediately another and bigger pipeline was laid. The second line was completed in 21 days — a record
according to the Tulsa Oil and Gas Company.

The barren hills adjacent to the first two wells were alive with activity. Each drilling company set up its own camp. Tar-paper shacks, the material for which could be hauled in one wagon, were thrown up in one day. Even the smallest drilling outfit had a cookhouse and a bunkhouse, and the larger companies added more and more tar-paper cabins to accommodate their workers. By December 31, 1920, eleven producing wells were flowing, having been drilled by six different oil companies — Frantz, Mid Northern, 56 Petroleum, Montalcal, West Dome and Great Western.

The story of the 56 Petroleum Company has been told over and over. Because it involved Montana people in a Montana venture, it seems right to tell it again here. The Helena Independent printed a front page article on November 14, 1920, which included this story.

"Smiling Joe Baker is from Oklahoma where oil wells are thicker than Indians in the Cherokee days... for several years Baker has been in the real estate business in Miles City. The oil business is something like the real estate business only it is just 1000 times faster — like jazz music compared to a Thanksgiving anthem... Baker told the Powder River people down in Miles City that it was a great big roulette game, and the people of Miles City like a roulette game... He picked out several pieces of ground (near Mosby) but failed to get his first choice; he took what he could get and landed in Miles City one day with a homesteader and a lease all made out. But the lease had to be signed by the wife of the homesteader who had gone to Wisconsin.

"Baker went to a Miles City bank and told them his story. He did not have a cent of money over the railroad fare for the homesteader to take the lease to Wisconsin for his wife to sign. He persuaded the cashier of the bank to assure the homesteader that $14,000 would be waiting for him when he returned with the lease signed.

"Miles City always comes through. The homesteader was no sooner on his way to Wisconsin than Smiling Joe Baker was out to sell 56 units in his oil lease for $250 each in order to raise the $14,000 to pay for the lease. In a few hours the money was in the bank... Baker secured a rig and started the drill. The lease was secured in early July. the well was 'spudded in' in September, and November 1 the units which were sold to the original 56 subscribers were quoted at $12,500 each.

"This is the well about which there has been more talk than any other well because it was wholly outside the big companies, had no big money in it and was only the private enterprise of a handful of Miles City business men. All kinds of stories were told of its value, but oil men know of but one way to estimate the value of a well. They say a flowing well in a promising field is worth $2500 per barrel production per day. If the '56' continues to give up 2000 barrels per day, filling its four 500-barrel tanks every 24 hours, it is worth at this rate $5,000,000. If it is only a 1000-barrel well when it strikes its gait, it is worth $2,500,000."

The Homestake Oil Company derricks and camp were typical of the individual oil company leases. Note the wooden derricks.

The Grassrange newspaper reported on October 28, 1920, that two trains daily had been put on to transport oil from Winnett. Eighteen cars of oil had been shipped on Sunday and six on Monday of that week. By the end of the next year (December 1921), close to 70 wells were producing and at least 60 leasing companies were listed by the Winnett Times as being actively involved in drilling in what was to become Petroleum County.

Businesses thrived in Winnett in a helter-skelter fashion. Almost 200 new businesses were established in a year's time — some housed temporarily in tents! Hardly a week passed without prominent oil men from all across the United States visiting. Storage, pipelines, transportation
and refining all presented their unique problems. A huge 55,000 barrel tank was erected in Cat Creek to collect and store the oil, and a pipeline was hurriedly laid to Winnett.

A scattering of businesses opened in the oil field — some at the Frantz camp, some at other camps. There was no planning. A hotel was opened by the Currans, a brother and sister. It was a one-story, tar-papered building later operated by the Roberts family (until it closed in 1926). Orville Canfield operated a grocery store and post office. The Cat Creek Post Office received official designation on May 11, 1922; before that time mail was unofficially delivered to various oil camp offices by freighters and truckers. The Canfield Trading Company operated until 1926 when it closed, and Mrs. Ira Johnson took over as postmaster. At that time the post office was moved to the Cat Creek Garage which Mrs. Johnson’s husband, Ira, owned.

Vernon Peterson operated a store and pool hall which he sold to Mr. and Mrs. Winfield J. Bowers. Mr. Bowers also ran the stage route to Winnett. In the very early days, homesteaders hauled water to drilling rigs with horses and water tanks on wagons. Soon, however, the Cat Creek Water Company ran a water line from the Musselshell River to the West Dome. Also the Breed Springs Water Company advertised in the 1921 Winnett Times offering to furnish water for field operations, drinking and cooking. The going rate for water was one dollar a barrel at a time when oil, too, was bringing one dollar a barrel!

Ernest Barden had a blacksmith shop at the Mid Northern Camp and several of the camps had their own livery stables.

Though each camp at first had its own cookhouse, one by one, individual cookhouses closed until the only ones remaining were at the Mid Northern and the Frantz camps. Mrs. Parsons and Mrs. Earl Smith had charge of the Mid Northern cookhouse when it was at its peak. Later Mrs. Metzger and Mrs. Willette operated it. Scotty Spears, Paul Hagen, Clair Lias and Bill Rainland were ear-

ly day Frantz cooks. In 1925 Mrs. Bessie Martindale took over the management of the cookhouse. She ran it for almost twenty years.

An old-timer, William Griebel, wrote of those old cookhouse days: “The cookhouse was under the supervision of a Scotty Spears and the food was pretty good considering what they had to do with. They could only seat about forty men at one time and some of these guys were afraid they were going to be cut short on their eats. Had about 150 men to feed each meal. The door between the waiting room and the dining room was a 2’8” by 6’8” and they would sure jam through this door. One day three men tried to get through this door at one time and got stuck and put one of the men in the hospital. They acted worse than a bunch of cattle!”

A community hall built in the Frantz camp became the center for every kind of gathering. Dances (often as part of those wonderful old-time charivaries honoring newlyweds) with music furnished by a traveling orchestra or hometown talent, farewell parties, Christmas and Sunday school programs as well as funerals took place there. Movies were shown once a week. And yes! There, too, in the earlier years, young and old proceeded for their shower bath!

In the summer of 1925 a daily vacation Bible school was held in Cat Creek under the direction of Rev. C. H. Cottom and the Rev. T. T. Fike. A regular Sunday school was organized on August 5, 1925, with Mrs. George Ghiert acting as superintendent and Mrs. Rogers as assistant. Mrs. Ira Johnson was elected superintendent in 1926 and with the exception of two years during which Mrs. Armagost served in that capacity, Mrs. Johnson filled the position until she retired and left the community.

After the first couple of frantic years of exploration and development, the reality of the limitation of the oil field’s size was gradually accepted. The predictions of oil-bearing sands stretching from Black Butte on the northeast end of the Judith Mountains to beyond the Musselshell River were not being realized. Though hope
ran high in the minds of many promoters and landowners, the fact remained that oil was being produced on less than ten sections of land in an area less than a mile wide and barely six miles from tip to tip (with a gap of several miles between the West Dome in Cat Creek proper and the Mosby Dome on the river). More sobering still was the area was surrounded by dry holes.

The oil field moved into a more stable production and transportation stage. Trucks replaced horses, rotary rigs replaced cable tool rigs, internal combustion engines replaced steam, portable derricks replaced wooden derricks, graded roads replaced trails and the oil developments in the Kevin-Sunburst north country replaced the excitement of the Cat Creek find. Many workers were either transferred or chose to move to the north fields. Mergers and consolidations left only a handful of companies producing in the Cat Creek field.

Early on the Frantz Oil Company had run into financial difficulties in spite of its successes in the field. In August 1921 it had been forced to turn over a controlling interest to Sid Keoughan, president of the Elk Basin Oil Company. Mr. Keoughan also acquired controlling interest in the Mutual Oil Company and the then-small Continental Oil Company. All of these holdings were eventually merged in 1924 under the Continental Oil Company name.

In 1930 Dan Moran became president of the Continental Oil Company and, according to Mrs. Ben Stone, "Under his management, neatness and cleanliness were the order of the day." She goes on to say, "The entire camp was rebuilt, three-room frame houses replaced the tar-papered shacks, all the powerhouses were scrubbed and cleaned and a coat of paint applied to every building. Everything needing repair was taken care of, guards were placed around the machinery and the accumulation of discarded tools and junk was carried away. Nothing was permitted which would in any way be a hazard. All this gave a much improved appearance to the camp and created a feeling of pride in home and surroundings which had previously been lacking. Its great value, however, lay in the fact it greatly reduced the accident ratio."

The Continental Oil Company established a telephone line to Winnett in the very early days. The line had a direct connection to the railroad loading dock and also to the Burt Sisters telephone exchange.

Cat Creek quickly took on the appearance of a "company town" with its green and white Conoco paint. Officials from the main office made whirlwind inspections, and workers questioned where all the profits went, who controlled production and why the price of crude was low; but day-to-day life went on. There was an active PTA, a horseshoe court with lights, an organized ladies' club and an enthusiastic baseball team. In 1931 the Campbell brothers were the pitcher (Robert) — catcher (Reese) combination; and Bill Perrigo was on first. Other team members were Billy Ihde, Allen Peters, Berry Roberts, Herschel Barber, Elmer Grosser, Jack Ihde and Richard Adams.

In 1938 Conoco bought out the Homestake Oil Company, one of the few Montana-owned-and-operated oil companies to survive. (See also COOLIDGE — Cat Creek) Mid Northern and the 56 Company had already been absorbed in the early 1930s, so this gave Continental virtual control of the producing field.

In the normal operation of the oil field, a variety of people and crews were necessary — foreman, clerk, gaugers, pumpers, maintenance crew, pulling crew, pipeline and loading dock crew. The list does not include the obvious needs of the employees for a school, housing, bunkhouse and cookhouse.

Each producing well had a pump installed in the bottom of the hole. These pumps were powered, in the early days, by large engines in central power plants. Above-ground rods connected each well's pump to a power plant. The pumpers walked the rod lines to check for wear and to keep them greased. If a rod which ran the pump in the bottom of a well broke or became disconnected (or the pump itself needed repair), the pump and rod were pulled out by a "pulling crew" with the aid of a winch and tripod. Hand tools called rod wrenches and "crummies" were used to disassemble rods and tubing. The rods and tubing were laid on rod racks and tubing racks until they were replaced in the well. Under normal conditions it took a crew of three about four hours to "pull a well."
The maintenance crew was responsible for welding, repairing and keeping the power plants in operation. Oil was pumped through above-ground pipelines to storage tanks on individual leases and from there to large central storage tanks from which it was piped to Winnett. The gauger’s responsibility was to measure and record the amount of oil going to the main tanks and to test the oil for water and the basic sediment. The value of the oil was determined by the results of these tests. A large pumping station pumped the oil to Winnett. The pipeline and loading dock crew worked out of Winnett, monitoring the storage tanks, loading railroad tank cars and maintaining pipelines.

When electricity was furnished to Cat Creek by the Rural Electrification Association in about 1950, the rodlines were abandoned and individual electric pump jacks were installed in each well. Pumping stations were no longer necessary.

About the same time, another change took place in Continental Oil Company’s transportation system. A trucking firm, Babcock and Lee, underbid the railroad for transporting crude from Winnett to the refinery in Billings. The oil was trucked until about 1958 when a pipeline was laid from Cat Creek to the Ivanhoe Dome near Melstone. A pipeline already connected Melstone to the refinery in Billings.

The number of producing wells in the Cat Creek field had decreased gradually through the years with a corresponding decrease in the number of employees. Production for 1944 was reported to be 112,353 barrels compared with a high of approximately 3,000,000 barrels in 1922. Rumors occasionally circulated concerning new drilling efforts or deeper producing sands, but it wasn’t until 1945 that new development began in earnest.

Nels Fradd, who owned some acreage in the west end of the oil field, managed to interest B. R. Gainer and Associates of Portland, Oregon, in drilling a deep test well on his property. In the fall of 1944 a rotary rig was set up to drill approximately 2000 feet to the Ellis sands. In February 1945 a 50-barrel-per-day well had been brought in, but in May it caved in with water and had to be abandoned.

Dave Schrock, a seed grower from Corvallis, Oregon, was one of the men associated with Gainer in the Fradd well and another test well at Rattlesnake Butte. Mr. Schrock negotiated a lease on the Fifer property near the discovery well on the Musselshell River. The property had been tied up in litigation for several years; as soon as the clear title could be established, Mr. Schrock located a well site and began drilling.

On October 4, 1945, the Winnett Times reported: "The rotary bit of Spencer and Livingston of Cody, Wyoming, drilling contractors, bored nine inches into the Ellis sand last Friday afternoon. Oil under high pressure forced its way up through 12-pound mud and drilling was shut down to run casing. Extra crew members from Mr. Schrock’s Rattlesnake Butte test well were rushed to the discovery and assisted in running casing. The Halliburton Co. of Wyoming arrived early Saturday morning and ran cement into the hole to shut off water from the Cat Creek water sands.

‘Oil workers said the possibility of losing the well was averted by a matter of only one or two hours time. Oil pressure threatened to cut out the heavy drilling mud which would permit water from sands above to spoil the well.’

The next week it was official! A 300-barrel-per-day well was flowing from the Ellis sands. A tank-farm area was cleared before the well was drilled in and, when production was found, four 250-barrel tanks were connected to the Continental pipeline. Schrock immediately began negotiations to drill several additional wells. The Taylor Drilling company of Centralia, Illinois, contracted to drill four wells on the Fifer lease.

On November 15, 1945, the Schrock No. 2 came in a producer at 1390 feet. It had been drilled in 77 hours and 15 minutes! Mr. Taylor and his crew, however, broke their own record the next week when they drilled the Schrock No. 3 to 1414 feet in 40 hours and 30 minutes!

Spencer and Livingston in the meantime moved their rig to the old O’Dea Ranch which had been purchased by

Cat Creek CONOCO employees meeting at the Billings refinery with Glen Apple, a company official from Ponca City, Oklahoma. (L to R) Fay Story, Bob Rostad, Elwood Ihde, Bill Nevin, Arl Winnett, Bob Eike, Glen Apple and Raymond Ihde
W. S. Brindley. They agreed to drill a well on a share basis — one-third Mr. Brindley, one-third Joe Murphy (a Lewistown area rancher and financier) and one-third Spencer and Livingston. On January 1, 1946, they brought in a 1000-barrel-a-day gusher at 1376 feet. Even though the well settled down to a 450-barrel producer and eventually encountered caving problems, the strike, along with the Schrocks-Fifer completions, provided the impetus for a new oil boom in Cat Creek and Winnett. The hills again bustled with activity.

Development was under way across the Musselshell River where William Hanlon brought in a well on the East Dome. An oil strike at Rattlesnake Butte increased leasing and exploration activity in the entire southern half of Petroleum County, and once again the Winnett Times ran weekly field reports of drilling activity in the county. The Times reported on February 21, 1946, "One of the greatest lease plays in Montana history is reported going on in the area between the Cat Creek field and the Porcupine Dome." (See SKETCH.)

J. Hugo Aronson, future governor of the State of Montana, was busy moving equipment into the field. His specialty was erecting portable derricks and transporting heavy machinery. The Arras Tank Company came in from Cut Bank to erect more storage facilities. A new camp was set up with a cookhouse and four bunkhouses on the Schwartz lease in Cat Creek. Fourteen new businesses opened in Winnett in the spring and summer of 1946. Housing was at a premium. Hopes ran high.

The Farmers Union Central Exchange bid an average of $200 per acre for a state lease adjacent to the Schrocks discovery well. This drew attention, not only because of the amount paid for the lease, but also because it created a new concept in production and marketing. Farmer's Union already operated one of the largest oil refineries in the state at Laurel, and it had a tremendous outlet for its refined products through the numerous Farmers Union oil and gas stations and bulk plants. This lease gave them the opportunity to supply their own crude, completing the chain from raw production to retail sales. Their first producing well was drilled in the summer of 1946.

Production in the Cat Creek area for 1947 rose to 416,032 barrels from a low, as previously mentioned, of 112,353 barrels in 1944. The rate of increase was not to continue, however. The dream of uncovering a "mother pool" of oil which would dwarf the present field did not materialize. Once again dry holes (as had been the case in the 1920s) began to limit the anticipated production area.

The Toronto Pipeline Company built a line from the East Dome to Cat Creek in 1946. In 1949 the company sold the line to Farmers Union Central Exchange which was increasing its holdings in the area. The same year, Continental Oil Company opened a new 9½ million dollar refinery in Billings. Many people remember the grand opening with dinner in a 55,000-barrel tank and dancing in the new bulk plant warehouse.

For the next twenty years Conoco and Farmers Union Central Exchange were the major producers in the field, each maintaining its own crews and "camps." As mechanization increased, fewer and fewer employees were needed. Deep-testing and rejuvenating of wells went on in the original Cat Creek field. It was not always advantageous, however. Without complicated negotiations, Conoco could bring in production from the lower sands. Both Homestake and the 56 Company had withheld heavy royalties in the deeper structures.

Because the pool of oil under the main field was gradually being depleted and production was down, it became necessary to instigate a recovery program. In about 1934 an air-pressuring system was being used with a degree of success until the late 1940s. In 1959, however, a water-flooding program was instituted. According to the Winnett Times (11-26-1959) an estimated 50 percent of the crude oil from the dome had been recovered through natural flow, pumping, and the air-pressuring system; under the new water-flood program it was anticipated that another 30 percent could be recovered.

The water-flooding program consisted of drilling water input wells, building an injection pumping plant and constructing an automatic tank battery. The theory was to pump water into the oil-bearing structure at critical points where it forced oil into pools which would be pumped to the surface. The total cost of the West Dome system was estimated to be $400,000. As a result of the program, the production of the field increased from 11,913 barrels of oil in July 1959 to 15,695 barrels in July of 1960.

During the 1960s expansion of the water-flooding plan took place. In 1969 Farmers Union Central Exchange bought all of Conoco's holdings in Cat Creek. Farmers Union has continued to operate the field under the name of CENEX Exploration and Production. (Farmers Union Central Exchange Incorporated officially adopted the name CENEX in 1972.) All of the production flows via pipeline to the Ivanhoe Dome near Melstone. The total operation of the field was handled by four men in 1988.
From these beginnings...

(Photograph courtesy Montana Historical Society)
Aikens, Charles R. "Bob" Aikens was married to Ramona Bevis, a sister of Lester Bevis. The couple had one son, Claude, born in 1937. Bob had the mail route between Winnett and Cat Creek during the 1930s. He worked for Winfield Bowers who operated a store in Cat Creek. Later Bob was employed by Continental Oil Company.

Alderdice, Saul Mr. Alderdice was a driller on the Frantz Corporation crew which drilled the first oil well in the Cat Creek field in 1920. Saul, a son of Mr. and Mrs. Lyman Alderdice, was born January 4, 1881, in Denver, Colorado. He grew up and received his education in the Big Horn Basin of Wyoming. He married Vera Mead.

Mr. Alderdice retired from the drilling business in 1961 and made his home in Billings, Montana, until his death on October 30, 1969.

Alger, Frank Frank and Mabel Alger lived in the Cat Creek area in the 1920s. School records indicate they had two children — Fern (1915) and Jack (1920). The children attended the Brown School. The family moved away in 1930.

Allan, Ted Ted Allan worked for Winfield Bowers who owned the store in Cat Creek during the late 1920s. He hauled supplies with a team and wagon or sleigh and also drove the Cat Creek camp school bus. Sometimes the "school bus" was a team and sleigh. (See also ALLAN — Musselshell River)

Allen, John (Sec 34-15-29) John Allen located on 320 acres along present-day Highway #200 near Jitney. Fires from overheated stoves were a common hazard in early days, and in May 1924 the Winnett Times reported, "A fire broke out in John Allen's cabin Wednesday afternoon. An oil stove caused the blaze which was quickly extinguished. Though the house did not burn down, the interior was so damaged it was necessary for the family to find another home at least until the place can be repaired. One of Mrs. Allen's hands was burned but it is not believed to be seriously injured."

Amick, Roy J. (Sec 31-15-29) The Amick homestead was located along present-day Highway #200 just east of Gorman Coulee. Roy Amick's sons, Robert and Vern, owned and operated the Amick Brothers' Drilling Company in the 1940s. In September of 1946 they bought a new drilling rig which had all the latest features. It was a portable Sullivan 300A mounted on a truck trailer. Its rated capacity was 3500 feet but it could drill up to 5000 feet. It had hydraulic lifts for raising the 60-foot derrick and most of the drives and belts were on a single chain drive. The rotary table was a part of the rig frame and was operated by a shaft drive.

Concerning their new rig, Vern jokingly said, "We're going to 'perforate' Central Montana!"

Anderson, Howard Howard Anderson and his family came to the Cat Creek area from Saco, Montana. They lived on the Mitchell place on the Musselshell River and worked for the Hanlon Oil Company. Howard and his wife, Maxine (Erickson), had three children — Dan (1944), Candy (1948) and Dianne (1953). In 1952 they moved...
across the river to the Hanlon refinery and the school-age children went to the Rowton School. Later they lived in Poplar, Montana.

ANDERSON, Oswald  Mr. Anderson worked for the Minnesota-Flatwillow Drilling Company in the early 1930s. He was a bachelor. In March 1933 he purchased a ranch at Riverton, Wyoming.

ARMAGOST, Wilbur F. (Sec 22-16-27) "Billie"  Armagost left Beaver Crossing, Nebraska, in 1914 to take out a homestead about nine miles northeast of Winnett. He had worked for Elmer Eager in his general store while in Beaver Crossing and wrote back to tell him of the good country and that it might be a good place for a store. As a result Mr. Eager came to Winnett and opened a store.

Billie loved animals. He had a pet pig which followed him everywhere, even to the neighbors for dinner. Occasionally he worked for W. J. Winnett and he used to tell of a narrow escape when feeding 1000 razorback hogs. The hogs were gathered around the grain wagon and in order to get them away, Billie took a shovel full of grain, walked a short distance and called to the hogs. They all took after him, and he had to run and climb up on a shed, or they would have trampled him to death.

Billie was a good entertainer and storyteller. He loved to sing and chord on the piano, playing for many a dance in the earlier days. He was also an avid sports fan.

In 1920 he helped haul timbers with his team and wagon for the Discovery well at Cat Creek. It was in the winter and it took a couple of days to make the trip. He often told how cold it was sleeping under the wagon. After a pipeline was built from Cat Creek to Winnett, he got a job loading oil into tank cars for shipment. Two years later, he was transferred to Cat Creek to be the head gauger.

In 1920 Mr. Clark brought his wife, his daughter Izetta, and son Perry to Winnett where he helped build the Winkes store. He also worked for Hough Dray; so he had a part in the building of the town of Winnett.

In 1924 Billie Armagost married Izetta Ruth Clark. The couple was honored along with four other newlyweds (Bert and Alice Wells; Frank and Pearl Bastian) with a grand charivari through the roads and streets of Cat Creek. The Winnett Times reported, "a whooping cough procession of cars, Fords and trucks followed the jolting cart up and down the main thoroughfare of the Mid Northern, the 56 Petroleum and the Frantz Camps!" A dance followed with Mr. and Mrs. Peden furnishing the music.

The Armagosts raised three children during their years in Cat Creek. Frances was born in 1924. Wilbur in 1926 and Hershel Clark in 1928. The three children all attended elementary school in Cat Creek and graduated from Winnett High School. (An interesting note — Billie was chairman of the Winnett school board and gave diplomas to Frances, a 1942 graduate; her future husband, Jim Black, class of 1940; her future sister-in-law, Mrs. John Black (Margaret Hagen) class of 1938; and her brother Wilbur, class of 1944. Mr. Armagost's term of office expired two months before Clark graduated in 1946. Otherwise, he too would have received his diploma from his father.)

Frances married Jim Black and the couple have seven children. They live in Williston, North Dakota, where Jim is in business with his three sons. Wilbur received a degree from Rocky Mountain College in Billings, Montana, and is a pastor of the First Baptist Church in Lemoore, California. He and his wife have four children. Clark is an electrical engineer, married and the father of three children.

Billie and Izetta lived in Cat Creek for 26 years where Billie worked for Continental Oil Company. In 1943 he was promoted to field superintendent and in 1945 experienced the "mini" boom in the Cat Creek oil field. During that time he supervised putting a light plant on the river field, placing all the wells on electric power. In 1950 he was transferred to Parkerton, Wyoming, where he continued as superintendent for Continental Oil Company.

The Armagosts lived through the bustling days of booming Cat Creek, with its one-room tar-paper shacks in five or six separate camps, to the consolidation of the field under Continental Oil Company. They were fine upstanding members of the community who worked and supported the school, the Sunday school and all other community projects.

Mrs. Armagost reported, "Mr. Armagost 'went to be with the Lord' in March 1955, leaving me widowed at the age of fifty, too old to be young and too young to be old!" Asking God to not let her feel sorry for herself, she took a course at the Child Evangelism Institute in Pacific Palisades, California. She returned to Billings, Montana, and managed a Young Women's Apartment for fourteen months, then she became the director of Child Evangelism Fellowship in Cascade County, Montana, a position she held for 18 years.

Not content to sit back in quiet retirement, Izetta continues her Christian Women's Club activities and teaches an adult Sunday school class in Williston, North Dakota, where she now lives (1989). In addition, at age 83, she decided to study for a high school diploma. She didn't graduate from high school because her father, Wilbur F. Clark, moved the family around a great deal, going where work was, laboring as a bricklayer and carpenter. There wasn't a high school anywhere they went, and Izetta only finished a couple of years of school beyond the eighth grade.

When the fact that Izetta did not have a high school diploma came up in a conversation with her daughter and son-in-law, who is a member of the Williston School board, the son-in-law suggested she get a GED (General Education Development) certificate, the equivalent of a high school diploma. After much prayer, and determining that it was God's will, she did just that! She says God allowed her to use this experience to tell others of His love for her and for others. She now proudly displays the certificate she received in May 1988.
ASHLEY, Nellie Nellie Ashley was born May 19, 1885, in Bloxham, England. Her maiden name is not known. She graduated from Summerville Ladies Seminary at Oxford, England, with a M.A. degree, and she held a doctorate in theology and a fellow degree from the Royal College of Music in London. She also held a diploma from St. John's First Aid and Emergency, London. She served as an Anglican missionary in the Congo, Pakistan, West Indies and northern Canada.

In 1915 Nellie married John W. Ashley, M.D., in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. The couple had one son, Avery. Mrs. Ashley and her young son came to Montana in the late teens where they made their home with a cousin, Henry Coxon, on his homestead near jitney. Through the years, Nellie occasionally taught school. At one time she was on the staff of the Billings Polytechnic Institute. She also taught at Goldstone near Havre, Montana. Nellie was a member of the Episcopal Church, the American Legion Auxiliary and the Winnit Women's Society of Christian Service.

Avery Ashley graduated from Winnett High School in 1932. He married Garnet McVee of Glasgow, Montana, in 1939, while working on the Fort Peck dam project. He was a civil engineer in the Army during World War II, and after the war he served as a government engineer in Nenz, Brazil. He and his wife had five children.

Nellie died at age 82 and was buried in the Lewistown City Cemetery.

BAIRD, Amos Amos Baird worked for Mid Northern Oil Company as a pumper in the late 1920s. He and his wife, Dyel, had a son, Grant Everett, born in 1922. Grant attended school in Cat Creek for several years before the family moved in 1931.

BALDEN, Thomas Thomas and Beverly Musekamp Balden lived in Cat Creek in the 1960s. Thomas worked for Continental Oil Company. The couple had four children — Jean (1948), John (1949), Richard (1951) and Donald (1953) — who attended the Cat Creek School.

BANGS, H. A. Mr. Bangs lived and worked at the Frantz Camp in Cat Creek in the early 1920s. His wife, Eunice, lived in Winnett where their daughters were enrolled in school. Their daughter Eunice graduated from Winnett High School in 1924. She married but had no children. She was secretary to a judge in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, until her death. No information could be found on the other daughter, Alivia.

BARBER, Benjamin Clark (Sec 3.4-15-28) "Clark" Barber bought the Al Elkin's relinquishment about a mile north of Shay in the early teens. He was remembered by Stella Manuel Coffman as a "slow-moving, slow-talking bachelor from Nebraska." In 1917, however, he married his schoolgirl sweetheart who had married someone else and was the mother of three little girls. She died during the birth of her child in 1923, leaving a baby boy, Herschel. The Reverend George Maine conducted funeral services for her, and she was buried in the Shay (Cat Creek) Cemetery.

Herschel was cared for and raised by Ernest and Bessie Barden. He attended Cat Creek Elementary School and graduated from Winnett High School in 1936. He is a welder by trade and has made his home on the west coast for many years. He married and had one daughter, Celia.

Mr. Barber moved to Gallup City in the northern Montana oil fields. He remarried. His wife, Alta May, died in 1962. They had no children. Mr. Barber died in 1969 at age 81.

BARBER, Robert Robert worked for Continental Oil Company in the early 1940s. While living in Cat Creek he and his wife had a baby boy born March 6, 1940. In 1941 the family moved to Frannie, Wyoming, where Robert continued to work for Continental.

BARDEN, Ernest Ernest Barden was born in Michigan in 1868. He came to Lewistown, Montana, before the days of the railroad and took up a homestead in the Snowy Mountains. He married Bessie Massengale on April 3, 1910, in Billings, Montana. The couple moved to the Ashley community in 1911 where Ernest operated a sawmill and blacksmith shop. Bessie filed a homestead on Cottonwood Creek (Sec 8-16-28).

The oil boom in Cat Creek created a need for blacksmiths and in 1922 the couple moved to the oil field where Ernest worked for the Mid Northern Company until 1933. In 1936 Ernest set up a blacksmith shop in Winnett. (See also BARDEN — Winnett)

The Bardens had no children of their own but they raised Herschel Barber after his mother died. (See also BARBER — Cat Creek) In later years the Bardens lived with Lorenz Thorsen on his ranch in the Cat Creek Basin. Ernest died in 1945 and was buried with Masonic rites in the Ashley Cemetery. Mrs. Ira Johnson of Cat Creek read the service at the home, and members of Jerusalem Lodge No. 115, A. F. E A. M. took charge of the graveside rites. Mr. Barden was a long-time member of the lodge and had requested the members perform the last rites.

Bessie Barden married Lorenz Thorsen in 1946.

BARNES, William I. "Bill" Barnes was a salesman for Continental Oil Company. In March 1927 he was promoted to district manager and was transferred to Wenatchee, Washington. The Winnett Times reported, "He was known here for his ready smile, and his vast store of good stories, making visits from him most enjoyable."

In 1931 Bill stopped in Winnett on a trip through the state as a representative for Eaton Metal Products. He was selling tanks, pumps, etc.

BARNES, William R. (Sec 2-15-29) In June 1926 the Winnett Times reported the Will Barnes family was leaving Cat Creek for Beaver Crossing, Nebraska, where they intended to make their future home. They had lived in the Cat Creek area for about nine years.
BARNETT, Ben Ben Barnett came to Cat Creek in 1919 as a driller for the Frantz Oil Company. In 1920 he married Inez Adams. They had a ranch on the Musselshell River with some livestock. In the spring of 1930 Ben went to work in the oil field near Cut Bank leaving his wife to run the ranch. He filed for a divorce on April 19, 1930, naming Archie Olmstead, a young rancher on the river, as correspondent.

The Winnett Times reported on May 9, 1930, that Mrs. Barnett had shot her husband while they were en route to Shelby by car. He died the next day and first degree murder charges were filed. It was first reported Mrs. Barnett said she shot Ben because he refused to withdraw divorce proceedings, but later court proceedings revealed he was accidentally shot when he attempted to take the gun away from her. The murder charge was dropped.

