

a history of

**SCHOOLS IN
PETROLEUM CO.**



“

*How great it was to hear
the school bell ring every
morning calling all the
students to school.*

*It could be heard all over town and
even up to the rimrocks. I have fond
memories of the sound of that bell
calling us in from recesses. Even
though the electronic bells and buzzers
serve the same purpose, there is
something much more memorable and
enjoyable about the sound of that bell.”*

– Nancy Freburg, Class of '64

DEDICATION

*The Petroleum County History Committee
dedicates this compilation of school histories to our biggest fan,
Nancy Freburg.*



In 1919, the first senior class graduated from Winnett High School. In the one hundred years since, there has been no bigger supporter of the school, it's children, or the community library than Nancy.

Nancy returned to her home in Winnett and began working at the Library in 1994. Her work at the library kept it on the cutting edge of technology and an amazing resource to both students and members of the public. She spent hours bettering the library, working to preserve and share our community history, and serving in local organizations, such as the Lions Club and Partners In Education. Her example of humbleness and dedication echoes through the halls of the Winnett School and we will be forever grateful.

- PETROLEUM COUNTY HISTORY COMMITTEE

Raye Anne Lund

Sue McKenna

Carol Ann Schaeffer

Laura Nowlin

In 1919, the members of the first graduating class accepted their diplomas from Winnett High School.

The Petroleum County Community Library History Committee compiled this school history in honor of the 101 years of graduating classes at WHS. We have taken this opportunity to also spotlight some of our rural schools and the role that they played in the educational development of the people of the county.

“One-thousand one hundred four students of the classes of WHS made their way over the obstacles of high school life and finished their High School career in WHS. One-thousand one hundred four have made their way over the rolling hills of study, the rocky foothills of six-week tests, and the icy peaks of the semester exams. The seniors of the 101 classes of WHS finished High School and launched into the sea of life and voyaged to their various ports of destiny.”

Excerpt Modified from the 1939 Class History in the autobiography, Aunt Rain – The Personal memoirs of Lorraine Bauer, Class of '39



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF ANNUAL

Margaret Anne Cromwell, born a Hawkaye, July 24, 1902. Freshman, Sophomore and Junior at Missoula High. Youngest helped put "19" on Konah shield. In Junior year was member of Girls' Glee Club; took part in play "Princess Chrysanthe" who wrote Junior play, "Goodbye Boys." Secretary-Treasurer of Senior Class; Captain of Girls' Basketball Team; member of Girls' Glee Club. Has taken a mixed course in school. English shark, but — "deliver me from commercial."



SNAPSHOT EDITOR OF ANNUAL

Nellie R. Layer, born in Beaver, Coaling, Neb., Dec. 24, 1900. She attended school during the first eight years in both Beaver Coaling and Anaheim, Calif. Was Freshman, Sophomore and Senior in Winnett, spending the Junior year at Evansville, Wis. Nellie was a member of Girls' Glee Club and Literary Club at Senior Class. She has followed no special course in school. Had many heated discussions during Freshman course.



BUSINESS MANAGER AND ATHLETIC EDITOR

Byron J. Conrad, born in Humphrey, Neb., November 24, 1889. He attended school the first eight years in Wood River, Neb. Freshman in Stanford, Montana; Junior in Lewistown and Sophomore and Senior in Winnett, Montana. Member of Literary Societies in first and third years. Member of Athletic Committee during Senior year. His hardest task during his last year in High was keeping away from the girls.



LITERARY EDITOR OF ANNUAL

Mabel L. Pratt, born in Iowa, March 26, 1900. Attended school in the states of South Dakota, Minnesota, North Dakota and Montana. Spent first two years of High at Casselton, North Dakota. Was member of Literary Society in Freshman year, also member of Social Committee. Was Treasurer of Sophomores Class. Took no special course in school. Was the only Junior in Winnett High during the first semester of last year. Had a good average during school career, especially in mathematics. Vice-President of Senior Class. Got into several scrapes during first two years of High, especially with the other classes.

“

I have traveled abroad and seen some great things, but there's no place like home, Winnett/Dovetail.

Friends tell me I'm not from a town but from 30 miles north of somewhere that wants to be town.

I say they are jealous.”

– Marlee Iverson, Class of '84

PETROLEUM COUNTY

For thousands of years, native tribal people populated central Montana. Beginning in the 1860's, early adventurers to the area began settlements along the Missouri River and along Flatwillow Creek. These were mostly trading posts serving travelers headed to gold mines further to the west. In the 1880's, stockmen moved to the area, taking full advantage of the open range, first for sheep and later for cattle.

Walter J. Winnett established his ranch headquarters underneath the

sandstone rimrocks in 1879. He sold a portion of his land to the Milwaukee Land Company for townsite development and in 1914 the first sale of town lots took place. The railroad first chugged into Winnett in 1917.

The homestead boom lasted from 1910-1919, when homesteaders staked their claims on 320 acres of land advertised as perfect for farming. Approximately twenty towns and communities grew up to support the surrounding population. After a debilitating drought beginning in

Photo by Eliza Wiley, courtesy of
Laura (Brady) Nowlin



1917 worsened in 1919, those who had arrived only a few short years before realized that the prairie of Petroleum County would not allow survival on only 320 acres. The exodus began in 1919. It slowed for a few years due to an oil strike at Cat Creek, twenty-two miles east of Winnett. The Frantz Corporation struck oil in February 1920 and by 1922 Winnett's population increased from 316 to 1,213. The strike resulted in a brief five-year boom. By 1930 Winnett's population dropped back to 408.

The Great Depression hit the area hard, although many New Deal programs helped people survive. Still, many more residents left. In 1942, Petroleum County adopted the county manager form of government in an effort to cut costs and reduce debt. Electricity, indoor plumbing, and telephone lines reached rural residents during the 1940's and '50's. In 2014, the community celebrated 100 years of the town of Winnett and recognized thirty-four "centennial families".

“ *As people continued to move away, the many separate communities have given way to a county-wide, close-knit neighborhood where people rally around each other and operate on a 'set of morals without even thinking about it.'* ”

- Lu Pugrud, Class of '46

EARLY SCHOOLHOUSES

With the homesteading push into Montana in the early 20th century the land of central Montana filled with hardworking men and women. These people created communities, at the heart of which one-room schools were quickly established. The first school district was officially formed at Flatwillow in 1899. School operated in various locations near Flatwillow for three-month periods. Frank Moshner built two schoolhouses in 1912, one for Winnett and one for Flatwillow – the first buildings to be constructed for that specific purpose.

