

Collection #  
SC 2444

**JENNIE VAWTER  
PAPERS, 1825–1918 (BULK 1869-1879)**

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**COLLECTION INFORMATION**

VOLUME OF                    3 folders  
COLLECTION:

COLLECTION DATES: 1825–1918 (bulk 1869–1879)

PROVENANCE: Gift of Paul C. Rosenblatt, Family Social Science, University of Minnesota, 290 McNeal Hall, 1985 Buford Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108, June 1994

RESTRICTIONS: Original diary may not be photocopied due to physical condition.

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ALTERNATE FORMATS: None

RELATED HOLDINGS: None

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1994.0799

NOTES: The diary was found in the attic of Dr. and Mrs. Harold Peterson, Roseville, MN, and given to Paul Rosenblatt by Jean Peterson.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jennie Vawter was born Sarah J. Pardun on 18 April 1847 in Manchester, Dearborn County, Indiana. She was the daughter of Walter Kanap Pardun (ca. 1808–72) and Dianna Pardun (b. ca. 1815). Her siblings included: Isabelle B. (d. 1872), Harriett (ca. 1846–77), Walter H. (b. ca. 1851), and Monroe (b. ca. 1855). Jennie Vawter refers to Isabelle as “Bell,” Harriett as “Hattie,” and Monroe as “Roe.” Walter H. Pardun may have been known as “Henry.”

On 15 April 1869 Jennie Pardun married John M. Vawter (b. 29 February 1836), of Jefferson County, Indiana. Vawter was the son of Beverly Vawter (1789–1872) and Elizabeth (nee Crawford) Vawter (1793–1866). He had served with the 10<sup>th</sup> Indiana Cavalry, Company H during the Civil War.

Jennie and John M. Vawter had at least two children: a daughter, Minnie Bell (b. 13 April 1870), and an unidentified son.

Jennie Vawter’s sister Isabelle married Israel Noyes of Ripley County, Indiana on 15 November 1857. Isabelle Noyes died following childbirth in spring 1872, after which Noyes married Vawter’s second sister, Harriett Pardun (15 June 1873). Harriett Noyes died in 1877, and Israel Noyes married Elizabeth Hyatt on 5 July 1878.

Henry Vawter, and possibly Israel Noyes, moved to Nebraska in 1879.

Sources: Materials in collection;  
1860 Indiana Census; Church of Latter Day Saints Family Search (<http://familysearch.org>), accessed 18 June 2002;  
Hanlin, George. “Vawter Diary Holds Details and Mysteries of Ripley and Jefferson Counties, 1869–1879.” *Hoosier Genealogist*, 42, no. 10 (Spring 2002): 37–40 (see Appendix of this document for the text of the article);  
“Vawter Family” (<http://www.fmoran.com/vawter.html>), accessed 21 June 2002.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection includes one diary kept by Jennie Vawter of Jefferson County, Indiana, mainly during the years 1869–83. The entries discuss Vawter’s family life, and social activities in Ripley and Jefferson Counties. Vawter expresses her feelings openly on a number of topics including her wedding, the birth of her two children, the deaths of family members, and the departure of her brother Henry to Nebraska.

An entry following the death of her sister, Isabelle (Bell) in spring 1872, illustrates the level of detail and depths of emotion that Vawter frequently conveyed in her writings:

. . . Friday evening at two o’clock her spirit took its flight. . . We all go over the Israel’s, go in through the kitchen and directly we are invited in to look again upon that sweet form that is now lying in the *coffin*. But I cannot describe my feeling. It is beyond description as I notice the changes that death has made already. The lid is put down and with solemn tread she’s borne from the home of her married life *forever*. We arrive at the Baptist church. She is borne in and there placed upon the chairs for one more look at the last. *The last look* till the judgment morn. We are forced back. The cloth is gently slipped [sic] over that lovely face and O! how hard as I steal and look and see her forehead and nose, the upper part of her face and now *it* is gone. Then comes the coffin lid. Carefully they place it. Solemnly they screw on the lid. Gently they bear her to her last resting place and O! the earth rattles solemnly down on her narrow house, and how mournfully it echoes in the heart as we know they are covering her from our sight *forever* untill [sic] we go to her, but the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh. . . .

