

Whispers of the Past

Two years ago, I started volunteering at the Broadwater County Museum during the winter. As a history buff, it helped me get through the dark months of cold and snow with my well-being somewhat intact. I tried my best to help Linda Huth, museum curator, with various projects but she often had to rein me in to stay on task. I did not disclose to her about my ADD but I'm sure she is aware of it now. The museum is full of very interesting pieces and parts of the history of our county and state and I tended to wander off and explore any chance I got.

There are a lot of families here that can trace their history back several generations. I have lived here for over 35 years and I wanted to feel like I belonged, had roots here. Low and behold, I tripped over a record of a person with the surname Douthitt being buried out at the Centerville Cemetery. For me, it was close enough to Douthett to feel a connection. It gets way more confusing after that but I think I have it sorted now.

As soon as Linda freed me from the bonds of our latest project, I raced out to the cemetery and searched for Myra Douthitt. I figured we were on a first-name basis now that I found her. The only Myra I found on the headstones was for a Myra Townsend. I realized I needed to do more research about this place and Myra. Even though it was freezing cold, I wandered around the cemetery and felt the loneliness of the place but also the peace. I went home and started looking through records on websites like Ancestry, Find A Grave, and Archives, to name a few.

Myra Douthitt was born and raised in Richey, Missouri. She married William Henry Townsend in 1883. They moved to Colorado and had 5 children, 2 of the sons dying there. Maybe that's why they moved to Townsend. Maybe it was the name. 'Hey honey, I heard about a town in Montana with our name. We should move there.' Anyway, she died in 1907 at age 46. She was known to have heart trouble and had gone out to get firewood and collapsed and passed away. She was well-known in the Townsend area and was described as affable, pleasant, and generous. I want to be remembered that way. Especially as affable. What a fun word.

As I wandered around the cemetery in the next few months, my daughter Megan, who knows me and cemeteries, sent a YouTube video about cleaning headstones. I watched so many of them my eyes dried out. Linda told me if I wanted to do anything at Centerville, I should get permission from the county as they had taken over maintenance responsibility. I reached out to

Lindsey Richtmyer and she talked it over with the other commissioners and they said yes. I ordered the stuff to do it right and headed out with my bucket of cleaning stuff.

Myra's headstone was easy. It's a kind of dark stone so cleaning was mostly getting bird droppings off. Bird droppings are the hardest thing to clean. The white part doesn't want to go away. What is in that stuff? I then moved over to the next headstone. A nice white one that needed all my tools. Sanford Wood. He was a Civil War veteran.



I will get more into the fine art of headstone cleaning later because there are rules in cleaning so you don't do more damage than actual cleaning. And I want to talk about Centerville and the cemetery itself. One interesting fact about this cemetery is it was the Poor Farm or Pauper's cemetery. And I've been digging deep. No, not grave digging. Yuck.

You'll see, so stay tuned.