BASTIAN, Frank On January 24, 1924, Frank Bastian married Pearl Shay in Lewistown, Montana. (See also BASTIAN — Brush Creek and SHAY — Cat Creek) The Cat Creek community held a gala charivari for the Bastians, the Wells and the Armagosts — all three couples newlyweds! Frank was employed by Continental Oil Company for 29½ years. For the first ten years he was employed in the Cat Creek oil field, and during the last 19 years he was shipping clerk for the company at the Winnett loading racks. The Bastians' two children were born while they resided in Cat Creek — Mary Lou in 1927 and Donald in 1932. (See also BASTIAN — Winnett)

BEER, Samuel F. (Sec 21-16-29) The Reverend Samuel F. Beer and his wife, Katherine, were very early settlers in the area. Samuel took out a homestead about five miles north of Cat Creek, but his main vocation was that of the ministry. He preached the first sermon in the Cat Creek Basin on August 9, 1910, in the unfinished home of the I. E. Thomases. He organized the Methodist Church in Grassrange and held services in the original sod-roofed log schoolhouse there.

There were at least five children in the Beer family — Dora and Pearl who were school teachers, Vance born in 1891, Ida May born in 1894 and Ira born in 1899. Pearl taught in District #122 in 1915 and in District #26 in 1917. Dora taught in District #26 in 1916. In District #121 in 1917 and in District #159 for several terms as well as teaching in the Grassrange area. She married Guy Fowler in 1925. (See also FOWLER — Cat Creek)

Vance Beer homesteaded about two miles south of Winnett (19,20-14-28). Dora also had land in Sec 18-14-28. Ira made his home in Cut Bank, Montana.

BENSON, Bert (Sec 10-15-29) Bert's homestead was on the north edge of the Cat Creek oil field. In December 1920 the Grass Range Review reported, "Bert Benson, who was made wealthy by Cat Creek oil, was through here last week. He is driving a new Buick roadster. He also has purchased a GMC truck." He was married to Orpha Claver on December 14, 1921, and the couple had six children.

"Bonehead," as his old friends called him, moved to Castle Creek near Lewistown, Montana, but his new found riches did not last, and in 1942 he and one of his sons returned to the Cat Creek homestead with two four-horse teams and a wagon. His old homestead buildings were little more than a pile of rubble, so he dug out an old cellar in the hillside and fixed it for a place to live for the summer. He contracted tick fever and died in the fall.

BENTLEY, Henry "Bennie" Bentley came to Winnett as a CCC boy. He married Marie Ranf and after World War II, he worked for Continental Oil Company — first at the loading docks in Winnett and then at the oil field in Cat Creek. The Continental cookhouse burned on August 8, 1946, and Marie opened a cookhouse for Continental in their home in September 1946. The family returned to Winnett in 1948. (See also BENTLEY — Winnett)

BERGERSON In September 1936 Mr. Bergerson and his family came from Lander, Wyoming, to work for Homestake on the new well they were drilling. In 1937 the family moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

BEVIS, Burt Burt attended the Cat Creek School and graduated from Winnett High School in 1955. He went into the dirt-contracting business with his father in Cat Creek. Burt married Judy Ziesmer in 1958. The couple made their home in Cat Creek until 1973. Judy served as postmaster in Cat Creek from 1962 until 1972. (See also BEVIS — Winnett)

BEVIS, Lester and Dorothy (Messinger) Bevis were early-day residents of the Valentine community. (See also BEVIS — Dovetail) They moved to Cat Creek in 1941. Lester took over the Cat Creek Garage and maintained the mail route from Winnett to Cat Creek until 1972.


Fire completely demolished a cinder-block shop building at the Bevis place in Cat Creek on February 3, 1977. In addition to the building, three welders, a pickup truck and all of the tools collected over a lifetime of being in the construction and repair business were destroyed. Mr. Bevis estimated the loss at about $10,000. Mr. and Mrs. Bevis, asleep in the house, were not awakened by the fire that was believed to have started when a piece of roofing was loosened in the wind and kept blowing into the electrical lines at the service entrance.


BIGLEN, Frank Frank Biglen of Lewistown, Montana, worked for the Homestake Oil Company in the late 1930s. He returned to Lewistown in December 1938 when Homestake sold to Continental.
BLAKESLEY, Lou Mr. Blakesley replaced Mr. Bergerson as the head of the Homestake Lease in March of 1937. Lou and his wife, Minnie, had two girls — Betty Lou (1923) and Shirley Jean (1925). The family spent part of 1938 in Oilmont but they returned to Cat Creek and worked for Coolidge & Coolidge on the Minnesota — Flatwillow Lease. In later years the Blakesleys made their home in Cut Bank, Montana.

BLANK, Carl Mr. Blank owned a barbershop in Winnett before becoming the school janitor for the Cat Creek School in 1924. (See also BLANK — Winnett)

BOSTON, Lorne Franklin Mr. Boston ran a hotel close to the Hover-Schwarz lease location in early-day Cat Creek. In 1926 the Winnett Times reported that Franklin Boston was going into the duck business on a large scale. He had made arrangements for a water supply from Mid Northern Oil company and built a large dam. He purchased one of the largest incubators available along with 1000 duck eggs of the game variety Teal. Unfortunately the newspaper did not carry any future account of this business venture.

There were four children in the Boston family — George (1912), Alfred (1913), Bernice (1915) and Lorna (1917). Mrs. Boston was deceased. Mrs. Michaels was their housekeeper. The family left Cat Creek in July of 1930 to live in Lewistown, Montana.

BOWEN, Dorothy Dorothy Bowen was a teacher in the Cat Creek School in 1936 and 1937. She was the daughter of Dow and Katherine Bowen who ranched on the Musselshell River. Dorothy went to grade school at the Bowen and the Ross Schools and graduated from Winnett High School in 1934.

In 1941 Dorothy went to California where she has lived ever since. She is married to a doctor and they have four children. In 1970 Dorothy went back to college to update her credentials for teaching in California. (See also BOWEN — Musselshell and Winnett) It is very easy to confuse Dorothy with her aunt, Dorothy Bowen, who taught school in Winnett in about 1918 and held a number of other positions in the community.

BOWERS, James Winfield In 1925 Winfield and Leta Bowers purchased Mr. Petersen's store in Cat Creek and in 1927 they acquired the stage route from Winnett to Cat Creek. In 1928 they moved to Winnett. (See also BOWERS — Musselshell River and Winnett)

BOYD, F. L. F. L. (Roy) Boyd was the son of Frank and Mary Boyd, proprietors of the Teigen Hotel and store. In 1927 Roy worked as a mechanic at Cat Creek. The Winnett Times reported he had invented and patented a clutch and transmission which would make gasoline power feasible for depth drilling with standard cable tools. Roy moved to Gallup City, Montana, in the northern oil fields. (See also BOYD, Frank — Teigen)

BOYER, H. E. Mr. and Mrs. Boyer lived in Cat Creek in 1921 where Mr. Boyer worked in the oil field. They were parents of a baby born in December 1921.

BRITZMAN, W. C. Mr. Britzman hauled lumber to the Benson tract in the Cat Creek oil field in May 1921. The lumber was to be used for the erection of a brokerage office, lunch room and housing house. Mr. Britzman was to take personal charge of the brokerage office and information bureau which he intended to establish.

BROWN, Mervy O. (Sec 29-15-28) Mervy Brown married M. Avis Hunter on January 6, 1920. She had graduated from high school in Orillia, Ontario, Canada, studied art in Toronto and worked in an airplane factory during World War I. Shortly after their marriage, the Browns homesteaded just north of Box Elder Creek about three miles south of Shay.

The couple left the area in 1926. According to Mrs. Brown, "When we left there we didn’t have a definite plan in mind; but when we got to Billings, Montana, it was hot and the children were tired so we spent the night and have been here ever since." (W. T. 8-1-63)

In 1975 the Browns visited Winnett and the Winnett Cemetery where Mr. Brown’s parents are buried. Mervy died in 1978, Avis in 1983. They had four children — Frances, Ruby, Clint and Ralph.

BUHLER, George According to advertisements in the Winnett Times, George Buhler was manager of the Breed Springs Water Company in 1921. Breed Springs was located about five miles south of the Frantz west camp. Water, until it was produced from artesian wells in the oil field, was at a premium in the oil camp. It was needed for the domestic use of the families and huge quantities were necessary for drilling. Homesteaders who had a team and wagon with a tank often made a little extra money hauling water to drillers.

George Buhler was elected president of the Winnett Gun Club in 1921.

BURKE, George George Burke was a field superintendent in Cat Creek in the 1920s. He married Catherine Guidici, a school teacher. They had two little girls. In 1929 they lived in Helena, Montana, where Mr. Burke was employed by the State Highway Commission.

CALLAHAN Mr. Callahan worked in the Cat Creek oil field in the early 1920s. The family returned to their former home in Illinois in 1924 due to the illness of Mr. Callahan’s mother.

CAMPBELL, Claude Claude Campbell married Maude Morrow in Melstone, Montana, on June 9, 1915. Maude had filed a homestead on Sec 12-14-29 southwest of Jitney. The couple settled on her property. Claude went to work in the oil fields in 1920. He was production foreman for Mid Northern until they sold their holdings. He then had charge of the Homestake Oil Company.

The Campbells had three children — Dorothy (1921), Robert (1918) and William Reese (1920). Claude served seven years as a school trustee.

The family spent the winter of 1936-37 in Salem, Oregon, but returned to Montana in the spring. In June 1937 they built a home in Cut Bank, Montana, where
Claude was employed by Exxon as a production supervisor. He retired in 1956 in the Hamilton, Montana area. Claude died in 1985 at age 93.

Claude’s brother Earl was a talented wood carver. His work was displayed at the Miles City Jubilee in 1934. Another brother, Robert, also worked in the Cat Creek oil field.

CAMPBELL, Donald Donald Campbell was serving as a staff attorney for Mid Northern Oil Company in 1924. Representing the company, he testified against the formation of a new county. This made him quite unpopular with many of the local residents. Mid Northern opposed the issue on the grounds it might increase the company’s taxes. Donald was a brother of geologist Gordon Campbell.

CAMPBELL, Gordon Mr. Campbell was born in St. Cloud, Minnesota, and came to Montana about 1913. As a geologist he studied the Devils Basin and Cat Creek mineral structures. He was instrumental in choosing the site of the first oil well drilled in the Cat Creek field. In 1922 his efforts resulted in the discovery of oil in the north field near Cut Bank, Montana. Gordon died in 1938.

CANADY, Edward L. Mr. Canady held an official position with the California Oil Company in the early 1920s. He married Alice Davis, a Winnett High School graduate who was teaching at the Knapp School in 1924. (See also DAVID — Tedgen)

Edward Canady was born in Kenansville, North Carolina in 1886. He and Alice had three children — Valera (1927), Florence (1930) and Ruth (1935). Edward died in 1960. Alice was still living in Bakersfield, California in 1985.

CANFIELD, Orville Mr. Canfield operated the first store and post office in Cat Creek. It was located on the Joseph Miller land a little northwest of what was to become the permanent Continental camp. Six or eight houses were located in the Miller camp.

Mr. Canfield had four children: Theodore (1902), Faye (1903), John (1906) and Orville (1910). Mrs. Canfield was not living when the family came to Cat Creek. Theodore went to college and became a well-known lawyer and business leader in Santa Barbara, California. A news release at the time of his death in 1952 stated, “He was the largest attended funeral here (Santa Barbara) in many years, testifying to the high esteem in which Mr. Canfield was held by employees of his business interests and by high city, county and state officials.”

Miss Faye Canfield came to Winnett from Havre, Montana, in June 1921 and worked for the Independent Pipeline Company. John Canfield, the Winnett Times reported, went to Santa Barbara, California, in 1924. One of the Canfields married Miss Kneeland who taught the upper grades in Cat Creek in 1923-1924. She was from Nebraska.

Mr. Canfield left Cat Creek in 1926.

CANONICA, John (Sec 19-15-28) John Canonica was born November 24, 1869, in Lugano, Switzerland. Elizabeth Scollick was born December 1, 1884, in Gomersal, Pennsylvania. They were married November 26, 1904. The couple had five children: Robert Earl (1906), Agnes (1908), John Everett (1912), James Howard (1915) and Ruth (1921). John Canonica passed away February 15, 1931, and Elizabeth, August 16, 1975. Both are buried in Tacoma, Washington.

The following was written by Agnes Canonica Hurley: "In the year 1915, John and Elizabeth Canonica and their three children — Earl, Agnes and Everett — came to Winnett and took up a homestead about eight miles east of the town of Winnett. They came from Lewistown, Montana, though they have previously been in Billings, Montana, and White Sulphur Springs, Montana. (Ed. It was reported in the Lewistown Democratic News on August 18, 1916, that John Canonica had completed plans for a hotel for W. J. Winnett, the building to be of stone quarried east of the town of Winnett. This building was probably the present [1989] courthouse.) Their son Howard was born in Winnett. They proved up on their homestead and lived there until 1921. In that year they moved to the old Smith place where the children could be closer to school. Ruth was born that year.

"In 1922 the family moved into the town of Winnett. Two years later they left Montana and went to Washington. I will tell you as much as I can remember about our neighbors, and the schools I attended.

"Adjoining us on the north was the Parker family. They had one son, Wyll, who attended the Brush Creek School. They were a Mormon family. Their place was right on the main road. Pat Quigley had a place just west of them.

"On the east of us was the Myers family and their three children — Isa. George and Pearl. None of them attended the Brush Creek School. Pearl graduated from Winnett High School. They left soon after we came. (See MYERS — Flatwillow and Kelley)

"The Hunter families came and occupied the land the Myerises had settled. They were from Iowa and stayed only a few years and went back to Iowa. Mrs. Shirk and her grown son occupied the land after that and were still
there when we left. They came from Ft. Benton, Montana.

"Across the creek to our west was the homestead of the Sykes family. They had two children and the oldest one attended the first Brush Creek School that I remember. A part of their land was rented to Mr. and Mrs. Jones who were teachers. Mrs. Jones taught at the first Brush Creek School. Adjoining them on the west were the homesteads of the Christophers and the Stages. Rozella Christopher, who is my age, always attended school in Lewistown. The Stages had three children and their oldest, Elnora, attended the Brush Creek schools.

"The first Brush Creek School that I can remember was in a cabin just south of the Pribble (Stewart) place. The man who owned it was to be gone for part of the year. When he came back it was moved to the Stages place. Mrs. Jones taught the first part of the year. I do not remember who took her place while she was gone. I was in second grade.

"The permanent Brush Creek School must have been built about 1916. It was located on the Smith place right on the main road. Mrs. Jones was the first teacher there. Mr. O. W. Lasater was the next teacher. He was there until he became principal of the Winnet High School. Miss Van Tassell was the next teacher, and she was there in 1922 when we left."

Agnes married Gerald I. Hurley and they had a daughter, Patricia Jo. Agnes lives in Tacoma, Washington.

**CARPENTER, Laurabelle** (Sec 27-1-5-28) Laurabelle Carpenter filed on 320 acres of land about three miles south of Shay. She and her elderly father, Sumner Clark Sr., lived there and fulfilled the requirements for ownership. (Sumner Clark Sr. was a grandfather of Archer Clark, Grassrange storekeeper, and Bob Clark, Winnet storekeeper.) Laurabelle kept a diary during the year of 1917. The following is part of a story written by Ann Teigen based on the diary. It tells of a typical winter day.

"Laurabelle shook the ashes from the cookstove and put paper and kindling in the firebox, then added bigger pieces of wood and touched a lighted match to the paper. After a brief crackling, the flame died. She poured a little kerosene out of a can, over the wood. The fire sputtered, then roared, and soon she added more wood. She put the water bucket on the stove to melt the solid ice formed during the night.

"Her bed was in the kitchen-living room. Her father slept in the small room adjoining, so she went into his room, lighted the fire in the heater and then went back to bed to get warm.

"When the ice melted in the water bucket, Laurabelle dipped some out to warm for washing her face and hands, then put some water in a pan to cook oatmeal. The room was warm near the stove, but the floor was still very cold. Soon Mr. Clark got up, and after their meal of oatmeal with sugar and canned milk, Laurabelle went outside to get wood and take care of the chickens. She put on her high-buckle overshoes, sweater, coat, scarf and cap and took the scoop shovel, scooping a path ahead of her as she went. The chicken coop was close to the house, but it was a struggle to get to it, with the wind whipping around her, and the snow drifted against the door.

"She had ten hens and a rooster. They were cold. They would hold one foot up under a wing, then the other, and take a few careful steps, as though not wanting to put their feet on the cold dirt floor. There was an old pan with a solid chunk of ice in it. Laurabelle took the pan back to the house and set it on the stove until the ice loosened up, then she threw the chunk of ice outside, put warm water in the pan, and took it back out to the chickens.

"The next chore was to get some more water. She took a small stew pan with a handle, and scooped up snow from a drift a short way from the house. She would bring two water pails full of packed-down snow and set them on the hot stove where they steamed and sputtered, while she sat down to rest and get warm. When the snow melted, she poured it into a wash boiler and went out to repeat the process. Finally the boiler was filled, and the buckets were full. The buckets would be for drinking and cooking, and that in the boiler for washing and dishes. The hard-earned water was precious and not to be wasted.

"That afternoon Laurabelle rested while she read a little from the paper that had come the week before; she had read it several times. She mended a worn elbow of her father’s sweater and darned some of his socks. The sun gleamed weakly in the west, then surrendered to the darkness. It was only five o’clock, but Laurabelle lit the kerosene lamp, and in its tiny light she and her father ate their evening meal. She read a chapter from the Bible aloud to her father. The poetic majesty of the words were soothing and comforting. They went to bed early, while the cruel cold enfolds the house, even though the fires in the two stoves crackled and glowed through the draft opening. Twice during the night, Laurabelle got up and added wood to the fires.

"Laurabelle was 58 years old on February 4, 1917. Her father was 87. Small wonder she wrote in her diary, ‘If I find it hard sometimes to be ‘content with what you have,’ Father not feeling very well. … No passing on the road today except Mr. H. hauling ice from creek. No mail. Everything very dull … Have done little today besides getting meals, washing dishes, carried in wood, dug snow to melt, and baked two pies, yet very tired. … Have been sad and discouraged.’

"Conditions did not improve when summer came. June was hot and the mosquitoes terrible. Water was scarce. Neighbors brought barrels of water now and then, and when it rained, the rain barrel and every other container would be brought out to catch the runoff from the roof. On August 1, Laurabelle wrote, ‘About discouraged and without faith. My oat crop almost a complete failure. Potato bugs getting my potatoes. Water low in barrel. Everything drying up, and still the cruel drying wind blows.’"

Laurabelle and her father left the homestead in Oc-
ober 1917, but they had stayed long enough to fulfill the necessary requirements to receive a deed to the land.

**CARRELL, Charles** Charles and Stella Carrell homesteaded in the Dovetail country but moved to the river camp at Cat Creek shortly after oil was discovered there. They maintained their place at Dovetail, however, and returned to plant garden, etc. The school-age children went to the Brown School.

The family left the area in the fall of 1930 and moved to Fromberg, Montana. (See also CARRELL — Dovetail)

**CARRELL, Charles Ambrose** Charles Ambrose was the oldest son of John Ambrose and Minerva Carrell. He married Annette Rostad whose parents homesteaded in the Pike Creek area. The couple had four children — Anna Ellen (1943), Charles (1944), Gladys (1945) and Kenneth (1948).

"Amby" and "Net" moved to Cat Creek in 1948. Amby worked in the oil field and Net ran the cookhouse. They made their home in Cat Creek until 1952 when they returned to Winnett. (See also CARRELL — Winnett)

**CARRELL, George** George, the son of John Ambrose and Ellen Minerva Carrell, was born in 1916 in the Dovetail area. His parents homesteaded at Dovetail but moved to Cat Creek soon after the oil boom in 1920. George went to school in Dovetail, Cat Creek and Winnett. He married Virginia Huffman on April 14, 1939.

In 1943 the couple moved to Cat Creek where George did contract trucking, well pulling and other oil field work. The family moved to Winnett in 1949 though George continued to be employed at Cat Creek. In September 1959 Al Levi and George Carrell acquired a portable well-servicing unit which they put to work servicing wells in the Cat Creek oil field as well as in the surrounding area. They named their company the Cat Creek Well Service.

George worked for Farmers Union Central Exchange (CENEX) in the 1960s and was instrumental in promoting their purchase of the Continental Oil Company’s holdings in Cat Creek in 1969. George became the production foreman for CENEX, a position he held until the time of his death in 1983. He had worked in the Cat Creek oil field in one capacity or another for 40 years — some record!

George was very interested in the history of Cat Creek and he collected and saved many oil field items there. Had he lived, he could have written a fine history of the oil field. (See also CARRELL — Winnett)

**CARRELL, John Ambrose** John Ambrose and Minerva Ellen homesteaded near Dovetail. Like many other homesteaders looking for work to help make ends meet, the Carrels moved to the oil field in the early 1920s. They lived at the river camp and their school-age children went to the Brown School.

The Carrell children were: Charles Ambrose (1909), Doris (1913), William George (1916), Altha (1920), Archie (1923), Harold (1927) and Leta (1930).

In August 1926 tragedy struck the family when their daughter, who was fourteen years old, was severely burned and died as a result of the accident. Doris was trying to start a fire in the cookstove by using crude oil. It exploded in flames and her clothing caught fire. Archie died in 1944 after graduating from high school in 1943. Leakage of the heart caused his death.

The Carrels returned to Dovetail in 1930 and moved to Winnett in 1939. (See also CARRELL — Winnett and Dovetail)

**CARRICO, William and Elizabeth** (Sec 21, 27, 28-15-29) The Carricos held adjoining homesteads of 320 acres each several miles southeast of the Cat Creek oil field.

The Winnett Times reported on August 19, 1921, "Mr. and Mrs. Carrico and daughter arrived Monday from Parkerton, Wyoming, for a few days’ visit with old friends. They own a valuable piece of land in the Cat Creek territory which they homesteaded several years ago. Mr. Carrico is now connected with the Mid West Refining Company in an executive position."

**CARSTENSEN, Carl** Mr. Carstensen was on the Homestake drilling crew when it drilled its first well in Cat Creek in 1920. He was on the scene in 1928 when an explosion killed two oil field workers in Oilmont. He was not injured, however.

**CARTNEY, A. W.** Mr. Cartney came to Cat Creek in 1922 and took charge of drilling for the California Oil Company when it took over the Devereaux Company. In 1924 he was transferred to the Kevin-Sunburst field as district superintendent for the California Company.

**CASSIDY, E. F.** Mr. Cassidy was transferred from Cat Creek to Gallup, New Mexico, in April 1926. He was to have charge of the construction of a 90-mile pipeline. In later years, Mr. Cassidy, his wife and son lived in the Kevin-Sunburst area.

**CHAMBERLAIN, Ralph** Mr. Chamberlain bought the Rhens Cat Creek river lease on speculation in 1921. In 1947 he incorporated the Chamberlain Oil Company which functioned until 1958. Ralph and his wife, Blanche, had four children. He died in 1960.

**CHARLES, John** (Sec 20-15-30) John Charles owned the land on which the discovery well was drilled at Cat Creek. He committed suicide at Butte, Montana in 1926 by shooting himself through the head. Relatives stated that illness had caused him to become despondent.

Mrs. Ida May Charles and their son, John, continued to make their home at Butte.

John Charles, the son, was in the Army Transportation Corps in World War II, and attained the rank of captain.

**CLIFFORD, Guy** Guy Clifford was born in 1893 in Idaho Falls, Idaho. He and his parents lived in Great Falls and Helena, Montana, and Burlington, Wyoming, before moving to Bridger, Montana, in 1915. Guy worked on the big smoke stack in Great Falls when it was being constructed. He met Alma Ellen Foust in Bridger and she
became his wife.

Alma was born in Smithville, South Dakota, in 1895 and came by wagon to Montana in 1896. In 1975, at age 81, Alma wrote the memories of her life. The following are excerpts from the history.

"The year was 1896. We traveled in covered wagons. Five other families decided to travel with us, and they also had to travel in wagons. It was June and the weather was nice. My mother said we had what was called a 'sheet-iron' stove to cook on. It was light to lift in and out of the wagons. She would have her bread mixed and put in loaves — all ready for when they camped at noon. Dad would put out the stove, and she would bake the bread for their dinner. The women really had to plan since they all had large families to feed. . . . We were on the trail for a month and everyone seemed to make the trip without any trouble."

Alma grew up and was educated in the Bridger area. On May 15, 1918, she married Guy Clifford, and he went to work in the oil fields in Elk Basin, Wyoming. Their two children, Guy Jr. and Marjorie, were born while they lived there. In October 1932 Guy was transferred to Cat Creek.

Alma's memories continue, "Guy's job was a pumper. He had to get up early each morning and walk around to all his wells to take the gauges . . . We played lots of cards in Cat Creek, mostly '500' and sometimes bridge. The kids would have parties the same night, so they had lots of fun, too. Most of the kids had bicycles, and one time Guy Jr. rode his to Winnett. We didn't know it until he got home!"

"While in Cat Creek, Guy Jr. got a job hauling water for the school. He got six dollars a month. He hauled the water in his wagon and did very well. He bought his bicycle, a watch and some clothes. In 1936 he finished the eighth grade. Since there was no high school in Cat Creek, he had to go to Winnett. He graduated there in 1940 at age 16. He liked high school and belonged to the Winnett Boxing Club. Most of the boys were pretty good boxers, and they traveled to some pretty far places and won some nice trophies. Guy was real good and got several trophies, too."

"When Marjorie was 11 years old and still going to school in Cat Creek, we bought her a piano. She and some of the other girls used to play in the recitals. . . . When Guy finished high school, Marjorie was ready to start. She was 14 years old. There was a fire in the dorm soon after she started, so she stayed at the Northern Hotel from then on. . . ."

"While Guy was still in high school, a man named Fred Story was training some of the boys to weld, and Guy was one of them taking the training. When he graduated we took him to the Billings Polytechnic School where he finished the course."

On January 30, 1942, the Winnett Times reported Guy Jr. and Fay Story went to Seattle, Washington, to look for defense jobs. They were plagued with problems on the trip — flat tires, mechanical troubles, etc. They were forced to hock their watches and musical instruments to pay for repairs but finally arrived in the big city. They parked the car and walked to the restaurant to eat. When they came out, they could not find their car and finally had to call the police for help. The car was right where they had left it, but they had gone the wrong way to find it!!

Guy got a job "bucking" rivets for Boeing Aircraft. He was also a welder in the Bremerton Navy Yard for a time before he was called to the Army.

In August 1943 Mr. Clifford was transferred back to Wyoming by Continental Oil Company. Marjorie went to high school in Bridger, Montana, where she and her mother lived because there was no house for them in the oil field. She completed her education in Deaver, Wyoming, after the family moved into a house in Frannie, Wyoming.


**COCHRAN, Kenneth** Kenneth Cochran married Margery Shaughnessy on April 18, 1941. Margery was the daughter of John and Leta Shaughnessy, who came to Cat Creek in 1929 (See also SHAUGHNESSY — Cat Creek). Margery was a 1940 graduate of Winnett High School and attended Billings Business College. Kenneth attended the University of Wyoming before their marriage. He worked for Continental Oil Company. The couple made their home in Cat Creek until 1949, when Kenneth was transferred to the company's Billings office.

The Cochrans have two sons, Kenneth Jr. (Pete) and John Charles. Pete made a name for himself playing American Legion baseball in Billings. In 1961 he signed a contract with the Los Angeles Dodgers for between $40,000 and $50,000. He had a batting average with the Billings American Legion team of well over .400.

**COLGROVE, C. W.** (W. T. 12-2-21) "C. W. Colgrove organized the Montana Independent Pipe Line Company by interesting a number of eastern capitalists in the venture. Construction was completed early in the summer at a cost of $450,000. It is through his efforts that the operating organization of the company was perfected and the line put in shape for carrying oil."

**COLGROVE, Charles C.** Charles and Clara Colgrove lived in Cat Creek during the late 1920s where Charles worked on the Catlett lease and Clara taught school. On January 28, 1927, the Winnett Times reported: "Mrs. Colgrove, the new intermediate teacher suffered the loss of all her personal property when the cabin she occupied was destroyed by fire."

The couple had twins born in 1931 — Charles and Margaret. The couple bought a ranch near Pryor when they left Cat Creek. In 1937 they sold their Pryor property and moved to Oregon. While living in Junction City, Oregon, Charles (the son) sold a 4-H lamb for the top price of $2175.
COOLIDGE, E. B. "Hardrock" Coolidge acquired his nickname working in the gold mines near Maiden and Kendall, Montana. He was born in Plattsmouth, Nebraska, in 1884 and received his higher education at the South Dakota School of Mines.

"Hardrock" formed the Montcal Oil Company. He is reported to have said the company was "California money and Montana guts"; thus, the name Montcal. Montcal brought in the seventh producing well in the Cat Creek field in November 1920. The drilling crew was made up largely of miners brought from the gold mines.

E. B. also organized the Homestake Oil Company which became widely known in Cat Creek and throughout the state. Homestake drilled four producing wells in Cat Creek in 1921. From these humble beginnings in Cat Creek, Mr. Coolidge built large oil and gas holdings statewide. He was instrumental in organizing the State Oil Conservation Board and served as its chairman in 1952.

The Homestake Oil Company sold its Cat Creek holdings to Continental Oil Company in 1938.

During Jimmy's last year in high school he worked for Shorty Huotte who was in the trucking business hauling equipment and supplies to Cat Creek. A regular driver made two trips a day with a White truck loaded with oil well casings, supplies, coal. Etc. Jim would load the truck in the evening with three or four tons of coal - sometimes big lump coal which was tough to shovel, and at 3:00 a.m. he would get up and head for the oil field, shovel off the load and be back in Winnett in time for school! In addition to playing basketball and football and participating in other school activities.

James married Florence Hamilton in June 1926. Florence had come to Winnett from Minnesota and worked for several years in the Eager Mercantile. The couple was charivari'd with a wild ride in a two-wheel cart through the Cat Creek camp and pelted with rice and beans. Jim worked for Mid Northern and they made their home in Cat Creek until 1934.

James remembers one holiday season when there was lots of snow and the roads were blocked all over the county. Only first class mail had been delivered to Cat Creek for a number of days because only a horse could get through. Several days before Christmas, he and Art Winnett decided to try to break through with a truck from Cat Creek to Winnett to pick up a load of mail. Many people ordered gifts from mail-order catalogues and there wouldn't be much of a Christmas if the mail didn't get through. The Frantz Camp sent a couple of trucks and a bunch of fellows to help shovel and open the road as far as Jitney. They worked most of the day, and Jim and Art made it to Gorman Coulee by dark.

They stayed all night with "Turkey Red" Smith. The next morning they made it into Winnett without too much trouble. They loaded boxes and sacks on the truck as you might load bales of hay and tied the load with ropes. They headed back after noon and got to Gorman Coulee about dark. They managed to get up the hill but the wind was blowing a gale and there was a genuine ground blizzard in progress. They couldn't see where they were going or where the deep drifts were, and soon they were hopelessly stalled. They decided to walk back to the Jim Parson place to spend the night. They were able to find enough of their own truck tracks to finally make it back to his place. The next morning the wind went down and they found the truck way off the road headed in the wrong direction! They managed to get it shoveled out, however, and got to Cat Creek about 2:30 p.m. Nelle Johnson, the postmaster, was up most of the night sorting and distributing mail and packages. There was a Merry Christmas in Cat Creek!

