

## **Whispers Of The Past**

Let's talk about the railroad, the Northern Pacific Railroad. The town of Centerville was started in 1870. It was platted and lots were sold, ranches were born, people came. Centerville was deemed well-suited for potential ferry and steamboat business on the Missouri River. Surveyors for the railroad decided not to use the Centerville location. In 1878, an area about a mile south was selected for the route location. There was nothing there until the railroad set up a depot and from then on, a town sprang up with the land plotted, platted and lots sold. Most of the businesses and residents moved pretty much everything to the new town, Townsend, over the years.

I've researched cause of death for the folks interred at Centerville and been amazed at the number of deaths that can be attributed to the workings of the railroad. Trains were deadly for workers and citizens. Just thinking about the kind of deaths these were makes me a little queasy.

Robert Smith, a quartz miner from Ireland, was struck by a train engine in 1917. The county paid \$10 for his burial.

Charles Sheldon, a worker for the Sullivan Gold Mining Company, was killed by a train while driving during a blizzard near Winston in 1936.

John G. Rickman was a brakeman who was buried in a landslide that had caused the train to go off the tracks near Lombard.

C. J. 'Shorty' Moody was a porter on the train. Cause of death unknown. He was only 26 years old.

John C. Hanson was a section foreman for the railroad at Lombard and was killed in an accident that broke both femurs and his neck. He died of internal injuries at the age of 47. He has a nice headstone with a sign that says 'Railroadman'.



These are just a few of the people who lost their lives due to the railroad. There may be more out at Centerville, but their stories are lost. I'm guessing there are more in some of the cemeteries scattered around what became Broadwater County. John Hanson is the only one with an actual headstone. The rest are somewhere in the Centerville Cemetery but are unmarked. I often wonder if their families knew what became of them.

In the meantime, I've been working a bit out there, chopping out cactus, restoring the rock borders around gravesites, and pruning shrubs. Birds of all kinds are making their appearance, and I've already yelled at the robins not to poop on the headstones. It seems like the gulls have come early but it's fun to watch them bob and weave in the wind currents as they go by. There's no sign of life on the osprey nest platforms, but they still have a month or two to make an appearance. Gophers are everywhere and I get a kick out of watching my dogs, Tank and Maizy, chase them. I keep filling up the gopher holes with cactus and rocks.

Work out there will stall soon when I get my knee replaced in the next week. I wonder if I'll finally look graceful getting up and down off the ground after surgery. Time will tell. I'm just glad no one sees me now.