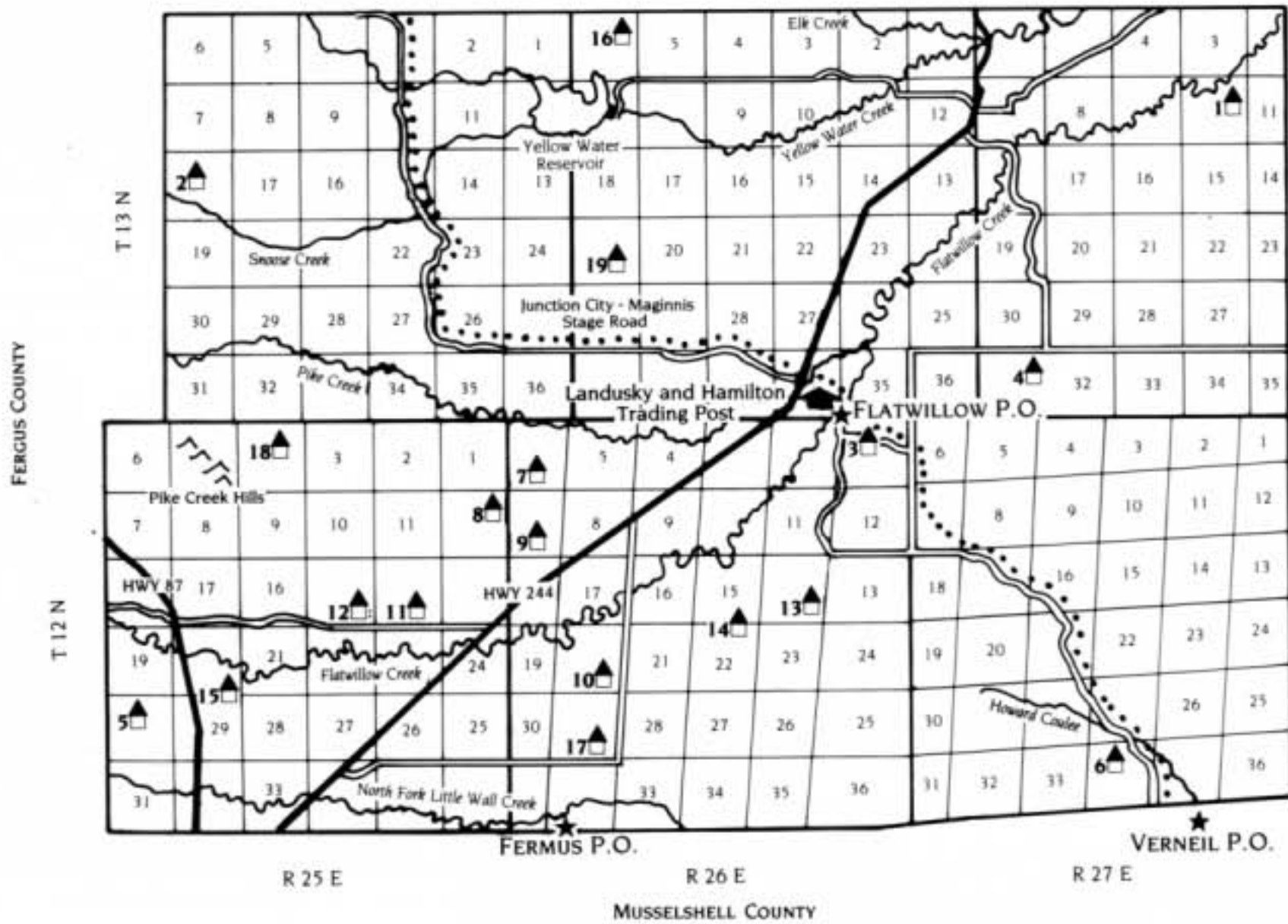
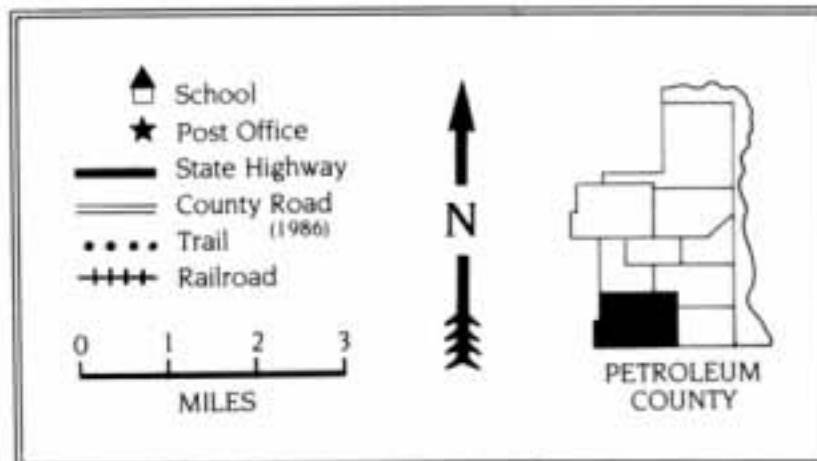


