

Ross Community

A little north of the midpoint along Petroleum County's portion of the Musselshell River (just below the mouth of Blood Creek) a post office was established on the east side of the river in 1904. It operated under the name of Sagebrush with Thomas Gilfeather as postmaster. The first designation was rescinded in 1906 and the post office was officially recognized as Ross. The Gilfeathers ran the post office until it closed in 1935.

There is a wonderful story about the first school at Ross. It needs to be retold even if time has colored some of the details. It is said that 12-year-old Knute Nordahl rode 75 miles to the town of Giltedge to attend a school board meeting and request a school for the children in the Ross area. The school board members knew the people across the Musselshell River were in a different county and outside of their jurisdiction, but they were so impressed with Knute's ride and his request that they agreed to provide a teacher and pay her wages! (Records indicate Knute would have been 12 years old in 1908.) A small log cabin was built on what was known as the Usher place and the Carl Nordahl, Adams and Gilfeather children attended their first school under Miss Jessie Belcher.

A couple of years later, after the death of the three older Gilfeather children from diphtheria, a small log schoolhouse was built more centrally located for the other children in the community. It was on the west side of the river on the Tuohy place. The school only operated about a year at this location. In about 1911 a 12-horse team was used to move the building down and across the river to the Piper place. It was used as a temporary school while a new frame schoolhouse was being built.

After the new building was complete, the old building was used for a teacherage. The new school was sometimes called the Ripley School. It burned in 1927. The fire started in the entryway and the teacher, Ruth Viall Stanton, broke a window with her hands and helped each frightened child out of the window. She carried scars on her hands all of her life from the cuts she



The Ross schoolhouse

received from the broken glass. School was held in the Piper house after the fire. In 1941 the residents of the area built the Ross Community Hall at the Piper site. It was completed in August 1941.

In about 1930 a school opened down the river for the Long, Coon, Roberts and Keith children. It was known as the Shannon School. The little log school operated until 1937. Later it was moved downriver to the Matovich Ranch to be used as a school.

The present Ross schoolhouse (Sec 4-16-30) was built in 1930. The Nordahls and Dow Bowen got the logs up in the hills and built the building. School was held there until 1947, but it was closed from 1947 to 1958. During that time, school was held at several locations, depending upon the children to be served. It was held at the Bob Gibsons from 1950 to 1956 and at the Richard Knapps in 1957-58. In 1958 the Ross schoolhouse was remodeled and the school opened again. It has been in operation to date (1988).

Mecaha Overview

The name Mecaha was chosen by J. J. Capron, the U. S. Land Commissioner, residing on Lodgepole Creek on the east side of the Musselshell River. Mecaha means "raccoon" in the language of one of the Southern (Highland) Indian tribes. This was an appropriate name, as there were many people by the name of Coon living in the area.

The Mecaha Post Office was opened in 1915, near the mouth of Lodgepole Creek (T18N R30E). Although it has been recorded that Tina Busic was the first postmaster, this has been disputed. Long-time residents, Albert Adams and Marcus Matovich, agreed that the first postmaster was a man named Otto T. Green.

Green had the post office and a store in his home until the fall of 1922 or the spring of 1923. At that time his



Mecaha Post Office

home burned down and Tina Busic took over the post office in her home.

W. G. Roberts was postmaster until 1938, when Ina Marks took it over. Ina ran the post office until it closed in 1941. The site of the Mecaha Post Office is the present day Marcus Matovich Ranch.

When the Mecaha Post Office closed in 1941, mail was delivered twice a week from Mosby to all residents living along the stage road on the east side of the Musselshell.

Some of the mail carriers over the years were Lark and Charles Sandidge, Knute Nordahl, Gus Newell, Sever Wangsness, George Mock, Gid Busic, Joe Bagwell, Adolph Ziesmer, Easton Rowton, Harry Nordahl, Roland Matthews, Roy Gibson, and Larry Petersen. Roy Gibson carried the mail about 20 years. He quit in July 1968, and Larry Petersen has had the mail route ever since.

At one time alfalfa seed was a major source of income for ranchers living along the Musselshell in the Ross and Mecaha areas.

In 1925 an estimated 35 tons of seed was hauled into Winnett. Eleven wagon and truck loads entered Winnett on November 5, 1925, and the rest of the caravan was on the road between Winnett and Mecaha. Each fall the seed growers along the river organized a caravan to haul seed to the shipping point. By 1928 all the seed growers owned trucks and were able to transport seed by truck

rather than wagons. Previously it had taken two or three days to make the trip by wagon. Transportation by truck took only about four hours. Many Garfield County ranchers sold seed in Winnett due to the good market and good roads.

Most of the early day settlers in the Mecaha area obtained their year's supply of groceries at Roy, Montana. People would travel to Roy on the 79 Trail, as it was a better road than the stage road on the east side of the river. The stage road ran from a point three miles east of Mosby north to Ross and Mecaha.

When the stage road was improved in the 1920s, more people began to go to Winnett for supplies.

In 1926 there was a movement in western Garfield County to annex the district containing Mosby, Ross, and the Mecaha Post Offices to Petroleum County. This district included some of the most productive lands in Garfield County along the Musselshell River and Lodgepole Creek.

