Looking west on Winnett’s Main Street (1918)

Buildings facing Main Street. (Left to Right) Block 18 W. J. Winnett Ranch house, Hoyle’s Barbershop, Halls Icehouse (set slightly back from street), post office, Rasmussen Mercantile; Block 17 The Mode, Enterprise Meat Market (Beck), Spears Restaurant in Moll Pool Hall, Woods Drugstore, Winnett State Bank; Block 16 Toggery, Mrs. Thompson’s Restaurant, Jarrett Hotel, Smokehouse Billiard, Aristo; Block 14 (west end of Main Street) first Eager Mercantile
Homestead Town

The town of Winnett gradually emerged from within the perimeter of the Walter Winnett Ranch in about 1909 and eventually encompassed the ranch. The house, barn, corrals and sheds were clustered together on a flat plain which was separated from the imposing and protective Eagle sandstone rimrocks by box elder tree-lined McDonald Creek.

The large ranch had many employees and, reportedly, Mr. Winnett built the famous Log Cabin Saloon for their convenience. Otto Senst, bookkeeper for Walter Winnett, and Ed Rule operated the saloon until its demise in 1919, when the Volstead Act prohibited the sale of intoxicating liquor.

As homesteaders staked their claims nearby, the need for a store and post office prompted Walter Winnett and Oscar Badger to open a general store in one of the ranch buildings. The structure faced northwest at the east end of what later became Main Street. Walter Winnett owned several large horse and wagon freight outfits, and the supplies for the store were freighted by wagon from Musselshell or Lewistown. In 1913 Tony Rasmussen purchased the stock and conducted the store in the same location for one year. He then moved the merchandise to his own building (Lot 1, Block 18, Main).

To qualify as an official United States post office, the need for postal service had to be justified. For that reason, Oscar Badger and Walter Winnett set up a trial post office in their store. Frank Nelson, another homesteader and local resident, and John Coble, a Winnett Ranch employee, carried mail each Tuesday and Friday from the Flatwillow Post Office to the Winnett Store. (The mail was delivered to Flatwillow by stage from the town of Musselshell.) This gratis project was continued for six months and a careful record kept of the amount of mail handled. At the end of that time, the post office department extended the route serving Flatwillow to include Winnett. A post office by the name of Winnett was officially sanctioned on October 4, 1910. John W. Hughes was chosen postmaster, serving until December 12, 1911. (See Appendix for postmaster list.)

In January 1914, Bessie Rasmussen was appointed postmaster. The post office may have been moved to the Rasmussen store until a new frame building was built in 1915 (Lot 3, Block 18). The mail continued to come by stage from Flatwillow until 1916, when a route was established between Grassrange and Winnett. In 1917 the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad was extended to Winnett, and the railroad was awarded the contract for transporting mail. Contracts were let to local draymen for hauling the mail to and from the Winnett depot and the post office. When the train discontinued daily service in 1956, the mail was delivered from Roundup and Jordan.
office was moved to the former Marti building (Block 15, Main). The building had been recently stuccoed on the outside and newly plastered on the inside and was rented to the post office department by the Marti family. In the fall of 1972 Winnett was one of the fortunate towns to be granted a new post office building (Lot 14-15, Block 10).

Oscar Badger was named the first United States Land Commissioner for this district in 1912. This was an important position because of the number of homesteaders who were not only filing, but also proving up on their claims.

By 1914 Ira Pierson was chosen as justice of the peace for eastern Fergus County. Several accounts can be found of his performing marriages in the spacious W. J. Winnett home.

In about 1913 or before, the Milwaukee Land Company acquired land from property owners between Grassrange and Winnett for a railroad bed. They also secured a portion of land from Walter Winnett for a townsite. G. W. Morrow, townsite agent for the railroad, arranged for the platting of the town. On July 18, 1914, the Milwaukee Land Company held the first sale of Winnett town lots in the old Culver Hotel of Lewistown with $64,000 worth of lots being sold. Almost immediately the music of saws and hammers could be heard, and by the time the first Winnett Times paper was printed in
Walter Winnett's freight outfit ready to leave Lewistown for Winnett. W. J. Winnett is the man in the white shirt. Ed Fleury is directly behind the man in the suit.

Showing prize stallions west of the Winnett barn. White building is a bunkhouse later known as the Ranchers Rooms.

Sheep bedded down east of the Winnett barn on the bank of McDonald Creek.
September of 1914, a headline read: "Thirty-two Business Houses in Winnett." Only a few of the first businesses are noted here. Names of all known businesses of Winnett are listed in the Appendix.

It is believed that, after the town was platted, the first business building on Main Street was the Winnett Land Company (Block 8, Main), which was owned and operated by Albert W. and Ralph Ogg. Their office opened in July of 1914. They did a thriving business selling town lots and preparing documents for homesteaders. John W. Brummett had a real estate office on Main Street and Walter J. Winnett also handled real estate transactions during those early years.

The Winnett State Bank (Lot 1, Block 17, Main) was constructed and opened its doors for business in August 1914. Officers of the bank were Samuel Phillips, president; Hammon B. Greene, vice-president; Charles Wiper, cashier. Many local men were stockholders. This bank became the First National Bank in 1919.

The First State Bank (Lot 4, Block 8, Main) opened its doors February 13, 1917. Benjamin F. Lepper of the Flatwillow community is believed to have constructed the bank building. W. J. Johnson was president and David Hilger and Howard Lepper, directors. Howard Lepper was cashier of the bank until his death in 1918. Sometime after the Winnett Block was completed in 1917, the First State Bank moved its headquarters into the Winnett Block. Carleton A. Kelley was cashier, and Archibald Faragher and Anthony Rasmussen were directors of the bank in September of 1922. The original bank building was used as an office for the AMZ Oil Company during the boom, as the county-division headquarters in 1924, as Busy Corner Grocery in 1925, and as a dry goods store for the Eager Mercantile in 1929 and 1930.

The First National Bank and the First State Bank merged in November of 1923. The new headquarters were to be in the First National Bank building. The move had hardly been completed when the merged bank was forced to close its doors. After some reorganization procedures, the bank opened as the Farmers and Merchants Bank in July of 1924. It served the community until January 1930. Among other things, the building later became Winnett's State Iquror store, Mint Bar and Café, and (in 1989) Art Moore's woodworking shop.

After the Rasmussen store opened, the next store to open was operated by O. G. Rosing in the summer of 1914. It was a grocery-hardware combination believed to have been connected with the Mahon-Robinson Company (Lot 6, Block 8, Main). In 1915 or 1916 it became the Hagemann-Pullin Grocery.

In 1914 Elmer Eager of Beaver Crossing, Nebraska, sent a former employee, Pratt Woodard, to build and operate a general store in the center of Block 14 on Main Street. After Mr. Eager moved to Winnett to manage his business interests, he built a larger store (Lot 15, Block 10, Main). His first building was then used as a school and church from 1917 to 1920, next as the Valley Lumber Company, and finally, in December 1924, it became the present Catholic Church.

Everyday work clothing could be purchased at one of the general stores, but when a young man had landed that all important date, he naturally wished to get dressed up a bit. To meet the needs of that situation, Alvie Morningstar built the Toggery in 1915. The same year, Oscar Badger and Henry Chadl opened The Mode, a men's clothing store in what had previously been the Badger restaurant. The next year, Erik Hove and Oscar Badger were the proprietors (Lot 7, Block 17, Main).

Joe Shumate opened the Central Billiard Parlor (Block 9, Main) on October 19, 1914. He advertised candy, cigars, tobaccos and soft drinks in addition to billiard tables. The building still serves the public in 1989 with meals, drinks, pool table and occasional dancing. It is Art Moore's Winnett Bar. The building celebrated its diamond anniversary this year of the State of Montana Centennial.

Walter Sevals built and operated the Smokehouse Pool and Billiard (Lot 2, Block 16, Main) in about 1915 or 1916. The building was purchased by Elmer Eager for a store in 1928 but was used for only a short time as the store burned in September of 1929. Ray Moll also owned a pool hall (Block 17, Main). The Masonic and Eastern...

Enlarged view of Main Street business section:
Winnett residence (south side of Main)
Rasmussen Mercantile (s)
Ogg Land Office (north side of Main)
Mahon-Robinson store operated by O. G. Rosing with lumberyard to north and west (n)
Schmidt Hotel (n)
Montana Bar (n)
Toggery clothing (s)
Jarrett Hotel (s)
Smokehouse Billiard Parlor (s)

In foreground on Broadway Avenue:
Pribble Implement with the Reynolds blacksmith shop attached to north side (both burned in 1921)
Basin Lumber and Hardware (Later Monarch Lumber and Hardware). Building still standing in 1989 on corner of Broadway and Wheeler
When laid in 1917, the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railroad tracks were just to the north of the Pribble Implement.
Looking east from Broadway on Main Street in 1916. North side (L to R): **Block 9** (between Broadway & Ashley) Bachelor Cafe, Central Billiard, Montana Bar, Schmidt Hotel; **Block 8** (between Ashley & Lepper) Mahon-Robinson, Winnett Land Co.; **Block 7** (between Lepper & Grand) Log Cabin Saloon; end of street, Winnett barn and livery stable.

South side (R to L): **Block 16** (between Broadway & Ashley) Smokehouse, Jarrett Hotel, Toggery; **Block 17** (between Ashley & Lepper) Winnett State Bank, Woods Drugstore, Spears Restaurant in Moll building, Winnett Times, Langshausen office, 1st Enterprise Meat Market, The Mode clothing; **Block 18** (between Lepper & Grand) Rasmussen Mercantile, Post Office, Hoyle Barber-shop, Winnett residence

Ed Fleury proudly lends a 16-hitch string of horses at the 1916 Fourth of July celebration.

Star members met in the second story of his building. Junior high and high school classes were conducted in the Masonic rooms from 1915 to 1917. Later the building became known as the Odd Fellow Hall and, among other things, served as a drugstore from 1946 to 1959. The building stands unused in 1989.

A grand Fourth of July celebration was held in 1916. It was during this celebration that Ed Fleury, a Metis freighter, reportedly performed a feat which has become a local legend. Bets developed over his ability to execute a U-turn within a city block with his 16-horse team hitched to some wool wagons. Those who bet against Ed’s ability were quickly deprived of their money, as Ed was a skilled teamster and accomplished the feat with dexterity.

The series of pictures on these pages depict the parade with many of the main street businesses in the background.

Homer Geis came to Winnett in 1914 as Winnett’s first practicing attorney. Nicholas Langshausen came in from his homestead south of town and built a law office on the south side of Main Street in 1916. Percy Napton, Ethel S. W. Abbott, and Raymond Wiedman were other early attorneys.

In September of 1914, Homer Geis set up the print shop for the Winnett Times. The printing machinery and equipment came by rail freight to Musselshell, then by wagon freight to Flatwillow and Winnett. The shop was located in Lot 4, Block 17, East Main Street. Mr. Geis hired as editor, E. V. Alexander, brother of the physician Joseph L. Alexander, who arrived in Winnett in 1915.

In 1917 the printing business was sold to Edwin M. Berg. Sometime between 1917 and 1921 the business was moved to the central portion of the Winnett Block. In 1921 Charles Doherty and C. E. Palmer became
publishers and editors. Their “banner” editorials were enjoyed until January 1931. During Charles Doherty’s ownership, in November of 1925, the Winnett Times moved to a 25’ by 70’ building which was to become its final location (Lot 12, Block 11, Main). In order to move the heavy machinery without completely dismantling it, the large plate glass window of the Winnett Block had to be removed. It required three days, two trucks and nine men to move the large modern plant.

Delmar Cole became the editor and printer from 1931 to 1936. He was followed by William Rader who sold to Rudolph Glatz in July of 1940. Rudy published the paper a record 36 years — from 1940 until April of 1976. At that time this venerable Winnett institution was sold to the Roundup Record-Tribune. Louise Rasmussen publishes the Roundup Record-Tribune and Winnett Times in 1989. Lot 12, Block 11 continues to be the home of the Winnett Printing Company and the company’s owners, Rudy and Bernice Glatz.

The frantic flurry of homestead building created the need for lumber and building supplies. One of the first to supply this need was the Independent Lumber Company. It was a large business — the store and yard occupied Lots 1, 2, 3, and 4 of Block 2. B. F. Moulton was president; W. J. Winnett, vice-president; Tom Fleming, treasurer; and P. J. Anderson, manager.

The Grogan-Robinson (formerly Mahon-Robinson) Lumber Company (Lots 18-19-20, Block 9, Lepper) was a North Dakota corporation which also had a branch in Grassrange. The Montana Lumber and Hardware was established August 10, 1914. It was a branch of the Montana Lumber and Hardware Company of Lewistown owned by George Wiedeman. The location of his first store in Winnett is not known, but after the Winnett Block was completed in 1917, the Montana Lumber and Hardware Company operated in the eastern one-third of the building. It remained in that location until November of 1929 when a new building was constructed adjacent to the Winnett Block on the east. The Montana Lumber and Hardware closed in 1971, but Vernon and Janet Bauer operated their Trading Post hardware store in the building until July of 1979. The building (now used for some storage and, on occasion, dancing) still stands in 1989.

The Basin Lumber and Implement Company (Lot 5, Block 2, Broadway) was established in 1916 and became the Monarch Lumber Company with P. J. Anderson as manager in December of 1921. Tillman Sandaker was manager from 1926 until 1942, when the stock was sold to the Montana Lumber and Hardware Company. Rogers-Templeton Lumber Company (Lots 13-14, Block 3, Lepper) was managed by O. G. Rosing in 1918.

The rapidly growing town was in need of overnight lodging when Emil Schmidt built the first hotel in the spring of 1915. The Schmidt Hotel (Lot 17, Block 9, Main) was a two-story structure containing 24 rooms. Under the ownership of Robert Hogg in 1925, it was renamed the Commercial Hotel. Although there were several succeeding owners, the name remained unchanged. The building was dismantled in 1967. Charles Jarrett built the Jarrett Hotel (Block 16, Main)
soon after the Schmidt Hotel was completed. It was later known as the Central Hotel which burned in the big fire of September 1929. The Park Hotel (Lot 14, Block 17, Lepper) served as a school dormitory the school year of 1920-1921. It was a hospital in 1924 (See NICHOLSON). In 1926 it became the Masonic Temple and remains that in 1989.