Flatwillow — Lone Prairie Wallview — Yellow Water



SCHOOLS

- 1. Bachman
- 2. Carmichael (Bender Creek)
- 3. Flatwillow, Lower
- 4. Flatwillow, Upper
- 5. Glaze
- 6. Howard Coulee
- 7. 1st Lone Prairie (East End)
- 8. 2nd Lone Prairie
- 9. 3rd Lone Prairie
- 10. 4th Lone Prairie
- 11. 5th Lone Prairie
- 12. 6th Lone Prairie
- 13. Orient (Joyce)
- 14. Root
- 15. Rung
- 16. Walker
- 17. Wallview (Johnson, Richardson)
- 18. West End (Kepford)
- 19. Yellow Water Basin (Franzen)





Community gathering. Front row: unknown, Mrs. Ernest Zimmerman, Mrs. Edith Klinger, George Evans, Helene Stroup, Annie Stroup, Marjorie Stroup, Mrs. Adam, Perry Baker, Anna Baker, Theresa Johnke, Henry Johnke, Mrs. Emil Zimmerman, Tillie McEaney, William McEaney. Back row: unknown, Mrs. Glen Stroup, Eline Warner, Glen Stroup, Vida Doman, Charles Doman, Lillian Berven, John Berven, Emil Zimmerman



Log Cabin Prairie Home



Shepherd's Wagon



Typical Backyard



Homestead Shack

Early History

The Flatwillow locality for purposes of this book includes all of the southwestern portion of present-day Petroleum County in Townships 12 and 13, Ranges 25, 26 and 27. It is an area of approximately six townships encompassing the drainage of Flatwillow Creek, Pike Creek and Yellow Water Creek.

Flatwillow Creek originates in the Snowy Mountains of Central Montana and enters the southwest corner of Petroleum County. It flows eastward for six or eight miles after it enters the county and then turns toward the north. Beautiful sandstone rimrocks, dotted with pine trees, line the eastern edge of Flatwillow Creek as it begins its northeasterly flow toward Petrolia Reservoir. Sandy soil on the top of the rims toward the east is in sharp contrast to the gumbo flats and hardpan drainage of Yellow Water Basin and Pike Creek.

Pike Creek originates in the low hills south of Grassrange. It is not a live stream and is wholly dependent upon spring runoff and rain for its existence. Yellow Water Creek originates north and a little east of Pike Creek. It is fed by a series of small springs west of the Petroleum County line. These springs made upper Yellow Water Creek attractive to early settlers. Yellow Water and Pike Creeks both flow in an easterly direction and empty into Flatwillow Creek.

An historic description of Flatwillow Creek and Flatwillow Crossing can be found in Granville Stuart's book *Pioneering in Montana*. In his journal he records an overnight stop in May 1880 at Landusky and Hamilton's trading post at Flatwillow Crossing. He says of the country, "There are a few plum thickets and choke cherries and plenty of box elder, but no ash, and but little cottonwood or under brush. Deep rich soil. 'Pike' Landusky and Jo Hamilton planted corn, potatoes, and turnips and they all grew. There is no doubt that tomatoes, squash, pumpkins and such can be grown successfully here.

"There are some yellow pines and cedars on the bluffs but not much and it is about eighteen miles up to the spur of the Snowies on the south side of the creek to good pine poles and logs. Flatwillow is about thirty to thirty-five feet wide with generally steep cut banks (muddy) but mostly gravel bottom . . .

"Landusky and Hamilton have three log cabins of one

room each, dirt roof and dirt floor. They have a picket corral of box elder logs about seven or eight feet high and sixty feet square where they corral their horses every night and put a boy, Harry Morgan, out to watch them day times. The Sioux Indians raid this country regularly. . . Plenty of good hay land around here and picturesque cliffs coming on the south side."

After their stop at Flatwillow Crossing, Stuart and his party traveled up Flatwillow Creek for about 20 miles before turning north to McDonald Creek and present-day Grassrange. In view of the land transactions in the 1880s documented in the following pages, it is interesting to note Stuart makes no mention of seeing any settlers or cabins until reaching Brown's trading post which, presumably, was in the Tyler area. Settlement must have come very quickly to the area.

