

Joseph Cannon Rockett

(14 Nov 1847–11 Apr 1929)

of

Spearsville & Camp Creek, Union Parish, Louisiana



by Timothy Dean Hudson†



†I am extremely grateful to my cousin, Wayne Barrett of Junction City, Louisiana, for sharing his information and research into our Rockett family with me in the decades since 1983. He began researching our Rockett ancestors in the early 1950s, and I originally learned most of the information here from Wayne's work.

Joseph Cannon Rockett

Joseph Cannon Rockett [Joe] (14 Nov 1847–11 Apr 1929) was born in Lafayette County, Mississippi, the son of James William Rockett (4 Jun 1792–22 Oct 1857) and Eudocia Holcombe (30 Oct 1809–23 Feb 1879). After James' death in 1857, Eudocia took her youngest four children and followed the families of her sisters, Teresa Holcombe Hunt and Francis Holcombe Hayes, both of whom left Mississippi in 1854 and settled at Spearsville, Union Parish, Louisiana. Eudocia and her children made the journey from Mississippi to Louisiana by oxcart. Upon their arrival, they apparently lived with Teresa and her husband, Baptist minister William Hunt, on their farm a few miles north of Spearsville. Eudocia later bought land from her brother-in-law, and Joe, his brothers, and youngest sister all grew up there.

During the Civil War, Joe C. Rockett's two surviving older brothers, William H. and Hosea H. Rockett, both served in Confederate military units and saw action during the conflict. Hosea was captured at the Battle of Port Gibson on 1 May 1863 and spent time in a Federal military prison. He lost an eye in the conflict.

Joe Rockett turned seventeen years old in November 1864, and that same month, he went to Farmerville and enlisted in the Union Parish company of the "*Home Guards, Reserve Corps.*" This reserve unit was commanded by Denmark native Henry Regenburg, also the commander of the Confederate Post of Farmerville. This organization was composed of teenagers and older men outside the age range for regular military service. Although its precise activities during the War are unknown, this unit probably saw no action. On 17 February 1912, William C. C. Smith of Farmerville applied for a Confederate pension, and he listed Joseph C. Rockett as one of his comrades who served with him in the Union Parish Home Guards. Smith was born on 1 November 1847, just two weeks before Rockett.

Joseph Cannon Rockett first married about 1868 or possibly early 1869 to Rebecca A. Upshaw (7 Apr 1851–10 Apr 1882), daughter of Alexander Wilson Upshaw (c1826–11 Feb 1883) and Zilleann Frances Barron (9 Nov 1824–c1895). The precise date on which they married is unknown. Soon afterwards, Joe bought a farm a few miles south of Spearsville near Camp Creek, with his land adjoining that of his father-in-law. He developed a successful farming operation and spent the remainder of his life there. Rockett also operated a store and blacksmith shop. Despite the difficult economic times of the postwar period, he managed his finances well and lived better than most of his contemporaries. His record books from the 1880s survive and show that he regularly loaned money to local citizens.

As the grandson of Baptist minister Hosea Holcombe (20 Jul 1780–31 Jul 1841), religion played a major role in Joe Rockett's life. When the concept of missions, seminaries, Sunday Schools, etc. became an issue among Baptists in the early part of the nineteenth century, Rev. Holcombe strongly advocated for missions, and most of his children and grandchildren attended Missionary and Southern Baptist Churches during their lifetimes. There is an unusually large number of Southern Baptist ministers, deacons, and other church leaders among Holcombe's children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Joe's younger brother, Tom Rockett, joined the Spearsville Baptist Church in October 1860 when he was only eleven. Eudocia and her other son, Hosea, had already joined the church, and it appears that Joe joined when they did, perhaps in 1858 or 1859. Although the precise date of his joining the Spearsville Baptist Church is not recorded in the surviving minutes, he was already a member by the 1860s. On 5 January 1873, the church appointed Joe Rockett to serve as clerk for the church conference held that day. A few years later, Joe and Rebecca Rockett switched their membership from the Spearsville Baptist Church to the Camp Creek Baptist Church. By 1878, Joe served Camp Creek as a deacon, and he remained an active member of the church until his death. Many of his children and grandchildren belonged to Camp Creek Church, and his great-grandson, Forrest Post, served as pastor there for many years.

