

SWEENY SPEAKS

Maxey Brooke

A Sweeny Library

Sesquicentennial Plus One Project

**Sweeny Library Association
Sweeny, Texas. 1987**

SWEENY SPEAKS

Maxey Brooke

Sweeny has a lot of good storytellers. Also a lot of storytellers who aren't so good.

For a great many years I have listened to both kinds. When I heard a good story, I'd go home and write it down.

Here is a collection of Sweeny stories, the ones, at least, that are fit to print.

HOW IT STARTED

I first became interested in Sweeny history about twenty-five years ago. I was Assistant Scoutmaster for Troop 61.

A new regulation had been issued requiring candidates for Eagle Scout write a brief history of the community.

The only history I could find was an article written by Mattie Sue Jordan for the Brazosport Facts in 1961. This was enough to give the boys a start. But we needed more.

So, I made it a project to talk to all the old-timers about the early times. When I found an interesting story, I'd write it up for the Phillips weekly newsletter.

By 1966, I had acquired enough information for a nine-page "Sweeny Story" which Phillips printed and distributed. It also appeared serially in the Brazoria County News.

In 1976, the Sweeny Chamber of Commerce reprinted an upgraded version, "This is Sweeny", as a Bicentennial project.

All my questioning and writing got some other people interested. An elderly member of the First Baptist Church and one from the Church of Christ got into an argument as to which was the first church in Sweeny. Neither had any documentary evidence, so they appealed to me to settle the dispute.

"Well," I said, "Old Peter Crain once told me that he joined the New Zion Church in 1924 and that at that time the church was 60 years old. Since New Zion is much older than Sweeny itself, that makes it the oldest church in town."

After hearing that wise decision, the two were very cool in their relations with me.

There used to be a barber shop behind Murphy's Jewelry. One of the barbers was named Cleet. He was a good barber, but very slow and methodical.

After he gave me my first haircut, I told my wife "I have never had such a thorough haircut in my life. He trimmed every individual hair on my head. (That wouldn't take long," she remarked); he trimmed the hair in my ears, he trimmed the hair in my nose, he trimmed my eyebrows. I thought he was going to open my shirt and trim the hair on my chest."

Two or three days later, the tops and back of my shoulders began to itch. I took off my shirt to see what was the problem. That son-of-a-gun had run his clippers down the back of my shirt. The growing hair stubs were rubbing against the shirt and making me itch.

Another time, I took my ten-year-old son Jamie in for a haircut. He protested that Cleet was too slow. He was used to having Ray Nash get him out of the chair in about two minutes.

It took about fifteen minutes. After we left the shop, I said, "Now, that wasn't so bad, was it?"

"I guess not," Jamie replied, "but he didn't have to make it a confederal case."

Few people can spin as interesting a tale as can Briten Sewell. Today (7/31/85) I caught him in a reminiscing mood.

"The electric company came to Sweeny in 1927," he recalled. "They needed hands to dig holes for their poles. They paid a dollar a hole. I was a big old awkward boy and I decided to quit school and get rich digging holes. I worked all day and dug only one hole. Next day I was back in school.

"Do you know how Sheriff Walking John McKinney got his name?" he asked.

I've heard it was because he did so much walking during his campaigns so he wouldn't miss asking anyone to vote for him."

"That's not right. This is the true story. It seems there was a bootlegger operating in the woods around Angleton. Every time the Feds would try to catch him, he would see their cars coming and he'd get away."

"You guys just don't know how to catch a bootlegger" he told them, "so I'll have to show you."

The next evening he walked in a round about way to the bootlegger's hangout, about four miles, caught him in the act, arrested him, and walked him back to jail. After that, he was known as Walking John.

Where Tommy Holcomb's house sits (corner of McKinney and 2nd) was the old Rice place. Mr. Rice was an engineer who was in charge of building the old iron bridges at Brazoria and West Columbia.

One day Mr. Rice went down to the depot to watch the train come in. Someone had left one of those heavy baggage dollies too near the track. The train hit it and knocked it against Mr. Rice and killed him.

Mrs. Rice decided she couldn't make it in Sweeny and wanted to take the children back to Oklahoma where her folks lived. This was during the depression and she couldn't sell her place.