Several events, no doubt, prompted and encouraged this rapid development. Gold was discovered in the Judith Mountains in 1879, and the construction of Ft. Maginnis began in 1880. Both events spurred the need for transporting freight through the area. Freight from the Yellowstone River originated where navigation of the Yellowstone became difficult at Junction City. Fort Custer and Terry's Landing near the mouth of the Big Horn River. The most direct route to the Judith Mountains and Fort Maginnis from these points was via Flatwillow Crossing.

Silloway's "History of Central Montana" states that in 1883, or earlier, regular stage lines were operating between the Maiden mining area and Junction City. According to his history, stations on the line were Fords Creek, McDonald Creek, Yellow Water Creek, Flatwillow Crossing, Musselshell, and Junction City. Flatwillow Crossing was on the Fred Lawrence ranch, the Yellow Water stop was at the Jim Duffy ranch and the McDonald Creek stop was at the Chamberlain ranch. (See also LAWRENCE; LANDUSKY; DUFFY)

Post offices were officially designated at Flatwillow, Grassrange and Musselshell on March 27, 1883. John Dochter was appointed postmaster at Flatwillow, John Chamberlain at Grassrange, and Lawrence Reed at Musselshell.

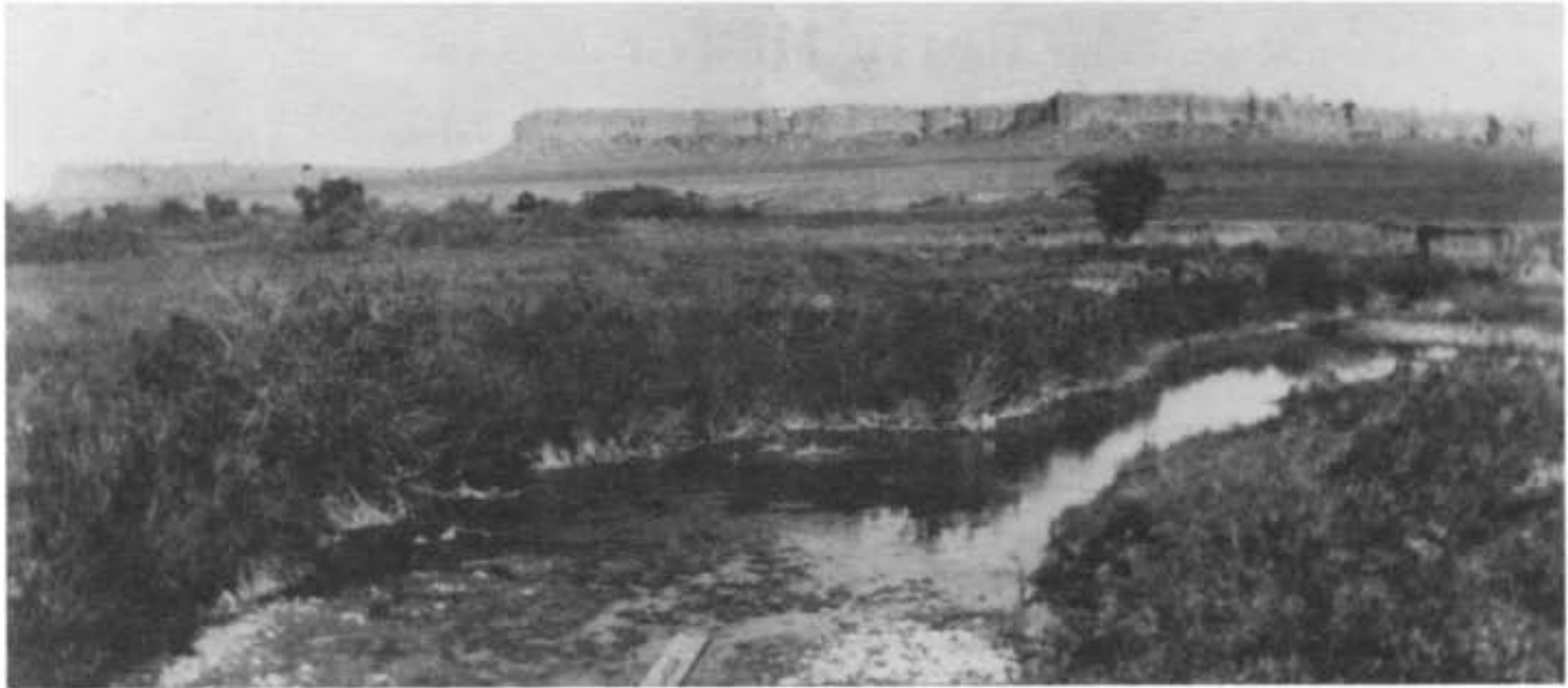
Flatwillow Crossing

(By Angelu Tripp Pugrud)

Flatwillow Crossing, as it appears on the earliest maps, started out as a trading post for trappers and Indians. The trading post was situated between Flatwillow Creek and the mouth of Pike Creek.

