

Whispers Of The Past

The more work I do out at Centerville, the more questions I have about it. Unfortunately, the answers don't come easily, probably because I don't quite know where to look or what I've found is contradicted in different references. Here are a few questions boggling my brain:

Who started the cemetery? Who is the first person buried there? Who owned the land and who was it given to in order for it to become a cemetery? Who decided it would be a potter's field or an indigent burial area? Was there ever a cemetery association or board or caretaker or overseer? Why was it abandoned for the most part? When or why did the county take it over? Why do I care?

That last question is the only one I can answer and even I can't quite understand or explain it. The simple truth is I don't know. I've had a thing for cemeteries for a very long time and I guess finding this one has given me a chance to make it better. My original intent was to clean up veteran burials to honor both the sacrifice of the soldier and my father. It snowballed from there and I can't seem to stop wanting to clean up the place and learn the history of it and the people. Truth be told, I just like how sitting out there, working on a grave, brings a peace I need these days, a chance to breathe and wonder about the people who came to our area to live out their lives.

So, who is the first person buried out there? I've come across many sources saying it was Bedford C. Maxwell, age 47. He was buried out there in 1877 and his headstone has been lying on the ground for quite some time. I searched all kinds of records for more information on him and this is what I found, not much. He was the treasurer for one of the Masonic lodges in Centerville, lived in Springville, and had a younger brother named John. He and John were born in Arkansas into a farming family. The two of them went to Shasta, California as gold prospectors,

and ended up here with the same intention of mining for gold but instead set up a ferry on the Missouri River where Indian Creek comes into it. When Bedford died, John went to Texas after settling Bedford's estate and died there. Neither brother married. This leads to another dang question, was the little town of Bedford named for him?



As for who owned the land and gave it up to be used as a cemetery, I think, but am not quite sure, it was part of the George McFadden ranch which surrounded the little town of Centerville. George also gave the land for the poor farm nearby. What a nice guy. He later sold the rest of the ranch to Paul Ragen.

I will keep digging and with my luck and inquisitive mind, I'll just come up with more questions. I can't wait for the Montana History Museum to open back up so I can really get some answers. I'm hoping to find the Connors Mortuary records so

I can get the plot numbers for the unmarked graves. Maybe by then, Benny and Joan, my ospreys, will have better luck building a nest. One can only hope.