While Walter Winnett was operating his store, he commenced building a large warehouse (Lots 5-6-7, Block 7, Grand). The first story of the building was built of Eagle sandstone quarried from the local rimrock. However, Mr. Winnett disposed of his store business before the building was completed, and as a result, he decided the town needed an opera house more than he needed a warehouse. The building plan was modified, and two stories were added with lumber sawed at Mr. Winnett’s sawmill near the Musselshell River. The structure, completed in 1916, was used as an opera house until 1918, when it was converted into a hotel building. In the fall of 1918, the would-be hotel became the first school dormitory. It served this purpose during the 1918-1920 school years. Frank Millsap bought the building for use as a hotel in June of 1920. It was appropriate that this building constructed of all local Montana materials was named the Montana Hotel. The hotel operated for 25 years. The school district purchased the building in 1945 for use as a school dormitory. It then served as a church and home for a minister and his family in 1950, and finally, was razed by the school district in 1960. Some timbers and other lumber from the historic hotel live on in the First Baptist Church.

In about 1916 or early 1917, William Dickson built the town’s first theater. It was named the Arlsto (Lot 1, Block 16, Main). Some school and sundry supplies were offered for sale there, and the building, in addition to being a theater, served as a gymnasium for high school and adult athletes until the school’s first gymnasium was completed in 1921. Commencement exercises for the first Winnett

One of the few pictures of the first Arlsto. Schoolgirls Velma Woodard, Inez Anderson and Thelma Brown about 1918
East end of Main Street near corner of Lepper and Main before construction of the Winnett Block (present courthouse). Note tennis courts immediately behind what would become the courthouse. Stone construction on far right became the Montana Hotel. The Winnett Land Company in foreground was owned by A. W. and R. Ogg.

Another view of empty corner lot where Winnett Block would be built in 1917. North side of street shows stone work for Montana Hotel. Log Cabin Saloon, Winnett barn and ranch bunkhouse (later Ranchers Rooms).
High School graduating class were held there in the spring of 1919. The building, later owned by Rudy Beck, became the Beck Hall, the American Legion Athletic Hall, the Palm Garden, the Olympic Bowling Lane, the Eager Mercantile and finally, the beautiful Love Bird Cafe, which burned September 1, 1929. Mr. Dickson sold the first Aristo building and had a second Aristo built. (Block 14, Main) It was a fine brick and tile structure that opened in November of 1921. Besides serving as a movie theater and ice cream parlor, it was the scene of commencement exercises, funerals, political rallies, boxing bouts, dancing, roller skating and home talent plays, before being dismantled in 1942.

Several other theaters operated in later years. The Winnett Theater (Block 7, Main) was established in August of 1921 by Harold W. Berry. The Winnett Theater also extended theatrical service to Cat Creek during the boom years. In 1932 the building became Vane Catlin’s Service Station, which burned in 1937. The Peoples Theater, operated by William Grieble, operated for about a year. The first location was in the Moll building, and the second in the center of the Winnett Block during 1927-1928. In 1945 Lloyd Lafond converted the original Basin Lumber building into the Rimrock Theater. The original Central Billiard Parlor, known as the Tunnicliff Hall, served as a theater for a short time also.

Rudy and Freida Beck built a slaughter house on their homestead south of town. They processed their own meat and sold it at their Enterprise Meat Market (Block 17, Main). They sold the business to J. Otis Mudd and Frank Bockman in 1921. A new building was built (Lot 4, Block 16) which burned in 1929.

Mrs. Klein (Mary Anna) Cole managed the Bachelor Cafe, which was west of the Central Billiard Parlor. Schuyler “Scotty” Spears operated his restaurant in the Moll building. Mrs. O. S. Thompson and Ray Badger were early restaurateurs.

William Northrup, a crippled man, owned and operated a barbershop (Block 10, Main), and besides cutting men’s hair and shaving faces, he offered haircuts, facials and manucures to ladies. The Northrup building later became a furniture exchange store. Mrs. Walker’s millinery and dress shop, Longpre Bakery, Eager Mercantile, and now a storage building (known as the Bauer building). Reportedly, there was also a barber chair in the Log Cabin Saloon, and Len Hoyle was one of the very early barbers.

Although there have been reports of a very small earlier burial ground on the northeast edge of the rimrocks, it was not until July 1916 that serious consideration was given to the establishment of a cemetery. At that time, William Stockton was engaged to survey and lay out the lots and streets of the graveyard, which is located in the lee of a hill about one-half mile north of town.

Apparently the first physician to serve the early town of Winnett was Dr. Brown from Grassrange. He came to Winnett when called. Dr. J. L. Alexander was the first resident doctor (17 Lepper Ave.) He came in 1915 and cared for Petroleum County patients until his death in 1948. Dr. Kent W. Berry arrived in 1921. When the Winnett Hospital was established by Mrs. Lyda Nicholson, R. N., and Stella Yoovedian, R. N., in March 1924, Dr. Berry was the surgeon. The hospital was in the Park Hotel building (See also NICHOLSON).

Mrs. Volney (Ella) Wiggins conducted a Rimrock Hospital, a maternity hospital, between the years of 1922 and 1927. She also cared for some of Dr. Alexander’s bedridden patients. The building (7th Ave. E., Rimrock Addition) was later moved to the Harmon Grosboll Ranch in the Petrolia area.

A dentist, Dr. R. R. Robinson, with offices in the Hover building, and later in the Winnett Block, arrived in Winnett in 1921. Another dentist, Dr. Knight, later served the community on a scheduled basis until the late 1920s.

An optometrist, Dr. George A. Lhamon, came to Winnett every sixty days through the early boom years and saw his patients at the Schmidt Hotel.

R. J. Woods arrived in Winnett in September of 1914 and established a drugstore (Block 17, Main). Reportedly another drugstore known as Central Drug was in operation for a short time during the oil boom, but no data is available for it. The Woods Drugstore closed in 1937. In February 1946, the Woods Drug building became the Smokehouse News Store in which magazines, cigars, cigarettes, and candy were sold. It was a very popular hang-out for youngsters, because it also had a jukebox, and young people were welcome to dance. There was no other drugstore until first Vern Scheurman, and then

Rudy Beck’s meat market parade float in 1916 parade

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Arthur Kencke, both registered pharmacists, offered prescription service in 1946 in the I.O.O.F. hall building. That pharmacy closed in 1959 and became the Winnett Drug and Gift Shop under the management of Gladys Long.

Dan Sommerfield and his wife, Alice, on the porch of their Harness Shop, visit with Milt Rice and Bill Petrusch.

There were harness shops and livery stables to care for the needs of horse-powered transportation. Charles Pullin, Frank Nelson, Walter Winnett and Tom Carr, among others, ran livery stables. I. S. Shine opened a harness shop in 1914, and Daniel Sommerfield mended harnesses, collars, saddles and bridles in the two-story Harness Shop building (Block 15 So. Broadway).

Motorized vehicles fast replaced the faithful "hayburners." Three garages were established — the Wide Awake Garage (Block 11, Moulton) in 1916, the Motor Inn Garage (Block 10, Broadway) in 1916, and the Winnett Garage (Block 8, Ashley) in 1916. The Petroleum County Shop in 1989 is located to the rear of the former garage.

In 1916 Walter Winnett began the construction of a large two-story, Eagle sandstone building. Reportedly, Croatian stonemasons were engaged in building the structure. The sandstone, when first blasted, is of a soft texture which can quite easily be carved and chipped into building blocks. However, its composition is such that the longer it is exposed to the elements, the harder and more firm it becomes. The lumber for the interior of the edifice was freighted from Grassrange by wagon. The new building, known as the Winnett Block (Lots 10-11-12, Block 7, Main) was ready for occupancy by the fall of 1917. The west portion of the main floor was occupied by the First State Bank, the center section by the Winnett Times printing shop, and the east portion by the Montana Lumber and Hardware Company. A restaurant was in the basement, and business offices occupied the top floor.

Twelve years later, Mr. Benjamin F. Lepper, by then the owner, remodeled the building for a courthouse and leased it to Petroleum County for $200 a month, giving the county an option to purchase for $31,000. With rent money applied against the purchase price, the county did not buy the building until after Mr. Lepper's death. On March 1, 1943, the building was purchased from the Lepper estate for $6400. Under the terms of the original contract, $27,600 had been paid in rent, making the total cost $34,000. However, Mr. Lepper had paid $4000 in taxes on the building throughout the years, which made the actual cost to the county $30,000. In this Montana State Centennial year of 1989, it remains a beautiful stone building, and Petroleum County residents are proud to claim it as their courthouse.

Jacob Vogel wrote on the back of this picture: "This is the new stone $40,000 building at Winnett, Montana. Mr. Winnett built it, but he had a wool clip worth $50,000; so I guess he could afford to do it!" Jacob Vogel is seated behind the wheel of his Model T with Ella Dyer and young William Vogel in the back seat (1919).
In 1977 Frank Valach, a son of John Valach (who built the present Masonic Temple building, the second Aristo, the Hover building, and many other brick and tile structures during the oil boom), and Frank’s son, Robert, renovated the basement into a functional hospitality area. Senior citizens enjoy a weekly meal and sociability there. It is used for many business gatherings and parties.

One of the most important events for Winnett was the arrival of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad on October 10, 1917. There was a gigantic celebration. The fine local band, under the direction of Dr. J. L. Alexander, enthusiastically greeted the first train. A local girl drove the “golden” spike that completed the rail line, and Winnett was on the railroad! A huge parade and picnic was followed by a rip-roaring rodeo.

The train rendered a vital service to the community for many years. Bigger trucks, better highways, and more efficient oil pipelines all contributed to a decline in the demand for railway service, and daily freight service was discontinued in 1956. On October 29, 1965, the depot closed. Commissioned freight service continued for a time, but in September 1972 the last train whistle was heard in Winnett as the small train chugged its way west to Lewistown.

The arrival of telegraphy in Winnett coincided with the arrival of train service in October of 1917. It was Winnett’s first rapid communication link with outside points. Mordecai J. Boyd, an expert and experienced telegrapher, was the depot agent for the Milwaukee Railroad. Many Winnett people remember entering the depot and hearing the pecking noise of a Morse code message being received or transmitted. The staccato sounds represented different letters and numerals which were transcribed into words by the telegrapher. Transmission was by telegraph wires strung on telegraph poles which paralleled the railroad track. The slang expression for telegram was “wire.” Railroads used telegraphy for all their internal business communications, but service was available to the public as well.

Words were carefully chosen when sending a message since the charge was based on the number of words in addition to the address. The initial charge was for ten words, the cost increasing with each additional word. The word “stop” was used in place of a period, since punctuation had to be spelled out. All capital letters were used. A message might read: AUNT KATE DIED STOP CAN YOU COME STOP FUNERAL PENDING. A “night letter,” consisting of more words, could be sent at reduced cost but delivery was not made until the following day.

A telegraph service which was commonly used in earlier days, and can still be used today, was that of sending money. It was a safe sure way to quickly send money which was easily converted to cash with none of the problems attendant to cashing a personal check.

The first telegrams or wires were hand delivered from the depot to local residents. After telephones became common, the message was telephoned from the local
telegraph office to the recipient. Messages to people outside of the city limits were often mailed, sometimes causing frustrating delays.

It is assumed the telegraph system was discontinued in Winnett with the closing of the depot in October of 1965.

The homesteaders who had been fortunate enough to acquire productive land reaped some fine harvests from the newly-turned virgin soil. Two elevators were opened in Winnett in November 1917 to receive their produce. The Western Lumber and Grain was managed by George W. Conrad and was located west of the Milwaukee depot. That elevator eventually became known as the Montana Elevator Company. The building still stands in 1989 and is used as grain storage for the Bohn Ranch of Petrolia. Ted Hegna owned and operated the other elevator which was just east of the depot. It was known as the T. E. Hegna Elevator Company and later became known as the Farmers Union Elevator. It served the area until 1935, when it was dismantled by the Hegnas.

The Town of Winnett attained legal status with the meeting of the first Town Council on August 5, 1918. This historic meeting was held in the law office of the Town Clerk/Attorney, Nick Langhausen, with Peter J. Anderson as Mayor, Robert J. Woods as Treasurer, and John Jensen, Charles E. Pullin, Henry T. Knapp and Werner G. Hagemann forming the council.

Licensing of businesses was a matter of immediate concern and eighteen categories of businesses were defined, with a license fee established for each. It is interesting to note that these charges were, in every instance, the same as or more than the amount charged today (1989). It seems there might have been some discrimination practiced at that time as “each male engaged in laundry business” required a license, but nothing is mentioned about those of the fairer sex.

The “moral health” of the community was also a matter of great concern to the early councils and many ordinances were passed to ensure this “health.” No pianos, player or electric, or other musical instruments of any kind were allowed in a business where there were pool, billiard or bagatelle tables. It was illegal for anyone under the age of 18 (later changed to 19) to be where these games were played. No gambling was allowed; drunkenness, obscene language, cruelty to animals, operation or frequenting of houses of ill-fame were all subject to severe penalties. Operation of an “opium joint” had its own section of local law and was, of course, strictly forbidden.

Building codes were addressed, and all buildings within one block of Main Street were required to have “a good substantial chimney of brick, tile, concrete or stone.” Coalholes in the sidewalks were required to be flush with the walk, not more than 24” in maximum dimensions and covered with cast iron, suitably roughed. Coalbins, ash and swill barrels were prohibited on the sidewalks.

Furnishing water for the town people had always been a concern. The first sketchy history in regard to the water supply for the emerging homestead town was in September of 1914, when the Winnett Times reported a diamond drill “in the hands of experts” was about to begin drilling for water on the rimrock. The outcome of the venture is not clear. Almost immediately following incorporation of the town in 1918, however, a bond issue of $35,000 was approved for construction of a concrete storage reservoir 35’ in diameter and 22’ deep and a distribution system. (The reservoir, incidently, is still being used in 1989.) It can be assumed that the water from the aforementioned well and from a spring atop the rimrock was gravity-piped in wooden lines to the reservoir.

“Uncle” Ben Wood (Sec 32-15-27) had dug an 80’ well on his farm in the Brush Creek country and secured a voluminous supply of excellent drinking water. With a horse-drawn tank wagon, and later with a tank truck, he hauled and sold water by the bucket to the families who were not connected to the town’s small water system. In order to draw the attention of the waterman, a “WATER” sign was displayed in the window of the home owner when water was needed.

By the time a town council was organized, Winnett was entering the age of modern conveniences, and the council strove to implement orderly development.

