

Syrene Cockerham McCoun (1868-1962), Ancestor 11

By her great granddaughter, Linda R. Horton, 19 August 2021



Grandma McCoun, shown at left when she was about 37 years old, is the only one of my eight great grandparents whom my siblings and I had the chance to meet. Born on 2 May 1868, she lived to age 94, dying on 19 October 1962. It was many years before we knew her name as anything other than "Grandma."

She was born Syrene Cockerham in Wolfe County, Kentucky, in the Appalachian foothills, the eldest child and only daughter of James Kash Cockerham and Zerilda Manervia Puckett. She had three younger brothers. At 22, Syrene married Robert Pepper McCoun (1860-1940). During the first 11 years of marriage, Syrene and Rob had seven children, six of whom lived to adulthood. Syrene and Rob owned a farm in a tiny hamlet called Vortex, three miles south of Campton, the county seat. The central role in Syrene's life was farm wife, reigning over a large, close-knit family who revered her. According to her obituary, she had 25 grandchildren, 45 great grandchildren, and one great great grandchild.¹

Visiting Grandma McCoun

Syrene's grandson Raymond Thomas Horton made certain his children visited his grandmother every so often, either at her home outside Winchester, Kentucky where she lived after her husband, Rob, died in 1940 and their farm was sold, or in Winchester after Syrene moved in with one of her children. Like many other Wolfe County families, Raymond's had moved away in the 1930s. Their move was triggered by the untimely death of Raymond's father in 1931.



A family photo below right recorded a visit to Syrene's home in 1947 when Raymond and his wife Marcia's eldest child, Linda, was an infant. From left were Syrene's daughters Hettie McCoun Horton, Ethel McCoun Horton Shuck, Linda, her mother Marcia Bryan Horton, Syrene, and her daughter Wayland. Syrene, then 79, returned the baby's quizzical gaze with a smile. The 1955 photo at left was taken during a visit that included Raymond's youngest daughter, Jean Lee Horton. From left were Ethel; Syrene,



age 87; and Jean. Most visits were during the sun-drenched months in which everyone could sit outside, as was memorialized in these 1947 and 1955 photographs. The visit that Linda remembers most vividly occurred during the last year of Grandma McCoun's life. Her parents had driven their children to visit their great grandmother, then living in Winchester.

Grandma McCoun was lying in a large bed looking even older and tinier than I remembered. It seemed she had sunk into the mattress. Standing in the doorway, I shrank back in teenage awkwardness. Then, when Grandma saw me, she beamed, said my name, and beckoned me to sit on the edge of the bed. Reaching for my one free hand, she clasped it with her two warm ones, pulling me to her. Allowing myself to be pulled down, I was careful not to lose my balance, fearing I could crush her fragile body. Teetering at an angle on the bed's edge, I saw her shining eyes, brighter than ever, and she crinkled into a smile that lit the room.

Grandma McCoun asked what I was studying in school. I was 15 years old and in my second year of high school, taking the honors classes recommended for college-bound students. I recited the names of my classes: English, second-year German, geometry, biology, world history, and chorus. She said, "Well, mah land, I don't know what half those thangs are!" and laughed like she had just told a good joke. I was uncertain how to respond to the laughter, so I just smiled more broadly and continued gazing back.

Grandma McCoun clasped my hand even more tightly and I gently reciprocated, feeling her soft-skinned but bony hand. I broke the gaze by leaning to hover over her in a long embrace, while she clasped me to her. Then I broke loose, patted her arms, said that other people needed a turn visiting, and stood. The experience was *intense*.

Later Marcia explained that Grandma McCoun was just as smart as anyone, but she had never learned to read and write. There were no opportunities for schooling in the mountains when she was a girl. She never had a chance to take any of those high school courses that I was telling her about.

The photo at right shows Grandma McCoun as we remember her, tiny, spry, and smiling. In almost every photo, she was wearing a modest dress with long sleeves and a lace collar, indicating that she was partial to this style.

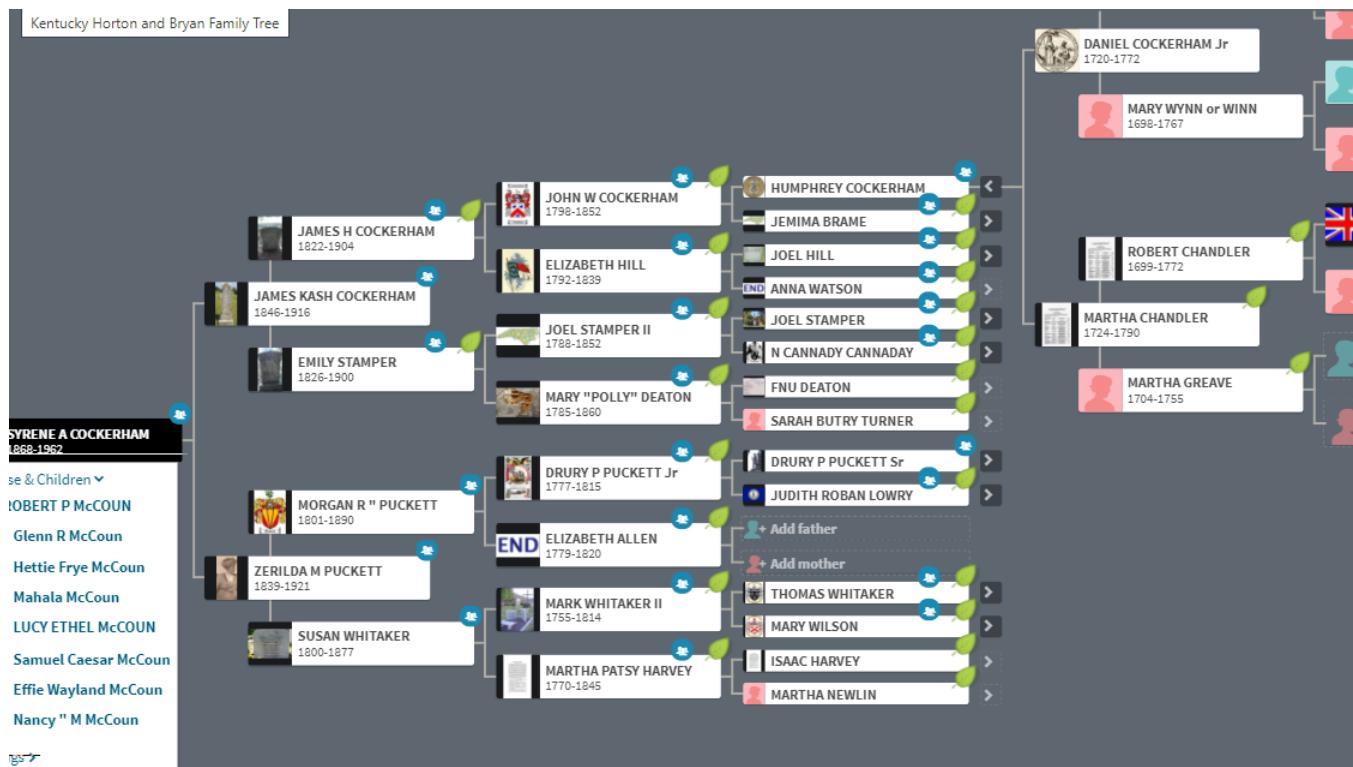
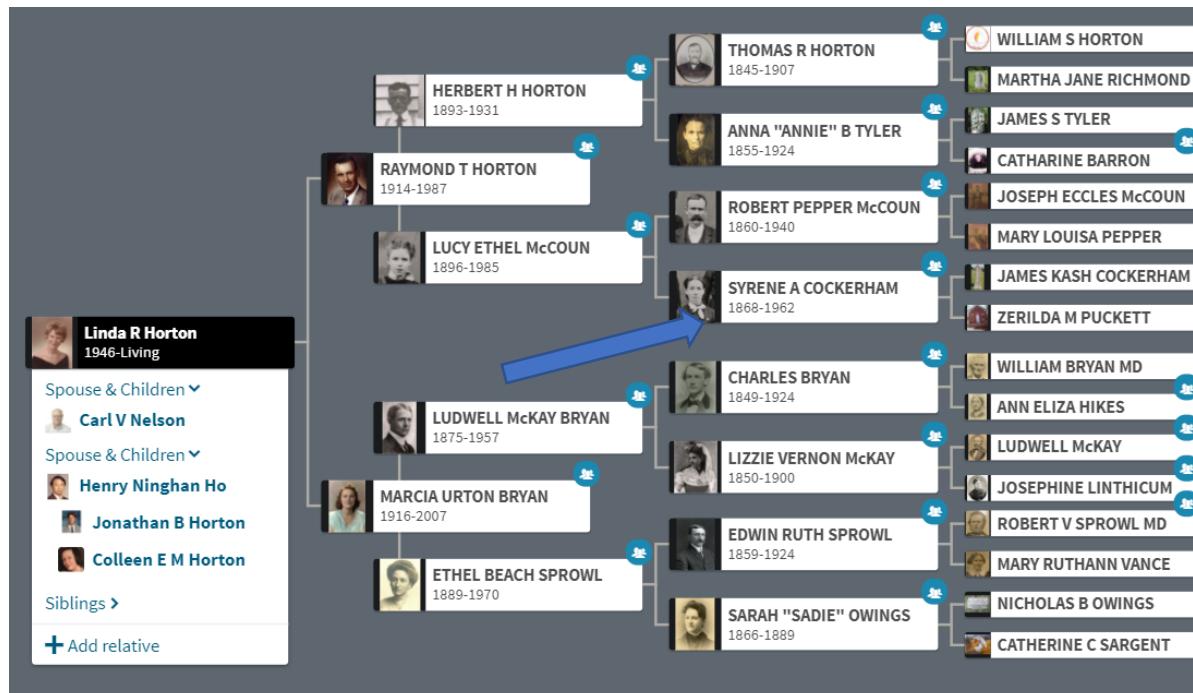
Placing Syrene in our family tree and on a map

Syrene's ancestors reached British colonial America before the American Revolutionary War, settling mostly in Virginia for a few generations before moving westward to Kentucky in the mid-nineteenth century. As nearly as we can tell, Syrene's ethnicity was 100% English. Her ancestry included founding families of Virginia such as the Randolphs and Ishams, making us, through her, cousins of famous Americans such as the third U.S. president, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), who was her third cousin four times removed, and John Marshall, (1755-1835), the "Great Chief



Justice" of the United States Supreme Court, who was her fourth cousin three times removed. A few of her early immigrant ancestors landed in Maryland colony: one was a man named Edward Teague (1659-1697), who also was an ancestor of President Barack Obama on his mother's side, making the former president Syrene's fifth cousin six times removed.

The phrase "Ancestor 11" in the title of this biography refers to Syrene's position on the family tree, also known as an Ahnentafel number. Counting the individual at the left as 1, and Raymond Thomas Horton as person 2, Marcia Bryan as person 3, etc., simple counting indicates that Syrene Cockerham is Ancestor 11 in this pedigree.



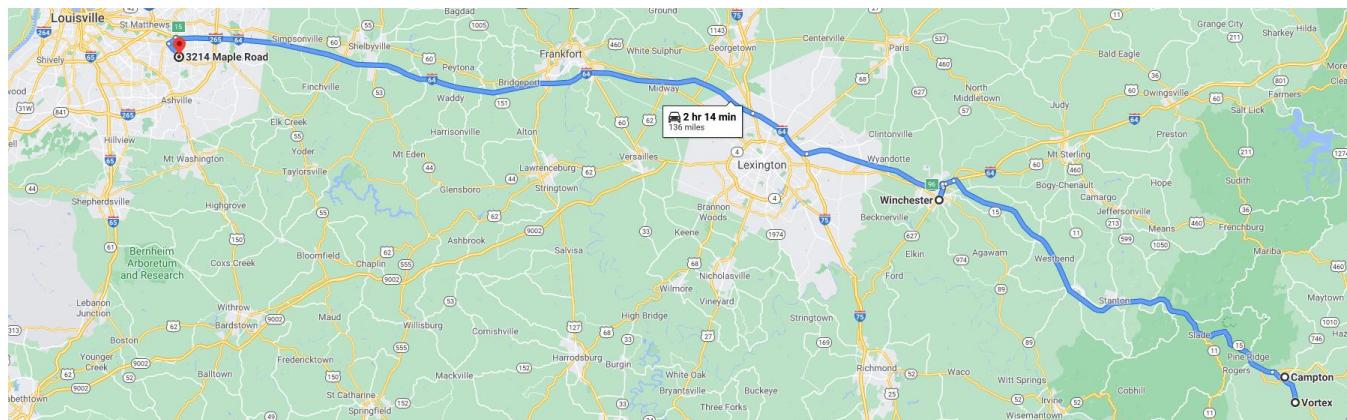


The above map of the United States shows where Kentucky is located, and the map at right indicates the location of Wolfe County, one of the smallest of the state's 120 counties.

