



# Jeffersonian

Fall 2020

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1411 N. 27th St. Mt. Vernon, IL 62864 618-246-0033 jchsvip14@gmail.com historicjeffersoncountyil.com

## 2020 Updates

Because of the need for social distancing, all of our Saturday afternoon programs March through November had to be cancelled. However, all of those programs have been rescheduled in 2021. They are all in the same month as this year. Dennis Stroughmatt will be appearing in January 2021 with his Cajun Music and a program on black history will be scheduled for February.

The Chocolate Festival has been cancelled for this year due to social distancing but will return next year at the Elks Lodge #819.

The Heritage Festival will be this year, but only one day on Saturday, October 3rd, rather than two days. The Candlelight Walk will take place this year on November 7th.

At this time, a decision has not been made whether the Model Train and Nativity Sets will be offered this year. That decision will be made in October.

All of the quarterly dinners – June, September, and December also have been cancelled.

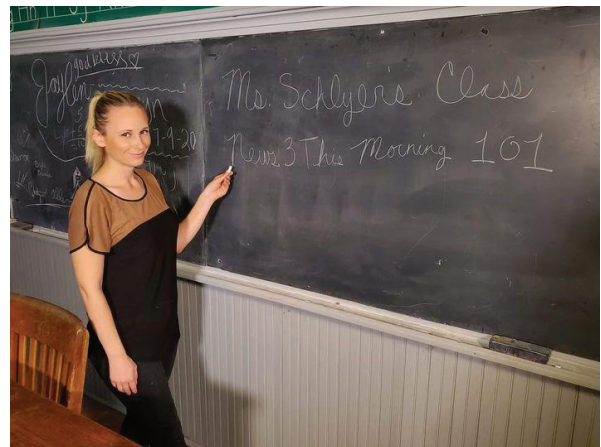
We look forward to a great year in 2021 for all of our usual programming and events.

*Submitted by Sharon Francois*

*If you have a skill or craft you would like to demonstrate or display for the Heritage Festival, please call the JCHS at 246-0033.*

## JCHS in the News

Brooke Schyler of WSIL, Channel 3 News visited the Historical Village in the very early hours of July 29th. Ms. Schyler interviewed Lucy Baker and Linda Duncan, who did a very fine job representing the JCHS, they promoted the Drive-thru Ice Cream Social and shared the Historical Village with the WSIL audience.



Thanks to everyone who made our Drive-thru Ice Cream Social a Success! We sold 167 sundaes and got to see old friends and make new acquaintances.



## A Letter from Kirby Dixon



Thirty years ago, my 20-year-old #2 son Brian and I drove to south Dallas, Texas, from Marietta, Georgia. My job was to start work on the Superconducting Super Collider program and find a place for the rest of the family to move into. It was supposed to be a 40-year program, so the future looked secure.

Brian had already had too many growing-up experiences in Georgia and was happy to move on to new opportunities as a college student in Texas. He soon found academia far too slow for his ambitions and moved on to looking for a fulfilling work opportunity.

My work on the Super Collider proved that the concept was far too complex to be successfully built with the technology available at the time. The program was cancelled leaving thousands unemployed. We had come to love the Texas environment, but felt lucky to lease out the then worthless house and move back to Georgia for the new F-22 stealth fighter program.

Brian, by that time a full-blooded Texan, stayed behind to fend for himself. After struggling for a while with married life and fatherhood, he found his niche in property and casualty insurance.

Now a self-made millionaire, Brian knocked on our back door after midnight this summer and announced to his mother and me that he was moving us to Texas. He had been wanting us to make the move for several years, but we were not ready to give up the country life and I had work to do at the JCHS. But this time, with my health not good enough for me to keep up with the farm work and the village shut down by COVID, we decided that the time was right. We admitted to old age and committed to drastic downsizing to be nearer caring family members.

Texas is still beautiful in spite of the millions of others who have discovered it since we left 26 years ago. We are living in one of Brian's houses less than half the size we left, but Marianne and I both feel healthier thanks to the clear, dry, relatively mold-free air. Marianne has spent more time in the fresh outdoor air already this month than she did over the last six years in Illinois. We are still buried in boxes and packing paper and exploring the area for the best places to eat.