Individually-owned generating plants brought electricity to the earliest businesses and larger homes of Winnett. In March of 1919 a franchise was granted to Werner G. Hagemann for the first commercial light plant in Winnett. His was a very small plant, and it was not long before another source of electricity had to be located.

Frank Seal, an electrical engineer from Great Falls, Montana, was granted a franchise in June of 1921. His plant, known as the Winnett Electric Light and Power Company was capable of lighting 4000 25-watt lamps at any time of day or night, with the generator having access to 100 horsepower furnished by two semi-diesel crude-oil-burning engines. The plant and office (Lot 10, Block 17) opened in late July of 1921 — operating at first only until midnight, with the promise of 24-hour service and power for motors to be added later.

The plant was the scene of a serious accident in December of that year. An air-pressure tank, which was used for starting the large crude-oil-burning engines, exploded, causing the death of Everest A. West, a visitor to the plant. Daytime engineer Clarence Enlow was seriously injured and suffered a 60% disability of his left arm. The state boiler inspector asserted that the accident was due entirely to the tank being defective — the manufacturer had overestimated the strength of the product. Whereupon Frank Seal vowed: “Tank, or no tank, and regardless of strength or size, there will never be another in this building. The tank goes into the ground as soon as we can put it there!”

The Winnett Electric Light and Power Company continued to operate until February of 1925, when it sold all its holdings and franchise to Barney and Frank Winkes. The company was renamed the City Light Company and was
moved to a new location (Lots 13-14, Block 2, North Broadway). Another 100-horsepower engine was added and 24-hour power and light service instituted. New meters were installed for all patrons.

Harry Hafer and Al Johnson of Lewistown purchased the City Light Company and the Winkes home in 1937. They, in turn, sold to Joe Pitman in April of 1943.

Town residents and their country neighbors signed up for rural electric service, and in 1947 Joe Pitman sold his local electric plant to Fergus Electric Cooperative, which serves Winnett in 1989.

In April 1919 the Burt Sisters secured a franchise for their telephone system. Mr. and Mrs. John Burt had installed telephone service in Grassrange in 1918, and their two daughters — Blanche and Matty — operated the Winnett exchange. The Grassrange line was extended the 23 miles east to hook up with the new system. Oil companies in September 1920 extended a line from Cat Creek to their loading docks in Winnett and to the Burt Sisters’ exchange.

Burt Sisters Telephone Company had been in business for forty years when it was sold to Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative in July of 1959. Mid-Rivers provides telephone service to the entire town and county in 1989.

Whenever people congregate in one spot, there are always a few, it seems, who are prone to follow a wayward trail and become a threat, if not a danger, not only to themselves, but to others. To protect the law-abiding citizens of Winnett from these rogues, the Milwaukee Land Company donated Lot 1 in Block 5 to the town for use as a jail in January of 1919.

This resume of the birth and growth of the town of Winnett up to 1920 is intended to give the reader a picture of the town whose growth was spurred by the arrival of the homesteaders. (Please see the later sections which address the development of the schools and churches of Winnett.) By 1918 the town’s growth was beginning to falter. 1918 was a year of severe drought, and a quietus of building descended upon the town. The summer of 1919 was equally dry, and many settlers were leaving the land. Worry was rife among both town and country citizens.

The winter of 1919 arrived with a vengeance in October. A heavy, wet snow fell, and on October 26, 1919, the government thermometer at the weather station on the Wiggins Ranch registered thirteen degrees below zero — the coldest reported that early in any year. The low temperature changed the heavy snowfall into a veritable sea of ice. (For more on that winter, see CORNUE — Petrolia.) In addition to the cold discomfort of it all, local businessmen knew that the farmer’s plight directly affected their own economic outlook.

The town had its own problems. Water lines froze, and the water delivery wagon had difficulty making rounds. There was a coal strike, and local bins were depleted early in the season, with no replacement coal to be obtained. There were some days when business places opened their doors for only a few hours in order to preserve their inadequate fuel supply.

Oil Boom Town

Looking east from the corner of Broadway and Main (1920). Note popcorn wagon on left corner and the lack of sidewalks.

On a weekend in February 1920, a rumor circulated in town regarding a possible oil strike in the Cat Creek area. The rumor was verified when Editor Edward M. Berg printed a special edition of the Winnett Times on February 25, 1920, with a banner headline that proclaimed: ‘FIRST WELL IN FERGUS COUNTY COMES IN WITH GREEN OIL PRODUCTION MONDAY’. Words can scarcely describe the sudden excitement and tumultuous growth of the town which had so recently been worried about its own survival. The population increased faster than buildings could be constructed and ‘tent’ homes and places of business sprang up.
North side of Main Street looking east from Broadway, left to right (1920)

**Block 8, Lots 4-12**
- 4 Winnett Grocery
  (First State Bank 1917)
- 5 Boyes Sombor? tailor
- 6 Pullins
- 7 Rainbow Cafe
- 8 Dugan barbershop
- 9 Savoy Hotel
- 10 Butte Block
  (hotel and cafe)
- 11 Bakery
- 12 Wenona Service Station
  (Coles station 1933)

**Block 7, Lots 12-15**
- 12-11-10 Winnett Block
  (First State Bank, Winnett
  Times, Montana Hardware)
  courthouse after 1929
- 9 (Montana Lumber and Hardware
  after 1929)
- 7 Winnett Theater with
  confectionery and
  tobacco shop in front
- 6 Cash Meat Market

**Block 7 addition**
- Log Cabin Saloon (1912)
- Delco Cafe?

Montana Hotel on east
center of block

**Block 9, Lots 6-17**
- 6 vacant
- 7 popcorn wagon
- 8 Pastime Parlor
  (former Bachelor)
- 9 Hover building
- 10 Winnett Cafe
- 11 vacant
- 12 Central Billiard Parlor
  (former Shumate)
  (Winnett Bar 1989)
- 13 Oil Cafe
- 14 "barber-drinks"
  (later Town Cafe)
- 16 vacant
- 17 Schmidt Hotel
  (Commercial 1925)

Business locations marked with an asterisk have been verified by deed or town plat records. Lots facing Main Street and Broadway Avenue are, with only one or two exceptions, 25 feet by 140 feet. All other lots, including residential lots, are 50 feet by 140 feet. The lots are not uniformly numbered in all blocks.

On the north side of Main Street numbering begins, in most instances, with Lot 1 in the northwest corner of each block, with three lots on the west side, lots 4-15 facing Main, and lots 16-17-18 on the east.

Businesses on the west end of north Main Street which do not show in the picture include **Block 11**: Wilson Building (later Stenson Garage, Winnett Times); **Block 10**: millinery shop (1922) in former Northrup barbershop; Eager Mercantile and warehouse (later first courthouse on corner of Broadway and Main).
Block 16, Lots 1-12
- 1 Aristo, 1st
- 2 Smokehouse Billiard
- 3 Palm Garden Confectionery (1923)
- 4 2nd Enterprise Meat Market
- 5 Jarrett Hotel (later Central Hotel)
- 6 Thompson Restaurant (1915)
- 7 Toggery (1916), First Hub (1921), Blumenfield's Cafe (1921), Mother Stewart's Cafe
- 8 Creet and Opp (1921), Winnett Land Co. #2 (1921), Second Hub (Oct. 1921)
9 vacant, 10-11 unknown
12 Bandstand

On the south side of Main Street, Lot 1 is the first lot on the west end of each block with 12 lots facing Main Street. The numbering continues 13-18 around the block with the six larger lots facing the avenues.

Businesses on west end of South Main Street which do not show in picture include Block 14: Burt Sisters Telephone, Valley Lumber (Catholic Church, 1925); Block 15: 2nd Aristo (1921), Kragrud Furniture (1921), Winkes Bros. Store (1921), Marti Bros. (1921).

Several interesting features on a 1922 fire-rating map deserve mention. The map lists the population of Winnett at 1213 in September 1922. Seventeen men, including a fire chief, made up the volunteer fire department. The department had at its disposal two hand hose carts and one hand hook and ladder truck with 1000 feet of standard hose. A fire bell was noted. (Reportedly the fire bell was the bell which originally adorned the Winnett residence.)

During prohibition (1919-1933) billiard parlors replaced bars. The 1922 fire map lists four "billiard-drink" establishments, one "barber-drink" combination, three "drink" businesses in addition to four confectioneries, five restaurants, and a "soda pop" factory.

The fire map also shows 10 "lodging" businesses in addition to two hotels. Eight "ice" buildings — small wooden structures on the alley behind business places — are also indicated!
On April 2, 1920, a *Winnett Times* article stated: "Twenty-two four-horse teams left Winnett Tuesday morning with supplies for the oil field." In August of 1920 the first oil from Cat Creek flowed through a pipeline laid on top of the ground to Winnett. It was loaded into railroad cars and the thrice-weekly train schedule was increased to, on occasion, three trains a day!

In June of 1921 when a rodeo was held in Winnett, a headline in the *Winnett Times* read, "Thirty hotels and rooming houses are packed to capacity for the big stampede and rodeo." Many were the stories of beds in halls and lobbies, and of the tent hotel wherein the beds, not the rooms, were rented and not by the day, but by the shift. One man would crawl out of bed and another fall wearily in.

In the summer of 1921 the newspaper reported, "Within just six weeks in 1921 there were 48 new homes built. It is predicted that with the first hint of cold weather, many of those who are living in tents will hurry to build their houses."

Listings in the *Polk Directory* and a count of advertisements in the weekly newspaper indicates there were nearly 200 businesses and a population of about 1200 people in Winnett by the end of 1921.

The oil business was not without its financial disasters and corporate maneuvering. The *Independent Pipeline Company* laid 19 miles of six-inch oil line from Cat Creek to Winnett and built a loading rack about one mile east of Winnett. The company also built two 55,000-barrel storage tanks — one at the loading racks and one in Cat Creek. They invested over $400,000 in the venture. However, the Mutual Oil Company and its affiliate, the Standard Oil Company, secured the greatest share of the oil production in the field, and with their great storage facilities and both a two-inch and a four-inch pipeline to the railhead in Winnett, there was no need for the Independent's six-inch line. The Independent Pipeline Company, with no oil to transport, met with complete failure. The company proclaimed its grievance to the world on a sign which was erected near its loading racks and read (W.T. 9-29-22):

"HERE LIES THE INDEPENDENT PIPELINE WITH NO OIL TO TRANSPORT — A HALF MILLION DOLLAR TRIBUTE TO THE UNSCRUPULOUS, PERFIDIOUS, SMOTHERING, FALSE PROPAGANDA OF THE STANDARD MONOPOLY."

On June 6, 1921, sod was turned for the first oil refinery in Winnett. Built near the Independent Pipeline storage tank, it was to be fed by the Independent Pipeline. The refinery, known as the *Great Northern Refinery*, was completed, and the first tank car of gasoline refined in Winnett was shipped on November 1, 1921. The fate of the Great Northern Refinery is not documented in the local newspaper. However, according to the *Winnett Times*, the Independent Pipeline Company was sold at a sheriff's sale to satisfy a debt of $51,660.09 to the Continental Supply Company in April 1923. The *Winnett Times* (6-5-1925) also reported, "The Continental Supply Company this week deeded the former Independent pipeline to the Mutual Oil Company for a consideration of $60,000."

Not a part of the townsite, but certainly a part of the town's history, was the *Weowna Refinery*. A small refinery, it had been built by Batchler and Miller at Cat Creek and was moved to Winnett in October 1921. It was located on the east side of McDonald Creek not far from the Milwaukee railroad tracks. In just 19 days, it was erected and ready to refine gasoline, kerosene, naphtha, and fuel oil. Oil was piped from the *Elk Basin* supply tanks on the hill to the refinery's storage of 20,000 barrels capacity, and the finished product was piped to the company's loading rack for shipment by rail.
J. Otis Mudd behind the counter of the Enterprise Meat Market. Mr. Mudd and Frank Boeckman owned the market from 1921 until it burned in 1929.

Interior of the Monarch Lumber and Hardware Company
By July of 1922 the refinery was shipping a railroad tank car of gasoline daily. In January of 1923 the Weowna was enlarged with an additional storage capacity of 20,000 barrels. Its output of gasoline, heavy fuel, kerosene and light fuel was 810,158 gallons for the month of January 1923. The business prospered for about three years. Then financial problems developed and in 1927 the refinery was sold at a sheriff’s sale. It resumed operation under new management in June of 1929, was sold for taxes in October 1929, and operated on a small scale for only a few years thereafter.

Another refinery was built near the creek east of town in 1936. When oil was drilled on government lands, the government royalties were paid in barrels of crude oil. The Yale Oil Company was the highest bidder for the crude in 1936, and the company constructed a facility to refine the crude. Yale Oil Company lost the bid to Continental Oil Company in 1937, and the Yale refinery in Winnett was dismantled.

Another business closely connected with the oil industry moved from Lewistown to Winnett in 1921. (W.T. 9-16-1921) "This week the Oil Fields Bulletin widely known as Montana’s first oil journal, is published at Winnett instead of at Lewistown as formerly. Sam W. Teagarden, after publishing the magazine successfully at Lewistown for some time, decided to move the oil fields journal to where the oil fields are in order to render better service to his readers and advertisers."

"The bulletin has a wide circulation throughout the American continent and has established a reputation for authentic information . . ." Mr. Teagarden’s offices were in the Winnett Block. F. H. Safford assisted in the publication. The Montana Oil Journal has continued to be published throughout the years and presently (1989) has offices at Billings, Montana.

It is fortunate the town of Winnett had already been legally organized and was in operation as a town before the onrush of the oil boom. Winnett was reclassified as a city of the third class in April of 1922 with a population of 1213. Though only estimates are available, some say a population of about 2000 was reached sometime in 1923. By that time, oil production had stabilized and new well-drilling activity slackened when no new fields were discovered. By 1930 the population of the town was only 408 people. In 1932 the council discussed returning to a "town" status. It appears that this was not accomplished until May of 1937. In the meantime it had been necessary to provide a number of services to the town and the community.

Recreation and Parks

When the town of Winnett was platted, W. J. Winnett, who had previously owned the land in Sec 6-14-27, deeded some of the lots as a gift to the town of Winnett with the stipulation that the tract be reserved forever as a park. McDonald Creek, with many twistings and turnings meandered leisurely through the area. So it was that in the early years, two natural swimming holes were located — one by the name of Little Casino for the very young and inexperienced swimmer — and the other, Big Casino for those who could swim. Big Casino eventually sported a diving board. The two pools were near to each other, so families could divide according to their swimming skills and still enjoy their time together. Parents and older family members instructed the younger children.