In 1934 James and his wife moved to Cut Bank where James became production foreman for the Santa Rita Oil and Gas Company. They moved to Kevin in 1944 where James still lives (1989). Florence died in 1986.

The Coxes had two children — Marlene (1938) and James Jr. (1941). James was killed in a tragic airplane accident in 1974. He was the pilot of a plane that went down in New York. He left a wife and four children.
COX, Orlie (Sec 2-15-28) Orlie Cox was born in Trenton, Missouri, in 1883. He married Lillie Shay who was born in 1885 in Eldorado, Kansas. Lillie's parents came to their homestead in the Cat Creek Basin in 1910. Orlie and Lillie bought a relinquishment about two miles south of the Shay's homestead in 1917.

Orlie and his wife had six children, five of whom were born before they came to Montana: James (1904), Maxine (1906), Irene (1909), Howard (1911), Claudine (1915) and Frantz (1921). Frantz was born in Winnett shortly after oil was discovered in Cat Creek, and he was named after Mr. Frantz whose company drilled the discovery well.

Orlie went to work in the oil field shortly after oil was discovered and the family moved from the homestead to Winnett so the children could attend high school. James and Maxine both graduated from Winnett High School in 1923. Irene graduated in 1928 and Claudine in 1933. In 1934 Orlie and his wife moved to Cut Bank where Orlie was employed by the Santa Rita Oil Company. Lillie died on March 15, 1935 and was buried in the Shay (Cat Creek) Cemetery. Orlie died in 1961.

James Cox married Florence Hamilton. (See also COX, James — Cat Creek) Maxine married Joe Neil. (See also NEIL — Winnett) Irene worked in the assessor's office for a time and then was the bookkeeper for the Neil-Ingeo Garage. In 1929 she married Vern K. Doherty. (See also DOHERTY — Winnett) Howard married Virginia Parkinson in 1932 (See also Parkinson — Musselshell River). He worked for Mid Northern in Cat Creek until about 1936 when the family moved to Cut Bank. He and Virginia were divorced and he is now retired and living in Quartzsite, Arizona. Claudine married Jack Blakesley who was also an oil field worker. They make their home in Thermopolis, Wyoming.

COXON, Henry (Sec 30-15-27) Henry Coxon was born in Northumberland, England, in 1882. He came to the Judith Basin in 1910, and in 1913 he came to the Cat Creek Basin with a team, a sheep wagon and one cow. He struggled along on the homestead, sometimes working for other people. He worked for a couple of years in the Cat Creek oil field but is quoted as saying, "As soon as I got the money for a few dogies (cattle), I quit." He ran a school bus from the California Camp to the Follette School for a time. On November 7, 1924, the Winnett Times reported, "The children are delighted to have Henry Coxon bringing them from the California Camp with a new Ford!"

Henry lost his place for taxes in the 1930s but managed to save enough working for the WPA to buy it back. Twice he had buildings, machinery, hay and feed destroyed by fire, but he always was able to pull things together and keep going. He bought other land around his original homestead, and by 1964 he had about a thousand acres, plus leases. He sold the property to the Solf brothers before he died in 1967.

Henry's cousin, Nellie Ashley, made her home with him for a number of years. The Winnett Times reported their involvement in an accident in July 1930. "While speeding from Grassrange Monday evening, Henry Coxon, accompanied by Nellie Ashley, met with an auto accident from which they miraculously escaped serious injury. A blow-out of a front tire turned the car completely over two or three times, demolished the top and sides, tore off fenders, shoved back the radiator and made the car practically a total loss. That the occupants were not seriously injured is a miracle."

CRAIG, Guy Mr. Craig was the general manager for Mid Northern Oil Company in 1921 with an office in Winnett, Montana.

CRAMER, Susan (Sec 10.15-15-28) Susan Cramer homesteaded northeast of the Shay flat in about 1915. In 1920 after oil was struck at Cat Creek, her son George and his family came to the oil field to work. George and his wife, Martha, had four children — Oscar born in 1905, George in 1909, Grace in 1915 and Blanche in 1917. The school-age children attended the Shay, the Follette and the Cat Creek school. Oscar was the only one of the children to graduate from Winnett High School as the family moved before the others completed high school. He had the honor of being named to the All State High School football team as left halfback, and also received honorable mention as running guard for basketball. The family lived on various leases in the Cat Creek field and for a time with 'Gramma Susan' on her homestead. They moved to Charlo, Montana, in June 1929, where some of their Cat Creek friends, the Snyders, had taken up residence.

Grace wrote, "When we lived on the Schaeffer lease, my mother raised McScovey ducks as we had a pond near us at that time. While feeding the ducks, she fell, broke the tip of the spine and was in St. Joseph's Hospital in Lewistown. My father was helping a friend move a building. it slipped and he was being crushed by it. Mr.
Ihde got a team of horses and forced them to lunge, releasing him. He was in a cast for a long time.” Such were the trials and tribulations of every day life. She continued, “We had a community hall in Cat Creek where Christmas programs and all activities were held as well as church activities and classes. We were an average family and, as children, were happy making our own entertainment. Our parents took us on picnics when they could. We played cards, played house, made doll clothes, made paper dolls from catalogues and fashioned clothes from wallpaper sample books as well as played school. My sister Blanche always wanted to be the teacher, and when she grew up, she became a teacher.”

“When we were living there in 1928, one of the Shays had gotten a radio. What an occasion that was to go listen to it! It was a long, black box-like machine and we listened by a headphone as it squawked and squeaked back to us — but it was wonderful.”

“At one place we lived, we children walked a couple of miles to school or rode horseback. During winter months my mother hitched a team and took us in a sleigh. The sleigh was enclosed where we rode and covered in front with heavy blankets. We had lap robes over us and heated bricks. We were very cozy and warm as those bricks kept our feet warm. How much our parents did for us children in those days! Life was hard and everyone was struggling along and helping their friends and neighbors.”

Oscar Cramer wrote of the feverish drilling activity in Cat Creek. A wild-cat rig had to have 50 feet of hole down in order to hold their lease. They were set up and ready to drill but their steam boiler had not come. The offset well next to them was being drilled so that they hooked up pipe connections to the same water, oil and tanks, and to the steam engine the same as the offset rig. At noon the other drilling crew pulled their boiler over to the wild-cat rig, connected it up and had it drilling when the other crew came back from dinner. They got down the fifty feet with their neighbor’s live steam boiler!

Oscar married Dorothy Shafer and they had four daughters — Doris who was born in 1928 but only lived a short time. Rosalie born in 1929. Hazel Jean born in 1932 and Shirley Mae born in 1935. In spite of many years of hard work working in the oil fields, driving truck, tending pipelines and tank farms, dressing tools and pumping oil, the Cramers had a wonderful life together. Dorothy died in 1984 and Oscar continues to live in Kalispell, Montana in 1988.

George and a friend left Cat Creek in 1928 and worked their way to California where he took sick and died on July 1, 1928.

Grace married Arnold Stoverud in 1938 in Missoula where they both worked until they retired. The couple had two sons. Bruce was killed in a hang-gliding accident in 1981. Dale is a pharmacist in Great Falls, Montana.

CROWELL, Christian L. (Sec 10.15-15-28) Chris Crowell homesteaded in the Cat Creek Basin in the fall of 1910. He was one of the very earliest settlers in the area.

CULVER, John W. (Sec 5-14-29) John W. Culver was born in Maryland in 1884 but moved to Iowa at an early age. It was in Iowa that he married Ida Sines. The couple had three children — Ray, Perry and Mildred. The family came to Montana in 1916 making their home on a homestead taken out in the name of their son, Perry.

Perry worked at the Frantz camp in Cat Creek. In 1924 the Winnett Times reported he had a new Oldsmobile which was “a peach!” In 1927 the paper reported Perry and his wife and little son were moving to Kevin, Montana. From news accounts it appears Perry became associated with a man named McGinley as drilling contractors in the late 1920s and 1930s. They drilled several wells at Cat Creek for the Continental Oil Company. They also drilled in Wyoming and northern Montana.

John Culver died in January 1934. A Masonic burial followed.

CURTIS, Clifford Clifford Curtis was one of ten children born to Herbert and Lillian (LaValley) Curtis of Brady, Montana. Brothers and sisters were Blanche, Ethel, Glenn, Jack, Clayton, David, Allen, Laura, and Richard.

Clifford, his wife Alice, and their three children — Dorothy (1935), Frances (1937) and Dennis (1939) — lived in the Cat Creek area when Clifford was an oil driller. The family lived for a time in Winnett and were involved in the activities of the community. Two other daughters — Edith and Evelyn — were born after the family left the area.

Evelyn was not allowed the privilege of knowing her father, as Clifford was killed in an oil drilling accident May 3, 1949, before her birth.

The mother, Alice, later married Si Thibert of Cut Bank, Montana. Alice died February 28, 1986. Clifford was the brother of Mrs. Ernest (Ethel) Freburg. (See also FREBURG — Blakeslee)

Cliff’s brother, David, also worked at Cat Creek. David is now married and lives in Great Falls, Montana.

CUTRIGHT, William William Cutright worked with Curley Harlan rebuilding tanks for Continental Oil Company in 1931. (See also CUTRIGHT — Ashley)

DAVIES, Bud Bud Davies received third degree burns when a torch exploded while he was working on the Gene Hunt lease in 1943. The Davies family moved to Winnett in May 1943.

DAWSON, Arthur Arthur and Ella Dawson lived in Cat Creek in the 1940s. They had four children — William, Frances, Theresa Irene and Annie Ruth. The youngest, Ruth, graduated from the eighth grade at Cat Creek and went to high school in Roundup, where she lived with her sister Irene who was working there. After graduation from high school, Ruth went on to a Bible college in Devil’s Lake, North Dakota. She married the Reverend S. E. Dunckler in June 1951. The Dawson family left Cat Creek in 1951.
DIXON, Alexander  Al Dixon owned land in the Blakeslee area. (See also DIXON — Blakeslee) He and his wife, Hattie, acquired property on the Musselshell River and were living in the area when School District #198 was formed. Mr. Dixon was one of the first trustees. The Dixons had one daughter, Josephine, born in 1915. Mr. Dixon suffered a serious appendectomy in 1924. The Dixons sold their river ranch to Casey Fail in 1928.

DORLARQUE, Edgar (Sec 19,20-15-30) Edgar and Anna Johnson Dorlarque owned 160 acres of land about a mile west of the Musselshell River on the edge of the east Cat Creek oil field. The Dorlarques had the following children: Mildred (1911), Edgar (1912), Delmar LeRoy (1914), William (1915), Alice (1917), Franklin (1920) and twins born in 1921. One of the twins died at birth and Myrtle survived. One more son, John, was born in 1926.

Ed was connected with E. B. Coolidge on the Homestake lease in west Cat Creek. He was on the drilling crew which drilled the first Homestake well. The family moved to Winnett in 1922 and to Maiden, Montana, in 1926. They left Maiden for the oil fields in Northern Montana in about 1928.

DUFF, Alfred  Alfred (Babe) Duff was married to Ruth Nave, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ed Nave of Lewistown, Montana. They lived in Cat Creek during the early oil boom days. Babe worked for Mid Northern and was the head man on their pulling-machine crew. In 1927 the family moved to Lewistown, but their son John stayed to finish the school year in Cat Creek.

The Duffs were in the northern Montana oil fields in 1930 when Babe accepted a contract with Homestake to bury 25,000 feet of pipeline on the Homestake lease. The ditch was to be 4½ feet deep, and the Winnett Times reported Babe said he intended to dig 50 feet per day without a mechanical digger. In 1935 Babe was in Frannie, Wyoming, but came to Cat Creek to clean two wells for Continental Oil Company. Babe died in Powell, Wyoming, in 1953.

DUNLAP, William F.  William "Fred" Dunlap, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Dunlap, was born in Topeka, Kansas, in 1887. They settled at Loon Lake, Washington, where Fred went to school. For a time the family operated a confectionery store in Castle Rock, Washington. Fred married Nora Jahnke in 1915 in Portland, Oregon. Nora, the daughter of Fred and Mary Jahnke, was born in Johnson Creek, Wisconsin. She was raised and educated in Wisconsin, but when her father died, she and her mother moved to Portland, Oregon, where she was employed as a sales clerk.

In 1916 Fred and Nora moved to Missoula, Montana, where Fred was employed by the Washington Power Company as a lineman. He served in the Navy in World War I in the same capacity.

In April 1926 the Dunlaps came to Cat Creek and made their home on the river. Fred was manager of the Kessling Oil Company which he later bought. In 1928 Fred built a refinery. It was homemade and built on the side of a hill overlooking the Musselshell River. It used gravity flow from crude oil storage tanks into stills where it was refined. The finished products flowed into storage tanks and from there onto the loading platform.

Farmers and other customers purchased the fuel on the spot and hauled it themselves. The still had a capacity of 390 gallons with a daily output of 100 barrels of refined fuel. The fire which ran the still heated the boiler and furnished steam for firing, pumping water and various other uses. It was the only refinery in operation in the area at the time.

The Dunlaps had four children — Edith (Fred’s child by an earlier marriage) born in 1919, Clyde (1916), Mary Ann (1932) and Shirley (1935). Clyde went to the Brown School and graduated from Winnett High School. The Dunlaps moved to Winnett in 1938 and the girls attended Winnett schools. (See also DUNLAP — Winnett)

DUNPHY, John and George (Submitted by Carroll Manuel) "Jack (Sec 1,12-15-28) and George (Sec 13-16-28) came from Iowa. Their older brother Jim had settled in the Denton country before they came in 1910. Jack came down here and homesteaded before George. Jack never married. Although he was a bachelor, his place was sort of a community center. He usually had a couple of hired men with one of the fellows' wives doing the cooking. My folks worked there some, as did the Guhrs.

"Jack had a nice place with a big shelter belt and good buildings by homestead standards. Part of his land was subirrigated and he had a nice alfalfa field. He raised lots of hogs, cattle and horses. He farmed quite a lot and soon bought out several homesteads. In the summer he ran a haying crew as well as three plows summer fallowing. He had a Franklin car and a Model T truck, the first I can remember. Before he owned the truck and before the railroad came to Winnett, he had to haul his grain to Lewistown. During the winter he kept four horses shod and on the road all winter hauling wheat to Lewistown. They hauled 120 bushels at a trip and made a round trip in five days.

"When they started drilling for oil at Cat Creek he hauled freight on the back haul. After they struck oil, the Frantz Oil Company built more barn room at Jack’s place and hired my dad (LeRoy Manuel) to cook for the teamsters. They would unload in the oil field and start back and stay overnight at Dunphys. Jack had a good water well and Frantz had hay and grain hauled in for their horses. They could stable forty horses at a time. The teamsters all carried their own bedrolls. They would roll them out wherever there was space to put them down. When the weather was bad, sometimes the floor was entirely taken up with sleeping men so you could hardly open the door or walk through the room.

"Jack’s sister Ann used to come for the summers after the train came into Winnett, and Jack’s nephews, the O’Neill’s from Livingston, also used to come to spend their summers. It was a good thing Jack had a big ranch house."
Raymond O'Neil was quite a bird hunter and kept the cook supplied with sage hens and prairie chicken when he was there.

"There were many community picnics held at the Dunphy place on account of the trees. That grove of trees was really nice. They had a number of plum trees in the shelter belt that produced really well. They made good wine, too! Jack was everyone's friend and had many partnership deals on everything.

"George Dunphy's place wasn't nearly as good as Jack's. George was drafted in World War I. After he came back from the war, he didn't stay long. He turned his place over to Jack for pasture and went back to Iowa and farmed there.

"Everything was really rolling on the Dunphy place through the 1920s — wheat, cattle, horses and hogs. Jack raised corn and hauled it in wagon loads into his hog pens. In 1930 things started to fade, and 1931 was really a dry year. Annie convinced Jack to move back to Iowa and take over the old homestead that they still owned. Curley Harlan rented the place for a few years, but the great depression took its toll and no one lived on the place for a couple of years. This place was always the place of my dreams, and I took over in 1939 and it sure has been good to me!"

Two articles taken from old editions of the Winnett Times are worthy of being included in the story of the Dunphy place. One dates from October 21, 1914: "The farmers of the Cat Creek basin are rejoicing over a large crop this year. The largest yield was threshed by the Dunphy Ranch, averaging 37 bushels."

The next article is dated December 5, 1930: "Jack Dunphy, the bachelor par excellent of the Cat Creek basin, was in Winnett on Wednesday to find out if any of the Rogge bachelors were married yet. Learning to the contrary, he returned to his ranch to spend the winter in peace and contentment."

EDDY, P. L. Mr. Eddy was the district superintendent for Mid Northern Oil Company. He took over the position from Guy Craig, P. L. married Isabelle Hillius in July 1930, and on July 22, 1930, the Mid Northern Camp held a charivari and dance for the couple. In 1931 they were transferred to the oil fields in northern Montana.

On July 17, 1942, the following article appeared in the Winnett Times. "The body of P. L. Eddy, well-known oil man in northern Wyoming and southern Montana, was found in his auto where he shot and killed himself. A note stated, 'I am sorry to do this but I have been sick for three years and can’t get well so this is best for everyone.' Mr. Eddy is survived by two daughters. Mrs. Ted Jacobs of Billings, Montana, and Mrs. Earl Weimer of Powell, Wyoming."

EDEN, Clyde The Edens came to Montana in 1915 and to Cat Creek in 1937. The couple had two sons — Fred and Emmett. Clyde went to work for Continental Oil Company in December 1937 and retired in 1951. When the couple moved to Harlowton, Montana, they were honored with a festive going-away party given by the Masons and the Order of Eastern Star in Winnett. Mrs. Eden died in 1969, Clyde died November 14, 1976.

Emmett married Marie Dreisbach of the Kelley community. Emmett was killed when struck by a car in the winter of 1988. (See DREISBACH — Kelley)

Fred married Violet Miller, daughter of Matt and Margaret Miller of Musselshell, in 1935. They farmed south of Musselshell until the fall of 1951, when they moved to Lewistown, Montana. Fred worked as a mechanic for various shops and last worked for Horning Implement, retiring in 1980. He has worked as grounds keeper for the Elk's Country Club since then.

Students and faculty members in School District #1 in Lewistown enjoy the tasty baked goods that Vi prepares as head baker in the schools' central kitchen.

EDMONDS, Scottie Mr. Edmonds was the mid Northern superintendent for a short time in the mid 1920s. He later had a pipeline installation and trucking business which was a prosperous venture.

EIKE, Lyle Lyle Eike was a son of Olaf and Hannah Eike. (See EIKE — Blakeslee) Lyle married Roberta Thorshelm and the couple had four children — Larry (1940), Kenneth (1942), Martin (1946) and Melvin (1947). In November 1942 the family moved from Welter to the Charles Lease at Cat Creek where Lyle was employed by Continental Oil Company. When Farmers Union bought out Continental's Cat Creek holdings in 1969, Lyle was transferred to Circle Ridge, Wyoming. He retired there in the spring of 1978 and moved to Winnett.

The Elke children all attended school in Cat Creek and high school in Winnett. Larry graduated in 1959 and married Joyce Retterer. (See EIKE — Petrolia) Kenny graduated in 1960 and, after three years in the Army, he married Marilyn Retterer. They had two children — Marsha and Lance. Kenny died in 1978. Martin graduated in 1963 and married Patsy Knerr in 1965. The couple have one daughter, Tammy. Melvin married Roxie Knerr (See EIKE — Cat Creek).

After Lyle retired in Winnett, he took it upon himself to take care of the Winnett Cemetery. He cleaned and mowed and gave the cemetery the kind of care it had never had before. When he died in 1988, memorial funds were used to rebuild the cemetery fence. After Lyle's death, Roberta moved to Lewistown, Montana. She died in the spring of 1989.

EIKE, Melvin Melvin was the youngest son of Lyle and Roberta Eike. He was born and raised in Cat Creek and has spent his entire life around the oil field. He did odd jobs as a boy, had part-time work as a teenager, and went to work for Farmers Union when they bought out Continental in 1969. He has been with them ever since.

Melvin married Roxie Knerr in 1968. She was the daughter of Howard and Frances Knerr. (See also KNERR — Brush Creek) Roxie took over the Cat Creek Post Office in 1972.

**EIKE, Robert** Robert Eike was born in Grassrange, Montana, August 31, 1923, to Olaf and Hannah Eike who lived on the Fergus County Sheep Company Ranch. (See also EIKE — Blakeslee) Bob attended the Staff School until 1932 when his mother died. At that time he went to Becket, Montana, to live with the R. P. Wallace family and attend the Minnick Gulch School. After his father moved to the Ahe Helleland place, he again attended the Staff School. His father, his brother George and he batched. His sister Rose Jean went to Brooten, Minnesota, to live with his mother's sister Sophie Samsal. His older brother Olaf Lyle Eike went to work for Forbes Leslie.

Robert submitted the following account of his life. "In 1936 the Works Progress Administratrion was building the Valentine Dam. My dad and brother Lyle worked on it with two teams of four horses, running a fresno hauling dirt. That fall my brother George and I boarded at Sinclair's and McNeeanys' to attend seventh and eighth grade respectively. In the summer we went back to the ranch. In 1937 we boarded at the dorm and I started high school. My dad had the mail route to Valentine, Dovetail, and back to Winnett. I was kept busy working weekends, being a member of the boxing club, working for the National Youth Administration for $20.00 a month, and fitting roller skates at the old Aristo Theater. I also played basketball for the Winnett Rams. I applied for and received my first social security card then because I had a government job (NYA) for two years.

"Bob Gilfeather, George and I went to Lincoln, Montana, in the summer and worked for Angus Cameron. We hayed on his ranch until school started, When I left Lincoln in 1941, I bought a 1936 Ford car from Lee Coon for $300.00. It was my first car so my transportation was solved for driving to Winnett for high school.

"Delmar Dunham was the shop teacher in Winnett High School. Ivan Hodges took Claude Sims and me to Bozeman for the state achievement test in woodworking. We took first and second respectively. I graduated from Winnett High School in the spring of 1942 and worked around Winnett, Denton, Fairfield and Lewistown.

"I was drafted into the military service in 1943, going first to Butte, Montana, then to Fort Douglas, and eventually to Fort Knox, Kentucky, for basic training. Following basic training I was attached to the 772 Tank Battalion, a part of the 5th Armored Division. I was assigned a M4A1 medium tank driver; we were in eight camps in the United States training infantry with tanks.

"Later we shipped overseas to LeHavre, France, on the ship Sea Robin where we embarked on D Day plus two on the French coast of Normandy. We went from LeHavre to Rouen, Paris, and Reims in France. We crossed the Rhine River on pontoons at Mannheim to Heidelberg, and went on to Stuttgart, Germany. We traveled overland to Innsbruck, Austria, then south to the Italian border where we met other American troops in Italy.

"The war ended in Europe in June of 1945. We were sent to Lamoosie, Austria, to regroup and haul displaced persons until we got orders to move out and ship back to the United States. We unloaded at Newport News, Virginia, where we took a train to Shelby, Mississippi. We were preparing to go to the South Pacific when the war was ended. I was discharged November 30, 1945, and returned to Winnett, Montana.

"The Cat Creek oil field had a new discovery in the Ellis formation made by Spencer and Livingston. I was employed by Taylor Drilling on December 5, 1945, working 12-hour shifts until April 24, 1946. Then I took a job on a pulling and servicing crew with David Potier, Ray Ihde and Robert Rostad. When Ben Stone retired, I took his job as gauger for Continental Oil Company in the Cat Creek field.

"In September 1946 I married Florence Petersen of Mosby. (See also PETERSEN — Musselson River) She had graduated from Winnett High School in 1943 and worked at the Eager Mercantile and on Treasure Island in California before we were married.

"We purchased the Cat Creek Post Office from Mrs. Nelle Johnson in January 1947 and Florence was appointed postmaster. Except for a short time, from October 1949 to August 1952, Florence held the position until we moved to Melstone in 1962.

"I was a member of the rifle club and softball team. That was quite popular at the time. I joined the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars at Winnett. I spent many hours of volunteer time helping put on 22 rodeos. When I was commander of the Sandman Post #95, we started the all-school reunion.

"We lived at Cat Creek for 15 years. Four lovely children were born to us — Elva Jean (1948), Leta Rae
(1949), Bette Marie (1951) and John Lee (1956). We moved to Melstone, Montana, in 1961 where Continental Oil Company drilled an oil field at the West Sumatra Field. I worked there until 1972 as a pumper. I worked with Robert Rostad and Fay Story who had lived in Cat Creek before. I was active with the Melstone Volunteer Fire Department and the City Council while living in Melstone. All of the children graduated from Melstone High School.

"We moved to Dickinson, North Dakota, when CONOCO drilled a new field. Once again I worked with Fay Story and Raymond Ihde. I enjoyed bowling on two bowling teams. Flossie worked at the bowling alley restaurant which was the Greyhound depot.

While I worked for CONOCO, they put in three water flood projects — one at Cat Creek, one at Melstone and one at Dickinson. We returned to Melstone to retire in 1982 after 36 years with CONOCO. I worked for Eddie Grebe on the ranch for about a year and I have been doing odd jobs when I feel like working. In the summer I enjoy raising potatoes and tomatoes.

"We now have ten grandchildren. We enjoy fishing, hunting and family activities. Don and Elva Arthur live at Bozeman with their three boys and one girl. Eddie and Leta Grebe, with one boy, ranch at Melstone. Stan and Bette Neuman reside in Cheyenne, Wyoming, with one boy and one girl. John and Kathie Elke are now residents of Sidney, Montana. They have two boys and one girl."

**ELKINS, Benjamin** (Sec 3-15-28) According to information furnished by Stella Manuel Coffman, Benjamin Elkins and his three bachelor sons came from the Zortman gold mines in the Little Rocky Mountains. The young men (Al, Gabe and Ellis) did not stay very long. Land records do not show that they proved up on their land. Gabe married Florence Vinn, a member of another homestead family.

Floyd Maine mentions B. A. Elkins in an article he wrote for the Winnet Times. He says Mr. Elkins came in the summer of 1910. He also relates this little story: "I remember once Neal (Pratt) and I were out of kerosene and one day walked three miles to borrow some for our lamp, only to find the neighbor was also out and we must go to the Elkins' place to borrow some. The two of us walked ten miles farther to get oil. Mr. Elkins had less than half a gallon left but he shared equally with us, each taking one-third of half a gallon."

The same news article says that Elkins brothers threshed 3200 bushels of grain in 1915. The Benjamin Elkins property was sold to John R. Dunphy.

**ENGELKING, Robert** Mr. Engelking came to Cat Creek in the very early 1920s as a driller. On October 23, 1923, he and Margery Hough were married. Margery was a stenographer for the Weowa Refinery company at the time. She was a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. O. K. Hough, early residents of the Jitney area. (See also HOUGH — Cat Creek)

The Engelkings moved to the Kevin-Sunburst area in 1924. The couple had two daughters — Joan (1925) and Shirley (1927). Mr. Engelking remained in the oil business all of his life and was a successful and respected man in the field. He died in 1978. Margery is still living in Shelby in 1988.

**ESMAY, Wayne** Mr. Esmay was production boss for Mid Northern at Cat Creek in 1924. He also worked for Mid Northern in the Kevin-Sunburst field. Mrs. Esmay and their young son Jack lived in Billings in 1924.

**FAIL, Lewis** The Fail family moved to Cat Creek in 1921 and lived on the north edge of the oil field. Soon, however, they moved nearer to the 56 Petroleum Company camp where "Casey" was employed. When Continental Oil Company took over the 56 holdings, Casey went to work for them.

Lewis's son, Alvin, tells of one of his memories of childhood. "Life in the Cat Creek oil field in the 1920s was very exciting to a small boy. The drilling rigs, the big old trucks that were used in those days, and watching the work that went on every day in the field were a real adventure.

"I remember when we got electricity in our house (about 1925 or 1926); one of the older boys told me if I would get a rod and stick it in the light socket, it would really make sparks fly in the dark. Several nights later, I was in the bedroom and I got onto a chair and unscrewed the light bulb, and taking a heavy wire handle I had removed from a grape basket, I inserted it into the light socket. To put it mildly, there were a lot of sparks. The fuses blew at the generator at the 56 powerhouse, and the whole lease went dark. Someway, I was able to replace the light bulb and move the chair before anybody discovered what I had done."

In 1928 the Fails bought the Alexander Dixon Ranch on the Musselshell River. (See also FAIL — Musselshell River) The family moved to Gallup City, Montana, in 1930 where Casey was employed in the northern oil fields. Mrs. Fail and the two boys returned to care for the ranch in 1932 and Isabelle stayed with her father to keep house for him. They moved permanently to the ranch in 1938.

**FOLLETTE, Ford** (Sec 13,24-15-28) Floyd Maine indicated in a 1917 article in the Winnet Times that the Follettes came to the Cat Creek Basin in the spring of 1911. There were two children in the family — Doine and Elmer.

A school was opened on the Follette property in 1921. It served the homestead children as well as, a little later, children from the California Oil Camp to the east.

**FORBES, Mr.** The Forbes family came to Cat Creek in April 1946. The girl, Dian, entered the third grade. Mr. Forbes was a driller for the Clark Drilling Company. The Forbeses only lived in Cat Creek for a short time.

**FORTUNE, Kelly** In 1967 Kelly came from Miles City and worked on the Perkins and Heubing Ranch. Then he went to work for Farmers Union and worked in the oil field for about three years.
Kelly married Karen Sue McLean. They had two children when they were living in Cat Creek — Roderick (1968) and Gene Elliott (1970).

**FOWLER, Guy**

Guy Fowler was a driller for the Schaffer Oil Company in the early 1920s. He married Dora Beer in August 1925. The Winnett Times reported they intended to make their home in the State of Washington.

**FOWLER, Wade K.**

Wade and Helen Fowler purchased the M. T. Wells Ranch in November 1951. According to the Winnett Times, the property consisted of 3157 acres at a cost of $11.00 per acre. The Fowlers had one son, Dan.

**FRADD, Nels**

(4-15-29) Nels Fradd and his sister Olivea Fradd came from Minnesota and homesteaded side by side on the west edge of the "soon-to-be" Cat Creek oil field. Olivea married Fochen Moreland (See also MORELAND — Cat Creek). Both Nels and Olivea taught school — Nels at Kelley in 1914 and in the Chippewa area near Grassrange, and Olivea in the Flatwillow district in 1915 and later, as Mrs. Moreland, in District #159.

The following account of Nels Fradd was submitted by Carroll Manuel. "Nels wasn't really cut out to be a farmer. He didn't want anything to do with horses. His brother-in-law did all his farming so he could prove up. When the oil boom hit, Nels was in the chips! He liked to drink whiskey and play poker. He moved to Lewistown and got an apartment, and that is all he did until the money ran out. He never liked to cook, either, so he would do almost anything to eat without cooking.

"When I first remember him, he had come back from Lewistown and was living with an oil geologist by the name of Fuch. They were living in the old Frank Zuern house and making a geological map — trying to discover where the oil was. We used to sell them milk for ten cents a quart. They also bought eggs from us. I think that is about all they ate. In 1927 we had a nice field of corn and my dad hired Nels to cut the corn and shock it by hand. The corn patch was between our house and where Nels and his buddy lived. Nels would cut a row of corn and come to our house to eat and then cut a row on his way back home. He finally got it cut!"

