

Whispers of the Past

What's in a name? Apparently, a lot of frustration on my part.

As I continue both working on the Centerville Cemetery graves and researching those who reside there, I come across names so common, it is almost impossible to get any 'dirt' on them in terms of their lives, how and where they lived, and how they died.

After my first foray into trying to discover just who is in this cemetery, I scoured two sources, both were called 'Montana, US. County Death Records', versions 1830-2011 and 1907-2018. I filled pages with names to research. I then put the names and whatever dates I can get from the lists and plug them into 'Find A Grave' and from there, hopefully, I get more places to look from Ancestry and Archives and the state newspaper archives.

Seems logical, right?

Sometimes. The newspapers have a few issues (ha!) pertaining to names. First, there are the women who are shown as Mrs. Edwin something or Mrs. Richard something. What is her first name? No one knows. I sure don't. Sometimes, I don't know if it's the right Mrs., especially if there are several somebodies with the same last name. I could be looking at info for Jane when I'm trying to find Jean or Martha.

Then there are the more common names like George Thompson or John Smith. Do you know how many George Thompsons or John Smiths are in the papers over 100 years? It takes crack detective skills to find out anything, but I will tell you I finally narrowed George Thompson to Winston, working for the railroad, found

dead in a saloon in 1909, quite possibly from drugs, because he was known as a dope fiend. Eventually, I found out John Smith was from Massachusetts, worked as a mining engineer, was widowed and died in 1913 of colon cancer. What was his wife's name? Probably Mrs. John Smith.

Neither of these people have headstones, but they are shown to have been buried in Centerville.

Lone Swede doesn't have a headstone either. He was a hobo, born in 1869, died in 1914. That's all I could find.

How about August Renke, born 1861 in Germany, died of kidney failure in 1913. He was a cement worker and built sidewalks.



The list goes on and I will continue to try to find out more about them and others because they deserve some kind of recognition. I always wonder about their families. They came here, worked, died and had to have left some roots

somewhere. Did any family member back where they came from wonder what happened to them? How sad is that?

At some point, the goal being before I die, is to reach the end of my research for anyone buried out there and for those who don't have headstones, I'd like to create an interpretive sign displaying the history of the place, the names with headstones and the names of all those buried out there without a sign that's legible, pretty much everyone in fact. Just in case some long lost family member makes their way to this old cemetery and finds a name they know. A name forgotten for so long. We won't be able to tell them exactly where in the cemetery but hopefully they will find the peace in this place that I have.

Speaking of that, my ospreys, Benny and Joon came back! Probably took a wrong turn somewhere so that's why they were late. I was worried. And another fun fact out here are the irises planted a long time ago are blooming. Families planted them many decades ago and they are still hanging in there. I've sprinkled different native wildflower seeds out there hoping to get a little color added to the place.

Again, if anyone wants to share anything about the Centerville Cemetery you think I need to know, feel free to send me an email at douthetts@aol.com.