While schoolhouses varied in size and materials (in 1930 Petroleum County operated 48 one-room schoolhouses, 41 of these were frame and the remaining 7 were log) all had essentially the same layout. In every township in Montana existed two sections of land (sections 16 and 36) specifically for school use. One corner of the school section held the building. Most buildings contained a cloakroom just inside the door for students to hang their coats and store their lunches. The schoolroom was spacious, usually with large windows on one side to provide light. The teacher's desk stood on the far side with a blackboard and pull-down maps behind the desk and across the back wall. A pot-bellied stove sat in the center or the corner to provide heat. Outside, two outhouses stood to service the children's needs, or provide a little recess fun for the boys who loved to lock the girls inside. A water pump, a flag pole, and sometimes playground equipment stood out front.

Some schools provided a teacherage. This was either a separate building or a partition off of the original school building. Sometimes a barn to shelter the horses children rode to school also appeared.

Flatwillow teacherage and students, L-R: Ruth Noll (mostly hidden), Helene Stroup, Anna Noll, Jerra Lee Wilson, Arlene Johnke, Mabel Redd, Paula Johnke





First school on Dovetail in Tom Iverson's 1 room homestead shack. Pictured L-R: Raymond Dobner, Blanche Payne, Andrew Iverson, Gene Galloway (teacher), Issac Iverson, and Altha Payne



Mosby School



Dovetail Recess



Staff School Picnic Back row: Agnes Mutch, Lyle Eike, Jean Eike holding Barbara Kauth, Jim McEneaney, Bill Mutch. Front Row: George Eike, Alice McEneaney, Bob Eike, Dale Opitz, Junior Opitz, Floyd, Evelyn and Marvin Lewis.



Mosby Students



Three Buttes School

“ *There was a partition between the two school buildings. It was kept closed, and we only used the east side. But once a month on the weekends, the two doors would be fastened up to the ceiling, and it became the community dance hall.*

On dance weekends, everyone in the community came, old and young. We kids would sit on a bench or lay on the floor under the benches out of the way and watch until we fell asleep. That was a big deal.”

– Lee Iverson, Class of '59

The schoolhouse was used for numerous social functions. It provided a center for the community, both physically and socially. The people of central Montana lived far from their neighbors with poor roads and transportation to reach each other, and the schoolhouse provided a meeting place and a building for fun community functions.

Socializing in a place of isolation kept people connected and this connection often times took place in the schoolhouse. In the days before extensive automobile travel, dances, church services, card parties, holiday parties, and voting were often held in the schoolhouse.

Maypole at the Kelly School



WINNETT SCHOOLS

As their children reached school age, the Winnett family chose not to have their children travel the 13 miles to Flatwillow to attend school. Rather, they hired a teacher and converted a bedroom in their house to a schoolroom for children in the McDonald Creek vicinity. This arrangement lasted just one year, and the Winnetts moved to Lewistown the following year to have their children attend school.

Growth in this rural area increased with homesteading settlement. To meet growing educational needs, a school was opened in 1911 in a cabin two miles west of the Winnett Ranch. The following year the first public school in Winnett was built at 101 S. Broadway. This classic gable-roofed, one-room schoolhouse became known locally as the “first little white schoolhouse.”

Twenty-five students attended classes in 1911. By 1914, several students had reached high school age and a second teacher was hired to teach the four high school students who enrolled that year. These upper level classes were held above the Ray Moll pool hall.

In Winnett, school enrollment swelled, reflecting settlement patterns. In one year, high school enrollment jumped from 4 to 25, and classes were moved to the Eager Store building.

With children traveling long distances for school, the need for supervised housing for rural students arose. As Miss Amanda Swift, the first high school teacher recalled, “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 cheerily did. Thus, started our first dormitory.”



The Little White Schoolhouse, c. 1915

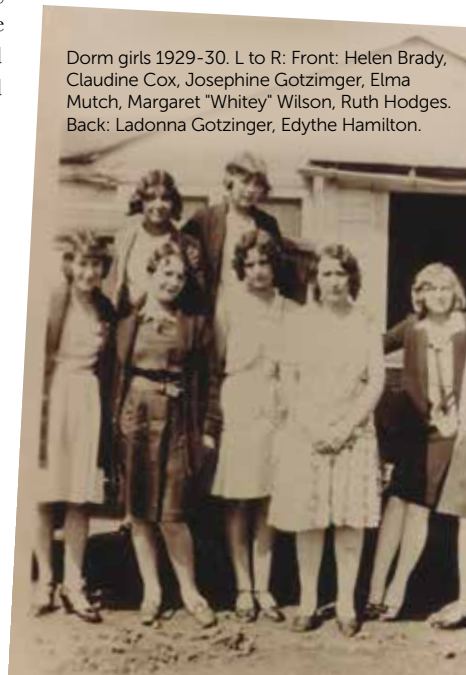


By 1918, fifty-three children were enrolled across elementary and high school grades, with a superintendent and four teachers on staff. W.J. Winnett rented out the Winnett Opera House for a school dorm and an apartment for the principal and family. In April, the community passed a bond for new building construction and Otto Wassmandorff of Lewistown was hired to draw up the plans. Wassmandorff conceived a building plan in three phases. School bonds were sold during the fall of 1919, and that year the first unit of the school was built for \$9,350 by Sullivan Construction.

By the time the new school opened, 65 pupils were enrolled, with a total of four elementary teachers, seven high school teachers and a superintendent. The building housed four elementary classes upstairs and four high school classrooms in its daylight ground level. The wood frame school house was moved into the new school yard to serve as an assembly room for the high school, and a three-bay garage was added on its west end for auto mechanic classes.

Construction of the second unit of the school proceeded and was completed by the end of the 1921 school year, adding a large auditorium/gymnasium, two more classrooms, an office and a library. *(see next spread)*

School enrollment reached 322 in 1921, with 167 in the elementary grades, 60 in grades 6-8, and 95 in the high school. The school board built a 23-room dormitory that year, boarding students or teachers at \$20 per month.



Dorm girls 1929-30. L to R: Front: Helen Brady, Claudine Cox, Josephine Gotzinger, Elma Mutch, Margaret "Whitey" Wilson, Ruth Hodges. Back: Ladonna Gotzinger, Edythe Hamilton.



THE SCHOOL BOARD BUILT A 23-ROOM DORMITORY IN 1921, BOARDING STUDENTS OR TEACHERS AT \$20 PER MONTH.







Construction of the second unit of the Winnett School was completed by the end of the 1921 school year, adding a large auditorium/gymnasium, two more classrooms, an office and a library.

Plans for the third unit of the school were never carried out. They entailed a unit identical to the first, to be placed behind the second unit. Some improvements and additions were made over the following years, though, which included a decorative tin ceiling added in the gym in 1922, indoor lavatories in 1934, and a shop/wood working building east of the school in the early 1940s.

During the latter 1900s, the Winnett School served a growing area, as school consolidation annexed small outlying districts. In 1950, with their high school accreditation threatened by fire code restrictions on basement classrooms, the district floated a \$90,000 bond to build a new high school next to the historic Winnett School. In 1965, the original frame schoolhouse was sold to the local Methodist parish and moved to Block 15, where it serves as a church to the present day.