Joe Rockett actively participated in local Baptist organizations during his adult life. He served as treasurer of the Everett Baptist Association and remained active in it for many years. For nearly thirty years, he served as president of the Union Parish Singing School, later the Union Parish Singing Convention.

Joseph C. Rockett became politically active as a young man in his twenties. In 1873, he ran for constable of Ward 3, receiving forty-seven votes but losing the election. On 12 March 1888, he represented Ward 7 as a delegate to the Union Parish Democratic Convention. As part of the significant reform of Louisiana's public schools, in August 1888 the Louisiana Governor appointed Joe Rockett to the first Union Parish School Board. He was reappointed to the School Board in March 1893, and Rockett remained interested in local school affairs throughout his life. In 1911, he volunteered to serve as the clerk of election for his precinct in a special School Board election. In 1914, he was elected as one of the trustees of the Camp Creek School and continued to serve in that capacity for several years.

Low agricultural prices during the 1870s and 1880s led to extreme dissatisfaction among farmers in the southern and western states. This prompted the formation of two organizations to support the interests of farmers, the Farmers' Alliance and the Farmers Union, both with local,

state, and national chapters. The Farmers' Alliance advocated farmers' rights and economic reforms, while the Farmers Union focused on political advocacy and cooperative enterprises. Both organizations gained significant influence among white and black farmers beginning in the latter 1880s.

Joseph C. Rockett was very active in both the Farmers Union and the Farmers' Alliance and helped organize local chapters. When local Farmers Union groups in Union Parish established their Parish Union on 2 February 1887, Rockett was one of the delegates from the Camp Creek Farmers Union and was appointed to the Parish Union's finance committee.

The activities of the Farmers Union and Farmers' Alliance added to the existing factional strife that lingered among Democrats from issues of the 1880s. As a result, the 1892 gubernatorial campaign looked like a rousing free-for-all. On 17 December 1891, Louisiana Democrats converged upon Baton Rouge for the annual Democratic Convention where they would select their candidate for the next governor. Joseph C. Rockett served as one of the delegates who represented Union Parish at the convention. They ultimately selected Murphy J. Foster as the Democratic gubernatorial nominee.

In 1891–1892, Democrats battled over how to respond to the Farmers Union and Farmers' Alliance movements, as well as the free silver movement. This led many Southern Democrats to switch their party affiliation to the Populist Party. Soon after attending Louisiana's Democratic Convention in December 1891, Joseph C. Rockett switched his party affiliation and became an adherent of the Populist Party. In this regard, he bucked the trend going back to the Civil War of white Southerners giving their blanket support to the Democratic Party. The revolt against the Democratic establishment stemmed from decades of poor agricultural prices and general dissatisfaction with the economic depression that had plagued the Southern states since the War.

In 1893–1894, Joe Rockett served as an officer in the Union Parish Farmers' Alliance. In September 1894, he served as a delegate to the Union Parish Populist Party Convention, and they elected him to serve as a delegate to the Populist Congression Convention to be held at Monroe. He was also elected to the Populist Party Executive Committee. In addition to these organizations, Rockett also belonged to the Free Silver League, a political group closely allied with the Populists. In early 1895, he served as the vice president of the League's Union Parish chapter.

On Christmas Day 1895, delegates at the Union Parish Populist Party Convention nominated Joseph C. Rockett as the Populist candidate for state senator. The campaign in the spring of 1896 proved vicious, as the Populists advocated "*fusion*" to meld white and black farmers in their bid to defeat the Democrats. Rockett ran very strong in the hill parishes of Union and Lincoln, winning

51% of the vote in Union and 56% in Lincoln. However, he had a poor showing in the Democratic strongholds of Morehouse and West Carroll parishes and lost the general election.

To punish the Populists for their strong showing in the 1896 election, Louisiana's Democrats pushed to hold a Constitutional Convention in 1898. To prevent a repeat of their near defeat, the Democrats planned to enact suffrage reform to prevent black men from voting. Both the Populists and Democrats held parish and district conventions in late 1897. Joe Rockett served as a delegate to the Union Parish Populist Convention in October, and at a second meeting in November, they selected him as their nominee for the Union Parish delegate to the 1898 Louisiana Constitutional Convention.

