TALKING HEADSTONES

Lew Maudsley, George Rogers Clark, SAR, presenting "Joseph Bordeaux Narrative" 2026 Talking Headstones - Union Pioneer Calvary Cemetery. Tumwater, WA

My name is Joseph Bordeaux Sr., and this is the sorrowful story of my family. We came to Shelton from the Parish of St. Isidore in Canada East late in the year 1888, hoping for a fresh start. Instead, fate served us supper no family would ever wish to remember—and ensured that cabbage would never again be considered harmless company.

On Monday, we ate cabbage prepared for dinner. Nearly everyone partook except our youngest daughter, whether by luck, instinct, or an early distrust of vegetables—was spared. Soon afterward, my wife, our sons Joseph Jr., Paul and Zenon, and I became gravely ill. I was 36; the boys were ten, eight and six. By Friday, all four of us had died. My wife survived and was taken to the Sisters' hospital in Olympia, where she slowly improved.

Our family had already lost an infant child the previous Christmas. That little one was taken up and reinterred beside us. On Sunday morning, our funeral train of mourners left Shelton at eight o'clock and reached the Catholic Church in Olympia shortly after eleven. The church was so crowded that many who came from Shelton could not get inside. It was an impressive gathering, although I would gladly have accepted a much smaller turnout under happier circumstances.

After the rites, our caskets were carried in two hearses and a buggy, followed by at least 25 vehicles on the three-mile journey to the Catholic cemetery. About 75 people came from Shelton, and the steamer Willie was chartered for the trip. The funeral had been planned for Saturday, but the Clara Brown ran aground near Arcadia, delaying the coffins until noon. Even in tragedy, travel arrangements apparently insisted on adding their own complications.

Although we became sick soon after the meal, no one understood how serious it was. Nearly 36 hours passed before Dr. Heirzer was called, and by then the poison had taken too firm a hold for medicine to

stop it. Our neighbors worked day and night and offered every kindness they could. In June 1889, the Mason County Journal reported that my widow planned to return to Canada with one of the Sisters accompanying her. She presumably took our surviving daughter. What became of them afterward is unknown; history, regrettably, sometimes closes the book before finishing the final chapter.

Narrative written by Lew Maudsley