

When I first discovered the Centerville Cemetery, I spent time just walking around and marveling that this was even out there. How did I not know about it for decades? But one day, I happened to glance north along the Centerville cutoff road and thought I saw headstones in the distance. I immediately turned down the road towards the RY mill and just before the entrance to it, there was a gate to the cemetery and the sign.

One of the headstones that caught my eye was for the McMahons, Michael and Larissa. I just happened to know a Michael and Larissa in our area but they are in their 30s now. And their last name is not McMahan. So, I wondered, who are these people? Now we all are going to know.

The McMahon family started when Michael came out to Montana from Ireland in 1866. I don't know his journey or how he even knew about this area but he made it to the Bedford area and found himself deeply in love with a much younger woman, Larissa Austin. Okay, I may be making up the deeply in love part but this is one of the families I researched and felt happy about as I followed the trails of each family member. They started ranching along the Missouri river near Bedford which was a thriving little town with a flour mill, boarding house, saloon, school and other businesses. It's hard to imagine it now as there isn't much left of the town these days but it was located at the Warm Springs pond area just north of present day Townsend.

Michael and Larissa went on to have 4 children, Sallie, Austin, James, and Alta. The boys followed Michael into ranching with James taking over the ranch after Michael died in 1904 of a heart attack at the age of 55. Larissa died of cancer in 1903. She had found a lump under her arm and went through several surgeries in Helena and Great Falls. In one of the newspaper clips it said the Great Falls surgeon freely used a knife to try to get at the cancer. Ick. I don't know about you but I was surprised by this level of cancer treatment in the early 1900s. She returned home and passed away with family by her side. She was only 44 years old.

Both Michael and Larissa were well thought of and missed by the Bedford and Townsend communities. In the meantime, the kids went on to have interesting lives of their own. Sallie and Alta both became teachers. Sallie taught for several years in Townsend and then became the superintendent of the schools in the area for 8 years before moving to Helena to be the chief clerk for the Montana Fish and Game. She married Milo McNeill, had 2 children and died at the age of 91. She is buried in Forestvale in Helena with Milo. Alta taught several years in Townsend and married Dana Kelly of Helena. They too, are both buried at Forestvale.

Austin carried on the ranching tradition but had moved on to Carbon County in Joliet and Columbus. He later moved to Seattle and then settled in California where he was buried in Oakland.

James took over the ranch from his father and lived out his years there. He married Ruth Palmer of Absaroka and he died relatively young, like his father at 55. Must be something about that ranch because his siblings all lived into their 80s and 90s. He is buried at Centerville near his parents.

As so ends another pioneer family story. I don't know that there are any descendants here now but if you know something different, let me know. You can contact me at rangebabe56@gmail.com.

It's been too hot to work out at the cemetery this summer but I'm hoping to get back out there soon and find inspiration for my next story. Benny and Joon, the ospreys, left early this year and it was another failure at nest building and having babies. What's with those two? Then again, there are a lot of ospreys in our area so I guess it's okay.