

Museum Notes

By Carol Krogan, assistant curator
For the week of December 26, 2021

This week's column presents you with the story of another Vernon County pioneer, Jesse L. Davis. Jesse L. Davis was born in Cumberland County, PA on November 7, 1809. When he was ten years old, his family moved to Shippensburg, PA where he attended school and assisted his father in the tannery business. When he was eighteen years old, he relocated to Carlisle, Indiana where his brother John W. Davis worked as a physician. It was here that he married Vienna T. Purdy in 1832. Vienna was born in Indiana to William M. and Sarah Purdy, natives of Kentucky. For two years Jesse was employed as a clerk there and subsequently moved to Edwardsport, Knox County, IN where he was engaged in the mercantile business. In 1846, he received an appointment as a clerk in the Post Office Department in Washington, D.C. After obtaining a leave of absence from this position in 1855, he travelled to Wisconsin to purchase land in sections 10 and 15 in what later was established as the town of Sterling. His family remained in Sterling while he returned to Washington D.C. to continue his employment until 1862 when he resigned and moved to his new home in Wisconsin to farm. Davis became a storekeeper in 1868 and served as postmaster. His store and house were located east of the Retreat Community Hall.

Jesse and Vienna had five children. Dr. John William Davis was born in 1837. As a young man he moved to Washington D.C. where his uncle, John W. Davis served as speaker of the House of Representatives. While living there he attended the Georgetown University School of Medicine. He enlisted in the Civil War and served as a surgeon. In 1866 he married Elizabeth Morgan and they had 4 daughters and 3 sons, one of which was adopted. John William Davis died in Lansing, Iowa in 1915. His wife died in 1919 and they are buried in Lansing. Jesse and Vienna's second son, Warren Green Davis remained in Retreat. He married Jeanette Miller in 1860 in Indiana and they had seven children. Warren had several occupations; fire insurance agent, saloon keeper and optician. He died in 1904 and Jeanette died in 1913. Martha "Mattie", was born in 1844 and married George H. Bryant. They had 6 children. Mattie died in Iowa in 1885 three weeks after giving birth to her sixth child. Jeanette was born in 1849 and died in 1862. She is buried in Walnut Mound Cemetery. Their third daughter Laura was born in 1853. She married Robert N. McKay and they had two daughters. Laura died suddenly of paralysis on August 15, 1888 at the age of 35. She is buried in Walnut Mound Cemetery. On August 20, 1888, only five days after the death of his daughter Laura, Jesse Davis suffered a stroke. He died the next day at his home in Retreat. He was laid to rest at Walnut Mound Cemetery. His wife Vienna died on October 3, 1904 at the age of 88.

We sincerely hope everyone had a Merry Christmas and send out a wish for a Very Happy New Year!