

Whispers Of The Past

When I first started working out at the Centerville Cemetery, I was intrigued at just how many graves are out there. The obvious ones have headstones but there are so many more with remnants of markers or not even that, just mounds. I have run across several lists various people have made of the people buried at the Centerville Cemetery so not only do I have those to do research from, but I also went through two lists on the Montana state death lists to see which cemetery the people from our area were buried in. I went through two bottles of eyedrops doing it. None of them look like the others. The most recent list was done in 2011 by Charleen Spaulding from Helena.

So, how many people are buried out there? I seriously don't think we will ever know exactly but there are easily over 100. You could try to go out there and physically count them but from my experience, it's hard to know what is a grave and what is not. Of course, the obvious ones have headstones of some kind. Then there are what I call 'the lumps' which are the ones that are shaped like the leftover dirt after burial is piled on top. There are the ones that are sunken depressions. And those with the old metal markers that are mostly unreadable but there is no lump or depression. Flat cement stones are scattered throughout stamped with the names and dates of people who died but without those, you would never know anyone was buried there.

Most cemeteries have a plat of surveyed land with locations of potential gravesites in nice orderly lines. I've stood on the road surrounding the sections and tried to look down the rows to see if there was a plan to make rows so they weren't buried on top of each other but even they don't appear to be straight rows. They are a lot like my own attempts to draw a straight line without a ruler. I have been unable to determine rhyme or reason to how it's laid out versus how it's supposed to be laid out.

If I had to guess, I would say the original 'pioneer' families chose their own spots because they seem to be clustered in one area. Family plots include Van Voast, Marks, Raymond, Johnson, and McMahon. Later, the land was used for burials from the poor farm that was nearby. and other parts of local families who put in headstones that are scattered throughout the cemetery. I need to figure out how they got the land in the first place for both the cemetery and poorhouse.

When I started all this two years ago, I was given a sheet of paper showing a numbered map of the graves. Even with my handy dandy magnifying glass, I couldn't read it. It's not dated and I know there have been more recent burials that are not recorded on the map. A visit to the courthouse led us to a large image of the tiny map I had gotten and I've asked for a same size copy of it so I can match what is out there to what I've been researching and cleaning. In the meantime, I'll keep working out there, adding to my list of questions about life and death back in the day.

All I wanted to do was clean headstones and now I'm obsessed with finding out so much more. If you have any information you'd love to share with me, I can be reached at douthetts@aol.com and you can be my newest favorite person.

To view the Centerville Cemetery plat visit:

<https://mt43news-business-services.com/CentervilleCemetery>