Thinking about the history of the area invokes questions: Who was first? What happened to them?

By researching deed books, it is apparent that Flatwillow Creek, Pike Creek, and Upper Yellow Water Creek were well settled by the year 1885. The area was not surveyed until about 1885 or 1886, so no legal land descriptions before that time are available. Prior to the formation of Fergus County in 1885, people in this area



Flatwillow Crossing

were required to go to White Sulphur Springs to file documents. The following is a partial list of some land transactions on Flatwillow and Pike Creeks prior to 1900, starting at the Fergus County line and working downstream.

Phillip Gallager sold one-half interest in his 720 acres in 1885 to Joseph, Edward and Thryse Hudnott; in 1888 he sold the other half to them, and they sold the entire parcel to Jim Willowdale that same year.

William and Isabelle Perkins sold their 680 acres in 1892 to Marion Wheeler and Alfred Lyman. Part of this acreage sold in sheriff's sale to Tom Cruse in 1902.

Marion and Jennie May Wheeler sold their 520 acres to William Parberry in 1895. The Parberry Estate sold the land to Alice Shaw in 1904, and she immediately sold it to W.S. Shaw.

John Bender had 320 acres which Carl Lindstrand acquired in 1899 in a sheriff's sale. Lindstrand lost it in 1904, again in a sheriff's sale, to Alice and W. S. Shaw.

Ora Clement sold his 160 acres to Hallowell Clement in 1892 which Hallowell added to the 155 acres he already owned. Hallowell also bought 315 acres in 1890 from Ida and Olin Clement, 160 acres in 1899 from Carl Bender, and 80 acres in 1887 from Lester Hunt.

Robert and Rebecca Miller Jones sold their 160 acres to Peter Peterson in 1899. This became the property of Berven-Reisater in 1904, by way of a sheriff's sale.

David Miller controlled 320 acres that passed to Albert Miller in 1889. A sheriff's sale in 1899 gave the land to L. H. Hole, who sold to Hallowell Clement in 1900. Henry Sieben sold his 160 acres to Hallowell in 1889. (This is the same Henry Sieben who started Sieben Land and Livestock of the Helena area).

Florence and Henry Neill sold 320 acres to William

Cameron in 1887. Cameron sold all of his holdings to his neighbor, David Perrie, in 1893. David Perrie sold some of his land to Christina (Perrie) Wilson (Mrs. Jim Wilson Sr.) in 1898; in 1905 he sold the rest of his holdings to her.

Powell Landusky and Jo Hamilton sold 480 acres to Fred Lawrence in 1882. Fred and Mattie Lawrence had 320 acres in addition to this.

I. G. Sherman had 320 acres, Pleasant Spurlock 80 acres, William Garl 320 acres, Ansor Gray 220 acres, William Robertson 320 acres, William and Charles Cram 480 acres and B. F. Lepper 480 acres.

On Alkali Creek, Peter Peterson had 320 acres and John Romanstadt had 160.

John Berven, Helge Hus, Frank Johnson, Loren Peterson, Tom Reisater and George Sheppard were on Pike Creek.

It is noteworthy that of all the people on Flatwillow Creek, in what is now Petroleum County, only Reed, Welch, Lawrence, Clement, Gallaher, Perkins, Clark Bros. and Lepper filed water rights before 1885. This indicates that the others were largely stockmen who used the creek for stock water and were not interested in developing hay meadows.

According to Harry Tripp, who came to Flatwillow in 1911, the settlement consisted of a store that was managed by George Davis, and owned by Handel Brothers of Musselshell; a log hotel which was operated by Mrs. Frank (Ella) Millsap and owned by Mrs. I. G. Sherman; the Yellow Dog Saloon operated by Frank Millsap; a blacksmith shop operated by Emerson Grow; the Baker home; the Davis home; a large log barn and another log structure that served as a bunkhouse in one end and a schoolhouse in the other.



Town of Flatwillow in 1911

Flatwillow Store and Post Office

The *Winnett Times* (February 27, 1927), says the Flatwillow store was built in the year 1892.

The *Polk Directory* published in Lewistown, Montana, in the early 1900s provides interesting statistical information on all of Central Montana. In 1904-05 it lists Flatwillow as a "village on Flatwillow River some 65 miles SE of Lewistown, Montana. Mail stage tri-weekly to Billings and Giltedge. Fare \$7.50. W. J. Wells, Postmaster. General merchandise store owned by W. J. Wells and M. L. Wells. A. X. Carpenter, clerk." Frank Millsap ran a saloon.