However, annexation was not possible. By law, the retained portion of the county had to have an assessed valuation of \$8,000,000. The annexed portion had to have a valuation of \$4,000,000. The total assessed value of all of Garfield County at that time was only \$5,000,000. Thus, the movement to annex part of Garfield County to Petroleum county was ended.

Schools in the Mecaha Area

In August 1917 a petition requested a school district on the western edge (T18 R30) of Dawson County (now Garfield) on the Musselshell River, extending east across the river to Sec. 3-18-29. As a result, Joint School District #189 J-1 was formed.

The first Mecaha School was built in this district in 1918 near the mouth of Lodgepole Creek on the east side of the river. Families with children in school were: Thomas, Adams, Davis, Atwood, Lotspeich, Riley, Olmstead, Fuller, Dundom, Smith (Songer), Coon and Marks. About 1921 this schoolhouse burned and school was discontinued.

In 1919 the joint district was dissolved and the area east of the river became Garfield District #25. The portion west of the river became Fergus County District #189. The area was enlarged to include the east half of T18 R28 and a portion of the north half of T17 R28-29.

Two schools, the 79 and the Atwood-Horseshoe Bend, operated in this new district in the early 1920s. The 79 School in Sec. 17-18-29 had formerly been in District #169 (Dovetail). It served the Killham-Kirkendall-Kastner families and was sometimes called by the name of one of those people (See picture KILLHAM — Dovetail).

The Atwood-Horseshoe Bend School was on Drag Creek in Sec. 11-18-29. Students included those from the Marks, Atwood, Thomas, Neiter and Olmstead families (See picture ATWOOD).

Some teachers in District #189 were: Ruth Irish, Florence Rosean, Anna Roberts, Mattie Cox, Hazel

Talbot, Gladys Foster, Mary Koon, Lucille Neiter and Zell Conolly.

In 1926 the Atwood schoolhouse was moved, placed on the bench below the 79 hill, and renamed the Mecaha School or Nordquist School. Its location was Sec. 24-18-29. Teachers included: Cora Nordahl, Philip Black, Esther Scherlie (Adams), Eulalie Winter, Mary B. Sterrett, Alice Halvorson, Helen Friedrich, Irene Marks and Regina Larson. This Mecaha School closed in 1941.

The first Lone Star School was built on the east side of the Musselshell River near Lodgepole Creek in the fall of 1922. School was held there intermittently. In 1946 the schoolhouse was dismantled and rebuilt on the west side. This school was also referred to as Marks or Mecaha School. Eulalie Winter was the teacher. Some students were: Tiny Brindley; Albert, Dorothy and Jack Marks; Nevin Gibson. The school closed in the spring of 1949.



Mecaha School in the 1960s

Cemeteries

Not many places in Petroleum County are as isolated as the Musselshell River breaks area. Schools, roads, churches all presented special problems to the people who lived there. Even dying, funerals and cemeteries presented unique problems. It is not surprising there are more "home" or local cemeteries along the Musselshell River than in any other part of Petroleum County. It was simply a matter of practicality.

Research done by Lucile McVey in April 1980 verified the existence of at least four cemeteries near the river. (Copies of Ms. McVey's records are available at the Petroleum County courthouse and the Winnett Public Library.)

The largest of the cemeteries is the Coon Cemetery on Lodgepole Creek. The first burial at this site was either

the baby daughter of Caleb and Bessie Olmstead or the Mann twins who died at birth. The first marked grave is that of Pricella O. Coon, who died in 1919. There are between 20 and 30 graves at the site — some marked, some unmarked. The most recent burial is that of Albert Adams who died in 1988. His parents were both buried in the Coon Cemetery.

The Nordahl Cemetery has nine marked and eight unmarked graves; the Gilfeather and Mosby cemeteries, even fewer.

The graves of two soldiers who were buried at old Fort Musselshell were moved by the Winnett American Legion when it became apparent the area was going to be flooded by the waters of Fort Peck.

ADAMS, Albert Albert Adams, son of Dennis and Violet Adams, was born in 1902 at Lewistown. He lived with his parents on the Musselshell river near Mecaha. He attended school at Lewistown, boarding in Lewistown during the school years. After he had finished school, he returned to his parents' homestead to farm and ranch.

In 1936 he married Esther J. Scherlie of Harlem, Montana. They resided at Babb, Montana, where Esther was teaching school. In about 1938 they moved back to the Musselshell River and leased the Gus Nordquist place. They moved to Winnett in 1945. Albert ran the Petroleum County road patrol for several years and worked for Rogge Brothers Ranch. He also worked many years for Kenneth Cole in his filling station. Albert enjoyed trapping and teaching kids how to trap and how to take care of the pelts.

Albert and Esther had three sons. Duane Albert (1938) now lives in Washington, D. C. Denis L. (1940) is in the Naval Reserve and is a C. P. A. in Billings, where he lives (1989). (He audited the Petroleum County books one year.) Elton J. (1943) is a highly rated arthritis doctor and lives in Great Falls.

After Albert and Esther moved to Winnett, Esther taught English in Winnett High School. She was an outstanding teacher who kept going back to school to keep up with new ideas and procedures. She taught at Winnett until her own boys were ready to go into high school, then she taught eight years at Grassrange High School, as she thought her boys might do better with other teachers. After Elton graduated, she returned to Winnett to teach until she retired in 1974. In 1968 she not only taught four English classes, but was also the principal and guidance counselor.

