

Whispers Of The Past

Another year of work done at the Centerville Cemetery is about to end unless we don't have winter and since we have already had snow, it's highly unlikely that will happen.

I spent a good part of yesterday afternoon finishing up some of the project headstones I've been working on, mostly involving children. Many headstones are cleaned up and some I've had to reset as time has buried them deeper into the earth, making them only partially readable. I've made a list of those needing to be epoxied because they are not solid on their bases and at some point, may fall over and break. That's the plan for next year.

At times, I don't feel like I'm making any progress at all out there. I really had no idea how many people are buried out there and my research tells me repeatedly that my original list is incomplete.

Every once in a while, when I'm looking through old newspapers or the Broadwater Bygone book, someone's name will pop up I know isn't on my list. Dang it. Further proof that we will probably never know for sure how many there are. And then I wonder why I care so much. I don't know.

I recently went to Northern Ireland again with my sister to find our 5th great-grandfather, grandmother and 3 of their kids on our dad's side who emigrated in 1752 to the US. It turned out to be our second visit, being stymied by history. We spent a couple days in a building housing probably millions of records and found nothing concrete. PRONI, Public Records of Northern Ireland, is a place where you walk in and feel that finding an ancestor is possible. My sister had done a bunch of ancestry work in the big genealogy center in Salt Lake City, so we had PRONI

numbers to start with. She told me not to get my hopes up, but of course, I didn't listen.

We were given special badges to get into rooms to search and then read whatever files we asked for using the numbers my sister had found. When I called up my first record, I went to the reading room where the order was handed to me to take to a table and search through a paper document for the info you want. I slipped the document out of the sleeve and realized I was holding something written over 400 years old. There was no version of Douthett anywhere in it but I was literally shaking with excitement over the possibility and the age of the document.

The problem, which we were forced to accept, was the records for the 1700s had been burned up in a fire in Dublin and our family was in Northern Ireland in the 1700s.

We got kicked out of PRONI one afternoon because a big storm called Amy, created by Hurricane Humberto, was about to hit Northern Ireland, and they wanted everyone to get home before it hit. I think the message was clear: 5th great-grandfather and family were not going to be found and we both walked away into the wind and rain, turning our umbrellas inside out and feeling beaten. My sister said she was done with Ireland. I don't blame her. And then I thought, why do we care so much about this? After a few weeks of reflection, I don't know.

I have now mostly finished my laborious research into the people I know are buried at Centerville and I just need to type it all up into something that could be used by anyone else who wants to know about it. And when the Montana History Museum opens in December, I'm going to look for mortuary records to see if there are any plot numbers in their registry to match up to the unmarked on the cemetery map. Winter work.

As I have said many times in these articles, my original intent out there was to honor veterans by cleaning their headstones. It is more complicated now. The place has touched me and I'll keep at it, but if you were to ask me how or why, I would probably shrug and tell you, I don't know.

Again, if you have any information you'd like to share with me about the cemetery or inhabitants, send me a message at rangebabe56@gmail.com.