In 1908-10 the directory lists Flatwillow as a post office 30 miles north of Musselshell, "the shipping point, on the CM & ST. P RR. (Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad). Mail and stage tri-weekly to Musselshell and Giltedge. Joe Nervobig, postmaster. Handel Bros., General Merchandise, cattle and horses. George Davis manager for Handel Bros. Edward Weaver, Manager of hotel owned by I. G. Sherman."

With the coming of the railroad to Musselshell in 1908, the Handel Brothers of Musselshell started a freight and stage line. The first stop, going north, was Flatwillow Crossing. Here they changed horses and had an overnight stop. Flatwillow was the only post office in the immediate area and served a very large area. Its patrons included residents on upper and lower Flatwillow Creek, Pike Creek, Yellow Water Creek, Elk Creek and McDonald Creek. Among those served were: Lillian Bean and W. E. Bean, H. F. Clement, George Davis, Herman E. Garl, Claude Hammergren, Barney Higgins, Louis Holland, Ernest Hunter, Lewis Jenkins, Walter Jordan, John Kinnick, W. Lund, F. H. Magnuson, D. B. Miller, Frank Nolan, Lars Pugnud, Tom Reisater, John Berven, John Rowley, W.S. Shaw, Pleasant Spurlock, Thompson

Brothers, Frank Ward, James Wilson, Perry Baker, Walter J. Winnett and George F. Wright.

Homesteaders arriving in 1911-12 recall the store as being on the east side of the street, with the Yellow Dog Saloon on one side and the blacksmith shop on the other. Those coming later remember the store as being on the west side of the road near the present store building. It can be assumed that when Lepper-Davis purchased the store from Handel Bros. in 1918, it was moved across the road. This could have been necessary because the original site had been homesteaded.

In 1918-19 the *Polk Directory* indicated that the post office served 147 people with George Davis as postmaster. There was tri-weekly stage service from Musselshell; R. C. Blee was blacksmith; Oscar Bundy was blacksmith; Lepper-Davis Co. (B. F. and H. W. Lepper and George Davis) operated a general store; Edward Nasheim was road supervisor; Oliver Brothers were dealing in grain; John Reams was constable; Oscar Rutledge was Justice and I. G. Sherman owned the hotel.

In 1926 Lepper-Davis sold the building and stock to Vern and Blanche Porter. Porters also took over the job of postmaster. By this time living quarters and storage space had been added to the store. The house (known as the Davis house) had been moved across from the Flatwillow Hall.

On the night of February 4, 1927, the store and all attached buildings burned to the ground. Porters were able to save a few of their personal belongings, but very little. Porters did not rebuild but moved back to their ranch in the Lone Prairie area.

Jim Wilson wanted a store in the community, so he hired Ted Svindland to build a new, stucco-covered



Flatwillow Store in 1911 (south side)

building with a full basement. Elmer Eager stocked the store and O. H. Redd (who had been working for Eager in Winnett) operated the store until 1930 when Mr. Eager needed his stock back in Winnett to replace the inventory lost in a fire. O. H. was able to restock, however, and



Flatwillow Store and Post Office (front view)

the store continued in operation until the summer of 1935.

The store building is still standing. It, the Flatwillow Hall and the old Jimmy Wilson house are all that are left of the town of Flatwillow, Montana, in 1989.

Flatwillow Hotel

According to an item written by Amanda Swift for the Winnett Times, the Flatwillow Hotel was originally built by Fred Lawrence as a home for his bride, Mattie Lawrence. Ed Weaver operated the hotel in 1908 and 1909. Millsaps moved from Lewistown to operate it in 1910.

The hotel was a two-story log building with a kitchen added. It was quite busy for a few years because of teachers and homesteaders, and the fact it was the stage layover. When the Millsaps moved to Winnett in 1917, the hotel was closed to the public. It was torn down and burned in the 1950s.

The following is a story related by Fern Millsap Whitten: "Mrs. Si Sherman, who owned the hotel that Dad and Mother managed, used to come over from Billings every so often. As I remember her, which may have been an entirely different impression than she gave to others, she would come floating into the hotel, expecting the best room and the most attention. She always demanded that water be carried upstairs for a bath as soon as she arrived. For each meal she had a different dress on, and she also changed in the middle of the afternoon. After I had watched her for awhile, I looked at her and exclaimed, 'You must be awful dirty to change your dress so often!' She looked at me through a long-handled lorgnette, sniffed and said to my mother, 'What an ill-mannered child.' (I was about five.)"

Fern also tells of a black couple who came looking for a job. Mrs. Millsap told them she would hire them, but that

if they drank they would have to leave. They worked for quite a while helping with the cooking and odd jobs, and in the evenings they would play the piano and sing. Fern recalls that they were very good and everybody enjoyed them. One day, when the stage was in, they went over to the saloon and got drunk. When they came back to the hotel Mrs. Millsap told them to leave. They loaded their things and staggered over and got on the stage.