Esther Adams was an exacting English teacher. She taught in the Winnett High School for many years. She would accept only the best from her students and willingly gave her time to help any student, in or out of school hours. Many of her students did not appreciate her as a teacher until they "grew up" enough to realize what a



Albert Adams family: Albert, Denis, Elton, Duane, Esther

wonderful influence she had been in their lives.

Esther's health failed soon after her retirement, and she is now in a nursing home in Lewistown. Albert moved to Lewistown to be near her. He died in 1988 and is buried in the Coon Cemetery near the mouth of Lodgepole Creek.

ADAMS, Dennis Ezra (T18N R30E Garfield County) Dennis E. "Ezra" Adams was born in 1866 at Judson, Missouri, in an 18' by 20' log house. Violet Ellen Coon was born in 1873 and married Dennis in 1891. They moved to Montana in 1892 and ranched in the Rosebud River area until the government bought their ranch for the Cheyenne Reservation. In 1898 they moved to the Musselshell River country, about twelve miles south of the mouth on the east side of the river, and took up a homestead.

They got their mail first at a post office named Sanford on Big Dry Creek, now in present day Garfield County; Kismet was the second post office; Vincent the third; Valentine the fourth; Mosby the fifth; Ross the sixth; and Mecaha the last. By the time they sold the ranch, Mosby was the only post office still running.



*Dennis and Violet Adams family
Inez, Albert, Earl and Violet (seated)*

The Adamses got their groceries from Custer Junction and Melstone in the early years. Then, as more homesteaders came in and more trails were opened, they went to Lewistown, Roy and Winnett.

Ezra and Violet had three children — Inez (1897), Albert (1902) and Earl (1904).

Ezra died in 1921 and is buried in the Coon Cemetery near the mouth of Lodgepole Creek. Violet stayed on the ranch and continued to operate it and raise the kids. In 1945 she sold the ranch to Marcus and Ruby Matovich. Violet died in 1958 and is buried in the Coon Cemetery. (Albert Adams)

ADAMS, Earl Earl Adams, son of Dennis and Violet Adams, was born at Ross, Montana. He married Alice Bauman in Roundup, and they had one daughter, Dolly (Smith), who now lives at Hilger, Montana.

Earl left Ross in 1945 for a ranch at Hysham, Montana. He died in 1978 and is buried in Sunset Memorial Gardens in Billings.

ADAMS, Inez Goldie Inez Adams, a daughter of Dennis and Violet Adams, was born in 1897 at Lame Deer, Montana. She married Glen Cessna in 1914 and they lived in Plumville, Pennsylvania. In 1917 they returned to Montana and homesteaded near Jordan. In 1921 she moved to Ross and then cooked at the Cat Creek Oil Field for a time.

Inez married Ben Barnett in 1923 at Ross.

During World War II Inez worked in Port Angeles, Washington, where she married Lewis Peterson in 1943. They lived in the Sarpy Creek area out of Hysham, Montana, then went to Billings and owned and operated the Peterson Service Station in the Heights until his death in 1972.

Inez moved to Roundup in 1973 and lived there until her death in 1975. She is buried at the Sunset Memorial Gardens at Billings, Montana.

ALFORD, Thomas F. "Tex" The following incidents of the life of Tex were collected from various sources:

Tex, as he was known by everyone in Central Montana, was born August 16th, 1860, in Sprinkle, Texas.

Tex came up the trail with the Turkey Track cattle herds in 1860s and 1870s and then worked with the RL's Ryan Brothers. They ranged on the upper Musselshell and Yellowstone Rivers and both the Big and Little Porcupine Creeks. He worked for several years for the RL, then went north of the Missouri River, working for the Circle C (Coburn Cattle Co.); the Long X, owned by the Reynolds Cattle Co; the Circle Diamond (Bloom Cattle Co.) run by John Survant; and the UL Cattle Co., owned by Bill Floweree. These cattle outfits all pooled together and called themselves "The Bear Paw Pool."

Tex often told of the hard winter of 1886 and 1887, which ended with a very heavy cattle loss. A little bunch of about thirty head of steers wintered in a short coulee coming from the north into lower Lodgepole Creek, later called Barker Coulee. The cattle hadn't bunched up and had wintered in real good shape. He also said that 1906 and 1907 was almost as tough, if not tougher, than 1886 and 1887.

Tex told that while working for the RL, he was piloting the wagons. One morning, he stopped the wagons and galloped down the ridge a couple of miles to find a place to camp on the Big Porcupine Creek for noon and ran across a bear. Those days, there was a bounty on bear because of their killing cattle. Tex roped the bear. When the bear hit the end of the rope, the horse bucked Tex off and the bear got the rope off. Tex went back to the wagons. He said there were three wagons — the mess wagon, the bed wagon and a wood wagon — and in addition the horse wrangler and the boss. He got five cussins' for being gone so long, but then they all loped back and got the bear.