While Joe was selected as the Populist nominee for convention delegate, his brother, Hosea H. Rockett, still worked to support the Democrats. In December 1897, Hosea served as a delegate to the Union Parish Democratic Convention, meaning that he was supporting his brother's opponent, State Senator E. T. Sellers. Joe Rockett ended up losing the election for Union Parish convention delegate by a mere thirty-four votes.

Louisiana's 1898 Constitution codified white supremacy by including the "*Grandfather Clause*" to disenfranchise black voters and many poor whites. This helped to solidify the control of the Democratic Party in the state and prevented black men from voting for the next fifteen years. Thus, after 1898, the Populist movement gradually faded. The Farmers Union chapters remained important to support farmers, and Joseph C. Rockett served as president of the Union Parish Farmers Union for several years and remained active in the organization into the 1910s.

In 1900, Joe Rockett began serving as Jury Commissioner for Union Parish. On 23 October 1907, Rockett announced his candidacy for the Union Parish Police Jury. Farmerville's "*The Gazette*" wrote:

Mr. Rockett is a progressive farmer and has taken considerable interest in public affairs of his ward and parish for many years past. Beina a man of good business qualifications, and strictly moral and honest in all of his views, he would if elected make ward three an excellent representative. We take pleasure in recommending Mr. Rockett's candidacy...

Rockett lost that election. Although he continued serving as an election commissioner for his local district for several decades, it does not appear that he sought any additional political offices other than as Camp Creek School trustee.

In addition to his numerous religious and political endeavors, Joe Rockett remained an active farmer throughout his adult life. In 1902, the average price of cotton per pound in Louisiana was eight cents, with a low price that year of only five cents. Joe Rockett's first bale of 1902 sold in

Bernice on August 14th for 10.05¢ per pound. Two months later at the Union Parish Fair, Rockett won three prizes. The judges awarded him for the best hay, prize of \$2.50, best Pea Hay, for which he received \$1.00, and the best Crab Grass Hay with the prize of another \$1.00. Beginning in 1903, Rockett served on the board of directors of the Union Parish Fair Association, and he continued to actively participate with organizing the local fair for many years. At the Parish Corn Club exhibition on 1 October 1910, Joe Rockett had a “*very interesting corn*” exhibit. Rockett still served on the Union Parish Fair Association board of directors in 1914, representing Ward 3. In 1920, he served as one of the managers of the agricultural exhibits at the Union Parish Fair.

As he reached his latter sixties and seventies, Joseph C. Rockett continued to actively participate in civic, religious, and agricultural organizations and groups. On Tuesday, 22 September 1914, he attended the Cotton Convention held at Alexandria as the delegate from Union Parish. On 6 November 1917, he attended the organizational meeting to establish the Union Parish chapter of the Young Men’s Christian Organization, whose focus then was to aid the young men in army training camps and on the frontline fighting World War I in Europe.

After decades of stagnant pricing, a movement began in 1920 to reduce the amount of cotton produced by United States farmers in an effort to raise prices. The Southern Cotton Conference began organizing at both the state and local levels. Joe Rockett served on the Union Parish Committee to plan the organizational meeting held on 18 January 1921, and he served as chairman for Ward 3. In 1922, he helped organize the Union Parish Farm Bureau and served as the organization’s first president, retaining that position for four years and afterwards serving as a director.

Joseph C. Rockett remained in good health and very active throughout his seventies and into his eighties. In 1924 at the age of seventy-seven, he continued to serve as president of the Union Parish Singing Convention. He also served as Chairman of the Union Parish Agricultural Conference held in April 1924.

In Louisiana’s Democratic gubernatorial primary election scheduled for 17 January 1928, Gov. Huey P. Long faced two opponents, including U.S. Representative Riley J. Wilson. The Union Parish Democrats held a campaign rally for Rep. Wilson on 1 October 1927 at Marion, with the local citizens throwing a barbeque and basket dinner for the seven hundred people who attended the event. At six weeks shy of eighty years old, Joseph C. Rockett was elected to serve as chairman of the campaign meeting. He called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m. and introduced the day’s speakers. Rep. Wilson went on to lose the primary election, receiving 28.3% of the vote to Gov. Long’s 43.9%.