Story Hour Kids at Winnett School, 1986
Left to Right, Back Row: Tony Hale, Heidi Jensen, Kerry Wiggins. Middle Row: Sam Beanblossom, Johnna Hedman, Cody Bohn, Ethan Ostby. Front Row: Shannon Damschen, Starla Allen, Leila Gershmel, Mariah Mlekush.

In the early 1970s, a \$498,000 bond passed to erect a new elementary building adjacent to the high school, and next door to the historic Winnett School. Designed by Page, Werner and Assoc. of Great Falls, the new school housed the elementary classrooms as well as a new joint school and community library. The historic school was condemned in 1994 and an additional new school addition was completed in 1999.

The Winnett School system has long striven to provide students with a quality education and life skills. From sports to technology to healthy eating, the Winnett Schools continues to meet a high standard. In 2006, the US Department of Education awarded a Blue Ribbon to 200 of the nation's 120,000 schools - the Winnett Schools received this award. In 2017, the school lunch program began serving locally-raised beef donated by area ranchers.



Demolition of Historic Winnett School in 1994

IN 2006, THE US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AWARDED A BLUE RIBBON TO 200 OF THE NATION'S 120,000 SCHOOLS - THE WINNETT SCHOOLS RECEIVED THIS AWARD.

“ *I am just amazed how Winnett has upgraded. I love the school. It's modern and this library is just stunning. It's so 'big city.' I read the curriculum of all the subjects you offer here. It's just wonderful. I am so glad it is affordable for these few people in the county.”*

– Doll Sims, Winnett School Cook from '63 – '70



Addition built in 1999



West Face of Winnett School, c. 2015.
Historic school's bell is displayed out front.

Winnett Schools are Here, Thanks to a Determined Lady.

Amanda Swift served as the first Superintendent of Schools, and, without her effort, we may not be here today, celebrating 100 years. The account of accreditation is best told in Ms. Swift's own words.

The year is believed to be 1918.

“We waited vainly for word from the State Board of Education at its conference in Helena. Finally, I decided to go on the stage to Grassrange and take the early Saturday train to our Capitol. The stage driver, however, told me that the melting of the two-foot June snow had so risen the creeks that roads were impassable, and he couldn't make it with his car, but he thought by keeping my horse to the hills and higher land I might make it. I went to Teigen that Friday night. They roused me for an early breakfast and started me with much advice about the ride. Coming near the Bowman place, I encountered what seemed to be a lake. The man there said, Go right ahead. Tisn't deep. I brought my horse thru it last night.' Evidently the water had risen overnight, for soon my horse was swimming, and I was a frightened individual clinging desperately to the saddle horn and the Boston bag containing all my precious documents and duplicates of school records. The horse swam through, and I came to the waiting train a bedraggled straggler in the long riding skirt of those days. I tried to repair my appearance in Lewistown and was

soon on my way to Helena on the train. Because of the rising of the creeks and the continued rain, the train had to make detours, and in one place the passengers walked over a mile.

“I was a little late to the meeting, and as I stood at the entrance I heard the Hobson representative explain that Winnett contained just a mere handful of people — that this idea of a high school there was just the wishful thinking of the teacher, one of those damn Yankees from New England, trying to figure out a job for herself. The man from Moore declared it would rob the three fine high schools of Fergus County (Lewistown, Moore and Hobson) to start a high school out in the woods. (Deluded man! He just didn't know Winnett was over 25 miles from the timber and only painful effort got us wood to burn!)

“The state superintendent replied that she, too, felt such applications should be treated with greatest distrust and very critical and searching investigation. (The lady was a good politician and vote getter and realized 'twas a time to make good with the delegations from three flourishing towns of Fergus County.) Thereupon Leon Foote, her deputy, arose and put in a plea for Winnett. Principal Cummings of Lewistown, our friend, testified as to the genuineness of the statement of Mr. Foote but he deemed it wiser to defer the accrediting, although he resented the implication of the Hobson man that the

teacher was working for a job for herself — at any time he stood ready to engage her at Fergus County High School.

“I stood rooted to the floor, dismayed, disheartened, yet so angered by all the camouflage and outright falsities that I bolted in at last, presented my papers and records, told how I found out from my county superintendent in Lewistown that all the records that had been given to her by me had been demanded from her by the selfsame people who went to Helena. She claimed they only wished to examine the papers and then would forward them to Helena. They had not done this, hence, a statement by one of the board that I hadn’t complied with the request to file all records with the county superintendent. She in turn was to forward the records to Helena with her comments and recommendations. After a fiery, tempestuous presentation

of facts, I was delighted to have Principal Cummings withdraw his motion to defer the accrediting and heartily move the prompt accrediting.

“The Board of Education voted unanimously to accredit; the \$5000 state appropriation due us was made. I returned to Winnett a hero for the time being...”

*Evidently the water
had risen overnight,
for soon my horse
was swimming, and
I was a frightened
individual clinging
desperately to the
saddle horn and
the Boston bag
containing all my
precious documents*

Winnett School & Students, c. 1932
Children: Lucille Merten with doll carriage, Carrol Hough, Roscoe “Buddy” Moore, Charles, Norman, Ruth and Edith Stormwind, Bobby Nelson on tricycle, Dale Nelson sitting in wagon.



MEMORIES

Compiled in the following pages are some of our favorite stories about attending school in Petroleum County. Please send your own stories to the Petroleum County Community Library.

“What I enjoyed most as a teacher in the Winnett School was watching the children start at the 4-year-old level with Story Hour at the library and then follow their progress through the 14 years ahead. It was fun to have them in their teen years and be a part of helping to prepare them for the larger world. I feel blessed to have been a teacher in the Winnett School for 18 years and a substitute teacher the first year after we returned. It was a most rewarding experience and those rewards seem to continue even after I have retired. I hope our small school can always send them into the world with many of the attributes that they will need to be successful men and women.”

– JOAN (HILL) MURPHY, CLASS OF ‘55

“We had some great high school teachers including Esther Adams, our excellent English teacher.”

– MAVIS FREBURG SHOTWELL, CLASS OF ‘55

“Freshman initiation was a fun and silly time. Everyone enjoyed the initiation. Another freshman tradition was whitewashing the “W” below the south rim. ***The Freshies would sneak up there with their equipment and try to get the job done*** before the upper classmen came and dumped out their white wash!”

– MAVIS FREBURG SHOTWELL, CLASS OF ‘55



Mrs. Esther Adams,
beloved teacher at Winnett High School

“I had to take Algebra as a freshman. The title alone sounded foreign and evil to me, and it turned out I was right. Mr. Thurston was trying to teach it, and I spent 9 months trying to explain to him that you use numbers for math and letters for English. He just couldn’t get it. He would try to get us to add X plus Y and divide the sum by Z. I could see why he was so frustrated, so I tried my best to straighten him out for both our sakes. Didn’t happen. He did have some math genius in him though, as at the end of the school year he was able to average my 17 consecutive F’s and came up with a D-. I think, in hindsight, he probably came up with that so he wouldn’t have to be embarrassed by me exposing him in front of a new class for another nine months the next year.”

