# Winnett Montana Community Newsletter Volume 2, Issue 11, Aug/Sept. 2023

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Thank you to all who contributed to the production of this edition!

#### BED, BREAKFAST AND BOOKS: Dorm Life in Winnett Written by Terry Lewis

Back in the day when Winnett's oneroom school opened its doors to elementary students, there was one flaw: it was only feasible for the town kids to attend. The town's first elementary school teacher, Amanda Swift, spent her summer riding her horse to outlaying homesteads, keeping "home-schooled" children up to snuff. With rutted - sometimes impassible – roads, few automobiles, and certainly no yellow school buses, other country schools sprouted up throughout the prairie. Single female teachers took up the lonely challenge, living in attached teacherages or even boarding with one of the families. However, that just took care of the first through eighth graders.

Winnett's first upper elementary and high school took off in 1915-16. Once Miss Swift took the need for a high

school to the capital, citizens were back to the original only-town-kidscould-attend-school problem. The following year, parents expressed interest in boarding their high schoolage children in town so they could attend the newly-accredited high school. Amanda solved their problem by convincing several bachelors to donate their unused shacks. These were moved close together, and Mrs. Brown was hired to supervise the there was no other choice. Soon, children. When she worried about leaving her piano behind, a group of fellows carted it to the school. The high school classes were relocated from above Moll's Pool Hall to the first Eager store building; some adjustments were needed. Ladies got together and not only stitched a sturdy cover for Mrs. Brown's piano, but fashioned denim curtains to divide the store into classrooms. Continued on Page 8 & 9



Opera House where the school presented musical and drama entertainment (1916-1918). Converted to a school dormitory in 1918 and Montana Hotel in June of 1920. Credit: Petroleum Co. Pages of Time

# COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: -Mary O'Driscoll Meserve-Have License, Will Travel

Lion! enthusiastic However, where she waited tables to support herself her replacement team bus driver. and her young daughter, Paulette. But her passion was barrel racing.

after graduation in 1954. Stationed in Okinawa i fulfilled by his wife. "I got the best years," came home to roost. Now planted in Winnett, Bill continued trucking, hauling road oil out of Billings. Not to be undone, Mary got her CDL license and joined him behind the wheel.

That worked until their daughter Dottie was born in 1980. Bill then worked as a ditch rider and crop inspector and enjoyed announcing at local rodeos. The couple traded the truck's cab for front-row seats in a couple of school buses - "yellow milk cows" as Bill called them. Like a Jersey cow, they required attention twice a day. For eight years, Mary drove the Petrolia Bench bus, but when Bill took over the north bus, she switched to the i east route. Bill drove the ball teams, too, and dreamed of transporting a Winnett team to the state basketball tournament. He never got that

Of course, you know Mary Meserve. Yep, I chance. Bill died during the 2009 District she's Winnett's long-standing bus driver, the Tournament. Grieving in the stands after person who kept the basketball books, and Winnett's boys won the District championship, was Winnett's City Clerk. Oh, and an Mary turned to the athletic director and asked, Mary's !"Well, what time do we leave for Divisionals?" connection to Winnett actually began in Utah Teri Harris breathed a sigh of relief. She had

The boys went on to State from Divisionals and after that the girls launched a series of Now, Bill Meserve joined the Air Force right successful state-bound teams. Bill's wish was for four years, he directed air traffic. Mary Mary smiled. Driving the team bus kept Mary laughed. "Can you imagine what those pilots going after she lost Bill, even though it meant heard from that cowboy atop the control steering over icy roads, squinting through tower?" After the service, Bill began trucking, I blizzards, and dodging those pesky deer. "In but he also enjoyed rodeoing. While traveling all those years," Mary stated, "I only hit one the circuit, Mary met the former bronc rider. I deer. We were on our way to Melstone." She Bill took Mary under his wing and gave her shook her head and continued. "Sometimes I! some useful tips. The barrel racer and the had to beat myself out the door, but I'd rather Mary executed a belly-crawl-sneak on an bronc rider tied the knot in 1978. It was a send myself than to trust driving that bus to antelope buck. When Bill heard the shot, he "blended family" in today's terms, which someone else." She kept the books for the came barreling over the hill, ready to get in included Mary's Paulette and Bill's two team for ten years, as well. It fit in nicely with on some action. Mary's own dream was to children, Kari and Coty. Bill hailed from driving the team. When the final buzzer get a big bull elk. She finally checked that off Winnett where his folks still resided. Since his sounded, she exited to warm the bus for the her list in 2016, but with Ronnie Kastner's parents were getting on in years, Bill and Mary trip home. Mary piloted Winnett's students on help, rather than Bill's. She knew exactly many field trips, too. On one adventure with a where she wanted to hunt. The bull she bunch visiting the mine at Landusky, a tour! guide met them, hopped aboard, and directed Mary up a steep, winding road. The climb forced the heroic bus driver to do some fancy clutching-shifting. When the kids were safely back down the mountain, the much-impressed guide asked whether Mary owned the bus. If so, the mine could sure use a skillful driver to shuffle tours up and down that hill! When Kiena Sandman's oldest son mounted the steps of Mary's bus, it marked the first of several third-generation riders she'd ferried to school. Mary retired after 40 years, turning "the yellow milk cow" over to her replacement. Still, on those nights when the team bus hits the road, she doesn't rest until it rolls back into town.



