

## Centerville

Centerville Road runs between the River Bridge north of Townsend and Mill Road/Canton Lane. A lot of people believe that the name came from the original name of Townsend. The small community of Centerville was founded in 1870 actually preceded the founding of Townsend by 13 years.

Centerville Road very closely follows the layout of the long main street (Ferry Street) planned for the town of Centerville. The planned main street ran from the business center of the town (about where the big barn just south of Centerville Road) to the Bedford Ferry (where the River Bridge is now) and was close to the planned wharves on the river.

In 1876 the Helena Herald had this description of the area:

“From Confederate Creek to Centerville is the Missouri Valley; from Centerville to Grayson Creek is what is known as the Deep Creek valley and from Grayson Creek to the Missouri River Canyon, Poverty Flats”.

As its name implies, Centerville was the center of the areas described the Herald. Since the town preceded the Bedford Flour Mill (1873) and the founding of Canton in 1872, the small town was also the commercial center of the area.

The town had two main stores with a post office, a saloon, a blacksmith shop, a Masonic Hall and a rarity at that time: a doctor. According to the Broadwater Bygones there were also two Lodges chartered in Centerville: Valley Lodge No. 21 A.F. and A.M. (Ancient Free and Accepted Masons) and Missouri Valley Lodge No. 52 I.O.G.G.

During the early days of Montana many people travelled by steamboat up the Missouri River from St. Louis to Fort Benton where the Great Falls of the Missouri stopped the steamboats. At the time that Centerville was founded it seemed feasible that specialized riverboats could continue travel up the Missouri from the Great Falls to the headwaters.

At the Gates of the Mountains there is a display about such a steamboat “The Fern” that was built at Centerville. The builder believed he would make a fortune shipping to and from Great Falls. In fact, running with the current he was able to make the trip to Great Falls in 24 hours. Unfortunately running against the current took nearly 2 weeks to return. Since riverboat travel on the Missouri was only feasible during periods of high water the idea quickly died.

Why did the promising community of Centerville disappear? The town was made redundant when the Northern Pacific Rail Road built a line through the valley and decided to create Townsend – about a mile south of Centerville – and bypass the small community. There was no point in trying to compete with the town that had a railroad depot. Centerville was deserted as the residents relocated to Townsend.

The Centerville cemetery is located at the north end of Mill Road just past the entrance to the RY sawmill property.

Most of the information about Centerville came from the Broadwater Bygones available at the Museum. To learn more about Centerville and the Missouri Valley visit the Broadwater County Museum.