The 1880 map² below, made when Syrene was 12 years old, is marked with an arrow for Louisville, a triangle for Winchester, and a star for Wolfe County where Syrene lived all her life, save the last few years near or in Winchester in Clark County.



The map on the next page shows the route today on major highways built in the twentieth century.



Syrene's Early Years

Two years before Syrene was born on 2 May 1868, her parents had been married at a place called Puckett's Bend, the location given in family records. Puckett's Bend cannot be found today on a map, but there is a creek named Puckett's Branch in northwestern Breathitt County near its border with Wolfe County, roughly at the southeastern corner of the 1880 map on the preceding page. Her parents had been born in Kentucky to people whose roots were in North Carolina or Tennessee. The father of James Kash Cockerham had made the 300-mile trip from Wilkes County, North Carolina to Owsley County, where James Kash was born in 1846 and where his young family were counted in the 1850 census. James' bride, Zerilda Manervia Puckett, was born in Floyd County, Kentucky, in the eastern corner of the state. The ninth of 13 children, she and her family moved several times during her childhood. James was 20 and Manervia 27 at the time of their marriage. Compared to most couples then, she and James were getting a late start raising a family. They had a small family for their era, with Syrene and three sons.

According to a grandson, Robert Coldiron McCoun (1928-2019), Syrene was named for a place mentioned in the Bible.³ “Cyrene” means “wall” and was a Greek city on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea in what today is Libya.⁴ During the time of Christ, the city had a large Jewish population. Christians are familiar with this place name because a Jewish man from there, Simon of Cyrene, was ordered by Roman soldiers to carry the cross of Jesus to the site of his crucifixion. Some records add to Syrene’s name the middle initial “A.” It is tempting to suggest that Syrene’s middle name was Ann, but no such assumption can be made in a family in which more unusual names were the rule.

Although the Biblical origin of Syrene’s name is an enticing theory, there were at the time of her birth several inspirations a lot closer to home than the Mediterranean city. Three of Syrene’s cousins had similar names. Her mother Manervia had a first cousin named Serena Puckett, born in 1831, and a niece named Serena Miller (born to her sister Matilda Puckett Miller in 1854). James Kash Cockerham’s first cousin Nancy Stamper Congleton named a daughter Cyrena in 1862. All these relatives lived near James and Manervia in Wolfe County. Also, James and Manervia made “Congleton” the middle name of their second son, Archalaus Congleton Cockerham, a mouthful of a name. It is no wonder he went by “A.C.” Neither James’ middle name, Kash, nor his son’s middle name, Congleton, is known to be an ancestral name in our family. But, like the ancestral families bearing the surnames Cockerham, Horton, Puckett, Stamper, and Tyler, the Kash and Congleton families were prominent among the horde of settlers

who, in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, migrated to Kentucky's Appalachian counties.

“Syrene” is one of those names that can be spelled many different ways, as we have seen in the spelling of her cousins’ names. Our Syrene was referred to in the 1870 census as Sarena; in the 1880 census as Sirenay; in the 1900 census as Sarha; in the 1910 and 1930 censuses as Syrena; in the 1920 census as Syreen; and in the 1940 census (and her certificate of death) as Syrene. Her namesake, the only daughter of her eldest son Glenn, spelled her name with a “C,” Cyrenne McCoun (1927-2003), but the 1930 census enumerator spelled the child’s name Cyrene and his 1940 counterpart spelled it Cyrinne.

The 1870 census entry showed Syrene at age two in Wolfe County. For everyone counted in Wolfe County that year, the post office listed was Hazel Green, then the county’s largest town.

21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100

The 1880 census indicated that two of Syrene’s three younger brothers had joined the family. Manervia’s father, Morgan, was living with them. James was working as a house carpenter. .

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100

If any photographs of Syrene were taken when she was a little girl, they have not been located. Above is a photo taken in about 1883 of her three little brothers, Gardner, Harvey, and A.C. Summaries of their colorful lives are included in a biography of James Kash Cockerham.

Gardner spent much of his life in a lunatic asylum; Harvey died of a gunshot wound; and A.C. shot a man, was convicted of unlawful firearm possession, was married several times (and was probably a bigamist), and worked in various places, including Louisville and St. Louis, Missouri, as a traveling salesman. He worked for a food company and later



sold patent medicines. Among the four children of James and Manervia Cockerham, only Syrene and A.C. have descendants alive today. A review of Kentucky newspapers indicates that the violent events involving Syrene's brothers were not, sad to say, unusual in Wolfe County in the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century.⁵

It was mentioned that Syrene never learned to read and write. When she was a small girl in the 1870s and 1880s, there were no schools anywhere close to her family's farm in Wolfe County. By the time she married, and her children came along in the 1890s, a one-room schools were available, including one in Vortex after Rob and Syrene bought a farm and built a home in that village. All of her six children attended school for a few years and learned to read and write. Only in 1896 when Syrene was 28 years old did Kentucky enact compulsory school attendance laws for children under 14, and the laws were not well-enforced.⁶ The lack of schools was the main reason Syrene never learned to read or write. Her grandson, Robert Coldiron McCoun, told the author that she just never saw any reason to learn to read or write because she always lived with people who could, i.e., her parents, her husband, and their children

Meeting and Marrying Robert Pepper McCoun

Sometime in the 1880s, James and Manervia Cockerham had begun running a boarding house in Wolfe County near the woods where white oak timber was being felled and transported to metropolitan areas for construction. As a young girl, Syrene worked in her parents' boarding house, where she was a big help. One of her responsibilities was serving food to the boarders.

Two family stories tell how Syrene met her husband, Robert Pepper "Rob" McCoun, each ending with the punchline in which he was thinking, the first time he saw her, "That's the girl I'm going to marry!" One how-they-met story, told by Rob's namesake, his grandson Robert Coldiron McCoun, had Syrene working in a general store. There Rob spotted her when he entered to make a purchase, and he thought, "That's the girl I'm going to marry!" The other was told by Robert's father, Glenn McCoun, to the author's mother, Marcia Bryan Horton. This version maintained that Rob and his father Joe were living in Syrene's parents' boarding house while running a lumber company during the heyday of the Kentucky timber industry. This would have been in the late 1880s. Tiny, energetic Syrene was serving food to Rob and the other boarders. She was so short she was barely able to see over the table to set it⁷ but, for Rob, it was love at first sight. He thought, "That's the girl I'm going to marry!" And he said this even though he had a girlfriend he had met back home in the Bluegrass before going to Wolfe County. He forgot all about that girl when he saw Syrene.

Whichever story was true, one thing was for certain: from Syrene's standpoint, Rob McCoun was an exotic fellow compared to the local possibilities. He had just returned to Kentucky from Texas, where he had lived several years as a cowboy, participating in several long cattle drives over vast distances. He had been in Texas long enough to learn how to rope cattle and to acquire a Texas "twang" in his speech. Although a Kentuckian like Syrene, Rob was from a part of the State—the lush Bluegrass region—quite different from the tall hills and deep hollers



familiar to her. He probably had more interesting stories than most fellows in Wolfe County. Furthermore, Rob was easy on the eyes, as this photo of him as a young man will attest. Robert Coldiron McCoun said his grandfather's most striking features were his pale blue eyes.

Rob's biography will tell how his life involved several branching points that landed a Bluegrass boy—born to a mother from a wealthy family who founded the Kentucky bourbon industry—first in Texas cattle country, then in Kentucky timber country. The very existence of the hundreds of people who descend from Rob and Syrene depended upon the choices made at these branching points.

Marriage and Children

According to family records, Syrene and Robert were married on 14 February 1891, a day that already had been celebrated for many years as Valentine's Day.⁸ She was 22, and he was 30. They were married in Morgan County, Kentucky, a county adjacent to Wolfe, at the home of her Aunt Mary Jane Cockerham Sebastian and her husband, John Calloway Sebastian. John and his sister Margaret "Peggy" Sebastian Elam were the witnesses. A minister known as Brother Benton performed the ceremony.⁹

The newlyweds lived for a while with her parents. Rob's father Joe McCoun had quit the timber business and had moved back to Mercer County where, in about 1889, he had married a widow named Mary Priscilla Adams Sea who owned a house and farm. After Joe's death in 1997, his widow invited Rob and Syrene and their children to come live with her, promising that she would leave them the Mercer County farm when she died, as she had no children of her own. But Syrene did not want to leave Wolfe County, so Rob instead bought a hilly farm near Vortex in Wolfe County where he lived the rest of his life.¹⁰ The farm was near Devils Creek, an eight-mile tributary that joins the North Fork of the Kentucky River. Rob built a comfortable frame house on the top of one of the highest hills in the area.

Biographical sketches of the seven children of Syrene and Robert are included at the end of this biography. Their birthdates and names were:

1891, 24 November. Glenn Reynolds McCoun.

1892, 12 December. Hettie Frye McCoun.

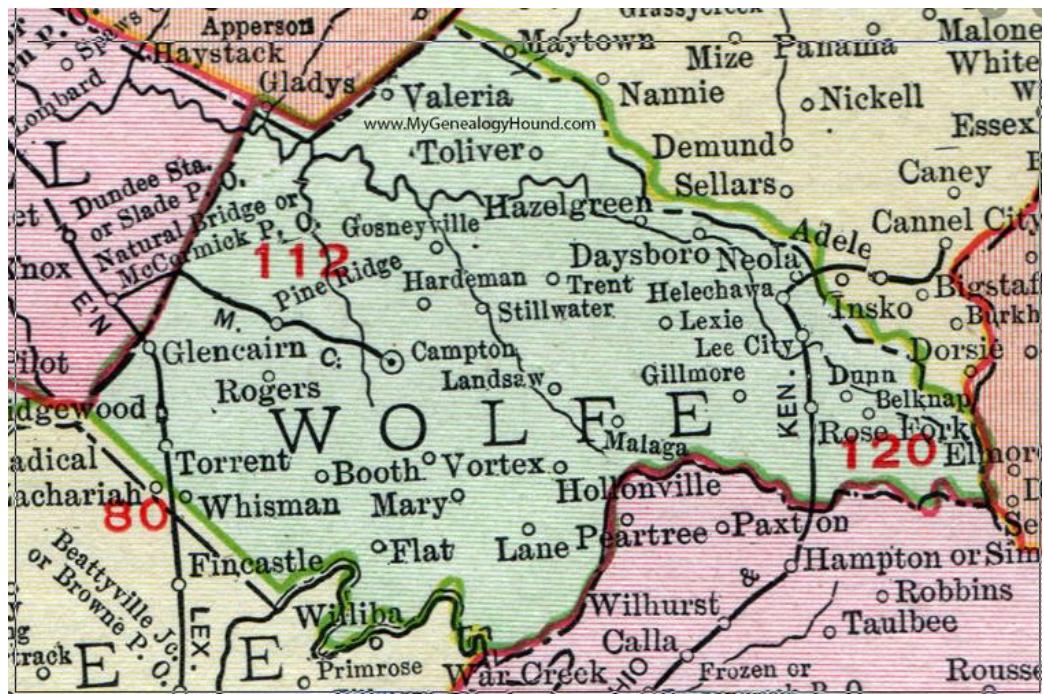
1894, 28 August. Mahalah McCoun (born and died the same day).

1896, 22 September. Lucy Ethel McCoun (she always went by "Ethel," and the children of her son Raymond called her "Effie Shuck").

1898, 6 April. Samuel Caesar McCoun (he always went by "Caesar").

1899, 10 December. Effie Wayland McCoun (she always went by "Wayland").

1901, 29 December. Nancy "Nannie" Mayo McCoun was born, the seventh and youngest child.



Two post offices served the area, one in an older community known as Antioch, named for an early church, and which was renamed Mary by 1911 when the map above was made. The other post office was in Vortex, an equally small community founded on 21 June 1893 and named for a section of Devil's Creek "that would rampage during the rainy seasons and was especially addicted to whirlpools."¹¹ Family members gave Vortex as the address of Robert and Syrene McCoun's farm, but census reports gave Antioch, Wolfe County districts, or Campton as the farm's location.

The Census enumerated on 8 June 1900 listed Robert, age 39, a farmer, and indicated that he could read and write. Neither "Sarha" (Syrene) age 30 nor her brother Harvey living next door could read or write. Syrene and Rob's children were Glenn, age 8; Hettie, age 7; Ethel, age 4; Samuel C, 2; Effie W, 5 months.

