

*The Story*

*of*

*"Ma" & "Pa" Sweeney*

[Early Pentecostal Pioneers in Maine]

written by: Bro. Daniel T. Rideout - 2023



Bro. Charles & Sis. Mabel Sweeney

### Charles ExSmith Sweeney

b. 9/4/1871 in Selma, Nova Scotia

d. 8/10/1962 in St. Petersburg, FL - age 90

### Mabel V. (Vincent) Sweeney

b. 1884 in Fall River, Massachusetts

d. 2/7/1971 in St. Petersburg, FL - age 86

Burials: Memorial Park Cemetery, St. Petersburg, FL

Cenotaph: Forest City Cemetery, South Portland, Me.

## The Story Of Ma & Pa Sweeney .....

To God Be ALL The Glory!!!!

Sis. Mabel Sweeney wrote a book, a sort of "auto-biography" of their travels in The Gospel Ministry, entitled: "From Egypt To Canaan." This book is now out-of-print, but the excerpts of this account of their life, shared from various sources, as well as accounts of memories of them, recorded by others, helps us get a glimpse, if possible, of The Life & Ministry of "Ma" & "Pa" Sweeney. Ma & Pa Sweeney were "Circuit Riding Preachers, of their day.

Bro & Sis. Sweeney lived in a little house in West Garland, Maine. It was still standing around 1987/88. Sometimes they would set up tables on the lawn, to have a picnic, and afterwards have an Old Fashioned, Holy Ghost, Pentecostal service. In those days, these types of meetings were called "Open Air" meetings. They were very poor folk in the natural, but RICH In The Holy Ghost!! They traveled much, up and down the East Coast, from Maine to Florida, sometimes sleeping in tents, to Preach The Gospel! They didn't always own their own car, so they had to get rides anyway they could.

Bro. & Sis. Sweeney were originally trinitarians, but because of The Love Of The Brethren, they later came into the Understanding of Jesus Name Baptism.

Sis. Sweeney recalls an account c1930. She was asked to go start a Pentecostal Work in the Auburn Maine area. She felt it was The Lord's Will, but she said: "Pa and I will Inquire of The Lord, and IF it is Auburn, rest assured I will be there." They fasted and prayed about it. They also put out a "fleece" to The Lord, that IF it was His Will to go there, that He would have a place to hold services in by Sunday. It was Tuesday, on Saturday, she got a card in the mail that read, "Will you come for Sunday? We have a Hall, and are waiting for the Preacher." They Knew it was God, and went. They went and stayed three months there. Bro. Sweeney went along with her, Helping Faithfully financially in the Work, and in Preaching too. They had The Favour Of God!! Folks were Saved and Filled with The Holy Ghost. Bro. George Rix, a Christian Missionary Alliance

Minister, and his wife, started coming to the services to see what was going on. They'd climb up the back stairs, so no one would see them. One night after the meeting, Sis. Rix told her husband, "George, Bro. & Sis. Sweeney has something we ain't got. I think we had better look into it." They soon Received their Baptism In The Holy Ghost and Spoke In Other Tongues as The Holy Ghost Giveth the utterance. They got "On Fire" for Jesus. Bro. Rix later became the pastor of that Assembly. That Work after many changes, moves, and pastors, was what was known as the L/A Church Of God. The last pastor of that Assembly was Bro. Robert Derocher, Jr., a Graduate of the Deliverance Bible Institute, that was in Portland, Maine. F.M.I. on this Work, please see my book entitled: "Pentecostal Pioneers of Auburn & Lewiston."

Bro & Sis. Sweeney visied the Sailoft Mission church in Portland, quite often, during their travels, and she said they had good services. In the 20's, she recalled being at the Sailoft, when a Bro. Tatman was pastoring, at the time. During that time, he left for California. She said: "The meetings went on just the same, and God Blessed us by sending us other Spirit-Filled workers, such as Sis. Christine Gibson of E. Providence; Bro & Sis. Tan Ditter; and Sis. Minnie Clark, and let me tell you, they were On Fire for God. God Bless them." Sis. Sweeney later wrote, "Sis. Minnie Clark was our pastor (at the old Park St. church), and a good one, too, Filled with The Spirit Of God."

