

JEHU AND MARGARET (HENDRICKS) DICKENS

By Justin Kirk Dickens

Jehu Dickens (September 9, 1832, died March 29, 1907) was born in the Peachtree area (near Naoma) of Raleigh County, West Virginia. He was the sixth son and the fifteenth (or sixteenth) child of early settlers Thomas Dickens (about 1785, died 1866) and Rhoda Pennington Dickens. Jehu married Margaret Hendricks (August 9, 1832, died November 7, 1899) on July 20, 1854. She was a daughter of early settlers Francis Hendricks and Margaret Stewart Hendricks. All documentations of the Ralph and Mary Clay Stewart family agree that a daughter, Margaret, was born about 1802, and that in 1820 this daughter married Francis Hendricks.

Jehu and Margaret settled on a very hilly tract of land on the head of Drews Creek, being part of a large tract of land owned by F & JA Granger of New York. A survey of the parcel that Jehu farmed is in the Raleigh County records dated January 12, 1866. Very likely Jehu, being the youngest son of his father, was not deeded a portion of the original land grant(s) to his father because older sons acquired the inheritance. In particular, Jehu's next older brother, Henderson, lived with his parents until they died. One can envision old Thomas pointing in the general direction toward the hills bordering his known property and suggesting to his youngest son just to stake out some land and farm it - a wedding present of sorts, perhaps.

On October 1, 1861, Jehu was enlisted in the Union Army to serve in the Virginia 8th Regiment volunteer infantry by Capt (William Sewell) Dunbar. Oral family history tells us that Jehu was initially taken away by Confederate raiders to be drafted into the Confederate army, and that Jehu slipped out after dark and ran north to Charleston to volunteer for the Union Army. He was listed as, " ... six feet ½ inches high, fair complexion, blue eyes, and light hair ... "

Jehu served in Capt. Parker's company. In his application for pension prepared much later, Jehu recalled, "and we were put on a train of box cars at Washington City to go to Baltimore and the weather being very warm and not being room in the car that I was in and the Captain told part of us to get on top of the car and we did and the wind blew very severe in our face and there being a great deal of dust on the track and it settled on my lungs and set me to coughing at night I had fever ... and on the evening we arrived there I was detailed on guard (sic) ...," which he had to do in the rain without any dry clothes. He was captured on Christmas Day, 1861, while on patrol, and was confined at Richmond, Virginia, starting January 2, 1862. He was exchanged on February 22, 1862. He was granted a 20-day furlough starting March 3, 1862, and it was probably during this furlough that Confederate units came through his part of Raleigh County searching for food and Union soldiers, and they nearly recaptured Jehu. Confederate raiders came through this area frequently. According to a report from a daughter, "Confederate soldiers would come through the country side and take all the family food. Margaret would hide food in the ground to have some for her family. Once they (the raiders) came into the house and took food and then took the one good quilt she had, (took) it outside, put it on the clothesline and shot it full of holes."

The records do not reveal how Jehu served the summer of 1862 except to report that he was “Present” from March to August. He was hospitalized in September 1862 for severe respiratory problems, and spent the remainder of his service hospitalized, including the last fifty-five days in the General Hospital at Point Pleasant, Virginia. He was discharged January 21, 1863, being designated as unfit for further duty, his illness diagnosed as consumption (i.e., tuberculosis). Jehu's given name often shows up in the records as “John,” and his surname spelled, “Dickins,” a spelling that he apparently preferred.

Later he served as second in command in Capt William Turner's Home Guard from 1864 to 1865. Much later, upon hearing of Jehu's death, Capt. Turner wrote an obituary which appeared in the Raleigh Register, April 11, 1907. In it Turner reports, “After we recuperated our health, we decided to renew the conflict and upon recommendation to Governor Arthur I. Boreman I was commissioned Captain and Jehu Dickens 1st Lieutenant of a company of W. Va. State Guards for Raleigh, Wyoming and McDowell counties.” Turner also reports that, “(Jehu) was in early life a local preacher of the M. E. Church ..., ” and then referring to the State Guards, “As a soldier, Bro. Dickens was a strict, brave, fearless man; the boys used to say, ‘With the Captain to do the cussing and the Lieutenant to do the praying, we can go anywhere.’ About 1867 he (Jehu) removed from Raleigh, drifted out west to Illinois, united with the United Brethren Church and was a very successful minister, ... ”

