

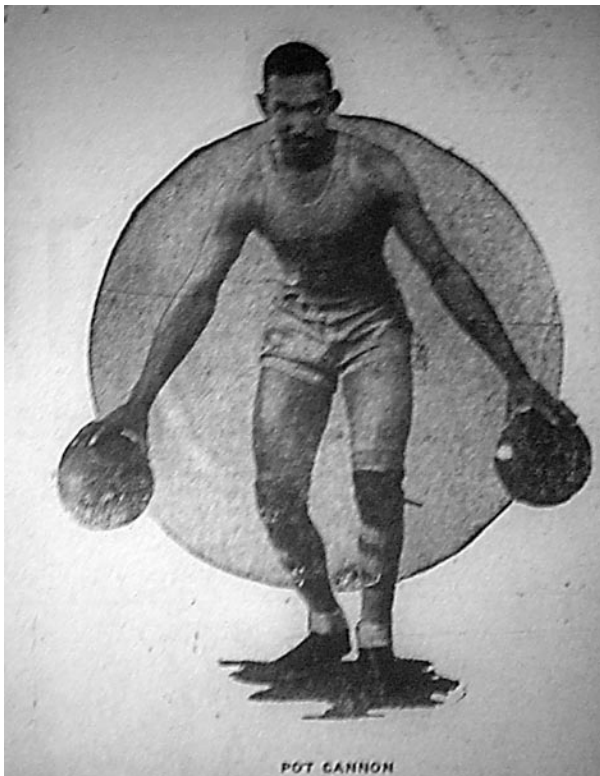
The Gym-Stormers

The 1920's were famous for those daring aviators that barnstormed across America with death defying stunts. The 1930's had their own version of barnstorming: exhibition basketball. Three Forks, having built a gymnasium in 1931, took advantage of the many teams touring the west. Among the teams invited to play the hometown team were C.M. "Ole" Olson's New York Harlemites.

Olson was the owner / manager and player for a successful exhibition team called the Terrible Swedes. Olsen and a host of other promoters were taking advantage of the wild success of the Harlem Globe Trotters and sponsored their own teams with similar names. In 1935 Olson and the Harlemites toured Montana. Olson cancelled a February 5 game against the Great Falls Great Northerns because the contract said his team would be the first negro club to play in Great Falls. He found out that that Pullin's Globe Trotters and the original Harlem Globe Trotters had already played there. The Harlemites went on to have successful engagements in Billings and Anaconda.

The Harlemites played two games in Three Forks in 1935 and, according to the Herald "their basketball wizardry far surpassed the exhibitions put on by other traveling teams which played here," and Pot Cannon was one of the wizards (photo below). They came back in January 1936 to play the second game of a double header versus the Three Forks All Stars. The first game was the Three Forks Wolves versus Holy Rosary. Unfortunately, the Herald did not have a sports section like today's papers and no accounts of the game were published.

(It is interesting to note that the Harlem Globe Trotters, first promoted and managed by Abe Saperstein in 1929, were originally from Chicago and did not play the "home town" of Harlem until 1968.)



A year in Willow Creek 1920

A curious thing about 1920; February had five Sundays, a rare occurrence, since it occurs only once every 28 years. As it was a leap year, the Willow Creek correspondent to the Three Forks Herald, Mrs. Dorinda Hankinson wrote:

*Young ladies this is Leap year
I have told you o'er and o'er
And if you don't propose girls
You'll wait just four years more.*

Entertainment was a group effort in that era. The Ladies Aid Society was active the whole year, giving surprise parties of appreciation to various women of the area. The Willow Creek Study Club, started in 1914, gave a "delightful Valentine party Saturday afternoon at the home of Mrs. E. D. Thorndike." The Commercial Club held regular dinner meetings and "smokers," dinner, smoking and skits or recitations. They also worked during the year to improve the streets and sidewalks of the town. Groups met regularly to play 500 (card game) and entertain and the Willow Creek Homestead B.A.Y., "The Yeomen," met the last Saturday of every month.

School was held in a building built in 1911 and it was beginning to get a little tight. Parents were urging the school board to consider building a new school and the \$60,000 bond for the school passed in March.

