



according to the Tulsa Oil and Gas Company.

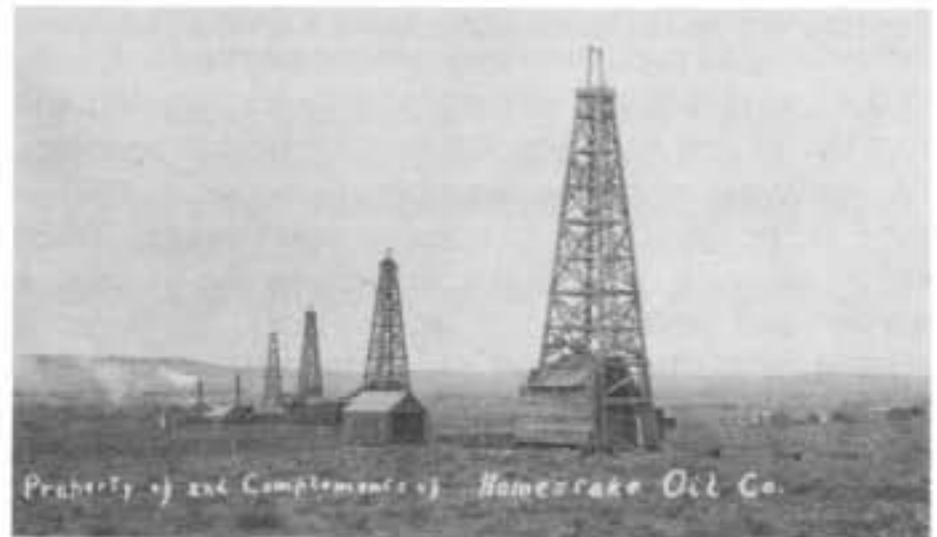
The barren hills adjacent to the first two wells were alive with activity. Each drilling company set up its own camp. Tar-paper shacks, the material for which could be hauled in one wagon, were thrown up in one day. Even the smallest drilling outfit had a cookhouse and a bunkhouse, and the larger companies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

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

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

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

"Miles City always comes through. The homesteader was no sooner on his way to Wisconsin than Smiling Joe Baker was out to sell 56 units in his oil lease for \$250 each in order to raise the \$14,000 to pay for the lease. In a few hours the money was in the bank . . . Baker secured a rig and started the drill. The lease was secured in early July,



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

the well was 'spudded in' in September, and November 1 the units which were sold to the original 56 subscribers were quoted at \$12,500 each . . .

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



A Daily Sight: Oil tank cars loaded with high grade oil from the Cat Creek field leaving Winnett, Montana, for the refinery. Photo by Western Portrait film service, Roundup, Montana.

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

Businesses thrived in Winnett in a helter-skelter fashion. Almost 200 new businesses were established in a year's time — some housed temporarily in tents! Hardly a week passed without prominent oil men from all across the United States visiting. Storage, pipelines, transportation

and refining all presented their unique problems. A huge 55,000 barrel tank was erected in Cat Creek to collect and store the oil, and a pipeline was hurriedly laid to Winnett.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After the first couple of frantic years of exploration and development, the reality of the limitation of the oil field's size was gradually accepted. The predictions of oil-bearing sands stretching from Black Butte on the northeast end of the Judith Mountains to beyond the Musselshell River were not being realized. Though hope



*Living quarters in the heart of the oil field at the Frantz camp (Photo courtesy of Montana Historical Society)*



ran high in the minds of many promoters and land-owners, the fact remained that oil was being produced on less than ten sections of land in an area less than a mile wide and barely six miles from tip to tip (with a gap of several miles between the West Dome in Cat Creek proper and the Mosby Dome on the river). More sobering still, the area was surrounded by dry holes.