He told of working for the Bear Paw Pool ridin' the lower country in the Larb Hills. On Sun Prairie and in the UL country, two old timers lived on the Missouri River. Joe Legg and Andy Peck were reppin' for themselves, ridin' with the Bear Paw Pool. Each one had one horse apiece. The "Pool" cowboys wondered how their horses stood the work. The "Pool" cowboys all had ten horses apiece and changed horses mornin', noon, and night.

Tex later went to wolfing. Stockmen, as well as the state and government, were paying big bounty money for grey wolves, which were awful bad on stock. On one wolfin' job for a rancher near Malta, Tex was asked to go into the Missouri breaks, north of Rocky Point country, to trap wolves. Later in the winter, the rancher got to thinking that Tex was butchering beef on him and selling it to the Indians on the reservation which was not too far from there. Well, the rancher got a stock inspector to investigate the situation. When the inspector got to Tex's camp, Tex invited him in for dinner.

After dinner, the inspector told him of his errand. Tex said, "Yes, we'll ride down the river about two miles to an air hole. Can ye dive? That's where the hides are. I only kill what I need for myself and the cats. Anyhow, I kill the wolves that kill his steers, so I don't think he is out very much and shouldn't begrudge me some beef."



Tex Alford, "The Old Trail Boss" at the Joe Legg Ranch, spring 1919

The inspector went back to the ranch. The rancher asked him what he found out at Tex's camp. He told the rancher, "You just as well forget it. For what the wolves kill and what Tex and his cats eat, it's not very much." The inspector said that Tex lived in a small shack and had one saddle horse and two of the biggest cats that he's ever seen. He called one "Corbett," and one "Fitzsimmons," after two prize fighters that he was very fond of.

Tex also ran the Rocky Point Saloon and later ran the Fort Musselshell Saloon and Ferry.

He was overtaken by ill health and suffered greatly from asthma. His last four years were spent in Winnett.

(W.T. 7-4-40) "Early-day Cow Hand Is Taken By Grim Reaper on Thursday." The life of one of the most colorful characters in Central Montana came to an end July 4th, 1939, when Thomas F. 'Tex' Alford, 79, died at his Winnett home after four years of failing health.

Tex was one of the few early day trail drivers remaining. He had trailed large herds of longhorn cattle from the plains of Texas to the Montana ranges until the time of his death. Tex could sit by the hour and fondly relate, with keen memory, the thrilling stories of the adventures and hardships of the early day cattlemen headed north from the South."

Just an Old Cowhand

(Dedicated to the memory of Tex Alford)

He cared not for show, this gray old man,
With hair unkempt, and whiskers long,
A pipe which smelled, and boots well worn
For he was "just an old cowhand."

Yes "just an old cowhand," and yet
A heart of gold, a helpin' hand,
A wisdom learned, not gained from books,
And a patience few will ever get.

Did someone say, "Just an old cowhand?"
Ask his dog, his horse, and those he met.
On ranges he rode in days long past,
From Canada's borders to the Rio Grande.

They'll tell you of many kind deeds done,
A life he'd saved at the risk of his own,
A task he'd finished for one who was sick,
And his last crust shared with a needy one.

"Just an old cowhand?" Well, maybe,
But when his tally's checked on the Other Side,
From the "Big Book" held in the Angel's hand,
God grant that ours as good will be.

(From *Campfires and Cowchips*, by Floyd Hardin)

ALLAN, Walter (Sec 25-17-29) Walter W. Allan was born in 1867 in Iowa. Cenia B. Moore was born in 1876 at Kirksville, Missouri. Walter and Cenia were married in 1892.

The couple moved to Montana from North Dakota in the fall of 1892 and spent the winter at Fort Maginnis. They homesteaded near Grassrange in 1897 and then moved to a ranch on the east side of the Musselshell River in 1908.

They had three children: Hellan, born in 1900 at Grassrange, married John Winter and had one daughter,



Cenia, George and Walter Allan

Hazel, then later married John Hill; James T. (Ted), born in 1903 near Grassrange, served in the Army in World War II and worked as a livestock buyer around the county but never married. He died in 1959 and was buried in the Winnett Cemetery with military honors. George Allan married La Veda Gibson and had two children.

Walter and Cenia lived on the homestead they bought from Amund K. Raundal when they came to the river country. They celebrated their 52nd wedding anniversary there in 1944, then retired and moved to Winnett. Mr. Allan succumbed to a heart attack in 1946. Mrs. Allan suffered a second stroke when informed of her husband's death. They were the oldest residents of Petroleum County. They are buried in the Winnett Cemetery.

Following is a story they told their granddaughter, Hazel Gibson: When they moved to the river and moved into the Ole Nordahl house, they found there was a certain place in the floor that made queer noises. Mrs. Allan scrubbed the floor, etc., but that didn't help. One morning she had her husband take up that portion of the floor. They found a bloody pair of overalls and a pair of left overshoes there. Grandmother (Mrs. Allan) wouldn't stay there any more, so they sold the place to Tuohy and purchased their home ranch from Mr. Raundal.

ATHEARN, James Franklin (Sec 17,18-21-27) James Franklin Athearn was born June 12, 1856, in Sawyers Mills, Maine. On July 4, 1876, he married Amy Wade, also of Sawyers Mills. In 1877 they moved to Fargo, North Dakota, residing there and in other Dakota sections until 1909. He and his family came to Montana in 1909 and settled near Wilder in the Missouri Breaks where, for over a quarter of a century, he carried on a successful stock-raising operation in partnership with his son, John F. Athearn.