On 31 August 1927 at the age of eighty, Joe Rockett picked 164 pounds of cotton. He told *"The Gazette"* editor that he *"would like to be enlisted as one of the 'young' boys of advanced age who are good pickers in this parish."* The following year, he cultivated eleven *"big loads of corn"* and one bale of cotton. On 26 December 1928, he went to Farmerville, where he discussed his plans for an even larger crop in 1929.

In early 1929, Joe Rockett dropped a stick of wood on his foot, causing a slight injury. However, it turned into *"blood poison,"* which weakened him and led to his death on 11 April 1929 at the age of eighty-one. He was buried in the Camp Creek Cemetery beside his church.



Children of Joseph Cannon Rockett

Joseph Cannon Rockett married twice, first to Rebecca A. Upshaw and second to Mary Elizabeth Howell. He had fifteen known children by his two wives. In 1928, the year before his death, Rockett reported that he had sixty-three grandchildren and twenty great-grandchildren.

The children of Joe Rockett include:

Children of Joseph Cannon Rockett and Rebecca A. Upshaw:

1. **James Wilson Rockett** [Jimmy] (20 Jan 1870–3 Sep 1960)
2. **William Lafayette Rockett** [Willie] (7 May 1872–17 May 1953)
3. **Floyd Henry Rockett** (28 Jun 1875–23 Feb 1945)
4. **Della Pearl Rockett** [Pearl] (21 May 1878–30 Jan 1967)
5. [male infant] **Rockett** (Jan 1880–Jan 1880)
6. **Ela Rebecca Frances Rockett** (18 Feb 1882–8 May 1923)

Children of Joseph Cannon Rockett and Mary Elizabeth Howell:

1. **Charles Freeman Rockett** (19 May 1883–18 Jan 1972)
2. **Sadie Rockett** (17 Mar 1885–5 Jul 1895)
3. **Joseph Elton Rockett** (28 Jan 1887–21 Jul 1971)
4. **Iva Jane Rockett** (1 Oct 1888–10 Jan 1969)
5. **Homie Rockett** (25 Jul 1890–17 Sep 1986)
6. **Robert Brooks Rockett** (20 Jan 1892–12 Aug 1900)
7. **Minnie Rockett** (24 Jan 1894–7 Dec 1959)
8. **Mattie Rockett** (5 Apr 1895–21 May 1983)
9. **Lettie Rockett** (9 Dec 1897–19 Jan 1916)



Children of Joseph Cannon Rockett & Rebecca A. Upshaw

Joseph Cannon Rockett married first about 1868 to Rebecca A. Upshaw (7 Apr 1851–10 Apr 1882), daughter of Alexander Wilson Upshaw (c1826–11 Feb 1883) and Zilleann Frances Barron (9 Nov 1824–c1895). Rebecca was born while her parents still lived in Tallapoosa County, Alabama. About 1852, she moved west with her parents and maternal grandparents, Henry Barron and Sarah Callaway, settling a few miles south of Spearsville, a small village located in northwestern Union Parish, Louisiana. The Barrons and Upshaws bought land in what is now known as the Camp Creek community several miles south of Spearsville.

Joe Rockett had probably joined the Spearsville Baptist Church in 1858 or 1859, although the date on which he and his elder brother, Hosea, joined was not recorded. After Rebecca married Joe about 1868, she joined the Spearsville Baptist Church on 27 August 1869 and was baptized soon afterwards. Joe and Rebecca lived on their farm at Camp Creek until her death in April 1882. She was buried in the Spearsville Cemetery near where Joe's mother, Eudocia, had been buried a few years earlier.