Herman Vezey said he would take it, but he didn't know when he could pay her. It was several years later when the oil field came in, Herman got four wells on some property he had bought at a foreclosure sale. And as soon as he got some money, he paid Mrs. Rice every cent he owed.

A lot of people didn't know that Herman was a musician. He could make a piano talk. I think he played in a band at some Oklahoma college. He was a very quiet guy, but when he got riled up, he could cuss a blue streak.

Clyde McKinney
July 1985

A.M. (Chick) Anderson tells of his first view of Sweeny, November 9, 1919. He was six years old.

My father had moved to the Dakotas from Bay City. He didn't like it there, so in a few years he came back. We were on the train and it stopped about where the turn-around is. It was a horse trough then.

The thing I remember was seeing four span of oxen hitched to a wagon frame. And it was up to its fellows in mud.

I moved to Sweeny in 1941. Once, I told the story to a friend. He said, "Oh yes. That belonged to Frank Orr. He used it to haul ship knees that were used during the war to build Liberty Ships." That was the reason for the wagon frame.

Note: In the Bicentennial "This is Sweeny" is a picture of four span of oxen hauling logs, in front of Smith's Grocery. Is it the same?

MAIN STREET ANIMALS

At a Chamber of Commerce meeting, I showed the old grey mayor, Chick Anderson, a picture of a team of oxen hauling a load of logs down the main street of Sweeny.

"Do you suppose these are the same oxen you saw when you were a boy?" I asked.

"They might be," he answered, "I just don't know."

Mrs. Curtis was just across the table from us. "I don't remember any oxen in Sweeny," she said, "but I do remember the cows sleeping on Main Street. When we came home at night, we would sometimes have to stop the car, get out, wake them up, and drive them off the street. And Lela Baker has a photograph of a bear her father shot on Sweeny's main street."

27 November, 1984

About six months later I found the photo. Mary Lon Nairn had it. It showed Frank Orr, John Brooks and three other men with a bear they had killed in the woods, and brought to Main Street, dated 1913. About the same time, Verna Arrington showed me a picture of Tom Orr, Lela's uncle, with another bear he had shot.

KATHERINE BANNISTER

When I was about fourteen and started having boy-friends, I had them write me care of the Sweeny post office. My uncle (William Sweeny) was the post master and the post office was in a corner of the Smith Store.

One day I rode my horse into Sweeny, stopped off at the store and asked Mr. Travis Smith if there was any mail for me. Mr. Smith was an awful sour-puss who never smiled except for business reasons. As he was sorting through the letters, I thought I saw one addressed to me. I put my hand on it to make sure. Mr. Smith slapped my hand and exclaimed, "Get your hands off the United States Mail!"

That made me so mad that I hit him across the face with my riding crop so hard he couldn't see.

"I'm going to report you!" he cried.

"All right," I said, "My uncle's the post master."

I remember my father was so ashamed of what I did, but at the time I didn't care; I was young and frivolous. But I never did tell Randolph about it because it would hurt him.

15 June, 1966

I don't want this to get back to Katherine Bannister because she is so proud of her ancestors. She has a right to be. Most of the Sweenys were good solid citizens. But Ed Sweeny was the dirtiest old drunk you ever did see.

One day he rode his old grey horse into town and right at the turn-around he pulled out his gun and began shooting and yelling.

Mr. Smith, Randolph and I were standing on the porch of the store and Mr. Smith said, "Randolph, go take Ed's gun away from him."

I had just been married a short time and I thought Randolph was kind of precious, so I said, "If you want his gun, why don't you get it yourself?"

But Randolph walked over to him and said, "give me your gun, Ed."

Old Ed climbed down off his horse, so drunk he could hardly stand up, and threw his arms around Randolph, and said, "Randolphy, you know I'd give you anything you asked for." So, he took off his gunbelt and gave it to Randolph.

Randolph got him back on his horse and had old Ezi Grimes, a colored man with one leg shorter than the other who used to run errands for us, to take him home.

There were seven bridges between Sweeny and Old Ocean. They were made out of live oak and had railings. Every time Ed went home, he managed to knock the railing off one bridge.

Another time, we were going to West Columbia. When we got to the river, there were cars lined up on both sides. Randolph just pulled around them to see what was the matter. There was old Ed Sweeny in the middle of the bridge. Every time a car would start to cross, he would make his horse rear up and step on it. Randolph said, "What in the world are you doing, Ed?"