10	Cockerham, Robert	Alfred	M m	May 1874	29	M	7
	— Low E	Wife	W F	June 1872	27	M	0
	Bailey Miller, ed.	Hard	M m	Mar 1895	12	A	
4	McCormick, Robert	52-15.	M	May 1861	21	A	
	— John	Wife	W F	May 1874	30	M	7
	— Glen	Son	M m	Nov 1891	3	S	
	— Nettie	Daughter	W F	Dec 1892	1	S	
	— Ethel	Daughter	W F	Sept 1895	4	A	
	— Samuel, Jr.	Son	M m	Apr 1898	2	S	
	— Effie W	Daughter	W F	Jan 1900	5	S	
	Priddy, Cal	Daughter	W F	Oct 1883	17	S	0

Glenn and Hettie had each attended school for three months earlier in the year. Hettie was counted twice in the 1900 census. She also was listed not only with her parents but also in the Campton household of her maternal grandparents, James and Manervia Cockerham, where she was probably staying with them to help out at their boarding house.

According to Glenn, reporting his memories to his nephew's wife many years later,¹² [His father Robert Pepper McCoun] set about farming Bluegrass-style, using methods that seemed strange to some of his neighbors. He had his own blacksmith shop and tools to make wagon wheels and other necessities. There were apple trees, grape vines, beehives, and a spacious root cellar to store the vegetable crops in. They worked hard and made a good living.

The family had a professional photograph made in about 1904, shown on the next page. We do not know whether Syrene sewed the children's clothes. She probably did, but they may have been store-bought because, by that time, nearby Campton had several general merchandise stores that sold clothing, according to a 1905 issue of the *Campton Courier*. It. also listed four doctors, one dentist, four lawyers, a bank grocery stores, a grist mill, an oil drilling company, and a company that manufactured saddles, harnesses, and shoes.¹³ In short, Syrene would not have to travel far to buy either ready-to-wear clothes or the fabric and the notions needed to sew the clothing herself. By 1894, the Sears, Roebuck and Company catalogue was offering sewing machines, musical instruments, buggies, and clothing.¹⁴



Clockwise from left were Caesar, Ethel, Rob, Glenn, Syrene, Hettie, Wayland, and Nannie, between her parents. Perhaps the picture was taken by Syrene's brother, Harvey, who at age 20 was described as a photographer, when listed with his parents in the 1900 census. Several of the children inherited Rob's deep-set eyes. The dresses worn by Syrene and her daughters were beautiful. Hettie's dress is styled similarly to her mother's, in terms of the pleats and triangular

decorations, while the two youngest daughters wore nearly identical frilly dresses. Ethel's outfit was less remarkable—and it is unclear whether the two straps down her chest attached to a handbag or to a skirt—but what stands out about her is how beautiful she was. No one could guess that this beautiful child would grow up and turn into the cranky and unhappy old woman her grandchildren knew.

In the 1910 census, enumerated on 25 April, Robert, age 49 and still a farmer, reported that he owned his farm free of mortgage. For Syrena, 41, her occupation was housework while Glenn, 18, was a laborer. Also in the household were Ethel, 14; Caesar, 12; Effie, 10; and Nannie, 8. Everyone in the family except Syrene reported they could read and write.

McCoan R. P.	Head	m w 44 M 19	Tentucky	Tentucky	Tentucky	English	Former
—	Wife	m w 41 M 19	Tentucky	Tentucky	Tentucky	English	Housework
—	Robert	m w 18 S.	Tentucky	Tentucky	Tentucky	English	Laborer
—	Ethel	m w 14 S.	Tentucky	Tentucky	Tentucky	English	None
—	Caesar	m w 12 S	Tentucky	Tentucky	Tentucky	English	None
—	Effie	m w 10 S	Tentucky	Tentucky	Tentucky	English	None
—	Nannie	m w 8 S	Tentucky	Tentucky	Tentucky	English	None

Hettie, age 17, had married Eugene Horton, age 27; in the 1910 census, they were living elsewhere in Wolfe County, next door to her brother-in-law Corsa Horton and two doors from Eugene's widowed mother, Anna Tyler Horton and her three youngest sons (Richmond, Herbert, and Marion). Fourteen-year-old Ethel was listed twice in the 1910 census, for she was shown not only with her parents on the family farm but also in Campton, with her maternal grandparents, James Kash Cockerham, then running a livery stable, and his wife Manervia. On 1 January 1914, Ethel would marry Herbert Hilary Horton, the younger brother of her brother-in-law Eugene Horton, Hettie's husband.



A 1919 photograph portrayed 53-year-old Syrene as the proud matriarch of a growing family. Standing from left: probably William “Bill” Elkins (1900-85), the long-time beau of Wayland McCoun, who sat in front of him, smiling; Herbert Horton, Glenn McCoun, Eugene Horton, and Caesar McCoun. Middle row: Wayland, Ethel McCoun Horton (marked by arrow) holding Glenn, Syrene Cockerham McCoun, Hettie McCoun Horton holding Geneva, and Nannie McCoun. Front: Ethel’s sons Wilson and Raymond and Hettie’s children Eunice and Seldon. Ethel was a beleaguered 22-year-old mother of three boys, still pretty but no longer the little girl in the 1904 photo. Before Ethel’s childbearing was done, she would have two more sons as well as two daughters.

According to Robert Coldiron McCoun, who spent a lot of time with his grandparents, Syrene was the boss of the household. Despite her small stature, she thoroughly hen-pecked his grandfather. Said the younger Robert, “Grandpa was psychologically deaf. Grandma would be screaming, ‘Rob, Rob, Rob,’ and he couldn’t hear her.”¹⁵ Robert also said that it was expected in those days that one of the children would not marry but would continue living with the parents to care for them in their old age. Often this would be the youngest daughter. When Nannie, the youngest child of Rob and Syrene McCoun, got married, the task of caring for aging parents fell to Wayland. And her beau, Bill Elkins, had similar responsibilities, to care for his parents. Grandson Robert believed that Wayland was bitter that the family eldercare responsibilities had devolved to her.

In the 1920 census for Antioch Precinct, enumerated on 19 January, only the two married daughters were missing: the family consisted of Robert, age 59, farmer; Syreen, 42; Glenn, 28, occupation, oil; Caesar, 21, occupation, oil; Wayland, 20; and Nannie, 18.

McCoun Robert P.	Head	WF M 40 9 11	John Konner
— Syreen wife		F W 42 11	John Konner
— Glenn	Son	M W 21 3	John Konner
— Caesar	Son	M W 21 3	John Konner
— Wayland	Daughter	F W 20 8	John Konner
— Nannie	Daughter	F W 18 5	John Konner

Between this census and the 22 April 1930 census, Glenn, Caesar, and Nannie all would marry, as is mentioned in the sketches about their lives at the end of this biography. Still on the family farm in 1930 were Robert, age 69, who continued to farm; Syrena, 52; and Wayland, 28. Next door were Herbert Horton, an oil driller, and his wife, Ethel, Syrene and Rob’s daughter. The Horton children were Raymond, 15; Wilson, 13; Glenn, 11; Leona, 8; Herbert Jr, 5; and Samuel, 2. A seventh child, Virginia, was born in December 1930.

Herbert’s death in July 1931 would result in his widow and children moving away from Wolfe County. Ethel took a job in Louisville as a housekeeper for a recently widowed man named Charles Homer Shuck. Raymond attended Berea Academy and College from 1931-35, then enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps, before he too moved to Louisville, in 1937.¹⁶ Except for his brother Wilson, working on the Mercer County farm of their great uncle, Raymond’s siblings already were in Louisville. The youngest five were living in the Louisville Masonic Widows and Orphans Home. In May 1938, a McCoun family reunion was held at the home of Rob and Syrene McCoun. The six children of Syrene and Rob gathered for a group shot.

Standing were Glenn, Ethel, Nannie, Hettie, Wayland, and Caesar. Rob and Syrene were seated.

The photo below shows the grandchildren of Syrene and Robert at the 1938 reunion. The McCoun parents of the young people in the photo were Glenn (G), Hettie (H), Ethel (E), Samuel (S), and Nannie (N). Someone must have told the children to clasp their hands in front. The effect is adorable. The names of each child (and the first initial of the McCoun parent's first name) were:



In the back row, Joe Horton (H), Mary Alene Horton (H) holding infant Carl B. Strong (N), Glenn Horton (E), Wilson Horton (E), Robert Horton (H), and Raymond Horton (E). Raymond, marked with an arrow, was to become the author's father. Middle row, Anita Strong (N), Margaret Portes Strong (N), Lillian McCoun (S), Cyrenne McCoun (G), Thelma Horton (H), Helen Rose McCoun (S), William Robert Strong (N), and Glenn H. McCoun (G). Front row,



Edsel McCoun (S), Thearon Horton (H), Robert Coldiron McCoun (G) [a source for many family stories], and Fred McCoun (G).

Standing: Ethel McCoun Horton Shuck and Charles Shuck, Mary Alene Horton (H), Carl Strong and wife Nannie, Wayland McCoun, Eugene Horton and wife Hettie, Grace Coldiron McCoun, in hat (wife of Glenn McCoun), Glenn Horton (E), Wilson Horton (E), Emma McCoun (Caesar's wife), Raymond Horton (E), William Strong (N). Middle row seated: Robert and Syrene McCoun. Standing: Thelma Horton (H), Anita Strong (N), Helen Rose McCoun, laughing (S), Cyrenne McCoun behind her (G), Edsel McCoun in hat (S), Margaret Portes Strong in front of Raymond (N), Lillian McCoun (S). Seated on ground, Thearon Horton (H), Robert Coldiron McCoun (G), Glenn Hatchet McCoun (G), and Fred McCoun (G)



Above, standing: Ethel and Charles Shuck, Nannie McCoun Strong, Wayland McCoun, Eugene Horton, Hettie McCoun Horton, Glenn R. McCoun, Raymond Horton behind Caesar McCoun (in hat), William Robert Strong (N), Glenn Horton (E). Middle row seated: Robert and Syrene McCoun. Standing, Thelma Horton in spotted dress (H), Robert Coldiron McCoun (G), Helen Rose McCoun (S), Emma Swango McCoun (Caesar's wife), Thearon Horton (H), Cyrenne McCoun (G), Lillian McCoun (S), Margaret Portes Strong (N). Front row: Anita Strong (N), Mary Alene Horton (H), Wilson Horton (E), Grace Coldiron McCoun (in hat), Robert Horton (H) with Fred McCoun (G) and Glenn Hatchett McCoun (G).

In the second photo on the previous page, several people had moved around. Rob McCoun's cane leaned against his rocker, and because the photo was taken at a different angle than the earlier group shot, we get a better look at what appears to be a shed or greenhouse with a peaked roof. It seems from the photos that the grandchild generation enjoyed this reunion as much as their parents and grandparents. Raymond, Wilson, and Glenn Horton probably weren't as boisterous as the little kids but must have enjoyed the chance to return to Wolfe County and see once again the country and their kin. The three boys' four younger siblings were not at the reunion. The three youngest Horton children (Herb, Sam, and Virginia) had since 1934 been living in the Louisville Masonic Home for Widows and Orphans. Glenn had lived there until he reached adulthood and began working, and Leona to age 15.

At right: Rob and Syrene McCoun at the reunion.

Not quite two years later, the 1940 census was enumerated in Wolfe County on 18 April. As in 1930, only three people were still on the farm: Rob, age 79; Syrene, 72; and Wayland, 40. The census asked about years of education. Rob reported eight years, Syrene zero, and Wayland four.

McCoun, Robert (X)	head	M	W	79	M	No	8	8	Kentucky
—, Syrene	wife	F	W	72	M	No	0	0	Kentucky
—, Wayland	daughter	F	W	40	S	No	4	4	Kentucky

Death of Rob McCoun

Robert Pepper McCoun died at home later that year, on 25 September 1940. He was 80 years old, and the cause of death was cardiac dropsy (edema) due to chronic myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle). He had been to see the attending physician, Dr. Taylor Center, 15 days earlier. The informant on the death certificate was his daughter, Hettie Horton,



then living in Winchester. Rob was buried in the Evans Cemetery in Campton, where Syrene would join him 22 years later.

Everyday Life Based on Contemporary Accounts

The preparation of this biography was aided by family photographs of Syrene and her husband and children. We also have memories from family members who knew her. Furthermore, she lived in the 1850-1940 era for which detailed U.S. census records are available.

The picture that emerges of Syrene's life is that of a woman invested in her responsibilities as a farm wife and as the matriarch of a large, close-knit family. Contemporary accounts can help fill out what we know about her, and the endnote accompanying this paragraph lists several sources that contained useful descriptions of what life was like in Wolfe County during Syrene's lifetime.¹⁷ The sources help us see how people on small farms produced for their own consumption and for sale. To the extent possible, farmers sought to produce the meat, dairy products and vegetables needed to sustain life along with enough of a surplus in something they produced to bring in cash to purchase products they could not themselves produce. During the long period in the United States in which most heads of families reported their occupation as farmer, this is what people did. They raised what they needed to provide for their families along with a line of work that brought in cash. We know that Syrene and her daughter Wayland for many years produced cream and eggs for sale.