The pools, being situated as they were within city property, were governed by city laws and ordinances. Some rules were made in regard to propriety. The city fathers were especially opposed, it seems, to "skinny-dipping." In June of 1925 the following notice appeared in the Winnett Times: "NOTICE TO SWIMMERS — Any person or persons bathing in McDonald Creek within the city limits without bathing suits or other proper covering will be subject to immediate arrest and prosecution. Signed, George R. Waldrop, Mayor."

Just the week before, the Eager Mercantile had an ad in the paper: "Bathing suits for men, women and children. You do not have to be a judge of values to get a good bathing suit here — they are all good. We take care of that point when we select them for our stock."

There were apparently no opening dates for those early swimming holes. In 1928 the pool was unofficially opened on March 21st by five high school boys — Clayton Kruger, Rondall Brady, John Munson, Joe Kroetch and Clairmont Clark.

It was not until 1943 that the town attempted to provide a municipal pool. An excavation was dug on the corner of Main Street and South Broadway and filled with water from the city water mains. It was a very popular place for its few days of existence. Unfortunately the town’s water system could not keep up with the demand created by the thirsty dirt walls and floor, and the project was doomed to failure.

In 1962 the Phillips family donated two lots in Block 11 between Wheeler and Main streets, and a group of volunteers, headed by the Reverend David Zietlow, Robert Clark and Rudy Glatz, donated time, material and money to build a concrete pool. This pool deteriorated badly over the years and in the late 1970s application was made for a grant from the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation for replacement funds. After two years of local fund raising and inclusion of the George Ore Memorial Park recreation and picnic area improvements, these funds became available, and the present pool was constructed in 1981.

In these days (1989), a lifeguard is always on duty during regularly scheduled hours, and swimming classes for

Sidewalks and Streets

Three miles of concrete sidewalks were laid by the Miracle Concrete Construction Company during the summer and fall of 1922. Also that same fall a contract was awarded to Thomas Carr and Boone Kennedy for the scarifying, grading and graveling of the streets. Voters approved a $105,000 bond issue for these improvements.
different levels of experience are provided. Shades of Big and Little Casino — some days the water can scarcely be seen in the pool, because it is so thickly populated with swimmers on a hot summer afternoon! How proud the earlier town officials would have been!

The town sponsored a municipal golf course, north of town near the cemetery, and the first game played was against Roundup in April of 1926. (W.T. 4-16-26) "... The ladies of the club have arranged to have a tent on the course and serve hot coffee and sandwiches to the players... A great deal of work has been done on the fairway and greens... The posts along the fairway, as well as the sand boxes, have all been painted white. The greens have been oiled and leveled..."

Baseball was a favorite sport, and Winnett fielded a team that met Lewistown, Roundup, and all the neighborhood community teams. The baseball field, with even a bandstand and protected bleachers, was located in Block 20. John Merten’s suit imprinted "WEOWNA" is often seen at historical displays.

Tennis courts appear in some of the earliest pictures of the town. In 1937 a gravel court was constructed south of the schoolhouse. Of the older players, William Bennett, clerk of the school board and clerk of the town of Winnett, was the one to beat in those years. When the town’s streets were paved in the late 1970s a paved court was laid near the present (1989) football field.

Water and Sewer

Nothing could have been of more critical importance to the town than its water supply. Just before the discovery of oil, the town council contracted with N. J. Littlejohn to dig a city well in the alley in Block 7, to be used by those not connected to the water system. Digging was slow due to the layers of rock which had to be penetrated by blasting. The well was completed, and equipped with a hand pump. Residents of the town were allowed to obtain their water from the well.

The influx of oil people created an immediate demand for more water. In April of 1921, the town contracted with a resident geologist, C. J. Stone, to drill a well in the Rimrock Addition of the town. Stone was to be paid 10 cents per 100 gallons for water delivered into the reservoir. Meanwhile, Locksley Lantz contracted with the council to enlarge the good water well on the Phelps Millar farm north of town (Sec 33-15-27), install a pump, and deliver water via a two-inch water line to the city reservoir. By the end of September the Stone well had been completed and had 700 feet of excellent drinking water standing in the casing. Shooting the well created a 300-foot underground reservoir but did not increase the flow. A pump was installed and water piped to the tank on the hill, but the well produced for only a short time.

$1100 was raised by popular subscription to defray water expenses, and a pipeline was laid from the Wood farm to the city reservoir to supplement the water supply in October of 1922. Shortly thereafter a $52,000 bond issue was approved to enlarge the distribution system within the town.

By 1922 the great number of cesspools within the city were becoming a health and physical hazard. In December 1922 the Miracle Construction Company installed a trunk sewer system the full length of Main Street which fed into a disposal plant. Two main lines ran parallel to Main Street down the alleys on each side. The system was completed at a cost of $37,000. Sewerage for the southeast portion of town was not completed until 1934. If the sewer system was to work properly, it was necessary to have sufficient water flow through the sewer lines to keep them flushed out. This factor, along with the increased number of water customers, created a larger demand for water. The city contracted to have a well drilled in exchange for a water franchise. Water from this well flowed into the reservoir in October 1923, but by February 1925 the well failed. Lloyd Hassett, who was leasing the Wood farm and water route, was deluged with requests for water! Many more "WATER" signs appeared
in windows.

Ralph Bowen, from his farm on top of the rimrock, furnished some water to the water tank for a time, but badly deteriorated water lines (apparently from a very early water system) could not adequately deliver the water his wells produced. Fred Merten, also on the rimrock, drilled two wells which each initially produced 100 barrels a day. Windmills pumped the wells, and gravity took care of the flow to the reservoir.

The city council had a new water line laid from the wells on the rimrock to the tank, and in about 1926 the City Light Company agreed to take over the management of the water system. They installed an electric line to the top of the rimrock and replaced the time-honored but sometimes unreliable windmills with electric pumping power. The electric line, as well as a telephone line, was laid to the Merten home, and Mertens were put in charge of the pumping operation.

The wells on the rims, supplemented at times by Ole Rigg’s house-to-house delivery from the original Wood farm, supplied the town with water until 1935. At that time the town of Winnett was charged with the responsibility of furnishing 6000 gallons of water daily free of charge to a CCC camp, if the town wished to have a camp established in Winnett. The State Water Conservation Board agreed to pay the initial cost of drilling the wells. Installing electric pumps and supply lines with a loan agreement which stated that 12 months after the camp was abandoned, the city would pay a regular monthly sum from their water revenue to repay the water board. Local driller Perry Miller was contracted to drill two wells on top of the rimrock. Each well was 120 feet deep and furnished the needed water supply.

In 1937 a government-financed artesian well was drilled in Block 13 of the Rimrock Addition. Farmers were allowed to haul from it. The well came in with such pressure that no pump was required for the first years to force the water to the reservoir on the rimrock. After that, deep-well and booster pumps were added. The town leased the well from the federal government. It was a good source of water for over 30 years until caving problems developed.

The 1960 decade saw the ecological-awareness programs, and that is when the townspeople agreed to bond themselves to build the first sewer lagoon to eliminate the dumping of raw sewage into McDonald Creek. These turned out to be the first aerated lagoons in eastern Montana and were promised to be adequate for at least 20 years. However, within 10 years the Environmental Protection Agency insisted that they no longer provided the necessary protection for downstream waters. A matching grant was secured from EPA and the third lagoon was added to the system with a complete updating of aeration equipment.

In 1972 another deep well was drilled at the base of the rimrock near the east end of town (Lot 6, Block 1, Rimrock Addition). The well was a fine producer, but the town distribution system had badly disintegrated. Great leaks developed which were almost impossible to locate. The water would break out of a line, follow a gravel layer and enter the sewer. The sewer lagoons would be full and the water tank empty.

With the success of securing government aid fresh in their minds and the knowledge of several new programs available for municipal water systems, action was initiated to find funding to repair the badly deteriorated water distribution system. The town made application for grants from the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation as well as the Department of Commerce (Community Development Block Grant program) for funds to assist with replacing the system.

Both applications were approved in the first year, and although more money was to be borrowed for the project, a complete new distribution system was built in 1984. Another well was drilled and a new metering system was installed. The following year the approval of an additional grant from CDBG made it possible to increase the water storage capacity by adding another 10 feet to the height of the reservoir. A chlorination system was added in 1987.

The residents of Winnett in 1989 are blessed with an adequate water supply — a living tribute to the past and present mayors, councilmen, clerks, water commissioners and general laborers. Theirs have been the hours of sleep lost — sometimes just in worry; theirs were the hours spent groveling in the mud repairing broken lines; and more recently, theirs were the hours spent in properly preparing detailed and complicated grant applications. Empathy is to be felt for those who hold the most poignant memory of all — the helpless feeling, while fighting a devastating fire, of the fire hose on their shoulders becoming suddenly limp from lack of water.

Fires

AND devastating fires there were! The first major fire was that of the Pribble Implement on July 20, 1921. The next major fire came on September 30, 1921. It burned the Winnett Soft Drink establishment, the Army and Navy Store, the Munroe Hotel, the Cecil Hotel and the Winnett Post Office — all in Block 18. December 19, 1921, the Field Hotel (location not known) burned and on September 8, 1926, the Leader Hotel (Block 3, Broadway) succumbed to an electric-wiring-malfunction fire. The Cosmopolitan Rooms and the adjoining Riley Cafe, both owned by Hattie Neville, (Block 9, Broadway) turned to ashes October 11, 1927.

Nine buildings fell as the result of a block-size fire on September 1, 1929. The buildings were: the Love Bird Cafe owned by Mable Towne; Eager Mercantile Company; Shipton Soft Drink; Enterprise Meat Market owned by J. Otis Mudd and Frank Boeckman; Central Hotel, owned by James Weaver; Mother’s Cafe, owned by Mary Stewart; Hub Clothing, owned by Sol Stormwind; the Rudy Beck residence and garage; and the Sol Stormwind residence (all Block 16).
The Alaska Hotel, location unknown, burned in the early 1930s. Harry West’s barbershop, Len Hoyle’s barbershop and the Savoy Hotel (Block 8, Main) all were razed by fire on October 30, 1931. The Eager Mercantile Store, which had served as the first Petroleum County courthouse in 1925, was lost on January 30, 1945.

In May of 1960, the Town Tavern, operated by Pearl and Thamar Mart, the Town Cafe, run by Charles and Lois Poulton, and the Winnett Barbershop (Block 9, Main) were burned. Floyd’s Bar (Lot 7, Block 17) burned in May 1966.

Cliff’s Auto Service, the former Broadway Garage, was gutted by fire in January of 1967. The Gusher Bar, which had been the Winnett Post Office from 1921 to 1926, was completely destroyed by fire in March of 1975.

The last major fire destroyed the T. N. Sandaker building, owned by Joe Whisonant, in August 1986. The building had housed the State Liquor Store at one time and was part of the Monarch Lumber Company’s yard.

The Town Cafe and Town Tavern both burned in 1960. This picture was taken in the 1940s.
Mother Stewart's Cafe (Lot 7, Block 16). The Eager Mercantile calendar on the wall is dated June 1929 — two months before the huge fire which destroyed Block 16. Behind the counter are Minnie Huot, Alice Wadman; on stools, Lillian Wadman and Cora Weaver; Mother Stewart standing beside the table. Cora Weaver lost her hotel next door in the same fire.

Harold "Pete" Tunnicliff and Ed Stauffer (Brumberger) in "Pete and Otto's" Town Tavern in 1939.
Civilian Conservation Corps

In 1935 the town experienced an interesting revival when contingencies of Civilian Conservation Corps young men arrived in Winnett. They had come to this area to construct a new intake ditch into War House Butte Reservoir and to build the Yellow Water Dam. Their camp was in a bend of McDonald Creek near the east end of the town's rimrock. There were some who were awry-eyed and who clucked their tongues when first they heard of the camp's location within walking distance of the town. They could easily imagine the havoc that might be wrought as a consequence of having 200 young men turned loose on the town. The army-disciplined young men were found to conduct themselves as well as any of the home-grown boys, and the town and community soon opened their hearts and homes to them. The camp's last reveille and taps were heard in September of 1938.

Mini Oil Boom

A minor increase in population was noted in 1945-46 when more oil was discovered on the Mosby Dome near Cat Creek. In April 1946 the Winnett Times headlined an article "14 New Businesses Opened in Winnett." The article went on to say, "Incredible as it may seem, fourteen new businesses have been established, eleven of them already being in operation. They are: Rimrock Theater, operated by Lloyd Lafond; Shell Station, operated by E. M. 'Murry' Palin; the Antlers secondhand store; the old school dormitory boarding and rooming house; the Arras Tank Co.; the National Supply Co., serving drilling operations; the New Winnett Cafe; the Smokehouse, owned by R. W. Gilmore; three new bars, the Mint Bar and Lounge, the Rotary Inn, and the Gusher Bar and Lounge. Soon to be in operation are the City Food Lockers cold storage system; a drug store and a laundry." The small boom was of short duration. By 1950 the town's population was noted as 390. There has been no activity to stimulate growth since that time.

Town Government

In the early years, the town council meetings had been held in various locations such as Nick Langshausen's law office, the City Light Company office, the courthouse, Eager Mercantile Company, and the William Bennett home. Incidentally, Mr. Bennett's trailer, which he used as an office during the time he was town clerk, burned in the mid-1950s, and it is assumed that is the reason the minutes and other records of 1920 to 1926 are missing.

Town government did not have a home until the Soil Conservation Service building (Lot 20, Block 16, Broadway) was acquired in the mid-1950s. This gift from the federal government was with the stipulation that the
Ted Bayer, CCC enrollee, takes time out for chow on the job at War House Lake

Neat rows of cots and foot lockers in the CCC barracks

Kitchen crew on duty in the efficient CCC camp kitchen
building be used for education or health purposes. Use as only a town clerk's office did not meet this requirement. The public library was in need of space, so the mayor appointed a committee to make the necessary cooperative arrangements to secure the building for joint use by the town council and the library.

The building request was granted and the library occupied the main portion of the building, fulfilling the educational requirement. The town clerk established an office in the small addition on the north side of the building. Council meetings were held in the library. At this time the water and sewer accounts were a portion of the job of the water commissioner, and the records were kept in his home.