Mary and Bill hunted anything that was legal. Once, Bill was forced to wait in the pickup not all that patiently - for two hours while tagged scored 369. Mary figures she got a









Bill & Mary at Dottie's Wedding

Mary with her beautiful daughters, Paulette (R) and Dottie (L)

little help from Bill's heavenly perch. The two of Harry spends quite a bit of time following her I in the Winnett Lions Club. She was awarded them helped with Hunter's Safety for years. Mary continues to perform that service with Eric Jolma and Butch Arthur. Since there are so 17) and Piper (age 13) are making their many girls enrolling, it became expedient to have a female instructor on board. She received her 30-year plaque for teaching Hunter's Safety. During one deep-snow winter, the kids couldn't get in for the scheduled classes. That summer, Carter and Paige earned their certification under their grandma during the makeup session. Mary made sure each grandchild got their first rifle from her, too!

grandkids' activities these days. Paulette and the Lion's most prestigious prize, the Melvin Grant Gershmel's two daughters, Paige (age Jones Award. For "Dedicated Humanitarian marks on the wrestling mats. Mary never ! it reads from her wall. misses a meet whether it streams on TV or she's in the bleachers. Dottie and Jeremy Haworth's daughter Charli (age 7) is a budding gymnast while Carter Kaiser (age 19) is pursuing theater arts. Now that she's retired from bus driving and the years she to serve and cheer Winnett and her family served as City Clerk, a position she took on onward. in 1990, Mary has become even more active

Services" from the Lion's Club International,

Somehow, "dedicated service" about sums up what Mary means to our community. Whether she's steering a "vellow milk cow" or wearing the Lion's yellow vest, she lives

By Terry Lewis



Paige's middle school graduation gift

Paulette, Piper, Paige & Grant Gershmel



Paige & Piper, Mary's westlers. "Boys invented wrestling, Girls perfected it!!"



Carter's high school graduation

Jeremy, Dottie & Charli Haworth, Carter Kiser



Lions Club Main Street flower project



Retirement party holding the personalized gun sling from the Town of Winnett



Retirement gift from the kids



Geema intoducing grand kids to the school bus

# WINNETT SCHOOL NEWS

#### SUPERINTENDENT'S CORNER

I have come full circle! Twenty-eight years in education at Winnett School followed by ten years of Administration in Fromberg School and I am now happily returning to my alma mater with a commitment to the excellence for which Winnett School has always been known. I appreciate all those who have reached out with encouraging words of support, the amazing staff that I am so fortunate to join, the Winnett School Board, and to our former superintendent, Lindsey Wilkerson, who has worked hard to ensure a smooth transition.

My priority will always be our students and you will find that my decisions will be based on "what is best for kids." I fully understand that there are many different perspectives when dealing with issues; consequently, I will do my best to listen to all viewpoints and make thoughtful decisions based on the needs of our students, staff, and school. If I err, let me err on the side of a child!

I hope you are looking forward to the new school year as much as I am!

- Feri Harris

#### 2023/2024 Winnett School Calendar - 156 Days

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Aug 16: First Student Day
Sept 4: No School/Labor Day
Oct 9: Columbus Day
Oct 19/20: MEA Days/PIR
Oct 31: Halloween
Nov 1: Parent/Teacher Conf 4-7pm
Nov 11: Veterans Day
Nov 23: Thanksgiving Day
Dec 22-Jan 1: Christmas Break
Dec 25: Christmas Day