– VERNON PETERSEN, CLASS OF ‘60

“It seems like I was always into something in high school. That was just a damn good training course for practical jokes. We found a hole underneath the stage to a heat vent. We got some stinking limburger cheese and a broom and pushed that cheese up that hole to that heat vent just as far as we could get it to go. We got pretty good results there. That worked so good, Dean Sims and I were skinning skunks for ten cents apiece. We did it for people who didn’t like to do their own skinning. We decided to save some of that ‘skunk juice’ and see how that worked.” After a draw on his cigarette, Jack chuckled, “now that does work. If you wanna vacate a school and shut it down for a couple of days that’s what you use. We really didn’t put that much around. Just on a few banisters and stairs. We used an old nose dropper and bottle and just dribbled a few drops here and there. When things warmed up, well, nobody ever ratted on us. Of course, everybody knew who did it. But nobody ever told on us. We would have been kicked so far out of school they wouldn’t of been able to communicate with us!”

– JACK HANSON, CLASS OF ‘47

First Student Council, Winnett School, 1927



“The kids pulled lots of pranks, but I pulled one too.

We had a superintendent who thought he had to supervise me. I had been doing that hot lunch thing for years before he ever came, and I had it down-pat. Anyway, he was so sure that my kitchen was dirty. It was fly season and I battled the flies. In previous years, we would buy those fly bars or fly strips. However, this superintendent felt if I would just keep a cleaner kitchen, I wouldn't have such problems with flies. I replied, 'I have no screens on the windows and its fly season, and yes I do have flies, and it's not a matter of uncleanliness, it's fly time.' Well, he did not like the fly strips that I had hanging around the kitchen. He told me to take them down, as we didn't know what kind of fumes came off of these and that the fumes could be permeating the food. 'You might poison these children!' he told me. So, guess what I did. I took down the hanging fly strips as directed. They had just come out with those yellow, solid bars. . . I bought some and I hurled some of them up on the tops of my cupboards, so high no one could see them. I'm not very big, so I just stood back and threw them up there. Well, they worked. Not a fly. Not a fly. He said, 'See Mrs. Sims, I told you if you would just keep a cleaner house, you wouldn't have flies.'”

– DOLL SIMS, SCHOOL COOK '63 – '70

“We all loved Doll Sims, lunch room cook during the late '60s and early '70s, because she dished out love and concern for us in equal amounts with her great lunch dishes and homemade buns.”

– TERI (MCCUE) HARRIS, CLASS OF '74

“Some schools, including mine, have started a new program to give schools a better source of meat. Here in Montana we have beef cattle, a lot of them actually. This new program has the people in our community donate a beef cow to the school... The community I live in has really stepped forward in helping improve our school lunch program.”

– KODY LUND, CLASS OF 2017

“Rules was made to be broken. All the [dorm] window screens were removable, and it wasn't that far to the ground for a long-legged kid. I guess if you would have been too short, somebody would've helped ya.”

– JACK HANSON, CLASS OF '47

“Ain't we got fun,” photo from the Hilma Hedman collection. 1927.



“Girls and boys were separated on different wings. Boys were on the west end of the dorm and the girls were on the east end. The middle section contained the kitchen and large dining hall. There was a furnace on each end.”

– JACK HANSON, CLASS OF '47

“In my memories of my high school days, I recall my first year at the “Dorm”. Mrs. Summerfield was matron (1928) and I was just a “green” country gal, straight off the farm and a small country school. She took me under her wing, so to speak, and comforted me when the more wise kids poked fun at me. Bless her heart – I’ll never forget her.”

– ERMA (HANSEN) DAMSCHEN, CLASS OF '32

“It wasn’t like we were slaves or anything like that, but we had to be to bed at a certain time, you ate regular, and had to keep your room cleaned up – just some little patterns of behavior that some kids didn’t have at home.”

– JACK HANSON, CLASS OF '47
(pictured here at right)



Winnett Dorm Tenants
c. 1929

“In 1922 ... my roommate was Helen Hopkins Robinson and she and I learned that we could get out through the heat grate, go down into the cellar, and out the door when the matron wasn't looking. We did this several times. We just did it to be ornery, we had no reason to go. We just thought it was fun.”

– LILLIAN (STORY) HOUGH, CLASS OF '27

“The last year they had the dormitory, I was the furnace man. I don't know what happened, but it was cold, and I did stoke up the furnace pretty good. The dorm consisted of 'more imagination than insulation.' I returned to my room, and all of a sudden here came a hysterical dorm matron. The boys' wing was on fire. The furnace was located right under my bed! It caught the floor board on fire, so I burned up the boys' wing. Well, we couldn't live in it anymore, but there were enough empty rooms on the girls' wing, so us boys all moved down to the girls' wing. Well, then I WAS a hero! All the boys thought I was just about the greatest thing that ever came down the pike.”

– JACK HANSON, CLASS OF '47

“I remember a group of us from the Dorm coming out of the old Aristo Theater after the show.

The temperature was -65 and still. Everyone took off running for home. I stopped my friend Clara Eglund and instructed her as my parents had instructed me, not to run in the cold temperature. The others arrived quickly with frozen faces. We arrived about ten minutes later and much to the matron's (Mrs. Walker) surprise we were in fine shape because we had walked slowly, covering our faces one side at a time with our mittened hands.”

– EVELYNE (HILL) BETTI – CLASS OF '36



WHS Girls Basketball Team, 1948 – Back Row: Louann Hill, Rosemary Solf, Viola Isaacson, Luanne Cole, Joan Pangburg, Paula Johnke, Marie Johnke, Jim Cain (coach)
Front Row: June Marinoff, Virginia Hanson, Gunda Sivkeland, Joan Marty, Lois Teigen

Rural students attending Winnett High School generally stayed in the dorm during the week and went home on the weekends. These students surmounted the distance and poor methods of travel to get to Winnett for the week. Younger students attending rural schools either traveled every day to and from school, boarded with the teacher, or stayed with nearby neighboring families during the school year.

“During the winter of 1906-07, Mrs. Messier and the children lived in a dugout on land belonging to Mr. Leedy, so the children could attend the Leedy School. Mr. Leedy had built the school and hired a teacher for the benefit of his own children and some others in the area.”

– ROBERTA MESSIER DONOVAN

“He went to country school, sometimes walking with his brothers and sisters as far as four miles one way. It was mighty cold in those days and by the time they got to school, their lunch would be frozen, and they themselves almost frozen.”

– HELEN KINDT QUIGG about HENRY CLINT QUIGG

“When I was a first grader, I stayed with the Mutch family during bad weather, as they lived just a short distance from the school. Other years my sister and I stayed with the teacher during the week, going home on weekends.”