And Ed said, "Why Randolph, if you want to cross, go right ahead."

But after we had crossed, I looked back and there was Ed still blocking traffic.

Mrs. J. R. Smith
2 October, 1966

Will Sweeny claimed he bought his place from Old Man Black, who took his money, got on a boat, and went down river. Nobody ever heard of him again. Some of the old Negroes told me he knocked the Old Man in the head and dumped his body in the river.

He sent his Negroes to tear down the Strickland Chapel and haul it to build his house and barn. I remember the big church doors were the doors in his house.

He never married but he had children by at least two Negro women.

After he died, word got 'round that he had buried treasure. People went out and literally wrecked the house; tore down walls, wrecked the fireplace, dug up the yard. I don't guess anybody found anything.

Pat Ellis
19 November, 1966

Ray Nash's barber shop is a good place to hear stories. I heard this one over fifteen years ago.

Phillips was going through an expansion and had hired a bunch of contract workers.

One of them, a burly, red-headed carpenter was getting a much-needed haircut.

"It's been better'n forty years since I was in Sweeny last time," he said. "The old school building had burned down and we were putting up a new one. Y'all know Bobo Arrington?"

We all knew Bobo Arrington.

"Well, me and Ol' Bobo were carpenter helpers. The building was about finished. In fact, they were already holding school in part of it."

"Well sir, it was lunch time and a bunch of us were sitting outside eating our sandwiches when a car drove up and this lady gets out."

"'Who's that?' somebody asked."

"'That's Miss Kelley, the new school marm.'"

"Bobo studied her carefully. 'Ya know,' he said, 'I'm going to marry that girl.'"

Sure nuff, later he did.

SHORT SNORTS

In 1913, Clarence C. Daly built a grist mill just west of the present lumber yard, near the cotton gin. Later, this was the site of the vegetable sheds.

-Fletcher Daly, who taught school here in about 1965.

Bobby Nairn says that when he was quite young, in the early 40's, outdoor moving pictures were shown on a sheet hung on the side of the Old Red Garage. The show on the corner of Main and 3rd was built in 1947.

H.K. Brooks graduated in 1943 in a class of 20. He says the Junior High was built in 1940 and that before then, anybody wanting to go to high school had to go to West Columbia.

He also told me (9/30/66) that his father, John Brooks, was born in Brazoria County in 1876. He lived on the San Bernard all his life. He (John) said the carpet-baggers came to Brazoria County after the War Between the States but didn't stay because the mosquitoes ran them off.

The Brazoria County News for October 27, 1966 wrote:

"A note in the column 'In Times Past' from 50 years ago in the Angleton Times last week says, 'D.N. Joyner has completed his building for his crate and box factory at Sweeny. When the engine and other machinery are fully installed, this will be a very complete institution and one of the best of its kind in the country...'"

J. R. Smith tells me that a Mr. Elliot started an electric system in Sweeny using an automobile engine running a generator, but it didn't catch on. Barkley Smith says the first public utility system, the Texas-Louisiana Electric Company, began service in 1926.

May 22, 1967: A Mr. McIntosh, who is a barber at Kilgore, was a barber in Sweeny and West Columbia in the early 20's. He told Al Yates about the Ku Klux going after Will Sweeny for consorting with Negroes.

Will waited in the bushes until they got to his place (Black's Ferry). Then he shot into the mob, wounding three of them and almost wrecking their car. They left him alone after that.

Notes from a Conversation with J. R. Smith 6/15/66:

R.D. McDonald formed the Bernard River Land Development Company. Hurd may have been his agent.

Travis Smith came to Adamston in about 1906, bought the land from his brother, and started his store in 1908.

William Sweeny was appointed postmaster August 17, 1909. Travis Smith was appointed postmaster December 2, 1913. Randolph Smith was appointed postmaster December 6, 1920.

Andy Warters started his vegetable shipping shed after he returned from World War I, in about 1920 or 1921.

Bob Santner, who was the motivator, told me the Nazarene Church was organized on July 2, 1961 with three families. On March 22, 1964, the building was erected.

The M.M. Fridays moved to Sweeny in 1914 from Friday, Texas.

