

Whispers of the Past

I know it's a wee bit late, but I have been super busy, and Memorial Day is a special time for me every year for a lot of reasons.

This year, at Centerville, I remembered to thank each and every veteran headstone with a flag and a silent thank you, maybe even a salute and a little prayer. My own father was a Vietnam veteran who flew an F-4 Phantom jet over both North and South Vietnam in 1967. The veterans at Centerville were primarily Army serving in the Civil War, WWI, WWII and as far as I can tell, other conflicts, although I have not figured out which. Yet.

As I continue my research on everyone in Centerville, I've stumbled on a lot of military records showing registrations but not service records. Still, there are quite a few veterans out at the cemetery, somewhere around 15.

One is Nick Jancu, who has an interesting headstone. It's not a military headstone, but it says he was born in Romania and fought in WWI. Turns out he immigrated in 1909 at age 12 with his father and they somehow made it here to work as sheep ranch hands. In 1918, he enlisted in the Army but did not end up leaving the States because the war ended. He came back here, got married in Livingston to Edna Thomas from Belgrade when he was 26. That marriage didn't last long so they got divorced. He then worked as a sheep farmer and filed for land under the Homestead Act and having learned a lot about the sheep business, he started his own bands and was well known for having high-quality sheep and lambs. Somehow, he found the time to become the proprietor of a soda fountain and pool hall. He died at the age of 42 from a heart attack while driving a truck near the Irish Ditch and Missouri River. Oh yeah, he was accused in the murder of a woman he had been seeing in Helena, but was later acquitted. That's all I could piece together, except that he was 5'6", 180 pounds, and had a ruddy complexion.



I want more info.

Did Edna leave him because she didn't like sheep? How did he get the money to buy a pool hall and why a pool hall? Nosy, aren't I?

Then there is Ben Bunch, who has a white military headstone stating his role in the service in a Veteran's Hospital Unit in 1919. He was born and raised in Kentucky, moved west and worked as a ranch foreman in Avon at the Snowshoe Ranch, never married and he was tall and slender. That's all I could find. Tall and slender. How he ended up in the Centerville Cemetery is yet another mystery I haven't been able to solve. I have learned there are a lot of men named Ben Bunch all over the country and over the decades but not much about our Ben Bunch. Sometimes, that's how it goes.

I think about these people who seem to have left their family roots and went far away from them and wonder if anyone in their families know they are buried here. The same goes for Sanford Wood from my first article. Nevertheless, I applaud and appreciate their service to our country no matter what it was. Thank you to all veterans everywhere and thank you Dad.