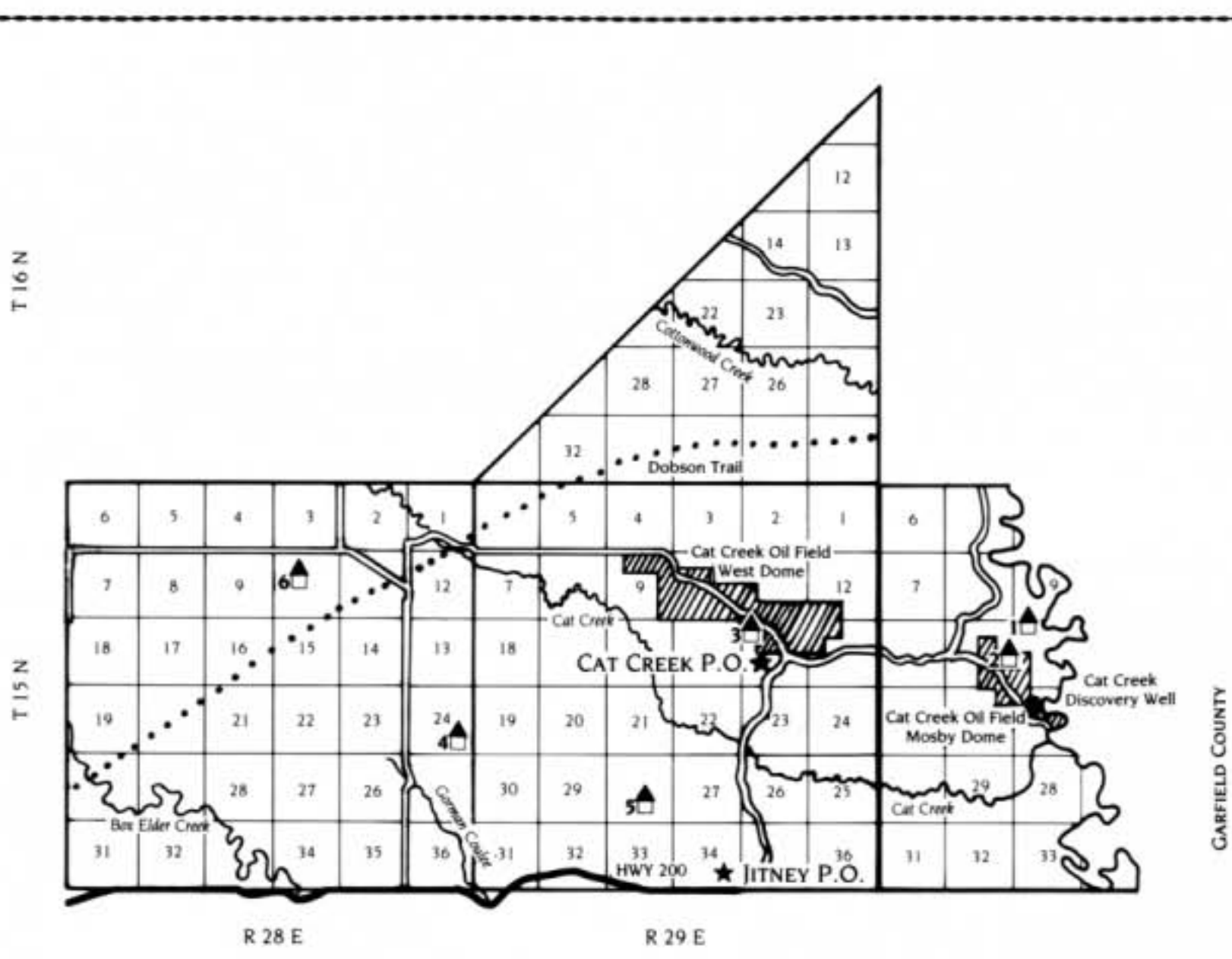
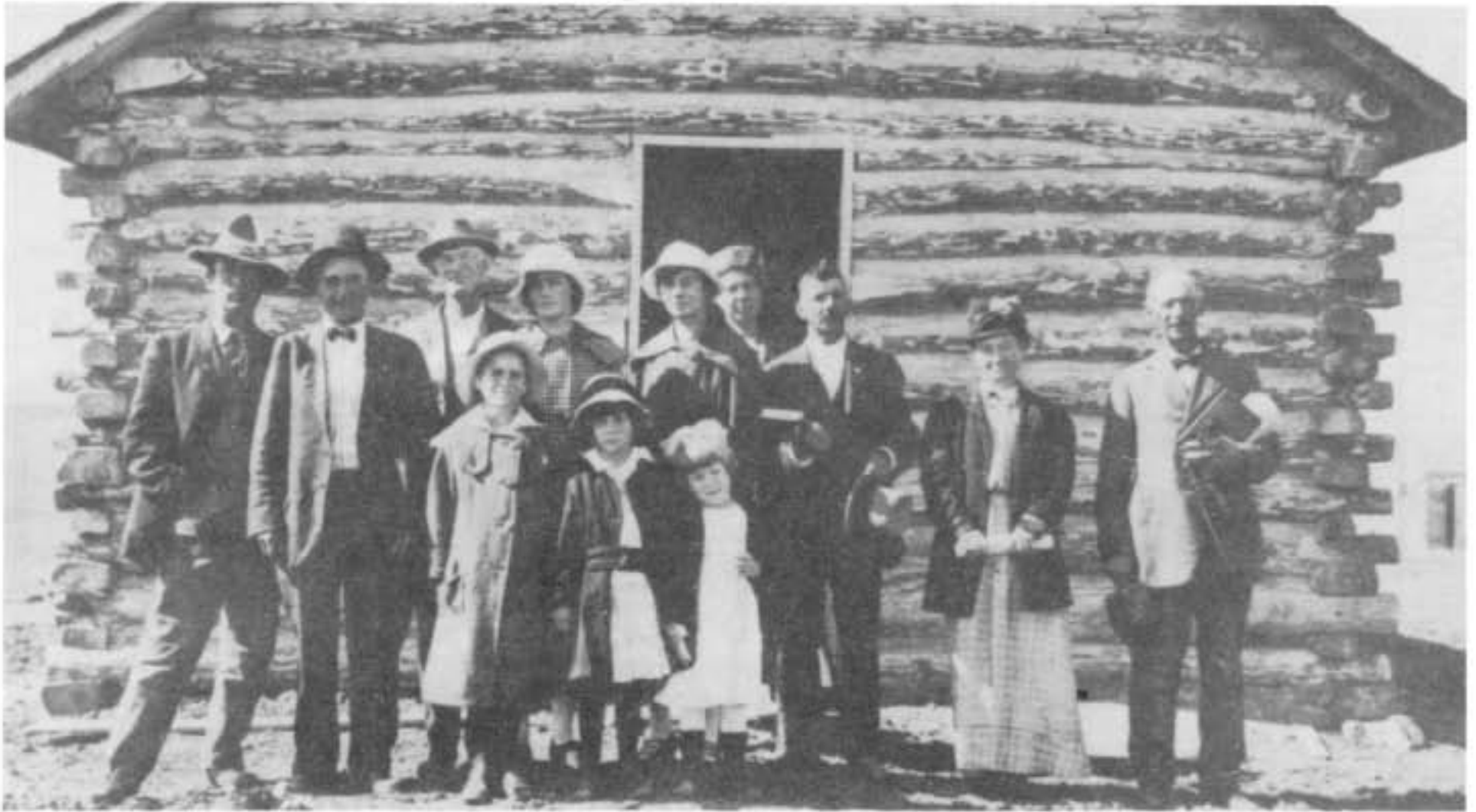