– HELEN LESLIE BRYSON

“Edith’s (Brumfield) family lived across the Missouri so every Friday afternoon she would leave the school and ride home... She rode both ways on horseback, having to cross the river either by swimming the horse across or by boat. It was six or seven miles cross-country for her to travel.”

– MARIE ZAHN, LITTLE CROOKED CREEK SCHOOL IN 1928





I bicycled two miles to school; my dad took me on the tractor if the snow was too deep.”

– Luann Knutson, Class of ‘67

“[Kids] rode horses to school which we just turned loose in the school yard. . . A couple times Vic (Wadman) and I tied our horses up and then left the gate open at recess. After a while the other horses got out. They would take off grazing, and then we would just happen to notice that they were gone. [The teacher, Ruth Ingalls] would send Vic and me to bring them back. We sure had a hard time getting them back! We’d run them around to get them out of sight of the school in a coulee bottom on good grass. We’d let them graze a while and then go for a ride around the country. We made it back before school was out and the teacher never got wise.”

– CARROLL MANUEL, CLASS OF ‘38

“I had a little Shetland pony named Star, but I just called him Pony. He was about 11 hands high. I rode him about a mile and a half; we had to cross the Musselshell River and climb a hill from the coulee to school. Pony packed me to school for years. Often, I rode bareback, but his saddle was so small and light that I could hoist it onto his back myself. I tied my lunch and books in an old flour sack, and they flopped along as we galloped to school.”

– DIANE AHLGREN, CLASS OF ‘77

“Those old country school houses were something. They never knew what insulation was in those days. They always had a row of windows on the south side with very little shades if any.”

– CARROLL MANUEL, CLASS OF ‘38

(pictured at right)

“It was up to the teacher to get to school to build the fire and clean the school before school.”

– CARROLL MANUEL, CLASS OF ‘38

“The school was heated with a coal furnace. Numbered coal buckets were placed in the foyer. We all were assigned a number, and we were responsible for keeping our bucket full of coal from the shed out back.”

– LUANN KNUTSON, CLASS OF ‘67

“There was a big oil stove, and we all moved closer to it during the winter. Often, we would bring a potato to school and put it on top of the stove; by lunch time, we had a hot potato.”

– LEE IVERSON, CLASS OF ‘59



Education was important to early homesteaders and several provided space for school in their own homes, “In the Dovetail area, the first school was held in the one-room log cabin that had been the Iverson home.” – Pages of Time

Several ranchers also paid for the new schools, “M.P. Teigen, my great grandfather, built and paid for this school house himself. He also paid the first teachers himself.”

– DAVID D. WICKHORST

“My granddad donated an acre of land to the school district in 1923. The school is a combination of two schools; Franklin, down a little way, started in 1919, and Connolly, back up the road, was built in 1917. Both schools were moved here and joined in 1923; the school was named Dovetail after Dovetail Creek.”

– LEE IVERSON, CLASS OF '59

“We had a very small room that was our library; after completing our assignments, it was a privilege to choose a book. George Washington and Abe Lincoln hung on the wall above the teacher’s desk, the alphabet stretched across the top of the blackboard, and we had lots of world and United States maps.”

– LUANN KNUTSON – CLASS OF '67



Top: Schellenberger School, 1914 Hillius children, Louisa Wilson, teacher, Sam Pribble, School trustee.

Left: Dovetail School, Labeled, “My children at Dovetail School 1933–34” by teacher Alzora Prewitt Clark.

MANY COUNTRY SCHOOL TEACHERS TAUGHT IN MULTIPLE PLACES, AND MANY MARRIED LOCAL RANCHERS.

Gen taught in at least five different country schools. “I taught school in several rural areas,”

– GENEVIEVE HAMILL (LATER BRADY)

“My grandparents, Bard M. Teigen, who was 24 at the time, and Ann M. Teigen, who was 19, first met in 1929 because her first teaching job was at the Teigen School. She was Ann Clark back then from Grass Range. They were married on December 11th, 1934.”

– DAVID W. WICKHORST

“A lot of young girls came west to teach and hunt husbands. It must have been quite a shock to their systems out in those little remote school houses.”

– CARROLL MANUEL, CLASS OF '38

“I had a contract with the School Board. But Pete Lund was the one that took me from Valentine out to Dovetail. And it was unusual for me because I had never even seen log houses – log houses with dirt on the roof. I came to Winnett – Dovetail – because I’d got a job teaching there, at Dovetail Schoolhouse. When I came over, I came on the train from Missoula to Harlowton and on up to Lewistown, and on out to Roy. And they had told me the mail truck would meet me there. To me, a mail truck was different than what I was met in – an old Ford truck.”

– HELEN WAGAR IVERSON, TAUGHT AT DOVETAIL 1927-29



Martha Cornue, Teacher



Entertaining Gertrude Austad, a teacher in the Petrolia area.

Most memories of the rural schools mirror that of Carroll Manuel's, saying, "We all had good times at those old schools, though."

"We had a 15-minute recess twice a day. Mrs. Jensen waving a hand brass bell in the doorway meant the playtime was up. If we had wandered too far and out of hearing range, we had to make up the time – this was very annoying. Our playtime or free time was seasonal. What we did on our free time depended on the weather. The fall days were spent roaming over the nearby hills and down to the creek, where we picked out sticks and willows that would make suitable 'stick horses.'

"This does not sound like much today but to us in the 1930's picking out a good stick horse became quite an art. First, you had to find a stick that wasn't too big or small. If you wanted a buckskin, you carefully scraped the top of the bark off. If you wanted a palomino to put style to your bunch of horses, you scraped deeper and took all the bark off leaving a pretty whitish color. My friend, Marie, always had the stick horse that bucked the hardest and was forever throwing her to the ground."

– MARGARET HEDMAN
(pictured at right)



Kelly Area Teachers
L to R: Ruth Straight, Esther Hodges,
Jessie Moore, Lily Cooley.



“Rodney and I attended the Mosby country school from 1970-1975. My grandmother, Alma Rowton, was our teacher. The first few years there we had no plumbing and had to use outhouses up the hill, boys to the left and girls to the right. We played Fox & Geese when there was snow, Anny I Over, Tag, and spent many hours on the swing set. There were around ten or more students until the last year, and then Rodney, our cousin Darwin Rowton and I were the only students. Mosby School was closed in 1975, and we rode the bus into Winnett for the remainder of our school years.”

– TAMMIE STARKJOHANN, CLASS OF ‘82

“We also put on a Christmas program for the parents, which was fun to learn the pieces for these little plays. For the end of the school year, we put on a program and had a community picnic with everyone coming to join us from miles around.”

– MARIE ZAHN

“In the second grade at Christmas time we put on a little play. We went over to the Shay School, and the Brush Creek School was also there. We all put on our plays there, and then had a dance afterward. I believe that was the first Christmas tree I ever saw, and it even had candles on it.”