James F. Athearn was the author of numerous letters of homey philosophy of life at his Missouri Breaks home and ranch. He wrote "Letters to the Editor" that appeared in several Montana newspapers. He signed these letters as "Ol Man Athearn" and listed his address as "Cataranges Castle, Missouri River Jungles." These letters were widely read and chuckled over. In one letter he described his place as being "the farthest north and west as possible to still be in Petroleum County."

The Athearns had three children — John F. Athearn, F. D. Athearn, and Mrs. T. B. Torson. (*Lewistown Democrat News* — obituary)

ATHEARN, John F. (Sec 17,18-21-27) John F. Athearn was born at Grafton, North Dakota, on December 13, 1887, and was schooled there. He was a son of James and Amy Athearn. He married Ruth Green and the family moved to Wilder in 1909. He drove the stage from Zortman to Harlem for several years, then enlisted in World War I. He returned from World War I and ranched on the Missouri River with his father until 1935. They moved to Lewistown, Montana, where he served as deputy sheriff of Fergus County for two years. John and Ruth had four sons — Max Marcotte, Jack, Murray and Earl G.

D. Athearn, and Mrs. T. B. Torson. (*Lewistown Democrat News* — obituary)

ATWOOD, Wesley G. (Garfield County) Wesley G. Atwood, born in 1866, married Catherine Coon (1870), daughter of William Coon Sr. They homesteaded in 1913 in the Ross area on the east side of the Musselshell. They had five children.

James Atwood married Alma Messier. They lived on the lower Musselshell until about 1936 when they moved to Idaho. James died in 1965. Odessa married George Fox. (See also FOX — Musselshell River and Winnett) Mildred married Len Isaacson (See also ISAACSON — Winnett) Bertha married Willard Markland, and after his death, married Bill Johnke at Fairfield (See also MARKLAND — Flatwillow) Alice married Henry Sims. (See also SIMS, Henry)



Atwood School. Back Row (L to R): George Marks, Pete Marks, Preston Thomas (wearing hat), Mildred Atwood, Eva Neiter, Lottie Olmstead, Elizabeth Marks; Front Row: Goldie Thomas (looking down) and Ina Marks

BAGWELL, Joe B. (Sec 1-18-29) Joseph B. Bagwell was born in 1887 at Weaversford, North Carolina. He came to Montana in 1907, worked first for the Huidekoper Ranch near Melville, and later on, the N Bar Ranch.

He homesteaded near the old Mecaha Post Office, and in 1916 and 1917 was the mail carrier from Mosby to Mecaha.

Joe generally made two trips a week from Mosby to Mecaha, the round trip totaling 76 miles and the job paid \$1400 a year. He used two horses and a light rig, but

when the going was tough he carried just the first class mail and traveled on a saddle horse.

One day Joe started out from Mosby with the mail; the temperature was in the 40s and Joe was in his shirt sleeves. After a bit, he saw a small cloud developing in the northwest sky, and in a matter of minutes the temperature dropped to below zero. Joe nearly froze to death in that storm before he got to shelter. He got by with frosted cheeks and hands.

In that same storm, two school ma'ams in Garfield County froze to death because they had no matches with which to build a fire.

Bagwell also carried mail for seven years from Mecaha to Bervie.

The rising water of Fort Peck reservoir moved Joe out of his homestead area in 1938, and he established himself at Mosby. In later years, he retired and moved to Winnett and sold his holdings at Mosby.

Bagwell served with the Army in France during World War I, as a private in Co. E 18th Infantry.

Joe never married. He had two sisters that also lived in the area — Mrs. W. G. (Carrie Ann) Roberts and Mrs. Gid (Tina L.) Basic.

Joe died in 1967. He is buried in the soldiers' plot in the Lewistown City Cemetery.

BAILEY, Charles Charles married Leona Harvey from the Melstone country. In December 1934 they moved to the Homestake lease at Cat Creek where Charles was employed. The couple had two sons, Robert and Harvey, who both met with tragic drowning deaths. Robert, who was born in 1925, was considered a top hand with a horse and did lots of riding, not only on the Bailey place, but also for neighbors. In 1943 when he was eighteen years old, he and Carl Brindley were trying to round up a yearling bull near the Casey Fail place. He jumped his horse into a deep hole in the river while attempting to turn the bull. His horse went down and came back up without the rider. After an all night search, neighbors found the body the next morning. Robert was buried in the Musselshell cemetery.

The next year the younger Bailey boy, Harvey, who was 16, went swimming after a day of threshing with Medric and Sonny Dundom and Raymond Ihde. He went down in a deep hole in the Musselshell River and the other boys were unable to rescue him.

In 1944, Charles was transferred to Lance Creek, Wyoming, where he continued to work for Continental Oil Company until his retirement.

BAILEY, Robert E. (Garfield County) Robert Bailey first came to Montana to work on a ranch at Lavina in 1902, then ranched for himself at the mouth of Cottonwood Creek on the Musselshell River. He was a good hand with livestock and horses and was pictured in the Winnett Times still driving cattle at 83 years old. (See also SULT)

In 1938 he tried to retire and live with his daughter in California, but he did not find it to his liking. He came

back to Winnett, where he lived until he was 92 years old. At that time he moved to Thermopolis, Wyoming, to live with his son.

