



The Reverend Walter Leege

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



Old building moved in

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

METHODIST 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 continued at the schoolhouse under the Reverend Beer, who was serving the area from Lewistown, Montana, to Jordan, 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 protestant 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 arrived, 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-



The Reverend Alexander Aiton, wife Jean, and two children



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. Klensing, 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



"It is hard to tell who enjoyed this more — the youngsters — or Miss Rose!" At Neihart, 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

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

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 concensus 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



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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
That's sifted down through tinted window panes,
And yet I seem to feel You near tonight
In this dim, quiet starlight on the plains."
(Excerpt from "A Cowboy's Prayer" by Badger Clark)

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.



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



Masons build a fire escape. (L to R): Bill Wiggins, Kenneth Cole, Fred Story, Ed Skibby, Andrew Eckland, Elliott Trump, John Sibbert, Rudy Glatz, Henry Sibbert, Les Thompson

SANDMAN POST NO. 95 was approved and chartered September 1, 1920, and was named in memory of Carl Sandman, who was killed in World War I. The Legionnaires are always vigilant to any worthy cause within the community and see that their service-related brothers and sisters are rendered the respect due them. The Legionnaires, along with members of other organizations, were most cooperative in building a memorial for the local men who made the great sacrifice during World War I (See METHODIST CHURCH HISTORY). They also have given special recognition to the following honored dead of World War II: **Robert Beedle, Edward Warner, Roscoe Moore, Charles Nordahl, Edward Marks and Glenn Shaw.** Graves of all servicemen, whether or not they met their deaths in the wars or other service, are marked with a flag on Memorial Day.



Legionnaires bury Buddy Moore in Custer Battlefield National Cemetery

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY The Auxiliary was first organized on January 22, 1922; a permanent

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 Tunncliff, 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.



Girls win 4th place in State 1974. (Back row) Susie Bevis, manager; Mr. Lindsey, coach; Kim Barisich. (Second row) Linda Welter, LaRae Arthur, Jana Woodford, Sarah Shaw, Deanna McCue, Jill King, Sonia Brindley, Margie Solf. (Front row) Jackie Barisich, Karen Kimmel, Patricia Brindley, Debby Grantier, Kelly Bohn, Sandra Phillips, Gail Shaw, and Tammi Grimm.



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