

Preserved H. Sweet  
1834-1894  
by James L. Sweet

Preserved H. Sweet was born in Kirtland, Geauga, Ohio on June 7, 1834, to John H. and Harriet (Harris) Sweet. Both John and Harriet Sweet were from Palmyra, Ontario (now Wayne), New York. This farming family migrated to Kirtland, Ohio between 1830-1834, where Preserved and his siblings were raised, learning to work a farm in the process.

On the tenth day of November, 1857, Jonathan Burnett, Justice of the Peace of Geauga County, Ohio, officiated the marriage of Preserved H. Sweet to Maria L. Messenger. Between 1858 and 1859, Preserved, Maria, and daughter Etta moved to Watertown, Tuscola, Michigan where Preserved continued to work the land. Another daughter, Lucia E., was born in 1859. Lucia was followed about four years later by Charles Eugene Sweet, on August 24, 1863. Sadly, Preserved's wife, Maria, died on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, 1865, at the young age of 27, leaving Preserved to raise his young family. Maria is buried at the Shadyside Cemetery in her hometown of Auburn Corners, Geauga, Ohio.

Preserved subsequently met the widow Charlotte E. [Benedict] Mitchell. They were married on March 15, 1866, in Lake County, Ohio by the justice of the peace. Over the next 17 years they had six children together: Edward B., Berdena M., Letta, Orlo M., Herbert J. Their youngest child, Wesley P. Sweet, was born September 2, 1883, in Olivet, Hutchinson County, Dakota Territory.

In the mid 1870s – most likely about 1874 – the Sweets moved to Hutchinson County, Dakota Territory, near Olivet, in the southeastern part of the territory. They were likely enticed there by brother-in-law Smith H. LaMunyan. Smith's wife, Lorinda, and Preserved's wife, Charlotte, were sisters. Thought to be one of the first, if not the first to establish a farm in this area, the LaMunyan's were farming in Olivet by April of 1873. As trees were sparse on the prairie land, and lumber brought from other areas expensive, these families in all likelihood lived in houses constructed from blocks of sod cut from the land. These sod houses had thick walls and thus were cool in the summer, and relatively warm in the winter.

The lives of Preserved Sweet's family was to be forever changed on January 12, 1888. Summarized from the story passed down by daughter Berdena: Late morning on that bright, sunny, clear day the family of seven set out by sleigh over the snow covered prairie on a short journey of about four miles to attend the wedding of Preserved's eldest son, Charles Eugene Sweet. The sleigh was well stocked with robes and blankets. It wasn't long before wispy clouds began to appear, the wind picked up, and the temperature was noticeably dropping. By the time they had reached about halfway to their destination the wind was intense, the snow was blinding. When the horses could face the storm no longer, Preserved turned the team around in an attempt to seek shelter in a schoolhouse they had recently passed. But by then they could not find even their own tracks, the wind and snow seeming to come from all directions. Not finding the schoolhouse, they kept going as best they could over the open prairie hoping to find refuge from the storm. By around midnight the horses could continue no more. Within a couple of hours one horse had died, the other near death. Once the storm had subsided, ensuring everyone was covered as much as possible, Preserved set out to find help. He came upon one house with only a lady in residence. She took him in to warm him up. While thawing, his face swelled to the point that he could not even see; he would be unable to lead anyone to rescue his family. Fortunately, the teacher from the schoolhouse they had passed the previous day happened upon the family and got them to the safety of his house, a short distance away. Neighbors and doctors were summoned and soon found that several in the family had frozen limbs.

Consequently, within the next month daughter Berdena had both hands amputated. Orlo and Herbert lost their legs below the knees. Youngest son, Wesley – aged 5 – lost two fingers of his right hand; the other two were crippled. Preserved lost part of three fingers on his right hand and his left hand was stiffened so he could not shut it; also all the toes on both feet and the heel of his left were amputated. The mother, Charlotte, was frozen inwardly, but had no amputations. It is not known how cold it was in that sleigh the night of the blizzard, but the next day the thermometer registered forty-six degrees below zero. Charles' wedding took place on January 17<sup>th</sup>. He and his new bride, Dicey, came to live with and assist Preserved and family until they were well.

No longer able to run the farm, in October, 1888, they moved to Western Springs, Illinois. It proved to be an unhealthy place for the family. Preserved contracted typhoid fever and died on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December, 1894. He was returned to Auburn Corners, Ohio for burial.



Sweet Family circa 1890. Back row: Berdena, Edward, Charlotte  
Front row: Herbert, Orlo, Wesley, Preserved

In the years following, Charlotte went back to Ohio where it has been reported that a wealthy benefactor donated a building lot in Painesville, Ohio to the family. Other donations were solicited to erect a house upon the lot. Berdena submitted the story of the family's ordeal to a charitable group in Kirtland whereupon a quilt was raffled. A total of \$140 was raised for her through the sale of raffle tickets at twenty-five cents per ticket. The quilt was also given to her, by the raffle winner. Berdena eventually married her cousin, Roy L. LaMunyan, the son of Smith and Lorinda LaMunyan. Herbert and Orlo went to live for a time in the Kirtland, Ohio home of Mahlon Sweet and family. Mahlon was Preserved's brother.

#### Sources:

- U.S. Census 1840, Kirtland, Lake, Ohio
- U.S. Census 1850, Kirtland, Lake, Ohio
- U.S. Census 1860, Watertown, Tuscola, Michigan
- U.S. Census 1870, Rome, Ashtabula, Ohio
- Dakota Territory Census 1885, Hutchinson County, Dakota Territory
- Ohio Marriages 1790-1950
- Find A Grave online database
- Civil War Veterans Censuses of 1885 and 1890
- The details of the family's ordeal in the blizzard are based on the story submitted by Berdena M. Sweet to the Kirtland, Ohio charity. Additional information about this storm, known as the "Children's Blizzard of 1888," can be found on the Internet and elsewhere.

Note: Wesley P. Sweet and second wife, Nellie, were this contributor's grandparents.