After they were gone, Mrs. Millsap and the girls went to clean the couple's room. When they turned the mattress, they found an arsenal of knives and guns hidden there. Mrs. Millsap admitted she would not have felt so at ease with them had she known about the cache.



Flatwillow Hotel, Davis Home, School (1911)



Rodeo at Flatwillow Crossing in the late 1920s

Flatwillow Hall

In the early years the community recreation consisted of dances, card parties and potluck dinners. These were held in the schoolhouse. At Flatwillow there was an outdoor dance floor. By 1920, about 150 families claimed Flatwillow as their address and there were over 50 children in the Flatwillow School. The people decided they needed a community hall and started making plans.

Mr. B. F. Lepper offered to donate \$1000 to the cause if the community would name the building Lepper Memorial Hall. It was to be a tribute to his nephew, H. W. Lepper, who had died of the flu in 1918. In the spring of 1921, with this money as a starter, the community held a donation drive, ordered materials, and, with the use of volunteer labor, built the Hall.

The Grand Opening of the Hall was held on July 4, 1921. It was an all-day affair including a picnic, games, supper and dance. It was a tremendous success with over 300 people attending. Quite a debt remained to be paid, so dances, rodeos, plays and other events were scheduled to pay off the debt. All labor was free, from taking out ashes to cleaning the Hall before and after an event. Only the orchestra received pay. In 1925 the community was able to announce in the *Winnett Times* that the Hall was free of debt.

Not everyone was happy with the way things were going at the Hall. In the fall of 1925 a group of people, with Henry Hawkins as spokesman, tried to close the Hall to dancing after midnight on Saturday. A law was cited (Section 11039 Revised Code, State of Montana 1921) loosely known as the Sunday Dance Law. The Hall board posted public notice that this law didn't apply to the Hall, because the Hall and area around it were considered a playground-entertainment center and because no liquor was being sold.

In early 1926 Henry Hawkins had Bob Bessay, secretary-treasurer of the board, arrested for violation of the law. He also had Jim Wilson notified that he should remove the Hall from his property to avoid legal responsibility.

A jury trial was held in Winnett. Witnesses for the plaintiff were Henry Hawkins, Harley Pollock and John Berven. Witnesses for the defense were Del Walker, John Fishborn, Herman Puller, Ben Zimmerman, Willard Markland, Ralph Hardy, Charles Doman, Joe Cassidy, O. E. Boggess and Ruth Palmer. The jury decided five to one in favor of the defense, and the board was cleared. Henry stated that he would appeal to the Montana Supreme Court.

Then disaster struck. During the night of Monday, May 3, 1926, Flatwillow Hall burned to the ground. The State Fire Marshall decided the fire had been set by a person or persons unknown. It was revealed that Bob Bessay had received an anonymous typed letter stating, "BETTER LAY OFF THE SUNDAY DANCES — THIS IS A WARNING." Bob had thought it was a threat to have him arrested again, and gave no thought of the safety of the Hall itself. The community was stricken and, quite naturally, those who had brought suit were blamed. The rumor was circulated that the owners of the dance hall in Winnett had hired the fire set, knowing they would be blamed. Records do not show anyone was ever arrested for, or convicted of, the arson.

The Hall was insured for \$3000 and, as soon as the insurance company paid the claim, the indomitable people of Flatwillow started cleaning up the mess and planning the new Hall. Just over \$2000 was raised in donations. On July 1, 1926, the rebuilding material was hauled to the site. Ted Svindland was hired to be the head carpenter and to oversee the volunteer labor. Building on the old foundation, it was hoped to have the work completed in one month.

On July 23 the first dance was held in the "New Hall." It was on the subfloor, and there was still work to be done, but the community was proud and happy again. The old hall had had a stage across one end which took up quite a bit of space. In the New Hall all the floor was left free and a stage was added to the east side. On August 14, 1926, a grand opening of the New Hall was held. An enormous



First Lepper Memorial Hall (1921)

crowd came to help celebrate. The Hall was "up and running."

Two annual "Hall" events have survived throughout the years. At Memorial Day Dinner, everyone gets together for a meal and cleans the cemetery. The Thanksgiving Dinner used to be a dinner followed by an evening of local talent skits and card playing. These events came to an end in the 1960s because there were not enough people to participate. Now the annual meeting of the members of the Hall association is held at this dinner.

For many years some activity went on at the Hall every week. Since everybody tried to go to everything and there were no babysitters, the children went too. Where else could one find grown men dancing with little girls and grown women dancing with little boys? As the evening wore on, the children wore out. Each child would take his or her blanket, which the parents had brought, and go to sleep on the basement tables. There were always older women downstairs cleaning up from supper and visiting. While they didn't consider themselves baby-sitters, they did keep an eye on the sleeping children.

