

# HISTORICAL SWEENEY MURDER & REVENGE SHOOTING

Basil Shannon basil\_shannon@yahoo.com. Work in progress. Comments/inputs welcome.

I recently ran across an old newspaper article on the Internet regarding a murder & revenge shooting 5 years later.

## Sweeney family colors Brazoria County historical records

**By Marie Beth Jones**  
Special to The Facts

Do you remember the feud between Wilson Davis and the Sweeney family that was the subject of this column a few weeks ago? Thanks to a call from Toby Sweeney, I learned that it's an even more interesting story than was evident from the court records.

Toby questioned my mention of Rees P. Sweeney having served as a Brazoria County sheriff and tax assessor-collector prior to his shooting of Wilson Davis, the man who had killed Sweeney's brother and was threatening to kill the rest of the Sweeney family.

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**INSIDE:** Astros lose to Reds in extra innings, Sports 1B

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# Tales

CONTINUED FROM COVER

elderly relative who knows a great deal about the Sweeny family's history. He also mentioned the existence of a family genealogy that might shed light on the matter.

Mrs. Vandre told me that she was the daughter of Reese P. Sweeny of West Columbia, and said he had been only a little past his 16th birthday when he shot and killed Wilson Davis. The former sheriff was Reese's relative, and was about 30 years older than her father, she said.

Mrs. Vandre's daughter, who has worked for years on Sweeny family history, also provided some clarification regarding her grandfather and the former sheriff.

She believed her grandfather must have been named for his older relative, though they spelled their first names differently. Her grandfather's name was "Reese," and the sheriff's name was "Rees," without the "e," she said.

The court records indicated the shooting occurred because Davis, who had spent five years in prison for having killed his son-in-law, Thomas J. Sweeny, had returned to Brazoria County reportedly making threats against all of Thomas Sweeny's relatives.

At that point, it appeared to Sweeny family members that it was going to be a case of who could shoot first, according to the stories Toby was told.

The original shooting — that in which Davis killed Thomas Jefferson Sweeny, the younger Reese's half-brother — occurred when

Reese was only 16 years old.

The Sweeny family genealogy shows that Thomas Sweeny was the son of Edward Haynie and Mary Nash Sweeny, and was reared by his father and stepmother, Valeria Corker Sweeny, after his mother's death.

He married Lula Davis on April 20, 1894, died in 1896, and was buried on the Nash Ranch in Brazoria County. Lula Davis Sweeny later married John T. Bethany.

The younger Reese Sweeny, who was the son of Edward Haynie and Valeria Sweeny, was born Nov. 24, 1888, in Brazoria County. He was married several times and had a total of eight children. He died Sept. 29, 1949.

Although the story of these shootings is not included in the Sweeny family information on file at the Brazoria County Historical Museum, the data included there is colorful, following the story of pioneers who came to what now is Brazoria County in 1832.

John Sweeny Sr. and his wife, Ann, had lived in Tennessee for about a dozen years when they decided to move to Texas. The family history quotes a 1958 newspaper article stating that the town bearing the Sweeny name was purchased for the price of a load of mules.

A history published by the Sweeny Bicentennial Committee in 1976 says John Sweeny sent two sons to Nashville to sell some mules, and they became caught up with the "Move to Texas" fever there. They bought a land grant, and John Sweeny was so angry about it that he "beat the tar out of both of them and

roll-top desk.

When John had cooled down a bit, his son, William Burrell Sweeny, and brother, William Sweeny, came to Texas to look over the property, and in 1832, John, Ann, seven sons, two daughters, 250 slaves, and a long train of wagons and draft animals moved to Texas.

The booklet about the town's history says they crossed the Sabine River at night to avoid paying the 50 cents per head tax on the slaves, and settled at Chance's Prairie, about nine or 10 miles west of West Columbia.

Just across from his house John started a cemetery where he buried his daughter, Freedonia, who died soon after they arrived here. He gave land for this cemetery, and he and most of his immediate family members are buried there.

A Texas Historical Commission marker with a bit of information about the cemetery was erected in 1960. It notes that this burial site has been generally used by the neighborhood ever since Freedonia's death in 1833. Veterans of all wars since the Texas Revolution are among those buried there, according to the marker's lettering.

Unfortunately, the historical marker now appears to be missing, and members of the Brazoria County Historical Commission would appreciate information on its whereabouts.

Marie Beth Jones, a published author and freelance writer based in Angleton, is chairwoman of the Brazoria County Historical Commission.