There was no gym available, so the basketball team had to pray for good weather in order to practice outside with THE basketball. By February, the team had enough practice in to take on the Married Men team and beat them handily 22 - 4. In March, Willow Creek traveled to Cardwell and ended up with a loss 11-10. The players were;

Alvin Cleveland - Center, Francis Cleveland - Right Forward, Frank Cook - Left Forward, Charles Noble - Right Guard, Richard Hilke - Left Guard. Ross Parks changed places with

"REO"

The Gold Standard of Value.



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Willow Creek Garage and Machine Shop

Frances Cleveland in the second half and Lyle Williams was a substitute.

The next game turned out much better for the team, as Willow Creek ran over the Pony team 23 – 8. A dance was held after the game featuring Miss Agnes Brabec and Stewart Avery of Three Forks.

Things were looking well in Willow Creek in 1920. The Willow Creek Bank was thriving, the Kid Theatre was showing pictures and while the rains had stopped in most of the state, crops around Willow Creek had not been hard hit. The last bouts of the dreaded Spanish Flu were over a year in the past. In April, the contract for the new school house was let to Mr. Stanton. And a group of men were leasing land in the pursuit of a new oil drilling project. Mack & Black, down at the Willow Creek Garage and Machine Shop, were selling the latest model of the REO.

May - The class of 1920 graduates were Pearl Woodside, Viola Noble, Lyle Williams and Alvin Cleveland. Mr. Cleveland notes (in a later letter to the reunion committee) that this was the first graduating class from Willow Creek.

In June, the cheese factory had started up again. And Frank Cooper's team and men were kept busy hauling in materials for the new school. During the summer, the Business Men, the Married Men and the "Kids Nine" were crossing bats on the local diamond.

A series of Revival Services, led by Pastor Milton F. Hill, were held at the Willow Creek Church during July, "with good music and a brief, but earnest message."

But progress wasn't made in every facet of life in Willow Creek. "Very few business houses in town have any telephone at all, and those that have, find them dead usually." And of course,

Prohibition was on.

In August, three Boy Scouts from New York were hiking their way to Seattle. As they were traveling up Willow Creek hill, one of them was accidentally shot through the knee and the group had to lay over until the lad healed.

With the opening day of school, many new families arrived in town. Students were eager to move to the new school, but in the meantime, the old facility was having difficulty handling 35 high school students. The road from Table Mountain to Willow Creek was improved, but the bus nearly overturned on one rainy and slick day, so further improvements were made.

Basketball practice between bouts of bad weather prepared the new team for new season. Team members for the 1920-1921 season were Frank Cook – Right Forward, Hobart Price – Left Forward, Francis Cleveland – Center, Charles Noble – Right Guard, Richard Hilke – Left Guard with subs Byron Parker and William Walbert.

In October, William Mack and family moved into the Walter Mack house after a blaze destroyed their ranch home. The Women's Study Club sponsored a community wide celebration of Armistice Day on November 11.

After school on Friday December 10, the high school boys stayed over and moved classroom desks and chairs to the new \$60,000 school building. The slate blackboards had been moved two weeks earlier (making it difficult for teachers to teach in those few days).

The last opportunity for ladies to ask the men for their hand in marriage was a Leap Year dance on December 18. The school Christmas cantata was canceled on the account of two students (children of Homer Thompson) coming down with scarlet fever.



Marriages during the year:
Miss Irene Harwood to Mr. R.G. McPherson both of WC.

Miss Cosa Hankinson and Mr. Ben Houston. Miss Nelly Walbert and Mr. Howard Collins. Miss Bessie Powell and Mr. Ewart Thrisithick of Butte. Miss Vernice Cooper to Mr. Therson Torgrinson of Valier. Miss Pearl Woodside to Mr. William Smith.

Births: A daughter to Mr. & Mrs. William Kelly, June 25. A daughter to Mr. & Mrs. Tom Waggoner – Nov. A son to Mr. & Mrs. William Peterson – Nov. 30.

Deaths: John O'Connor - 60, William Cook - 83, Clinton Williams – 87. Helen Elfers Hoillein – about 30.

Photo by Patrick Finnegan