When Wilsons sold their ranch to the Nebraska Feeding Company in the 1940s, apparently no one considered the fact that the Hall was still on their ranch land, and that no lease had been written. In the 1970s, Bud and Ruby Jones (managers of the Nebraska Feeding Co.) tried unsuccessfully to get Mr. Foxley to deed the ground to the community. In the spring of 1983 the sale of the Nebraska Feeding Co. to the First Continental Corporation was finalized. Mike Greytak, a shareholder in the FCC, made inquiries of Pugruds about the building the corporation had acquired as part of their purchase.

At a meeting to discuss the situation, local people expressed the opinion that they owned the Hall because they had paid taxes on it for 60 years. They all knew, however, it would take a court case to prove the point. Mike Greytak felt sure he could arrange a 99-year lease. He had the area surveyed and a lease was written.

On the basis of this lease, a committee was appointed to raise financing for the continued operation of the Hall. The committee knowing that many people had fond memories of the building, decided to sell memberships to the Hall. Memberships would cost \$50 each and the



Flatwillow Ball Team: (Back row) Howard Tripp, Joe Oliver, Louis Hazar, Harry Tripp, Tom Oliver, Billy Petrusch; (Front row) Johnny Merten, Evan Williams, Carl Moshner, Bud (King) Rutledge



Mrs. O. M. Green's 4-H Girls. Among them are: Jo Doman, Anne Baker, Jackie Carter, Mildred Green, Frances Sharkey, Goldie Darnell, Helen McCollum, Louise Berven, Evelyn Wilkinson, Zell Carter, Verna McCollum, Helen Rhea



Present Lepper Memorial Hall (1926)

money would be put in savings or CD's so taxes, lights, coal and insurance could be paid out of the interest on the money. Seven hundred letters were sent out, and about 90 memberships were sold. Many people bought memorial memberships for their parents. These names are listed on a plaque in the Hall.

In 1986 John Greytak, president of FCC, prevailed upon his backer, Aetna Life Insurance Co., to give the community a deed to the property. This was done and the deed recorded. The Hall and surrounding land now belongs to the community.

Flatwillow Telephone

The idea of a telephone in the Flatwillow area was born when word of a resident's sickness reached Roundup, Montana. The lady, Mrs. Clement, was back East and became very sick. Word of the illness reached Roundup in the midst of a blizzard and was delivered to the Clement family at great risk to the messenger.

In the spring of 1930, a group of interested citizens started selling shares in a proposed telephone company. The company was incorporated in May with a value of \$2300. There were 58 subscribers — both individuals and businesses. At about the time funds were needed for materials and the necessity for collections on subscriptions became urgent, agricultural, climatic and commercial conditions, both general and local, turned for the worse. Collections were almost impossible to make, in most cases because of the financial inability of the subscriber.

Work on the line was carried on spasmodically as finances and time would permit. Finally, on November 29, 1930, the line was completed and telephone communication was established with Winnett through the Burt Sisters Exchange. The line was built with minimum

expense and with native ingenuity creating many of the tools for the work. These tools, although crude, served to accomplish desired ends and saved the community many dollars.

There is a song entitled "This Old House," and the verse speaks of the old house "knowing his children and wife, and knowing his strife." This Old Hall has known our parents, our grandparents, our friends, and neighbors. It has helped us celebrate Christmas, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, births and weddings. It has shown us many good times with pleasant memories. It has helped us say "goodbye" to our loved ones and to honor them on Memorial Day. It has served as church, a sports arena, a dance hall, and anything else it was needed for!

The main line had two rural termini — the upper or west terminus being at the southwest corner of the Thum ranch on Flatwillow Creek, and the south branch, which ran past Flatwillow Post Office, having its terminus near the William Myers' place. There were approximately 700 poles in the main line which was 28 miles long. Two side lines were set, one going to the William Johnke place, the other to the Tony Mlekush place. The line was also extended to accommodate the McFadden and O. M. Green ranches.

Those with service were Thums, Clements, Porters, Berkins, Wilkinsons, Myerses, Carters, McCollums, Jim Wilson Jr., McFaddens, Greens, Mlekushes and William Johnkes.

Although the service operated just a few years, one must admire these hardy souls who were independent enough to spend their own time and money to realize a dream.

Wallview and Howard Coulee

Wallview and Howard Coulee lie in the lower two-thirds of Township 12N, Ranges 25-26-27E, and the upper two-thirds of Township 11N, Ranges 25-26-27E. Wallview was often called the Flatwillow Bench. It was a complete community although it had a post office for only a brief time and no store. The post office was run by Otto Hill in his home from February 1915 until August 1916 and was known as Fermus. The name was derived from the first syllable in each name of the two counties near whose boundary it stood — FERgus and MUSselshell.