To be sure, I miss all the super people who make up the Jefferson County Historical Society. The trucker schedule and our oversupply of STUFF forced me to leave without saying goodbye to most of you. I was hoping to complete my third year as president in this 75th year of the JCHS, but .... Please know that I love you all and will continue to support you, as long as, I can from Texas (locally well known as God's Country).

*Submitted by Kirby Dixon*

*The Jefferson County Historical Society will miss Kirby very much. We are thankful for the years of dedication and service he has provided the Historical Society. We wish Kirby and Marianne the very best in Texas! Sharon Francois will be serving as the President of JCHS until the election of the 2021 officers in December.*

## JCHS Officers 2020

Acting President – Sharon Francois

Secretary – Linda Duncan

Treasurer – Larry Periman

## Membership

Join the Jefferson County Historical Society and help preserve our history.

Calaboose (Youth) .....\$12  
Pioneer (Individual).....\$25  
Pioneer (Couple/Family) .....\$35  
Mt. Olive Church.....\$50-\$99

Hickory Hill School .....\$100-\$299  
Puckett's General Store .....\$300-\$499  
Zadok Casey.....\$500-\$999  
Carl L. Schweinfurth .....\$1000+

## New Members and Membership Renewals

(\*denotes new members)

Melanie & Ryan Andrews	Lane & Mary Harvey
Joe Ashbrook	David C. Jahntz
Glenda Burton	Tommy Lee Johnson
Margie Carrel	David & Reva McKee
Norma Colwell	Ben & Cyndy Mitchell
Ron & Marilyn Copenhaver	Sharon Nichols
Mike & Mary Ann Davidson	Richard Scott
Nona E. Elliot	Richard & Carolyn Stubblefield
Betty Flota	Robert & Sue Tomlin
Joan Goldman	Larry & Joann Williams
Kathy Greenwood	Gordon & Susie Wurth
Jerry & Leslie Hannig	

## What Did You Forget?

We certainly understand that Covid-19 has disrupted everyone's life. It has affected us and our families as well. If the shutdown has strapped you financially, we hope and pray for your recovery. But if you just forgot, amid all the turmoil, then we beseech you— Please pay your 2020 dues. Since the "Corona" made its ugly entrance, our income has dried up. No tours, no programming, no weddings. We are doing all we can to pay our bills. If you are able to pay your dues, we will greatly appreciate it.



## Articles Submitted by Joe Ashrook

### THE MURDERER WHO LIVED DOWN THE STREET

When I was a boy in the 1950s, the Henry family lived on the northwest corner of 7th and Harrison—about one block east of my house. I knew the Henry boys; Gary was four years older and Tom was several years younger than me.

One day an old man, who had not lived there before, began to appear on the front porch. He was the Henry boys' grandfather, and we learned—I don't remember how exactly—that he had been in jail for murder. Naturally the neighborhood kids eyed him with some degree of awe and wonder. It wasn't fear. He looked so old and feeble that it didn't appear he could do harm to anyone. It was just that we were in the presence of a man who had actually killed someone; we didn't know who or how or why.\*

We moved on to other things and forgot about this old man on the porch. But now over fifty years later I have found out who he was. He was Lawrence Hight, the preacher in the famous Hight/Sweeten murder case of the 1920s. It turns out that Mrs. Henry was Mildred Hight, the daughter of Reverend Hight. She married Clarence Lester "Bus" Henry in 1935, and when Mr. Hight was released from jail, he came to live with his daughter for the last years of his life.

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### THE HIGHT/SWEETEN CASE

There isn't space in this article to tell the whole story of the Hight/Sweeten murder case. But to lay out the basic facts if you've never heard of the murder, or to refresh your memory if you only remember a little about it, here is a brief summary. Reverend Hight was the minister of the Methodist Church in Ina, Illinois, in 1924. He had a wife, Anna, and three children. He fell in love with an attractive young member of the church named Elsie Sweeten, but she was married to Wilford Sweeten and had three sons.