Hover Building as it appeared in the 1940s. Built in 1920 for the Hover-Schwarz Oil Co., it became the Hansen Cafe in 1931 and, after prohibition, the Hansen Cafe and Beer Parlor. Later owners included Stauffachers, Myers, Hougren, Quigley, Calveri and Pinkerton. The Stockman Bar closed in 1980 and the building was demolished shortly thereafter. (See also HOVER -- Winnett)

Winnett Public Library and City Offices

When the library moved to new quarters in the school in 1974, the town office was moved to the main part of the building, and the water and sewer accounting became the responsibility of the town clerk. This change fulfilled the requirement for health-related use of the building.

A list of elected town officials can be found in the Appendix.

Elmer Eager holds the record of being the longest serving mayor with 13 years, two months. William Bennett served as town clerk for 22 years. Orene Raundal Barbee has the honor of being the first woman to serve as a council member, being elected in 1969. Guri Cook, Eva Lengemann, Helen Quiggy, Donna Rabern and Luann Knutson have joined the ranks of women elected to the position in following years.

Public Library

Petroleum County residents have long appreciated the value of a public library. Even when space, professional people, and even books were limited, they still made every effort to provide some sort of service to readers of all ages.

The Winnett Times in the early 1940s

The Park Hotel, built before the 1920s, became the Masonic Temple in 1926. The building had served as a school dormitory (1920-21) and a hospital (1924).
The first documented effort was a simple book exchange. A shelf for reading material was maintained in the Snowflake Bakery in 1921. Patrons could exchange a book they wished to donate for a book on the shelf. No one monitored the exchange or worried about the ownership of the books. When the bakery closed, the service ended; but American Legion Auxiliary, Rebekah and Eastern Star members cooperated to establish a volunteer library in the basement of the courthouse.

Mrs. Harry West was the first librarian. When the Wests left Winnett in 1936, Mrs. Florence Kindt, also a reading enthusiast, became librarian. She and others volunteered their services to maintain a library for 22 years.

In 1950 Martha E. Hamilton, in her will, left a little over $4500 to the town of Winnett to be used for library purposes. When the town council became aware of an opportunity to utilize the old Soil Conservation Service building, if a library were to occupy a portion of the building, Mayor Rex Eger appointed a five-member committee to make the necessary arrangements to establish a library. Florence Kindt, Frances Eger, Fern Wacker, William Bennett and Rudy Glatz served on the committee. When Florence resigned to become the librarian, she was replaced by Hallie Tripp.

The minutes from the first board meeting of this group are full of hammers and nails and saws and paint. Shelves were built, lights were installed, and painting and varnishing was done — much of this by volunteer labor on the part of the committee members themselves. Finally on April 21, 1958, the library was formally opened with a reception and open house. The library operated and grew in these quarters. It became a legally constituted county library with a tax base, an appointed board of trustees, and better resources to serve the entire community. When the school board began planning a new facility, the library board asked that consideration be given to including a combined school-public library in the plan. Cooperation between the school board and the library board resulted in the establishment of the first combined elementary-high school-public library in the state. The joint library was dedicated on April 21, 1974, with Montana State Superintendent of Public Instruction Delores Colburg giving the dedication address. The community library has operated successfully since that time.

**State Visitors**

Two events during the 1980s gave Winnett statewide attention. In May 1980, the Montana State Board of Public Education held one of its regular two-day meetings in Winnett. State Board members were given the opportunity to view firsthand a Class C elementary and high school in operation and to ride a school bus on a regularly scheduled bus route.

As a special honor to the state board, the Petroleum County Community Library Board of Trustees invited the state board members to plant a tree commemorating their visit to Winnett. Marjorie King, as chairman of the State Board of Public Education, turned the first shovel of dirt for the commemorative planting.

Governor Ted Schwinden proclaimed Winnett "State Capitol for a Day" on October 23, 1987. The governor and several members of his staff were guests at an open meeting in the Petroleum County courthouse hospitality room. Later in the day, Governor Schwinden visited the local schools, where he quizzed some of the students as to whether or not they intended to remain in agriculture, and if they planned to attend school beyond high school.
1989 Town of Winnett

A phantom homesteader returned to Winnett in 1989 to survey the businesses and public institutions of the town of his past. The visit began at the west end of Main Street on the south side of the street. Looking to his right, his eyes first fell upon the Catholic Church. "I remember when this was the Eager Store, and then a school and church for several years. Later I bought lumber there when it was known as the Valley Lumber Company. The Catholic Church bought the building from the Eagers in 1924."

"The next business building is the D and E. Oh yes, Barney and Frank Winkes constructed that store in 1921 and named it the Winkes Brothers Grocery. The upper story was leased by fraternal lodges. George Waldrop bought the store in 1925, and Elmer Eager, William Herweg and Donald Gullickson were later owners. It is now the property of Ethel Gullickson and is unused. However, it was the site of a fine Montana State Centennial exhibition during the Winnett High School reunion of 1989.

"And next, this is the old Marti building. It was built during the oil boom as a grocery store. It became the post office in 1926 and remained that until 1972 when it became Winnit's fire hall where the ambulance and fire truck are stored.

"Kozy Korner — what an eye-catching name! It is a restaurant which was opened by James and Marge Johnson in 1984, with a bar added in 1986. I remember when it was known as the City Service Station owned by Dow Hough in 1936."

The phantom crossed Broadway Avenue but stayed on the south side of Main Street. He shook his head in wonder. "I remember when nine buildings burned along this block in 1929 and now there is only one business place. It is new — Gershmel's General Store — built in 1985. Gary and Linda Gershmel, owners, also handle Trustworthy Hardware supplies.

"Now there, across Lepper Avenue, is my old bank building. It opened as the Winnit State Bank in 1914 and later became the First National Bank. It merged with the First State Bank and became the Farmers and Merchants Bank until it closed in 1929. Art Moore owns the building now and uses it for his woodworking shop.

"The next two-story building — well, if it isn't the old Moll Pool Hall! The second floor was a meeting place for both the Masonic and Odd Fellow lodges. In about 1916 the meeting rooms served as classrooms for the school. When the Masons acquired their own building in 1926, the building became known as the I.O.O.F. or Odd Fellow Hall. It served many purposes and now is owned by Ralph Corbett and used for storage.

"The next building, after crossing Ashley Avenue, is evidently a residence, but behind the house I see the old Brown schoolhouse which formerly was east of Cat Creek. It was moved to Winnit for use as a home in 1945.

"The metal shop building next in line was constructed by William Britzius in 1948, and in the 1960s was a warehouse and office for Mid-Rivers Telephone Cooperative. And what a pity! The Winnit Ranch house should be next, but there is nothing to be seen of the old landmark."

The phantom old-timer continued across McDonald Creek in order to survey the full length of Main Street to the top of the rimrock hill. As he crossed the bridge, another memory came to mind. "I remember," he mused, "when the town first built a bridge here in the spring of 1918. The creek, at that time, was flowing over a wider and flatter plain several yards to the east. In the fall of 1918, Boone Kennedy was given the contract to change the channel of McDonald Creek and thus open for use the bridge which had been built.

Arriving at Seventh Avenue East, and looking south, the visitor saw the building which houses the government well which was drilled in 1937 but is no longer used. Looking farther south he could see the business quonsets of Bevis and Sons' construction and trucking business. Just west of the Bevises, on city park land, is the town's newest water well, drilled in 1984.

A little past Eighth Avenue East and directly under the rimrock, he could see some old buildings of the Rimrock Dairy which was operated from 1948 to 1959 by Ernest and Ruth Freburg. A little farther east, the town's blue-painted chlorination plant stands, and on Lot 6, Block 1, the town's other water well, drilled in 1972.

Making a U-turn on Main Street at the top of the hill, the viewer paused, and looking to the north, looked down upon three rather square pools of water and an orange building — the town's aerated lagoons and pump house. Just a little west of the pools could be seen the concrete forms of several buildings.

"I remember," said he, "of being in town one day when a truck filled with singing and shouting young men went down Main Street — CCC enrollees — whose camp buildings had been set on those forms. And over there,

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toward the northwest in the bend of the creek, those two rusty oil storage tanks must be the remnants of the Weowna refinery."

Recrossing McDonald Creek, the shadowy guest exclaimed with excitement. "And there is what is left of Walter Winnett’s old barn — that building must be the oldest of any in town — it is at least 90 years old. Since the Rogge Brothers gave it a new roof and removed some of the north end, it isn’t as spectacular a building as it once was; but what a history it would tell, if barns could only talk!

"I can scarcely believe it! Looking north down Grand Avenue, I see the Northern Hotel. What a beautiful structure still, and so well maintained! It was new in August of 1921. Theodore Svidland built it, and it has had only two other owners — Hugh and Blanche Grove and, now, Joe and Charleen Pease.

"Just north of the hotel and still on Grand Avenue, I see the home of Laugeman’s Big Sky Lures. Fuller and Ruth Laugeman started this business in 1973, and they sell trapping lures to customers in every state in the union.

"Moving along the north side of Main Street, I see another empty building. I remember it as the Montana Lumber and Hardware which was constructed in 1929. It operated until 1971, at which time it became Vernon and Janet Bauer’s Trading Post until 1979.

"The Petroleum County Courthouse stands squarely on the corner of Ashley and Main. How well it has stood the rigors of weather and time. The building was known as the Winnett Block when it was completed in 1917. It became the courthouse in 1930.

"The B & D Service Station on the corner across Ashley Avenue, now owned by David and Becky Grantier, was once the property of Al Hoyle. It was rented to Kenneth Cole in 1931 and was later purchased by him. It was sold to Robert Coffey in 1966 and to the Grantiers in 1980."

The phantom homesteader marveled at the empty space between the service station and the next building. Every lot had once been occupied. He smiled, however, and thought, "Now here is another old-timer like myself. Joe Shumate would be proud to know that Central Billiards, the first billiard parlor built in the town of Winnett in 1914, is still serving the public as in the old days. It is now known as the Winnett Bar, owned and operated by Arthur and Lillian Moore."

He crossed Broadway and looked with pride at the Winnett Post Office. "It appears so new," he thought, "although it is 18 years old. Luann Knutson is postmaster and Pat Busenbark is clerk. But now this next building — someone called it the Bauer building — I remember it being the Northrup building, built by the barber William Northrup."

A few paces beyond Moulton Avenue brought the visitor to the Winnett Printing office. He reminisced, "This had been. I believe, the Stenson Garage before Charles Doherty moved the Winnett Times print shop here in 1925. Although the Winnett Times has not been pub-
lished in Winnett since April 1976. I understand that Rudy and Bernice Glatz still operate a business here known as Winnett Printing.”

A few steps farther west brought the visitor to George Ore Memorial Park and Winnett’s Municipal Swimming Pool. Then looking across Teigen Avenue, he saw the Lutheran Church. Beyond the church to the north, he noticed the Heltz Trailer Court. This finished his tour of Main Street businesses in the year of 1989.

There was more he wished to see, however, and he betook himself to the cemetery north of town. He looked west and south to where the golf course had been but could see no signs of its ever having existed. “But what is that over there?” he asked himself. “Looks like bleachers. That must be the rodeo grounds with electric lights and all!”

“Just guess I’ll take a peek at the businesses on good old Broadway — there used to be a passel of them. I’ll start right here on the north end and go along the west side first. Here is a nice large building, but boarded up and unused. It was the Hilltop Service Station, built by Claude Allen in 1961. After his death it was sold to James Altenburg. With Bruce Arthur as partner, the business name was known as Hilltop Service (Aral, Inc.) for several years. At one time the building also housed the Hilltop Cafe operated for a time by Edith Arthur. James Altenburg sold the fine welding and machine shop equipment and closed the Exxon gas station in the fall of 1989.

There used to be several buildings along here near the old railroad right-of-way. There I see some oil storage tanks — wholesale storage for the B & D Service Station — and that little green building — it is storage for Harold Belstad. It just might be a part of what used to be the City Light Company, and later the Ford Agency and Garage operated by Harold Belstad and Lloyd Berg.

“Next is a large cement block building, Olsons’ Grocery. Two World War II veterans, James Dundom and Arnold Hansen, built The City Food Lockers, a frozen food storage and meat processing plant and opened it for business in March of 1947. Joe Pitman assisted in the management of the business which also had the franchise for General Electric Appliances. In 1948 the business was sold to Floyd Hill. He operated it until August 1949, at which time he sold the meat and locker business and the building to Charles and Louise Allen, retaining only the appliance franchise. The Allens stocked grocery items now in the former appliance display area. In July of 1951 the Allens sold the business to Robert Clark. When Mr. Clark died in 1964, his son Jack bought the business and managed it until October 1973, when it was sold to Ronald and Lorene Olson, the present owners. Olsons also operated the State Liquor Store on the premises.

“Here is the old original Basin Lumber Company store which became the Monarch Lumber Company in 1921. It later became the Rimrock Theater operated by Lloyd Lafond in 1945. It was converted by Robert Clark to a coin-operated laundry, barbershop and ladies’ beauty salon in 1952. The building housed Winnett Upholstery, managed by Orene Raudal and Marjorie Bratten.

“Across Wheeler Street is a new-looking service station known as Rabern’s Oil, owned by Bud Rabern. Dan Petersen is the mechanic in the two-stall shop attached to the service station. The garage was constructed by Harold Belstad in 1967 and was known as Harold’s Auto Service until sold to the Raberns in 1987.

“I wonder what I can find on the west side of Broadway after crossing Main Street. This two-story building is definitely a residence now, but it looks so familiar. I know. It used to be Dan Sommerfield’s Harness Shop until that type of service was no longer needed. The Sommerfields lived here until moving to Oregon in 1938. It has been a residence since that time.

“I don’t see the little white schoolhouse that used to be just across Millsap Avenue on the corner facing Broadway. When it was first built in 1912, it was the only
building other than the Winnett Ranch buildings so, of course, it had no street address. It was moved in 1918, as I remember, to the school-building block farther south on Broadway. Here is another business — C and S Photography. It became a business in 1979, when Ralph Corbett and Carol Schaeffer acquired Rudy Glatz’s dealership for film processing.

“And here, just across Rowley Avenue, is the school-building block. The little white schoolhouse was the first school building to occupy the block. It sat near the corner of Broadway and Rowley, but soon after, the fine old Spanish-style stucco school was completed and is still being used. It faces Moulton Avenue, rather than Broadway. Now, I see a large brick building in place of the little white schoolhouse. It houses elementary classrooms, a gymnasium, lunchroom, and community library and was completed in 1974 and attached to the north end of the Winnett High School, which was first occupied in 1951. South of the high school is the industrial arts building which was finished in 1974. The entire town block is taken up with a well-maintained school complex, truly a credit to the community.