Cat Creek — Jitney — Shay



- SCHOOLS**
1. Brown - 1
 2. Brown - 2
 3. Cat Creek
 4. Follette (Knapp, Rogge)
 5. Hough (Jitney)
 6. Original Cat Creek (Shay)



Church at the Cat Creek Basin (Shay) School on September 16, 1917. (L to R) Floyd "Lone Eagle" Maine, Sylva Thomas, George Holt, Pearl Shay, Leone Pribble, Ginevra Van Tassell, I. E. Thomas, Flora Thomas, Reverend George Maine, (children) Maxine Cox, Irene Cox, Juanita Shay



(Front row Bill Armagost, Ben Stone, Bartley, Bill Peden
(Back row) Ritchie, George Burke, Lou Sontag, Ira Pierson

Sunday school at the new Shay schoolhouse in April 1926



Cat Creek Basin

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The first permanent settlers locating in the basin first looked over this beautiful and fertile valley on April 6th,

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

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

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

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

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

"We borrowed a couple of cow ponies and trailed over

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

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

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

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

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

"Mr. Thomas invented an 'arm-strong' grain separator, which consisted of a wagon box and a flail. With the help of his family and a few curious neighbors, the entire crop

was flailed out in three days and measured just 42 bushels from one and one-half acres. This 42 bushels was distributed among all the neighbors in the basin. This may well be said to be the beginning of the wheat-growing industry of Cat Creek Basin.