There were six children in this family when they came to Sweeny, Eldridge, Ada, Earl, Guy, Fred, and Woodrow. The furniture and all were moved on the train. It arrived at night and it was raining. They stayed at a hotel and the next day it took four mules to a wagon to take the family out near Old Ocean to the farm that a Mr. O'Conall owned, which now is part of Old Ocean Acres and Phillips' tank farm.

Then to this family came two more children, Luciel and Garlen. After the 1919 Storm came they moved to Katy and then Alief, and then (had) another daughter, Mary Ellen. Back to Sweeny in 1925.

Mr. Friday passed away in 1946, Mary Ellen a daughter in 1940. Mrs. Friday in 1970.

Guy, Woodrow, Luciel, and Garlen live in Sweeny, Ada and Earl in Houston, Eldridge in Goldthwaite with their families.

It was a trying time moving from sand to black land.

The children went to school in a little one room school house which stood where the entrance of Phillips' plant is. Miss Rice and later a Miss Ethel Parten who is Mrs. Winscott (taught at the school. Mrs. Winscott) is still living in Sweeny at the Sweeny House. After two or three years the school was transferred into Sweeny. The two teachers lived at the Friday home.

Written By Mrs. V. M. Long

John Sweeny Sr. left his Sweeny site plantation to his daughter Sophia, who married John MaGrew, Sweeny's overseer. It was her second marriage. She died intestate in 1898. William Sweeny sold his Chance Prairie land (to Mrs. Bannister's mother) and bought the Sweeny townsite from Sophia's heirs, Betty MaGrew Rowe (Mrs. Frank Rowe) and Ella MaGrew Wilson (Mrs. Ashley Wilson).

The John Sweeny plantation became known as the MaGrew plantation.

G.I. Stevenson bought land south of town.

In about 1915, two promoters, Dunnum and -----, tried to start a peanut promotion scheme.

Conversation with Mrs. Bannister
15 June, 1966

Cousin Betty was absolutely the cutest thing - an absolute doll. She lived in a big house just behind Mr. Kirby, the lumber millionaire. The house was just beautiful; great big rooms full of fine silver and china and priceless antiques. But she was a forerunner of the SPCA. Her beautiful house was full of cats and dogs and chickens and ducks and mules. One day, she and Mr. Frank Rowe went for a drive - people went for drives then - when she saw a man whipping a horse. She stopped and got out and took the whip away from the man and used it on him. And her house stunk. I one time said "Mama, I'm never going back to Aunt Betty's house. It stinks."

Cousin Ella was a cutter. She wasn't as pretty as Cousin Betty, but she was a handsome woman - a rich widow. She had a big house where the Majestic Theatre now stands. She didn't let her kids stop her from going, either. She'd put them in the back yard in a piano box and hire a girl to keep an eye on them. But she lived too high. She had to turn the house into a rooming house. It was really an American Plan hotel - she had a manager and everything. She and Judge Love got married. He thought she had money and she thought he had money. When they found out about each other, they got a divorce.

An uncle or somebody told her if she would give him Ashley, that he would educate him and leave him all his property. Cousin Ella liked that. She didn't like kids and anyway Ashley was a pest. He was educated in the East at Harvard. Cousin Ella died a rich woman and she made sure Ashley got everything that was coming to him. He dressed and looked like Adolph Menjun only he was handsomer.

I remember one day a car drove up to our house with a lot of skiing equipment tied on top. It was Ashley and his boys. I said "Ashley Wilson, what are you doing with all that ski equipment in South Texas in the middle of summer?"

Well, it seems that they had been on a skiing trip in Colorado and decided to drop in on us on the way home.

Mrs. Bannister
29 September, 1966

Soon after I came to Sweeny, I was invited to a Christmas party. We drew names and were expected to get that person a gift. I drew Peggy Yates.

I went to Slay's Hardware Store, which Elmer Slay ran in addition to being the local station master. I determined to get a plunger or plumber's friend.

"Elmer," I said, "how about gift-wrapping me a plunger."

He looked at me quizzically. Then, without batting an eye, he picked up a plunger, considered it for a moment, wrapped it in colorful paper, and tied it with a bow. Just as though he had gift-wrapped a plunger every day of his life.