“Continuing down the west side of Broadway, I find no more old business buildings, so I’ll cross Broadway on Jenkins Avenue and look at the pretty little A-frame building with a lighted cross — it is the First Baptist Church.

“Turning north, now on the east side of Broadway, I see what must be the school’s athletic field. There are running lines for track and field sports, a tennis court, and even a lighted football field. The football field was given as a memorial to James Bartlett, a junior in high school who was killed in a car accident in 1963.

“The next block is occupied with construction equipment owned by Hugh and Mary Brindley, operating under the name of Brindley’s Earthmoving. Their office is in their home, the original Badger residence, at 115 South Broadway.

“There are no business buildings in Block 28, Broadway, but what a huge new building I see being built in Block 28! It will become Winnett’s new Emergency Services building, replacing the present fire hall on Main Street. Dwarfed by the new building, the present city hall occupies the lot to the north. It was a Soil Conservation Service building which became the public library and city clerk office in 1958, and the official Town Hall in 1974.

“Crossing Main Street, I’ll stay on the east side of Broadway as I continue north. There seems to be no business until I reach Block 3 across Wheeler Avenue, where there are large fuel tanks on platforms and three metal buildings — Montana Highway Department property. Two trees, which I am sure Charlie Young planted in front of his Leader Hotel, still stand. They must be 70 years old!

“Crossing the old railroad bed, the former Montana Elevator, now covered with steel, still stands. I see. The depot to the east and the three big black oil storage tanks on the hill to the west are gone forever.

Although our phantom guest had seen all of the commercial and public buildings on Main Street and Broadway Avenue, he did not seem quite content until he searched out the county shop (Block 4, Lepper); the remains of the Wide-Awake Garage (Block 11, Moulton) believed to have been built in about 1916; the Masonic Temple on Lepper Avenue which was formerly the Park Hotel, a school dormitory and a hospital; the Burt Sisters telephone office, now the Olson residence at 10 South Teigen; Dr. Alexander’s former office, now the Art Moore home at 8 Lepper Avenue; a new WyMont re-cycle shop on Highway #244 and Jenkins Street; the stockyards and scale along the old railroad tracks; and Rabern’s wholesale house and bulk oil tanks on First Railroad Street North.

The weary, but not quite satisfied, phantom hesitated — had he seen all? He decided to take one more hurried glimpse. He remembered that when the first town lot sale was held in July of 1914, four hardware stores had been purchased. Were there no more remnants of them? “Ah, ha,” said he, “that VFW Hall, it is a portion of the original Mahon-Robinson Lumber Company. And in Block 3, Lot 8, a part of the Rogers-Templeton Hardware is now a residence. He returned again to the creek and saw something he had not noticed before — a building west of the Winnett barn. He happily remembered, “That used to be the Welter schoolhouse. I bid high and got the schoolmarm’s box at a box social and dance there one time!”

He took one last swing to the southwest, and what did he find — the oldest original building still in use! It was the first little white schoolhouse, beautifully preserved, standing proudly as the Methodist Church on the corner of Millsap and Moulton Avenue.

**Schools**

In 1899 when District #26 (Flatwillow) was formed, it was a huge district which encompassed the southern portion of what would become Petroleum County including the W. J. Winnett Ranch and the area which was to become the town of Winnett. When the older W. J. Winnett children became school age, the only school in the area was at Flatwillow. So the Winnetts saw fit, in 1907, to convert a bedroom in their home into a schoolroom and to hire a teacher for their own children and any other children who could attend. Katherine Moore was hired to teach, and her salary and all other school costs were paid by W. J. Winnett. The following year, Miss Carpenter, who later became Mrs. Frank Metzel, was hired. The Winnett family, however, did not find this school situation entirely satisfactory, so, for the next several school years, the family moved to Lewistown. No school was held again in the area until 1911.

By 1911 the influx of homesteaders had increased the need for a school. and Hannah Deethardt (Sec 35-15-26) offered the use of her cabin, which was about two miles
Winnett’s first schoolhouse constructed by Flatwillow District #26 in 1912. Frank Moschner was carpenter. Grades 1 through 6 in the 1915-1916 school year with Louisa Wilson as teacher. Boy with bat is Kenneth Cole. Boy with hand raised is Harold Deethardt, son of George Deethardt. Other students named, but not in order are: Edith Winnett, Margaret Alexander, Reba Wilson, Mildred Woods, Edna Hillius, Claude Diere, Grace Woods, Charles Kent, Lewis Winnett, Harold Homer Howe, Emma Smiley. Three are not named.

west of the Winnett Ranch, for a school. Miss Dora Beer was hired by District #26 as the teacher.

At last, in 1912, a school building was erected on a lot which was to become 101 South Broadway, and the first public school within the future townsite of Winnett was opened. It was a one-room white building 20 x 40 feet in size. It was to have, and still has, an interesting place in the town’s history. In spite of its rather ample size for its day, it became known as the “first little white schoolhouse.” Agnes Jones of Missouri was hired to teach approximately 25 pupils in the new building. She died ere her term was completed, and Alma Frye (later Mrs. Edward Reynolds) completed the school year.

The trustees of District #26 hired Miss Amanda Swift in the spring of 1913. She was given the responsibility of teaching in Winnett for an eight-month term, then to spend the balance of the year teaching at other places within the district, wherever school instruction was needed.

By the fall of 1914, several local students were ready for high school classes. Miss Swift, being certified to offer this instruction, voluntarily tended to their classes after her regular elementary hours and on Saturdays.

By the 1915-16 school year, it was obvious one person could no longer teach all of the elementary children and, in addition, give special help to older students. Miss Louisa Wilson was hired to teach grades one through six in the “little white schoolhouse” and Miss Swift was placed in charge of the higher grades. The upper classes were held in the Masonic rooms above the Moll Pool Hall. (The building is known today (1989) as the old Odd Fellows Hall on Main Street.)

On February 29, 1916, District #159 was formed from parts of District #26 and several additional townships to the north and east. The trustees (H. B. Greene, G. H. Deethardt and S. O. Pribble) of the new district had the responsibility of administering not only the school in Winnett, but also schools in the Brush Creek, Elk Creek and Cat Creek areas. They also immediately set about legitimizing the high school department which Amanda had voluntarily been sponsoring. Miss Wilson was again hired for the 1916-17 school term. She taught approximately 30 lower and intermediate level students. Miss Swift had charge of about 20 upper level students, again
in the Moll building.

The next year, 1917-18, the upper grades were moved to the first Eager store building on the west end of Main Street (the present Catholic Church). Miss Swift wrote of that year: "Mr. Jones, a fine and experienced teacher was hired as principal. Mrs. Jones taught French, Mr. Lasater, mathematics, and I had English and history for the grades and high school. Everything went well that year until Mr. Jones resigned to take a more lucrative position in the bank. Fate smiled on us, though, in the person of George Bramble, a talented, highly educated man . . . one of the finest, most devoted instructors it has been my lot to meet — a natural born teacher, justly beloved and respected by all his students and patrons. His youngest son, Blaine, entered our school, and George’s wife was an asset to the community. At the completion of his year’s work, to our sorrow, he left to take a better position in Tacoma, Washington."

Miss Swift also wrote of the district’s efforts to provide supervised housing for a few out-of-town students. "As the summer of 1917 waned and war excitement grew, it became evident that there were students to enroll for each of the four high school years. Some parents from outside the town wished their children to board themselves, could quarters be found and someone furnished to oversee them. Mrs. Brown of the Circle Bar neighborhood was approached for the position. We proposed to get a cabin for her, furnish it with fuel, and install her as guardian of the bachelor girls. We persuaded bachelors to donate their abandoned shacks to the cause. Others were called upon to move the buildings into the supervised areas, which they cheerfully did. Thus started our first dormitory.

"Mrs. Brown, a fine, kindly lady, was a warrior withal, and after promising to act as angel guardian, began to worry about her piano left in her home. Men were beguiled into carting it in from the ranch to the school (for her cabin had no room for it). The ladies met and sewed denim into a durable piano cover and also into curtains to divide the store building into classrooms . . . Many were the makeshifts to which we had to resort to make the building answer the purpose. Mr. Woodard was our janitor who grieved that the curtains weren’t substantial walls." (For an account of Miss Swift’s dealings with Mrs. Brown, see SWIFT — Winnett.)

Due to Amanda Swift’s heroic persistence (See Tribute in main introduction), Winnett High School became accredited for the 1918-1919 school year, and a $5000 state appropriation was received. The board of school trustees called a bond election for the purpose of building a large combined high and elementary school. The issue carried by an overwhelming majority in April of 1918. Otto F. Wasmendorf, from Lewistown, Montana, was hired as architect. He met with the board on September 22, 1918, and presented his building plans. Because the war had its priorities, the bonds could not be sold, nor could any construction commence until the fall of 1919.

Winnett Opera House where school presented musical and drama entertainment (1916-1918). Converted to school dormitory in 1918 and Montana Hotel in June of 1920.

In the fall of 1918, the former Winnett opera house, recently converted into a hotel, was rented from Mr. Winnett for a school dormitory. Mrs. Brown was again chosen as matron, and Mrs. Millsap, experienced in hotel management, was cook. The students helped with the work and the school district furnished fuel and lights. Parents could exchange meat, eggs, butter, and other edibles as payment for board.

Mr. M. A. Cromwell was principal in 1918. He, his wife, and daughter Anne had an apartment for housekeeping in the dormitory. The first white schoolhouse was moved in August of 1918 to Block 27 — the site of the proposed new building. Grades one through six attended there, while the upper grades and high school went to the Eager building. There were 63 high school students. Winnett High School graduated its first class in the spring of 1919. Commencement exercises were held in the first Aristo building. The four graduates — Margaret Anne Cromwell, Byron J. Conrad, Nelle R. Eager and Mabel L. Pratt — produced the first high school yearbook entitled "Winnett Proceeds." From that source came the following bits of history:

Mr. Cromwell taught science, penmanship and manual training; Mrs. Mary Feaster, history, spelling and English; Miss Viola Thurman, commercial; and Miss Marie Afflerbach, Latin.

There was a flu vacation that year. School was closed October 24, 1918, and not opened for a month. Most all students and teachers were victims. The time lost was made up by attending school on Saturdays for over four months. Because of the "vacation" there was no athletic activity until the second semester. When athletics finally was started, a high school athletic association was organized. D. Y. Wilson, Leta Hough and Byron Conrad managed its affairs. With the encouragement of Mr. Cromwell, the association quickly produced a program and a dance, and made the sum of $34 for the Winnett Athletic Fund. Also the school staged a Japanese operetta for the benefit of the Epworth League, a church youth
group. The show was such a success that the group staged the performance in Teigen and gave a dance for the benefit of the high school Athletic Club.

Since there was no school gymnasium, the businessmen of Winnett formed an association to which they sold memberships. They rented the Aristo for use as a practice and playing floor for boys' and girls' basketball several nights a week. The Winnett Athletic Association, as the businessmen's group was known, made an agreement with the high school Athletic Club to give the club membership if the high school association would give them what funds they had accumulated. The high school students who participated in athletics, nevertheless, were required to buy a membership ticket in order to take advantage of the playing floor!

High school was again conducted in the Eager building for the 1919-1920 year. In the fall of 1919, the approved school bonds were sold, and the first unit of the new school building was completed. William Sullivan had the contract to build four classrooms and basement (north end) at a cost of $9350. With the completion of the four elementary classrooms, grades one through six were moved into the new building and the white schoolhouse was used for a high school assembly room. A three-stall garage was built onto its west end. A teacher, trained in mechanical and electrical engineering, taught classes there which offered practical mechanical experience to students. Locally-owned cars were used as "patients"; students repaired these cars for only the actual cost of parts.

In the spring of 1920, the discovery of oil at Cat Creek triggered a business explosion in Winnett. Frank and Ella Millsap, business opportunists recognizing the need for another hotel in Winnett, purchased the dormitory building from Mr. Winnett. The dormitory students were moved to the former Park Hotel (Masonic Temple, 1989), where Mrs. Dan Sommerfield, school district clerk, took on the additional responsibility of dormitory matron.

Mr. B. F. Tanner was superintendent for the 1920-1921 and 1921-22 years.

By the end of the 1921 school year, the first and second units of the new school building were completed. There were then 11 classrooms, a gymnasium, an office, furnace room and coal bin, and a shower for men and boys near the science room downstairs at the west end of the basement. The high school library, which was also a classroom, was in the basement — directly across the hall from the furnace room. All the elementary rooms were upstairs, and each had its own classroom library. The gymnasium later became the study hall, and the white schoolhouse, a music room.

The third unit, which had been planned, would have been the same as the first and would have included a shower for girls and women in the basement. That unit was never completed.

In the year of 1921-1922, there were 95 students in high school. The grade enrollment was as follows: first, 45; second, 33; third, 26; fourth, 30; fifth, 33; and two teachers instructed the 60 students who were in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Seven elementary and seven high school teachers were hired. A new 23-room dormitory located east of the school (Block 28, Broadway) was constructed by Richard Valentine in the summer of 1921 and was ready for occupancy by fall. To beautify the gymnasium, a metal ceiling was installed during the summer of 1922.

In 1923 a cesspool was installed for the boys' showers, which, being in the basement, were too low to be connected to the town's new sewer line. It was not until 1934, when with the help of the Civil Works Administration, indoor lavatories for both girls and boys and showers for girls were installed, and the school was connected to a different branch of the city sewer system. Also, in 1923 the flagpole at the west entrance of the school building was donated and erected by the Frantz Oil Company.

The school years rolled on and the school bell, rung by the faithful janitors, called the eager and not-so-eager students to their classrooms. In the early 1940s a two-
story shop and woodworking building was erected just east of the school.

Desks continued to be removed from the gymnasium, which also served as an assembly and study hall, for basketball practice and games. After such activities, students and teachers were responsible for returning the desks to their designated rows.

In 1950 the accreditation of the high school was threatened because of the number of high school classes being held in, what was termed, a fire trap of a basement. Consequently the electorate approved a bond issue of $91,000 for the construction of a high school building. It was completed during the summer of 1951.