He and his wife had two daughters — Ana Sales and Gertrude Skidmore, both of Riverside, California; and one son, Charles, of Thermopolis (See also BAILEY, Charles).

Robert Bailey died in 1956.

BARISICH, Joe (Sec 17-19-30) Joe L. Barisich, son of Anton and Mary Barisich, was born in 1884 in Yugoslavia. He received his schooling there. He came to the United States in 1900. He was a miner, and from 1904 to 1908 he worked in the Kendall Mine near Lewistown, Montana. In 1908 he moved to the former Long S Cattle Ranch near the mouth of the Musselshell River.

Mary M. Loncaric, daughter of Paul and Maria Loncaric, was born in 1888 at Selce, Yugoslavia. She received her schooling there. She came to the Lewistown area in 1922.

Joseph and Mary were married in Lewistown in 1923. They had three children — Mary J. (1924), Tony P. (1925) and Jack L. (1929).

Joe and Mary always spoke Croatian at home, so the kids learned English when they went to school. Tony had to take the first grade over because the teacher said he couldn't speak English well enough. (Tony claimed he failed because the teacher couldn't speak Croatian!)

When Jack misbehaved in the early years of his schooling, one of his teachers would take down his bib overalls and whip him in front of the class. He got several whippings before his mother sewed the bibs to his shirt so the teacher couldn't take them down in front of the kids again.

These kids were the last to attend the old Fort Musselshell School, a well-known log pioneer schoolhouse that was also used for public dances for many years. Mr. Barisich was a member of the school board in that district.

The Barisich family lived on the river until 1938 when the government bought their land to flood with the Fort Peck Dam. They moved to Winnett in 1939, and the kids finished their education there.



Joe Barisich family: Dad, Jack, Mom, Mary, Tony

Tony Barisich graduated from Winnett High School and has worked on ranches around Winnett for many years. He never married and still lives in the house his parents bought when they moved to Winnett. Mary Barisich married Victor McKnire. They lived at Grassrange and later, in Billings. Mary died in 1985. Jack Barisich graduated from Winnett High School and married Marylee Sims. They live in Winnett. (See also BARISICH — Winnett)

Joe Barisich died in 1962 and Mary died in 1973. They are both buried at Calvary Cemetery in Lewistown. (Jack Barisich)

The following two items are of family historic interest: "Joseph Barisich was always called "Joe Bush." Many of the people around didn't know his real name. He had a small country store on his ranch, which he stocked with groceries from Lewistown. He also kept quite a few hives of bees. He collected the honey (the very best from sweet clover and alfalfa blossoms) and sold it in five gallon cans, at \$6.00 per can to all ranchers in that part of the country." (Ben Garthofner)

(W. T. 11-1-45) "Mrs. Barisich was awarded U. S. Citizenship papers by Judge Stewart McConochie last Friday. Mrs. Velma Merten, Clerk of Court, and Mrs. Barisich drove into Lewistown for the occasion."

BARKDOLL, Ruben A. (Garfield County) Ruben A. Barkdoll, son of J. H. and Minerva Barkdoll, was born in 1875 near Montra, Ohio. Emma J. Dial was born in 1885 at Eldorado Springs, Missouri, where she attended the local schools. Ruben and Emma were married in 1910 at Nevada, Missouri. In 1913 they came west to Montana. Their first stop was in the Moore, Montana, area, where Ruben worked for a time for Ed Withrow, his sister's husband. In about 1915 the Barkdolls moved to a homestead five or six miles north of Mosby in Garfield County.

Ruben and Emma had three children — Floyd (1906), Robert (1908) and Ruby (1913). The children went to the Twin Buttes School and to other schools in the area.

Ruben died in 1929 and Emma stayed on at the homestead with the children. She continued the operation until about 1940, when her health began to fail. She moved into Winnett and lived there until her death in 1943. She and Ruben are both buried at the Winnett Cemetery.

Floyd Barkdoll ranched on the Musselshell on a place he bought from Pearl Dundom and James Weaver (Sec 9-15-30). In 1954 he sold his place to E. E. Sult and bought a bar in Winnett. He operated Floyd's Bar until his death in 1958. He was killed in a car wreck, along with Herbert J. Killham, on November 6, 1958, when his pickup side-swiped a larger truck and careened off the road. The accident occurred just inside the Judith Basin County line.

JoAnn Dundom Ostermiller had remembrances of Floyd: "Floyd Barkdoll was, to me, a very special person. I think it was mostly because he had such a way with animals. We used to have a grey-striped tomcat that Floyd named Mr. Tibethy. This feline and the man knew

each other quite well, but there were limits. Floyd would tease Mr. Tibethy only so long, where upon the cat would attack him, which is what he wanted; then Barkdoll would leave him alone. All animals loved him, even the chickens."

Robert Barkdoll made his home on the homestead until 1948, when he moved to Roundup and married Mrs. Virginia Murphy. They later moved to Miles City and were living there when he died of a heart attack in 1953. He is buried at the Winnett Cemetery.