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

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

"The spring of 1914 made the basin look something like a neighborhood of real farmers. By this time the Rogge brothers, Shays, I. E. Thomas, Clark Barber, Maine Ranch, Dunphy and Follette each had grain fields of 80 acres or over. That year something like 28,000 bushels of grain was threshed from 1100 acres. During the fall of 1914 there were over 1500 acres of fall wheat sown, while the next spring 800 acres were sown to spring crop, making a total of 2300 acres harvested in the basin in 1915, from which we threshed 62,000 bushels of grain, an average of 27 bushels per acre for the entire basin, while several fields made from 40 to 45 bushels per acre . . . Many of the ranchers in the basin the past two years have specialized in one certain phase of farming. The Rogge brothers now grow hundreds of bushels of corn annually and at present are feeding several carloads of hogs. I. E. Thomas, William Cutright, John Dunphy and Maine Ranch have had good success in raising alfalfa and several varieties of Dent corn. Several farmers have also grown flax with success.

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

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

Cat Creek Cemetery

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

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

ty. Roy Shay elected president, L. H. Manuel elected secretary, H. J. Knapp elected treasurer." LeRoy Manuel continued as secretary until 1960 when the records were discontinued.

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

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

Post Offices

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

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

Walter Piotrowski served as mail carrier. After the Cat Creek Post Office was established in 1922, the Cat Creek

carrier carried the Jitney mail en route to Winnett.

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

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

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

Schools

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

The first Cat Creek School was opened in Charlie Wortman's cabin about one mile north of Thomases in 1912, with Grace Miller as teacher. Grace boarded at the Thomases. According to Floyd Maine, "On November 11, 1912, our day school was established in an abandoned

log house, Miss Grace Miller being the first teacher. During the following winter she organized a literary society among the settlers, and many a pleasant Friday evening was spent in merriment when the thermometer ran below the zero line."

Stella Manuel remembers school being held the next year in Walter Shay's cabin. (Walter died the year before) In 1914, Mr. Maine goes on to say, "We built our first regular schoolhouse, Miss Ginevra Van Tassell being the first to teach in our new building. (See picture of log school at beginning of chapter.) In 1919 a school site



Hough schoolhouse in 1957 after it was converted for use as a cow camp on the Manuel Ranch

was purchased from the Shay family in Sec 10-15-28. A very fine new building was built complete with a basement. The basement served as a snug warm teacherage. (Pictured at beginning of chapter.) After a school was opened in the Cat Creek oil field, this school became known as the Original Cat Creek or Shay School.

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

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

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



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



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



Cat Creek School (1931) with Eline Warner as teacher. Jack Ihde standing, Herschel Barber, Billy Ihde, Allen Peters, Richard Adams, Robert Campbell, Elmer Grosser, Wilma Manuel



Genevieve Hamill (later Brady) at the Brown School with two of her students, Alvin Fail and Margery Shaughnessy in 1933 or 1934.

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.