In the late 1920's, Ma & Pa Sweeney visited the Lincoln Center Church of God often. Bro. Wesley Ayers started that Work there, in a School house building. Sis. Sweeney writes of one of their visits there: "We left Auburn for Lincoln Center, Maine, to be with Bro. Ayers, and his good wife, and their daughter Dorothy. We spent four weeks with them, holding meetings every night, and God Blessed us, and souls were Saved. We stayed at the pastor's home-he sure is a Firebrand! If you ever want to get a Good Blessing, be sure and visit his Assembly; you will always find a warm welcome for the children of God."

Sis. Sweeney writes of early Pentecost in Medway, Maine: "... we went to Meday, Maine. Bro. & Sis. Lyons were there to meet us, and believe me, God did Give us a wonderful Revival: the Hall would be packed to the doors every night.

Many souls were Saved and between 25 and 30 were Filled with The Holy Ghost and Fire! Glory To God! Our little Sister Amy Baily was with us and God did Make her a Blessing among the young people. I'll never forget the wonderful Water Baptism we had in the river, just at the end of the bridge. The shore was lined with people, and on the big bridge the folks were crowded - they were even sitting away up on the iron girders that they might get a good view. Pa, Under The Anointing Of The Spirit Of God, preached a mighty message on what we ought to be before we are Buried Into Water Baptism With Christ, and how we should Walk after. As the five brothers walked into the water one after the other, the Saints would begin to sing, "Shall we gather at the river," and it seemed as if this beautiful song that came from those throats rose higher and higher and higher, 'till it was lost in Heaven. What a sight, in these days, to see men and women follow The Footsteps Of Jesus. Bless His Name, it was hard to tear ourselves away from these dear Saints on both sides of the river. We visited Brother and Sister York's Assembly on the other side of the river, and I never was in an Assembly where God had so many wonderful singers in all my life; when they would sing Under The Anointing Of God, it seemed as if the very rafters would ring, and we knew God was there. Dear old Uncle John Thompson, and his dear wife Aunt Deborah, how everybody loved them! Uncle John was the Pioneer Circuit Preacher and these Assemblies 'round about are the fruits of his Labour. May God Bless them in their old age, and still Make them a Blessing 'till He calls them home."

She writes of her memories in 1929, at the old Newburgh Centre Pentecostal Church, where The Holy Ghost was first Outpoured in Maine, during the 1906 Azusa St. Revival: "God Bless the dear Saints at Newburgh. We counted it a privilege to be in that little town, since we have learned that this little place was where The Latter Rain first fell and the first person was Baptized with The Holy Ghost And Fire According To Acts 2:4 (kju), in the State of Maine."

In Searsport, Bro. Perley O. Andrews started a Full Gospel Mission there. The original church building was on the corner of Leach & Main Sts. It is still standing today. However, the congregation moved down the Street to a larger facility, later on. This Work was started as a Jesus Name (not Jesus Only) Work, but in later years was affiliated with the Assemblies of God. Bro. Chester Staples

held a Revival there in Searsport, and they had a big Water Baptism through the ice! Ma & Pa Sweeney also visited this Assembly c1930. She writes: " ... held meetings in Searsport, Maine, for Brother Perley Andrews. It was while we were there that The Lord allowed us to buy a new Chevrolet car through our dear Brother Robert Carle, who was a dealer in cars, by allowing his Commission toward a payment. We had been without a car for a year, and we had prayed and God had heard and we knew He would send us one, Glory To His Dear Name. And The Lord always sent the rest of the payments just on time; sometimes it would be almost the last day before it was due. Pa would say, "Tomorrow is the last day, Ma." I would say, "Praise The Lord, Pa, He Said He would supply our needs, but I have never read that He would supply them in advance!" And let me tell you, He has never failed us - always on time. After the Searsport meetings were over, we started for Patten, Maine ..."