Above, in about 1947, family members gathered at the home of Syrene, not shown in this photo. At left was Samuel Horton, son of Ethel, who then was a student at Berea College and later would graduate from the University of Kentucky with a degree in engineering. Next to him were

the four McCoun sisters—Nannie, Hettie, Ethel, and Wayland. In front of Ethel was her granddaughter Beverly Schumaker (daughter of Ethel's daughter Leona), who lived with Ethel until marriage. In front of Wayland McCoun was her nephew Carl Buel Strong (Nannie's son). To the right of Wayland were Charles Shuck, Ethel's beautiful daughter Virginia, and Hettie's husband, Eugene Horton.

After the death of Rob McCoun in 1940, Glenn began immediately to press Syrene and Wayland to leave the farm and move in with him, according to Robert Coldiron McCoun, who was 12 when his grandfather died. Glenn, his wife Grace, and their four children had moved to Winchester in 1936, seeking better schools. The date can be pinpointed because their son Robert remembered that he was entering third grade and could barely read. He had dyslexia, but no one at that time knew anything about this learning disability. Nannie and her family lived there, too, and later Nannie helped take care of her mother.

After Rob's death, Syrene agreed that the farm should be sold but she and Wayland were not ready to move in with Glenn or Nannie. Instead, they moved to a smaller house with a few acres a few miles from Winchester. The house in the photo at right may have been the home Syrene and Wayland shared for several years.

To bring in money, they kept cows and chickens, to produce cream and eggs for sale. They sold large cans of cream for three or four dollars each, according to Glenn's son,

Robert. Glenn told Marcia Horton that, although his mother had never learned to read or write, she had no trouble figuring out how much people owed her for eggs or cream.¹⁸ Glenn, his wife Grace, and their children drove to their place every weekend and always bought cream. The whole thing made no sense, their son Robert said, because cream was readily available in Winchester stores. His parents were supporting Syrene's belief that she was earning a living and thus could live independently. Robert recalled that his grandmother's hands were always red, rough, and calloused from all the milking. Her hands must have healed once she gave up the milking: great granddaughter Linda's last memory of Syrene was that her hands, though bony, were extraordinarily soft skinned.



Final Years

Syrene's caregiver daughter, Wayland, died in Winchester of "sarcoma liver" on 23 March 1951 at age 51. This is a young age compared to the lifespans of her long-lived parents and siblings: Syrene lived to 94, Rob to 80, Glenn 93, Hettie 94, Ethel 88, Caesar 90, and Nannie 80.

Wayland's nephew Robert

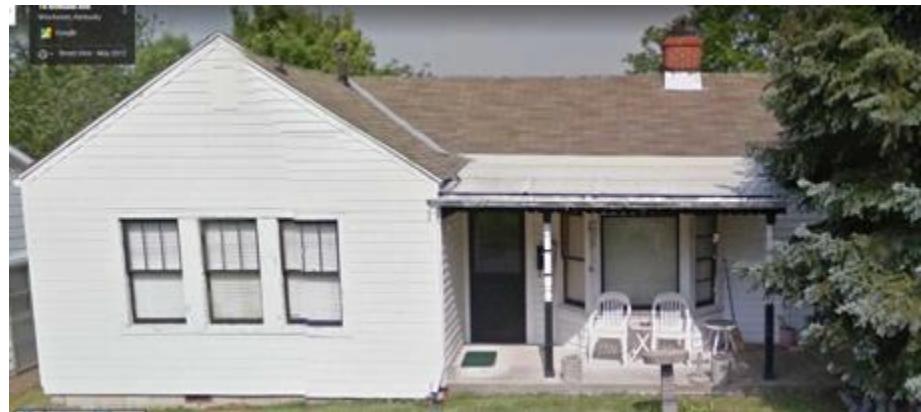
Figure 1 Syrene McCoun's home at time of death.

McCoun—who lived almost to his 91st birthday—believed that Wayland’s illness and early death were brought on by bitterness and stress. At age 88, Robert, a writer, told Linda Horton that he was thinking of writing a story about his aunt and entitle it “Wailin’ Wayland.” The story would focus on her unrequited love of Bill Elkins and her feeling of entrapment in the role of caregiver. Sometime after Wayland’s death, Syrene moved from the home on a few acres near Winchester into her son Glenn’s house. The exact date of her move is not known but it likely was between 1954 and 1962. The 1954 photo on the first page of this biography, with 86-year-old Syrene, her daughter Ethel, and her great granddaughter Jean Horton, appears to have been taken at Syrene’s home outside Winchester. The 1959 photo above was probably taken in Syrene’s last home in Winchester. Syrene, age 91, had a visit from her great granddaughter Sharon Compton, age 3. Sharon was Hettie’s granddaughter. (Photo courtesy of Sharon’s son, Neil Cate.)

On 19 October 1962, Syrene Cockerham McCoun died at the home of her son Glenn and daughter-in-law Grace McCoun in Winchester, Kentucky. According to the death certificate,¹⁹ the cause of death was myocardial infarction (heart attack) due to atherosclerosis.

Her obituary was published in the 21 October 1962 *Lexington Herald-Leader*:

Mrs. Syrene C. McCoun
WINCHESTER, Oct. 20—
Mrs. Syrene Cockerham
McCoun, 94, widow of R.P.
McCoun, died at 2 p.m. Friday
at her home, 16 Rowland
Avenue, after a long illness. A
native of Wolfe County, she was a member of the Dunaway Methodist Church.



Survivors include two sons, Glenn McCoun, Winchester, and [Caesar] McCoun, [Jackson]; three daughters, Mrs. Hettie Horton, Carlisle, Ohio; Mrs. Ethel Shuck, Louisville, and Mrs. Nancy Strong, Winchester; 25 grandchildren, 45 great-grandchildren, and a great-great-granddaughter.

Services will be conducted at 11 a.m. Monday at the Dunaway Methodist Church by the Rev. Ronald A. Houk. Burial will be at 1 p.m. in Evans Cemetery. The body is at the Scobee Funeral Home.

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Mrs. Syrene C. McCoun
WINCHESTER, Oct. 20—Mrs. Syrene Cockerham McCoun, 94, widow of R. P. McCoun, died at 2 p.m. Friday at her home, 16 Rowland Avenue, after a long illness. A native of Wolfe County, she was a member of the Dunaway Methodist Church.

Survivors include two sons, Glenn McCoun, Winchester, and Ceaser McCoun, Jason; three daughters, Mrs. Hettie Horton, Carlisle, Ohio; Mrs. Ethel Shuck, Louisville, and Mrs. Nancy Strong, Winchester; 25 grandchildren, 45 great-grandchildren and a great-great-granddaughter.

Services will be conducted at 11 a.m. Monday at the Dunaway Methodist Church by the Rev. Ronald A. Houk. Burial will be at 1 p.m. in Evans Cemetery. The body is at the Scobee Funeral Home.

FORM V.S. NO. 3-A REV. 1-58 FEDERAL SECURITY AGENCY U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE NATIONAL OFFICE VITAL STATISTICS		COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS CERTIFICATE OF DEATH		FILE NO. 116 62 24536
				REGISTRAR'S NO. 122-
		Registration District No. 320 Primary Registration District No. 2120		
a. PLACE OF DEATH a. COUNTY Clark		b. USUAL RESIDENCE b. COUNTY Clark		
b. CITY (If outside corporate limits, write RURAL and give township) OR Winchester		c. LENGTH OF STAY (in this place)		
c. CITY OR TOWN OR Winchester		d. STREET ADDRESS 16 Rowland Ave		IS RESIDENCE ON A FARM <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
d. FULL NAME OF PERSON INSTITUTION 16 Rowland Ave		e. (Last) 16 Rowland Ave		IS RESIDENCE INSIDE CITY LIMITS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
3. NAME OF DECEASED (Type or Print) Syrene Cockerham		b. (Middle) Mc Coun		4. DATE OF DEATH (Month) (Day) (Year) 10 19 62
5. SEX female		6. COLOR OR RACE white		7. MARRIED, NEVER MARRIED, WIDOWED, DIVORCED (Specify) widowed
8. DATE OF BIRTH May 2, 1868		9. AGE (In years last birthday) 94		10. BIRTHPLACE (State or foreign country) Wolfe Co., Ky.
11. MOTHER'S NAME James K. Cockerham		12. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY? U.S.A.		13. FATHER'S NAME
14. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME Minerva Puckett		15. WAS DECEASED IN U.S. ARMED FORCES? (Name, No. or unknown) no		16. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. none
17. INFORMANT Mrs. Glenn McCoun		18. CAUSE OF DEATH PART I. DEATH WAS CAUSED BY IMMEDIATE CAUSE (a) 4201 Condition, if any, which caused or above cause (a) stating the under- lying cause (b) DUE TO (b)		MEDICAL CERTIFICATION Myocardial infarction Rheumatic heart disease DUE TO (c)
19. WAS AUTOPSY PERFORMED YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		20. ACCIDENT SUICIDE HOMICIDE		INTERVAL BETWEEN DEATH AND AUTOPSY few hours
21b. TIME OF INJURY a. m. b. m. c. p. m.		21c. PLACE OF INJURY (e.g., in or about home, farm, factory, street, office bldg., etc.)		21d. DESCRIBE HOW INJURY OCCURRED (Enter nature of injury in Part I or Part II of Item 18.)
21e. CITY, TOWN, OR LOCATION Wolfe Co., Kentucky		21f. COUNTY STATE		
22. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from 10-19, 1962, to 10-19, 1962, that I last saw the deceased alive on 10-19, 1962, and that death occurred at 2:00 p.m., from the causes and on the date stated above.		23. DATE SIGNED 10-23-62		24. SIGNATURE Eugene L. Shadburn, M.D.
24b. BURIAL, CREMA- TION, REMOVAL (Specify) Burial		24c. DATE 10-22-62		24d. LOCATION (City, town, or county) (State) Wolfe Co., Kentucky
25a. DATE RECEIVED BY 10-31-62		25b. REGISTRATION NO. 10-31-62		25c. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY Evans Cemetery
25d. FUNERAL DIRECTOR Scobee Funeral Home		25e. ADDRESS Winchester, Ky.		

002088 (24)

To modern eyes, Syrene's choice of clothing look old-fashioned, and her wife-and-mother lifestyle is no longer what predominates among women today. Even with the complete lack of schools available to her as a child, it is surprising that she didn't somehow manage to learn to read and write.

Without question, however, Syrene Cockerham McCoun made her mark in the world through the love she gave her family and the large number of descendants who trace their ancestry to her and Rob McCoun.

Vortex in the News: Attention to the Problems of Appalachia

In the 1960s, the place name “Appalachia” became synonymous with poverty and despair. Just six years after Syrene died, Senator Robert F. Kennedy traveled through Eastern Kentucky and on 13 February 1968 chaired a U.S. Senate hearing in the old schoolhouse in Vortex that had been attended by Syrene’s children. Kennedy was a month away from announcing his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination, a bid tragically cut short by an assassin’s bullet four months after the Kentucky trip.²⁰

Tour Sites: 1968 and 2004



Vortex, KY



Vortex School circa 1968



Vortex School Site 2004



RFK with Larry & Martha Hampton at Vortex School



Mary Cox & Family in Vortex School

In Vortex, the first of eight communities he visited, Senator Kennedy heard the testimony of local people, and a transcript of the hearing is available online.²¹ The testimony described the poverty and desolation of the area, the lack of jobs, the dependence on government programs, and the challenges of getting enough to eat and paying for high school students’ books. Although the Rob McCoun family never experienced the hardships described at the hearing, the kinds of food people ate, living right where Syrene had spent much of her life, might have relevance to our understanding of life in times past.

In the excerpt from the Senate hearing that follows, the questions were asked by Senator Kennedy and the answers were given by a witness, an individual from the Vortex area.²² By including the transcriptions of what people said, we give voice to Syrene’s former neighbors.

When reading this, we must keep in mind that the correct eastern Kentucky pronunciation of "Well," often used to begin a sentence, was "way-all." Anyone who knew Syrene's daughter, Ethel, will recognize this speech pattern.

The next witness is MRS., VIOLA HOLLAND,
Vortex, Wolfe County, Kentucky.

Q.1 Would you tell us what you are doing, what you are working on?

A Well, I'm a housewife and I have been working with the Appalachian Volunteers for the last three years, and the Community Action, working with the School Superintendent of Wolfe County, trying to improve our schools here in this one community in particular. I have been helping them, and I have also been working with the Grass Roots Program for the last year, and there's a lot of improvements that can be made in all of it. We have had the full cooperation of our School Superintendent in Wolfe County but there's a lot that we can't do. We need transportation up these hollers for our children; we need roads and we need them bad. If we can get roads up these hollers then we'll have ways to get our children out and get them to school.