Ruby tells her own story: "I, Ruby Barkdoll Matovich, was born to Emma Jane and Ruben Abner Barkdoll near El Dorado Springs, Missouri. I had two brothers, Floyd and Robert.

"The spring of 1914 we came to Montana due to my mother's poor health. We landed at Moore, Montana. My uncle, Ed Withrow, had a ranch in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains. We stayed there for a time. I'm not sure how long. My dad worked for my uncle and Bert Francis. My two brothers went to Mount View School.

"We left there in the spring of 1915 or 1916. I only know we moved and landed about five or six miles north of Mosby. The first time I saw the house on the homestead, there were no windows or doors, just walls. I asked Dad, 'How do you get in?' He grabbed me up and gave me a swing as if to throw me over the top (much to the delight of my two brothers, but not mine). We raised a garden if it rained. Dad worked for other people when he could. Sometimes he got meat and vegetables for his wages, or whatever they had to pay him with. If he got money, he got clothes and paid the taxes. Sometimes he would work for a neighbor, and that neighbor would come and help him in repayment.



Ruby Barkdoll

"My brothers went to school at Twin Buttes School. No one now seems to know where Twin Buttes School was. Their teacher was Mrs. Eline Warner.

"The next thing I remember was starting to school in the old Ralph Barney house. I well remember my first year in school. My first teacher was Mattie Cox from Virginia, with my next teacher being Mrs. Martha Griebel.

"It was a terrible winter. We lived about a mile and a half from school, and Floyd and I walked. There were some neighbors with two boys who rode six miles to the school. One very nice day in the fall, I went to school in a dress, a light jacket, and canvas strap sandals. During the day, a storm front came through, dropping the temperature about 40 degrees, bringing freezing rain and snow. The teacher wrapped me in a blanket, borrowed the neighbor boys' horses, and sent me home horseback with Floyd. The older boys walked to our place, then rode their horses on home.

"That was in 1919, the beginning of a very hard winter; livestock died all over the hills. That year my dad worked for a man by the name of Bill Bennett. He let my dad ride one of his horses home on weekends. After two months' work, he gave Dad a large hind quarter of beef.

"The next year my dad and Mr. Peters (a neighbor) built a schoolhouse half-way between them. Mrs. Griebel taught us that year.

"My fourth year of school was at Twin Buttes. I stayed with Charlie Longs, who lived just east of the Twin Buttes. My teacher was Bernice Turner from McTwiggin, Montana. The mail came from Sumatra, then by team and wagon, sled, or pack horse to the McTwiggin Post Office (Garfield County).

"My next teacher was Lelea Green at the Mosby School. The next two years were at Mosby, with teachers Anna Kleiman, Mrs. Warner, and finally, Mrs. Sheets my eighth grade year.

"I started to high school at Winnett in 1928 but didn't have the money to finish the year. I worked at a hotel for my room and board. I went home in February, and before school started the next year, I lost my dad. I stayed with Mom on the ranch and took care of what little stock we had. The following years were hard ones.

"I married Marcus Matovich in 1936." (See also MATOVICH, Marcus)

BARNETT, Austin Austin Barnett was born and raised in the Valentine country. His high school education was interrupted by a term in the service during World War II. He returned from service and graduated from Winnett High in 1947.

He married, and he and his wife, Carol, went to work for John Hedman. They had four children — Ronnie, Wanda, Lester and Lonnie. They moved to the Hedman place on the river (the former Ed Healy place), and their children went to the Ross School.

The following article appeared in the Winnett Times on November 21, 1958. "Girl Wades Icy River Three Times Same Evening! When eight-year-old Wanda Barnett and

ten-year-old Ronald Barnett started home from school on Monday evening, their saddle horses refused to ford the river at the crossing between Knapps and Gilfeathers. At last Wanda got off her pony, led him across the river, tied him to a tree, then waded back to her brother and led the horse across. In the process the girl stumbled on a rock in the icy water and was further chilled in the water that already extended over her overshoes.

"By the time the riders had traveled about a mile and reached the Gilfeather home, Ronald was cold from the cold evening, and Wanda was very, very cold and ice crusted. Wanda stayed overnight at Gilfeathers while Ronald accompanied his father home. Austin Barnett had mounted his horse and gone in search of the youngsters who were overdue at home."

The next week the Times reported, "Wanda and Ronald Barnett have changed their route to school since the river wading incident that cold, cold evening. Instead of fording the river horseback three times going to school, a total of six crossings per school day, they cross only once in a cable bucket near their home, get their ponies that are kept in a corral on the east side of the river, and continue through the Kleiman river place and on to the Knapp farm where the Ross School is currently located. This is a less worrisome plan."

The next spring, however, this "less worrisome plan" proved to be almost disastrous. The children had crossed the river in the trolley to their horses. While there the ice started breaking up. Family and friends came to warn them. They had a difficult time talking the children into getting back on the trolley — safely to their homeside of the river. The children did not realize the danger of the floating ice. They barely missed the ice jam that took the trolley out and stranded the horses and five cows. Austin and Bill Roberts had to go around by Mosby to get the livestock. They were able to get the horses, but the cows couldn't be freed. Later Austin and Harry Bevis dynamited the jam to turn the water loose because it was five feet deep in the meadow.

