

## Whispers Of The Past

Eenie meeny miney mo, who will be in this edition of Whispers of the Past and how do I pick the subjects? Honestly, it's anybody's guess, including mine. My friend, and the boss of me sometimes, Linda Huth, handed me a list of names she'd run across in her research for the newspaper articles she puts out every week of people buried in Centerville. I use her list to cross-check my list and sometimes a name not in my list pops up and I do my own research, head out to the cemetery and find a headstone to match. Most of the time, there aren't any but this time I struck gold on two. When I say I struck gold, I literally did in the sense that these two gentlemen came here for gold and ended up doing other things because they didn't strike gold. Get it? I admit, it's a stretch.

Richard H. Weeden, born February 12, 1844, in Missouri and died on July 27, 1907. He was a black man from Missouri who spent almost the entire Civil War in the 60th Illinois Infantry, Company F (1861-1864). He came west to Diamond City, married Eliza Jackson in White Sulphur Springs in 1897, and had two daughters, Helen and Lillian. He bought a small place in Duck Creek and worked for several ranchers, specifically Jim Marks, as a gardener. While raking hay for the Marks ranch in 1907, he was struck by lightning and killed, leaving behind his wife and daughters. Eliza ended up selling the little ranch and moving to town, working many jobs to make ends meet.



Eliza remarried to Lewis Miles, who lived in Toston, where she was a cook at the Toston Hotel. She later divorced him on the grounds of neglect and desertion and moved back to Townsend, where she was an active member of the United Order of Odd Fellows. Eliza had a lot of friends and was well-liked by the people she worked for and knew in town. She spent her last years in Billings with her daughters. She died in 1940 and is buried next to Richard.

I wonder what it was like to be a black person in the west during the late 1800s. Not many black people lived in Montana back then and truth be told, there still aren't. The population out here was a mix of both Union and Confederate soldiers and from what I've read, they did not get along well as the war was still fresh in their minds. I also wonder about Richard's service in the Union army. I'm guessing he was an aid to officers in camp rather than fighting in the infantry. All black infantry regiments weren't established until later in the war. It seems that both he and Eliza were well accepted in the communities here. I haven't found any information regarding Eliza's race, but I assumed she was also black. What I wouldn't give to have a conversation with them about life back in the war and then here in settlement days.

I've had to take a break out at the cemetery because I got my right knee replaced and I'm pretty sure I'd need a crane to get up and down off the ground. Now that it's warming up a bit, I really want to get some of the broken headstones reset. Patience has never been one of my virtues. The ospreys are starting to come back along the river and lake. There's been no sign of Benny and Joon, but as soon as they show up, I'll let you know. I bet you, like me, are hanging by a thread to see if they show up.

In the next article, I'll talk about the other man I mentioned above, Robert Fields. If you have any information about ANYBODY out there, feel free to contact me at [rangebabe56@gmail.com](mailto:rangebabe56@gmail.com).