Joseph C. Rockett and Rebecca A. Upshaw had six known children:

1. **James Wilson Rockett** [Jimmy] (20 Jan 1870–3 Sep 1960) married on 8 November 1891 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Elizabeth E. Jinks (23 Oct 1871–7 Jun 1940), daughter of William Lydo Jinks (16 Dec 1851–3 Sep 1922) and Martha Jane Goss (6 Feb 1852–8 Mar 1901). James and Elizabeth Rockett are buried in the Spearsville Cemetery, Spearsville, Union Parish, Louisiana.
2. **William Lafayette Rockett** [Willie] (7 May 1872–17 May 1953) married on 20 October 1892 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Minnie Leona Ward (2 Mar 1876–16 Nov 1908), daughter of Pleasant Stateright Ward (14 Feb 1855–16 Dec 1927) and Sarah Elizabeth Caroline Abbett (4 Jun 1857–29 Dec 1929). Willie married on 5 December 1909 in Lillie, Union Parish, Louisiana to Sarah Elizabeth Ogden [Bettie] (20 Sep 1879–12 Jul 1951), daughter of William Robert Ogden (7 Jul 1852–28 Dec 1942) and Sarah Ann Elizabeth Breazeal (7 Jun 1854–18 Sep 1929). Willie Rockett and both of his wives are buried in the Camp Creek Cemetery, Spearsville, Union Parish, Louisiana.
3. **Floyd Henry Rockett** (28 Jun 1875–23 Feb 1945) married on 19 September 1895 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Carrie Ellen Ward (25 Feb 1878–6 Jan 1947), daughter of Simeon Perry Ward (22 Dec 1845–16 Dec 1891) and Susannah Catherine Regan (29 Mar 1852–17 Feb 1929).

Floyd and Carrie Rockett are buried in the Mount Zion Cemetery, Forksville (near Calhoun), Ouachita Parish, Louisiana.

4. **Della Pearl Rockett** [Pearl] (21 May 1878–30 Jan 1967) married on 12 August 1897 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Joseph Franklin Beaird (30 Jan 1870–25 Jul 1943), son of John Washington Beaird Sr. (c1820–15 Feb 1877) and Martha Ann Regan (4 Sep 1832–24 Jan 1909). Pearl and Joe Beaird are buried in the Mount Union Cemetery, Spearsville, Union Parish, Louisiana.
5. [male infant] **Rockett** was born in January 1880 and died that same month of “*hives*” at the age of four days.
6. **Ela Rebecca Frances Rockett** (18 Feb 1882–8 May 1923) became romantically involved with Robert Henry Barron (22 May 1879–13 Jul 1952) in the latter 1890s. Her father expressed his strong disapproval since Henry’s father was the younger brother of Ela’s maternal grandmother, making her his first cousin once removed. Hoping to prevent the relationship from developing, Joe Rockett sent Ela on an extended visit to his brother, Bill Rockett.

Her father’s scheme failed, for Ela returned to Spearsville and married Robert Henry Barron on 16 July 1902 in Union Parish, Louisiana. He was the son of Henry Callaway Barron (4 Dec 1831–21 Jan 1911) and Sophronia Ellen Moses (1840–4 Sep 1920). Ela and Henry Barron farmed at Spearsville for twenty years.

In March 1923, Ela was pregnant with her eleventh child when a particularly virulent strain of influenza struck her household. All of her children and Ela contracted the virus, and it developed into pneumonia for two of her sons. She delivered her baby on 24 April 1923, but the baby died that very day. Weakened by the flu and her pregnancy, Ela developed pneumonia and died on 8 May 1923.

On 27 December 1923, Henry Barron married Ethel Mae Patton (7 Oct 1898–31 Jul 1993), daughter of William Elijah Patton Sr. (20 Aug 1853–24 Jul 1939) and Theodocia Elizabeth Fuller [Docia] (9 Jul 1866–8 Jul 1935). Ela, Robert, and Ethel Mae Barron are all buried in the Camp Creek Cemetery, Spearsville, Union Parish, Louisiana.



Children of Joseph Cannon Rockett & Mary Elizabeth Howell

Rebecca's death in April 1882 left Joe with five young children to raise. On 23 July 1882, he married Mary Elizabeth Howell (23 Feb 1857–13 Mar 1945), daughter of James Monroe Howell (c1820–c1870) and Mary Ann Belcher (c1828–?). Joe and Mary lived together on his farm at Camp Creek from the time of their marriage until his death in 1929. Her single sister, Emma Howell (1852–18 Jan 1948), lived with them beginning in the early 1900s.