In 1910 the settlers started a Sunday school which eventually led to the only church building in the area. Richardsons donated the land for a church and cemetery, and the rest of the residents donated time, money and lumber. Later this church was moved to Roundup where it still serves as a church. The cemetery was duly record-



A social gathering at the Berkin Ranch house in 1936. Evalena Johnke and children, Edith Klinger, Mary Brown and children, Lola Wilkinson, Edna Brown, Tillie Wilkinson, Leone Wilkinson

ed but there are several unmarked graves. Julius Heuschkel, whose family were early homesteaders, started a project in 1978 of cleaning and re-fencing the area and identifying graves. He has published an annual report on his progress as well as a list of the names and addresses of relatives he has contacted. The list was a great help in securing information for this book.

In 1911 the people of Flatwillow Bench applied for a school district. The area became School District #89. The district operated two schools for several years — Joyce or Orient, and Wallview or Richardson. The community had

a literary club where men, women and children met to discuss books, give reports, have spelldowns and hold debates.

Howard Coulee was largely railroad and state land with very few homesteaders. The people who lived on the western edge of the area seemed to go to Wallview to socialize, while those on the east joined the Kelley Community.

Though 78 families or bachelors were located in the Petroleum County half of the area, by 1935 there were almost no people remaining.

Lone Prairie and Pike Creek

Although this area did not have a post office or a store, it was a community that worked and played together. The people worked particularly hard to support their schools. Folks attended church in Flatwillow or Wallview and got their mail and groceries at Flatwillow. The area was settled very early — much of it by 1885. The advent of the Junction City-Fort Maginnis stage line was undoubtedly

responsible for much of the early settlement. All the early settlers were located either on a creek or alongside the stage trail.

Of all the people who lived in the Pike Creek and Lone Prairie areas, there now are no people living on Pike Creek and only six families in Lone Prairie. The whole area is owned by four families, the federal government and the state of Montana.

Irrigation Proposals and Projects

The possibility of developing a major irrigation project with the water of Flatwillow Creek has often been considered. As early as 1910, Abe Hogeland, an engineer and surveyor from Lewistown, Montana, studied the potential of such a project. A number of local people were interested in the survey.

In 1911 David Hilger of Lewistown, John Berkin and John McGinnis of Butte, Montana, and Walter Winnett formed a company called the Fergus County Land and Irrigation Company. The company filed the necessary papers to have about 8000 acres of land between Flatwillow Creek and Yellow Water Creek withdrawn from homesteading under the Carey Act.

The Carey Act had been passed by the U.S. Congress in 1894 in an effort to promote the development and settlement of arid lands in the western states. The U. S. Secretary of Interior was given authority to grant to certain states up to one million acres of qualifying desert homestead lands. The states were to administer the lands in a manner which would assure the irrigation, reclamation and settlement of the specified area. Individuals or groups (such as the Fergus County Land and Irrigation Company) could apply to the state for permission to develop an irrigation system, and if the project was approved by both the state and the federal officials and satisfactorily completed, title to the land would go to the individuals utilizing the water. The water users had to meet certain requirements similar to homestead regulations in order to comply.

The plan submitted by the Fergus County Land and Irrigation project met the requirements of the law, and the

land was withdrawn from regular homesteading. The company was given three years to complete the project. Their proposal called for a dam 90 feet high on a fork of Pike Creek in Sec. 10, 11-T12N-R25E. Water from Flatwillow Creek was to be diverted via a ditch to the reservoir, and irrigation ditches would be constructed to irrigate a large area between Yellow Water Creek and Pike Creek.

The project floundered, however, and even after having been granted an extension of time (to December 1918) the project did not materialize. Many felt it had been a speculative venture in which outside people intended to reap financial benefits with no real concern for the obligation to reclaim the land and settle it.

The land which had been withdrawn from homesteading continued under the control of the Carey Land Act Board of Montana. It remained a large unfenced open range area until March 1932 when federal action reopened it for homesteading. For the first 90 days after the reopening, veterans were given filing preference. After that time, other qualifying applicants could file homesteads. Among those who took advantage of the opportunity were Tony Mlekush, Albert Mlekush, William Johnke, Tony Pancich, Millie and William Markland and Glen Stroup.

During the 1930s a variety of new federal programs became available for irrigation and reclamation. Once more surveyors and engineers sharpened their pencils in an effort to develop a workable plan for an irrigation project utilizing the water from Flatwillow Creek.

In September 1933 the Flatwillow Bench Reservoir