The historical Sweeny name jumped out so I started check the names against what I think is the Sweeny family tree:

John Sweeny Sr (1783 -1855)

Benjamin Franklin Sweeny (1829-1860)

Reese Porter Sweeny (1856-1937)

Thomas Jefferson Sweeny (1812-1869)

Edward Haney Sweeny (1846-1923)

Reese Porter Sweeny (1888-1949)

(mother Valeria Corker)

Shot Wilson Davis who murdered his 1/2 brother Thomas Jefferson Sweeny

Thomas Jefferson Sweeny (1874-????)

(mother Mary Nash)

Murdered by his wife Lula Davis's father

Wilson Davis (1844-1905)

Daughter Lula Davis (1879-1908)

Murdered her husband, his son-in-law

Thomas Jefferson Sweeny

The article was put out in answer to questions raised by Sweeny family descendants to a previous article which I could not pull up on the Internet. I really struggled to get this straight in my mind which is at times questionable and welcome comments/corrections.

## THE FACTS NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

Partially transcribed and **marked up**.....

Sweeny family colors county historic records

By Marie Beth Jones | Posted Jun 5, 2006

[http://thefacts.com/article\\_77d2f800-f751-5430-b6e0-3bd6979ca33c.html?mode=jqm](http://thefacts.com/article_77d2f800-f751-5430-b6e0-3bd6979ca33c.html?mode=jqm)

"Do you remember the feud between Wilson Davis and the Sweeny family that was the subject of this column a few weeks ago?"

Thanks to a call from Toby Sweeny, I learned that it's an even more interesting story than was evident from the court records."

**Who is Toby Sweeny?**

Toby questioned my mention of Rees P. Sweeny having served as a Brazoria County sheriff and tax assessor-collector prior to his shooting of Wilson Davis, the man who had killed Sweeny's brother and was threatening to kill the rest of the Sweeny family."

**1 NOT this Reese Porter Sweeny (1856-1937) tax assessor late 1890's-1902**

**2 Actually Reese Porter Sweeny (1888-1949)**

"According to stories he had been told all his life, Toby said, Reese Sweeny was only about 16 years old when the shooting occurred ( **1904-1905???**). If that was correct, and Toby believed it was, Reese couldn't possibly already have served as a county official"

**1 1856+16=1872. Got to be a younger Reese P Sweeny (1888-1949)**

**2 1888+16=1904 Reese Porter Sweeny shot Wilson Davis**

**3 Then if Wilson was shot in 1904 after 5 years in jail then he murdered Thomas Jefferson Sweeny in 1899???**

"I checked the original column, and was relieved to see that my basic facts were correct, and although I had believed the former sheriff had done the shooting, I had played it safe in the wording."

**Facts appear to be incorrect**

"The story said that Reese Sweeny was charged with Davis's murder, and added: "The name of the defendant was enough to catch my attention. Not only was the Sweeny family well known in the county, Reese P. Sweeny had served as combination sheriff and tax assessor-collector a few years earlier, and after the offices were split, he served as tax assessor-collector."

**Reese Porter Sweeny was Brazoria County tax assessor-collector late 1890's-1902.**

"Toby suggested that I talk with Katherine Vandre, an elderly relative who knows a great deal about the Sweeny family's history. He also mentioned the existence of a family genealogy that might shed light on the matter.

Mrs. Vandre told me that she was the daughter of Reese P. Sweeny of West Columbia, and said he had been only a little past his 16th birthday when he shot and killed Wilson Davis. The former sheriff was Reese's relative, and was about 30 years older than her father, she said."

**Again. Got to be a younger Reese P Sweeny(1888-1937) who was about 31 years younger than Reese P Sweeny (1856-1937)**

"Mrs. Vandre's daughter, who has worked for years on Sweeny family history, also provided some clarification regarding her grandfather and the former sheriff.

She believed her grandfather must have been named for his older relative, though they spelled their first names differently. Her grandfather's name was "Reese," and the sheriff's name was "Rees," without the "e," she said.

**Who are Mrs Vandre and her daughter?**

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**1888+7=1905**

'The Sweeny family genealogy shows that Thomas Sweeny was the son of Edward Haynie and Mary Nash Sweeny, and was reared by his father and stepmother, Valeria Corker Sweeny, after his mother's death.

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Unfortunately, the historical marker now appears to be missing, and members of the Brazoria County Historical Commission would appreciate information on its whereabouts." (There now)

**SWEENEY CEMETERY HISTORICAL MARKER**





Marker Text: "Begun as family burial ground when John Sweeney, early landowner, member of Stephen F. Austin's colony, chose this site for burial of his young daughter, Freedonia, 1833. In use ever since by the neighborhood. Has graves of veterans of all wars since Texas Revolution. Recorded Texas Historic Landmark - 1966."

"Marie Beth Jones, a published author and freelance writer based in Angleton, is chairwoman of the Brazoria County Historical Commission."