Nels ran unsuccessfully for County Clerk and Recorder in 1932 and then the depression settled in. Nels was a very smart man. He got the job of administrator for the Emergency Relief Act in Winnett. Under the program the government started graveling roads, and I think they put in a water and sewer line in Winnett. They also built reservoirs and poisoned prairie dogs. Nels was in charge of all the work force. He had a lot of men working and could tell you where anyone was without looking at his records. He really did a good job of getting reservoirs built and the faces on them rocked up. Those were really tough times but the crews seemed to have fun and worked hard. There are many of those old government dams that are as good as new and are over fifty years old. The government tore out hundreds of miles of old fence and made good open range. They introduced crested wheat grass on the old homestead fields and it made good pasture.

"After this job, Nels did some carpentry work for various people. He helped me on my house and built forms for me when we put in our big irrigating dams. About that time, however, the second oil boom hit in Cat Creek and Nels was off again! The oil bug was still alive in him! He told me once, 'Show me an egg and the air is already full of feathers!' They did a lot of drilling during the second boom but never got anything that lasted. Finally Nels moved back to Minnesota."

**GARRISON, Edgar**

Edgar and Mary Garrison homesteaded in the Dovetail community. (See also GARRISON — Dovetail) The family moved to the east Cat Creek camp on the Musselshell River in the early 1920s where Edgar was employed in the oil fields. The school-age children went to the Brown School.

"Robert Garrison and his son, Bob"

**GARRITSON, Robert**

(See GUHRT — Ashley and Cat Creek) Robert Garritson married Emma Guhrt in 1923. He was a trucker for the Mid Northern Oil Company in Cat Creek. After leaving Cat Creek he set up a trucking business in Billings, Montana, where they made their home.

The Garritson's had two children — Bob and Eileen.
GERDRUM, Doris Miss Gerdrum taught the Cat Creek School during the 1939-40 and the 1940-41 school years. She submitted the following account of those years:

"My first employment as a teacher began the day after my twentieth birthday in the Cat Creek School. My salary was $100 a month. Montana Jones, from Billings, Montana, taught the lower grades and I taught the three upper ones. We built our own fires in both the schoolhouse and the teacherage. I believe I had ten students — among them Wilbur Armagost, Bobby and Harvey Bailey (both of whom drowned at different times in the Musselshell River), Ellwood Ihde, the two Heck girls, and others.

"One Saturday that first fall, Bobby Bailey brought over a buckskin pony and asked if I’d like a ride. After I’d had one, he remarked, ‘He bucked Dad off and broke his leg last week!’

"Sometimes during the winter our washtub would be frozen to the bottom but somehow it seemed no problem.

"During the second year (Montana married during the summer of 1940) my roommate was Merle Winship of Great Falls. Montana, a first-year teacher. She had a car (I didn’t), so we got around a little more. We even dated a couple of ‘roughnecks’ (oil workers) briefly.

In the spring Merle had an operation for appendicitis so I finished out the last three weeks of school (all classes) alone. But I did have her car.

"Sometimes during those years I’d want to go home to Grassrange for a weekend and would catch a ride into Winnett with someone and then ride the Saturday train home around noon. Because the track passes near our house, the trainmen would stop the train to let me off. Then my dad or brother would drive me back on Sunday evening.

"After two years in Cat Creek I went to Winnett to teach. Ivan Hodges was my superintendent the last year in Cat Creek and the year in Winnett. During 1941-42 several of us lived in the old hotel but, strangely enough, I remember few incidents in Winnett compared to Cat Creek. It was a good experience."

Doris was born in 1919 in Grassrange, Montana. Her parents homesteaded north of Grassrange. Doris’s sister, Evelyn, was in the military service in World War II and was killed in Burma, India, while serving in 1945. Doris met her husband, Lloyd King, while teaching in Alaska in 1956. The couple has five children — Karn, Kristen, Kevin, Steven and Arne.

GEYER, Everett Byman Mr. Geyer was a drilling contractor in the Cat Creek oil field in the late 1960s. In January 1971 he was seriously injured in a drilling rig accident in Texas. The rig on which he was working tipped and Geyer came in contact with an electric power line. He was jolted with more than 7200 volts of electricity. He received extensive burns on an arm, hand and one foot, and surgery was necessary in order to save his arm and foot. Mr. Geyer recovered, however, and still enjoys coming back to Petroleum County to hunt occasionally.

GOOD, C. A. (Sec 8-15-28) (W. T. 3-29-1929) "A carload of emigrant goods owned by C. A. Good, arrived here Wednesday from Corning, Iowa. Mr. Good is a former resident of Petroleum County and owns a ranch northeast of the city. Mr. Good left here to make his home in Iowa, but has come to the conclusion that Petroleum County is the best place after all and plans on making his home here. Old friends of Mr. Good are glad to welcome the family back to the country."

GORMAN, Minnie and Eugene (Sec 1-14-28) Minnie and Eugene Gorman came to the Cat Creek basin in the early teens, and Minnie and their oldest son, Whitney, took out homesteads in what became known as the Gorman Coulee area. Whitney’s land was in sections 26 and 35 of T15-R28.

Mr. Gorman came from Texas with a trail herd before the turn of the century. For a time he was a meat hunter for the railroad construction crews who were building into Montana. Through his connections with railroad people he learned of the proposed route of a railroad from Lewistown to Jordan and he reasoned that a water tower would be needed in the Gorman Coulee area. He chose the families’ land because of its location in relation of the proposed rail line. But alas, the line was never completed.

The Gormans had three children — Whitney, Howard and Beatrice. Howard was married to Lillie Isaacson and the couple had two sons — Gordon and Laverne. Laverne graduated from Winnett High School in 1941. He was a talented artist and had an enterprising art business.

GOTZINGER, John John and Anne Gotzinger homesteaded in the Valentine area. (See also GOTZINGER — Dovetall) In 1922 the family moved to Cat Creek where John was employed by Continental Oil Company. The children — Rayburn, Josephine and Ladonna — attended the Cat Creek School and graduated from Winnett High School. (See also GOTZINGER — Winnett)
GRANT, George  George Grant was a pumper on the Chamberlain lease in 1947. He and his family were transferred to the northern Montana oil fields in February 1948.

GREEN, Harrison  Mr. Green was born in Island Lake, Minnesota, in 1889. He served in World War I and returned to Montana after the war. He had a homestead of 320 acres in what was to become the heart of the Cat Creek oil field. On October 30, 1920, the Mid Northern Oil Company brought in the first producer on his land — the sixth producer in the Cat Creek field. On December 31, 1920, another producer came in for him and more followed in the next several years.

In March 1924 the Winnett Times reported the Green property was the second largest producer in the Cat Creek field. It produced 36,535 barrels of oil in January 1924.

Mr. Green and his family made their home in Lewistown, Montana, where he was engaged in banking and the operation of an automobile dealership. He owned wheat farming property in Fergus County and had oil and gas interests in Missoula, Montana.

The Greens had three children — Betty Pearl, Robert and Tom. Mr. Green died November 1961.

GRIMME, Werner H.  Mr. Grimme worked for Continental Oil Company during the 1930s both in Cat Creek and the Oilmont — Cut Bank area. Mr. Grimme died in Cut Bank on January 18, 1955.

GROSSER, Lawrence  Lawrence Grosser was born in 1892 in Minnesota. His wife, Constance Cunningham, was born in Charles City, Iowa, in 1894. They were married in 1916. Three of their children (Floyd, Earl and Elmer) were born while they were living in Cathay, North Dakota. Five more children (Hazel, Leroy, Grace, Ruth and Edith) were born after they moved to Cat Creek in 1921.

Lawrence worked for the Homestake Oil Company in Cat Creek until it was sold to Continental Oil Company in 1938. The family lived in Cat Creek where the school-age children attended school, and then they moved to Winnet where the children could attend high school. The Grossers moved to Cut Bank in 1941. Mrs. Grosser died there in 1966. Lawrence died in 1971.

The oldest son, Elmer, lived in Petroleum County all of his life. He went to the Cat Creek School and graduated from Winnett High School in 1936. He worked in and around the oil field whenever a job was available and, after graduation from high school, he worked for ranches in the Mosby, Dovetail and Valentine communities. Elmer went to the service in 1942 and spent three years in the Army during World War II with the last part being spent in the Philippine Islands. He and Eva Prishmont were married in 1940. (See also GROSSER — Winnett)

Floyd attended the Cat Creek School and graduated from Winnett High School in 1938. He married Senora Garrison of Dovetail, and the couple had five children. He served in the Air Force during World War II. He worked in the oil fields in the Cut Bank, Montana, area all of his life. He died in 1981.

Earl graduated from Winnett High School in 1941 and served in the Signal Corps of the Army during World War II. He is married and has five children — Edward, Jerry, Donald, Danny and Mary Ellen.

Hazel was born in Cat Creek in 1922 and lived in Petroleum County all of her life. She graduated from Winnett High School in 1939 and married Deane Archer of the Teigen community. Hazel died in 1972. (See also ARCHER — Teigen)
Leroy finished school in Cut Bank, Montana. He was in the service in World War II and has been in oil field work all of his life. He married a Cut Bank girl.

Grace, Ruth and Edith all graduated from Cut Bank High School.

GROVES, William A. William Groves was born January 8, 1908, in Bridgeport, Ohio. He came to Montana in 1923. He married a graduate of Winnett High School, Clara Pollock. Clara’s parents homesteaded in the Flatwillow area. (See also POLLOCK — Flatwillow)

"Bill" worked for Hough Dray Line and Eager Mercantile Store until 1934 when he took a position with Continental Oil Company in Cat Creek. He replaced James Cox who moved to Cut Bank, Montana.

The Groves had four daughters — Lorraine, LaVonne, Lucille and Jean. The older girls attended elementary school in Cat Creek.

In March 1942 Mr. Groves left Cat Creek to enter defense work at Pearl Harbor. He passed a Civil Service examination for ship fitting and was told to report to the shipyard on San Francisco’s Mare island. Mrs. Groves and the four girls moved into the Longpre house in Winnett and the girls continued their schooling in Winnett. In 1942 the family moved to Missoula and after the war, Bill worked in Lance Creek, Wyoming, for a time.

William and Clara were divorced. In 1952 William married Eileen Scovel. He died in August 1957.

Clara worked as a bookkeeper for a number of years until she married Norm Pederson of Pederson Construction Company in Billings in 1959. Norm passed away in July 1988. Clara still makes her home in Billings.


GUHRT, Henry Henry Guhrt married Amanda Seim on May 31, 1890. She was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Seim, born in 1872 in Potsdam, Minnesota. How members of the Guhrt family first found their way to Montana is sketchy. It is known, however, that the Guhrt's daughter Lydia (born in 1892) married Ralph Bowen in 1913 and came to the Winnett area. Ralph homesteaded just east of Winnett (Sec 7-14-27).

Another daughter, Minnie, married Art Spaulding (See also SPAULDING — Cat Creek). A third daughter Emma came to Montana in 1916 to help Minnie before her baby was to be born. Emma and her brother George homesteaded northwest of Cat Creek (See also GUHRT — Ashley). Another son Elmer settled in Columbus, Montana.

Perhaps lured by their family and the prospect of work in the oil fields, Henry and Amanda came to Cat Creek in 1921. Five years later they moved to Shelby, Montana. Later they settled in Lewistown where Mr. Guhrt died. Amanda moved to Joliet, Montana, in 1946 where she died in 1952.
"Well the land didn’t explode into production. I would guess some gloom and doom set in — and then the great white fathers in Washington, D. C. had some more land on the tax rolls.

Charles married in 1921. In 1923 my sister Vida was born. She died in 1986. In 1925 my brother Charles was born. He died in 1988. My dad ended up farming in the Danvers area in 1926. He died in 1943. My name is Jim and I was born in an old house in a coulee in the Danvers area in 1929. I still have land there and my son Rod and his wife, Mary, live there. My mother, Bonnie, is still alive and in good health. She lives at the Masonic Home in Helena, Montana, and will be ninety years old next June (1989).

I live in Lewistown and enjoy the privileges of being able to still live in my native land. and I am still enjoying the spoils envisioned with the purchase of a $3 ticket and the hope and the way west.

My family still have the Cat Creek homestead but actually it is a little remote. One time I was down there and there were three prairie chickens walking along — and one had a cap on with a sign ‘Guide’!!"

GUSTAFSON, Ray E. Mr. Gustafson was the superintendent in charge of the Mid Northern drilling operations in Cat Creek in 1923. While on vacation in September 1923, he and his wife were returning from a fishing trip in Ringling, Montana, when their car struck a bump and their son Magel, then four years old, was thrown from the back seat of the car onto the roadside. He fell on his head and was knocked unconscious for a time. After first aid treatment in White Sulphur Springs, he recovered rapidly.

James Cox remembers another incident involving young Magel. Magel and several friends were riding on a bit wagon with Magel’s father when he stopped to look at a well. The boys, before anyone noticed, dropped nails into the tubing in the well! It resulted in hours of extra work for the crew.

HARLAN, Earl (Sec 10-15-29) Earl ‘Curley’ Harlan owned land on the western edge of the Cat Creek oil field. He profited from leases but no large production ever resulted from the drilling on his land. The easy oil lease money, however, led him into a life filled with moonshine and parties. His first marriage to Leone Pribble ended in divorce. He sold the surface rights to his homestead property to August Ihde. For a few years he rented the Olivea Moreland place, and in 1931 he rented the Dunphy place.

In 1930 Curley drove the school bus for the oil field school. The Winnett Times reported there was so much snow during the winter of 1930 that Curley was forced to use a team and sleigh from the first of December until the first of February for his school route.

In about 1935 Curley moved to Oilmont. In 1944 he married Edith Pipes of Lewistown, Montana. Tragedy ended both of their lives in October 1952. The Winnett Times reported ‘Earl ‘Curley’ Harlan shot his wife and then killed himself with a small caliber pistol at their home in Hot Springs, Montana.’

HARRIS, Edward (Sec 33-16-29) Ed Harris homesteaded about five miles northwest of Cat Creek. He married LaRue Wells on November 11, 1916. LaRue was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Merritt Wells whose homestead joined Harrises’. (See also WELLS — Cat Creek)

Ed was the first man from Fergus County to enlist in World War I. He went to Camp Lewis, Washington, in 1917 and to France in June 1918. He was a loyal life-long member of the Remnants Club of the 362nd Infantry.

The Harrises left their Cat Creek homestead in 1932 and moved to Great Falls, Montana. They operated a motel in White Sulphur Springs, Montana, in the late 1940s and moved to Lewistown, Montana, in 1956. Ed died in 1972, LaRue in 1973.

The Harrises; daughter, Jeannette, is the mother of Nikki Barnett. (See also BARNETT — Dovetail)

Mr. and Mrs. Ed Harris and daughter Jeannette LaRue in 1918

HECK, Waldo C. Waldo worked for Continental Oil Company in the late 1930s. He and his wife, Ann, had two daughters — Lavonne and Delores. The family moved to Libby, Montana, after having lived in Cat Creek for eight years.

HILLMAN, Edward P. Edward Hillman and his wife, the former Louise Gonion, lived in Cat Creek and worked for Continental Oil Company from 1946 until 1951. The couple had two children — Donald (1942) and Judith (1945). The Hillmans moved to Circle Ridge, Wyoming, in January 1951. Edward went to work for Farmers Union Oil Exchange. When they retired they moved to Musselshell, Montana, where Ed passed away from cancer.

HILLMAN, Eleanor Eleanor Hillman was a sister of Edward Hillman. She worked at the Continental cookhouse during the 1940s as a cook’s helper until the cookhouse burned in 1948.
HINES, Loren  Loren Hines and Florence Evans were married in Lewistown, Montana, on September 2, 1925. The Reverend Paul E. Meyer performed the ceremony. Loren was employed at Cat Creek. While living in Cat Creek their young son was burned when he attempted to light the kitchen fire by pouring oil on it. Although his face was painfully burned, the accident was not critical.

The Hines purchased the Kauth house in Winnett in 1944 so the children could attend school. In February 1945 they purchased a ranch near Buffalo, Montana.

HODSON, Harvey (Sec 28-15-28) Harvey Hodson homesteaded in the Cat Creek Basin near the Thorsen property in 1913. The family left the area in 1928 and moved to Oregon. A son, Joseph, born in 1920, visited the old homestead in 1975. Though there are no buildings remaining, Joe could vaguely remember the site.

Laurabelle Carpenter, a nearby neighbor, described the Hodson homestead in her diary: "They had a small, cozy house," she wrote. "with a barn and chicken house. Two milk cows and a few cattle were in the corral. The chickens were turned out during the sunny hours (in winter), picking at straw and grain in the barnyard." Harvey peddled meat in Cat Creek during oil boom days.

The Hodsons were good neighbors to Laurabelle Carpenter and her father, SUMER Clerk, Sr., often doing chores, hauling water and getting mail and groceries for them. Mr. Clerk said, "We would not survive very long without help from those good neighbors."

Harvey Hodson almost drowned in Box Elder Creek in the spring of 1917 when he attempted to cross the flood ed creek on the ice. There were no reservoirs in those days to catch the spring runoff and, without bridges, the creeks were often difficult to cross.

Laurabelle also wrote of Mrs. Elsie Hodson. "She was plump and rosy, and sweet natured." The Hodsons had a little girl, Elsa, at the time of Laurabelle's diary in 1917.

HOERMANN, Ernest (Sec 29-15-29) Ernest "Slim" Hoermann and his wife, Augusta "Sara" homesteaded in the Jitney area in 1911. They had one daughter born in 1919. She attended the Follette school.

The Jitney post office was located in the Hoermann home from 1924 to 1928. In 1930 the family returned to their old home in Green Castle, Missouri. Friends and neighbors held a farewell party for them.

HOLT, George (Sec 11-14-15-28) According to an article in the 1917 Winnet Times, George Holt was among the first settlers in the Cat Creek Basin. He came on April 6, 1910, with Walter Shay and Orville Sweet, presumably from Oklahoma.

HOSTETLER, William (Sec 6-14-30) The Hostetlers ran a dairy which they sold to John Shaughnessy in 1929. They moved to Asotin, Washington.

William and Hazel had one son, Roy (1916).

HOUGH, Oscar K. (Sec 34-35-15-29) "O. K." Hough was born March 21, 1871, in Adair, Iowa. He was a street car conductor in Des Moines, Iowa, for sixteen years. Previously married, O. K. was the father of two daughters, Margery (1903) and Leta (1900) when he married Jennie Nesselerode on December 24, 1908. Jennie was born February 12, 1877, and at the time of her marriage was a school teacher and also a typesetter and proofreader in a newspaper office. O. K. was a janitor in the high school in Corning, Iowa, where Jennie taught. Soon after their marriage, Mr. Hough became a mail carrier in Corning and served for four years.

The O. K. Hough family settled 17 miles east of Winnett in 1913. The following account of the family was furnished by a son, Dow Hough.

"The 16' x 18' single-room community-constructed log dwelling pictured became the 'house of refuge' of my father, O. K. Hough; mother Jennie N. Hough; my two half-sisters, Leta and Margery; and myself, Dow. We moved from a tent to this structure on the day before Christmas in 1913 with the mercury registering 30 degrees below zero. The picture, taken the next June, shows our total family all thawed out with Dad holding the tether on our milch cow, Blossom; Mother holding the reins to our work team, Doc and Eagle; Margery holding Phoebe, the kitten; and Leta holding the reins of our saddle horse. Pet, with me astride at 3½ years old. I cannot leave out Bounce, our egg-sucking dog, who literally froze his tail off in the preceding winter of many nights that were 40 degrees below.

"Montana life for the Hough clan (from Iowa) started on June 16, 1913, unloading from a Milwaukee railroad box car on a siding at Melstone, Montana. There were thirteen of us — Frank and Maime Hough, my uncle and aunt; their three sons, William and his wife Laura and daughter June; George; and Keith plus the O. K. Hough family. In addition, of course, was the total of all the household goods and farm equipment.

"My father's possessions included a team and wagon, saddle horse, milch cow, a collie dog, one plow, one hand cultivator and miscellaneous household furniture (very few items but two pieces I can remember were a china cupboard and a sewing machine). There was also a 30-30 rifle with a silver-inlaid stock. My uncle and his family's possessions were very similar and, like ours, very scant.
The group trekked overland from the Melstone railhead to the location of the three adjoining properties, each 320 acres. We came because a surge of pioneer blood ran hot in our veins, and because of the promise by our good Uncle Sam of becoming self-made land barons with an abundance of milk and honey. We found the milk and honey to be buckskin and beans, and we bought most of the beans! Life was almost unbearably cold in the winter and hot and dry in the summer. We did not know at that time that it was impossible to raise by farming enough forage, even on 320 acres, to exist. At least none of the fifteen farms surrounding us was successful in doing so. We all lasted about nine or ten years and then folded our tents, so to speak, and faded into somewhere else — many to Winnett.

The Hough clan was among the first to settle in the area but soon other hardy neighbors came, and we were endowed with a sparse but loyal and closely knit group, each ready to come to the aid of a needy neighbor. Existence was stern and food was scarce but with the plentiful supply of rabbit, sagehen, antelope and a few buckskins we all managed.

We soon were given a U. S. post office — Jitney. It was located in the log home of my parents (the same one in the picture) and it consisted of a simple board sign that said U. S. POST OFFICE nailed to a log in the center of the building front, together with a table which held a money and stamp drawer and a few homemade pigeon holes to serve the patrons who extended over an approximate four mile radius.

Then we got a brand-new school building located centrally in the community complete with teacher — Ginerva Van Tassell. Some of the pupils through the years will attempt to list: Keith Hough, June Hough, Danny Ricks, Floyd Maine, Dorothy Norton, Ralph Sanford, Erve Hunt, Walter Talbot, my two sisters and myself. This school. I am sure, holds a fond memory for all who shared in the quaint country education from the first to the eighth grade all in one room. It was genuine and thorough, at least it seemed so to me for I received much of the basics that stuck with me and still serve me in my prime of senility!

The school, the post office, as well as the very populace of the whole area, was very short-lived, for by 1925 everything seemed to disappear, and today only a few rocks remain that were used for the base of the log houses. Life during this twelve-year stretch was, to say the least, primitive and harsh. Even though it left some fingerprints on many of us, I for one will say that the total experience was an excellent education. I say it was harsh because food and bare essentials of life were on the line. We had no government aid to call on. We either did it ourselves or went hungry.

My father worked out most of the time, sometimes as far away as the Judith Basin. During threshing, he made $3.00 a day for team, man and bundle wagon. In the spring he would plow and plant our farm, if we had the seed, and then he would go and look for work. This left mother and I to plant the garden and tend it as well as take care of a very few head of stock — maybe six pigs and a milch cow or two and some calves. This kept us busy for we had to cut weeds and thistles for pig feed — mostly hoed from our meager garden. We 'Paris Greened' the potato bugs, kept the coyotes from catching all the chickens, herded the cows to green range grass (hopefully keeping them away from the wild green onions which devastated the milk and butter), and tried to maintain meat in the lard barrel for winter.

Our water supply consisted of a 29 foot dug well by a lone cottonwood tree about 3/4 mile from our house. We would haul the water in a 50-gallon wooden barrel on a stoneboat pulled by a team of horses. The water well supplied water to all the Hough clan for household use and stock water and sometimes, during really dry years, to our neighbors as well.

"If I am allowed to make a confession, the antelope served as our main meat. We fed them, they fed us. If we butchered a beef or pork we sold it for money to buy staples. I earned the cost of my Sunday 'knickerbockers' at age nine and the cost of all of my clothes from age 12 on. It took us one whole day to go to town and return for our scant supplies either bought or bartered in exchange for produce, eggs and chickens."

The Houghs moved to Winnett in 1920. (See also HOUGH — Winnett) Leta married John Shaughnessy. (See also SHAUGHNESSY — Cat Creek) Margery married Robert Engelking. (See also ENGELKING — Cat Creek) Dow married Lillian Story, a 1927 graduate of Winnett High School. (See also HOUTH — Winnett and STORY — Teigen and Cat Creek)

Hough, William Frank (Sec 34,35-15-29) William "Frank" and his brother O. K. Hough and their families journeyed from Iowa to Melstone, Montana, by railroad in June 1913. Their destination was a homestead about 17 miles east of Winnett. They brought all of their worldly possessions with them in the railroad car.

The William Hough family consisted of William, known as Frank, and his wife Malmie; their three sons, William A., George, and Keith; William A.'s wife Laura, and their daughter June. Another son, his wife Pearl and son Boyd did not come to Montana but eventually made their home in Tucson, Arizona. William A. homesteaded (Sec 27,28-15-29) and George as well (Sec 27-15-29).

The families lived in tents until cabins could be built. The O. K. Hough's dwelling was built first because they had the smallest child to care for. Their cabin was the gathering place for the Hough clan during the long cold winter. According to Dow (the son of O. K.) his Uncle Frank played a "pretty fair fiddle" and once in awhile some danced at a gathering in their home "if we could stand the dust from our dirt floor!"

A news item in the Winnett Times in January 1931 indicated the Frank Houghs left their homestead in 1918 to make their home in Arizona, and that Frank, at age 73, spent his time carving articles from Arizona cactus.

On June 24, 1921, the Winnett Times reported the tragic death of William A. Hough. "Wm. Hough, driver of
the jitney-Winnett stage, residing near Jitney, is the second victim of a crude-oil explosion in this vicinity during the past month. While attempting to rekindle the kitchen fire, he poured crude oil from a closed can on live coals with the resulting explosion of the can and stove, and the spreading of burning crude about the house and his person. His first effort after the explosion was to stop the blaze in the house (which he succeeded in doing) but he was so badly burned in the attempt that he died at the hospital in Lewistown Saturday.

"Immediately after the accident, he was hurried to Winnett where he received first aid and was then taken to the hospital in Lewistown. He was so badly burned from the waist down that little hope was ever manifest for his recovery.

"He is survived by his wife and two daughters, Helen and June. The remains were returned from Lewistown and funeral services held at Jitney Wednesday at 2 o'clock p.m."

On July 29, 1921, the following article appeared in the Winnett Times: 'W. M. Chaffee accompanied by his daughter, Mrs. W. A. Hough, and her two children left for Hardin, this state, where Mrs. Hough will visit for a couple of months. Mr. Chaffee will go on to his home in Texas and later join Mrs. Hough in California where they will make their home.' (See also HOUGH — Winnett)

HOVER, Herbert A. Herbert Hover farmed near Sidney, Montana, before moving to Helena, Montana, where he was engaged in the real estate business. He was president of the Montana Ranches Company and then became interested in oil development and promotion.

The Helena Independent reported on November 14, 1920: "Hover went to Lewistown several months ago and secured some leases. He picked out the ground he thought he could best handle himself and sold leases for cash and royalties to other oil men and companies, but his pet piece of ground is that held by the Hover-Schwartz syndicate in which a number of Helena business men and bankers are interested. This lease is located a quarter of a mile west of the Petroleum 56 owned by the Miles City pluggers. It is about the distance from the Big Lehman, No. 1, which as this article is written is expected to 'come in.' . . . Mr. Hover is interested in a number of properties, and with the writer of this article made a conservative estimate of what the combined income of his present holdings would be if a 1000-barrel well was secured on each of the 26 one-acre tracts he holds. The net income from his royalties and units would be about $80,000 per month!"

It is doubtful Mr. Hover ever realized this estimated figure, but the Hover-Schwartz No. 1 well came in on February 10, 1921, with several more wells to follow.

Mr. Hover had other extensive interests in oil related businesses. He promoted the financing and building of an Independent Oil Line Company from Cat Creek to Winnett. He was instrumental in the formation of the Arro Oil and Refining Company in Lewistown, Montana, and was president of the Hover Consolidated Royalties Company.

Mr. Hover sold his oil interests to Standard Oil Company and became a real estate broker in Lombard, Illinois. He retired to St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1941 where he died in 1951. (See also HOVER — Winnett)

HUNTER, James (Sec 20-15-28) The Jim Hunters came to Montana from Carbon, Iowa. They farmed in cooperation with the Don Routh family. They had a child in Brush Creek School. Pearl Stewart remembers, "In the winter I would hear the sled and horse coming, and you could hear the man singing, 'Iowa, Iowa, Iowa, that's where the tall corn grows.'"

The Hunters and the Rouths left Montana, but came back again. The Winnett Times January 1923 issue has this article: "Welcome Don C. Routh and James Hunter! Glad to see good people return to Brush Creek. These boys homesteaded here some years ago. Don saw service in France. Jim went back to Iowa three years ago, but Montana had such a grip on him, he had to return. They say Montana looks good to them. Mrs. Hunter and Mrs. Routh will join their husbands in a short time." The following month, the wives returned to Montana from Carbon, Iowa.

IHDE, August (Sec 3-15-29) August Ihde, the son of John and Anna (Markmann) Ihde, was born in 1889 in Peshtigo, Wisconsin. In 1905, as a young man, he left his family and home and traveled to Washington State where he worked in the lumber industry for a time. August came to Montana in 1911 and took up a homestead near Cat Creek. He later wrote to his brother, Richard, and talked him into coming to Cat Creek to take up a homestead next to his.

A crew of young men from the Cat Creek area went to the Judith Basin to help with haying, and it was there he met his future wife, Ellen Clark. Ellen was the daughter of John and Mary (Dundom) Clark, both from pioneer families. John grew up in Minnesota but started west at the age of 21. He traveled first to the Black Hills in South Dakota and in the fall of 1877 he bought a saddle horse and a pack horse and journeyed to Miles City, Montana. He worked at various freighting, logging and construction jobs throughout Montana. He took up land on Rock Creek near what was to become Moore, Montana. In 1894 he met and married Mary Dundom. The Dundoms had settled near the Moccasin Mountains in about 1884 after trailing a herd of horses from Washington State.

August and Ellen were married May 24, 1916, in Moore where they made their home for a few years. They moved to August's Cat Creek homestead in 1922 during the height of the oil boom, and lived there until they retired in 1966.

The Ihdes were parents of five sons: John (1917); William (1918); Frederick (1922) who died in January of 1923 at the age of six months; Raymond (1925); and Elwood (1927). The children went to Cat Creek elementary school.

John Ihde enlisted in the Army in 1939, and served in
Alaska during the entire World War II. He married Rosanna Kemp of Lewistown in 1945. They have lived in the Lewistown area since that time, and have raised a family of eight children. William enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1940 and made the Air Force his career. He served three years in Japan in the late 1940s. His first wife was Sarah J. Ware of San Jose, California. They had four children. He now lives with his second wife, Mollie, on a small acreage outside of Sacramento, California.

Raymond graduated from Winnett High School in 1944 and went to work for Continental Oil Company in Cat Creek. In 1952 he married Willis Flannigan. The couple have three boys — Mark (1954), Thomas (1956) and Daniel (1958).

Elwood graduated from Winnett High School in 1946. He, too, went to work for Continental Oil Company in Cat Creek. He and Leta Carrell, a 1948 graduate of Winnett High School, were married in 1948. The couple lived in Cat Creek until 1955 when "Woody" was transferred to Frannie, Wyoming. They have three children — Dennis, Regina and Darrell.


IHDE, Richard (Sec 11-15-29) Richard Ihde was born in Peshtigo, Wisconsin, in 1887. He was married to Clara Erdmann and the couple had six children — Roger, Roland, Donald, Willard, Virginia and Mrs. John Doering.