Also included in the diary is a list titled “School Commenced Oct. 1863.” The list appears to be an attendance record from an unidentified school likely located in Jefferson County. The last entry diary (1 December 1883) refers to the opening of a general goods store.

The collection also includes three items originally laid in the diary: a letter from Jennie to John M. Vawter (5 January 1870); an obituary, ca. May 1918, for Myron A. Pardun, a relative; and an advertising sheet for Samuel Alexander & Charles D. Penrose, a dry goods business (17 August 1825).

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## APPENDIX

“Vawter Diary Holds Details and Mysteries of Ripley and Jefferson Counties, 1869–1879,” by George R. Hanlin.

[This article originally appeared in *The Hoosier Genealogist*, Spring 2002 (Vol. 42, No. 1), pp.37–40.]

When researching history, be it related to families, social groups, religion, or politics, it is always a good practice to use primary sources—documents such as letters, diaries, court records, contemporary newspaper accounts,

and so on—to get a better understanding of the subject at hand. Of course secondary sources, which consist of other individuals' interpretations of history (usually after the fact), are also valuable tools. But reviewing and studying documents directly related to a subject add the details and provide the insight essential to understanding it fully.

The Indiana Historical Society's library is an excellent source of primary materials. It holds a variety of papers relating to individuals and families as well as a number of business records, all providing important documentation of life in Indiana. One small but notable collection in the library, SC 2444, contains just two items: the diary of Jennie Vawter and an accompanying typescript. While the diary is rather brief, it nonetheless serves as an important documentation of family history and nineteenth-century social life in Ripley and Jefferson Counties, Indiana.

Jennie Vawter was born Sarah J. Pardun on 18 April 1847, the daughter of Abraham Pardun of Shelby Township, Ripley County. Though Vawter writes that she began keeping a diary at age seventeen, the volume the IHS holds begins later, running from 1 January 1869, just before Vawter's twenty-second birthday, to 20 August 1879. The diary focuses heavily on the years 1869 and 1870. Among other things, it discusses Jennie's marriage to John M. Vawter (the son of Beverly and Elizabeth Vawter of Monroe Township, Jefferson County) on 15 April 1869; the establishment of their home in Smyrna Township, Jefferson County; and the births of two children, a daughter (referred to as Minnie in the diary) on 13 April 1870 and a son (who goes unnamed) on 11 August 1875. Much of the diary centers on social activities, such as Fourth of July celebrations and Christmas observances, and religious life, including church services and gatherings. The diary frequently mentions trips to places such as Dupont, Lancaster, Madison, and Wirt in Jefferson County and New Marion and Rexville in Ripley County and it often includes references to events at churches in Hopewell and Shelby.

Perhaps of most interest to those researching family histories are Vawter's references to friends and neighbors in the areas of southwestern Ripley County and northwestern Jefferson County. In the course of her diary, Vawter mentions some forty different family names, including **Pickett, Adam, Spears, Earhart, Grooms, Breeden, and Topf**. However, she usually refers to individuals only by the titles of Mr., Mrs., or Miss, without a first name. For only about a dozen people does she mention full names. Those people include: **John Surber, Mollie Bienfiel, Mary Caplinger, Ann Hartsock, Joe Lawler, Mrs. Em Castner, Milt West, Hattie Boyer, Alice Hyatt, Selema Cooper, Lucinda Spears, Israel Robbins, Israel Noyes, and J. M. Morss** (who married Jennie's sister Ann).

As Jennie's diary illustrates, one problem with using primary sources is that they often create as many questions as they answer. Who are these friends and neighbors, one might wonder? Where exactly did they live, and how did they know the Vawters and Parduns? The genealogist can use many tools to help figure out such questions, such as deed records, county histories, and census information. In this case the 1870 census index confirmed that many of these families did indeed live in Ripley and Jefferson Counties, but many mysteries remain. Another problem using primary sources (though certainly not unique to them) is the fact that the people recording the information make mistakes. They misremember events, apply their own worldviews to the details they preserve, misspell names and incorrectly record other data, and so on. Many times in her diary, for example, Vawter misspells the names of neighbors and nearby towns, and no doubt she makes factual errors as well. Still, the valuable information found in these primary sources and the answers these sources do provide make them a vital part of research.