The little white schoolhouse was sold to the Methodist Church in 1965, and it was moved to Block 15, Millsap, as it was no longer needed for school purposes. It had been not only the first schoolhouse, but a valuable adjunct to the school complex for 53 years. The congregations of every Winnett church had used it as as place of worship at some time in its history.

Twenty-two years later the high school indebtedness had been paid off, and most of the elementary districts of the county had been annexed to Winnett School District #159. The taxpayers of the county approved a $498,000 bond issue for the construction of a new elementary school complex. It consisted of a 40' X 60' library surrounded by six elevated classrooms; a kitchen-multipurpose room combination, and a regulation-size gymnasium. A Great Falls, Montana, firm — Page, Werner and Associates — designed the new facility. Klynn Cole, a 1952 Winnett High School graduate, was a member of that company. The Pritz Construction Company of Billings, Montana, was awarded the construction contract, and the building was completed in February of 1974.

School patrons, who had hoped so long for such a building, were pleased with the new open concept in the elementary classrooms: they were proud that their new building housed the first elementary-high-school-public library combination in Montana. The gymnasium, with extendable bleachers, accommodates 350 spectators — a vast improvement over the old smaller gym with the single bench along the west side, bleachers on the east side, and the stage and balcony. A new electronic scoreboard, donated and kept in constant repair by the Bohn family in memory of James Bohn, is on the west wall; underneath and to the sides, are two proud rams. They were painted by local artist, Joie Heitz, as a memorial to Casey Fail and George Waldrop. The ram head in the starting circle on the basketball playing floor was painted by Pam Wangseng, a Winnett High School graduate of the class of 1974.

Rams painted by Joie Heitz, Jim Bohn Memorial scoreboard, and center circle ram on floor painted by Pam Wangseng

Winnett High School Reunions

There have been Winnett High School reunions over a span of 31 years. Robert Elke, commander of the Sandman American Legion Post first conceived the idea in 1958. That reunion was so well received that another was planned for 1963 — both planned and sponsored by the American Legion and Auxiliary, with help from the entire community. The next reunion was planned to be on the 50th anniversary of the first graduating class — in 1969. Byron Conrad was the only 1919 graduate to attend. From that time forward the memorable occasions have been staged every five years.

And what celebrations they have been! Even the sun, the moon and the State of Montana have joined in the exhilarations of the homecoming alumni. In 1963 the sun and moon teamed up and put on a partial eclipse as part of the entertainment. Every welding helmet from the shop department was put to use by the many viewers. On the second day of the 1969 reunion, while the happy crowd was enjoying a rodeo, the announcement came over the loud speaker that Neil Armstrong and Edwin E. Aldrin, Jr., had landed on the moon, after traveling a mere 238,857 miles through space. They planted Old
Glory on the heretofore untrodden heavenly body. In 1989 the entire State of Montana was celebrating its 100th anniversary. Centennial medals were awarded to the winners of the historically oriented parade floats on reunion Sunday, July 16.

What a buzz and a rumble in the gymnasium, as nearly 500 people all tried to out-talk each other at the same time! About one half of the group can still lustily sing the Winnet High School Song. (The practice of seeing that the freshmen know the song before they can be called sophomores is no longer enforced!) The younger alumni prefer the Winnett cheering song:

Winnett High School Song
Once again here as schoolmates assembled,
We fain would lift our hearts in song.
To our High School, our dear Alma Mater
Let gladness the moments prolong.
We are proud of her lads and her lasses.
Of honors won in days gone by —
So here’s a cheer for Winnett High School
For Winnett High School, dear Winnett High.

Chorus:
Here’s to our classes, here’s to our lasses
Here’s to the lads they adore;
Here’s to the Seniors so “mighty”
Juniors so “flighty,”
Freshies and Sophomores;
Let mirth and gladness, banish all sadness
And, as the days go by,
You’ll find us ready, and steady,
Boosting for our Old High. Rah-Rah.

Cheer Song
Cheer, Cheer for Old Winnett High
Bring on the victory.
Shout it on high.
While our loyal Winnett Rams,
Go onward to victory.
Fight, fight, fight. (Repeat)

Churches

BAPTIST CHURCH Although thirty years old, the Baptist Church organization and building is the youngest of the churches in Winnett. The Baptist group had been holding Sunday school and church in an elementary school building during the 1950s. They were organized into an official Baptist congregation August 5, 1959.

They immediately made plans to build their own church building. Locally raised, the Reverend David Iverson drew the plans for the unique A-frame edifice. At the same time as the Baptists, with volunteer laborers, were constructing their new church building, another group of men were in the process of demolishing the famous old Montana Hotel. Some of the beams and floor joists from that hotel were used in the church construction. With the use of salvaged material and much donated labor, the total cost of construction of the First Baptist Church of
Winnett was approximately $2500.

The first service was held at Christmas in 1960. Charter members were: Hallie M. Tripp, David Iverson, Ella Iverson, Ruth Iverson, Isaac Iverson, Pearl Stewart, Guri Ann Cook, Clifford Cook, Hallie Angelu Pugrud, Anne Iverson, Zell Iverson, Phillip Pugrud, Anita Cook, Pat Cook, Bill Cook, Phil Hill, Delores Hill and Myrtle Lawrence.

Many memorials have been given to further beautify the building and site. Among them were: the painting behind the altar in memory of Isaac Iverson, the exterior sign board in memory of Zell Iverson, and the guiding light of an illuminated cross on the church's peak in memory of Mrs. Annette Iverson, grandmother of the Reverend David Iverson. The present (1989) pastor, the Reverend David Iverson, has been the shepherd of the Baptist flock for 30 years.

CATHOLIC CHURCH

The first Catholic church service in Winnett was held in the John W. Brummett residence on May 9, 1916. Encouraged by a good attendance, the Catholic members made plans to meet in either the Aristo Theater or the little white schoolhouse. The congregation started with only 16 members, but grew to nearly 100 members in the early 1920s, at which time their services were held in the new school gymnasium.

Father Aloysius Müeller, who lived in Hilger, Montana, came to Winnett on a Saturday once a month. In December of 1924, the parish, feeling the need for a building of their own, purchased what had been the first Eager store. (That building, known as "the big brown shed" had also been a school in 1918, the Valley Lumber Company, and a land office for A. W. Ogg.) Remodeled into a church, it became the site of the first Catholic wedding in Winnett when Anna Kleiman and Joseph Solf exchanged their vows there April 10, 1923. Father Müeller was transferred to Winnett for a permanent location and services were held every Sunday.

Catholic Church 1989

In June of 1929 work was started to remodel the store building to more resemble a church. The store front was removed and the roof resheled. A partition in the interior was removed to give more seating capacity. Additional windows were cut, and two large stained-glass windows that had been used in the old Lewistown Catholic church were installed in the front. By November 1, 1929, a small steeple had been placed on top and the exterior was lap sided. It was through the efforts of the Reverend Fr. Müeller that the building had been purchased and remodeled, and he and the whole congregation were proud of the achievement. Ted Svindland did all the carpentry work, and Otis Hewes did the painting and wood refinishing. The church was named St. Aloysius in honor of Fr. Müeller.

For many years, the members of St. Aloysius church were faithfully served by many priests from Lewistown, Montana.

In the early 1960s the foundation of the church building was found to be crumbling. A new foundation and sidewalk were poured. The building was moved back from the sidewalk, and with additional remodeling, became the present church.

Today (1989) the parish is served by a priest from the Roundup, Montana, community, and services are held each Saturday. The attendance varies from 15 to 20 people per week.

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH

The First Lutheran Church of Winnett had its beginnings in the old music hall (Winnett's first little white schoolhouse) on the school grounds. The first service was held in 1917 with the Reverend Paul E. Meyer. Once every month from 1917 to 1929, Rev. Meyer came from Lewistown to serve the Winnett families. Lutheran services were discontinued in Winnett in 1929.

In the summer of 1932, the Reverend Walter Legee of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Roundup, Montana, began
monthly services in Winnett. The congregation almost at once began to flourish with attendance ranging from 35 to 50. Pastor Leege also went to Grassrange, Sand Springs, Melstone, Kelley and Lavina — at first by bicycle and later by a Model T Ford. In 1952 Winnett members asked Rev. Leege to move to Winnett to be their full-time pastor. The congregation at Winnett organized, drew up a constitution, and incorporated, having 14 male members. An old homestead house, which at that time was being used as a lambing barn, was moved to Winnett from the territory near the abandoned Kelley Post Office, 25 miles southeast of Winnett. It was moved at a cost of $250 and was converted into a parsonage. The two lots on which the parsonage stands, were donated by Mr. and Mrs. Albert Adams. Two additional lots were bought for $125.00 from Marguerite Kerchell, and another two lots were purchased from Mr. A. C. Glatz for $125.00.

In 1953 the worship services were moved into the school gymnasium to provide room for the growing Sunday school. Meanwhile a Lutheran church at Vananda, Montana, had merged with a sister congregation at Forsyth, vacating the church building at Vananda. When this came to the attention of Pastor Leege and the Lutheran families in Winnett, a delegation was sent to examine the building in November of 1954. In the next month the building was bought for $100.00 and was prepared for moving. The cost of moving the church the 110 miles amounted to $275.00. On August 31, 1955, the young congregation dedicated its own place of worship.

During 1956 the prospering, growing congregation suffered a severe loss. Pastor Leege suffered prolonged ill health, resigned his duties, and moved back to Roundup in July of 1957.

In the spring of 1958, the congregations of Winnett, Melstone and Sand Springs called a graduate pastor from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Thiensville, Wisconsin. On July 20, 1958, Rev. David D. Zietlow was ordained and installed. Pastor Zietlow won many souls for the church and God. He was also active in the town and community affairs. He was successful in leading a volunteer drive to build a swimming pool for the community. The pool, after renovation in 1981, is still in operation. Pastor Zietlow will be warmly remembered by all who knew him for his winning ways and high spirit. He was one of God's tireless servants. Though his members were all sorry to see him leave, Pastor Zietlow accepted a call to Anchorage, Alaska, in November of 1968. He is there (in 1988) building more churches for God.

Pastor Roland Zimmermann was the vacancy pastor until Rev. Joel Frank arrived in Winnett in July 1969. Pastor Frank had just graduated from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. During Pastor Frank's stay in Winnett, the two-car garage was built, paneling was put on the inside of the church, and new windows (which were designed by the pastor) were installed on the south wall. Pastor Frank left to serve a congregation in Plymouth, Nebraska, in May 1973.

Pastor Putz of the Great Falls, Montana, church served as pastor pro tem until Pastor Kenneth Wenzel came in July of 1973. This was Pastor Wenzel's first church after graduating from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Pastor Wenzel remodeled the parsonage kitchen with poles and barn wood. He accepted a call to Grover, Wisconsin, on January 28, 1979.

Pastor Leerson served the congregation until Pastor Donald Dengler was installed on May 6, 1979. A new roof was put on the church building in 1980. Pastor Dengler left for a church in Michigan in May of 1984. Pastor Dengler was very involved with community affairs and was sorely missed when he left.

Pastor Joel Lintner was installed in July of 1984. The church's sister congregation in Melstone had bought a double-wide mobile home in June of 1984, so Pastor Lintner went to live there. The Winnett parsonage was sold to Bill Harris in November of 1984. Pastor Joel Lintner left for a church in Wisconsin in March of 1987.

Pastor David Reichel of Great Falls served as vacancy pastor until the present minister, Pastor Mark Lindloff, arrived in July of 1987. He was a 1987 graduate of the
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. He lives (1988) in the
parsonage at Melstone, where a two-car garage and
breezeway are being built onto the trailer.

Lutheran Church 1989

METHODOIST CHURCH The year was 1912, and a
group of early settlers near Winnett and the Cat Creek
Basin, being of Methodist inclination, were desirous of
organizing a church in the community. The Reverend
Samuel F. Beer, a homesteader and minister, was asked
to organize regular services. He enlisted the aid of the
Reverend William Wesley Van Orsdel (better known as
Brother Van). Brother Van had come to Montana by
steamboat in 1872 and had preached his first sermon at
Fort Benton in a saloon filled with gamblers, freighters,
and river roustabouts.

When Brother Van was asked, forty years later, to
come to Winnett to help start a church, it must have
seemed fairly tame by comparison. But, accompanied by
the Reverend E. L. Haynes, come he did, and it was not
long before Reverend Beer’s old organ was loaded into a
wagon and was headed down the main road of Winnett
to the new little white schoolhouse — ready for an old-
fashioned church meeting. About 50 people met that day
at the schoolhouse, and after the meeting, the Methodist
Church in Winnett was officially chartered. The following
were charter members: Emma Anderson, Ida May Beer,
Dora A. Beer, Mrs. Katherine Beer, Pearl Beer, Vance
Beer, Dena Deethardt, Johanna Deethardt, Theodore
Deethardt, Anna Deethardt, Ralph W. E. Johnson, Mrs.
Edith Jones, and Flora and Israel Thomas. Services con-
tinued at the schoolhouse under the Reverend Beer, who
was serving the area from Lewistown, Montana, to Jor-
dan, Montana.

The Reverend Beer was appointed to the Grassrange
charge in 1913. He moved his family to Grassrange, and
they spent the first months in a tent while the parsonage
was being built. He occasionally came back to Winnett to
hold services. Consequently, without a resident minister,
little progress was made in church affairs in Winnett
between 1912 and 1915.

Homesteaders were flocking to the area, and many new
businesses were sprouting in the town of Winnett, but
there was still no established church building except at
Wallview, a community south of Flatwillow. A poll of the
inhabitants of the town of Winnett and the surrounding
area was taken to determine the preference of a prote-
tant denomination which would most nearly satisfy the
spiritual needs of the greater number of people. The
choice fell to the Methodist denomination.

In 1915 the Commercial Club of Winnett, looking for a
way to give the town a boost, decided that a church
building was an essential part of the future growth and
development of the town. With that thought in mind, the
town fathers petitioned the Great Falls Methodist district
superintendent for a resident minister. The Reverend
Alexander Aiton, having recently come from Scotland,
was appointed and arrived in March of that year. Since it
was only two days before Easter when the Rev. Aiton ar-
ived, he anticipated that extra seating space would be
needed for the service. What could he do with time so
short? Rev. Aiton did what any Methodist minister would
do. He went to the nearest saloon to borrow empty beer
kegs and planking so that everyone would have a place to
sit.