After a love affair of some months they devised a plan to kill their spouses with poison to make it appear that they had died of natural causes. Then they thought that they could begin a life together.

They were caught of course, and there was a sensational trial in Mt. Vernon with most of the village of Ina attending. Even though overshadowed by the famous Leopold and Loeb murder trial in Chicago (also in 1924) the case brought national attention with reporters coming from Chicago and St. Louis. Stories about the case were published from coast to coast. Even the famous lawyer, Clarence Darrow, knew of the case and used it as an example in one of his arguments in the Scopes evolution trial in 1925.

Both Lawrence Hight and Elsie Sweeten were convicted of murder, but Elsie was given a second trial in 1927 and was found not guilty—much to the disappointment of many people in Ina. She had confessed to killing her husband during the first trial but had asserted her innocence since then.



## Articles Submitted by Joe Ashrook (continued)

### WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ELSIE SWEETEN

We know what happened to Reverend Hight. He was sent to prison in Chester, Illinois, apparently still pining for Elsie. While in jail he offered the public a song called "Hight's Confession" with words and music by George W. Bean and arrangement by T. Otto McPherson—both of Mt. Vernon. But as time passed he was forgotten by most people, and as partially covered above, he was released in 1952, came to Mt. Vernon to live with his daughter, died in 1959, and was buried in Oakwood Cemetery.



But what happened to Elsie Sweeten? She was taken to Joliet Prison in January of 1925, but was brought back to Jefferson County for her second trial in May of 1927. The trial took place in September, and she was released. At this point she must have gathered her sons for a move to Chicago. However, her son Stanton was still listed in the 1927 Mt. Vernon City Directory as a high school student living at 431 S. 22nd Street.

In Chicago Elsie changed her name to Marie Moore. She and her three sons—Byford (20), Stanton (19), and Harry (13)—were all listed in the 1930 U.S. Census for Cook County. Elsie was the operator of a dress shop. She returned to Jefferson County at least once (April of 1930).

By the 1940 U.S. Census for Chicago, Elsie had married a barber named Jack Turley. Elsie's sons had moved away. Byford changed his name back to Sweeten and remained in Illinois. Stanton and Harry kept the name Moore and moved to California.

At some point, probably after World War II, Elsie and Jack Turley moved to San Diego, California, probably to be near her sons. In the 1959 San Diego City Directory Elsie (Marie Turley) was living at 4374 Altadena Avenue with Jack who was working as a custodian.

Elsie Sweeten died October 31, 1960, in San Diego, California. I wonder if she knew that Reverend Hight had been released from prison and had died in 1959. I wonder if Jack Turley knew about Elsie's past.

I also wonder what that old man on the porch at 7th and Harrison was thinking as he sat on the swing. Did his mind wander back to his wife, Anna Hight, and Elsie's husband, Wilford Sweeten? Did he wonder what had happened to Elsie Sweeten? We can only guess.

\*Gary Sweeten (a distant relative of the murdered Wilford "Jack" Sweeten) was another young boy who saw Rev. Hight in Mt. Vernon after his release from prison. Here is his description of the meeting: "I met Preacher Hite when I was a young boy. He had just gotten out of prison and was sitting in front of a residential hotel in Mt. Vernon. I came one afternoon to hitch a ride to Ina when he asked my name and where I was going. When I replied 'Gary Sweeten and I am thumbing to Ina,' he said, 'I used to know some Sweetens in Ina.' I said, 'What is your name and he told me 'Lawrence Hite.' I replied, 'I bet you did know some Sweetens in Ina.'"



Sources:

1. U. S. Census 1930 and 1940
2. Mt. Vernon City Directory
3. San Diego City Directory
4. Hight-Sweeten Murder Case by Suzanna Norton in the Prairie Historian, V. 20, June 1990. Issue 1
5. Genealogy.com Forum- Sweeten Murder by Gary Sweeten
6. Ancestry.com
7. The Mt. Vernon Register-News
8. Personal Recollections