– CARROLL MANUEL, CLASS OF ‘38

Winnett School Band & Community Orchestra, 1939

Back Row: James Black, Fern Kindt, JoAnn Tripp, Lura Ann Gaines, Donald Bower.
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.



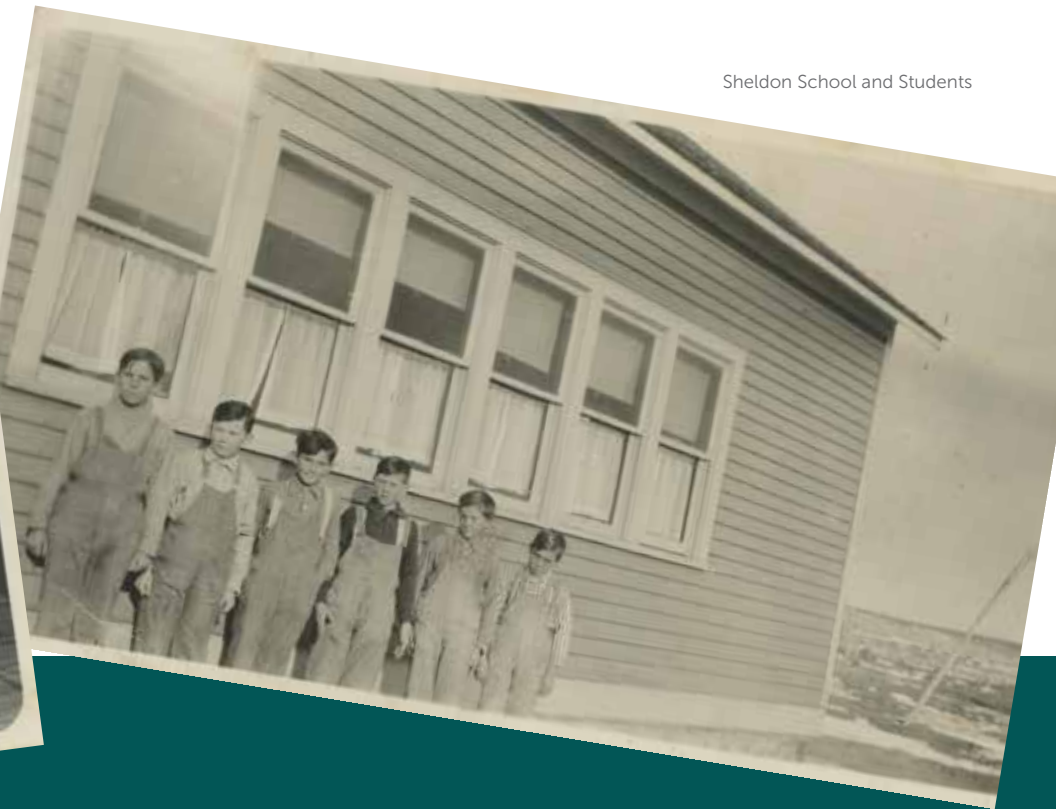
“Joe had a four-legged friend “Mr. Buck,” a big buck sheep that the Whisonants used for breeding purposes. Mr. Buck followed Joe everywhere he went. To make a long story short, the buck was quite mean, but not with Joe. The sheep had a love or hatred (he doesn’t know which) for ladies of adult ages. The buck loved to run at them, jump on them and usually knock them down. Mrs. Show, the teacher, walked with a limp and was scared to death of Mr. Buck. He had to be locked up when Mrs. Show would walk the quarter mile to visit us. She was petrified at the sight of him. It seems the teacher had some new puppies in her living quarters in the teacherage, part of the school that four-year-old Joe liked to come see during the school day. It was a warm day, and the door to the school was left open. Mr. Buck entered the school and ran up and started eating paper out of the waste basket. Mrs. Show became very frightened and jumped upon her desk and began to scream loudly. Lillian and Donald finally came to Mrs. Show’s rescue after all the students had a very good laugh. Little Joe became an instant hero and made the students’ day.”

– JOE WHISONANT, CLASS OF ‘55

“Things were really different out here in the country. I was the fifth of 10 kids, and we didn’t have time for foolishness before and after school. We milked the cows and fed the livestock before we walked to school, and we had ranch chores again every afternoon. After graduating eighth grade, I went back to Winnett for high school. My brother and I batched; we got a house in town and off the ranch. No more milking cows!”