TRAVIS L. SMITH

Born 30 November, 1852. Came to Texas 1871. Uncle, John W. Brooks and two older brothers preceded him. Acquired ferry at Columbia, stores at Columbia, W. Columbia, Brazoria, Chenango, Velasco, Quintana, and Sweeny with brother John G.. Organized Columbia Transportation Company, owned and operated seven boats. Dug canal across Galveston Bay for federal government. Organized the Tax Payers Association, a "white man's union" along with brother John G., A.R. Master-son, W.R. Nash, Calvin McNeil and others.

In Ft. Bend and Wharton Counties several citizens killed before carpetbaggers subdued. In Brazoria County, no bloodshed. State law provided that the bond of a county official should be made by resident land owners, and the Tax Payers Association made a rule that no bond would be arranged by any of its members for any man not acceptable to the Association.

In 1901 a farmer came into the Smith store in Columbia with a bottle in which there was a strange looking bug. When asked what it was, said "Mr. Smith, that is a boll weevil, the thing that ruined my crop and drove me away from the Rio Grande Valley, and as of today it is driving me from Brazoria County. He will sink your boats, ruin your mercantile business and gins, and you will lose everything, even your land, and there is not a thing you can do to prevent it.

Steam Boats on the Brazos

T.L. Smith, Jr.
1958

THE LITTLE HOUSE

You've seen it; a white, frame house between the bank and the Methodist Church. It may not look like much, but no building in Sweeny has contributed more to the life of the town.

Back in the twenties, Sweeny was just another little farming community. Lots of produce was raised. During the season as many as fifteen boxcars per day were loaded from Andy Warter's shipping shed.

Came the depression and Sweeny, like so many other farming communities, suffered. No one would buy produce and the price of a bale of cotton would hardly pay for the seed. The men used to sit around Smith's grocery and discuss the matter, but the women of the community decided to do something about it. The big problem, as they saw it, was food for the winter. So they formed the Home Demonstration Club in 1931.

They tapped the County Commissioners' Court for \$100. They scrounged building material; the foundation stones came from the old courthouse at Brazoria, and they conned men into building a little one-room house on the corner of the school ground; that would be at Elm and Sixth Streets.

The Freeport Sulphur Company contributed a canner. Johnny Brown scrounged an old railroad stove. They bought a sealer and were in business. Women came from miles around to can beans and tomatoes and corn and beef and pork and—what have you. They had no cash to pay for the use of the equipment, so they would leave part of their canning. The Home Demonstration Club used this to furnish hot lunches for the school children. In those days, people helped themselves and each other, instead of hollering for the government to take care of them.

Things began to look up in 1935, when the Old Ocean Field came in. People began to move into Sweeny and the strain on the school system began. Since the Canning Club, as it was called, was on school property, the trustees decided to appropriate it for a classroom. Once again, the women went into action. They bought two lots on Ash Street and moved the building before the trustees knew what happened.

In 1936, Herman Vezey organized a Boy Scout Troop which met there for a while. But by 1941, prosperity had done away with the original purpose. During the war years, the Red Cross used the little house to roll bandages. Just after the war, the Methodist Church bought the lots the little house now sits on, made a swap, and moved it to its present location.

For years, the Methodist Church used it as a Sunday School room. And since 1947, the Girl Scouts have used it as a meeting place, hence the name "Little House".

I'm indebted to Mrs. Clyde McKinney for much of this information.

MISSOURI PACIFIC LINES

Sweeny, Texas
April 11, 1947

Mr. A. F. Judd
Kingsville, Texas

Below I give you a history of Sweeny as recorded in the county yearbook gotten up some time last year.

The city of Sweeny seventy two miles southwest of Houston was named for one of the founders of the rich ante-bellum plantations, John Sweeny. Prior to the civil war the Sweeny brothers migrated to this area armed with the vision and the muscle and the brawn of the early settlers to carve out of the forests of oak and pecan thousands of acres of land richer than the fertile Nile Valley. Taking first place at the worlds fair in Paris in 1900, today almost a century later, Sweeny bristles with activity. Hundreds of oil wells surround the town. Oil refineries and a carbon black plant offer employment to the greater portion of the citizens. Farming and cattle raising still flourish with thousands of cattle roaming the woods and prairies. Every year hundreds of thousands of pounds of pecans are gathered from the pecans along the banks of the San Bernard River.