On August 5, 1921, the Winnett Times reprinted the following news article from the Milwaukee Sentinel:

"Worthless Farm Proves a Mint for a Homesteader — Hard luck, which turned to good luck, has made Richard J. Ihde of Green Bay (Wisconsin) wealthy, through a 'worthless' farm he abandoned when it refused to yield wheat, but which turned out to be rich in oil.

"After nearly accepting an offer of $1.00 an acre for it, he reconsidered and now is enjoying an income of $3000 a month representing one-eighth interest in royalties. An offer of $250,000 has been made to Mr. Ihde for one-half of his royalties and he has also turned down $1,000,000 cash for title to the farm.

"Ihde left Peshtigo in 1914 and took up a homestead in Montana with the intention of developing it into a wheat farm. His tract comprised 320 acres 20 miles from Winnett. He found wheat farming uphill business and met with untold discouragements. He had little money and had to 'batch' it. For two years he kept at it, getting his own meals and living the life of a hermit.

"In November 1917, he married Miss Clara Erdmann of Green Bay, and after the ceremony at Lewistown, Montana, the newlyweds took up their honeymoon on the farm. Two more years of discouragement met Mr. Ihde's efforts, and he finally decided he could never put the farm on a paying basis. His money was exhausted and he was forced to gain his livelihood in some other way. So Ihde brought his wife to Green Bay after being unsuccessful in his efforts to sell his farm, and obtained employment.

"Trying to forget his unfortunate experience with his western farm, Ihde settled down to his work here with the J. F. Mars Fruit and Produce Company. From time to time he received reports indirectly, but thought nothing of them. One letter offered him $1 an acre, but he did not think it worth while to answer the letter, although he might have been willing to sell for that. Later he received an offer for a lease. Then the man who tried to get him to sell for $1 an acre increased his offer to $4000 for a lease.

"With such a price staring him in the face, Mr. Ihde decided it was worth his while to take a trip to Montana to investigate — arriving here he found this section had gone wild over oil discoveries and indications were there might be oil on his land. So good were the prospects, he sold a lease to the 56 Petroleum Company for $12,000, reserving one-eighth royalty on all oil produced.

"Today there are four producing wells on the abandoned 'wheat farm' and 12 more wells are under construction. Some are expected to be big producers. Many flattering offers for the property have been made by big oil companies.

"When asked what he expected to do with his money, Mr. Ihde replied, "First I am going to establish my seven brothers and five sisters in business or on farms, then I am going to build a fine home in Green Bay for myself and my family.

"The story of Mr. Ihde's rise from comparative poverty to riches in a few years would be incomplete without a recital of the efforts made by the legitimate salesman and 'gold brick' artists to separate him from his money. Every mail brings him offers, and scarcely a day passes he does not turn down some opportunity to 'double his money.' But he declares he is not going to be stampeded into harvesting his surplus or selling the old farm, being content to see his income roll in in increasing dimensions as the oil gushes out of his barren fields that refused to yield wheat in sufficient quantities to afford him a livelihood."

Richard died in August 1966.

INGALLS, Ruth Ruth Ingalls taught the Brown School in 1932 and the Shay School in 1933. Her memories, though softened with subtle humor, are barbed with realities some would prefer to overlook or forget. The following are excerpts from writings by Ruth Ingalls English now of Olympia, Washington, after more than fifty years of successful and respected teaching.

". . . I have lived too long now by the philosophy, 'Let's concentrate on today; it's all we have,' to be able to turn back to that nineteen-year-old's notes and write a personal history in any way objective and not hurtful to people who may still be living. The trouble with a trip down Memory Lane is that there usually are a few potholes on the way. One of the biggest 'potholes' is trying to reconstruct a year in your life that you've spent a lifetime trying to forget!

"The story needs to be told of the hardships endured by very young teachers in pioneer Montana. hardship
multiplied by loneliness and fear and a lack of understanding (a common weakness of the young!) of the differences between the idealism and expectations with which we approached a new school year, and the reality of the situation.

"Of course, the West was won by the young — those pioneers, whether teachers or cowboys, gun-fighters or farmers were all young. I read somewhere that the average age of the Pony Express riders was 16!

"So I can say to myself now (at seventy-five years of age), 'Do you think you were the only one? How do you think the West was won?' But back then, I really felt I was the only one. Lola Freed and Marjorie Gaines, who started their careers at Cat Creek that same fall, had a two-room school together and a cute little apartment to live in, also together.

"I am enclosing a copy of 'Rules for Teachers. 1872,' many of which conditions still existed 50 years later in backland Montana. They are as follows:
1. Teachers each day will fill lamps, clean chimneys.
2. Each teacher will bring a bucket of water and a scuttle of coal for the day's session.
3. Make your pens carefully. You may whittle nibs to the individual taste of the pupils.
4. Men teachers may take one evening each week for courtship purposes, or two evenings a week if they go to church regularly.
5. After ten hours in school, the teachers may spend the remaining time reading the Bible or other good books.
6. Women teachers who marry or engage in unseemly conduct will be dismissed.
7. Every teacher should lay aside from each pay a goodly sum of his earnings for his benefit during his declining years so that he will not become a burden on society.
8. Any teacher who smokes, uses liquor in any form, frequents pool or public halls, or gets shaved in a barber shop will give good reason to suspect his worth, intention, integrity and honesty.
9. The teacher who performs his labor faithfully and without fault for five years will be given an increase of twenty-five cents per week in his pay, providing the Board of Education approves."

Ruth Ingalls English responded to these rules with comments relevant to her school year at the Shays School.
"There was no electricity, of course... any light for programs or evening meetings at the school would have to be by lamps with temperamental mantles and such to fool with. The coal was furnished up until March at which time I ran out and Dad had to bring railroad coal for the rest of the year; Shays charged me $1 a month for water, saying I was not a part of the school after 4 o'clock.
Thansk goodness, I didn't have to make the pens, but they weren't furnished either, nor was the ink.
4. Such 'court' as went on was not with the approval of anybody except me. At one time 'Happy' Quigley with whom I used to ride to the top of the hill each night after school said that I could no longer do so because the neighbors were talking.
5. Nothing was written about our moral standards, but it was clearly understood that bowling alleys were off-limits, pool or billiards was not played by ladies, poker was for the 'boys' and to have an empty beer can in your garbage would be grounds for immediate dismissal. In Troy, a year later, a schoolboard member proclaimed we could not wear silk stockings to school because it emphasized the fact that teachers made more money than other people in town!
6. Written in contract was the recipe for oiling the floor twice a year and the fact that marriage would result in immediate dismissal from my fabulous $800-a-year job.
7. The last warrant was a double one ($160) which was held out until we could prove we owed no debts around town before leaving for the summer and was probably expected to be a part of that 'goodly sum' for the benefit of our declining years.
8. The contract for $800 for ten months was $300 higher than I had received for my first year at the Brown Lease School, but I believe I deserved it... not only because I was now 'experienced' but, if for no other reason, as compensatory pay for harassment.
9. Although I performed my labor faithfully, it was not without fault. The county superintendent, Mrs. Frances McDaniel, visited me twice. I remember only her visit when she listed 16 things I had done wrong, but appended a grudging footnote: 'Some say you may be able to write Real Educator after your name.' My name was Ingalls at that time, of course, but after my initials became 'R. E.' I used to wonder... and that wonder has led me to title my autobiography RE: Real Educator?
"Perhaps the best way to end this 'saga of love and complaint' is with the last line of an article I wrote when I retired from teaching in 1972: 'I have a lurid past but my future is spotless.'"

Ruth's letter is signed: "Most sincerely, Ruth M. English. Real Educator?" (See also INGALLS — Winnet)

JACOBS, Theodore, N. Mr. Jacobs was a pumper for Mid Northern Oil Company on their West Dome lease in the 1920s. He was married to Audrey Eddy, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. P. L. Eddy who was the district superintendent for Mid Northern.

The Jacobs had two children — Ronald (1926) and Wanda (1927). The family moved to Billings, Montana, in the early 1930s. (See also EDDY — Cat Creek)

JENSEN, J. T. (W. T. 4-8-21) "Field Manager Jensen of the Great Western has annexed the added duties of Field Manager of the Alexander and Ritter-Lawson."
(W. T. 4-15-21) "The Great Western No. 2 came in Monday at a depth of 1375 feet... the 29th producer in Cat Creek in Sec. 10-15-29... J. T. Jensen is field manager for the Great Western, and as such, has two excellent producers to his credit."

JOHNSON, Ellis Ellis Johnson was a driller in Cat Creek in the 1920s. The following news article appeared in the Winnett Times November 5, 1926:
“Ellis Johnson, well-known Cat Creek driller, was instantly killed in the Kevin oil field. He was working on a 'Queen City' rig when the engine stopped suddenly on dead center. In tinkering with the engine, Mr. Johnson had his head between the spokes of the flywheel. The engine started suddenly and crushed his head between the flywheel spokes and the engine frame.”

JOHNSON, Ira Ira Johnson was born in Caldwell, Kansas, in 1891. He was orphaned at age seven. In 1908 he went to Billings, Montana, and attended a Rumley tractor school. He became a sales representative and mechanic for them. He worked in several areas in central Montana and came to Cat Creek in 1921.

Ira married Nelle Riddle in 1915. Nelle was born in Rockton, Pennsylvania, in 1889 and came to Montana in 1914. The Johnsons had one daughter, Beverly, born in Cascade, Montana, in 1917.

Ira was a good mechanic, and he set up a garage and filling station in Cat Creek. Perhaps this item from the May 16, 1930, Winnett Times pictures him best: "Ira Johnson, proprietor of the Cat Creek Garage was in Winnett on Wednesday purchasing supplies and greeting friends. Ira's genial disposition wins him both friends and business. He is an expert mechanic with a lively chuckle!"

With his easy jovial manner, Ira didn't always press for people to pay their bills. He liked and trusted everyone and was not above having a drink or two of moonshine with his friends. In contrast, his wife was serious and business-like. She organized and taught Sunday school for the Cat Creek children and in 1927 took over the post office from Orville Canfield and set it up in the service station. She was efficient and respected by all.

Beverly attended the Cat Creek Elementary School and graduated from Winnett High School in 1934. She married Lee Clyde, and the couple have two children. They lived in Great Falls, Montana, for a time but have made their home in Florida for many years. Beverly worked as a secretary at Florida Southern College, and her husband was the Bankers Life and Casualty representative in the area.

Ira died very suddenly in 1939. Nelle continued to operate the post office until 1947 when poor health forced her to retire and make her home with her daughter. The Winnett Times expressed the feelings of the community toward Mrs. Johnson stating, "Nelle, our spiritual leader and beloved neighbor will be sadly missed." Nelle died in 1952.

JOHNSON, James James Johnson has been employed by CENEX since the 1960s. (See JOHNSON — Winnett)

JOHNSON, Walter (Sec 33-15-28) Walter Johnson and his wife, Ruth, homesteaded east of Winnett in 1914. Ruth had been a native of Texas. In 1921 the couple recognized the need for a bakery in the town of Winnett so they opened a shop which they operated for ten years before returning to their ranch.

In July of 1936, their home, barn and chicken house were all destroyed by fire. In October of that same year they went to Toppenish, Washington, where Mr. Johnson was employed as a carpenter.

Mrs. Johnson received the sad news that her days were numbered, so Mr. Johnson arranged a trip for her to her old home in Magnum, Oklahoma. She died there in May of 1937. In May of 1939 Walter again returned to his Montana ranch, and then in March of 1945, he sold it to A. J. Bohn. He left for Carthage, Missouri.

Mr. and Mrs. Johnson had been active community members, both in Winnett and in their country community and were highly respected. (See also JOHNSON — Winnett)

JONES, Bob Bob Jones took over the Nate Wells place in about 1954. He and his wife ranched. They bought a nice log home and had it built on the place by Wade Fowler. The couple had two children — Kay and Denny Riddel. Kay graduated from Winnett High School in 1957. She married Jack Hill. Denny attended elementary school in Cat Creek. The family left the area in about 1958.

JORDAN, Etta (Sec 27-15-28) Etta Jordan was a sister of Mrs. Harvey (Elsie) Hodson. She and Laurabelle Carpenter, another unmarried lady nearby, became very good friends. Their friendship eased the loneliness of their prairie life.

KAMPSTER, Eugene Eugene Kampster worked in the Cat Creek oil field on the Chamberlain lease in the early 1950s. He and his wife, Margery, had two children at that time — Jimmie E. (1944) and Billy (1951). According to the Winnett Times, on June 15, 1950, Whitney Kampster was burned when a fuel tank blew up. The relationship between Whitney and Eugene is not known.

KELLEY, Edward J. Mr. Kelley was pipeline superintendent for Continental Oil Co. in the late 1920s. He was a small energetic Irishman with a sparkle in his eye.

KERR, William P. Mr. Kerr was the geologist who was instrumental in promoting and drilling the first oil test on the Brush Creek dome in 1919 followed by the successful Cat Creek well in 1920. (See Introduction — Cat Creek Oil Field)

Mr. Kerr died in June 1924 leaving a wife and one son, Frank W. Kerr, of Toronto, Canada.
KING, Mike  Mike King came from Iowa to work in the Cat Creek oil field. He did not marry. In the late 1920s he shared a cabin with Jim Cox and they ate in the cookhouse. He later moved to Gallup City, Montana. He was a neighbor of the Casey Falls in both Cat Creek and the Conrad field.

KITTERMAN, K. C.  Mr. Kitterman was employed by Mid Northern in the mid 1920s. He was injured pulling pipe in March 1924 and taken to Dr. Berry in Winnett. The Winnett Times did not give a follow-up report on the accident.

KNAPP, Harry Jackson  (Sec 19,20,15-29) Harry Knapp was born in Faulkton, South Dakota, in 1887. According to his daughter, Irma, when he first arrived in the Winnett area, he worked for a man with a large ranch — perhaps it was Henry Sibbert although it might have been Mr. Winnett. (Ed. B. F. Lepper) He then homesteaded west of Cat Creek in about 1910.

On December 23, 1913, he married Johanna Deethardt, a daughter of the Benjamin Deethardts, homesteaders northwest of Winnett. (See also DEETHARDT — Brush Creek) Harry and Johanna had six children — Vera (1915), Irma (1916), Howard (1918), Archie (1920), Raymond (1922) and Dorothy Ann (1930). Irma wrote the following account of her parents homestead days and her own memories of her childhood.

"Although my father's original homestead was near the area of the Follette School, he sold or traded it in a few years for land about another mile or more from the school. This new place was our home until my parents moved to Fairfield, Montana, in 1936. I do not recall the amount of land my father farmed but for many years it was all farmed with horses. He raised hay for our own livestock, and wheat and other small grains for sale. He also milked about 10 to 15 cows in the summer and sold cream to the creamery in Winnett — that is why, at least in the summer, we had to go to town every week. We usually had two 10-gallon cans of cream a week for the creamery besides what we used for our family.

"I can recall for several years we were able to hire one of the boys of the neighborhood to help with the summer field work. Later crops were not as good and since we could not afford to hire a boy, my mother would help with the haying. The grain was cut with a binder and, when my brothers and older sister and I were still quite small, we used to help shock the grain. Then the threshing crew would come with a threshing machine and a lot of the neighbor men with their hayracks and teams of horses. They would haul the bundles of grain from the fields and pitch them into the threshing machine which was set up close to our large shed. The straw would be blown from the thresher onto the shed which provided shelter for the cattle in the wintertime. Threshing time was always a busy and exciting time because there were so many men and horses around. Mother had to prepare lunch and dinner for all of the crew and, of course, my sister and I had to peel a lot of potatoes, shell a lot of peas and string a lot of stringbeans and help to serve the meals.

"Although my older sister, Vera, and I were born at our grandparents' home just northwest of Winnett, the three boys were born at our home. Dr. Alexander was our doctor but one of the neighbor ladies acted as midwife and stayed for several days or more to take care of mother, the new baby and get the meals for the rest of us. My youngest sister, Dorothy, was born when I was about 15. About a week before she was to be born, we went to Lewistown to attend the Fourth of July celebration and mother stayed there so that she could go to the hospital for that birth. We never had much occasion to go to the doctor. Since we lived in the country we were not exposed to many of the childhood diseases. There was no hospital in Winnett but one year some doctors and nurses from Lewistown came to Winnett and took over one of the hotels (I believe it was the Millsap [Ed. Park] Hotel) and performed a large number of tonsillectomies.

"In addition to raising grain and hay, our father also raised livestock — at one time having well over 100 head. Except for those we milked, every spring he would turn the rest of the herd out on the open range a few miles from our farm where they would graze over a large area all summer. Sometimes we would have electrical storms with much lightning and thunder and torrents of rain. One spring just after our livestock had been turned out onto the open range for the summer, we had such a storm with very sharp lightning. When my father went out to check on the livestock he found seven or eight of his choicest steers — some of those which would have been sold that fall — dead along a barbed wire fence closest to our farm. They apparently tried to get home during the storm and were hit by lightning along the fence. That was a real blow to the family income for that year.

"We lived about a mile and one-quarter from the Follette School and walked both ways each day. Occasionally, when it was very cold or the snow was very deep, our father would take us to school. He built a small, flat-bottomed sleigh with shallow sides and turned up front. On the bottom he fastened a sheet of tin so it

Hannah Deethardt Knapp holding Irma Knapp (now Irma Brocha).  Vera Knapp, Louisa Wilson
would slide over the snow more easily. Then he fastened a rope to the front, and riding his saddle horse, would pull the sled behind the horse.

‘For several years the teacher roomed and boarded at my parents’ home. (Follette School was a one-room, one-teacher school — sometimes with eight grades.) At that time we lived in a three-room log house with the kitchen-dining-living room area in the middle and a bedroom on each end heated by a wood and coal range. My father built a small (10 X 10 feet) house a short distance from the log house for the teacher to live in, and she ate with the family. Finally they built a teacherage on the school grounds.

‘We had a very good well to provide water for the family and the livestock. My dad had an engine in the log milk house and arranged a lot of wheels and pulleys which were used to pump the water. run the milk separator and best of all to run the washing machine so mother no longer had to wash clothes on the washboard. He also had dug a large pit and made an icehouse — he would cut large blocks of ice in the winter and store them in it in straw so we had ice in the summertime for lemonade and for making ice cream.

‘Every fall he would strip the wagon to the running gears, hitch up four horses to it and early in the morning would drive eight or ten miles to where there was some timber. He would cut and limb trees most of the day and come home late in the evening with supplies of wood for use in our cooking and heating stoves during the winter. He made a number of trips each fall to get enough wood to last us through the winter.

‘My sister Vera started to high school in Winnett the year before I did. She lived in the school dormitory. One day in January 1930, Dad went to town to do shopping and when he came home he brought Vera and all her luggage with him. In town he had learned that the bank had closed so there was no money to pay her dormitory rent. Those were bleak days but since we raised our own meat and garden produce and did a lot of canning in the summer, we did not go hungry like many families did during that time.

‘When Dorothy Smith and I graduated from the eighth grade in 1930, the only children left to attend Follette School were my three brothers and three children of the LeRoy Manuel family. The school board decided it would be less expensive to pay the two families to take their children elsewhere to school than to maintain a school for six children. Thus, the Follette School became only an empty building. When the oil field at the California Camp was in operation there were sometimes over 20 children who attended that school. It was also used for a year or two by the Follette Union Sunday School of which my father was the superintendent. We had many school programs and community dances there, as well. The desks would be piled against the walls and the younger children would fall asleep on them while their parents enjoyed an evening of dancing.’

Irina graduated from Winnett High School in 1934 and went on to Northwestern Business College in Spokane, Washington. Twice widowed, in 1947 and 1956, she raised two boys, Mike and Don, and one girl, Karen. She worked for the Unemployment Compensation Division of the State of Washington for over 30 years.


KNEELAND, Mabel Mabel Kneeland and her brother Duane came to Cat Creek from Nebraska. Mabel taught in the Cat Creek School in 1924. She married Jiggs Canfield. (See also CANFIELD — Cat Creek)

KUHRY, Benjamin (Sec 4,5-15-29) Benjamin homesteaded several miles northwest of the Cat Creek oil field. His brother, A. H. ‘Dick’ Kuhry, homesteaded in the Grassrange area where some of the family still reside. In 1937 Benjamin was making his home in Oriska, North Dakota, where he was in the mercantile business.

LAMBERT, Ed Mr. and Mrs. Lambert moved into the Mid Northern oil camp in May 1924. The Lamberts were former residents of the Valentine area. (See also LAMBERT — Dovetail)

LAMBERT, Hartley Hartley Lambert and his family moved to Cat Creek from Garfield County in the early 1920s. He worked at the Montacal Camp and later ran a pulling machine for Mid Northern. He and Earl Smith set up a well servicing business and moved to the Kevin, Montana, area. The Lamberts retired to the Bitterroot Valley in western Montana.

LAMMEL, Ed Mr. Lammel worked for Dave Schrock during the 1940 revival of the Cat Creek river leases. (See also LAMMEL — Winnett)

LANDHEIM, Gunvald Gunvald Landheim was a land and oil promoter and developer. The Winnett Times reported he moved a new drilling rig onto the Oiltana dome near Cat Creek in 1927. The Oiltana Dome was southwest of Ashley about three miles. Though geologists maintained conditions were right for the collection of oil on the dome, none was ever recovered. The Landheim family lived on the oil property and the children went to the Kid Hollow School. (See LANDHEIM — Ashley)

Mr. Landheim did not have the resources to finance some of his ambitious oil development schemes, so he went to Portland, Oregon, to promote his oil and land interests. Among others, he interested Burl R. Gainer and Dave Schrock, retired Oregon farmers, in his oil prospects. (These men eventually came to Montana to examine their oil investment and became interested in other oil property, which ultimately resulted in the revival of the Cat Creek east field in the late 1940s.)

Mr. Landheim spent almost eight years on the West coast. His family moved to Lewistown, Montana. When
he returned to Montana, he was able to put together a sizable block of land west of Cat Creek. He called the property the Columbia Petroleum Limited and/or the Landheim Development Company. It included land formerly owned by Ginevra and Albert Van Tassell, Arthur Spaulding, Grace Dobson, John Dunphy, Lucy Ryan, George and Floyd Maine, Charles Vogel and George Holt. Much of this land had been leased by the California Oil Company in the early 1930s. Several small producing wells were drilled in 1958. The Winnett Times reported on October 30, 1958, "Landheim Development Co. No. 1 Fee, a couple of miles west of the producing area of the West Dome of the Cat Creek field, got a flowing oil well after coring 10 feet of oil saturation in the second Cat Creek sand. Location is Sec 12-15-28. Tubing and production packer has been run."

"The core was from 1751 to 1761. Pipe was run for a test and after swabbing, the well flowed six barrels of oil per hour. Production plans have not been announced."

Carroll Manuel presently owns most of the land involved, but some of the oil interests are still maintained by Gunvald's son Elliot under the name Columbia Petroleum Company.

**LANE, Franklin** Franklin Lane was a son of William and Blanche Lane who homesteaded near Valentine. (See also LANE — Dovetail) He was married to Betty Jo Hamilton. She grew up near the Musselshell River. (See BUMP — Musselshell River) The couple had three children — Martha Sharon (1941), Donald (1943) and Terry (1949). Franklin was employed by Farmers Union Exchange when the company first invested in the Cat Creek oil field. The family lived in Cat Creek until the early 1950s.

**LANTZ, L. S.** Mr. Lantz, "Roxey" as everyone knew him, was the drilling superintendent for the Frantz Oil Company when the first oil well was brought in at Cat Creek. He arrived in Winnett on October 11, 1919, bringing with him a "rattletrap drilling machine and two drillers, Curley Meek and Sol Alderdice." Two other men, Joe Nordquist and Fred Barnet, filled out the drilling crew. The story of their drilling venture can be found in the introduction to the Cat Creek oil field history.

"Roxey" had the uncanny ability to make life-time friends out of those with whom he had only casual contact according to an article in the Montana Oil Journal at the time of his death.

Mr. Lantz became superintendent of the Tulsa division of the Continental Oil Company in the 1920s. In 1929 he became an independent lease broker. He successfully operated in this capacity until his death in November 1958.

**LAVERDURE, Ralph** (Sec 1,2-15-28) Ralph "Left Arm" Laverdure took up land in the Cat Creek Basin in about 1913. He was of Indian descent and, according to Floyd Maine, the grandson of the warrior "Left Arm" who died near Lewistown in 1914. Mrs. Laverdure sometimes helped neighbor women and had a vast store of knowledge about herbs and everyday remedies.

**LEACH, Art** Mr. Leach was a tanker for Continental Oil Company in the 1920s. He fell from a 25-foot scaffold and crushed his heel in an oil field accident in 1926.

**LEDOUX, Ell and Adelaide** The Ledoux family lived in Cat Creek in the early 1930s. He worked for Gene Hunt on the Brown lease. They moved to Winnett in 1937 and to Polson, Montana, the following year.

**LEHMANN, Mr.** "Big" Lehman was not commonly known by any other name than his nickname, and "Big" he was! People who knew him say he must have weighed 350 pounds. He drove a Ford touring car with the top down, and it is said that it looked as though he took up the entire front seat. The car literally squatted down when he got in!

Mr. Lehman had a lease on part of the Ihde property and brought in the Big Lehman No. 1 well on March 10, 1921.

**LEVI, Albert** Mr. Levi came to Cat Creek as a driller from Vernal, Utah. In 1947 his wife, Alice, took charge of the Spencer Camp cookhouse. The family moved to Winnett in 1948. Albert and George Carrell operated a well-pulling business together for a time. (See also LEVI — Winnett)

**LINTON, W. L.** Mr. Linton was in charge of the Frantz Corporation for two years. He was a pioneer merchant and rancher in Montana with a number of interests in the oil industry. He died in 1930.

**LIVINGSTON, W. L.** Perhaps this article which appeared in the Winnett Times on May 16, 1946, best tells the story of "Axle" Livingston's activities in the Cat Creek oil field.

"The now-famous rotary drilling rig of the more-famous drilling team of Dyrl Spencer and W. L. Livingston will soon be back to its old job of drilling water wells after drilling in the discovery well for Dave Schrock, et. al. on the Mosby dome in the Cat Creek oil field. (See also SPENCER — Cat Creek)

"Livingston announced the rig had been brought to Winnett where it will undergo a thorough overhauling from stem to stern after which it will be put to use drilling much needed water wells in the area. He said he already had a number of drilling contracts signed up.

"After drilling in the discovery well on the Schrock-Fifer lease, the partnership entered into an agreement with Wm. S. Brindley, the landowner, and Joe Murphy. The partnership deepened an old second sand producer to the deeper producing horizon below the third Cat Creek sand. The well came in flowing more than 1000 barrels a day on January 1, 1946. Since that time the well has caved in and production is at a standstill. Further plans of the combine are indefinite with the sale of the land by Brindley to R. C. Tarrant.

"Spencer, in the meantime, is associated with the Spencer-Denton Drilling Co. which is drilling for Farmers Union." (See also LIVINGSTON — Winnett)
LOCHIMER, George Mr. Lochimer was the field manager for the 56 Petroleum Company in the 1920s. He made his permanent home in Miles City, Montana. The 56 Petroleum Company had one of the most profitable leases in the Cat Creek oil field.

LONG, Walter Walter Long and his family moved to the Homestake Camp in 1924. The two Long children, Floyd and Mildred, entered the Cat Creek School.

LOVELESS, James Mr. Loveless was employed in Cat Creek in 1921. His wife and two children, Lorene and Virginia, spent the winter in Lewistown. In 1924 Mr. Loveless opened a gas station near the Cat Creek post office, meeting "a long felt need in the community" according to the Winnett Times. He worked at Mid Northern cookhouse before opening the gas station.

LUDWIG, Pete Pete Ludwig worked in the Cat Creek oil field in the late 1920s and 1930s. He lived in the bunkhouse and was a pumper for Continental. He moved to Kevin, Montana. Pete died in 1954.

LYNCH, B. L. B. L. "Ben" Lynch homesteaded in Sec 14-13-29 but moved to Cat Creek to become a pumper for Mid Northern in the 1920s. The Lynches had twins, Olen and Norman, born in 1921. The school nurse. Mrs. Kingsley, was impressed with the wonderful health of the twins when she made her school visit to Cat Creek in April 1927. The Lynch family moved to Sunburst, Montana.

MAIER, Mary Miss Maier was the intermediate room teacher at the Cat Creek School during the 1928-29 school year. She attended the state teacher’s college in Valley City, North Dakota, and had a B. A. degree from the University of Montana. In addition, she had four years of successful teaching in North Dakota and Montana before coming to Cat Creek. Mary married a law student from Missoula, Montana, and they lived in Winnett for a time. (See also BOOTH — Winnett)

MAINE, Floyd Floyd ‘Lone Eagle’ Maine came to the Cat Creek Basin in October 1910. In later years Floyd wrote a number of newspaper articles and several books under the pen name ‘Lone Eagle.’ Some of these writings were questioned by others as being exaggerated and romanticized tales of Indians and the old West. However, the Winnett Times published a special Easter edition in March 1917, and Floyd S. Maine contributed an article on the Cat Creek Basin to the issue. It is one of the very few early written accounts about the area and since it was written only seven years after Lone Eagle arrived, perhaps time had not had an opportunity to color his memories. Excerpts from the article are reprinted in the introduction to this chapter.

Floyd claimed to have been adopted by the Sioux Indians and given the Indian name Lone Eagle. His cabin was decorated with Indian blankets and relics and he called his farm the Eagle Bar Ranch.

It has been reported Floyd Maine was married to a Pratt girl and later divorced. The Cat Creek Cemetery records show the burial of a stillborn child, Shirley Winona Maine, on October 29, 1920.

MAINE, George S. (Sec 11, 12-15-28) The Reverend George S. Maine was born in Stillwater, New Jersey, in 1856. He came west in 1890 to take up duties as a Methodist minister in Iowa and the Dakotas. He came to Montana in 1911 and homesteaded on a tract of land about two miles east of Shay. He preached his first sermon in Montana at the I. E. Thomas home in April 1911. Mrs. Maine (Emma) came to Montana with her husband but very often returned to Iowa to spend the winters.

The Reverend Maine conducted funerals, weddings and Sunday school services. He died in June 1924.

MANUEL, Carroll Carroll, the son of LeRoy and Laura Mae Manuel, was born April 21, 1920. He was a teenager in the 1930s when his parents were struggling to keep their farm going. He wrote: "I got out of school early in the spring of 1936 and worked on the WPA poisoning prairie dogs. In 1937 the drought broke and people got back into livestock — mostly sheep. I got a job herding sheep in the fall of 1938. I graduated that spring, saved my money, and started on my own the fall of 1939. The 1940s were real good years. Land was 50 cents an acre and stock prices were on the rise. I put together a nice ranch and raised four real nice kids. My two oldest boys have the ranch now."


Walter married Judie King and lives on the ranch. They have two sons, Brian and Greg. Betty married Tony Kuhry and lives near Grassrange. Before moving to Grassrange, Betty served for a time as Winnett Public Library trustee. They have three children: Laura (who is married to Orren Kiehl of Winnett), Karen and Janel.

Victor and Kathy Manuel had two children, LaVonne and Colin. They were divorced and later Victor married Bonnie Rempel. They have a son, Alexander. They reside on the ranch. Thomas married Marcella Smith of Forest Grove, Montana, and they live in Red Lodge, Montana.