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

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

Cat Creek Oil Field

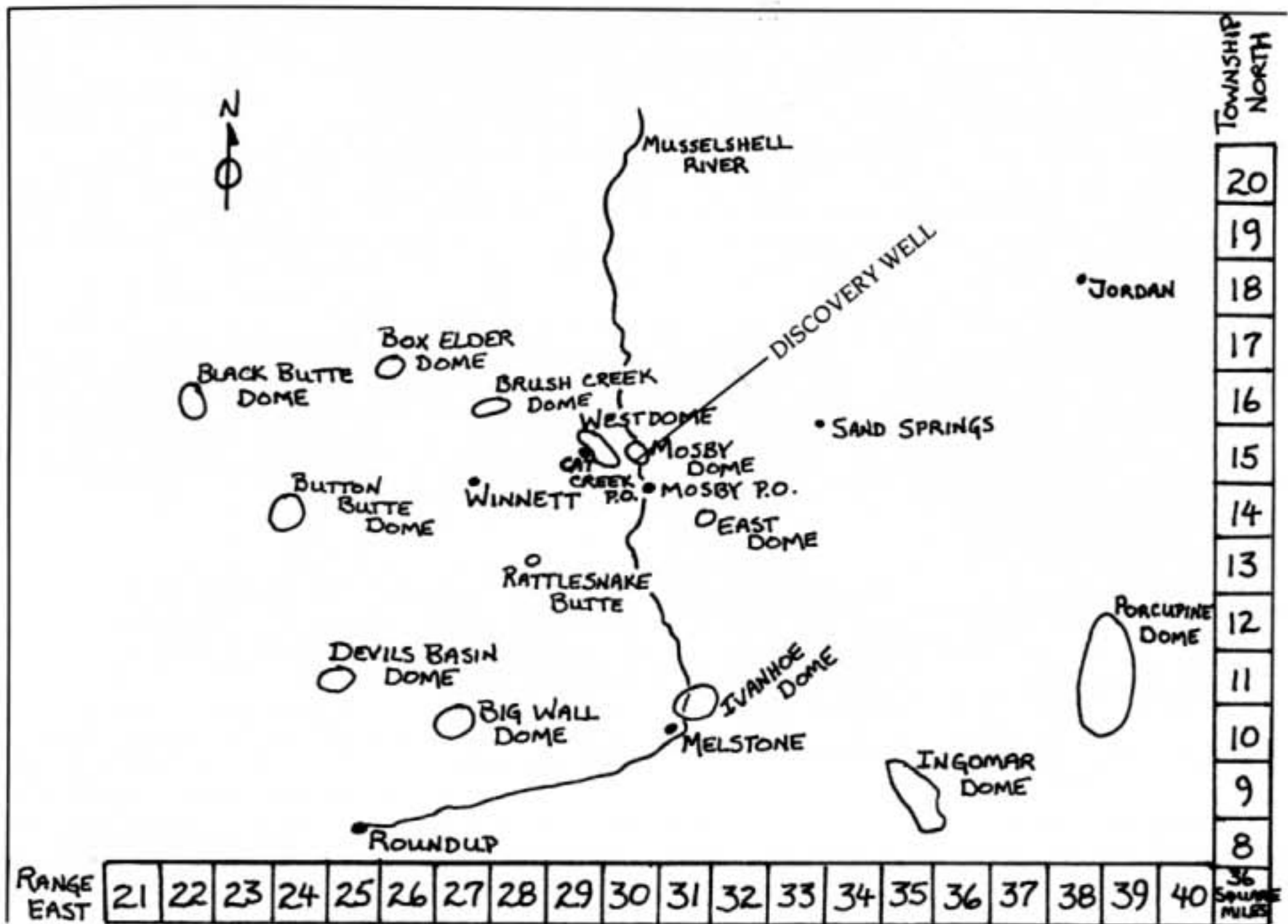
Scant attention was paid to the four strangers who checked into the hotel in Winnett on October 9, 1919. Too many everyday concerns plagued the people of the town and, for that matter, all of what was then eastern Fergus County. Severe drought, shortages of feed and water for livestock, poor crops and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

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

Mr. Kerr, living in Melsone at the time, finally aroused

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

All the while, Mr. Kerr continued to seek financing for a more ambitious drilling program in the Cat Creek area. He succeeded in arousing the interest of the Cosden Oil Company of Oklahoma to the extent that the company sent geologist Charles T. Lupton to Winnett to examine



Sketch of the relationship of various potential oil-bearing formations in Petroleum County and adjoining areas (W. T. 3-14-46)

the structure. Though Mr. Lupton's report was very favorable, the Cosden Company turned it down. After Cosden's refusal, however, Mr. Lupton gained the attention of Frank Frantz, ex-rough rider and ex-governor of Oklahoma, in the proposal.