Sweeny was really born when the NOT&M railroad routed its line through here and on its way to Brownsville from Houston. Travis L. Smith, father of our present mayor J. R. (Dynamite) Smith, left his native Virginia to seek his fortune in Texas. A few years later he established with his brother J. G. Smith a chain of general merchandise stores, most of which still offer their wares to the public. Mr. Smith erected the first building in Sweeny, a cotton gin. Later he was to erect the first business building, a general store and the town's first post office. He was the first Agent for the railroad and the express company. Mr. Herbert D. Heard, real estate man of

Kansas City, attracted by the railroad and the stories of the richness of the soil, acquired 14,000 acres of land in and around Sweeny, sub-divided it into tracts from one to one hundred acres, and sold it to home seekers from other states. Among the first to arrive were Emmet Rimmer, J.W. Reynolds, J.C. Brockman and M.J. Parten of Missouri, Billie and M.F. Chenault and Dr. J.G. Arrington of Tennessee, and Herman Vezey of Oklahoma.

Until the discovery of oil in the early 1930's, farming, cattle raising and truck gardening prevailed. Thousands of carloads of beans, corn and other marketable products were shipped to all parts of the nation. A.K. Warters owned a packing shed on the railroad as fine as any in the valley. With the coming of oil, the whole picture changed. Many of the farmers owned land that is now dotted with flow tanks and miles of pipe lines running across the prairie like the strands of a giant spider web. Refineries have sprung up to care for the butanes in the natural gas and for the refining of the crude from the Old Ocean field. During the war the government built and operated the world's largest 100 octane plant four miles north of town.

One of the states finest school systems is offered the children, with two excellent grade schools, a modern high school, home economics building, shop building, and gym. Two concrete tennis courts, a lighted football field and one of the best lighted softball fields in the state add to the fullness of educational and athletic activities. Sweeny is the first town in the history of the interstate scholastic league to send two basketball teams to the state tournament in one season. Both the boys and girls team won this right through the 1946 season. The six man football team has gone undefeated for two years. The girls softball team won the Houston Chronicle softball tournament.

IMLA KEEP MOVES IN, OUT

Imla Keep was a doctor, a widower with a small son, and one of Austin's Old Three Hundred. He came to Texas with the Groce family as some kind of business agent. He received title to a league and labor on the San Bernard on July 24, 1824. He did not seem to be a very good business man or farmer. After a quarrel with Jared Groce over some damaged cargo of which he had charge, Keep took bankruptcy in March 1826 and returned to Louisiana. Sweeny now sits on the Imla Keep League.

In 1823, John Sweeny, Sr., came from Tennessee to Texas with five sons, two daughters, and two-hundred fifty slaves. It is said he crossed the Sabine at night to avoid paying the fifty cents per head tax.

He had been here two years before to look over the situation and liked what he saw. He acquired the Imla Keep League and settled down just across from the present cemetery. In fact, he started the cemetery since one daughter died just after he arrived.

Oddly enough, this was not known as the Sweeny Plantation. That name applied to the John Sweeny, Jr. plantation in the Old Ocean area. It came to be known as the MaGrew Plantation (Some say McGrew, but in John Sweeny's will the name is spelled MaGrew.)

This was because he left the Sweeny site plantation to his daughter Sophia who had married John MaGrew, one of Sweeny's overseers. It was her second marriage.

She died intestate in 1898. William Sweeny sold his Chance Prairie land, (to Mrs Katherine Bannister's mother) and bought the Sweeny townsite from Sophia's heirs--Betty (Mrs. Frank Rowe), and Ella (Mrs. Irvin Wilson).

Just after the Civil War, the Smith brothers, John G. and Travis L., came to Brazoria County along with their uncle John W. Brooks. By the turn of the century they had established stores at Columbia, Brazoria, Chenango, Velasco, and Quintana; they had seven steamboats on the Brazos, gins, and other enterprises.

In October 1905, when the rails of the Brownsville Line reached a point seventeen miles east of Bay City, a side track was laid and given the name "Adamston". No one seems to know why or for whom it was named.

The 1899 floods and 1900 hurricane had hurt the Smith enterprises severely. In his efforts to recoup, Travis Smith's health began to fail, so he moved to Adamston in 1906 to farm.

But once a merchant, always a merchant. He was soon taking orders for notions and tobacco from the surrounding ranchers, filling them from the Columbia store, and delivering them. By 1908 he built a store approximately where the Randolph Smith home now stands.

A country store was the focal point for farmers for miles around. So the next step was to establish a post office.