– BILL SOLF, CLASS OF ‘56

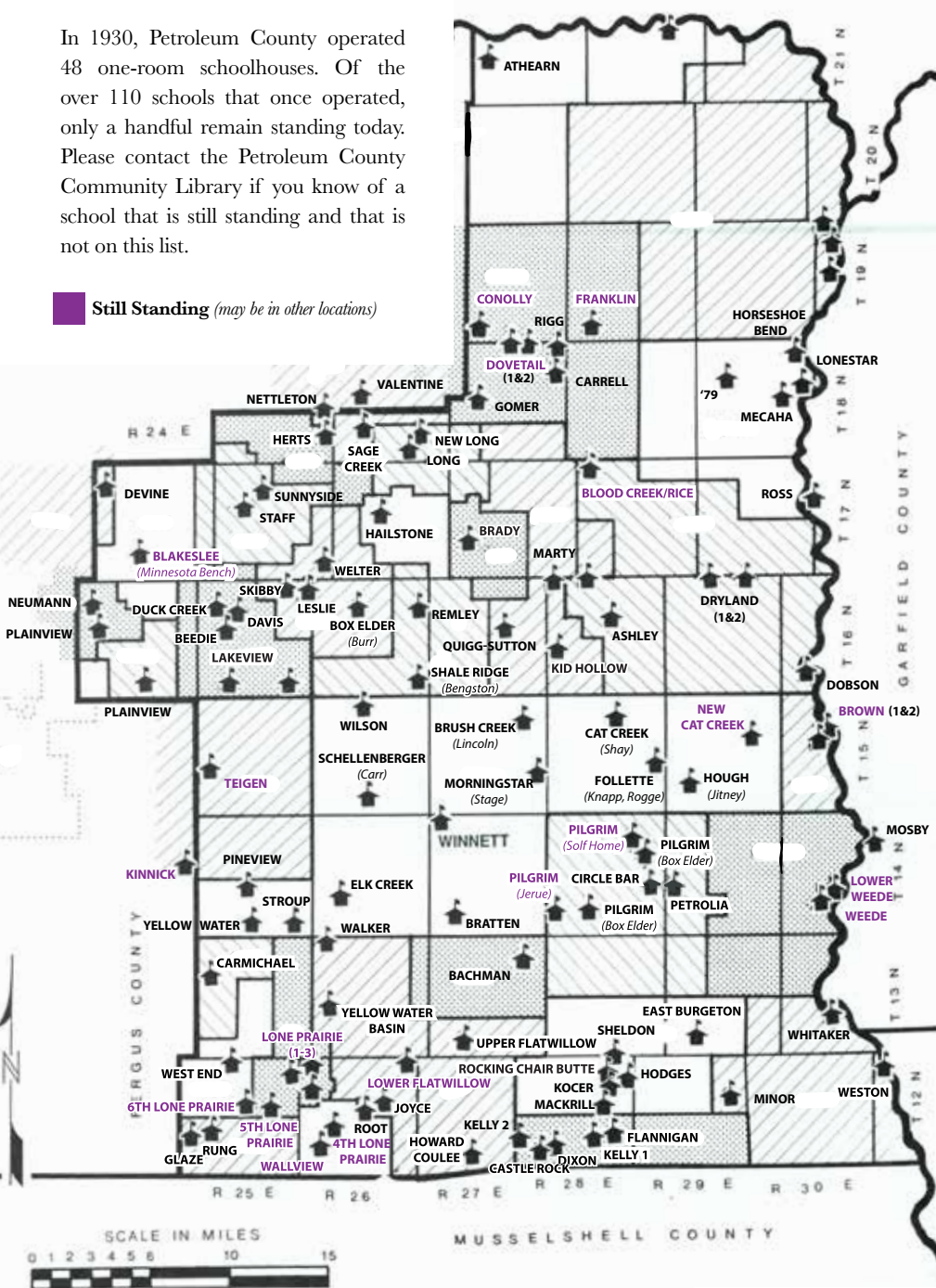
Sheldon School and Students



WHAT REMAINS TODAY

In 1930, Petroleum County operated 48 one-room schoolhouses. Of the over 110 schools that once operated, only a handful remain standing today. Please contact the Petroleum County Community Library if you know of a school that is still standing and that is not on this list.

Still Standing (may be in other locations)



BLAKESLEE SCHOOL

In 1916 Wick Junkin donated a lifetime easement for the Blakeslee School building, which still stands. Constructing a schoolhouse proved to be a difficult endeavor in a place lacking timber. In order to build the Blakeslee School on the Minnesota Bench, lumber had to be procured from Lewistown, about 50 miles away. Several community members agreed to take teams to Lewistown and spend the five to six days going and coming in order to get the supplies. Warner Kruger described the process once the materials arrived,

“The day the lumber arrived everyone in the community dropped what they were doing, and all assembled on the spot to put the school together. Putting the building up took just five days. The wives made a big picnic out of the affair, so stacks of food were brought for everyone, and what a gay time!”



Above and Top Right: The Blakeslee/Minnesota Bench School Kids.

Bottom Right: The Blakeslee School House in present day, photo by Michael Delaney

BLOOD CREEK/RICE SCHOOL

The Blood Creek School was also known as the Rice School and, along with the Ashley School, was the first school in the north central part of the county in 1917. The school was built by Ed Rice and his children attended school here. The school operated until 1942.



Rice School, Present Day. Photo by Lana Murnion.

BROWN SCHOOL

In September 1921, the Brown School became the newest school at the Cat Creek oilfield. Virgil Stewart was probably the first teacher. The school operated until 1942. The building was moved into Winnett and was a residence until it was damaged in a fire in the 1990s. It has stood empty since that time.



Top: Brown School, Present Day after being moved to Winnett, Montana.

Left: Genevieve Hamill (later Brady) at the Brown School with two of her students, Alvin Fail and Margery Shaughnessy in 1933 or 34.

CAT CREEK SCHOOL

“By the fall of 1922, more room was needed for the sixty or so children which Mrs. Annis Barnes had been hired to teach. A large one-room building had been acquired for use as a school. Early in the term, however, it became evident two teachers were needed. Miss Mabel Reed from Pennsylvania was hired, and the two teachers taught their classes in the same room. The next year, two rooms were added to the large room, and three teachers were hired. (One of the rooms added was the former Jitney school building.) During the early years of the oil field school, a school bus transported children from the various oil camps to the main camp where the school was located.”

- THE CAT CREEK SCHOOL, EXCERPT FROM THE *THE PAGES OF TIME*

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



Cat Creek School, present day. East of Winnett on the Ahlgren Ranch.

CAT CREEK TEACHERAGE

“One of the teacherages from the Cat Creek area was moved by Carroll Manuel and used by him as part of a cow camp. In the 1950s-60s, Manuel would drive his team of horses down to cattle in this location in the afternoon and feed them hay. He spent the night in the old building, fed the cows in the morning and headed back home to the rest of the cattle. This building is now on the Ahlgren Ranch.”

- VICTOR MANUEL



Top: Victor Manuel peeking out of the door of the Hough School Teacherage.

Left: Hough School Teacherage present day. Photo by Charlie Ahlgren.

CIRCLE BAR/PETROLIA/BOX ELDER SCHOOL

This school started out as the Circle Bar School, which was built from cottonwood logs sawed at the George Ingebo sawmill in 1914. Martha Freed was the first teacher. In 1919, the building was moved to the Petrolia townsite and became known as the Petrolia School. This school was closed and children attended only the Pilgrim School. Anna Solf purchased the Petrolia/Circle Bar building and had it moved to the Solf Ranch, where it became known as the Box Elder School. Bill Solf says of the building, “My mom recognized the value and beauty of these one-room schools and wanted one back on Solf land; she purchased Box Elder’s identical twin (Pilgrim School) and brought it here. This school is exactly like the one we went to.”



Top: Circle Bar School, present day, East of Winnett on the Solf Ranch.

Left: Headed home from the Circle Bar School in Bob Nelson’s Model T in about 1915.

DOVETAIL/CONOLLY/FRANKLIN

The first school district in the Dovetail area was formed in 1916. The schoolhouse that sits in the Dovetail location today was created from two separate schoolhouses: the Connolly school, built approximately 1920, and the Franklin school, built in the same year as the Connolly school. As people moved away, schools began to close. In 1923, members of the community decided to move the Franklin schoolhouse to a more central place. Tom Iverson donated land and the school was moved to the present Dovetail location along the 79 Trail. In 1928, the school board decided there needed to be a larger building at Dovetail for student activities as well as community functions. They moved the Connolly schoolhouse in and attached it to the Franklin school that year. The school operated until 1965. It is currently owned by the Chain Buttes Grazing District and hosts the occasional birthday party, card party, or graduation party.