MANUEL, Charles O. (Sec 25-16-29) Charles "Mick" Manuel was born in Seneca, Kansas, in 1894 and later moved to Indian Territory, Oklahoma. Carroll Manuel wrote of Mick: "When the Manuel clan came to Montana, Mick was just a kid. There was so much going on all the time that life was just a big party to him. He wasn’t ready to settle down yet. He worked around and broke horses. He really got around the country and knew many people. He and Clarence Shay became great buddies. Those two boys used to go to Winnett and get their snouts in the trough and maybe steal a pig from W. J. Winnett. People said you could sure tell when they came home — they were singing, and the pigs were squealing!

"When Mick and Clarence decided what they wanted to do, the land was pretty well taken up. There was quite a chunk of land down in the breaks that was not
homesteaded. They took up homesteads down there on Cottonwood Creek and used this rough country to run their cattle on. The winter of 1919 came along and sure put the crimp in their plans. The oil field work was just starting up, so both of them got started drilling oil wells.

"Mick went to California after things slowed down here to work in the oil patch. He was superintendent for a big oil company and lived the rest of his life in California. He and his wife, Maude, came back here several times to visit and enjoyed telling lots of stories about the good old days."

Mick died on July 20, 1973, in Bakersfield, California.

MANUEL, LeRoy (Sec 1-15-28) LeRoy Manuel, the son of James and Margaret Manuel, was born in Seneca, Kansas, December 16, 1887. (See also MANUEL — Ashley) He came to Montana "riding the rails" in 1910 and worked in the Judith Basin near Lewistown, Montana. Roy leased a place at Half Moon Pass in hopes of getting started on his own. When that didn't work out, he looked toward eastern Fergus County and the homesteads being offered there. In 1911 he homesteaded in the Cat Creek Basin.

On November 28, 1912, Roy married Laura Mae Hopkins. They had five children: Marion (1916) who died in infancy and was buried in the Cat Creek Cemetery; Wilma (1918); Carroll (1920); Merle (1921); and Edna (1924).

Carroll described their life on the homestead: "It took quite a lot of money to get the place fenced, buy machinery, horses and harness. They worked out a lot to get it all together. Even after they raised a crop, they had to haul it to Lewistown. They mortgaged their land and lost it. In 1923 we loaded our stuff in an immigrant car and moved back to Oklahoma. In 1925 the Schaffer Oil Company offered to pay off the indebtedness on the land and give it back to my folks for an oil lease. They were happy to do that so we moved back in the fall of 1925.

"Wilma had started to school and I started in 1927. Dad ran the school bus to the Follette School. He bought a Model T Ford. There were several families at the California Oil Camp, a half mile south of our house. When it was dry, he used the Model T. When there was mud, he used the buggy, and when there was snow, he used the team and sled.

"The year 1931 was a complete failure for farming. Most of our neighbors took their livestock to the Judith Basin to winter, but we stayed. It was a real mild winter, so we got by. People were starting to move out. The California Oil Camp closed, and the Follette School closed in 1930. Things really got tough from 1931 to 1937. We really had a struggle to survive. The spring of 1936 my dad went to work on the WPA with a four-horse team and a fresno building reservoirs."

The Manuel family survived the drought and remained on the farm until their retirement. Mrs. Manuel died following a traffic accident at Stockton, California, in January 1959. Roy was seriously injured in the same accident but he survived.

In 1961 Roy married Dora Brock. On May 29, 1964, Roy died, and he is buried in the Cat Creek Cemetery.

Wilma graduated from Winnett High School in 1936. She married John Kastner in 1939. (See also KASTNER — Winnett) Carroll remained on the ranch and is written about in a separate article. Merle graduated from Winnett High School in 1939. He married Audrey Story (See also STORY — Winnett) Edna graduated from Winnett High School in 1941. (See also PETERSEN — Musselshell River and WANGSENG — Winnett)
MARKIN, George  George and Molly Markin had two
children on the 1922 school census in Cat Creek. They
were Irene (1909) and George (1916).
MARKS, Roy  Roy Marks and his wife Nettie (Seefuth)
had two children on the school census — Edward Leroy
(1930) and Mabel (1932). The family moved to Flathead
County. (See also MARKS — Teigen)
MARSH, P. E.  Mr. Marsh and his wife, Minnie, were liv-
ing at the Globe test site in east Cat Creek in March 1930.
MARTINDALE, Clinton R.  Clinton Martindale was
born in Beemer, Nebraska, in 1889. He homesteaded in
the Valentine area. His wife, Bessie, was born in Avoca,
Iowa, in 1890. In 1923 the Martindales moved to Cat
Creek where Clint worked in various capacities and
Bessie ran the Continental cookhouse for 19 years.
The couple had one son, Gayle, born in 1910. He attended
the Cat Creek and Winnett schools. He also attended
Helena Business College and later made the
military his career. He died in 1957 and was buried with
full military honors.
Mr. and Mrs. Martindale moved to Thermopolis,
Wyoming, in 1945 where Clint was a district mainte-
nance man for the Continental Oil Company. He came back to
Cat Creek in the spring of 1946 to erect the stone and
cement Continental sign at the Highway 200 turnoff to Cat
Creek. Mr. Martindale died in 1948. He had worked for
Continental Oil company for over 25 years. Bessie
returned to Cat Creek for the summers and spent the
winters in California. She died in 1961.
McADAM, Robert  Robert McAdam was born in
Scotland and came to Miles City, Montana, when he was
13 years old. He married Maude Griffen of Stacey, Monta-
na. The couple had 13 children: Lloyd (1914), Mary
(1917), Robert (1918), Frank (1920), Blanche (1922), Roy
(1924), Annie (1927), Charles (1929), Donald (1931),
Glennette (1933), Mona (1935), William (1937) and Max
(1940).
Robert and his family moved to Cat Creek in 1923
where he worked for Mutual Oil Company and then the
Continental Oil Company Pipeline Division. The family
moved to Winnett in 1926 and Bob worked for the Ford
Garage until about 1929 when he went to work in the
Bannentine oil field near Dutton, Montana. In 1934 the
family settled in Cut Bank.
The McAdams' son, Robert, served in the Army in
World War II. He was taken prisoner of war and died in
the Philippines where he is buried. All of the other
children are still living. Maude died in 1964 and Mr.
McAdam in 1968.
Blanche McAdam married Vic Wadman and they made
their home in the Winnett area. (See also WADMAN —
Ashley and Winnett)
McGINLEY, Pat  Pat McGinley was a driller for the
Frantz Corporation in early Cat Creek oil field days. Later
he worked for Continental Oil Company. He was a
bachelor sporting a new Ford coupe in May 1924. Pat
became an independent drilling contractor in partnership
with Perry Culver.
McGLENN, William  William "Archie" McGlen was a
native of Missouri. He worked in the Cat Creek oil field in
the early 1920s, and in 1924 he took a position in the office
of the Continental Oil Company. Shortly afterwards
he married Frances Morgan. (See also MORGAN —
Teigen) The couple moved to Kevin in the 1930s and later
made their home in Glasgow, Montana. They had three
children — Archie, Doris (Sword), and Nancy Rae (Sloan).
Frances died in 1957 and Archie in 1970.
McGRATH, George  Mr. McGrath was a bookkeeper
for Mid Northern and was transferred from Cat Creek to
Kevin, Montana, in March 1924.
McGUIRE, Eldon  Mr. and Mrs. McGuire acquired the
Merritt Wells property after the Robert Jones family left in
1958. Mrs. McGuire had a unique pet which she displayed
in an interesting manner. Helen Sims described this inci-
dent: "My mother got a shock in Clark's store one day
when she approached Mrs. McGuire who was holding this
beautifully bonneted and baby-blanket-wrapped 'being.'
Mom peered under the bonnet to behold a tiny
monkey face!!"
The McGuire's had a son Eldon K. Jr. who chose to finish
his high school years in Miles City, Montana, rather than
move to Cat Creek with his parents.
McKNIRE, Ralph  Ralph McKnire was the son of Mr.
and Mrs. Edward McKnire of Grassrange, Montana. He
married Altha Carrell in 1941 and began work for Con-
tinental Oil Company as a roustabout in 1943. (See also
CARRELL — Dovetail and Cat Creek)
The couple made their home in Cat Creek until Ralph
was transferred to Wyoming. They had three children:
Ralph Edward (1942) and twin girls, Marilyn and Myrna
(1946). Ralph died in 1982. Altha still makes her home in
Thermopolis, Wyoming.
McSPADDEN, Dean  Mr. and Mrs. McSpadden had
their cabin in Cat Creek burn to the ground on April 26,
1924. Some of their furniture, clothing and bedding was
saved. Mrs. McSpadden belonged to the Mid Northern
Ladies bridge club in 1924.
McVAY, Claude  Claude and Della McVay were Cat
Creek residents in the 1920s. The school census showed
they had the following children: Agnes (1907), Della
(1911), Ray (1913), Gladys (1917) and Mamie (1917).
Their oldest son, John, worked in the Cat Creek oil field.
John married Lois Saylor, daughter of Mr. and Mrs.
Austin Saylor, and they moved to Oilmont, Montana,
where John was employed in the oil field. Lois died very
suddenly on May 30, 1930, leaving a newborn baby girl —
Lois (Patty). The baby was raised by her grandparents
(See also SAYLOR — Winnett). Patty graduated from Win-
nett High School in 1948 and married Ray Sult.
MEAD, William  William Mead, the son of George and Ida Mead who homesteaded south of Valentine, was born at Table Rock, Nebraska in 1897. (See also MEAD — Blakeslee) Rhea Kretzer was born in 1900 and came to Montana with her mother, Gabriella (Stone), and stepfather, Otto Storm. (See also STORM — Flatwillow) In the winter of 1922 Rhea and William were married. The couple had intended to be married in the spring but they were both without jobs and wanted to go from Howard Coulee to stay with the Meads near Valentine. It simply seemed easier to be married and go as a couple. In an oral interview, Rhea recalled the circumstances of their marriage.

"The closest place (from Howard Coulee) to get married was Roundup; so we got up about three o'clock in the morning and started on horseback, intending to ride all the way. We got up on top of the Knofskinger hill, however, and met the Copelands in their car. We told them we were on our way to Roundup to get married, and they insisted on taking us in their car. There was a schoolhouse barn nearby so we put our horses in the barn and went on in to Roundup. The Copelands witnessed our marriage at the Justice of the Peace, took care of their other business and took us back to our horses. We rode on home, arriving about ten o'clock at night."

The newlyweds went to visit the Meads, and while they were there, they learned that Billy Trimble was quitting his job in Cat Creek and was willing to recommend William for his replacement. That was the beginning of the Meads' 23 years in the oil fields. William went to Cat Creek immediately, and Rhea waited until the weather broke in the spring.

Rhea made the trip to Cat Creek from her stepfather's place on Howard Coulee with a team and wagon loaded with their few possessions. She recalled, "It was April and had been very muddy in places. The big trucks had made these terrible ruts. My poor horses could not walk in them — or out of them! By the time I got to Cat Creek they were very, very tired and I still had to go four miles on down to the river camp where Bill was. I did not know of this big hill that I had to go up or the big hill I had to go down. It was getting dark. I didn't know that the truckers had a switchback where I could have gone. I didn't see that.

"I stood up in the front of the wagon and I hit the horses and used a few choice words to help them along. I made it up the hill just fine, then we got down almost to the river and there was this big turnabout on the hill that I learned a lot about afterwards! But I got down with no problem. Anyway the next morning Bill and I went over to the cookhouse and the skinners (freighters) wanted to know how I got down the hill. I said, 'Why? I just came down.' "Without a roughlock?" they said. I said, 'What is a roughlock? As tired as those horses were there was no way that wagon would have pushed them out of a dead walk!'"

The Meads lived down on the river camp for about a month and then they were moved up to the main camp in Cat Creek where they had a little tar-paper shack like everyone else. It was about 12' by 16', one room with a Murphy bed which folded up against the wall. When Bill's parents and Gladys Thorsheim and her two children came to visit, they all managed to sleep on the floor. Rhea said, "We had a good time. We were glad to see them!"

The Meads had three children, all born while they lived in Cat Creek. Betty was born in 1923. She went to grade school in Cat Creek and graduated from Winnett High School in 1940. She played on the girl's basketball team coached by Ivan Hodges. Betty went on to Montana State College and took nurses training at the Great Falls Deaconess hospital. She became a registered nurse, a profession she has followed all her life.

Gene was born in 1926. He also went to Cat Creek School and Winnett High School. He played football and boxed on Shorty Saylor's boxing team. Lois was born in 1933. She began her education in Cat Creek, but her father was transferred to Riverton, Wyoming, in 1943 and she finished her education there.

Mr. Mead worked for Continental Oil Company for 23 years. He was their superintendent in Cat Creek for ten years. He died in 1945. Rhea married again to Z. C. McDermott. She is still living in Albuquerque, New Mexico (1988).

MEADER, Winona  Winona Meader married Harold L. Nordahl of Mosby on November 23, 1928. Mrs. Meader, whose husband was dead, had twins, Charles and Robert, born in 1920 according to the school census.

MEEK, John S.  "Curley" Meek is a name synonymous with oil development in Montana and Cat Creek in particular. Curley was the head driller on the crew when oil was struck in the Charles No. 1 well on the Musselshell River February 19, 1920.

Curley was born in Mapleton, Kansas, and came west to Wyoming as a young man. He was working for the Cosden Oil Company in the oil fields of Wyoming when the company was purchased by several of its employees including Frank Frantz, ex-territorial governor of Oklahoma, and C. T. Lupton, early-day oil geologist. Curley was put to work by the new company dismantling a rig and loading it on three railroad cars for shipment to Winnett. The story of that venture is told elsewhere. (See Introduction — Cat Creek)

Mr. Meek followed the early development of oil from Cat Creek to northern Montana. He established the J. S. Meek Drilling Company, and in addition to oil drilling, he drilled ore samples for the Anaconda Company in Butte and Lincoln and test holes for missile sites in Eastern Montana and North Dakota.

In 1937 he married and the couple had four children — Ramona, Mabel, Raymond and Donald. Curley was instrumental in establishing the Marias Museum of History and Art in Shelby, Montana. He con-
tributed many valuable historic items from the oil industry to it and to the Montana Historical Society in Helena, Montana, as well.

MERRIOT, L. G. Mr. Merriot was the bookkeeper for the Mid Northern Oil Company in Cat Creek in the 1920s. He married Jean Shoemaker. She established a sewing club for the schoolgirls in Cat Creek and taught them to sew.

The Merriots moved to the Kevin oil field and later to Wyoming where Mr. Merriot became head of the Basin Gas Company. Mrs. Merriot still lives in Thermopolis, Wyoming (1987).

MERCER, Maryanna The former Maryanna Hamilton spent most of her youth on a homestead north of Cat Creek (See also BUMP — Musselshell River) She was sworn in as postmaster of Cat Creek on October 6, 1949 and served until 1952. While living in Cat Creek, Maryanna also served as the Winnett Times correspondent. She married Jim Davis in July 1950. (See also DAVIS — Musselshell River and Winnett)

MILLER, Clarence E. (Sec 32-15-28) Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Miller homesteaded in 1910. They only lived in the area for five years. They had one daughter, Gladys, who died in 1930. Mr. Miller passed away in 1938 and Mrs. Miller in 1940. All were buried in Alhambra, California, where they had gone after leaving Montana. Two grandchildren survived them — Marjorie and Phillip Hunter.

MILLER, Grace (Sec 7-15-29) On November 11, 1912, the first school was established in the Cat Creek Basin in an abandoned log cabin which had belonged to Charlie Wortman. Grace Miller was the teacher. During the following winter she organized a literary society. Floyd Maline reported in the Winnett Times, “Many a pleasant Friday evening was spent (at the literary club meetings) in merriment when the temperature ran far below the zero line.”

Grace married Henry Oran Dobson in the fall of 1914. It was the first marriage conducted in the Cat Creek Basin. The ceremony was performed by the Reverend George Maline in the Maline Cabin. The Dobsons had one son, Edward. According to the Cat Creek Cemetery records, Grace died and was buried in the Cat Creek Cemetery sometime before 1917. (See also DOBSON — Musselshell River)

MILLSAP, T. J. "Terry" Millsap came from the Louisiana oil fields to work for the Homestake Oil Company. He married Lorraine Cunningham of Winifred, Montana, in August 1938. They were married at the Presbyterian parsonage in Lewistown, Montana, by the Reverend Orner. A group of serenaders took them to Flatwillow for a charivari and dance to celebrate their marriage.

MILROY, Roy Connie Milroy submitted the following: "Roy came to work for CENEX April 1978 at the Cat Creek oil field. We live at the Mosby Dome field which was originally all CENEX had here. They later bought West Dome from Continental Oil so Roy works both fields.

"October 11, 1979, we adopted a baby boy we named Justin William. He has attended school in Winnett from story hour, kindergarten through third grade. In 1987 he won a bronze medal for sheep riding at the Central Montana Fair in Lewistown, Montana.

"April 25, 1984, we adopted a baby girl we named Ginger Rose. She attended story hour in Winnett."

The Milroys were transferred to Casper, Wyoming, in June 1989.

MITCHELL, Ainsley "A. B." Mitchell was born in 1881 in Vienna, Louisiana. He was a veteran of the Spanish American War and came to Petroleum County in 1913. He acquired land on the Musselshell River near the site of the first oil well. In fact, he helped drive the location stakes for the well in 1919.

In 1926 A. B. married Anne Sommerfield. They made their home on the river until 1946. "Peggy," as she was known to everyone, ran the cookhouse for Continental for a number of years.

The Winnett Times commented in 1930, "The Mitchells have one of the best ranches on the river and are known far and wide for their hospitality." In addition to their ranching and alfalfa seed raising business, A. B. installed a small refinery on his property and refined oil for sale to local farmers. In 1931 tractor fuel sold at his refinery for 12 cents a gallon plus state tax.

In 1944 their house flooded badly during the June rains. Water was three feet deep in the house and surrounding area. They lost their garden and some household goods. They moved into the Continental cookhouse. Disaster seemed to follow them, however, because the cookhouse was destroyed by fire two years later. They managed to save most of their personal belongings but groceries and supplies stored in the kitchen and basement were a total loss. The cookhouse was a landmark in Cat Creek having been built by the Frantz Corporation in 1921.

A. B.’s name was often seen in connection with buying, selling, and trading leases. He died in 1947. Peggy died in 1968. The couple did not have any children.

MORELAND, Olivea (Sec 4-15-29) olivea Moreland was the former Olivea Fradd. She and her brother, Nels Fradd, came from Minnesota to homestead near the western edge of the Cat Creek oil field. (See also FRADD) Olivea was a schoolteacher. She taught a term at Flatwillow in 1915 before she was married, and later taught in District #159. She was married to Fochen "Slim" Moreland. Olivea died in 1944 and was buried in Harmony, Washington.

MORELAND, Willis P. (Sec 26-15-28) Willis Moreland owned 320 acres on Gorman Coulee and if one is to believe what one reads in the Winnett Times, he was a cowboy as well.

"Last week ended in Winnett with wild-west exhibits
befitting an old Cheyenne carnival. 'Steamboat,' Winnett's old reliable bucker, was the first number and he carried his part of the program in the usual fashion, his rider, Bob Loomis, being unable to stay in the saddle but a few moments. Mike Russian gave an exciting exhibition of bareback riding, which was enjoyed by all. The most exciting part of the entire celebration, however, was the final number, consisting of an exhibition of riding by Willis Moreland and Jim Young. The horse briefly occupied by these daring riders, has heretofore been known as a gentle, old reliable saddle horse. But when Mr. Young got astride the horse behind Mr. Moreland, the carnival spirit seemed to effect the horse, also, and during the next few minutes the riders gave an exhibition of leather pulling heretofore unequalled in those parts. The saddle was not thrown off by the horse and luckily nobody was hurt!'" (W. T. 11-4-21)

MOONCE, Carl B. Mr. Mounce was a pumper for Mid Northern in the early 1920s. He was the neighborhood barber. Carl and his wife, Alice, lived in a house on the Wildschutz lease. They had a son, Everett, born in 1920. The Mounces moved to Grangeville, Idaho, in August 1930.

NEVIN, William William Nevin married Emma Folda on July 24, 1922. She was the daughter of Joseph and Antonia Folda, early settlers in the Lewistown, Montana, area. In 1945 the Nevins moved to Cat Creek where "Bill" was employed by Continental Oil Company. The couple lived in Cat Creek for eighteen years.

The Nevins had two children — Dolly (Grinde) and Richard — both of whom graduated from Fergus County High School. Dolly's son Larry is currently (1989) serving in the Montana legislature. Richard and his wife, Donna (Erickson), live in Billings, Montana, where Dick is a Certified Public Accountant.

NORDHAUL, Cora Cora Nordahl taught the Brown School in District #198 in 1928 and in 1929. In March 1930 the following news item relative to her marriage appeared in the Winnett Times:

"Arthur Busby and Clara Nordahl slipped away to Lewistown on Saturday and were united in marriage, returning to Winnett on Tuesday. That night they were host and hostess in Cat Creek at a wedding dance which was attended by a big crowd of well-wishing friends.

"The bride is the popular and talented teacher of the Mitchell School in east Cat Creek and the groom is a popular youth who graduated from Winnett High School a few years ago. The happy couple plan to make their home on the Eager Ranch which Mr. Busby has under lease.

"Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Mitchell and Harry Nordahl accompanied the couple to Lewistown and aided them in the successful culmination of the great adventure." (See also NORDHAUL — Musselshell River)

NORDQUIST, Joe Joe Nordquist was a tool dresser on the drilling crew which brought in the first Cat Creek oil well. He also owned 320 acres of land in the Mosby Dome.

According to the Grass Range Review in 1920, Joe stopped in to say he thought he was 'right in line to become a millionaire!' It is believed Mr. Nordquist eventually moved to Lewistown, Montana, to make his home, where he was a rural mail carrier for many years.

NORHEIM, Thomas (W. T. 1-20-28) "Thomas Norheim was taken to the Attix Clinic by Dr. J. L. Alexander to receive medical attention for injuries sustained when he slipped off an ice-coated oil derrick and crashed 25 feet to the ground.

"Mr. Norheim fractured the neck of the right femur, an accident of a very serious nature, and the unfortunate victim will be incapacitated for some time.'"

NORMAN, Mart Mr. and Mrs. Norman were early residents of the Frantz oil camp. Mrs. Norman was active in the Frantz camp ladies club. Mart was transferred to Wyoming in April 1924.

NORTON, Thomas (Sec 3-14-29) According to the U. S. postal records, Thomas Norton was the first postmaster for the Lietny Post Office when it was established on February 26, 1916. Though very little is known of the family, apparently Mr. and Mrs. Norton had a daughter Dorothy (sometimes Dortha) who attended the Lietny School. Grandmother Norton lived with them.

O'NEIL, John and Louis John and Louis "Tip" O'Neil were bothers who were early-day investors and operators in the Cat Creek oil field. It was reported they sold their interests to the California Oil Company for five million dollars in 1926. The men went to the Kevinsunburst area after leaving Cat Creek.

John O'Neil played rugby while attending Santa Clara College and was a member of the 1924 Olympic team that won the championship.

OWENS, Troy Mr. and Mrs. Owens had one child listed on the 1921 school census when District #198 was formed — Mary, born in 1912.

(W.T. 9-16-21) "Mrs. Owens and daughter Mary of the Frantz camp spent a couple of days at the Montana Hotel in Winnett this week while looking for a residence in which to spend the winter in order that Miss Mary may attend the Winnett school.'"

PANGBURN, Harold Harold and Marie (Tripp) Pangburn made their home in Cat Creek during the 1940s where Harold was employed. He worked on the Chamberlain lease and in 1947 accepted a job with Spencer Drilling, later going with Continental Oil.

The Pangburns had three children — Robert (1931), Joan (1932) and Gary (1944). Robert graduated from Winnett High School in 1948. He has followed the ministry and worked with retarded children. Joan graduated from Winnett High School in 1950. She is married to Raymond Kindt, class of 1942. Gary is married and lives in Wyoming.

The Pangburns moved to Wyoming in 1950.
PEDEN, William M. (Sec 33-15-29) William Peden was born August 20, 1891, in Dolkeith, Scotland, and came to the United States at the age of 21. He homesteaded in the Jitney area along present Highway #200. In December 1921 he returned to Scotland to spend the winter renewing old acquainances, but he came back to Montana in the spring and went to work in the Cat Creek oil field.

In 1923 William married Mabel V. Reed the upper-grade teacher in the Cat Creek School. Miss Reed came from Pennsylvania. The Pedens often furnished music for dances in the community. They took an active part in all the school and community affairs. The couple had two children while living in Cat Creek — Jean (1924) and William (1926) — and two more after they moved to Shelby — Jack and Robert.

Mr. Peden became an oil gauger for the U. S. government in 1922 and was promoted to the position of government engineer. It was his duty to interpret and enforce the terms of oil and gas leases and to approve drilling sites and plans. In November 1929 he was transferred to Shelby, Montana. He retired in Great Falls, Montana, in 1974 after 35 years with the U. S. Geological Service. Mr. Peden died in 1961.

PERRIGO, Harry Mr. Perrigo was born in Iowa in 1896. He graduated from the South Dakota School of Mines in 1925 and came to Cat Creek (to replace William Peden) in 1929 as a U. S. petroleum engineer.

Harry and his wife, Etta, had eight children — triplets, Billy, Robert and Phyllis (1920); twins, George and Helen (1922); Harry (1925); Dorothy (1927); and Jack (1931), born after they left Cat Creek.

Mr. Perrigo was transferred to Billings, Montana, as district petroleum engineer for the U. S. Geological Service. He died in 1960.

PETERS, William T. William Peters bought a relinquishment on the Musselshell River in 1918. (See PETERS — Musselshell River). He and his wife, Edith, had a large family.

Mr. Peters was the head man on the Harlan lease and worked in Cat Creek until 1934 when he and his family moved to Rice, Washington.

PETERSON, Vernon Mr. Peterson operated a store and pool hall in Cat Creek in the early 1920s. He also showed movies several times a week. The Winnett Times reported on May 23, 1924, that Vernon had a new five passenger Nash, "a real beauty!"

PIERSON, Ira D. Ira Pierson homesteaded in the Brush Creek area (See also PIERSO — Brush Creek) and owned a home in Winnett (See also PIERSO — Winnett).

The children attended the Cat Creek School for a time. Ira's association with the Cat Creek oil field began when the field first was developed. He helped freight supplies and materials from Winnett to Cat Creek when the discovery well was being drilled. He supervised the building of the first road to the well site. Very soon after he was employed by Continental Oil Company for whom he worked until he retired.

In 1929 Mr. Pierson succeeded Mr. Sontag as field superintendent for Continental Oil in Cat Creek. He was transferred to Lewistown, Montana, in the early 1930s and in 1936 moved to Billings. From Continental's Billings office he was promoted as assistant to the general manager of the Rocky Mountain Division of Continental Oil Company in Denver, Colorado. The family moved to Denver in June 1940. The Piersons returned to Billings in 1950 when Ira retired. He died in 1959.

PIOTROWSKI, Walter (Sec 10-14-29) Walter Piotrowski homesteaded about a mile and one-half south of the present Cat Creek turnoff on Highway #200. Walter was the Jitney mail carrier for many years. He was a veteran of World War I.

Mr. Piotrowski had a car tip over on the Gorman Coulee hill and the passenger who was riding with him was killed in the accident. Walter never recovered from the trauma of the accident and he spent the last years of his life in a mental institution. Oton Moore served as his guardian. He died in 1956 and was buried in the Custer Battlefield National Cemetery.

POST, Cornelius (Sec 8-15-29) Cornelius "Neal" Post and his brother James came from Kansas and homesteaded four miles west of the Cat Creek oil field in 1911. In about 1925, the California Oil Company drilled seven wells near the Post land — five of which were producers. One well was on Cornelius' property.

James suffered a paralytic stroke in 1924. When his brother George came from Kansas to visit, James returned with him to be near the family. He died in Bellaire, Kansas, on February 20, 1929. Because of bad roads, word of James' death did not reach Neal for over a week. He was not able to attend the funeral.

Cornelius returned to Kansas to live, but he often came back to summer on his Cat Creek property. He died January 28, 1938, at age 69 in Bellaire, Kansas.

POTTER, David R. David Potter was the son of Aaron and Clara Potter of Tabor, Iowa. He came to Montana in 1912 with his parents and the family settled in the Valentine area (See also POTTER — Valentine). David married Irene M. Messenger (See also MESSENGER —

Betty Mead and Betty Lou Pierson and company car
Valentine in 1928 and they ranched in the Valentine area until 1942 when David went to work for the Continental Oil Company in Cat Creek.

The Potters' four children were all born before the couple moved to Cat Creek — Alice (1930), Ida (1932), Frederick (1937) and Franklin (1941). They attended the Cat Creek School. When Franklin was five years old he suffered a "light" case of infantile paralysis. It was the first case of poliomyelitis ever reported in Petroleum County.

"Dave" worked for Continental Oil Company for 30 years. He was honored by the company with a retirement party at Meeteete, Wyoming, in 1972. During his years in Cat Creek, Mr. Potter served on the District #159 school board and was active in many other community affairs.

Alice graduated from Winnett High School in 1950. She married Jesse Shinnick and they have three children — Gene, Jim and Cindy. They make their home in Lewistown, Montana.

Ida died in 1941. Frederick graduated from Winnett High School in 1955. He served six years in the National Guard and was discharged as Supply Sergeant. He married Joan Clark of Kirkland, Washington, in November 1958. The couple has three girls — Cathy, Julie and Terri.

Franklin graduated from Winnett High School in 1959. He married Joellen Trump, class of 1958. They have three sons — David, Raymond and Daniel.

David and Irene bought a travel trailer and traveled extensively after retirement. They made their home in Spirit Lake, Idaho, until poor health made it necessary for them to move to Great Falls, Montana. David died in 1983, Irene in 1988.

POYNTER, Reese Mr. Poynter worked at the West Dome and lived on the Chamberlain lease during the 1920s. He and his wife, Bessie, had three children — Delores (1919), Ruth (1920) and May (1924) at the time they lived in Cat Creek. Reese was transferred to the north field near Kevin, Montana, in November 1928.

PULLIN, George M. (Sec 17-15-28) According to legal records, Elinor Pullin (Sec 30-31-15-28) Charles Pullin (Sec 17-15-28) and Marcellus Pullin (Sec 32-15-28) also homesteaded nearby. The relationship of the people is not known. George moved to Winnett, however, and owned a store. (See also PULLIN — Winnett)

A Winnett Times news item of April 7, 1915, stated that George tried to stop a team that was running with a load of lumber, and was thrown to the street. Two wheels of the wagon passed over his legs, fracturing his right leg below the knee. His brother, Charles, was driving the team.

George married Gertrude Deethardt.

QUIGLEY, Edward (Sec 6-15-28) Ed Quigley had two brothers, Jack and Pat. All three were early homesteaders. Ed's house burned and the neighbors furnished him the things he needed to start housekeeping again.

REED, Ralph Ralph Reed was a brother of Buell, James, Dean and Spencer Reed who homesteaded north of Teigen. He worked for Farmers Union Central Exchange as a pumper. He had the reputation of being a willing friend and cheerful neighbor. He died in May 1947. (See also REED — Teigen)

ROGERS, Bertha E. Bertha Rogers operated the Curran Hotel in Cat Creek in 1923. She had a son, Albert, who was nicknamed "Shanks." It is believed she also had a daughter.