This was done on August 17, 1909, with William Sweeny as postmaster. The name given the post office was not Adamston, but Sweeny. Again, nobody knows who was responsible for the name or for which Sweeny it was named.

About this time R.D. McDonald's Bernard River Land Development Company bought up a great deal of land in this area, cut it into small plots and sold it. The combination of rich soil and a rail outlet for produce was most attractive. The first new families to arrive were the John Partens, the Emmet Rimmers, and the Levi Hankins who came from Missouri in 1910.

Nobody is sure how Burton D. Hurd fits into the picture. He may have been McDonald's partner, his agent, or he may have been an independent operator. Anyway, he gets credit for laying out the City of Sweeny in March 1911 and for promoting it for several years.

That year, Main Street was cleared and Mr. Smith moved his store, whose second floor was now a hotel, to its present location. The building now houses the library which was started in 1966.

The next group to arrive included the Chenaults, the Ellises, the Arringtons, the Warters, the Ballards, the Woodrums, the Meadors, and the Lindseys.

Now there were enough people in the vicinity of the Sweeny Post Office to take the first step toward becoming a community; they started a school. Miss May Rice, a graduate of the University of Ohio, was the first school teacher. She held classes in 1911 in a one room frame building with homemade seats and desks. Her class consisted of nine grade school pupils and two high school students. She was paid \$60 per month.

The school was closed before the year was up because she could not cope with a group of young hoodlums who harassed her.

Maxey Brooke
The Brazoria County News
Thursday, July 6, 1967

Brazosport Facts May 11, 1987 (BCHM.org)

'Sweeny Speaks' about its history

Author compiles bits and pieces of the past

By CATHERINE LEWIS
The Brazosport Facts

SWEENY — From notes scribbled on scraps of paper and heaps of dusty files cluttering his study, a local history buff has compiled a collection of this town's lore.

Maxey Brooke, a bright-eyed retired Phillips 66 Co. chemical engineer and Sweeny resident for the past 40 years, is the author of *Sweeny Speaks*, a 15-page booklet on the city's past.

The pamphlet includes simple stories about some of what Brooke terms the "old nesters" who were among the first to settle the area in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

The 74-year-old Oklahoma native said he did extensive research on the book. Though he admits the furrowing for information he did was more fun than work.

"I GOT MOST of my tales from talking with folks at the barber shop and post office. You wouldn't believe the kind of stuff you can hear at those places. You hear factual stuff and plenty of bull, too," he said relaxing in an easy chair in his home on Old Ocean Avenue.

His healthy stock of historical tidbits grew when he began to write down — on whatever he could find — every interesting story he heard. He said after doing that for about 40 years, he's accumulated a large quantity of stories.

The Sweeny Library Board printed the booklet and it is now being sold for \$5 a copy at the Sweeny Library. The money raised from the sale of the book will be used to purchase new books, furniture, a new card catalog and make other general improvements.

THE PAST HAS always been fascinating to Brooke, who also wrote *This Is Sweeny*, another booklet on Sweeny's history which was printed by the Sweeny Chamber of Commerce in honor of the U.S. Bicentennial.

Several years ago he wrote a column for the now defunct magazine *Brazos Living* called *Brazos Bill*.

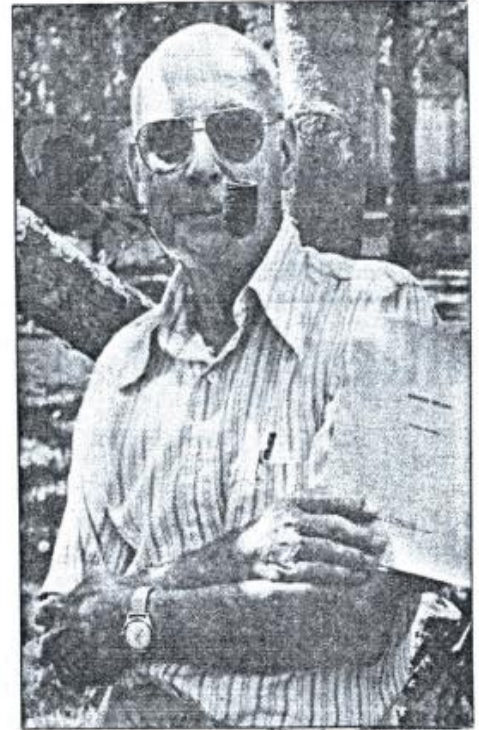
Since he retired 10 years ago Brooke said he has more time for his hobbies of reading, writing and just plain thinking about the past and the future.