Sis. Sweeney recalls an account of early Pentecostal History in Lewiston, Maine, maybe about 1924: "Thanksgiving Day we got ready to go to Lewiston, to hold a meeting at the Berean Mission. Pa had worked hard all week preparing a sermon for that day. He had it all fixed what he was gonna say and what he wasn't gonna say, but The Holy Ghost had Prepared Another, which he knew nothing about! What a happy day that was! When we got to Lewiston, we stopped at Brother and Sister Harvey Robinson's. There Sister Lottie, who was a worker at Berean Mission, was ill. We went in. Pa, Under The Anointing Of The Spirit, laid hands on her, And In Jesus' Name Commanded this fever to leave, and immediately Jesus Made her Whole, and she got up and came to the service with us, ALL Glory Be Given To Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Pa's testing began there. There were two Assemblies in that building, and, of course, Pa had to go in the wrong door, but God had a purpose in it! Brother Bedford, who had charge of this Assembly at that time, has since fallen asleep in Jesus. We expect to see him when The Great Trump Of God Sounds. He saw the great happiness that had come over Pa, and said, "Brother Sweeney, tell us about it." Pa did not have to be coaxed. He told them all what had happened, and it made them so hungry that he said to his congregation, "What do you say if we close the door and all go in Brother Prescott's Assembly and hear this Brother tell about his experience, and all

Worship together?" Pa took the Brother by the arm and walked in. Pa didn't notice anything; he felt so good, he thought everybody else did. Pa brought a message (not the one he wrote out, he lost that one; we never have seen it since), but one Inspired By The Holy Ghost. After the service was over it seemed as if everyone was Blessed. We got ready to go back to Portland. Mr. Prescott, who had asked us to come and hold meetings for one week, didn't seem to give us such a good handshake as the week before; something was wrong. We found out later that these two Brothers had not been on very good terms, and two days later we received a postcard saying, "I have decided your service will not be needed next week. I did not approve of your walking in as you did Thanksgiving Day." What a shock, after you thought you were doing your best. But this was a little thing." I mention the Berean Mission in my book: "Pentecostal Pioneers of Auburn & Lewiston." Note: I had to make an edit note on that church. The edit note is near the back of my book. Through research, the two pastors she mentioned of these two Assemblies, in Lewiston at that time, were: Elder Charles H. Bedford, & Mr. Albion S. Prescott. The Berean Mission was located at that time, at 204 Main St. Bro. Bedford's Assembly was located at 202 Main St., and was called "The Gospel Mission."

Sis. Sweeney wrote again of another account. 'Twas in Thorndike, Me., in the 1920s. "Our next call was to Thorndike, Maine, where Pentecost had not been preached much. Brother Gordon and his dear wife had been to one of our meetings and came and asked us if we would go and hold some special meetings in the Grange Hall. He felt that it was God's time... We arrived in thorndike, I'll never forget how God Undertook for us there: 70 were saved, four or five Filled with The Holy Spirit, many were Baptized in water; the crowds were so big that the Grange Hall could not hold them. The Masons let us hold our meetings in their Hall. They came from far and near, and it seemed as if the whole town cooperated with us. We had a wonderful Water Baptism in Unity Lake. What a gathering it was that stood on the shore! It was a beautiful day as the sun shone from a beautiful sky and was reflected in the placid water of the lake. The very Spirit Of The Almighty Jehovah was brooding on the water as Brother Harold Taylor began to sing softly, "Shall we gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river?" The rest of God's children picked up the sweet strain, and as it increased in volume and floated across the

waters of the lake, there was a rustle among the trees: Pa was coming down the little path that led from the woods to the shore of the lake with a crude staff in his hand which had been cut from a limb of a tree. He stood there for a few moments and offered a prayer, and with upraised hand toward Heaven, he walked out in the water, turned around, and leaning on his staff, he began to Address the crowd, Explaining to them what Water Baptism meant. After he had finished, the gathering started to sing: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee: Holy, Holy, Holy, Merciful and Mighty, God in three persons, blessed trinity. And from across the lake an echo came back, "blessed trinity." Glory to God!" It was many years later, that a Graduate, fresh out of Zion Bible Institute, Bro. Bernard Elliott, along with his dear wife, Sis. Evelyn, went to Thorndike, Maine, and opened up a Pentecostal work, there, in an old closed up church building! That was their first pastorate.