Aug 11: First Day of VB/FB Practice

Aug 14/15: Teacher PIR

Jan 1: New Year's Day

Jan 15: M.L. King Day
Feb 14: Valentine's Day
Feb 15: District BB in GF
Feb 19: President's Day
Mar 1: Ski Day
Mar 6: Parent/Teacher Conf. 4-7pm
Mar 29: Good Friday
March 31: Easter Sunday
April 1: No School (Spring Break)
May 12: Mother's Day
May 23: Last day of school
May 24: Teacher PIR
May 27: Memorial Day
AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2023













presenting awards at the WHS Spring Awards Banquet

Graduation & Awards Photo Credits: Carol Ann Schaeffer

Confi Join Partners In Education 18

The Missoula Children's Theater is made possible due to P.I.E. sponsoring the school event. This is just one of the many things that P.I.E. sponsors. To learn more, check out the next Winnett Times Oct/Nov issue that will have a full spread feature on Partners For Education. Their next meeting is **Sept 5th at 5:30pm.** We welcome anyone who might be interested in being a part of P.I.E. to come to the meeting. **Please join P.I.E.!** 

The Winnett School would like to thank **Phil and Lisa Pugrud** who donated their time and expertise to lay new flooring in the school basement. Thank you to these former grads for giving back.



Early Kindergarten at Winnett School will begin on Wednesday, August 16. The three-day weekly program will meet on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. Children who are four years old on or before September 10 may enroll. We would like for parents to enroll asap so that we have an accurate number as we are setting up the classroom and purchasing resources. We ask that parents complete an enrollment form and provide immunization information for their child.

Current research tells us that when children attend a highquality Early Kindergarten program, they get a great boost in early skills that set them up for success in elementary school. Contact Teri Harris, Superintendent for any questions or concerns you may have: 406-429-2251

### Bruno & Evelyne Hill Betti Summer Youth Program



"Thank you to Tammie and Eliza for helping the kids with our new garden beds!"

The kids were busy this summer growing veggies, open gym free play, swimming at the Lewistown Pool, music lessons with Karen Hale, baseball/T-ball and other activities.



Playing basketball during open gym.



Music and dancing with Karen Hale & Katie Zimmerman.



Day of pool play and fun in Lewistown.





#### COMMUNITY CENTER HAPPENINGS



#### Winnett School Dormitory Continued...



School dormitory (1921). Weiloff residence in background. Photo Credit: Petroleum County Pages of Time

Meanwhile, Walter Winnett began construction on a good-sized warehouse meant to house merchandise for his store. The first story, built of Eagle sandstone quarried from the local rimrocks, went up on what was to be Grand Street, Lots 5, 6, and 7 on Block Seven. But before the building was completed, Walter gave up on the grocery and hardware business. What to do with the big structure? Walter envisioned the town growing by leaps and bounds and determined that an opera house was needed - of all things. He rethought his plans and brought in lumber from his sawmill near the Musselshell River. When the top two floors were finished, the town had an opera house that ran from 1916 to 1918, a short life.

The structure was then converted to a hotel, but instead was commandeered as the first real dormitory, serving as such from 1918 to 1920. Mrs. Brown was again asked to be matron while Mrs. Millsap, experienced in operating hotels, was hired as cook. The school district furnished the fuel and electricity for lights. Parents exchanged meat, milk, eggs, butter, and other food for their children's board. It was a good system. In 1918, Mr. M.A. Cromwell was hired as the principal. The district offered him, his wife and daughter an apartment in the dormitory. In exchange, Mrs. Cromwell took on housekeeping duties, another workable arrangement.

Then, in 1920, Frank Millsap bought the building from Walter Winnett. He converted it back to a hotel. The Montana Hotel opened its doors in June of 1920. In 1921, since Millsap reclaimed the dorm for a hotel, the school district hired Richard Valentine to build a 23-room dorm. It sat on Block 28 on Broadway, opposite the current school library doors. A dining room was located in the center with a girls' wing extending out one end and the boys' rooms off the other side. Like many of the early structures in Winnett, it succumbed to fire in around 1945. The Montana Hotel had served the town for 25 years. With the dorm destroyed, the school district was able to buy the hotel for a dormitory once again. It served as such until 1950 when it was used as a church parsonage. The school district tore it down in 1960 after its 40-year run.

Not many of the "kids" who lived in the dorm are left to tell the tale, but Gunda Lewis remembers it well. Her account gives us a taste of what it was like to poke a passel of young adults into a hotel full of hormones. I shudder to think! When it was time for Gunda Sikveland to attend high school, she felt a combination of excitement and dread, much like the other new roomers. Not only would these out-of-town kids face a big school full of strange pupils and teachers, but they would be tucked into a dorm room for at least a week at a

#### Winnett School Dormitory Continued...

time without going home. When winter set in, the roads could get bad, and one week might end up being four.