"I always say, 'How can you know where you're going if you can't see where you've been,'" Brooke said.

Among the many yarns contained in the booklet is a story titled *Little House*, which talks briefly about a white house which still stands on Ida Nell Street between Cornelia and Filmore streets.

THE STRUCTURE has a rich history of housing the likes of the Home Demonstration Club, a Boy Scout troop for several years and

See **SWEENY HISTORY**, Page 12.



Facts photo by JIM GUSTKE

Maxey Brooke has written down countless quaint stories about Sweeny for a booklet.

12 THE BRAZOSPORT FACTS Monday, May 11, 1987

Sweeny history

Continued from Page 1

even today a local Girl Scouts troop uses the house for various activities.

Brooke writes, "You've seen it, a white, frame house between the bank and the Methodist Church. It may not look like much, but no building in Sweeny has contributed more to the life of the town.

"Back in the 1920s Sweeny was just another little farming community. Lots of produce was raised. During the season as many as 15 box cars per day were loaded from Andy Warter's shipping bed.

"Came the Depression and Sweeny, like so many other farming communities, suffered. ... The men used to sit around Smith's grocery

and discuss the matter, but the women of the community decided to do something about it. The big problem was food for the winter. So they formed the Home Demonstration Club in 1931.

"**THEY SCROUNGED** building material ... they conned men into building a little one-room house on the corner of the school ground ... they bought a sealer and were in business. Women came from miles around to can beans and tomatoes and corn and beef, pork. They used to furnish hot lunches for the school children. In those days, people helped themselves and each other, instead of hollering for the government to take care of them."

Another story told by Brooke suggests that Sweeny had three birthdays.

The first was said to have occurred in 1908 when the first post office was established, another when early settler Travis Smith came and erected a construction camp in 1909 and a third when Burton Hurd laid out the plat of the town in 1911.

"It's hard to say who's right, It's fun to think about and dig for these things," Brooke said.

Though Brooke has delved into the city's not-so-distant past in recent years, he wishes he'd paid attention to some of the old-timers sooner.

"When I came here in the '40s like so many people we were the ones running everything. Now, we're dying out and the baby boomers are on the school board, council, but I like it. It's time to turn it loose," he said.

History buff puts together booklet on Sweeny's past

SWEENEY (AP) — From notes scribbled on scrap of paper and heaps of dusty files cluttering his study, a local history buff has compiled a collection of this town's lore.

Maxey Brooke, a retired Phillips 66 Co. chemical engineer and Sweeny resident for the past 40 years, is the author of "Sweeny Speaks," a 15-page booklet on the city's past.

The pamphlet includes simple stories about some of what Brooke terms the "old nesters" who were among the first to settle the area in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

The 74-year-old Oklahoma native said he did extensive research on the book. Though he admits the furrowing for information he did was more fun than work.

"I got most of my tales from talking with folks at the barber shop and post office. You wouldn't believe the kind of stuff you can hear at those places. You hear factual stuff and plenty of bull, too," he said, relaxing in an easy chair in his home on Old Ocean Avenue.

His healthy stock of historical tidbits grew when he began to write down on whatever he could find every interesting story he heard. He said after doing that for about 40 years, he's accumulated a large quantity of stories.

The Sweeny Library Board printed the booklet and it is now being sold for \$5 a copy at the Sweeny Library. The money

raised from the sale of the book will be used to purchase new books, furniture, a new card catalog and make other general improvements at the library.

The past has always been fascinating to Brooke, who also wrote "This is Sweeny," another booklet on Sweeny's history which was printed by the Sweeny Chamber of Commerce in honor

of the U.S. Bicentennial.

Several years ago he wrote a column for the now defunct magazine "Brazos Living" called "Brazos Bill."

Since he retired 10 years ago Brooke said he has more time for his hobbies of reading, writing and just plain thinking about the past and the future.



AP Laserphoto

History buff

Maxey Brooke, a retired chemical engineer and Sweeny resident for the past 40 years, is the author of "Sweeny Speaks," a 15-page booklet on the city's past.