When the State Guards were disbanded in 1865, it appears that Jehu performed the final duties of submitting required paperwork. He wrote a letter to Margaret informing her of his pending return. Here is his letter, in its entirety:

Lens Creek, West Va
July 8th 1865

Mrs. Margaret Dickins:

Beloved Old Lady. I am well and hope you and our Blessed little children are well and doing well, I will Inform you I am Bound to go to Wyoming Courthouse and I cant be at home before the 20th of the month. But will then if not sooner, or, later. I send you, 5, pound Coffee By Jasper Workman. Also one Shirt and (1) Pair Slips. This is all and what You wanted Shall be had when I come down again.

Let Jasper Workman, Commence that Job of work when he comes.

Yours Respectfully.
God Bless you forever
Jehu Dickins

Lieutenant Commanding
Brigade, West Va
Brawn & Bully

Jasper Workman was possibly Jehu's older sister Rhoda's husband.

About twenty years ago, I was loaned the bible that Jehu used in his pastoral activities. Particularly for such an old book, it looked new. It was evident that he held the bible in his left hand, for the sweat from his hand had 'etched' his hand-print deep into the leather cover. I held this bible as he would have held it, and my left hand fit exactly and comfortably into his etching. By jiggling the book in my hand it would open up to pages that probably featured his favorite verses. Many of the other pages were still connected together just as they were fabricated when the book was printed and bound. In the flyleaf were entered only two birth dates: those of his older sister Susannah and her husband Rufus Canterbury. This bible was probably her gift to Jehu when he left Raleigh County.

Jehu and his family left Raleigh County in 1867, perhaps being forced to vacate the Granger land that had been surveyed only a year before. He traveled (I think) with his brother Thomas and brother-in-law George Hendricks and their families, settling in Parke County, Indiana. All three are listed in the 1870 Parke County census. He applied for, and eventually received a pension based on his disability and which was \$20 per month when he died. Several children were born in Parke County, and his oldest daughter was married there during this period. About 1877, Jehu moved once again to the west, to the Avena township of Fayette County, Illinois. He farmed when he was able, and served as a Minister of the United Brethren Church.

Left-to-right: Jehu Dickens (seated); Sarah Jane ("Sade") Dickens (standing); Margaret Hendricks Dickens (seated); Andrew Omer Dickens (standing). This photo was taken about 1888.



After Margaret died, Jehu lived with his (unmarried) youngest daughter, Sade. A year later Sade married Winton Beasley, and Jehu was a financial hardship for Sade and Winton, although Jehu's youngest son, Andrew, was able to provide a contribution from his mustering out payment following the Spanish-American war. Finally, on March 30, 1903, Jehu married Catherine Worden, a widow. After Jehu died, Catherine applied, unsuccessfully, for a widow's pension.

Jehu and Margaret had eleven children:

- 1 Mary Ann, July 26, 1855, married William N Williamson on October 18, 1873.
- 2 Martha Jane, 20 Mar 1857, died 8 Aug 1857.
- 3 Evaline, June 22, 1858, died in 1870 following the taking of the census.
- 4 Ashford Hall, June 1, 1860, married Annette Harvey on October 12, 1890.
- 5 Francis Jennings King, April 1, 1862, married Ida Barbara Crawford on April 8, 1889.
- 6 Samantha ("Mattie"), May 13, 1864, married Soake (Luke) Poppen on October 29, 1896.
- 7 May, July 14, 1866, married Samuel McGraw on October 27, 1888.
- 8 Maggie Marie, June 25, 1868, married Ohio K. Zeitler on September 25, 1887.
- 9 Sarah Jane ("Sade"), August 9, 1875, married Winton Beasley on October 30, 1900.
- 10 William, August 9, 1875 (Sade's twin); died when about 18 months old.
- 11 Andrew Omer, January 19, 1880, married Della Luella Williams on December 23, 1906. She was called "Dollie" almost all of her life. Andrew and Dollie were my grandparents through their only child, Milton C. Dickens