Q.2 Are all the children going to school in these hollows?

A Yes, all that can.

Q.3 Is it so difficult to get out of the hollows that they don't go to school?

A Well, you can't get in them. I've got two in school.

Q.10 Is the diet -- or would you tell us a little about what the diet is, what kind of food you have?

A Well, I don't buy too much food. We usually raise what we eat on the farm and I fed — well, I raised my family on beans and potatoes and milk and which I also have all my own, and vegetables out of my own garden. If I had to go to the store and buy all of the groceries for my family even the Social Security benefits that I draw wouldn't nothing like run us a month, and half -- a lot of other people lives without -- not half as much income as I've got, I don't see how they do it, right in this own county.

Q.11 How do they get their food, the other people?

A Well, they mostly raise it, and what little money that they get hold of, we work here in this county for four and five and six dollars a day, and we take that money and we try to keep our children in school, with what we make, and we try to make our own vegetables, our own eats; we grow our own hogs and have our own cows, and we make our own vegetables, so you don't have to go to the store for too much. If we did we just couldn't live at it, and that's the way it has been for the last forty-six years that I know of.

Q.12 What do the meals for your children consist of, as a typical meal, for your children in this area?

A Well, I usually -- once in a while I'll buy extras but it's very seldom that I'll buy extras. We feed our children in this country beans and potatoes and meat and milk and corn bread; biscuits and gravy for breakfast, or eggs -- we have our own chickens.

Q.13 Gee, it sounds very good!

...

The next witness is MRS. NANCY COLE,
BARWICK, BREATHITT COUNTY, KENTUCKY.

Q.1 Would you tell us where you live?

A I live at Barwick, Kentucky, born and raised there. I'm the mother of eight children and I married a miner the first time I was married and my husband was burned up in the mines. I was left with five children and then four years later I remarried and me and my husband just couldn't make it after a few years, so we separated. I had three more; that made me eight. I've raised these children by myself. I got on Welfare.

Q.2 Will you talk louder?

A I was on Welfare. The first part of the month we have good meals, up until about two weeks of the month, than the rest of the month we lived on beans and bread; gravy and bread for breakfast; sometimes by the last of the month we didn't have bread in our family. We didn't get enough Welfare, so life has been hard and I think that our government should do something to help the poor people to have enough food to eat so there wouldn't be no health problems. I think that this is one thing we need, and also we need industry in here for our boys to work at. I have raised five boys and they none have ever had a job in Breathitt County. One of them did, on the "Happy Pappy" Program, and stayed a while, but none of the others has a job; has ever had one in the county. They have had to leave. I have three boys now in Chicago. I have two at Barwick and they have families.

"Happy Pappy" was a local nickname for government jobs programs such as the Works Progress Administration. Concerning her two sons who still lived in Barwick, Mrs. Cole continued:²³

A One is twenty-seven and the other is twenty-five.

Q.4 And they have never had a job?

A They don't have a job and never have had one in the county.

Q.5 You say that under the Welfare system you weren't receiving -- didn't have enough money to provide the food?

A No, I didn't, because you have to buy your books for the children to go to school; you have to buy their clothes; you have to pay their hot lunch bill; you've got your electric bill to pay: you've got all these things to pay and you live off \$112.00 a month for the children, how can you have anything left?

Q.6 What do you think is the most necessary thing?

A I think there should be industry put in here for the people to work at so they can support their families; people that are able to work, let them work. The people here are not sorry if they have something to work at.

Mrs. Betty Terrill of Vortex, a mother of six, testified that her husband worked for \$3 per day but "there's no farm work going on now," so he had no earnings. The family's total income was \$69 per month.²⁴

Senator Kennedy and Mrs. Terrill continued their dialogue:

Q.13 What do your children have to eat?

A Well, we have a right smart; we raise our own hogs and have a cow and we always raise a garden.

Q.14 So you supplement that with the food stamps?

A Yes.

Q.15 How many of the children are in school?

A Five. I've got one in high school.

Q.16 What do you think the greatest problem in this area?

A I think the greatest problem in this area is the high school, having to buy their books, because for the poor people it actually runs into money that a lot of times they can't afford. I mean that's one of the biggest problems. Next year I'll have two in high school. I don't know whether we can make it or not and if we don't they'll have to quit, so I think that's one of the main things.

Q.17 Are there jobs in this area?

A Right now, no, and sometimes you can get work on the farm but that's not steady; I mean just seasonal, you know, but there is no industry.

Below: Senator Kennedy walked with school children in Wolfe County.



Many of the problems detailed at Senator Kennedy's hearings in eastern Kentucky continue unabated today. Subsistence farming on small homesteads is no longer the economically viable lifestyle that it was in Rob and Syrene' McCoun's days. Their descendants have all moved away—some to cities and towns elsewhere in Kentucky, some to Ohio and Michigan, and still others to points farther away.

Syrene Cockerham McCoun (1868-1962): Her Timeline and Descendants

1839. Birth of Syrene's mother, Zerilda Manervia Puckett, in Floyd County, Kentucky, the daughter of Morgan R. Puckett (1801-90) and Susan Whitaker Puckett (1800-77).

1846, 25 June. Birth of Syrene's father, James Kash Cockerham, in Wilkes County, North Carolina, the son of James H. Cockerham (1822-1904) and Emily Stamper (1826-1900).

Before 1850. James' family moved to Breathitt County, Kentucky. Breathitt County had been formed in 1839 from Clay, Estill, and Perry Counties.²⁵

1860, 8 May. Robert Pepper McCoun, Syrene's future husband, was born in Salvisa, Mercer County, Kentucky, the second child of Joseph Eccles McCoun (1825-97) and Mary Louisa Pepper (1834-74).

1860 Wolfe County, Kentucky was formed from portions of Breathitt, Morgan, Owsley, and Powell.

1861-1865, the U.S. Civil War resulted in victory for the Union. (No ancestors fought in the War.)

1865, 14 April. President Lincoln was assassinated in Washington, DC.

1865, 15 April. Lincoln died, and Vice President Andrew Johnson became President.

1866. Syrene's parents were married at Puckett's Bend in Breathitt County, near its border with Wolfe County, Kentucky.

1868, 2 May. Syrene Cockerham was born in Wolfe County, Kentucky.

1870, 12 August. Census in Wolfe County, Hazel Green Post Office: James K Cockerham, 23, farmer; Zarilda, 30, keeping house; Sarena, 2.

1872, May. Benjamin Gardner Cockerham was born, eldest of Syrene's three younger brothers.

1872 Presidential election: Republican Ulysses S. Grant defeated Democrat Thomas Hendricks.

1876, 19 July. Archalaus Congleton "A.C." Cockerham was born, second of Syrene's three brothers.

1876, November. Presidential election: In this controversial election, Republican Rutherford Hayes became President with a narrow victory in the electoral college and fewer popular votes than the Democrat, Samuel Tilden. Hayes was named the winner as a result of a political compromise in which his supporters pledged that, after his inauguration, Federal troops would be withdrawn from the former Confederate states and Reconstruction would end.

1877, 31 March. Reconstruction ended and Federal troops were withdrawn from the Southern states. Many gains made by Blacks were reversed. "Jim Crow laws" were enacted, restricting Blacks' rights.²⁶

1880, 12 June. Census in Precinct 8 of Wolfe County: James K. Cokeram, 33, house carpenter; Zarilda M., 40, keeping house; Sireney, 12, keeping house; Benjamin, 9; Archilas, 3; Morgan Puckett, 78, boarding.

1880, November. Presidential election: Republican James Garfield defeated Democrat Winfield Hancock.

1881, 12 July. Birth of Harvey Scott Cockerham, the youngest of Syrene Cockerham's younger brothers.

1884, November. Presidential election: Democrat Grover Cleveland defeated Republican James Blaine.

1888, November. Presidential election: Republican Benjamin Harrison defeated Democrat Grover Cleveland.

1891, 14 February. Syrene married Robert Pepper McCoun.

1891, 24 November. Glenn Reynolds McCoun was born, the eldest child of Robert and Syrene.

1892, November. Presidential election: Democrat Grover Cleveland defeated Republican Benjamin Harrison.

1892, 12 December. Hettie Frye McCoun was born, the second child of Robert and Syrene.

1893, 21 June. Vortex post office was established near Syrene and Rob's farm.

1894, 28 August. Mahalah McCoun was born and died the same day, the third child.

1896, 22 September. Lucy Ethel McCoun was born, the fourth child of Robert and Syrene.

1896, November. Presidential election: Republican William McKinley defeated Democrat William Jennings Bryan.

1898, 6 April. Samuel Caesar McCoun was born, the fifth child of Robert and Syrene.

1899, 10 December. Effie Wayland McCoun was born, the sixth child of Robert and Syrene.

1900, 8 June. Census for Antioch, Wolfe County: Robert, age 39, farmer, can read and write; Sarha age 30, cannot read or write; Glenn, age 8; Hettie, age 7; Ethel, age 4; Samuel C, 2; Effie W, 5 months.

1900, 1 June. Census for Campton, Wolfe County: James K. Cockerham, 62, hotel landlord; Manervia, 55; Harvey, 20, photographer; Hettie McCoun, granddaughter, 6; Rebeca Peters, servant, 45.

1900, November. Presidential election: Republican William McKinley again defeated Democrat William Jennings Bryan.

1901, 29 December. Nancy “Nannie” Mayo McCoun was born, Syrene and Rob’s youngest child.

1903. Oil drilling began in Wolfe County one mile west of Campton.

1903, 17 December. The Wright brothers successfully flew a plane at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

1904, November. Presidential election: Republican Theodore Roosevelt defeated Democrat Alton Brooks Parker

1908, November. Presidential election: Republican William Taft defeated Democrat William Jennings Bryan.

1910, 25 April. Census for Antioch, Magistral District 8: Robert, age 49, farmer, reported he owned his farm free of mortgage; Syrena, 41, housework; Glenn, 18, laborer; Ethel, 14; Caesar, 12; Effie, 10; Nannie, 8.

1912, November. Presidential election: Democrat Woodrow Wilson defeated Progressive Party candidate Theodore Roosevelt and Republican William Taft in a three-way race.

2016, 30 August. Syrene’s father, James Kash Cockerham, died in Campton at the age of 70. He was buried there in the Evans Cemetery.

1916, November. Presidential election: President Wilson was re-elected, defeating Republican Charles Evans Hughes.

1920, 19 January. Census for Wolfe County, Antioch, Magistral District 8: Robert, age 59, farmer; Syreen, 42; Glen, 28, occupation, oil; Caesar, 21, occupation, oil; Wayland, 20; Nannie, 18.

1920, November. Presidential election: Republican Warren Harding defeated Democrat James Cox.

1921, 30 January. Zerilda Manervia Puckett died in Campton at the age of 82. She was buried there in the Evans Cemetery.

1924, November. Presidential election: Republican Calvin Coolidge defeated Democrat John Davis.

1928, November. Presidential election: Republican Herbert Hoover defeated Democrat Al Smith.

1929, 24 October. The Wall Street stock market crashed and the Great Depression.

1929-1939. The Great Depression

1930, 22 April. Census for Wolfe County, Magistral District 3, Precinct 9, Campton: Robert, age 69, farmer; Syrena, 42; Wayland, 28.

1932, November. Democrat Franklin Roosevelt defeated Herbert Hoover, the first of four terms to which Roosevelt was elected.

1933. Cumberland National Forest was established, including parts of Wolfe County.

1940s. Bluegrass music was developed in eastern Kentucky, a combination of English and Irish folk music influenced by African American and gospel music.

1938, May. A McCoun family reunion was held at the home of Syrene and Rob McCoun.

1940, 18 April. Census for Wolfe County, Magistral District 3, Campton: Robert McCoun, 79, farmer; Syrene, 72; Wayland, 40. No employment was listed for any of them.

1940, 25 September. Robert died in Wolfe County. Cause of death was cardiac dropsy (edema) caused by chronic myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle).

1941, 7 December. Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The United States entered World War II. [For events related to World War II, see **Timeline and Descendants of Raymond Thomas Horton.**]

1951, 23 March. Wayland died of liver cancer at a hospital in Winchester. She was 51.

1948, November. Democratic President Harry Truman defeated Republican Thomas Dewey. Vice President Harry Truman became President following the 1945 death of Franklin Roosevelt.

1952, November. Presidential election: Republican Dwight Eisenhower defeated Democrat Adlai Stevenson.

1956, November. Presidential election: Incumbent President Eisenhower again defeated Stevenson.

1960, November. Presidential election: Democrat John F. Kennedy defeated Republican Vice President Richard Nixon.

19 October 1962 Syrene Cockerham McCoun died at age 94 at the home of her son Glenn and daughter-in-law Grace McCoun, 16 Rowland Avenue in Winchester, Kentucky. Cause of death was myocardial infarction (heart attack) due to atherosclerosis.