One item in Vawter's diary that genealogists will find especially helpful is an attendance record for students. At the top of the record is a title that reads "School commenced Oct 1863." Below it is a grid. Dates run across the top of the grid, beginning on Monday, the nineteenth and ending on Tuesday, the twenty-fourth. Running along the left-hand side of the grid are the names of students and their ages. To the right of each student's name are Xs, slashes, and zeros, marking the days he or she attended class. Below is a recreation of the students listed on the first page of the record and their ages:

Lewis B Roice	6
Henry Caldwell	12
Sarah A Gollay	9
Elizie Caldwell	9

Kannie[?] Caldwell	6
Filomea Roice	9
Lewis H Humphries	12
Edgar Humphries	9
Albert H Humphries	7
William Golaspie	4
Mary Humph[ries?]	15
Nancy C Brokaw	10
W <sup>m</sup> C Golay	14
George W Dohoney	11
Alexander Caldwe[ll?]	15
John Thomas Roice	16
Charles Roice	14
George Golay	12
James Edwards	14
John Green[?]	11
James H Humphries	15

At this point the page ends, and the attendance record continues two pages later. One can assume it is for the same session because the dates listed on the second page directly succeed those on the first. The dates are presumably for October and November, evidenced by the word “November” running across dates on the right side of the second page and the fact that the dates all correspond to October and November dates in 1863 according to “The Perpetual,” a perpetual calendar created in 1985 by Columbian ArtWorks in Milwaukee. The list of students continues:

William Dohoney	8
Martha E Dohoney	5
Mary F Dohoney	9
Albrado Dohoney	5
Whitley Dohoney	8
John Brokaw	16
Louisa Dohoney	12

Charly Humph[ries?]	17
Humphrey Roice	5
Burdit Golay	6
David Caldwell	6

Again though, this information raises questions. First, who kept these records? The heading is dated 1863, long before Jennie began this diary. The name of her husband, John M. Vawter, is handwritten in the front of the book and the writing in the school records appears to match the handwriting in John's name. It is possible that the book first belonged to him and that Jennie wrote in it later. (Indeed, her writing surrounds these two pages' worth of records, making this theory seem plausible.) Then one wonders who these students were and what school they attended. Further examination indicates that many of the names listed are also the names of families that lived in southern Monroe Township and northern Madison Township in Jefferson County. The 1870 census index lists many of the families as living in those townships. In addition, an 1859 directory of Jefferson County places many of the families in that region, several near the now-defunct post offices of Mud Lick and Stony Point, on the southeastern boundary of what is now the Jefferson Proving Grounds. It should be pointed out that variations of the family names appear in these two sources. For example, the name Humphries appears frequently in other sources as Humphrey, and the last name Roice appears elsewhere as Royce or sometimes even Royse. Because the census and the directory indicate that John Vawter's father, Beverly, lived in Monroe Township, one can assume that John grew up in that township. It is possible, therefore, that John was once a teacher in the vicinity and that the list of students belonged to him.

After exploring the Vawter diary in depth, one easily understands the value of such primary sources. These materials are rich in history and are often colored with invaluable detail. As illustrated by some of the questions posed above, though, they are not without their flaws. The key is to mine primary sources with care, sorting out the nuggets of good information and further exploring those that are questionable. No matter how diligently one digs, all too often the search ends in a series of perplexing mysteries that can be solved only by educated guesses. Still, what genealogist does not like a mystery? In the end, the time and energy used to explore primary sources, gleaned valuable facts and data and then trying to address some of the questions raised, will lead the researcher to a precious wealth of knowledge and a richer understanding of the lives of our ancestors.

Jennie Vawter Diary, 1868–1879, SC 2444, Indiana Historical Society. Some of the information in this article comes from the collection guide, written by Alexandra S. Gressitt, 28 September 1994.

## CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Traditional Search" icon.
3. Click on the "Call Number" radio button.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, SC 2444).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.