ROGGE, Ado (Sec 24-15-28) Ado Rogge and Frances G. Vogel were married April 20, 1904. They had three children — Mary C. (1906), Lawrence J. (1909) and Eugene (1911). The Rogge brothers (Odillo, Joseph, John, Albert and Benjamin) who came to the Cat Creek Basin in 1911 were first cousins of Ado. They had written to Ado and urged him to come to Montana. As a result, Ado and his wife's brother, Charles J. Vogel, came to Montana and filed on adjoining homesteads not far from the Rogge brothers' property.

Mary wrote of their trip to Montana: "From 1911 to 1913, my father and uncle Charles J. Vogel spent summers building our house. In the spring of 1913 my mother took us children with her to Montana on the Milwaukee rail to Melstone. My father met us and we had breakfast in a restaurant. Then we were on our way north — a two-day trip with wagon and baggage, our motor — a team of horses. The halfway point was the Hodges' house (in the Kelley community).

Mary recalls grade school at the Shay School and also going to the Follette School which was one mile east of their homestead. In the 1920s the family moved to Alaska. "We finally gave up," Mary wrote, "because of drouth, army worms and grasshoppers, and because we were hailed out whenever we did have a crop." Mary went to Seattle and continued her education and became a teacher. She taught school in western Washington for ten years, then went to Fairbanks, Alaska, where she retired in 1971.

Mary's brother Lawrence married and left Fairbanks and settled in Lake Stevens, Washington. Her other brother, Eugene, stayed in Alaska.

Ado Rogge passed away in 1959 and his wife, Frances, in 1960. They are both buried in Seattle, Washington.

The Rogge farm as it looked in 1986.
The Winnett Times reported they purchased the Pryor Hotel in Billings in December 1935. Later they moved to Seattle, Washington, where they both died, leaving no children.

Benjamin "Ben" was the cook and general handyman. According to Patrick Keith, a young man who spent his summers on the Rogge Ranch while growing up, Ben had suffered a heat stroke many years before and refused to work in the hot sun. Keith says of him, "Joe and Dill often castigated him for being lazy, but sometimes I think he put in more hours around there than anybody! Once, when silent pictures were still in vogue, Ben and two of the brothers motored to Hollywood in a new Dodge pickup. Because Ben was big, strong and good looking, they put him in as an extra in one of the mob scenes. It may have been in "They Way of the Cross."" Ben died in 1954 at age 70.

Joe Rogge, according to Patrick Keith, was the 'butter and egg man' and perhaps the front for the outfit. "He could tell stories till the cows came home," says Patrick. "and often bragged he could go anywhere in the United States and either know somebody or know somebody who knew somebody. He had been married at one time and had a boy who drowned." (This boy was the only child born to any of the members of the large Nicholas Rogge family.) Joe served as a Petroleum County commissioner from 1926-1936. He died in 1956 at age 75.

Odillo "Dill" was in World War I where he spent time on the firing line at the front. According to Patrick Keith, he was the "brains of the outfit and the money man. He wrote all of the checks... It was Dill who brought in the first power mower to the area. (Elmer Eager liked it so much he ordered a similar one the next day.) He built the first real flood irrigation ditches, took advantage of the first land-use procedures and sent the largest grass-fed steer (up to that time) to the Chicago Livestock Market." Dill died in 1953 at age 62.

Rogge barnyard with young cowboy, Pat Keith, roping a calf in 1936

ROGGE BROTHERS (Sec 4,5,6,13-15-28) The Rogge Brothers were born and raised in Iowa, members of a large family. The children of Nicholas Rogge were: Mary; Theresa; Agnes; Ed; twins, Marcus and Benjamin (1884); Joseph (1881); Odillo (1891); John; and Albert. The last five mentioned came to Montana and settled in the Cat Creek Basin in 1911, each taking out a 320-acre homestead.

Their first abode was actually a cellar or cave which they lived in while building a frame house. Like others in the community, they raised grain the first few years they lived in the area. According to Floyd Maine's account of the basin history, the Rogge brothers threshed 7500 bushels of wheat in 1915.

The Rogge brothers, individually and/or together, had numerous and varied outside interests. Reportedly they had a silver (or perhaps gold) mine in the Judith Mountains which produced enough to help them financially when the drought came. They had two small oil wells on their Cat Creek property and an investment in the Lewistown Brewery as well. They also had some truckfarm acreage near Seattle, Washington. They had a seed house in Winnett and they raised, bought and sold alfalfa seed.

In the 1930s they purchased a portion of the former Walter Winnett property on McDonald Creek for the primary purpose of raising alfalfa seed. As it turned out, the dust bowl and grasshopper years hit about that time and they considered themselves lucky to have enough hay to feed their own livestock and have some extra to sell. The large Winnett house was acquired with the land and Dill, Joe and Ben made their home there until they sold the ranch to the Ostlers in 1951.

In 1926 John Rogge went to Priest River, Idaho, to help fight fire and died while there. Albert "Bert" left the homestead in 1935. He suffered an infection from a tick bite that year and ended up marrying Miss Lethcer, a nurse from the Billings hospital where he was treated.
ROSTAD, Robert Robert Rostad was born and raised in the Flatwillow area. He was the son of Bernt and Anna Rostad. (See also ROSTAD — Flatwillow) Bob served in the CCCs in 1934 and later married Katherine Blazicich. Shortly after their marriage, Bob went to the service where he was a parachute packer during World War II. He was stationed on the island of Tinian in the Marianna Islands when preparations were being made for the atomic attack on Hiroshima. The B-29 bomber, the Enola Gay, which carried the historic atomic bomb took off from Tinian. Bob remembers the tight security surrounding the airplane. No one was allowed close to it. There were many rumors about the attack but no one was sure of its mission until it was over.

Bob was discharged November 30, 1945. He went to work for Continental oil Company in Cat Creek in 1946. The Rostads have three children — Theresa (1934), William (1946) and Nancy Lee (1948). The children attended elementary school in Cat Creek. Bob was transferred to Melstone, Montana, in 1961 where he continued to work for Continental Oil until his retirement.

ROUTH, Don C. (Sec 19-15-28) The Don C. Routh family was from Carbon, Iowa. Pearl Stewart recalls the Rouths and the James Hunters, also from Carbon, did most of their farming together. Their homestead claims bordered one another.

The Routh family had a final auction on July 25, 1930. According to the Winnett Times, “The Don C. Routh family left Saturday via automobile for Iowa, where they will visit for a while before continuing to New York state where they plan to engage in farming. Mr. Routh homesteaded in Petroleum County prior to the war. Shortly after coming from the service he sold out and returned to Iowa.

"After a year or two in Iowa, he returned to his old homestead in Montana only to leave again now with his family for New York state. The Routh family are highly respected ranchers of this county with hosts of friends who greatly regret to see them leave us. However, we are inclined to bet that the spell of Montana will bring them back again and the next time we hope to have better crops."

RUDDY, Lester Mr. Ruddy was superintendent of the California Oil Company in 1927. The company drilled seven wells about four miles west of the main Cat Creek oil field. Five of the seven wells were producers though none were very large. The California Oil Company was only in operation until about 1928.

RYAN, Lucy (Sec 11-15-28) Lucy Ryan and her two children bought a relinquishment from the Elkin brothers. Lucy was a cousin of the Rogge brothers and her mother, Mrs. Rogge, lived with her for a time.

SABON, George Mr. Sabon took the position of clerk in the Continental Oil Company office in December 1951. The Sabons had twin girls — Susan Vista and Sally Kay. The family moved to Frannie, Wyoming.

SANDERSON, C. R. C. R. "Pat" Sanderson worked for the Homestake Oil Company in the late 1930s. Pat and his wife, Mayme, had three children — Margaret (1929), Jacqueline (1932) and Mary (1937). When Continental Oil bought out the Homestake Cat Creek property in 1938, the Sandersons were transferred to the oil fields in northern Montana.

SANDMAN, Carl (Sec 32-15-28) Carl Sandman, son of Albert and Minnie Sandman, was born on December 29, 1920. His parents came to Winnett from Sisseton, South Dakota, in 1926, and lived in the brick Ninneman house in the Brush Creek area.

Carl’s wife, Virginia May Bohn, the daughter of Albert and Hattie Bohn, was born September 1, 1921. In St. Joseph’s Hospital in Lewistown, Montana. (See also Bohn — Petrolia), Virgie went to the Petrolia Bench School and graduated from Winnett High School in 1939. She and Carl were married on November 1, 1939. They lived in Winnett for three years, occupying the house where Helen Quigg now lives (1989). They also lived in the Fred Story house near the Lutheran Church.

Carl worked in Eager’s Store for about two years and for the railroad for one year until they moved to the ranch. In 1945 Virgie’s father, Albert Bohn, purchased the Walter Johnson place. He later sold it to Carl and Virgie. They still (1989) live on that place just north of highway #200 east of Winnett.

The Sandmans became parents of two children — Terry (1940) and Linda (1943). The children went to the Box Elder School located near Solf’s home. Both attended Winnett High School.

The Sandmans have raised cattle, grain and hay. In 1959 Carl began raising sheep. He is also a fine carpenter and has remodeled many houses in the area. During the 1960s he also built and sold cattle feeders. Many of these still may be seen today along the country roads.

Sandmans enjoy using the rural delivery route for their mail. They attend the Lutheran Church.

SANDMAN, Terry When the school bell stopped ringing there were anxious first and second graders with a new young teacher in Winnett. Miss Helzer started teaching in the fall of 1960.

A summer wedding in 1963 united Donna May Helzer, daughter of Adam and Lena E. Helzer of Bridger, Montana, and Terry Karl Sandman, son of Carl and Virginia Sandman of Winnett.

During Donna’s fourth year of teaching in Winnett, she taught her former first graders who were now fourth graders. The students had quite a time trying to remember their teacher’s name had been changed! April showers brought more than May flowers in the spring of 1964. Terry and Donna’s first son, Kory, was born on May first. Donna resigned from teaching so she could stay at home and take care of the new baby. Terry kept busy with ranch work and driving truck.

In September of 1965 the Sandman’s second son,
Karson, put in his appearance. That fall the family moved to Broadview, Montana. Terry began the study of raising hogs in an indoor operation. After two years of raising pigs, they moved to Two Dot, Montana. The new job entailed lambing, calving and putting up hay. There were many picnics and trips to the fishing holes, and hours spent watching nature in a beautiful setting. At times the bears caused some anxiety especially when their tracks showed up right outside the house!

December of 1969 brought the family an early Christmas present. He was named Kale. A move in January brought the Sandmans back to Winnett. After a few months work on the Nebraska Feeding Company, they moved to Mosby to work for the Rowton Brothers. Terry began a hog-raising project besides the usual ranch work. After two summers, they moved into the town of Winnett where they purchased the Gusher Bar. They operated it until a fire destroyed it in 1975. (See SANDMAN — Winnett)

Eventually the Sandmans moved their mobile home to the Carl Sandman family ranch on Box Elder Creek. Their three boys graduated from Winnett High School. Kory attended four years at Montana Tech in Butte, Montana, earning a degree in petroleum engineering. Karson attended two quarters of college at Bozeman, Montana, after getting married. He has worked on ranches, a seismograph crew and an oil rig. Then he joined the Air Force. He is furthering his education in electrical engineering and marketing.

The Sandman’s youngest son, Kale, received his high school diploma in May 1988. He took on several fencing projects near Mosby and Jordan after graduation and then worked for the Blue Range Mining Company near Lewistown, Montana. Kale married Lisa Hanson of Winnett and they have a daughter, Kiena Dezere. They are presently (1989) on the Sandman Ranch.

SAWYER, Lyle Lyle Sawyer and his wife, Leta, lived at the Franz Camp and Lyle worked for the Continental Oil Company during the mid 1920s. He was transferred to Wichita Falls, Texas, during the summer of 1928. The couple had at least three children — Harold (1923), Roger (1924) and Archie (1927).

Mrs. Sawyer sent the grammar school children in Cat Creek a sample of cotton stalks and bolls from Texas.

SCHAEFFER, Robert Robert Schaeffer was born on February 18, 1899, in Bluffton, Indiana. In 1910 his parents, John and Lillie Schaeffer and their younger children (including Robert) homesteaded southwest of Winifred. Later Robert and his mother moved to a homestead in the area between Roy and Valentine.

Robert worked in Cat Creek, first in the field and then at the Mid Northern cookhouse as a cook. He also worked as a cook and a pumper in the northern Montana oil fields at Gallup City and Cut Bank.

He married Isabelle Fall on March 18, 1952, and they made their home on the Musselshell River until 1964 when they moved to Winnett. (See also FALL — Musselshell River) They spent their summers on the Fall Brothers Ranch from the time school was out in the spring until it started again in the fall, however. When the Fall Ranch was sold in 1972, they lived in Winnett full time. Robert worked part time as custodian at the Winnett schools. He died in 1978. Isabelle still resides in Winnett (1989).

In 1953 one daughter, Carol Ann, was born to the couple. She attended school at Cat Creek for 5½ years. When the Cat Creek School closed, she finished grade school in Winnett and went on to graduate from Winnett High School in 1971. She enrolled in college at Montana State University, and then transferred to Eastern Montana College where she graduated in 1976.

During the summer of 1975 and through the Christmas holidays, she worked at the courthouse in Winnett. In the fall of 1976 she started work full time and became Clerk and Recorder and Clerk of the Court when Orene Barbee retired in 1977. Carol Ann married Ralph Corbett of Cascade, Montana. (See also CORBETT — Winnett)

SCHAEFFER, Stanley Stanley and Nelle Schaeffer lived near the Canfield store in Cat Creek. They had four boys — Robert, Bill, Joe and Calvin — and one daughter, Pat, at the time they lived in Cat Creek. Another daughter, Wanda, was born after the couple moved to Oilmont, Montana. Stanley was either a tool dresser or a driller in the oil fields.

SCHMIDT, Carl Carl Schmidt was the son of Emil Schmidt. (See also SCHMIDT — Winnett) It has been reported he had charge of the company car carrying supplies between Winnett and Cat Creek when the discovery well was drilled. In the 1920s he was employed by Continental Oil Company in Cat Creek and later transferred to the Kevin field. In 1932 the family returned to Winnett and Carl worked for the Catlin Garage for a short time before going to work for Continental Oil again.

Carl and his wife, Ada, had two daughters — Anna (1921) and Elenor (1924).

SCHROCK, Dave Dave Schrock was an Oregon seed grower who became interested in the oil activity in Petroleum County during the 1940s. He invested in oil property in both Rattlesnake Butte and the Mosby Dome. The Winnett Times reported, “Schrock-Fifer No. 4, a direct west offset to the discovery well, came in with an initial flow of 265 barrels daily. It has put the discovery well in the shade by flowing at the rate of 224 barrels daily of 51-gravity oil, with indications this flow may increase when the hole has cleaned itself of rotary mud and drilling water. (The discovery well is flowing at 185).”

“This well apparently checked almost exactly the same structurally as the discovery well, that topped the Ellis at 1394. At about the same surface elevation, it got the top of the Ellis at 1391. It was drilled with rotary tools to a greater depth into the sand than any of its predecessors, with the hole bottomed at 1423 when drilling ceased, approximately 32 feet into the sand.”
David Schrock and his Cat Creek oil interests were featured in the Sunday issue of "Montana Parade," a feature section of the Great Falls Tribune in December of 1945. The cover picture shows Schrock opening the valve on one well to show the oil gushing from the pipe. The article states, "Mr. Schrock, who has been dubbed 'the lucky pilgrim,' 'lucky farmer from Oregon,' and other more or less fitting nicknames, with his wife are taking the matter of fame and fortune in stride, apparently their natural congeniality being unaffected by all the excitement."

Mr. Schrock sold his Cat Creek oil interest to Farmers Union about 1948.

SCHWARTZ, Harry Jr. Harry Schwartz was born March 7, 1888, in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He received his elementary education in Tennessee. After coming to Montana he studied geology at the University of Montana. He married Lena L. Phillips in Rapid City, South Dakota, and the couple had two children — Georgia and Barbara.

Mr. Schwartz was active in oil business all of his life. He and Herbert Hover were partners in the Hover-Schwartz Syndicate in the early Cat Creek oil field. They brought in a producing well, the 19th in the Cat Creek field, on February 10, 1921.

Mr. Schwartz's interest in the Cat Creek area never wavered. In 1945 he was instrumental in the location of the new discovery well which brought a revival to the oil activity in and around Cat Creek. When the Schrock-Fifer No. 4 well came in a producer, the Winnett Times reported, "In addition to bringing assurance of financial gain to its backer, Dave Schrock, it was also a moral victory for H. H. Schwartz Jr., a geologist-engineer who made location for the discovery well and who also made location for the three flowing Ellis sand wells that were drilled in rapid succession thereafter."


SCHWARZ, Christopher "Chris" Schwarz owned land in the Kelley area but he and his wife, Ivy, also lived in Winnett. (See SCHWARZ — Winnett) They moved to Cat Creek in 1942 where Chris was employed by Continental Oil. Ivy often helped in the Cat Creek Post Office. The Schwarzes retired to Beaver Crossing, Nebraska.

SCOTT, Cleve Cleve Scott and his wife, Etna, lived on the Fifer place on the Musselshell River. Cleve worked with Stanley Schaeffer drilling wells in the early oil field days. The Scotts and the Falls were good neighbors and Isabelle Fall Schaeffer remembers evenings spent pulling taffy and playing Lotto with Jerrel, the Scotts only son. The Cleve Scotts moved to Cut Bank, Montana, in 1937.

Jerrel was born in 1911 and graduated from Winnett High School in 1932. He worked in the oil fields at Cat Creek before marrying Olive Parkinson of the class of 1931 in 1935. (See also PARKINSON — Musselshell River) Jerrel also worked in the Cut Bank oil fields before he went to the South Pacific with the Seabees from 1943-45.

He then worked for the border patrol and the immigration service.

Jerrel and Olive retired in 1975, purchased a new mobile home and moved back to Winnett. Local folks were happy to welcome these two former residents home. However, their stay in Winnett was short-lived. Jerry suffered a heart attack and passed away in May 1976. Olive, after a valiant battle with cancer, died just three weeks later.

SCOTT, Owen J. Owen Scott married Mona Baker in October 1925. Mona was a daughter of Perry Baker, Petroleum County sheriff. (See also BAKER — Flatwillow) The couple lived in Cat Creek in the 1930s where Owen was employed in the oil field. He was transferred to Oilmont, Montana. The couple had three children — Mona Ellise, Gerald and Steven. Later they made their home in Texas. Owen died in January 1950.

SHANNER (W. T. 7-1-21) "Field superintendent Shanner, of the Schaffer Oil and Refining Co. has tendered his resignation and left today for Chicago from whence he will journey to his old home in Louisiana. "Since coming to the Cat Creek field about a year ago in the capacity of field manager for the company, he has established that concern in Cat Creek and opened up a development program for them that bids fair to make them one of the largest producing companies in the field. The large number of acquaintances he had made, both in the city and in the field, will miss the genial gentleman."

SHAUGHNESSY, John L. John L. "Jack" Shaughnessy farmed in the Lewistown area until 1929 when he and his wife purchased the Cat Creek dairy from William Hostetler. Jack, the son of Thomas and Anna Shaughnessy, was born in Kellerton, Iowa. He served in the Army during World War I and came to Montana in 1921. He married Leta M. Hough, daughter of O. K. Hough, early-day homesteaders. (See also HOUGH)

During the deep-snow winter of 1929-30 Jack carried the mail to and from Winnett in a Ford Model T "run-about" equipped with caterpillar treads and two runners in front instead of front wheels. The Winnett Times reported on January 24, 1930, that "the contraption climbs through and over drifts with little or no trouble. However, it is slow-moving and requires 3½ hours to make the 25 mile trip to the field and three hours to return to Winnett. It is the only vehicle that has been able to travel since the roads drifted in. It is even difficult for horses to break through." During the 1930s John worked for Continental Oil Company.

John and Leta had two daughters — Margery (1922) and Betty (1925). Margery graduated from Winnett High School in 1940 and married Kenneth Cochran. (See also COCHRAN). John was transferred to Riverton, Wyoming, in 1943 and later to Gebo, Wyoming. Mr. Shaughnessy retired in 1961 and moved to Billings. Leta died in July 1985, John in September of the same year.
SHAY, John (Sec 8,9-15-28) John Shay was born in 1856 in Kansas and was married to Mary Ann Peller who was born in Kansas in 1859. The couple had ten children — Fred (1882), Estle (1883), Lillie (1885), Walter (1887), Effie (1889), Roy (1891), Carrie (1893), Clarence (1896), Lennial (1898) and Pearl (1902).

In 1910 John Shay hired his son Walter to come to Montana from Oklahoma and file on a homestead. Later the same year, John and Mary Ann and eight of the remaining nine children at home followed. The eldest son, Fred, was a policeman and stayed behind in Perry, Oklahoma. Estle, Roy and Clarence all took out homesteads near Walter’s property. In 1912 Walter died. “When my brother died,” Pearl recalled, “everyone said we would lose the homestead because final proof had not been made. Dad went to see a lawyer, and he said, ‘No, you bury your son on that ranch and you can prove up on it.’ So that’s what we did. We turned a small area into a cemetery.” The cemetery has been used for many years since that time.

John hauled logs from the breaks and built an eight-room two-story log house for his family, and for years the family prospered on the farm.

The Winnett Times printed an interesting article about the Shay Ranch in July 1924. “Fifteen years ago John Shay arrived in Petroleum County and located at his present site... All his barns, granaries and sheds as well as corrals are built of logs that were hewed and hauled the distance from the river. As the years wore on and his family grew up about him, he was ably assisted by his sons who also homesteaded next to their father giving the Shay family 800 acres of fertile Cat Creek soil in one parcel... They own a complete threshing rig and besides threshing their own crops, do considerable work for the neighbors. They went through the trying dry years without flinching and with bountiful crops last year as well as this year and are well on the way to making up for the lean dry years.”

Estle “Shorty” Shay homesteaded (Sec 23-16-29) but went to work in the Cat Creek oil field soon after it was opened in 1921. He moved to the Kevin, Montana, oil fields in the 1930s and made his home in that area until his death in 1960. Shorty was married twice and had two daughters, Juanita and Mildred, by his first marriage and one by his second marriage.

Lillie Shay married Orlie Cox before the family came to the Cat Creek Basin to homestead. (See also COX)

Effie married Mr. Gang and made her home in Oklahoma.

Roy married Hazel Pratt in 1917. Hazel was the daughter of Charles and Mary Pratt, other local homesteaders. Roy and Hazel had three children — Cleon, Marvel and Margery. The family moved to Fairfield, Montana, in 1938, and to Lewistown, Montana, about ten years later. Roy worked for the telephone company. Hazel died in 1953, Roy in 1951.

Carrie Shay married Neal Pratt in 1914. Neal was one of the earliest young settlers in the Cat Creek Basin having come with Floyd Maine in 1910. Neal and Carrie moved

Margery and Betty Shaughnessy and Alvin Fail at the Brown School in 1933

SHAUGHNESSY, Ted Ted Shaughnessy worked for Continental Oil Company in Cat Creek during the 1930s. He was a son of Thomas and Anna Shaughnessy. Ted was married to Doris Dudley, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Dudley of Grassrange, Montana. The couple had two daughters — Patsy Ann (1933) and a girl born in 1937. The family moved from Cat Creek to Winnet in 1936, and were transferred by Continental Oil Company to Lance Creek, Wyoming, in 1943.

SHAUGHNESSY, Thomas R. Thomas and Anna Shaughnessy came to Montana in 1918. T. R. was born in Troy, New York, on December 10, 1856. He and his wife were married in 1882. The couple lived in Iowa until they came to Montana. They had six children — Ted and Jack, both of whom lived in Cat Creek and worked for Continental Oil Company; Mrs. Andrew Hay; Mrs. Wayne Elkin; Mrs. M. J. Swift; and Frank.

Thomas and Anna moved to Lewistown, Montana, to make their home in about 1930. Thomas died in 1940.

SHAVER, Tom Tom Shaver and Rose Schleich of Powell, Wyoming, were married on January 2, 1945. Tom was a driller for B. R. Gainer and Associates. He was working for them at the time they drilled their first test well on the Mosby Dome in 1945. He later became the pumper for the Schrock well and was a foreman for Farmers Union when CENEX purchased the Schrock property.

The Shavers had two children — Beverly (1947) and LaDonna (1945).
to Minnesota where they raised six sons and two daughters.

Clarence "Tuffy" Shay and his wife Josie had one daughter, Marion. Tuffy worked in the oil fields all of his life — first in Cat Creek as a tool dresser and driller and then in Kevin, Montana, where he had extensive oil interests with Rudy Preval.

Lennial made his home on his parents' homestead. He died in 1944.

Pearl Shay became acquainted with Frank Bastian when he and another carpenter came out from Winnet to build the Shay schoolhouse. The two men boarded and roomed with the Shay family. After Pearl and Frank were married, they moved to Cat Creek where Frank was employed. (See also BASTIAN — Cat Creek — Winnet)

Mary Ann Shay died in 1925, John in 1929. They were both buried in the Shay Cemetery. Lillie, who died in 1935; Len, who died in 1944; and Effie, who died in 1965, are also buried there.

SHIRK, Garfield (Sec 18-15-28) Garfield Shirk was one of Petroleum County's young early homesteaders. He settled northeast of Winnet. He farmed, raised a few cattle, and built a dam, enlarging it later to have a good supply of water for his stock. He raised fine vegetables in the coulee below the dam.

( W. T. — July 1921) "Mrs. M. E. Shirk arrived from Fort Benton for a three-month visit with her son, Garfield Shirk, who has a farm near this city." That same year, he also enlarged his cow barn.

SHORT, Harry Harry Short worked in Cat Creek in the 1930s and then moved to Kevin, Montana, for a time. He returned to the Cat Creek oil field, however, and worked on the Chamberlain lease. In 1947 he was put in charge of their operation, a position he held at the time of his death in 1950.

SIMPSON, George George Simpson worked in the Cat Creek, Kevin and Wyoming oil fields for many years. He died in Lewistown, Montana, in 1944. He did not have any immediate family in the area.

SIMS, Claude Sims and Helen Redd were married June 4, 1947. (See SIMS — Musselshell River and Winnet; REDD — Flatwillow) The couple had four children — Lynn (1948), Ronnie (1950), Max (1952) and Mike (1954). Claude and Helen lived in Winnet for two years before moving to Cat Creek, where Claude was employed by Farmers Union Central Exchange for 22 years. The following was submitted by Helen "Doll" Sims:

"We had fifteen happy years in the Cat Creek community before we moved back to Winnet to send the children through high school. I remember the country dances at Dovetail, Valentine, Flatwillow and Ross. I remember crossing the Musselshell River one time to go to a dance at Ross. Ed Sult was ahead of us in his pickup, leading the way. He looked back at us and the water was up to the headlights on our new Buick station wagon! We had all missed the crossing.

"I remember being down at Sults one time in the dead of winter for breakfast. Harry Bevis, Ed Sult and Claude decided to go hunting so it was up to me to drive Betty Bevis and her children and my children back up the 'Fail Hill.' It was ice-packed and we would get almost to the top (in the same Buick station wagon), spin out and slide backwards to the bottom of the hill! What a scary slide with all the children in the car! It took pioneering spirit to survive the weather and roads but there were such great neighbors and friends there!

"We were very fortunate to have a home-grown teacher for a number of years — Gunda Sikveland Shaw. The children loved her and she was good for them and to them.

"All the fun we had was homemade. The men built and acquired (one way or another) enough Model T's to form a club. We had races all over the state. We attracted participants from as far away as California and Nebraska for a Missoula, Montana, to Sidney, Montana, race one year. One high school reunion we had a race from Lewistown to Winnet as part of the entertainment for the 'homecoming.' I raced one of our T's. I broke down before the finish line but what a thrill to be part of the race! Bette Matovich was my co-pilot — brave lady, huh?

"We moved to Winnet and bought the Lloyd Berg home in 1963 to send the children through high school. Claude drove back and forth to Cat Creek to work until we left there in 1970, when we moved to Billings for a year and then on to Missoula, where we still reside 1988." (See also SIMS — Winnet)

SIMS, Glen Glen "Jiggs" Sims worked for Continental Oil Company in Cat Creek in the 1950s. Jiggs is married to Ruth Noll, 1949 Winnet High School graduate. (See also SIMS — Winnet and Musselshell River)

SINCLAIR, Mick Mick Sinclair, son of Robert and Della Sinclair, was born at Valentine, Montana, in 1928. (See also SINCLAIR — Dovetail) He married Frances Akenson in the spring of 1948. She was born in Roundup, Montana, and was a graduate of Montana State University. She came to Winnet to teach in 1947.

Mick worked for Farmers Union Central Exchange in Cat Creek. Later he was transferred to Thermopolis, Wyoming.

SISSON Mr. and Mrs. Sisson came to Cat Creek with the Clark Drilling Company in 1946. They rented the Art Winnet trailer. Mr. Sisson was a tool pusher.

SKILES, J. E. Etta Skiles, the six-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Skiles died from rattlesnake bites in July 1923. She was struck twice in the leg by a large rattlesnake with six rattles and a button. It is believed high water forced the snakes into the town of Cat Creek.
SMITH, Earl  (Sec 25-15-28) Earl Smith was born in Belgrade, Montana, in 1893. He came to the jitney area in 1914 and homesteaded on Gorman Coulee. His wife, Editha Parsons, was born in 1895 in Wisconsin. They were married in 1913. Editha’s parents, James and Fidella Parsons, homesteaded about two miles south of the Smith homestead in 1916.

The Smiths had one daughter, Dorothy. She attended the Cat Creek, Follette, and Winnett schools and graduated from Winnett High School in 1934.

In 1928 the jitney Post Office was moved from the Ernest Hoermann home to the Smith home. Editha was postmaster until the post office closed in 1934.

Earl Smith served on the District #159 school board in 1930. After the family left the homestead, Earl and Hartley Lambert operated a well-servicing rig.

Dorothy married Merle Baldwin and they have lived on the same farm in Fairfield, Montana, for many years.

Snyder, Melvin  Melvin and Della Snyder were living at the Charles Camp in 1921 when School District #198 was formed. The following children were listed on the school census — Thelma (1908), Ruth and Ruby (twins born in 1911), Henry (1915) and Glen (1919). (See also Snyder — Ashley)

The Snyders moved from the Charles Camp on the river to the main Cat Creek camp east of the 56 holding in 1923. Melvin ran the school bus and they sold milk until they moved to western Montana in 1926.

Sontag, L. F.  "Lou" Sontag came to Cat Creek in the summer of 1920 from Elk Basin, Wyoming, where he was a pipe line superintendent. He was lured to Cat Creek by a better offer from the Homestake Oil company. In September 1921 he became field superintendent for Frantz Oil Corporation and Elk Basin Consolidated. He was instrumental in building the four-inch oil line from Cat Creek to Winnett for the Elk Basin Oil Company.

Mr. Sontag was obviously a very controversial man. He became the general superintendent for the Mutual Oil Company in Cat Creek but resigned in March 1924. The Lewistown Democrat News printed a caustic article concerning his resignation saying, in part, "It is said of him (Mr. Sontag) that he was a very good man in his line but was very unfortunate in his ability to handle men and that he probably had less friends among the men under him than any man who ever had charge in Cat Creek."

Mr. Sontag eventually settled in Great Falls, Montana, where he built a lovely home with a conservatory which he turned into a commercial floral shop in 1935. He sold his floral business in 1939.