When Gunda unpacked her bags, the dorm was back in the Montana Hotel, that three-story opera house wannabe. The new high school boarders mingled in the lobby surveying their new quarters, a big room containing tables surrounded by chairs - the combination dining room and study. A piano stood at the ready in case someone wanted to pound out an evening's entertainment. The matron had rooms on the first floor, and the kitchen was equipped to prepare three meals a day for the students. Upstairs, Gunda found her room and her roommate. Joan Marty and Gunda would room together for four years and become best friends. They shared both a room and a double bed

The boys' and girls' rooms were intermingled, but there were strict rules. It was fine if the students visited out in the halls, but only until 9:00pm. Then it was back to their rooms to get ready for bed, because the matron threw the breaker at 10:00! Since only the lights were powered by electricity, that was a workable "lights-out" solution. There were bathrooms with tubs, a luxury some farm houses had yet to see. Laundry facilities were downstairs where the matron washed the students' clothes, though the kids sometimes took their dirty duds home for Mom to wash over the weekend.

As Gunda recalls, it cost nine dollars a month for room and board; however, the school district paid each family a supplement which helped cover that expense. Even with a handyman and a matron to manage the care and maintenance of up to twenty bodies, the young people were expected to pitch in. They were responsible for setting and clearing tables and washing the dishes. Since there was no hot lunch program, the residents came back to the dorm for lunch. A hot meal was ready, but they still took the time to do the washing up. Of course, they cleaned their own rooms and helped keep the common area tidy. If the students were unable to return home for the weekend, there was the treat

of grilling their own toasted cheese sandwiches.

Not many of the students had cars, but the few who did were pretty popular when the noon bell rang. The "dormers" piled three-deep into a chariot whose driver was willing to provide a ride to the dorm-hotel for lunch. Naturally, there were a few high jinks. One night after a dance, Joan and Gunda slid into their rooms before "lights out". They heard rattling at their window and went to investigate the noise. Down below, a couple of older lads, Carl Brindley and George Mosby, were peppering the glass with pebbles. The out-of-high-schoolers partying and Carl had a "case" on Joan. The girls were flattered, but hissed at the pests to get going lest Matron hear the ruckus. There were consequences for rule breakers. Getting in after curfew resulted in the offender being confined to the dorm for the next weekend or, worse, being put to scrubbing floors.

When the '60's rolled around, the need for a dormitory expired. Funding provided for improved roads and a school bus system. Though some of Winnett's students face a long ride in the morning and again after school, it's preferable to being gone from home for weeks at a time. Parents count on their children for chores and for company, and that's a plus. Most ranches have multiple vehicles, so high schoolers drive home after a late practice. Still, the camaraderie and independence of living in a dorm is a minus.

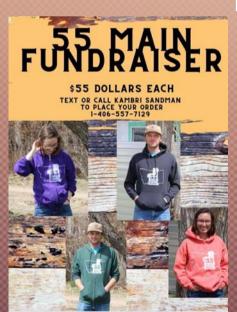
Like so many century-old traditions, dormitory life went the way of the one-room schoolhouse. Besides, serving as matron these days wouldn't exactly be a piece of cake. All our electronics would make throwing that 10pm breaker impossible. What - hand in your phones or else?

Once again, credit for this article goes to my one and only source, The Pages of Time. It took a bit of hunting and pecking to put together the timeline of buildings used for the Winnett dormitories. I drew the conclusion that the school district-build dorm must have burned around 1945. There may be someone who knows the exact date. I also want to thank Gunda Lewis for her lively "tales from the dorm" which made that experience come alive. I suspect there are more mischievous episodes buried with the skeletons of the long-gone dorms.

#### 55 Main Jam Sessions every 1st Saturday at 6pm



#### Notices/Announcements







#### **ACES Conservation Project Applications**

are now being accepted for Fall 2023 Water Tanks, Pipelines, Fence, Conifer Encroachment, Grass Seeding and Mesic Restoration. The next application review will be September 1.

For an application and information: <a href="https://www.winnettaces.org">https://www.winnettaces.org</a>

#### "CRAFTING

with

**NEIGHBORS**"

Every third Wednesday

9:30 - 2:30

Rebecca Room

PCCC (Petroleum County

Community Center)

Bring your needed craft supplies, lunch, \$5 to share in the cost of rental and your creative smile!!!