22 October 1962. Syrene's remains were buried in the Evans Cemetery in Wolfe County.

The Children of Syrene and Robert McCoun



1. Glenn Reynolds McCoun (1891-1985)
 - Born 24 November 1891 in Wolfe County.
 - Named for Glenn Reynolds, his father's friend in Texas.
 - Was working in Frankfort as a prison guard on 5 June 1917. During this time, introduced himself to Pepper cousins in Frankfort. Became like a son to a childless cousin, Lena Pepper Hatchett, who gave him money to start an oil business.
 - 7 September 1918 to 3 February 1919: served in Army.²⁷
 - 1923 married Grace Dorcas Coldiron, right.
 - 19 June 1924 birth of son Glenn Hatchett McCoun; the younger

Glenn enlisted in Marines and died in 1945 in the Battle of Iwo Jima.

- 22 August 1926 birth of daughter Cyrenne Christopher McCoun, who married Joseph Denton Ledford (1923-2003), lived in Lexington. Had four children. Died 4 January 2003.
- 24 July 1928 birth of son Robert Coldiron McCoun, an actor, singer, public relations professional, writer, international businessman; died in New York City on 6 July 2019. See tribute to him at the end of this biography.
- 9 November 1931 birth of son Fred Corbett McCoun. Was an ordained minister; with first wife Margaret Jane Giltner had three daughters; died on 31 October 2006.
- 1942 draft registration: address, 229 E. Broadway, Winchester; self-employed in oil business in Morgan County, Kentucky; age 50; height, 5 feet 11.5 inches; weight, 140.
- February or March 1945, death of son Glenn Hatchett McCoun in Battle of Iwo Jima.
- Glenn Reynolds McCoun died in Winchester, 18 October 1985 at age 93. Buried in Hazel Green.
- Grace Coldiron McCoun died in Lexington, 27 March 1994, almost 100 years old.



Oct 12, 1919

I have received this day.
fifteen hundred & fifty dollars (\$1550.00)
(Check - T.L. Smith \$1000.00) & (Elizabeth P.
Pepper \$550.00)

Glenn McCoun.

Laura P.S. Pepper papers, 1911-1927

On 12 October 1919, Glenn acknowledged receipt of \$1,550 from three Pepper cousins, half-sisters of Lena Hatchett. See the above photograph, taken by Linda Horton on 20 September 2019 in the University of Kentucky library, after her discovery of this document in the Pepper Family Collection. The receipt does not appear to be a promissory note promising repayment for a loan.

Rather, the money given Glenn is either a gift or an investment. The Peppers may have been investing in Glenn's oil business. This infusion of cash came from the daughters of the man (Robert Perry Pepper) whose failure to fulfill a roads contract led to the financial ruin of Glenn R. McCoun's grandparents, Joseph Eccles McCoun and Mary Louisa Pepper McCoun, as is discussed in their biographies. The cash from the Pepper cousins enabled Glenn not only to start an oil drilling business, but to attain relative financial security.

Without that help when he was a young man, Glenn may have been unable to assist his nephew Raymond Horton, twice: in 1939, Glenn offered Raymond a good job in Campton as manager of McCoun Motors, and in 1940 Glenn posted bail for Raymond when a girl accused him of misconduct. Raymond was acquitted by the jury, met and married Marcia Bryan, and with her had six children including the author.



2. Hettie Frye McCoun (1892-1987)

- Born in Wolfe County 12 December 1892.
- Named for her father's sister, Esther "Hettie" McCoun (1865-1955), who married Thomas Joshua Fry (1854-1930), a stockbroker. The elder Hettie and her husband lived in New Jersey for a while then Los Angeles, California.
- 1900 census, age 7, attending school. Completed five years, according to 1940 census.
- 1910 married Eugene Horton. 1910 census, living with Eugene, a cropper.
- Children:
 - Eunice (1911-99); married Robert Baber; three children
 - Robert (1913-84); married Dorothy Collier; two children.
 - Seldon (1915-72); married Nancy Ferguson; two children.
 - Geneva (1917-2007); married Fred Bradley; two children.
 - Mary Alene (1920-2008); single; worked various jobs; Hettie lived with Mary, c. 1969-87.
 - Joseph Eccles (1922-2018); married Frances Curtis; one child.
 - Thelma Jean (1925-2009); married Leonard Skinner.
 - Thearon (1921-); married Roy Compton; three children.
- 1930 census, living in Clark County, District 5, with Eugene, farmer and seven children.
- 1940 census, living in Winchester, Clark County, with Eugene and four children. About
- 1969, Moved in with single daughter Mary Alene, in Ohio.
- 1 August 1987, died in Franklin, Ohio. Buried in Winchester, Kentucky.



3. Mahalah McCoun (1894-1894)

- Stillborn; born and died in Wolfe County, 28 August 1894.
- Named for Robert's grandmother, Mahalia Perry Pepper (1804-1865).
- Buried in Evans Cemetery in Campton.



4. Lucy Ethel McCoun (1896-1985); always went by “Ethel.”

- Born in Wolfe County 22 September 1896
- Called Syrene “Little Mother.”
- Married Herbert Hilary Horton on 1 January 1914; shown with her at right
- Seven children:
 - Raymond Thomas (1914-87); married Marcia Bryan; six children; also, had fathered a daughter in 1938.
 - Charles Wilson (1916-91); married Corrine Chapman; one daughter
 - Glenn Marvin (1918-84); married Dorothy Fischer; no children.
 - Leona Anerine (1920-2006); married four times, five children.
 - Herbert Jr. (1925-2006); married Eva Eddleman; one son.
 - Samuel Hayward (1927-2004); married Lorraine Lebarre; three children.
 - Virginia Lee (1930-); married John Spratt; three children.
- Herbert died of typhoid fever in Wolfe County, 20 June 1931.
- Moved to Louisville before 1935.
- Married Charles Homer Shuck about 1935.
- Charles Shuck died 25 December 1954; was buried in Harrison County, Kentucky with first wife, who had died in 1935.
- Ethel died 20 April 1985 in Louisville. Buried in Resthaven Cemetery.



5. Samuel Caesar McCoun (1898-1989)

- Born in Wolfe County, Kentucky 6 April 1898
- Married Emma Swango (1906-86), with whom he had five children:
 - Helen Rose (1924-2006); married Calvin Slade; two children.
 - Lillian L (1926-2011); married Cornelius Nantz; one daughter.
 - Lena Clay (1930-1930).
 - Edsel Eccles (1933-2017); married Mary Jean Denton; two children.
 - Jack Swango (1935-36).
- Married Kate Stallard (1909-86) on 2 July 1950.
- Died in Jackson, Breathitt, Kentucky, 25 January 1989.
- The 27 January 1989 Lexington Herald Leader published this obituary:²⁸



Retired businessman S.C. McCoun dies at 90

LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER, LEXINGTON, KY., FRIDAY, JANUARY 27, 1989

S.C. "Caesar" McCoun, a retired Breathitt County oil businessman and car dealer and a former Jackson mayor, died Wednesday at Bourbon Heights nursing home in Paris after a four-year illness. He was 90.

Mc Coun, who began his career in the oil industry as a pumper in Lee County for Southwest Oil Co., started Panbowl Gas Co. in Jackson in 1933 and was its president until 1964, when he sold the company. The business is now called Public Gas Co. McCoun also had been active in oil production in Illinois, Michigan, New Mexico and Western Kentucky.

In 1927 he bought a Jackson Ford dealership, which was expanded to include Dodge and Plymouth vehicles, and ran that company until 1939.

He was Jackson's mayor from 1970 until 1973.



S.C. McCoun

Mc Coun was a member of "the old school," a man who "believed in an honest day's work," said Doug Rose, a member of the board of directors of Citizens Bank & Trust Co. in Jackson. Rose said that McCoun had no qualms about rolling up his sleeves and getting into ditches with his employees.

McCoun, a native of Devil's Creek in Wolfe County, was a member of the Jackson Lions Club and Jackson United Methodist Church. He was a former long-time member of the board of Hazel Green Academy in Wolfe County.

Surviving are a son, Edsel

Surviving are a son, Edsel McCoun of Jackson; two daughters, Helen Slade of Cynthiana and Lillian Nantz of West Carrollton, Ohio; five grandchildren; and two great grandchildren.

Services will be at 1:30 p.m. Saturday at Jackson United Methodist Church. Visitation will be from 3 to 9 p.m. today and from 8 to 10:30 a.m. Saturday at Breathitt Funeral Home in Jackson, and after 11:30 a.m. Saturday at the church.

Ray Morton was always grateful for financial help and "fatherly" advice from Uncle Caesar.

6. Effie Wayland McCoun (1899-1951)

- Born in Wolfe County 10 December 1899.
- Lived with parents her entire life.
- Never married; had a long-time sweetheart, Bill Elkins, who likewise never married because of his responsibilities as his parents' caregiver.
- Died in Winchester of liver cancer on 23 March 1951.



7. Nancy "Nannie" Mayo McCoun (1900-82), above left in 1947, with Hettie, Ethel, and Wayland.

- Born in Wolfe County 29 Dec 1901.
- Married Carl Buell Strong, Sr.
- Four children:
 - William Robert (1924-95).
 - Margaret Porter (1927-); married Robert Steiner. One son.
 - Anita Rae (1931-2013); married James Bennett; one daughter.
 - Carl Buell Jr (1937-).
- Cared for Syrene in her final years.
- Nannie died in Lexington 22 March 1982.

Postscript: A Tribute to My Cousin and Friend, Robert Coldiron McCoun (1928-2019)

Linda Horton, 19 August 2021

Obituary in the Winchester Sun, Tuesday 16 July 2019²⁹
Robert C. McCoun

Robert C. McCoun of New York City, died on July 6, 2019.

A native of Winchester, Kentucky, he was the son of the late Glenn and Grace McCoun; sister, Cyrenne Ledford, and brothers, Glenn H and Fred McCoun. He is survived by one nephew and five nieces.

Bob was a graduate of the University of Kentucky and served in the Army in the 50s. After that, he pursued his dream of acting and singing in New York City, where he lived the rest of

his life. He loved “The City,” the opera, the plays, writing plays, and short stories, but, most of all, he loved his family of friends.

Special thanks to Tony, SuZen, Karen, Delores, Shala, Jason, and so many who shared long friendships with Bob. He will be missed, but he will be long remembered for his delightful sense of humor, generosity of spirit, and joyful camaraderie. He was a dear friend to many.

I am indebted to Robert Coldiron McCoun (1928-2019), my father’s first cousin, for sharing so many memories of his grandparents, and my great grandparents, Syrene Cockerham and Robert Pepper McCoun. As a nine-year old, he was one of the younger grandchildren featured in the 1938 family reunion photographs.

When I first contacted Robert, back in 2013, I had no idea that he would have such a phenomenal memory of people and events so long ago. He could even relate family stories that took place before he was born but that had been told him by family members many decades earlier. The reason I contacted Robert was my interest in his doing YDNA testing so that we could learn more about our McCoun ancestry. YDNA is handed down from father-to-son, and when a male relative does YDNA testing, we both learn a lot about our shared ancestry in that patriline.

Because Robert had lived in the same West Village apartment in New York City for nearly half a century, his contact details had appeared in several city directories that had been digitized by the genealogy website, Ancestry.com. Accordingly, I had his address and phone number and eventually got enough nerve to call him and leave a message on his recording machine. He quickly returned my call, delighted to hear from a cousin. He remembered both my parents, especially my father’s infectious laugh, and he happily accepted my offer to mail him the McCoun Family History that my mother had prepared, as a tribute to my father, not long after my father’s death on 4 July 1987. After giving Robert a chance to read Mom’s compilation, Robert contacted me, and I had a chance to bring up the subject of DNA testing. After receiving my reassurance that I would bear the expense of the testing and help him understand the results, he was happy to oblige.

Robert’s YDNA testing results are interesting, and they will be discussed as part of a biography of his grandfather, Robert Pepper McCoun, who shared with Robert the same YDNA haplogroup. For now, I will just say that both Roberts are part of a haplogroup known as R-M 222 consisting of males with predominantly Irish and Scottish ancestry who are thought to descend from an Irish warlord by the name of Niall of the Nine Hostages. When I visited cousin Robert not long after receiving the results, Robert was amused and pleased to hear that he might have such an interesting patrilineal pedigree.

In the years between our first contact in 2013 and cousin Robert’s death on 6 July 2019 a few days before his 91st birthday, I had the chance to visit Robert four times. During two of the visits, I was accompanied by my daughter Colleen. During the last visit, in February 2019, I was accompanied not only by Colleen but also her son, my grandson Craig Swink. Craig was at the



time a senior at the Interlochen Academy for the Arts. A clarinetist, Craig was among the Interlochen music students in the Academy Band who had been invited to play at Carnegie Hall.