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

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

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

The Continental Oil Company established a telephone



*Typical wildcat drilling operation*



*This Continental Oil Co. bus brought a load of company officials from Ponca City, Oklahoma, on an inspection tour of the Cat Creek Oil Field in 1932.*

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

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

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

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

Each producing well had a pump installed in the bottom of the hole. These pumps were powered, in the early days, by large engines in central power plants. Above-ground rods connected each well's pump to a power plant. The pumpers walked the rod lines to check for wear and to keep them greased. If a rod which ran the pump in the bottom of a well broke or became disconnected (or the pump itself needed repair), the pump and rod were pulled out by a "pulling crew" with the aid of a winch and tripod. Hand tools called rod wrenches and "crummies" were used to disassemble rods and tubing. The rods and tubing were laid on rod racks and tubing racks until they were replaced in the well. Under normal conditions it took a crew of three about four hours to "pull a well."



The maintenance crew was responsible for welding, repairing and keeping the power plants in operation. Oil was pumped through above-ground pipelines to storage tanks on individual leases and from there to large central storage tanks from which it was piped to Winnett. The gauger's responsibility was to measure and record the amount of oil going to the main tanks and to test the oil for water and the basic sediment. The value of the oil was determined by the results of these tests. A large pumping station pumped the oil to Winnett. The pipeline and loading dock crew worked out of Winnett, monitoring the storage tanks, loading railroad tank cars and maintaining pipelines.

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

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

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

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

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

On October 4, 1945, the Winnett Times reported: "The rotary bit of Spencer and Livingston of Cody, Wyoming, drilling contractors, bored nine inches into the Ellis sand last Friday afternoon. Oil under high pressure forced its way up through 12-pound mud and drilling was shut down to run casing. Extra crew members from Mr. Schrock's Rattlesnake Butte test well were rushed to the

discovery and assisted in running casing. The Halliburton Co. of Wyoming arrived early Saturday morning and ran cement into the hole to shut off water from the Cat Creek water sands.

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

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

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

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



*Cat Creek CONOCO employees meeting at the Billings refinery with Glen Apple, a company official from Ponca City, Oklahoma. (L to R) Fay Story, Bob Rostad, Elwood Ihde, Bill Nevin, Art Winnett, Bob Eike, Glen Apple and Raymond Ihde*



W. S. Brindley. They agreed to drill a well on a share basis — one-third Mr. Brindley, one-third Joe Murphy (a Lewistown area rancher and financier) and one-third Spencer and Livingston. On January 1, 1946, they brought in a 1000-barrel-a-day gusher at 1376 feet. Even though the well settled down to a 450-barrel producer and eventually encountered caving problems, the strike, along with the Schrock-Fifer completions, provided the impetus for a new oil boom in Cat Creek and Winnett. The hills again bustled with activity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



*From these beginnings . . .*

*(Photo courtesy Montana Historical Society)*



*(Photo courtesy Montana Historical Society)*





*The quiet town of Cat Creek in 1961*

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

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

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

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

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

**ALLEN, John** (Sec 34-15-29) John Allen located on 320 acres along present-day Highway #200 near Jitney. Fires

from overheated stoves were a common hazard in early days, and in May 1924 the Winnett Times reported, "A fire broke out in John Allen's cabin Wednesday afternoon. An oil stove caused the blaze which was quickly extinguished. Though the house did not burn down, the interior was so damaged it was necessary for the family to find another home at least until the place can be repaired. One of Mrs. Allen's hands was burned but it is not believed to be seriously injured."