Top: The Conolly School being moved to Dovetail in 1928

Left: The Dovetail School in present day. Photo by Leslie Iverson

JERUE/PILGRIM/BOX ELDER

This school was first known as the Jerue School and was built from cottonwood logs sawed at the George Ingebo sawmill at the same time as the materials for the Circle Bar School, these two schools served the 40 children in the area in 1914. The school building was later moved to Box Elder Creek just below the hill at the Solf's place and became known as the Box Elder School. When it was no longer in use as a school, Clinton Hassett bought the schoolhouse and teacherage, moved them to his place, and made a home for the Henry Bratten family to move into in December 1959. The home has been occupied since by various hired men and their families. Orren Kiehl moved into the home after graduation from Winnett High School in 1986 and worked for Clinton. He married Laura (Kuhry) in 1988, and the couple has lived in the home since then, with the Kiehl Ranch acquiring ownership of the Hassett Ranch in 1990. Much remodeling has been done, a garage was added in 2005, and another addition was made in 2018. Orren and Laura have raised their two children, Ashley and Austin, in the home. Throughout it all, the original oak floor has remained intact, and is still very beautiful.

- LAURA KUHRY KIEHL



KINNICK SCHOOL

By the time the Kinnick School was established on the George Kinnick homestead, only the youngest of the Kinnick's five children, Alice, attended this school. This school operated for nearly fifty years, from 1914 – 1962, in multiple locations and served children from both Petroleum and Fergus Counties. Russ Gjerde relates that he received a very good education at the Kinnick School, especially in the area of phonics.

When there were no longer any students in the area, the school was 'consolidated' after three years and a sealed bid process was taken to sell the building. This was in December of 1963. Martin Olson purchased the building and it was moved to his place. In 1975 the Haynie's purchased Martin's ranch and the building was used for hired men. It has been added onto and is now home to their daughter, Lajette Haynie.



LONE PRAIRIE/WALLVIEW SCHOOL

Wallview School: 1912 - 1935 | Lone Prairie School: 1935 - 1964

The Lone Prairie School existed in six different locations and as two different buildings. The present-day Lone Prairie Schoolhouse began as the Wallview Schoolhouse, built in 1912, and located six miles southeast of the original Iverson homestead. In the 1930's, the building was moved five miles north to a more central place for the population at that time. In 1942, it was moved with Stanley Eliasson's semi-truck. The children of Andrew Iverson and Mr. Monsma occupied the schoolhouse. Approximately 1945, the Lone Prairie School was moved for the last time by Carl Brindley, who jacked it up, placed skids under it, and pulled it with his Cat to where it sits today on Upper Flatwillow Road. At this time, the school district had a cistern dug out beneath the entryway that was filled once a week and then water could be pumped out of it. An oil furnace was also installed. The Lone Prairie School operated until 1963-64.

- FROM SAM DEMBEK SCHOOL PROJECT, INTERVIEW FROM DAVID IVERSON



LONE PRAIRIE SCHOOL, 1922-1935

As discussed in the pages before, the Lone Prairie School existed in six different locations and as two different buildings. The second Lone Prairie School building was built by Otto Moore in 1922. He built a large school that had a basement and a cistern. School was held here from 1922-1935. After 1935, school was held in the building that had been at Wallview and that had been moved to the Lone Prairie community. This school building was moved into Winnett by C.V. Allen and still sits on the corner of Main Street and Grand Avenue.



Lone Prairie School Building, Present Day in Winnett;
& teacher and students of Lone Prairie in 1928

LOWER FLATWILLOW SCHOOL

The Flatwillow schoolhouse was built in 1912 by Frank Moshner, who also built the schoolhouse in Winnett. These were the first schoolhouses built in the county. Hallie King served as the first teacher in this new school building at Flatwillow. She walked back and forth from her homestead to school to teach about 30 children. She received \$65 a month. The schoolhouse held church services and community gatherings. The 1968-69 school year was its last. Tom and Lu Pugrud, nearby Flatwillow ranchers bought and moved the schoolhouse to their ranch in 1969. The Pugruds maintain and use the building for social gatherings.



Top: Historic photo of Flatwillow School

Left: Present Day Flatwillow School

TEIGEN SCHOOL

The Teigen area residents applied for a school district, but the process was too slow for Mons Teigen and he went ahead and built a school and hired a teacher, Louise Smith, himself in 1914. At one time, there were as many as 18 children. Ann Clark, teacher in 1929, met Bard M. Teigen and they married in 1934. In 1975, the couple donated the building and its contents to the Daughters of the American Revolution, who moved the building to the Lewistown City Park. The building needed to be moved when the museum began an expansion. The foundation for the old school had deteriorated beyond repair and the school was torn down. However, the contents of the school are on display in the Central Montana Historical Museum.

[Contributions from Dave Wickhorst and Nancy Schultz]



Teigen School c. 1970

WEEDE SCHOOL

The Weede School district was formed in 1913 and the first schoolhouse sat at the mouth of Flatwillow Creek [on the Musselshell River]. This land was acquired from George Gates. Verda Keith remembers getting to the Weede school, “When I was in first and second grade, I stayed with Lou and Mugs Hill and walked to school with their kids, a journey of about a mile and a half. The Weede School was where I went for eight years. Hills lived across the river so we had a trolley to ride, except when the river was frozen over.”

The first Weede schoolhouse is now part of the ranch house at Clint and Louanne Woodford’s ranch. The second Weede school was located down the Musselshell at the James McGibboney place. It was moved to the Shaw place and is used to store feed.

[Contributions from Louanne Woodford, Wyna Woodford, and Jolene Shaw].



Top: The first Weede schoolhouse, part of the Woodford Ranch House, East of Winnett on the Musselshell River.

Left: The second Weede school on the Shaw place.

WINNETT/LITTLE WHITE SCHOOLHOUSE

Constructed in 1912 by Frank Moshner, the Little White Schoolhouse served as Winnett's first school and is the oldest building in town today. It stood at 101 South Broadway, the location of all future and current Winnett school facilities. It was one-room and 20x40 feet in size. Around twenty-five students filled the building in its first year under the direction of Agnes Jones. Alma Frye (later Edwards) finished the year when Ms. Jones died.

The Little White Schoolhouse held grade school classes until the construction of a much larger school building in 1921. It then provided space for shop and mechanics classes. In 1965, the school sold the building to the Methodist Church and it was moved from Block 27 to Block 15, Lot 18. It was remodeled into a church. An entryway was added to the south of the building, and much later a multi-purpose room and kitchen was added to the east. When the old Winnett school building was condemned, this multi-purpose room held music and home economics classes for the Winnett Schools. So, for a few years in the late 1990s, the Little White Schoolhouse again heard the voices of schoolchildren.



Top: Historic photo of Little White Schoolhouse in Winnett

Left: Present Day, part of the Methodist Church



“

*I look back on my time in
Winnett with fondest memories.*

I loved hiking the rimrocks and in winter, skiing down the slopes, and in the summer the muddy swimming pool in the creek and ice skating on it in the winter. I was on Coach Whitten's football team, probably the poorest player, but earned my W, which I still display in the bookcase. . . . we staged several operettas and a minstrel show and [I] always enjoyed our school dances with real live music. The high school friends, both girls and boys, were very special and remain fondly in my memories.”

– Ely Swisher, Class of '33