Joe and Mary Rockett had nine known children:

1. **Charles Freeman Rockett** [Charlie] (19 May 1883–18 Jan 1972) married on 4 December 1904 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Sallie Ann Murry [Annie] (4 Mar 1889–31 Aug 1974), daughter of Jonas Berry Murry (6 Sep 1851–10 Mar 1932) and Zilpha Melinda Regan (2 Nov 1856–19 Mar 1955). Charlie and Annie Rockett are buried in the Camp Creek Cemetery, Spearsville, Union Parish, Louisiana.
2. **Sadie Rockett** (17 Mar 1885–5 Jul 1895) is buried in the Camp Creek Cemetery near Spearsville, Union Parish, Louisiana.
3. **Joseph Elton Rockett** (28 Jan 1887–21 Jul 1971) married on 16 January 1907 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Ozella Claudine Reagan (18 Dec 1887–4 Jul 1941), daughter of Joseph Daniel Regan (25 Feb 1866–5 Jul 1888) and Genetta C. Hudson (23 Feb 1868/1869–22 Oct 1952). Elton Rockett married in January 1942 in Union Parish, Louisiana to Mattie E. Hudson (6 Jul 1893–18 Aug 1977), daughter of Joseph H. Hudson (Jun 1856–13 Mar 1929) and Frances Mahalia Edwards (Feb 1862–9 Oct 1919). Mattie was the widow of John Franklin Crow (21 Jan 1879–9 Jun 1929), who died and was buried in Texas.

Elton and Ozella Rockett are buried in the Spearsville Cemetery, Spearsville, Union Parish, Louisiana. Mattie was buried with her parents and siblings in the Edwards Cemetery, Farmerville, Union Parish, Louisiana.

4. **Iva Jane Rockett** (1 Oct 1888–10 Jan 1969) married on 11 December 1904 in Union Parish, Louisiana to James Henry Goss (12 Apr 1886–11 May 1966), son of George Pearson Goss (16 Jan 1860–14 Jan 1931) and Joan Pratt (11 Oct 1865–17 Oct 1930). Iva and James Goss are buried in the Doyline Cemetery, Webster Parish, Louisiana.
5. **Homie Rockett** (25 Jul 1890–17 Sep 1986) married on 5 April 1910 at her parents' house near Spearsville in Union Parish, Louisiana to John Newton Futch (26 Feb 1887–31 Aug 1959), son of David Lafayette Futch (10 Mar 1858–31 Oct 1931) and Catherine Tucker (28 Jan 1861–20 Feb 1939). Homie and John Newton Futch divorced between about 1911 and 1914.

Homie Rockett married on 11 October 1917 in Union County, Arkansas to Joseph Brooks Beard [Joe] (6 Mar 1888–18 Jan 1965), son of John Washington Beard Jr. (28 May 1861–12 Dec 1934) and Eliza Belle Pickens (7 Jun 1865–29 Jun 1941). Homie and Joe Brooks Beard are buried in the Farmerville Cemetery, Farmerville, Union Parish, Louisiana.

6. **Robert Brooks Rockett** (20 Jan 1892–12 Aug 1900) is buried in the Camp Creek Cemetery near Spearsville, Union Parish, Louisiana.
7. **Minnie Rockett** (24 Jan 1894–7 Dec 1959) married on 27 October 1912 to Aylmer Moses Faulkner (18 Feb 1893–13 Nov 1962), son of Valentine Franklin Faulkner (1 Jul 1867–15 Aug 1938) and Missouri Ella Pickens (4 Jun 1871–23 Nov 1959). Minnie and Aylmer Faulkner are buried in the Greenwood Cemetery, Hot Springs, Garland County, Arkansas.
8. **Mattie Rockett** (5 Apr 1895–21 May 1983) married on 15 November 1913 to John Harmon Elkins Sr. (10 Jul 1893–18 Feb 1971), son of Jasper Newton Elkins (8 Jul 1854–14 Sep 1923) and Rachel Margaret Pickens (30 Aug 1859–3 Jul 1941). Mattie and John Elkins are buried in the Mount Union Cemetery, Spearsville, Union Parish, Louisiana.
9. **Lettie Rockett** (9 Dec 1897–19 Jan 1916) was sitting near the fire when her nightgown caught fire, prompting her to run. She suffered severe burns that led to her death. Lettie Rockett is buried in the Camp Creek Cemetery near Spearsville, Union Parish, Louisiana.

