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## Kelton J Hunt-Roten - a remarkable life lived

Kelton Joseph Hunt Roten

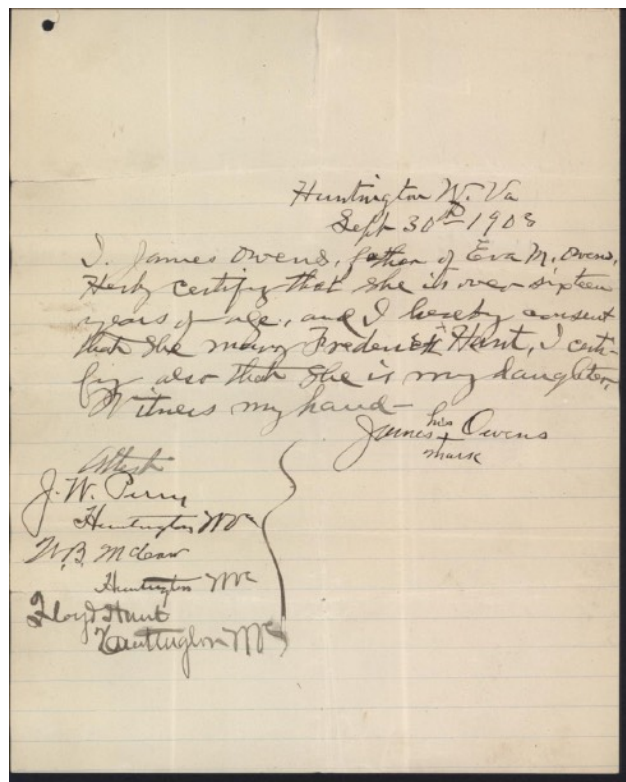
1905-1987

BIRTH 19 OCT 1905 • Wayne County, West Virginia, USA

DEATH 19 SEP 1987 • Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina

Kelton Joseph Hunt-Roten's (the author's 2nd cousin) story has its roots with Lawrence County Ohio's Anderson Hunt III (abt. 1821 - abt. 1907). I like to think of Anderson Hunt as a larger than life character; swashbuckling, charismatic, a commanding presence, and a rascal. As such, by my count, over the course of 40 plus years, he had five wives and fathered seventeen children.

One of those children was my grandmother, Delcia (Delcie) Hunt-Baldwin (1878-1945). Delcie's mother was Rachel Justice (1849-1903). It's unclear if Anderson Hunt and Rachel ever legally married. Rachel seems to have included Anderson as a husband as needed in various legal documents. In an 1880 Lawrence County (Aid Township) census record, Rachel (head of household) and two children (Delcie and Carlos) were residing next door to Anderson Hunt. In that same census record, Anderson Hunt indicated he was divorced. In Lawrence County birth records, Carlos and Delcie were both listed 'Illegitimate', no known father. Rachel had one more of son, Fredince "Fred" Hunt (1881-1945) fathered by a son of Anderson Hunt, George W Hunt (1848-1909).



With regards to Fred Hunt, I discovered and researched a fascinating story. Fred joined the US Army as a trumpeter in January, 1900. He was honorably discharged in December, 1902. He had lost a leg in a Spanish-American War battle. In September, 1903 he married Eva Mae Owens (1888-1958) in Lawrence County. Fred Hunt was 22 and Eva Owens was 15. In this regard, I found a marriage consent letter, signed with an 'X' from her father, stating she was 16.

In October 1905, Eva birthed a son, Kelton Joseph Hunt (1905-1987), in rural Wayne County, West Virginia. He, apparently, was born blind, or, became blind shortly after birth. Sometime in 1906, Fred Hunt and Eva either divorced or Fred abandoned the family. In 1907, Eva married a gentleman named Frederick Roten (1883-1973, the hero of this story). In the 1910 Cabell County, West Virginia, census, Eva was in the household of Fred Roten with a stepson, Kelton Hunt. In the 1920 Cabell County, West Virginia, census, Kelton Roten (not Kelton Hunt) was in the household of Fred and Eva Roten as a son.



**EVA, ABT. 1910**



This story really is Kelton's. He started school at the age of eight at the Romney (West Virginia) School for the Blind. There, Kelton excelled such that he was accepted as a high school student at the public high school in Huntington, West Virginia. Following graduation, Kelton was accepted as the first blind student at Marshall College (now Marshall University) in Huntington, West Virginia. His grades were so good that he was awarded an American Foundation for the Blind scholarship his second semester. Kelton went on to get a Masters Degree (Majors: English and Social Studies).

**KELTON AND ROVER, 1912**

Following graduation, he became a teacher at the Romney School for the Blind and later the State School for the Blind in Cumberland, Maryland. He pioneered teaching methods for the blind and was instrumental in establishing the West Virginia State Commission for the Blind. In this regard, he was in communication with Helen Keller.

Kelton became a recognized vocalist (tenor and baritone) and sang professionally (even on local radio shows in the 1920s and 1930s). He was an accomplished violinist as well - featured on a West Virginia folk music television series in the 1970s. He married twice and fathered three children.



**L-R RED OGDEN, JACK VORBACH, KELTON ROTEN, 1973**

Did Kelton know of his Hunt origins? Did he know that his biological father was Fred Hunt? Did Fred Hunt know about Kelton's success in life? Likely, we will never know. Fred Hunt died at a Veteran's Home in Yountville, CA in September, 1945.

As previously stated, the hero in this story is Kelton's step-father, Fred Roten. Fred and Eva together provided a stable and supporting home for Kelton in Huntington, West Virginia. This nurturing environment gave Kelton Roten the opportunities to excel, despite being blind. Fred and Eva remained married for 51 years until Eva died in 1958. The records suggest that Fred and Eva had no other children.

In 1984, Goldenseal Magazine, a publication of the West Virginia Department of Culture and History, published an interview with Kelton Roten. When the interviewer remarked that Kelton's experience with being blind had not left any bitterness, Kelton replied *"The word handicap never bothered me."*

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