Contact:

Melody Whitcher 603-491-0676 or 406-429-2311

# AUGUST COMMUNITY CALENDAR

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday		
			1	2	3	4	5		
					Seniors		Catholic (Mass) 5:30pm		
			PCCC Meeting 8am	ACES Meeting 6pm			Jam Session 55 Main Building 6pm		
	6	7	8	9	10 Seniors	11 1 <sup>st</sup> day of VB/FB Practice	12		
	Methodist 1030am Baptist 11am Lutheran 4pm (Mosby)	Pet. Co. Commissr's 9am	Ambulance Sheriff's Reserve	Town Council 5pm	Rimrock Readers 7pm Vol. Fire Meeting 7pm				
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19		
	Catholic (Word) 10am Methodist 1030am Baptist 11am	Teacher PIR	PCCC Meeting 8am Teacher PIR School Board 7pm	Crafting w/ Neighbors Pet.Co. Search & Resc. 1 <sup>st</sup> Day of School	Seniors		Catholic (Mass) 5:30pm		
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26		
	Methodist 1030am Baptist 11am	Pet. Co. Commissr's 9am Youth Program 3:40-5:30	Youth Program 3:40-5:30	Youth Program 3:40-5:30	Seniors				
	27	28	29	30	31				
	Catholic (Word) 10am Methodist 1030am Baptist 11am	Youth Program 3:40-5:30	Youth Program 3:40-5:30	PCCD Meeting 5pm Youth Program 3:40-5:30	Seniors				

Please contact Patti at 429-5601 BEFORE WEDNESDAY to reserve a SENIOR MEAL CONFIRM day/time of meeting or event before attending. Dates/times are subject to change

## SEPTEMBER COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2 Catholic (Mass) 5:30pm Jam Session 55 Main Building 6pm			
3 Methodist 1030am Baptist 11am Lutheran 4pm (Mosby)	4 Labor Day No School	Pet. Co. Commissr's 9am PCCC Meeting 8am Youth Program 3:40-5:30 P.I.E. meeting 5:30pm	Youth Program 3:40-5:30 ACES Meeting 6pm Fuels Mitigation Meeting & Supper 6pm	7 Seniors	8	9
10 Catholic (Word) 10am Methodist 1030am Baptist 11am	11 Youth Program 3:40-5:30	Ambulance Sheriff's Reserve Youth Program 3:40-5:30	13 Kid's Ag & Conservation Ed Day 12:30-3:30pm Town Council 5pm Youth Program 3:40-5:30 Youth Group 7-9	Seniors  Kids Club 3:40-5:30pm Vol. Fire Meeting 7pm Rimrock Readers 7pm	15	16 Catholic (Mass) 5:30pm
17 Methodist 1030am Baptist 11am	18 Pet. Co. Commissr's 9am Youth Program 3:40-5:30	PCCC Meeting 8am Youth Program 3:40-5:30 School Board 7pm	Crafting w/ Neighbors Youth Program 3:40-5:30 Pet.Co. Search & Resc. Youth Group 7-9	Seniors Kids Club 3:40-5:30pm	22	23
24 Catholic (Word) 10am Methodist 1030am Baptist 11am	25 Youth Program 3:40-5:30	26 Youth Program 3:40-5:30 Lions Club	27 Youth Program 3:40-5:30 PCCD Meeting 5pm Youth Group 7-9	28 Seniors Kids Club 3:40-5:30pm	29	30

\*\*\*The Sports Schedule will be posted on the Winnett Times FB page once it has been finalized\*\*\*

#### SPONSOR RECOGNITION

The Winnett Times is made possible by our sponsors -THANK YOU! We greatly appreciate your support!

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Petroleum Co Endowment Gunda Lewis Joan Murphy & Family Anonymous Cash Donation(2)

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## Free Classifieds & Announcements on the Website & current up to day INFO

If you have a classified listing (for sale or wanted), job posting or general announcement/Ad please contact Trish Smith @

www.winnettimes@gmail.com to have it posted on the Winnett website: www.VisitWinnett.com

Check out the website for all up to date information/announcements, community calendar, links to businesses/organizations, meeting agendas/minutes (that have been submitted) & and recreational ideas. It also has the current newsletter and all past editions of the Winnett Times in both PDF printable format and e-version FlippingBook.

This website is also linked to

**www.WinnettMontana.com** (ran by Chelsea McKenna). Both sites should have all the area info for the local community and visitors.

Winnett Times Contact Info: winnettimes@gmail.com & our FB Page

A huge **THANK YOU** to **David Ponte**, Publisher of "The Roundup Record Tribune & Winnett Times" for giving us copyright permission to use the old "Winnett Times" name on our newsletter. It has nostalgic value to our community, and we appreciate your generosity!

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