

Joseph Senter Routon

(Son of Stephen Palmer Routon and Mary Catherine Haymes Routon)

From

The Routon's of Paris and Henry County, Tennessee

by Stephanie Routon Tayloe

Joseph Senter Routon, the son of Mary Catherine and Stephen Palmer Routon, was born 1867. He was named after a popular politician of the time. He was a tall man, bald with fringes of black hair and a prominent mustache. He married Miss Minnie Wimbish, a distant cousin on his mother's side.

He started his career in education as a teacher and later became Superintendent of Henry County Schools, a position he held for over thirty-five years, a record in this country. He was dedicated to improving the schools and new modes of education. He worked hard to establish black schools. He tried to keep blacks in school, trying to help them improve their lot, as was said in those days. He was an intimate friend of Mordecai Johnson who went on to become President of Howard University. His brother, S. J. Routon, was a state senator at the turn of the century and together they worked to pass child labor laws to keep children in school. He realized the importance of agriculture and was instrumental in establishing an agriculture class at Grove High School, one of the first such classes in the state. He established a corn club for boys to encourage them to grow corn.

His sister-in-law, Pearl Routon, worked hard to have music and art taught in his schools and with his help was able to get this done. For many years after his death, she gave a scholarship in his name. His son Earl was Principal of Grove School for years.

Miss Ruby Krider, a young speech teacher in the 1930's wanted to teach dramatics in Grove School, but the officials laughed so she went to Miss Pearl Routon and she went to Mr. Joe and he said if she would teach debating, he would help them. Miss Ruby went on to become a legend in the field of dramatics, teaching for many years at Grove where she turned out well-known speech students, and later she taught at Murray State and Bethel College.

One of the family stories is that in the 1950's an elderly, well-respected, retired black schoolteacher, whose own son was one of the first black teachers in the Paris integrated schools, went to the welfare office where my mother, Val Routon, worked, and when he heard her last name was Routon, he said

with emotion, "If your name is Routon, I want to look into your face because one of the best friends I ever had was Mr. Joe Routon who was my superintendent when I taught in a country school. He would visit my school and talk to the pupils and always say things to brag on us and have some humor to give us."

An old neighbor of mine, Miss Vera Willoughby, said when she was a girl in school, Mr. Joe Routon would slip into the school and encourage the children, inquiring what books they had read lately. He was loved by all the teachers and pupils (about 1912).

His striking daughter, Helen, a teacher, married Tom Pemberton in Nashville. His son, Everett, served in France in WWI. He married Nonnie Bucy and Everett's descendants live in Routon today, Roger and John B. Routon and Carolyn Routon Goodman.