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

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

**ANDERSON, Howard** Howard Anderson and his family came to the Cat Creek area from Saco, Montana. They lived on the Mitchell place on the Musselshell River and worked for the Hanlon Oil Company. Howard and his wife, Maxine (Erickson), had three children — Dan (1944), Candy (1948) and Dianne (1953). In 1952 they moved

across the river to the Hanlon refinery and the school-age children went to the Rowton School. Later they lived in Poplar, Montana.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Armagosts raised three children during their years in Cat Creek. Frances was born in 1924, Wilbur in 1926 and Hershel Clark in 1928. The three children all attended elementary school in Cat Creek and graduated from Winnett High School. (An interesting note — Billie was chairman of the Winnett school board and gave diplomas to Frances, a 1942 graduate; her future husband, Jim Black, class of 1940; her future sister-in-law, Mrs. John Black (Margaret Hagen) class of 1938; and her brother Wilbur,

class of 1944. Mr. Armagost's term of office expired two months before Clark graduated in 1946. Otherwise, he too would have received his diploma from his father.)

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

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

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

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

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

When the fact that Izetta did not have a high school diploma came up in a conversation with her daughter and son-in-law, who is a member of the Williston School board, the son-in-law suggested she get a GED (General Education Development) certificate, the equivalent of a high school diploma. After much prayer, and determining that it was God's will, she did just that! She says God allowed her to use this experience to tell others of His love for her and for others. She now proudly displays the certificate she received in May 1988.



**ASHLEY, Nellie** Nellie Ashley was born May 19, 1885, in Bloxham, England. Her maiden name is not known. She graduated from Summerville Ladies Seminary at Oxford, England, with a M. A. degree, and she held a doctorate in theology and a fellow degree from the Royal College of Music in London. She also held a diploma from St. John's First Aid and Emergency, London. She served as an Anglican missionary in the Congo, Pakistan, West Indies and northern Canada.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**BARBER, Benjamin Clark** (Sec 3,4-15-28) "Clark" Barber bought the Al Elkin's relinquishment about a mile north of Shay in the early teens. He was remembered by Stella Manuel Coffman as a "slow-moving, slow-talking bachelor from Nebraska." In 1917, however, he married his schoolgirl sweetheart who had married someone else and was the mother of three little girls. She died during the birth of her child in 1923, leaving a baby boy, Herschel. The Reverend George Maine conducted funeral services for her, and she was buried in the Shay (Cat

Creek) Cemetery.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bessie Barden married Lorenz Thorsen in 1946.

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

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

**BARNES, William R.** (Sec 2-15-29) In June 1926 the Winnett Times reported the Will Barnes family was leaving Cat Creek for Beaver Crossing, Nebraska, where they intended to make their future home. They had lived in the Cat Creek area for about nine years.



**BARNETT, Ben** Ben Barnett came to Cat Creek in 1919 as a driller for the Frantz Oil Company. In 1920 he married Inez Adams. They had a ranch on the Musselshell River with some livestock. In the spring of 1930 Ben went to work in the oil field near Cut Bank leaving his wife to run the ranch. He filed for a divorce on April 19, 1930, naming Archie Olmstead, a young rancher on the river, as correspondent.

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

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

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

There were at least five children in the Beer family — Dora and Pearl who were school teachers, Vance born in 1891, Ida May born in 1894 and Ira born in 1899.

Pearl taught in District #122 in 1915 and in District #26 in 1917. Dora taught in District #26 in 1916, in District #121 in 1917 and in District #159 for several terms as well as teaching in the Grassrange area. She married Guy Fowler in 1925. (See also FOWLER — Cat Creek)

Vance Beer homesteaded about two miles south of Winnett (19.20-14-28). Dora also had land in Sec 18-14-28. Ira made his home in Cut Bank, Montana.

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

six children.

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

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

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

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

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

The Bevis children all attended elementary school in Cat Creek. Marian graduated from Fergus County High School in Lewistown in 1944, Earl graduated from Winnett High School in 1948, Harry in 1950, Joe in 1947 and Burt in 1955. Helen graduated from Fergus County High School in 1957.

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

The Bevises retired to Winnett in 1981. Les died in November of 1989.

**BIGLEN, Frank** Frank Biglen of Lewistown, Montana, worked for the Homestake Oil Company in the late 1930s. He returned to Lewistown in December 1938 when Homestake sold to Continental.