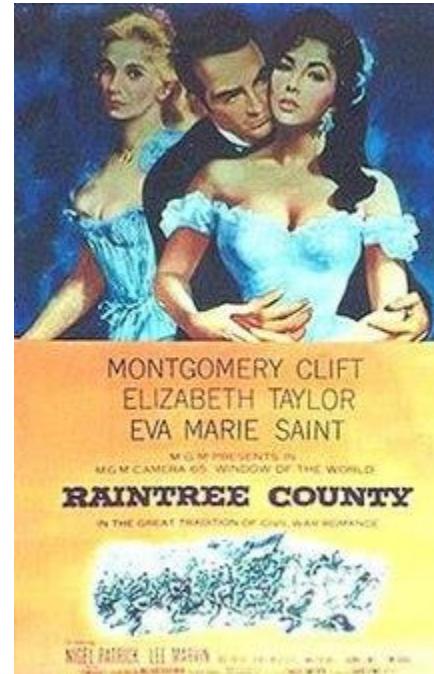
Robert's path to New York City was as interesting as the man himself. Born in Campton, Robert and his family had moved to Winchester so that the children would have access to better schools. As discussed earlier, Robert was a particular concern. He was entering third grade but could barely read. He told me he surely had dyslexia, but no one in the 1930s understood learning disabilities. Perhaps because of his difficulty with reading, Robert developed excellent listening skills. He was uninterested in sports and liked spending time with adults, hearing their stories. So it was that Robert, as a child, spent a lot of time listening to his parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins so that, as an elderly man, he had a large collection of stories to share. Like me, he had a keen interest in family history and gave me several "assignments" to do some research, as discussed at the end of this tribute.



A life-changing event came in 1955-56 when casting agents for the movie *Raintree County* visited Kentucky to hold auditions for a movie meant to be "the next *Gone with the Wind*." Several scenes of the movie were to be filmed at various locations in Kentucky. Already lined up for the leading roles were Montgomery Clift, Elizabeth Taylor, Eva Marie Saint, and Lee Marvin. Cousin Robert auditioned and was offered a part in the movie as a soldier.

Cousin Robert shared a lot of information about *Raintree County*, including the hype that preceded its release, the disappointment that the movie never lived up to the original expectations, and the many problems during its production including Montgomery Clift's horrendous California car accident that delayed shooting and disfigured him. The accident doomed Clift's career as a leading man

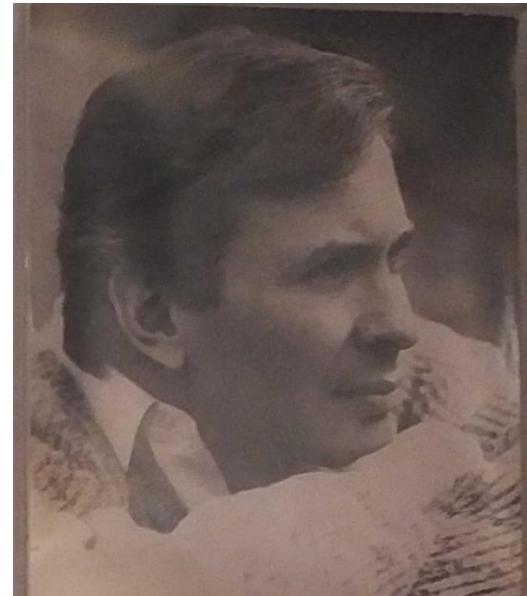
Over time, Robert overcame his difficulties with reading and writing and, by the time I knew him, described himself as a writer, among many other things. After high school, he lived at home for two years while attending Kentucky Wesleyan College, which at the time was located in Winchester,³⁰ then transferred to the University of Kentucky (UK) in Lexington, where he was a member of the Kappa Alpha fraternity. The photo above is from his sophomore year at Wesleyan and the one at left was in the 1950 UK yearbook. In that year he graduated from UK and went into the Army for the next two years. After the Army, he returned to Kentucky, where his father tried to interest him in his oil business.





and left him depressed and in chronic pain. Robert did not mention a romantic relationship between himself and other cast members, a point to which I will return.

Robert talked about how wonderful and beloved Elizabeth Taylor was as a person, and how despicably snooty and unpleasant Eva Marie Saint had been. After filming stopped, the movie was more than three hours long, and the story line didn't hang together. Additional scenes had to be filmed and spliced in to achieve story continuity, and then huge cuts had to be made to bring the resulting movie to a commercially acceptable length. These cuts eliminated from the final version both Robert's one line and all the scenes in which his character appeared. Robert said there is a scene in the film in which you can see the top of his head, and that was all. Robert's father Glenn continued to argue for Robert to take over his oil business, but Robert wanted instead to move to New York City to pursue his dream of being an actor and singer. The photos and portraits show how handsome Robert was in those years.



Robert did eventually get involved in the oil business, during the last 30 years of his life, but in Indonesia and in collaboration with a female business partner there. He also for a while in the late 1970s had a senior public relations position for a company just north of the City. So business was not an alien concept to Robert.

But Robert was, first and foremost, an artist, and a multifaceted one at that. Robert was an early member of the Westbeth artists community,³¹ a three-building residential and arts complex in the West Village of Manhattan. The building had once housed the General Electric company, and at that time the subway ran right through it!

In the photo at right, Robert pointed to his apartment, which was directly below where the trains used to run. He lived in that apartment from the Westbeth's founding in 1970 until he passed away in 2019.

Because Robert was a writer, as of 13 June 2021 he still was listed on the Westbeth website as a literary artist.³² Robert also was a talented visual artist. He crafted the butterflies that sat on his piano, as shown above. After Robert died, his executor sent me one of Robert's creations, a beautiful blue butterfly.



Robert provided Linda with the names of the movies³³ in which he had a part, but he cautioned that his performances were uncredited and that his scenes always “ended up on the cutting room floor”:

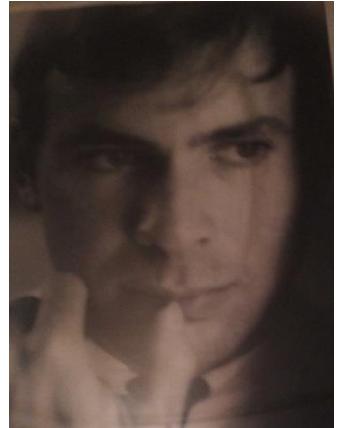
- Raintree County, 1957
- Butterfield 8, 1960
- Reflections in a Golden Eye, 1967



Elizabeth Taylor starred in all three of these movies, and Robert said that his friendship with the movie producer Hank Moonjean (who had been brought in as a director to straighten out some of the problems with *Raintree County*) was helpful in obtaining movie parts. Robert mentioned Moonjean to Linda when, on 22 October 2016, she invited him to accompany her and Colleen to a Broadway performance of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.³⁴ Robert and Colleen are shown at the theater. Robert mentioned that Hank Moonjean had been a producer of the critically acclaimed 1988 film, *Dangerous Liaisons* which, like the play was based on the 1782 French novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.³⁵

In his early years living in New York City, Robert also acted in several plays, some of them musicals. One of his voice teachers pronounced Robert's tenor voice one of the best he had heard. However, Robert could not land parts in which he would need to sing a solo, because he never acquired the ability to start a song on the right note without its being first played for him.

Before turning to Robert's interesting research assignments to me, I wish to briefly discuss the question of his sexuality. Because *Raintree County* was filmed in Kentucky, and the 1957 world premiere of the film was in Louisville, I had read about the movie as a child. When I learned a few years later that a cousin had a part in this famous movie, I got excited and said I wanted to meet him. I was puzzled, however, by the whispered information that, "Cousin Bob McCoun had an affair with Montgomery Clift." At the time I had not heard of homosexuality or bisexuality, so I could not make sense of the information that a male relative had an affair with another man. But I did sense the implication that there was something shameful about the described relationship, so I didn't ask further questions. Instead, I tucked the information away in my memory and never discussed the matter with anyone. For better or worse, I didn't bring up the matter with cousin Robert after we became friends. I figured that his romantic life was his private business and, if he had something to tell me, he would. I did not care one way or another if Robert were homosexual or bisexual, because that would not affect our kinship or friendship. The photo above of Robert.



For the record, Robert never volunteered to me any information about whether it was true that he and Montgomery Clift had an affair. It seems possible: Clift was known to have numerous affairs with men and women.³⁶ Robert instead talked to me about the tragedy of Clift's car accident in California during the filming of *Raintree County*, and the devastating impact Clift's injuries had on the marquee idol's quality of life and acting career. About himself, in other conversations cousin Robert described himself as bisexual, having had serious, serially monogamous long-term relationships over the years, some with men and some with women. He told me that "it [sex] just never was that important to me."³⁷ Because I believe that Robert was open and unashamed about his romantic life, I include what he told me in the interest of completeness.

My last visit to Robert was in February 2019, and with me were my daughter, Colleen Horton, and her son, Craig Swink, then 18. Craig, a clarinetist, was in New York City with other musicians who were members of the Interlochen Academy for the Arts Band. They performed a concert at Carnegie Hall. When we visited Robert, he suggested we take a selfie of all four of us standing in front of a wall hanging entitled "Generations." Robert suggested this artwork was particularly appropriate for our four-generation family gathering. It is a white-on-white circular version of a family tree in which the artist (a Westbeth colleague) had sewn hundreds of tiny threads to represent each individual in a huge family. In a previous visit, Robert had told me that he was writing a document that would complement his Will and would instruct his executor to send me the Generations wall hanging after he passed away. He later called me when I was back in Maryland to make certain he had my correct address. But unfortunately, Robert's wish that I receive the Generations wall hanging was not respected. By the time I learned that Robert had passed away, the



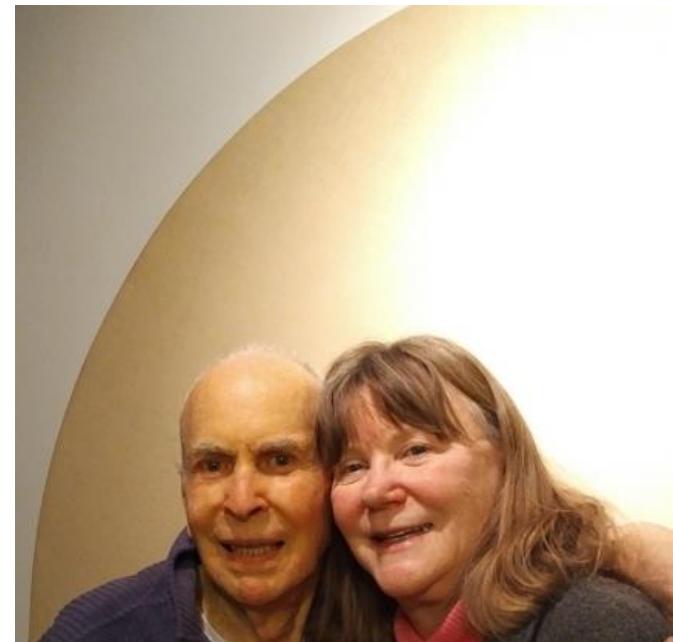
executor had given the artwork back to the artist who created it. This was a pity, but I didn't fight to be sent the wall hanging Robert meant me to have, in large part because I already have several family treasures that will need to find homes. At least I have the photos and memories.

Turning to family history, Robert gave me several assignments.

1. **Pepper/Culpepper connection:** One assignment was to determine whether our shared Pepper descendants might once have been surnamed Culpepper. I had heard this story also but have so far been unable to substantiate it. As happens so many times to family history researchers, I was foiled by poor recordkeeping in colonial Virginia.

2. **Richmond Surname:** Another family legend that Robert asked me to research was to whether it was true that our shared ancestors with the surname Richmond had originally had another surname but were allowed to use the surname "Richmond" either because of service rendered to one of the Dukes of Richmond or as loyalists to the British crown during the Revolutionary War. Richmond County, Virginia had been named for the first Duke of Richmond, Charles Lennox (1672-1723), the youngest of seven illegitimate sons of King Charles II. And our known Richmond-surnamed ancestors had been in Virginia, so connections between our Richmonds and the nobility of Great Britain seemed plausible. While so far unsuccessful, I hope someday to find evidence supporting cousin Robert's theory. Adding interest to the story is that YDNA testing by male fourth cousins with the surname Richmond resulted in matches not with other males with the surname Richmond, but rather with males with the surname Blackburn. The surname crossover from Richmond to Blackburn, or from Blackburn to Richmond, remains a mystery, but perhaps an answer lies in the surname Richmond having been bestowed to honor loyalty to a duke or to a king.

