

Whispers Of The Past

Robert Fields has the most unassuming headstone in the pioneer part of the cemetery, so I suspect he was a quiet, just plain nice guy. I say that after I did a bunch of research on him, so I guess I'm a bit of a cheater.

Born in 1829, he came west from Georgia in 1859, at the age of 30, a bit after the gold rush in California. In 1863, he followed the rush to Alder Gulch in Montana, eventually settling in the Missouri Valley in 1865.

That is a lot of country to cover in six years, before the railroad made it west, so how did he get here? Did he sign on with a wagon train to get out to California initially? His obituary says he came out with a Dr. Steele and family to California and mined at California Gulch. Um, that doesn't narrow it down at all. I wonder how many California Gulches are in California.

Anyway, Robert was well known and liked. I found all kinds of snippets of information throughout his years here about his inclusion in the community here. One that really made me happy was a piece in the Townsend Messenger newspaper in 1893, where a club was started for the pioneers of the area. The headline was 'The Gray Beards' and a meeting in which each member was acknowledged as to when they came to the valley. The membership cost 50 cents. The official name of this group was 'The Old Settlers of the Missouri Basin.'

I recognized a lot of the member names as I've gone about my research, several of which are interred in Centerville. He was also listed as a member of the 'Montana Pioneers of Broadwater County.' How cool is that?

Unfortunately, I couldn't find anything about where he lived or what he did for a living. I do know he worked as a farm laborer for Charlie Kanouse. There are a couple little articles about Robert and Charlie working a field with horses that didn't like being used for farm work. The horses ran away while Charlie was leveling a field and Robert had to come rescue him. Both ended up needing a little attention from Dr. Belcher. The horses were fine.

Robert died at the age of 80 and had never married. He was known to accompany various community members on trips around the state and was particularly attracted to Lewistown which he thought would become a city someday.



He died suddenly on November 11, 1909. He was mourned by his many friends who had come to love the old gentleman. I do not know who paid for or set up his simple headstone but I'm glad they did.

One of the frustrating things about learning about the people in the Centerville Cemetery is how much I want to know but am unable to fill in the blanks. With

Robert, I want to know why he never married. Where did he live when he was here? The census records I found list his occupation as laborer, which, in my mind, could be anything. Do his Georgia people know what happened to him? I think I have been watching too many episodes of Finding Your Roots.