With Rev. Aiton in residence to spearhead the efforts,
plans went forward to erect a church building. Since at
that time the town fathers had decided to have but one
church in Winnett. It needed to be large enough to serve
all the people in the community and the surrounding
area. With that premise in mind, pledges were solicited
throughout Eastern Fergus County to build a church, and
what a church it would be! Oscar Lindgren of the
Lindgren Lumber Co. drew up the excellent plans.

Plans were for the basement to encompass a boiler
room and coal rooms, a room for the boy scouts, and
showers. The ground floor would include a sanctuary with
seating for 250 people plus a Ladies Aid room,
kitchenette, ladies cloakroom and retiring room, and rest-
Victory Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church with entryway on west side, dedicated in December 1924. The steps on south side were eventually removed, and an entryway made there.

room. On the same floor, but in another part of the building, would be a gymnasium, kitchen, stage, dressing room and classroom. Plans for the second story included two galleries (each seating at least 50 people), a junior classroom, two Sunday-school rooms and a projection room.

By May of 1921 individuals and organizations had pledged over $17,000—a goodly sum in those days! Enthusiasm for the project was high and the building was to be a memorial to those from this area who had given their lives in World War I. Those honored dead were: William F. Klingsing, Arthur Lambert, Steele Morgan, Thomas McCarthy, Maurice O. Rosing, Carl Sandman, Hiram Williams, Fred Newsome, Angus Stone and William A. Roberts.

Many organizations, including the American Legion, the Masonic and the Odd Fellow members joined with the church body in promulgating and presenting the dedication ceremony which was held on May 29, 1921. Mrs. J. B. Morgan, as a representative of all who had lost family members in the war, turned the first shovel of dirt at the ceremony.

Work began immediately on the erection of the church. Farmers provided teams of horses and equipment to excavate the basement. The work was slow, and there were many delays and frustrations. In spite of the financial support of many civic organizations—the Epworth League, other young folks’ groups, and the Ladies Aid (which had already sponsored the building of the parsonage)—lack of money was a constant problem. Though $17,000 had been pledged, many of the pledges were not forthcoming. During those years there were severe droughts, hailstorms and grasshopper infestations. Many of the homesteaders picked up and moved elsewhere.

Rev. Alvin F. Taylor, a veteran who volunteered and had seen considerable service abroad, was selected as pastor in August of 1921 to succeed Rev. Aiton. It seemed fitting that Montana’s first memorial church should be erected under the supervision of a veteran.

By 1923 many of the original boosters of the church building had left the community. The oil boom, with its population explosion, had reached its peak. The building committee of the church decided to put a roof on the portion of the basement that had been completed by the Sullivan Construction Co. They hoped that better years would come in which the dream church could be finished. On December 6, 1924, the basement, with an opening on the west side, was ready for services. The Victory Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church was dedicated under the Reverend T. T. Fike.

The Reverend Donald P. Redfield, accompanied by his mother, came to serve until June of 1927. The Reverend Kaemmerer of Lewistown then filled in as a supply pastor.

By 1928 the church finally was able to clear all debts against it. With that fact in mind the church, which had been without a pastor for about eight months, petitioned the bishop to appoint a new minister. The Rev. E. D. Swisher was appointed to meet the need. The Swisher family came to Winnett in 1928 and stayed until 1934—through the dark days of the stock market crash and the early years of the depression. The Rev. Swisher, as well as his wife, will long be remembered for their dedication to the church and their hard work in the community. After Swishers left, Reverend A. J. Oliver served for one year.

There was a bright spot for the community of Winnett with the coming of Ellen Rose in 1937. She was young and enthusiastic, and even though times were hard and her monthly pay was often slow in coming, her enthusiasm rubbed off on those around her. She always had some project in the works, especially with the young people. She was a strong proponent of Epworth League and organized many taffy pulls, pageants, parties, picnics and campouts. It was hard to tell who enjoyed those undertakings more—the youngsters or Miss Rose.

But as hard as Miss Rose worked for the benefit of the church, without the equally hard work of the laity, the church could not have survived. The Ladies Aid, which
two daughters, Ruth and Lois, came and lived in the Winnett parsonage. Winnett’s church celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding in 1962. The basement church had seen 38 years of church service, Sunday school and youth group meetings, and election-day dinners. In its earliest years it had been a basketball court. Most funerals of county residents had been held there. It had been jam-packed for Christmas programs that also featured the arrival of Santa. Young folks had dramatized biblical stories there, made Christian symbols of broken glass which resulted in the effect of stained-glass windows, and had delighted in square and circle dancing on its spacious floor. But sadly, it was becoming apparent that either some major renovations would be necessary or a different building would be needed.

The Rev. Cornelius Wheaton, who was appointed to Winnett in 1963, worked hard to get the church out of the basement. A poll of members confirmed the consensus that moving another building would be less expensive than fixing up the old one. Winnett’s first little white schoolhouse had been declared unnecessary for school purposes, and the church board was the successful bidder on its sale. The building was moved to the church site and a hard-working group of volunteers renovated the building into a beautiful and practical place of worship.

The new building was dedicated with the Reverend Wheaton, who had worked as hard as anyone else, leading the service. He died while serving here, and John Soderberg, William Trampleasure, and Robert Firebaugh served until the Reverend Sigurd Burch led the flock for the next 10½ years.

Under Reverend Burch’s leadership the old brick building was torn down, the basement filled in, and a mobile chapel was purchased from a church in Billings, Montana, in 1972. In 1976 it was permanently set in place and a connecting hallway was built between it and the sanctuary. A bathroom was also installed in the sanctuary portion of the building. The Reverend Burch’s term of 10½ years was longer than that of any other pastor in the Winnett Methodist Church history. He was followed by Glenn Woodson (1981-1984) and Hap Piper (1984-85).

During Hap Piper’s term, the members of the three churches — Roundup, Grassrange and Winnett — realized

was made up of nearly every woman in the county, Methodist or not, put on election-day dinners year after year to raise money for church and community causes. And all of this in spite of the fact that the church building had no running water — either in or out!

Harold Engdahl, a graduate of Rocky Mountain College and a newly ordained minister, held services from 1943 to 1945. Ministers were hard to come by in the years between 1945 and 1948, but from time to time The Reverends Mrs. Vernon Lewis, R. J. Stephens, E. H. Maddox, N. J. Simmons and Bert Powell filled in. The Rev. Charles Rhodes came out of retirement to serve Grassrange and Winnett in 1948. He and his family started the custom of harvest dinners. The Rev. Crowe served from 1951 to 1955, and Loy and Betty Estes kept the church going during the summer of 1955. Rev. Jon Morris served until July of 1956.

The beloved Ellen Rose returned in 1956 — this time as the first woman to be ordained in the Methodist Church in the state of Montana. She lived in the Winnett parsonage and also served Grassrange. The old roof on the annex of the Winnett church had to be replaced. The coal furnaces under both the annex and the sanctuary were temperamental. Several cold mornings found Ellen Rose in the basement coaxing the fire. Finally two used stokers were bought and installed. Ellen was dedicated to the work of the church no matter how hard the task, and she kept on tirelessly.

A young student, Enrico Gravagno followed Miss Rose. He lived in an upstairs apartment of the Ore home. He and his wife were musically gifted and were superb singers.

In 1960 the Rev. Fred Collins with his wife, Mary, and

"It is hard to tell who enjoyed this more — the youngsters — or Miss Rose!" At Nethart, Montana, youth camp: (Back) Leta Eike, Anna Marie Davis, Ruth Freburg, counsellor, "Chuck" Allen, Mike Nunley, Miss Rose. (Front) Billy Schreier, Jean Bauer, Jay Wadman, Cheryll Grosser, Elva Eike, Glen Hough, Rusty Knutson
that the needs were so great that one minister could not adequately serve all three churches. It was decided that Grassrange and Winnett could and would be a self-supporting parish.

Richard J. Burch was given the challenge of dealing with that decision. He served the church well for four years. Once again Grassrange and Winnett were closely linked as a parish in their own right. In the spring of 1989 Joyce Kaplan, an ordained Methodist minister from Illinois, came to Montana to visit a friend. She heard the Annual Conference call for ministers and quickly and obligingly answered to serve the Winnett-Grassrange parish.

**REORGANIZED CHURCH OF LATTER DAY SAINTS** In April of 1924 an attempt was made to establish a branch of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Winnett. Elder George W. Thorburn of Deer Lodge, Montana, held an invitational service in the Victory Memorial Church. Finding a group of interested people, he conducted a series of services in the Allen (Northrup) building which was across the street from the Aristo. With the population in the town and surrounding area beginning to dwindle, a regular church was never established.

**CHURCHES — CONCLUSION** In 1989 members of churches other than those who have places of worship in Winnett travel to nearby cities to mingle with those of like preference. There are also those who gather in closely knit groups in their own homes. And, lest we forget, there are those God-loving people in Winnett and Petroleum County who will give their own coat to warm either animal or fellow being — and are not unlike the cowboy in "'A Cowboy’s Prayer':

> "I know that others find You in the light<br>That’s sifted down through tinted window panes,<br>And yet I seem to feel You near tonight<br>In this dim, quiet starlight on the plains."

(Excerpt from "'A Cowboy’s Prayer'" by Badger Clark)

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**Fraternal and Civic Organizations**

Winnett has had a large number of civic organizations throughout the years. The **Women’s Club** was organized in the very early years and was active until the mid-1930s. Among many other civic improvements sponsored by this group, was the establishment of a public restroom for ladies in 1924. It was located in the First State Bank building on the corner of Lepper and East Main Street.

**RIMROCK CHAPTER NO. 82 ORDER OF THE EASTERN STAR** was instituted September 10, 1918. Its meeting place is always the same as its Masonic brothers. Eastern Star members, among social attributions, provide scholarships for students interested in religious education — Estarl (Eastern Star award for Religious Leadership).

**JERUSALEM LODGE NO. 115 ANCIENT FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONs** was the first lodge to organize in Winnett and was chartered August 23, 1917. First meetings were held in the second story of the Moll building until the Winkes brothers built their store in 1921. Members met on the second floor of that building until 1926, when they purchased the former Park Hotel. Their purpose is to help community causes and care for the widows and orphans of their members.

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*Eastern Star officers about 1938 or 1939. (L to R): Bertha Weiloff, Bernice Cole, Anne Mitchell, Nadine Rader, Mildred Green, Leone Letts, Rhea Mead, Mary Alexander, Martha Hamilton, Lura Gaines, Jennie Hough, Nora Dunlap*
charter was received September 6, 1924, and the members met until April 21, 1925. The second Auxiliary was chartered July 27, 1931, and continues in 1989. Auxiliary members are particularly interested in the cause of Americanism, child welfare, education and all community service.

WINNETT LODGE NO. 129 INDEPENDENT ORDER OF ODD FELLOWS was chartered October 20, 1920. The Odd Fellows were very helpful, especially during the early years of Winnett, in assisting families of deceased members with all details of burial.

NICOL REBEKAH LODGE NO. 109 was chartered October 17, 1922. Its purposes are for members to visit the sick, educate the orphan, and help bury the dead.

EAGLE POINT THETA RHO CLUB became active in 1939. An affiliate of the Rebekah Lodge, the Theta Rho motto has been: Happiness Through Service; their purpose: teach girls to conduct business meetings, work together, and take part in social activities and community service.

Royal Neighbors present ambulance keys to County Commissioners. (L to R): Merry Tunnill, unknown, Laura Walker, Frances Eager, Viola Hill, Eulalie Winter, Mike Delaney, Harvey Cornue, Tony Mlekush

ROYAL NEIGHBORS OF AMERICA The local insurance and social camp was chartered March 13, 1937. A drive to purchase an ambulance for the county was initiated by the camp in the fall of 1949. The drive was successful, and an ambulance was presented to the county in the spring of 1950.

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS The first meeting of Glenn Shaw Post No. 6075 V.F.W. was held March 8, 1946, and the post was named for Glenn Shaw, who died in World War II. The group’s purpose is to care for veterans and their families and to contribute to the welfare of their communities.

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS AUXILIARY The auxiliary to Glenn Shaw Post of Winnett organized January 28, 1947, with 23 charter members. Their members complement the service of the V.F.W.
1919 Basketball Squad. (Top row) Thelma Brown, Elva Anderson, Edith Davis, Mabel Smith, Leone Millsap, Ruth Afflerbach, Sarah Davidson, Louise Schellenberger. (Bottom row) Julia Redmond, Dorothy Shaw, Anne Cromwell, Ada Byford, Dena Deethardt, Roxie Redmond. The first Aristo was their gym.

Winnett High School Student Council (1927): Clairmont Clark, Rex Eager, George Bratten, Dorothy Morgan, Mildred Woods, Vivian Hegna, Myrtle Boeckman, Mary Alice Wilson, Ruth Walker
The courthouse "gang" in about 1928. Ruth Walker, Mrs. K. E. Park, May Vontver, Ella V. Millsap, Dan Sommerfield, Ole S. Rigg, William Kindt, John Merten.

Winnett School and Community Orchestra about 1939. (Back row) James Black, Fern Kindt, Jo Ann Tripp, Lura Anne Gaines, Donald Bowen; (2nd row) Kenny Ingalls, Supt. J. H. Gaines, Margaret Wiggins, Ruth Hodges; (Seated) Robert Bennett, Mary Lou Bastian, Mrs. Harry Tripp, Betty Mead, Lorraine Bauer, Annabel Cornue.
A devastating blizzard struck the area on the first weekend in April 1955, causing livestock losses and completely isolating Winnett for two days. Hotels and residents' homes were filled to capacity with wayfarers. (From left) Myers Bar, Shumate building, barbershop, Wise Cafe, Town Tavern, Commercial Hotel, First State Bank building, Butte Block, Cole's Service Station, and the courthouse.

State Competitors in 1966. (Left to right) Tom Buchholz, Jerry Bohn, Al Sandaker, Russ Knutson, Tim Morey, Jay Wadman, Larry Ziesmer, Lary Poulton. (Kneeling) Coach Girard.

Champions — District 1st Place, Divisional 1st place, State 3rd place — 1975. (Back row) Mrs. Langohe, Sonia Brindley, Sarah Shaw, Jana Woodford, LaRae Arthur, Deanna McCue, Kelly Bohn, Jackie Barisch, Mr. Shepherd. (2nd row) Margie Solf, Gail Shaw, Debbie Grantier, Linda Welter, Karen Kimmel. Not shown: Judy Keith and Cathy Coffey.