BART, Wilmer R. (Sec 8-16-30) Wilmer R. Bart was born in 1860 at Bloomington, Iowa. After coming to Montana, he made his home in Garfield County, later homesteading in present-day Petroleum County near the Dow Bowen Ranch on the Musselshell River.

Mr. Bart was well known for the fine gardens he produced on a plot near his log cabin. He had devised his own irrigation system, pumping water using a Model T Ford for the power plant.

He was hitching a ride on a train one time, when he fell off. One leg fell across the track, and the train ran over it. After that he had a peg leg.

He only made trips to town when he needed supplies, which was infrequently. He never married. He died at 84 years of age in 1943.

BARTHELOW, Roy Roy and Marie Barthelow are listed as parents in the Weede School census. Their children are listed as follows: David (1907), Walter (1909),

and twins, John and Joan (1913).

BENSON, Arthur (Sec 2-12-30) Arthur Benson, son of John and Oline Benson, took over the home place when his father died. In 1940 he married Dorothy Blakeley at Townsend, Montana. They had six children: John (1941); Ronald Charles, who drowned in the river; William (1944); Charles Ronald (1951), who died of leukemia in 1954; Karen (1953); and Ardell (1956), born after her father's death.

A 1952 Winnett Times news item reported: "Arthur Benson reports roads are still snow blocked in his area, and that it was necessary for him to drive 130 miles to bring his children and Mrs. Benson to the Box Elder School. The Benson Ranch is located approximately 35 miles south and east of Mosby, by road. Across country, by horseback, it is 15 miles to the Box Elder School. With the roads still blocked by snow, the trip to school involves going by way of Melstone, a trip of about 130 miles. Mrs. Benson and children live in a house near the school on the Clarence Saylor Ranch through the week, going home over the weekends. (Mrs. Clarence Saylor is a sister of Arthur Benson.)

Mr. and Mrs. Benson thought it was quite a joke that a recent issue of the Times stated that county roads were all opened to traffic by the snowplows."

(W. T. 5-10-56) "Arthur Benson, 39, rancher in the southeastern section of Petroleum County, was killed instantly when struck by lightning about 2:30 p. m. Tuesday afternoon.

"A horse being ridden by Benson, as well as a horse being ridden by his son, John, 15, were also killed, although John apparently suffered only slight shock.

"Two other men, Elliott Trump and Bob Shelhamer, riding with the Bensons, were badly shaken and dazed when the bolt struck, knocking their horses to the ground. "The four men were riding in the rugged breaks country of the Musselshell River area to locate section corners and lines to establish new fencing when a storm came up suddenly, bringing rain and lightning.

"The death took place about three miles west of the Benson Ranch home in extreme southeastern Petroleum County. Because of the rugged terrain, it was not until 7:30 in the evening when the body was brought out."

BENSON, John A. (Sec 2-12-30) John A. Benson, son of Arthur and Dorothy Benson, is now (1988) in charge of the Benson Ranch on the Musselshell River. He married Betty Daniels, daughter of Bill and Nadine Daniels. They have two children — Kari Annette (1963) and Joy Rennae (1966). (Agnes Benson Saylor)

BENSON, John O. (Sec 2-12-30) John Benson and Oline Stenberg came from different areas in Norway to Big Timber, Montana. They met in Big Timber and were married. Later they moved to Melstone, and in the spring of 1912, they moved to a homestead on the Musselshell River, twenty-five miles north of Melstone, in Petroleum County.

Mrs. Benson and the children moved into Melstone

every fall for the school term where the children all went through high school.

They had five children — Theodore (1915) died in 1970, Arthur (1917), Agnes (1920), Opal (1924), and Elaine (1927). Their son, Arthur, took over the ranch in 1942.

John died in 1949, and Oline died in 1974. (Agnes Benson Saylor)

BOSTON, Lorne Franklin (Sec 4-13-30) In December of 1925, Lorne Franklin Boston, native of Halifax, Nova Scotia, made application with Clerk of Court, Mrs. Riggs, for final citizenship papers. K. E. Park and Dr. J. L. Alexander were witnesses. This was the first petition for naturalization filed in Petroleum County.

Lorne came as a homesteader and settled near Weede, where he bought some railroad land to increase his holdings. He raised vegetables for the oil camp and eventually moved there to work.

After Lorne Boston lost his holdings to the Federal Land Bank, John and Hellan Hill bought the property. In 1925 the Ripley brothers gathered his stock for him and shipped them out. Eventually Boston moved to Lewistown, where he spent the rest of his life. (See also BOSTON — Cat Creek)

BOULDEN, Francis W. (Sec 10-14-30) Francis Willard Boulden, son of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Boulden, was born in 1889 in Montfort, Wisconsin. Pearl Iva Allen, daughter of George and Martha Allen, was born in 1886 at Montfort, Wisconsin. In 1910 Francis and Pearl were married at Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Francis, Pearl, son Allen and daughter Faye I. homesteaded twelve miles north of Mosby in 1917. Another son, Kenneth, was born in 1919 while they were still on the homestead. In the spring of 1923 they moved upriver to the George Gates place, and Faye and Allen attended the Weede School, with Leta Bowers, teacher.

The following year (1924) they took over the Mosby Store and Post Office from George Gates. Daughter



Bouldens: Kenneth, Faye, and Allen