

STEPHEN JAMES ROUTON

Stephen James Routon was born February 28, 1874, at Routon, Tennessee. He was the fifth and last child of Stephen Palmer Routon and Mary Catherine Haymes Routon. He was named Stephen after his father and James after his uncle, Jim Haymes.

One of the stories he told about his childhood was in 1885 there came a big snow. His teacher had offered a prize to the children who did not miss a day at school. He was determined to get that prize. He walked in the deep snow to the school to find it closed. He then walked to the teacher's house to be sure she knew he had been to the school. He won the prize, a pearl handled knife. His big brother, Quince, won the bigger prize as he married the teacher, Miss Laura Bowden. The old timers used to talk about the big snow of 1885. Another time he and a friend went to town and on returning a blinding snow came upon them. They were riding on the same horse, and they kept each other warm and alive by telling stories. When he was about thirteen he ran away from home. He got a job as a news butch and worked on a riverboat going to New Orleans. Once the riverboat got stuck on the sandbar. The captain ordered the passengers into the main salon where he showed pictures and had my grandfather talk, explaining the pictures, to keep the passengers from panicking. He went to New York with the intention of working his way to Europe. He got a job on a cattle ship, but the odor of the cattle was too much for him, so he left the ship before it sailed out of the New York harbor. He returned home in a year or so and entered Bethel College in McKenzie, Tenn. I have a letter he wrote to his mother explaining a fight or "horseplay" he had had with another boy at the rooming house where furniture was broken in the scrimmage. The letter was an attempt to completely exonerate himself from his mother's ire.

He attended Rome Business College in Rome, Georgia. Here he took penmanship under a man by the name of Justine, who was 100 years old at the time and had lived in George Washington's day. My grandfather had the most beautiful handwriting of anyone in Henry County. His older brother was County Court Clerk in the Henry County Courthouse. Daddy Jim was his deputy and the early court books are filled with his beautiful script.

After Rome, he went to the St. Augustine, Florida, area where he taught school for a few years. He was one of the ones who put the first house numbers on houses in St. Augustine. He always referred to his time in Florida as the land of the crocs. He said he used to walk to his school and stop on a bridge to watch the crocodiles crawl to the sun in the sand. In 1901 he married Pearl Sanders, daughter of Henrietta Sanders.

They had four children.

In 1907 he was elected State Senator representing Henry and Carroll Counties. This was during the administration of Malcom Patterson.

He was knowledgeable about the murder of Senator Carmack as it had happened while he was in the Senate.

He admired Senator Carmack greatly.

He was instrumental in helping veterans get confederate pensions, also helping widows get pensions. The Nashville Banner paid him the high compliment of calling him "the hardest working man in the senate."

One of his greatest triumphs was obtaining a pension for a dependent of a renowned black cook who had served in the Confederacy. Long after he left the Senate he continued helping veterans get pensions, earning him the "the friend of the confederate veteran" name.

He entered the real estate business and at one time he owned over thirty rental houses. His wife's uncle, Tom Walker, was a big help to him in getting started.

He was an intimate friend of Senator Carmack, Gov. Patterson, Gov. James Porter, Gov. Tom Rye, and Gov. Cooper.

I remember him as a kind southern gentleman who tipped his hat to all of the ladies, opened doors for all women and he went to the Caldwell Barbershop, located in the Caldwell Hotel, every morning for his daily shave, shoe shine and collection of the news. He was always vitally interested in current events and the growth of the community. (This interest was mentioned in the newspaper published at his death.) Each morning upon rising he put on a fresh white shirt (done at the laundry) and his necktie and suit. He kept his hat on a rack at the front door and as he got outside the front door he placed his hat on his head and was ready for the day. He was proud and kept his pride.

In 1956 he went to Los Angeles, CA to appear on national TV, the show Ralph Edwards' "This is Your Life, honoring his wife." This was his last train ride. He was always supportive of the railroad industry.