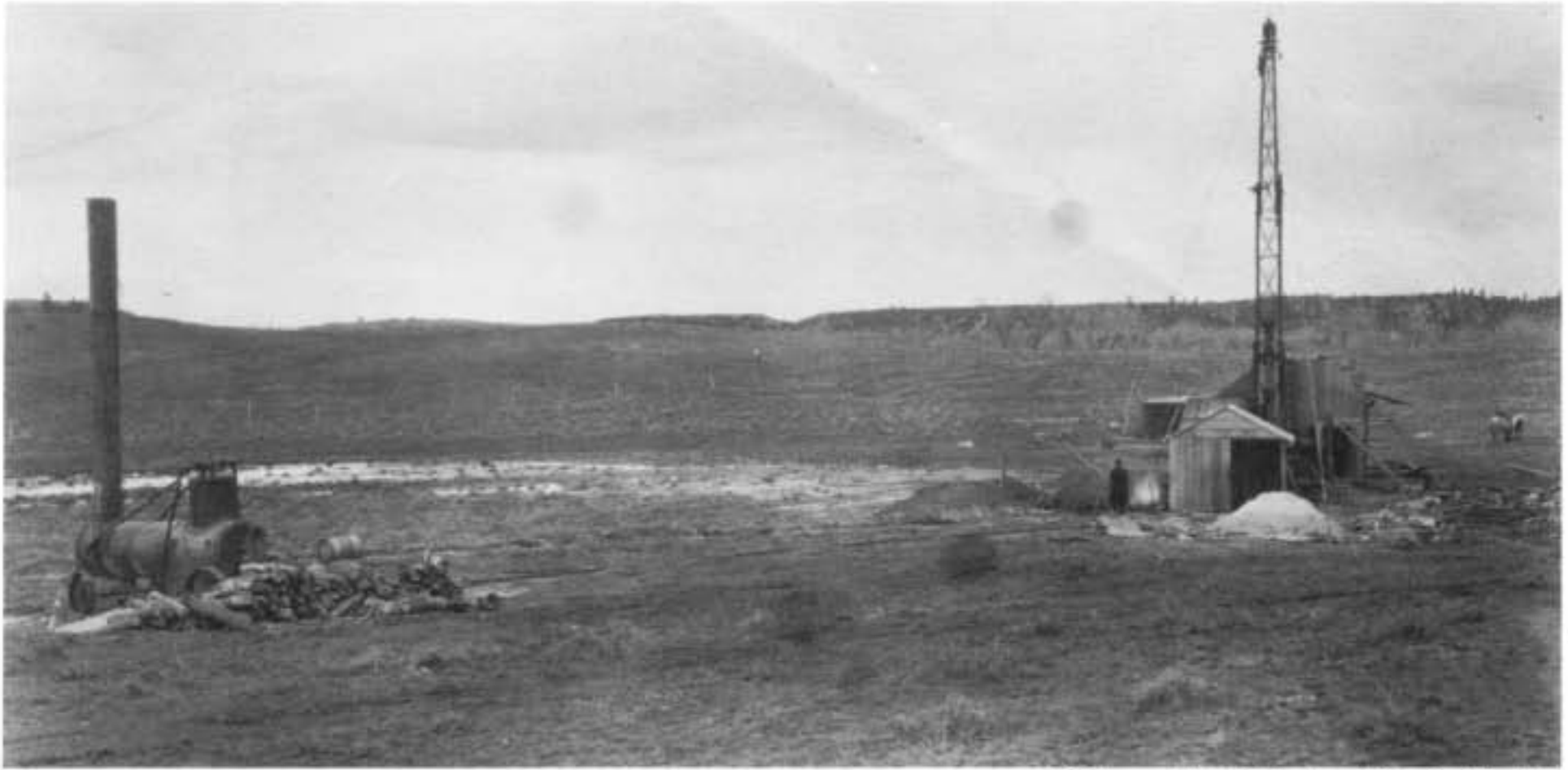
Frank Frantz was chief of the land department for Cosden in Oklahoma and Texas. He and several other officials of Cosden's western division, together with brokers and bankers from Casper, Wyoming and Denver, Colorado, formed a new company — the Frantz Corporation — with \$3,000,000 capitalization. The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

In the meantime, the Brush Creek well, which had been started by the Musselshell Valley Oil Company, hit a heavy flow of water at a depth of 600 feet and had to be abandoned. Undaunted, the Frantz Corporation sent drilling superintendent L. S. "Roxey" Lantz, drillers J. S. "Curley" Meek and Saul Alderdice, and tool dresser Fred Barnett to drill an exploration well on its newly acquired

Cat Creek holdings. These men were the strangers who checked into the hotel in Winnett on October 9, 1919.

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

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



The Cat Creek Discovery Well on the Musselshell River

(Photo courtesy of Montana Historical Society)

sharp curves.

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

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

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

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

"Drilling was slow, with power provided by a wood-burning boiler, fired with cottonwood logs, purchased in the area for \$8.00 a cord. It was even slower because the old drilling machine had no calf wheel. The drilling line was of the type then known as "rag line," nine strand

Manila rope 2½ inches in diameter. Every time pipe was run, it was necessary to pull the tools, take them down, spool the rope, and put on wire line for lowering the pipe. Re-spooling of the big rope and reassembling of the tool strip was necessary every time drilling was resumed.

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

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

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

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

On February 19, 1920, the well reached the Second Cat



The Frantz cookhouse on the river built after the discovery was made (Photo courtesy of Montana Historical Society)

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

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

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

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

two four-horse teams left Winnett on March 28 with supplies for Frantz' wells!

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

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

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