Sorensen, Ted  Ted Sorensen was born in 1918 in Grangeville, Idaho. He came to Cat Creek in 1938 and worked for the Homestake Oil Company until 1955. Ted was an employee of the Homestake Oil Company when the company was sold to Continental Oil.

Spaulding, Arthur J.  (Sec 6-15-29) Arthur Spaulding was born in 1891 in Minnepolis, Minnesota. He died in March 1958 in Minnepolis, Minnesota. He was married to Minnie Guhrt. (See also Guhrt — Ashley) She died shortly after the birth of their first child.

Her sister Emma cared for the baby. (See also Guhrt — Ashley)

Art’s homestead was in the area of the California Oil Camp which was never a large production area. The Helena Independent ran a front page article on the newly discovered oil in Cat Creek on November 14, 1920. The following is quoted:

""Using Arthur Spaulding, homesteader, as an example, some idea is to be gained of what oil lands are worth today in the Cat Creek district. A year ago when his crops failed Spaulding had a shack and a fairly good outfit for an eastern Montana farmer. He offered to sell the land — 320 acres and his complete outfit for $1500."

"Today Spaulding has received $25,000 for leases and his royalties by Christmas will be equal to about the same amount. He bought a fine home in Lewistown, a big automobile, and has fitted up an office in the Montana Building where he will collect his royalties, sell some more and, if he uses a bit of thrift, he is a wealthy man instead of a poor homesteader."

All of these dreams did not come true. In 1929 Arthur was managing a service station in Winnett. (See also Spaulding — Winnett)

Spencer, Dyrl  Dyrl Spencer and his wife and son, Terry, came to the area from Cody, Wyoming, in the fall of 1945. The Spencer and Livingston Drilling Company contracted to drill a test well for Dave Schrock on the Fifer lease. The Winnett Times (10-11-45) reported the following news on this well:

"Spencer and Livingston of Cody, Wyoming, credited with drilling in the first producing well in the Ellis sand in the Mosby dome section of the Cat Creek oil field, completed the drilling with only a light portable rig mounted on a truck chassis.

"Skillful handling of the equipment, not designed to drill deep wells, added considerably to the spectacular news of the discovery.

"Previous drillings of tests to the Ellis sand were frustrated by the flow of 10,000-barrel water sands above the Ellis. The drilling contractors successfully muddned off the water, but the pressure produced by the oil discovered in the Ellis washed out the mud, and for a time threatened to ruin the well. Quick work in running casing and a cement job saved the well by only a matter of one or two hours.

"Reaching the pay horizon, Spencer and Livingston stayed on the job for more than 72 hours straight to complete the well, taking no rest until the well was safely cemented."

Spencer and Livingston drilled a second well near the Fifer lease for Brindley and Murphy. (See also Livingston) In 1948 the Spencers moved to Lewistown, Montana.

Speth, Carl  Carl Speth was a veteran of World War I. He and his brother Mike came to Cat Creek to work in the oil field in the early 1920s. They often played for dances in the community. Mike did not stay in the oil field but...
became a barber in Yakima, Washington. Carl worked in Cat Creek for more than 35 years. He never married. He retired to Lewistown, Montana, where he died in 1974.

STEWART, Virgil E. (Sec 22, 23-15-28) Virgil Stewart was clerk of the school district when District #198 was formed in 1921. (See also STEWART — Winnett)

STONE, Benjamin (Sec 22, 23-15-28) Benjamin Stone was born in 1889 in Illinois. He homesteaded several miles south of Shay and was a veteran of World War I. He went to work in the oil field in Cat Creek in the early 1920s. Ferne Gardner came to Cat Creek as a teacher in 1925. She and Ben were married in 1926. They were active enthusiastic members of the community. The Winnett Times stated that they were the proud owners of a new 1935 Pontiac Straight 8 car in March of 1935.

Ben worked for Continental Oil Company until 1949 when he retired and moved to Billings where they purchased a small farm. In 1960 the couple moved to Mesa, Arizona. Ben died there in 1981.

Mrs. Stone wrote a fine article for the Winnett Times in 1942 about the history of Cat Creek oil field. It is a valuable resource and is available in the Petroleum County Community Library.

STORY, Lorren Fay (Sec 22, 23-15-28) Lorren Fay Story was the son of Fred and Ruby Story. (See also STORY — Winnett) He married Bernice Bauer in 1941. (See also BAUER — Brush Creek) The couple had three boys — Larry (1942), Jerry (1944) and Alan (1946). The family moved to Cat Creek in January 1946 where Fay worked for the Continental Oil Company. He was transferred to Melstone, Montana, and later to Dickinson, North Dakota.

STORY, Percy Story homesteaded southwest of Winnett. (See also STORY — Telgen) In the 1930s the Storys moved to Cat Creek where Percy had charge of the Hover-Schwartz operation in the West Dome.


STOUUFFER, Dent F. Dent Stouffer came to Montana with his parents, Bert and Betty Stouffer, who homesteaded in the Yellow Water area. (See STOUUFFER — Flatwillow) Dent worked in Cat Creek in its early years. He married Ada Town in 1928. (See TOWN — Musselshell River) The Winnett Times reported their wedding.

“Miss Ada Town, the popular and efficient county superintendent of schools in Petroleum County was married Saturday June 23rd to D. F. Stouffer of Cat Creek. The marriage took place in Billings at the Presbyterian parsonage. Mr. Stouffer is warehouse superintendent at the Frantz camp and is one of the most popular young men in the Cat Creek field. The newlyweds left immediately on a honeymoon trip through Yellowstone Park after which they will return to Winnett.”

The couple was feted with a charivari in honor of them and the James Coxes who were also recent newlyweds.

In May 1931 Dent was transferred by Continental Oil Company to its Ft. Collins office. In 1938 when Mrs. Stouffer returned for a visit, the couple had four children.

TAYLOR, Ike (Sec 22, 23-15-28) Ike Taylor did not live in Cat Creek but his drilling activity during the second oil boom in 1945-1946 was important to the area. The Winnett Times reported on October 25, 1945, on Mr. Taylor’s first drilling contracts in the area.

“A four-well contract has been let to Taylor Drilling Company of Centralia, Illinois, on the R. M. Fifer tract, the farm on which the Ellis sand discovery well was brought in on the 5th of this month.

“Taylor Drilling Company is headed by Ike Taylor, president, and for the past several months has had two rotary rigs in northern Montana drilling wells for the Texas Oil Company. Their rotary rig is being erected over location of Schrock-Fifer No. 2, 660 feet southeast of the discovery well. It is estimated this large rotary will complete a well every two weeks, weather permitting.” (For further information concerning the speed of the Taylor drilling operation, see the introduction to the Cat Creek oil field.)

Ike moved to Montana and set up his headquarters in Lewistown, Montana. He drilled many wells in central Montana. He was appointed to the Montana Oil and Gas Commission by Governor J. Hugo Aronson. Ike is quoted as saying at that time, “I got into the oil business in 1917 and I didn’t know much about it except that it was expensive if you didn’t get oil. That is about all I know for sure about it now after 42 years of it!”

Mr. Taylor died in 1962.

THOMAS, Israel Edward (Sec 3-15-28) “I. E.” Thomas was born in 1864 in Indiana. He married Flora Harshbarger in 1881 and the couple had two sons, one of whom died in infancy. Sylvia, born in 1896, journeyed to Montana with his parents in 1910. (See also CAT CREEK — Introduction)

Sylvia served in World War I and returned to the family farm. In 1929 she died following an appendectomy and was buried with military honors in the Shay cemetery. His
Mr. I. E. Thomas, one of Cat Creek Basin’s oldest settlers

mother, Flora, had died shortly before, leaving Mr. Thomas grief stricken. He made arrangements to sell his property in November 1929, and returned to Kokomo, Indiana to make his home with his sister.

In a letter to the editor of the Winnett Times in 1930 he reported, “Times are very dull here with factories either shut down or running one-half to one-quarter capacity. Prices here in Kokomo are as follows: Wheat, 73 cents; Corn 85 cents; Oats, 30 cents; Potatoes, $1.00; Hogs, per cwt., $7.85; Eggs, 30 cents; and Butterfat, 30 cents.”

I. E. Thomas died in 1944 and was buried with his wife and son in the Shay Cemetery.

THOMPSON, Oscar A. (Sec 11-19-27) Oscar Thompson came to Montana at age 16 from Fish Creek, Wisconsin. He worked near Roy, Montana, and homesteaded west of Valentine before working in the oil fields at Cat Creek. He married Mauve Peters on August 27, 1927. (See also PETERS—Musselshell River) The couple made their home in Cat Creek where Oscar worked for Continental Oil Company. He was transferred to Kevin, Montana, and later (in 1941) to Kansas. He also worked in Lance Creek, Wyoming, for Continental. When Oscar retired in 1956 he was superintendent for the Rocky Mountain Division of Continental Oil Company.

Oscar and Mauve had two daughters—Patricia (1928) and Estella.

THOMPSON, Ross Ross Thompson was one of the first teamsters in Cat Creek. He married Mildred Callahan in 1924.

THOMSON, Oscar (Sec 19,30-15-29) Oscar homesteaded about three miles southwest of Cat Creek. The following article was submitted by his daughter, Ida Nielsen of Uvalde, Texas:

“My father, Oscar S. Thomson, and his family arrived in the United States from Sarpsborg, Norway, in 1887 when he was twelve years old. Growing up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, he became a skilled house painter and worked in Chicago where he met and, in March 1912, married my mother, Mary Belle Moore, nee Moren, of London, Kentucky.

“Not a farmer, but lured by the opportunity to acquire land and work and hope for an independent, prosperous future, he came to Montana that same year to homestead on 320 acres near Winnett, bringing my mother and her five-year-old daughter by a previous marriage (Elizabeth).

“In October 1913 my mother returned to Chicago for my birth where hospital facilities were available and where she could stay with friends until I decided to see what this world was all about. Three weeks after my decision she brought me back to Winnett.

“I never learned how the homestead was developed or what crops, if any, were raised, but there was no income from it so my father went back to Chicago to work and, to ‘prove out’ the homestead, mother stayed, alone with her two small children in our two-room house on the prairie. Dad had rented a wagon and team of horses to haul lumber from Lewistown the same day they first arrived and built the house himself, so we at least had shelter, especially needed during the long winters when, as mother recalled, the temperature could drop to 45 degrees below. We also had a good well and an outdoor cellar to store vegetables from our garden which Mother watered, plant by plant, under the dry summer sky.

“Our nearest neighbors were Henry Coxon and his cousin, Nellie Ashley, also homesteading on the adjoining half-section. They lived in a dugout sod house, one big room dug into the side of small hill, rather dark, with a dirt floor, walls and roof, but which struck me as a very practical, ‘climate-proof’ arrangement. In 1939 my husband and I went to my old home place, driving through a storm of grasshoppers that clogged the car’s radiator and covered the roads, and visited with the Coxons. They were still living in the sod house but ours had collapsed into a pile of lumber, a sad ending to high hopes.

“Dad was convinced there was oil in the vicinity, having been told by a geologist that the area around us was located at an anticline where oil might be found, and there was some oil activity already going on there, so having given up on realizing anything from the land itself, he hoped that what perhaps lay underneath it might be far more productive. An excerpt from one of his letters reads, ‘When I was out here we had an oil boom but it didn’t last long enough. They drilled, but I think they did not go deep enough; it cost a lot of money and I did not have the capital. There is oil there, all you have to do is strike the right spot.’ He and my mother divorced in 1937 and Dad deeded the homestead to me with the advice that I keep it in case oil was discovered. He had it under lease to the Bureau of Land Management for grazing, but I didn’t continue the lease and instead permitted Mr. Coxon to use the land for his own purposes. During that time Shell Oil and then Sun Oil took leases on it for several years, then dropped them.

“It was impractical to hold the acreage only to pay taxes on it but I was loath to let it go, partly because of the low price offered by one agent ($2.50 per acre), and
partly because the land had a tinge of romanticism for me — I suppose it represented a piece of the 'Old West' as depicted in Charles Russell's paintings and Zane Grey's novels. However, practicality finally prevailed. Coming to terms with the elusive oil, I sold the homestead in about 1965 to Leo Solf, a rancher who owned the surrounding land, but in deference to Dad's dream, and perhaps still impressed by it, retained some oil rights.

"During the time Mother was at the homestead alone, she ran a cafe in Winnett, doing the cooking herself. She obtained a Blackfoot Indian woman to take care of my sister and me. The woman had a little boy who was my only playmate, my sister being six years older and interested in her own friends. The woman dropped me and my collar bone was broken so Mother took me to the doctor in either Winnett or Lewistown. He gave me a wooden whistle that had a loud, piercing sound, and I blew it constantly; very soon afterward, the Indian woman left, taking her little brave with her. My playmates then were a pet pig and the plentiful rattlesnakes — at least every time I saw one I ran to pick it up and play with it, but always at the final moment I would snatch to safety. I asked my mother once if that hadn't been a great worry to her, and after a long, reflective look, she said, 'Yes, it was ... I was always afraid you'd get to the creatures before I could rescue them.' But I know that, actually, she dispatched them with a hoe.

"There was other wildlife. Mother told of watching antelope stomp on the snakes until they killed them, and once my sister, walking home from school, began imitating coyote calls. Her call was answered and soon others joined in, sounding louder and louder — she finished her journey at a run! Some children rode horseback to school and others, like Elizabeth, walked. The only transportation we had was a horse and buggy, which couldn't be spared for the whole day.

"It was a hard life for Mother but she stood up to it well, coming from old pioneer stock in Kentucky. She was joined for a time by her brother, Dan Moren, who lived in a tent nearby. He came to homestead also, but mainly came out of concern for his sister. He left when he realized she was capable of dealing with her situation and was determined to stay as long as necessary to fulfill the terms of the Homestead Act. In October 1916, on my third birthday, we returned to Chicago to join my father. I still vaguely remember the dusty green plush seats and shoe box of fried chicken which was a part of train travel in those days.

"I really learned very little about my parents' life on the homestead because neither talked much about it. Dad almost not at all, and Mother mentioning mostly her neighbors, whose names I don't remember now, and how helpful they were, and the dances or socials that were held occasionally.

"It was a venture that didn't pan out as expected so I think they put it out of their minds. In any case, their experiences in Montana surely weren't as difficult as the Depression that hit some thirteen years later. And we all did treasure the 'free' land out West we possessed and thought of it with pride."

THORSEN, Lorenz C. (Sec 18-15-29) Lorenz "Shorty" Thorsen was born in 1885 in Frislev, Denmark. He left Denmark to come to the United States on his 25th birthday (August 6, 1910). He often told of the steamship crossing. There were many first-class passengers on the ship, and in the lower part of the ship there were cattle and horses being shipped to New York.

Shorty got a job on a dairy farm in New York and the next spring went to Aberdeen, South Dakota, where he worked on a ranch. In the fall of 1911 he went to Lewistown, Montana, with his Aberdeen employer who brought his threshing crew and machinery to work in the Montana grain fields. Shorty stayed in Montana and the following spring filed on a homestead about three miles west of Cat Creek.

On March 24, 1921, Lorenz was married to Etta Dobson. Etta was a widow with children still at home. (See DOBSON — Musselshell River) They made their home in Cat Creek from 1922 until 1929 and Shorty worked in the oil field. Etta's children went to the Cat Creek School.

In April 1929 Shorty divorced Etta and returned to his ranch where he raised purebred Hereford cattle in later years. He and Bessie Barden were married in 1946. They sold the ranch to Norris "Pete" Dobson in 1969 and purchased a home in Malta, Montana. After Bessie died in 1970, Shorty returned to Winnett to make his home. He lived in a nicely furnished mobile home on a lot near the high school. When he died in 1980, he bequeathed the mobile home and lot to the school and the furnishings to the public library.

TROCHTA Mr. Trochta was superintendent for Continental Oil Company in Cat Creek in 1927 at the time he was transferred to Lovell, Wyoming.

VANCE, Jacob Jacob Vance was born in Fairview, Utah, in 1893. He married Hazel Feaster. (See also FEASTER — Petrolia) The Vances had three children — Donald, Della and Alma.
Jacob was a foreman for the Mid Northern Oil Company in Cat Creek in the 1920s. The family moved to Kevin, Montana, where he was an oil patcher. Later he worked for the United States government at Malmstrom Air Force Base for 25 years.

Mr. Vance died in 1969 and Hazel continues to make her home in Great Falls, Montana (1988).

**VAN TASSELL, Ginevra** (Sec 12-15-28) Ginevra and her brother Albert Van Tassell (Sec. 7,17,18-15-29) homesteaded about three miles west of Cat Creek about 1913 to 1914. Ginevra was the first teacher in the new log school house built by the Cat Creek Basin community in 1914. (Miss Grace Miller had taught the first school in 1912 in an abandoned log building.) Ginevra (sometimes spelled Genevieve on teacher records) taught in various other rural schools during the 1914-1920 period.

Albert returned to LaSalle, Michigan, where another sister lived. He was killed in an automobile accident on January 28, 1932.

**VINCELLETTE, R. E.** Mr. Vincellette was married to Frances Pierson. (See also PIERSON — Winnett, Brush Creek and Cat Creek) He was employed by Continental Oil Company at Cat Creek in 1938.

**VOGEL, Charles J.** (Sec 23-15-28) Charles Vogel was born March 16, 1889, in Rapids City, Illinois. He came to Montana in 1911 with his brother-in-law, Ado Rogge. (See also ROGGE — Cat Creek) Charles did not stay in the area very long. It is believed he returned to Illinois where he married Lova Baietto on June 1, 1927, in Rapids City, Illinois. She died in 1964, Charles in 1965.

**VONTVER, Simon A.** ‘Sy’ Vontver was born in Lillehammar, Norway, in 1890. He immigrated to Austin, Minnesota, in 1908 and homesteaded near Little Crooked Creek in 1919. He married May Anderson the following year.

Sy began working for Continental Oil Company in about 1923. May was a teacher and she taught several terms in the Cat Creek School. She was elected to the position of Petroleum County Superintendent of Schools for two 2-year terms (in 1928 and in 1930). Mrs. Vontver was also a talented and accomplished writer. She had several articles published in Frontier, a literary magazine of the northwest, and the Montana Educator, the magazine of the Montana Education Association. She also had a short story published in O’Brien’s Short Stories of 1929. May was very active in American Legion Auxiliary affairs, as well.

The Vontvers had one son, Louis (1936). He became a doctor.

In 1937 the Vontvers took a vacation to Norway on the steamship Grippsholm. It was an exciting adventure for them, and several programs and news articles relating to their trip were given for the benefit of the community.

Sy was transferred to Lance Creek, Wyoming, in March 1943, and later to Elk Basin, Wyoming. He retired in Billings in 1955. He died in 1974.

**WALES, Mr.** Mr. and Mrs. Wales lived in the Frantz camp in 1924. Mrs. Wales was a member of the Frantz Camp ladies’ club. When they left in March 1924, the Ross Thompsons moved into their cabin.

**WALKER, John** John and Minerva Walker homesteaded near present-day Yellow Water dam. (See WALKER — Flatwillow) The Walkers left the homestead in 1920 and John worked for a dray line in Winnett. When oil was discovered in Cat Creek, he helped haul freight between Winnett and Cat Creek. In a short time he found employment in the Cat Creek oil field as a pumper for Continental Oil Company. After their daughter, Madalyn, graduated from high school in 1925, the Walkers made their home in Cat Creek. They lived in Cat Creek until John’s retirement when the Walkers moved to Great Falls to make their home with their daughter.

**WALSH, John** John Walsh and his wife lived in the Cat Creek oil field in the mid 1920s. Their daughter, Nellie, was mentioned in the school news, and their son, Kenneth, drew the attention of the Winnett Times in April 1924 when he ran into a barbed wire fence and was seriously cut about the throat. Dr. Berry repaired and sewed the wound.

**WELLS, Alfred B.** (Sec 3-15-29) Alfred "Bert" Wells was born in 1893 in Fairview, Wyoming. In 1914 he took out a homestead north of Cat Creek. He served in the Army during World War I and was active in both the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Soon after oil was discovered in Cat Creek he began work in the oil field, a vocation he followed all of his life. In 1924 he married Alice Avi Martin of Belt, Montana. The couple had one daughter, Fern.
Bert worked for Continental Oil Company at Cat Creek and in Wyoming until he retired in 1959. He died in 1969. Alice still makes her home in Billings, Montana (1988).

WELLS, James Merritt  James Merritt Wells was born in 1856 in Kankakee, Illinois. In poor health as a young man, he was told by doctors in Joplin, Missouri, that he had only six months to live when he was 20 years old. (He lived to be almost 94!)

James left Missouri and went to Texas where he joined a trail herd to Oregon. He took on a partner and the two engaged in trapping, and for seven months did not see another white man. He was in Wyoming in 1876 and then settled in Montpelier, Idaho, where he met and married Amanda Theadocia Campbell. They were to become parents of 11 children. The couple lived in Idaho, moved to Wyoming and in 1912 settled a few miles north of present-day Cat Creek.

Amanda was a respected and hard-working woman who was often called upon by neighbors in times of illness because of her nursing ability. She died in 1943. James died in 1949.

Two sons homesteaded in the Cat Creek area (See separate accounts) and two daughters lived in the area as young women. LaRue married Ed Harris (See also HARRIS) and Dorothy married Joe Woods.

WELLS, Merritt T. (Sec 34-16-29) Merritt T. "Mate" Wells, the son of James and Amanda Wells, was born in Star Valley, Wyoming, in 1885. He homesteaded on land north of the Cat Creek oil field in about 1911. During the peak settlement days he was a homestead locator — in other words, he located homesteaders on available land for a fee.

Mate was a bachelor. He dug a large chicken house in the bank and kept a bunch of laying hens, and he had several Holstein cows. He also raised a garden. He was a staunch democrat and after Hoover was president he said, "During Hoover's administration I changed clothes with my scarecrow three times!"

'Mate' Wells' camp outfit leaving Winnett on his way to the homestead near Cat Creek
From time to time Mate worked for other people. He freighted supplies to the Cat Creek oil field in the early days and worked for A. B. Mitchell a short time. He retired to Winnett in 1970 and served as Justice of the Peace. He died in 1974.

WHISONANT, Dudley Dudley Whisonant arrived in Montana for the first time when he accompanied his father from South Carolina to the Dovetail area in 1916 to file on a homestead. Young Dudley spent two years in the north country of Petroleum County before moving back to South Carolina with his family.

He stayed in the Carolinas until 1922. At that time he moved to Chicago and on February 25, 1928, he took Borghild Lunde as his bride.

Borghild had been in the United States nearly five years since landing on August 21, 1923, from her native land of Bergen, Norway. Her trip had taken a total of ten days by ship. One of the memories she recalled was sighting the Statue of Liberty as the band on the ship played “You Are My Sunshine.”

In 1931 the couple and their two small children, Lillian and Donald, moved to Petroleum County near Dovetail. Another son, Joe, was born in March of 1937.

Dudley joined into partnership with an old friend, James Wright, and they engaged in the ranching business on Blood Creek. (See also WRIGHT, James — Ashley) The partnership decided to move their headquarters to the Gorman and Balding holdings on Box Elder Creek in the spring of 1940.

Donald was killed in a horse accident in 1944. Lillian married Arthur Moore and later moved with her husband to their ranch on Flat Willow Creek near Hassett. Joe attended Box Elder School and Winnett Grade and High School. During this time, he met Jackie Trump, daughter of Edna and Elliott Trump, who leased and lived on the Ernest Hansen Ranch on Box Elder Creek. Jackie attended school at Flat Willow, Box Elder, and Winnett High School.

Joe stayed on the ranch with his folks until he leased the ranch with an option to buy it in 1964. After leaving the ranch, Dudley and Borghild worked construction and finally settled in the cafe and hotel business. They operated cafes and hotels in Roy and later in Lavina. Dudley passed away in 1982 and Borghild in 1985.

Dud and Borghild were noted for their ability to raise garden produce, especially cantaloupe and watermelon, without much rain or irrigation. Borghild always welcomed friends and strangers and was known for her ability to cook on a wood-burning range.

The Whisonant Ranch was quite small. Dudley worked at odd jobs, and the family milked cows and sold eggs and cream to make ends meet. In March of 1990 the Whisonant Ranch will celebrate its 50th anniversary.

Joe and Jackie were married in 1957. They are graduates of Winnett High School in 1955 and 1956 respectively. Their marriage brought forth two children — Don Scott (1961) and Robert Joseph (1963). Joe has worked the ranch since he was big enough to work and continues to do so at this time. He attended Rocky Mountain College and earned a B. S. degree in education in 1960 and has taught school, coached and counseled continuously for the past 29 years, along with operating the ranch.

Don and Bob helped on the ranch while living at home. Both are graduates of Chinook High School and Montana Tech with degrees in petroleum engineering. At this time both are employed in the oil industry. Bob is married to the former Peggy Funk, and the couple has two sons, Jacob and Colton.

The little place along Highway 208 eight and one-half miles east of Winnett has served as home for the Whisonants for nearly fifty years, and God willing, will continue to do so for many years to come. (Submitted by Joe Whisonant) (See also WHISONANT — Winnett)

WIEGERT, H. C. Mr. Wiegert was a round-about for the 56 Petroleum Company in 1924. He married Nan Peters (See also PETERS — Musselshell River) and the couple had two sons.

WILDSCHUTZ, Matthias (Sec 14-15-29) Matthias “Matt” Wildschutz was born October 3, 1905, in Granville, Iowa. He came to Montana in 1917 and homesteaded in what was to become the heart of the Cat Creek oil field. He enlisted in the Army and served overseas throughout World War I. He remained in Germany with the army of occupation until 1919.

Drilling for oil began on his property in 1920 and on January 23, 1921, the Wildschutz No. 2, drilled by Mid Northern Oil Company, came in a producer. Another producer came in five days later. The Winnett Times reported on August 25, 1922, that the Wildschutz properties led all other producers in the Cat Creek field with a total production of 72,000 barrels to that date.

Matt married Alice Burnside on May 10, 1921. She was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Burnside, homesteaders in the Winifred area.

Matt and Alice made their home in Lewistown, Montana, and Matt invested in ranch property in the Buffalo, Montana, area. He died in 1942 leaving Alice with the responsibility of managing the property. She weathered all the storms — improving the property with reservoirs, wells, planting a lovely shelter belt and building up a fine herd of cattle. Alice resides in a rest home in Lewistown (1988).

WILEY, Mr. and Mrs. The Wileys lived in the Frantz camp until February 1924. When they moved, their cabin became the home of Mr. and Mrs. William Armagost. Mrs. Wiley was a member of the Frantz Camp Ladies’ Club.

WILLIAMS, Helen Helen Williams taught the intermediate grades in Cat Creek in 1931-1932. She lived in a one-room cabin, a former oil company office, furnished by the Continental Oil Company. An account of her memories of that school term were related in a story published by the Lewistown News Argus on December 20, 1981. The following are excerpts from the article.
In late August 1931 I sped merrily across the North Dakota-Montana state line into the Land of the Big Sky armed with a teaching certificate for Petroleum County and not much else...

I learned that the main roads (in the county) were the widest with the deepest dust, and that side roads usually didn’t have carry-off ditches on each side. Most of the local mileage was on ‘natural roadbeds.’ ... It was so nice to be able to see over and beyond the ‘breaks’ in the landscape — so different from the shut-in feeling in the wooded area of the mountains of Tennessee or Virginia. I was soon able to look across toward the river and know whose car was swinging the curves long before they drove past my little terrace...

I recall the night of full moon in December when the air was full of snow and mist through which we could still see. I watched Nig, the cookhouse spaniel (shut out by the unsympathetic cook) padding across the street to my cabin. He learned fast where he could get sympathy!

I enjoyed camp. But have you ever read Bret Harte’s The Outcasts of Poker Flat? We had those characters — the slick gambler, the ‘fancy lady,’ the young unfortunates who were cared for by the ‘questionables.’

The Christmas dance at Bowen School was a big event annually. We were fortunate in our weather. We danced, ate and danced until the wee hours grew bigger ... Dancing in high heels was a definite hazard due to the condition of the floor, but no one complained. We arrived back in camp at sunrise...

I remember the weird feeling I had when I looked to my left across from the green grocery department in Eager’s Mercantile and saw the hanging samples of entirely different articles ... I remember the full page advertisement for holiday dinner week — and the small ‘black box’ after-thought at the bottom of the page ‘CASKETS ORDERED.’ How I wish I had kept that one!

The camp was a good place to learn what I wanted to know about Montana. I like to tell my little folks here of the bull snake that came into the schoolhouse looking for a drink — and that I was not afraid of it! About the horse that one bright morning took me straight out across the prairie to the lark’s nest we had examined the night before, and stopped stone-still beside it.

We had what was needed to make a good community. We had our pleasures and our problems, but I would not have missed it. It has been my nearly 50-year hope to return, and I might. Strange things do happen to me.”

WINNETT, Arthur Arthur Winnett was the son of Walter and Mary Winnett. He was born October 1904 at the Winnett Ranch and spent most of his life either on the ranch or in the oil fields.

Art married Katherine Niles, the daughter of Warren Niles, early-day homesteader on Calf Creek. (See also NILES — Musselshell River) Katherine was a schoolteacher and she taught in the Cat Creek School from 1930 until 1933.

Art had the Cat Creek stage route in the late 1920s, and in 1930 he resigned as the Cat Creek mail carrier and accepted a position with Mid Northern Oil Company. In 1932 he went to work for Continental Oil.

Art spent three years in the Seabees during World War II, serving in the Pacific. He was a motor machinist mate in charge of nineteen engineers. Part of their duty was maintaining the 225 horsepower diesel engines on the landing craft the Navy was using.

He returned to Cat Creek after the war and when William Armagost was transferred, Art became production foreman for Continental Oil. He was transferred to Melstone in 1962 and retired in 1965. He died in 1976.

WITHROW, Earl Earl and Molly Withrow lived in Cat Creek in the late 1920s. They had one daughter at that time, Annabell Rose, born in 1925. The Withrows moved in 1931.

WOLF, James James Wolf and Harry Sheets were saved by a cat from a fire which broke out in the Mitchell cabin where they were sleeping. The cat jumped on Mr. Wolf’s face and woke him. Oil had overflowed from the oil stove and the walls and floor of the cabin were on fire. (W. T. 1923)

ZIESKE, Maida Maida Zieske taught the Cat Creek School in 1958-1959. She and her husband, Roy, came to Cat Creek from Billings, Montana. They had two children, Jolene and Lynn. The family moved to Thomson Falls, Montana, where Roy managed a lumberyard.

ZINTZ, John (Sec 10-15-28) John Zintz, according to Floyd Maine’s history of the Cat Creek Basin, was one of the very earliest settlers in the basin.

ZOLLERS, Mrs. G. F. (W. T. 6-24-21) “Mrs. G. F. Zollers and associates in the Montana Bell Syndicate have completed plans to commence drilling operations on their holdings in Sec 21-15-29. Quite a number of Winnett people have holdings in this vicinity, and are much interested in the drilling of the well, and inasmuch as Mrs. Zollers is the first woman operator in the field, further interest is added.

WILSON, Frank M. (See also WILSON — Brush Creek) Frank Wilson and his wife Della moved to Cat Creek when the oil field was first being developed in the early 1920s. He worked there until 1945 when the couple returned to Washington, Iowa, where they had farmed before homesteading in Montana.

The Wilson’s son, Harve, also worked at Cat Creek. He married LaVonne Stewart in 1938. They had a daughter born in 1941 and a son born in 1944. Harve worked in Bremerton, Washington, during World War II.