In the winter of 1925 and '26, Bro. F. Harold Bickford and his family moved to St. Petersburg, FL. There, Bro Bickford started the first Pentecostal Assembly there. It later became an Assembly of God church. Ma & Pa Sweeney visited St. Petersburg at that time. Young Donald, Bro. Harold's son, remembers that Ma & Pa Sweeney peddled eggs, at that time. Ma & Pa Sweeney would see little Donald walking to School, and give him fifty cents.

Just to name a few more memories of this precious couple, IF The Lord Permits ...

Sis. Sweeney wrote/mentioned of Tent Meetings in Ashland, Maine, around the late 1920s: "The rain came down in buckets, the lightning flashed, the thunder just roared; the tent began to shake and leak, and the people began to move from one place to another to dodge the streams that would pour through the tent. One Sister began to holler, "Look out for my piano!" Folks tried to run out, but had to run back. Pa stood there with the rain running down his face, Preaching for all he was worth. He was above the storm and said, "You might as well Listen to The Word Of God, and it ain't pianos we want to Save, it is souls!" When Pa would slack down, The Spirit Struck the song leader, Brother Bouchard, and he began to sing, Oh, Lord, send The Power just now, Oh, Lord, send The Power just now, Oh,

Lord, send The Power just now, and Baptize every one. And let me tell you, I never heard Brother Samuel Thompson play his saxophone or Sister Kathleen Gardner play the piano as they did that day. It was not natural playing, singing, preaching, or praying, but It was A Demonstration Of The Holy Ghost before sinners to prove to them that the devil is mighty BUT God IS Almighty. The enemy would have frightened them out, BUT The Power Of God Held them fast, and out of it all, Saved three souls. Why shouldn't we praise God? We came out of the battle Victorious, THROUGH Jesus Christ Our Lord!"

Frances (Craig) Cook, and her sister, Erma (Craig) Adams, recall Ma & Pa Sweeney attending meetings at the Pentecostal Mission in Bradford, Maine, as well as the Conventions at Dexter. The Group in Dexter were "Life Advents." They were Holy Ghost Filled Christian Advents.

Ma Sweeney held special services for Sis. Christine A. Gibson, at The School Of The Prophets in East Providence, Rhode Island, that The Lord had Helped Sis. Gibson Establish there. The School Of The Prophets later became known as Zion Bible Institute. Bro. Billy Washington & his brother, Eddie, were Converted on March 10th, 1930, during those special meetings with Sis. Sweeney. Then, in 1931, in March once more, during more special meetings with Sis. Sweeney, the boys were Filled with The Holy Ghost. Bro Leonard Heroo, and others, were also Filled with The Holy Ghost, at that time, as well. Bro. A.A. Augut, that did the Baptizing for Sis. Gibson, back in those days, Baptized the Washington twins in the tank there.

There are so many things we could say of Ma & Pa Sweeney, but the books could not contain it all. They visted many early Pentecostal Assemblies in Maine, etc., in their travels, including in Winterport, Maine, at the old Full Gospel Assembly there, pastored by Bro Fred & Sis Gladys MacLaughlin. I have seen pictures of them sitting in the old seats there, in the original church building, downtown by the Fire Station. In the 1940s, Bro. F. Harold Bickford mentioned attending a United Pentecostal Fellowship Meeting in Carmel, and that Bro. & Sis. Sweeney were among those who attended the service. In the early days, the Jesus Name & trinitarians Fellowshiped together. They just Lifted Up Jesus, but after

the UPC was formed in 1945, the hierarchy of the UPC told their ministers that they could no longer Fellowship with anyone who was not "Jesus Name," then later, added, anyone who was not UPC. Bro. Harold Bickford held Ministerial Conventions each year in Mars Hill. Every preacher, Jesus Name & trinitarian were Ordained under his group, The Full Gospel Ministerial Fellowship, until the UPC was formed. In the early days, Bro. Bernard Patton was president of that group. Bro Bickford always took a humble position and was just Secretary/Treasurer. Many precious friendships were severed after the UPC made their Decree. Bro. Bickford was broken hearted.

This is the account of the life of Bro & Sis Charles Sweeney. IF i have forgotten anything important, it is not intentional. If any info is incorrect, i apologize, i'm going by Documented accounts of their life...



"Pa" & "Ma" Sweeney

*J*