3. **The Jesse James Connection:** The next one was so much fun. Robert asked me to find out whether it was possible that his grandfather/my great grandfather Robert Pepper McCoun was the half-brother of the outlaw Jesse James. I researched the issue thoroughly and sent him my results in the form of a PowerPoint presentation, which he loved. My bottom line was that, while there was no way that Robert Pepper McCoun was the outlaw's half-brother, there were many family connections between our family and that of Jesse James and other outlaws in his gang. In fact, I could not rule out the possibility that the father of Jesse James was William McCoun, the brother of our ancestor Joseph Eccles McCoun, who was in the right place in Missouri at a time when Jesse James was conceived. This William already os famous in family history, as he had made the mistake of getting involved in a private invasion of Mexico known as the Crabb Expedition and, when apprehended by Mexican authorities, was executed by firing squad. The biography of Esther Eccles McCoun dated 19



August 2021 includes a brief biographical sketch of William McCoun. The PowerPoint about the Jesse James question is an Appendix to Esther's biography.

4. **The Provenance of Robert's Dining Room Chairs.** Lastly, Robert asked me to research for him the provenance—history of ownership—of a set of four dining room chairs that he owned and stored under his baby grand piano in his New York City flat. His father told him the chairs once belonged to “Chief Justice John Marshall Harlan” and Robert figured that, since I had become a docent tour guide at the Supreme Court of the United States in 2015, I was the perfect person to research who had owned the chairs. I was happy to take on this assignment. Robert hoped to sell the chairs, as he needed the money, but Sotheby’s demanded documentary provenance that Robert had been unable to produce. I asked an official in the Curator’s Office at the Court if there was any interest in its acquiring the chairs; there was not. If there had been, I might have bought the chairs from Robert and donated them to the Court or to the Supreme Court Historical Society.

I wrote several versions of a provenance document for the chairs. It was impossible for anyone to prove that Robert’s four chairs had once belonged to John Marshall Harlan, who was a respected Associate Justice but never the Chief Justice. However, there was a plausible theory that Harlan had owned them briefly, when he lived in Kentucky, before he became a Justice in 1877. Early in the research, I learned that we are related to Harlan by marriage: his sister’s son, Clay Harlan Hatchett, had married a cousin by the name of Lena Pepper. Lena Pepper Hatchett, who was childless, regarded cousin Robert’s father, Glenn Reynolds McCoun, as an honorary son. Glenn instructed Robert and his siblings to call Lena “Grandma” or “Grandma Hatchett.”



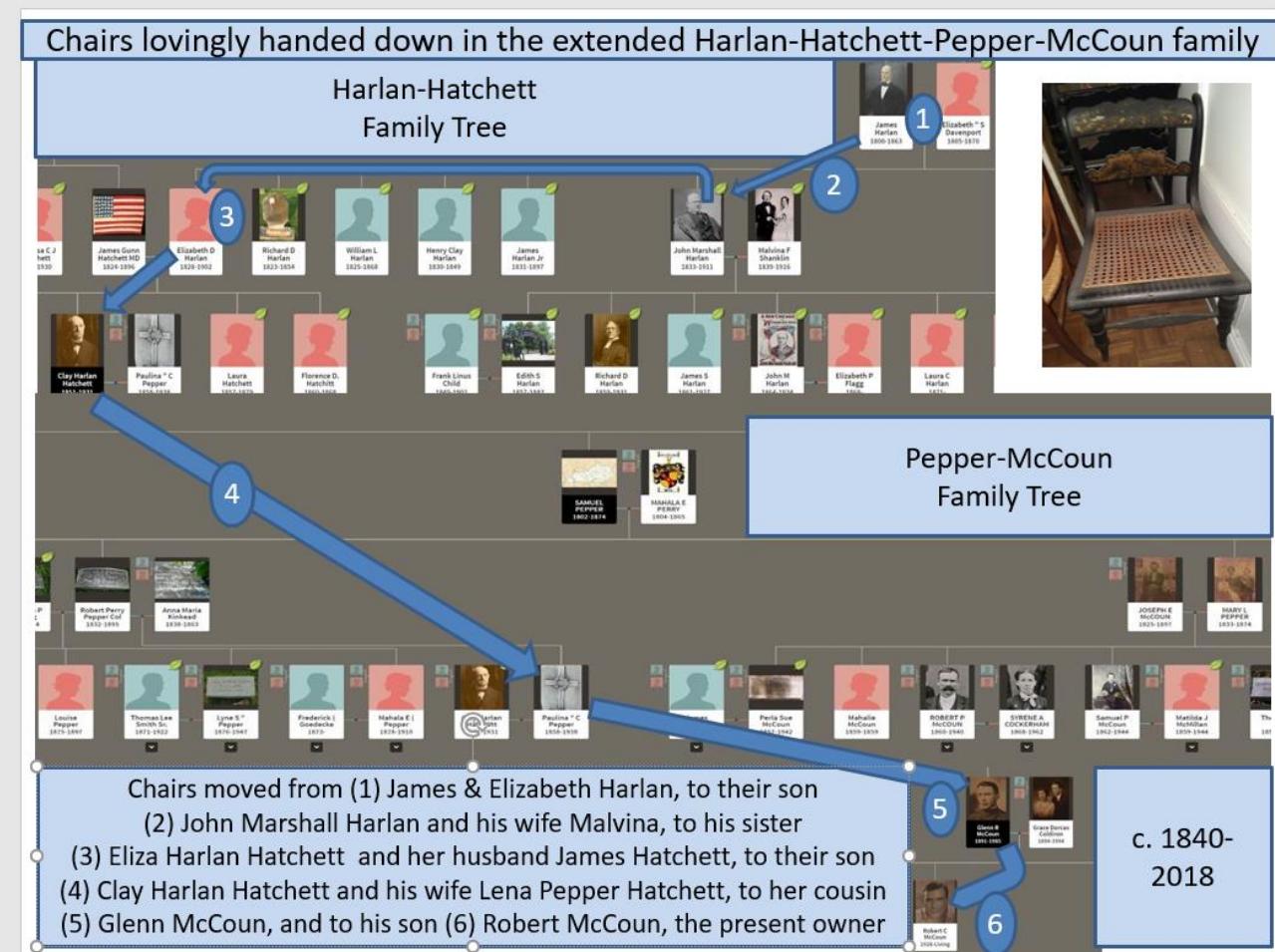
My effort to document the provenance of Roberts’ chairs will be included in a future biography of my great great great grandparents Samuel Pepper and Mahalia Perry Pepper, because cousin Lena Pepper Hatchett was the daughter of their son Robert Perry Pepper. For present purposes, I will include this illustration that accompanied the provenance document.

In case anyone is wondering what happened to the chairs, they were one of the last items to be sold at the estate sale organized by Robert’s executors. It is sad that the Generations wall hanging wasn’t sent to me, as Robert hoped it would be, and that the chairs went to some random buyer who probably had no idea of their possible history. But, at the end of the day, all those things are just STUFF. What matters in this life are people—our families, our friends, our fellow citizens, our fellow human beings.

In line with this philosophy, I offer this biography of Syrene Cockerham McCoun, with its mini-sketches of her children and this tribute to one of her grandchildren. Comments are welcome.

Linda R. Horton, 19 August 2021

lrhorton@comcast.net



¹ Counting Raymond Horton's daughter Carol Saunders and her children, Syrene at death had 46 great grandchildren and three great great grandchildren; two of Carol's children were born before Syrene died.

²

https://www.google.com/search?q=wolfe+county+map&tbo=isch&ved=2ahUKEwi3p8u88YbxAhVKqXIEHUSXANgQ2-cCegQIABAA&oq=wolfe+county+map&gs_lcp=CgNpbWcQAzIGCAAQCB AeOgcIIxDqAhAnOgQIIxAnOgIABCxAxBDOgUIABCxAzoCCAA6BAgAEEM6CggAELEDEIMBEEM6CAgAELEDEIMBOgYIABAFEB46BAgAEBg6BAgAEB5Q4pcBPWuBWCTxQVoAXAAeAGAAY4BiAGoGZIBBDU4LjGYAQCgAQGqAQtn3Mtd216LWltZ7ABCsABAQ&sc1ent=img&ei=Bci-YPeQEsSyTMpxK6CwA0&rlz=1C1CHBD_enUS884US941#imgrc=RJzdg0o1yAkaIM

³ Interview of Robert Coldiron McCoun by Linda R. Horton, 22 October 2016 (recording in the possession of Linda R. Horton).

⁴ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/cyrene/> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrene,_Libya
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon_of_Cyrene Matthew 27:32. "And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross."
<https://biblehub.com/topical/c/cyrene.htm>

⁵ Items from the Hazel Green Herald from March 4, 1885 [the first issue] to June 1, 1887, Works Progress Administration and Historical Records Survey, "Wolfe County - Hazel Green" (1936). *County Histories of Kentucky*. Hazel Green Herald, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063242/holdings/>

⁶ Katz, Michael S. *A History of Compulsory Education Laws*. Fastback Series, No. 75. Bicentennial Series. Phi Delta Kappa, Bloomington, Ind. 76 39p. Phi Delta Kappa, Eighth and Union, Box 789, Bloomington, Indiana 47401.

⁷ Horton, Marcia Bryan. *A History of the McCoun Family compiled as a Memorial to my husband, Raymond Thomas Horton (1914-1987)*. 1989. At A-25. Marcia added, “[Syrene] never did get to be very tall—about the same height as her great granddaughter Linda Horton was at the age of ten.”

⁸ <https://www.history.com/topics/valentines-day/history-of-valentines-day-2>

⁹ Horton, Marcia Bryan. *A History of the McCoun Family*, at A-25

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Cited in Rennick, Wolfe County Post Offices, at 16-17.

https://scholarworks.moreheadstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1304&context=kentucky_county_histories

¹² Horton, Marcia Bryan. *A History of the McCoun Family*, at A-25.

¹³ Wolfe County Woman’s Club, *Early and Modern History: Wolfe County Kentucky, 1860-1957*. 1957; 2019: Commonwealth Book Company, at 6.

¹⁴ Sears Archives <http://www.searsarchives.com/catalogs/chronology.htm>

¹⁵ Interview of Robert Coldiron McCoun by Linda R. Horton, 22 October 2016.

¹⁶ Linda R. Horton, Raymond Thomas Horton biography, 31 May 2021.

¹⁷ Hazel Green Herald, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063242/holdings/> *Items from the Hazel Green Herald from March 4, 1885 to June 1, 1887*, Works Progress Administration and Historical Records Survey, "Wolfe County - Hazel Green" (1936). *County Histories of Kentucky*. 53. https://scholarworks.moreheadstate.edu/kentucky_county_histories/53

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Wolfe County Woman’s Club, *Early and Modern History: Wolfe County Kentucky, 1860-1957*. 1957; 2019: Commonwealth Book Company.

¹⁸ Horton, Marcia Bryan. *A History of the McCoun Family*, at A-25.

¹⁹ Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives; Frankfort, Kentucky: *Film 7016187: All Counties*; also Ancestry.com. *Kentucky, U.S., Death Records, 1852-1965* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2007. Original data: Kentucky. Kentucky Birth, Marriage and Death Records – Microfilm (1852-1910). Microfilm rolls #994027-994058. Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky. Birth and Death Records: Covington, Lexington, Louisville, and Newport – Microfilm (before 1911). Microfilm rolls #7007125-7007131, 7011804-7011813, 7012974-7013570, 7015456-7015462. Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky.

Vital Statistics Original Death Certificates – Microfilm (1911-1964). Microfilm rolls #7016130-7041803. Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky.

²⁰ <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/the-kennedy-family/robert-f-kennedy>

²¹ <https://rfkineky.org/tour/index.html>

²² Id. at 8-21.

²³ Id at 11.

²⁴ Id. at 13. What follows was on page 15 of the transcript.

²⁵ Kentucky today has 120 counties. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/232566712.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/jim-crow-laws>

²⁷ *Beneficiary Identification Records Locator Subsystem (BIRLS) Death File*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

²⁸ Horton, Marcia Bryan. *A History of the McCoun Family*, at A-3.

²⁹ <https://www.winchestersun.com/2019/07/16/robert-c-mccoun/> (as accessed on 12 Nov 2020; no longer available on 13 July 2021); available to subscribers on U.S., Newspapers.com Obituary Index, 1800s-current <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/818682988:61843?ssrc=pt&tid=31832383&pid=19935116387>

³⁰ <https://kwc.edu/about-wesleyan/wesleyan-history-and-tradition/>

³¹ <https://westbeth.org/wordpress/about/history/>

³² <https://westbeth.org/wordpress/artists/westbeth-literary-artists/>

³³ Raintree County, 1957 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raintree_County_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raintree_County_(film))

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³⁴ <https://www.playbill.com/article/donmar-39-s-les-liaisons-dangereuses-will-transfer-to-broadway-com-369327>

³⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dangerous_Liaisons

³⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montgomery_Clift

³⁷ Interview of Robert Coldiron McCoun, 22 October 2016.