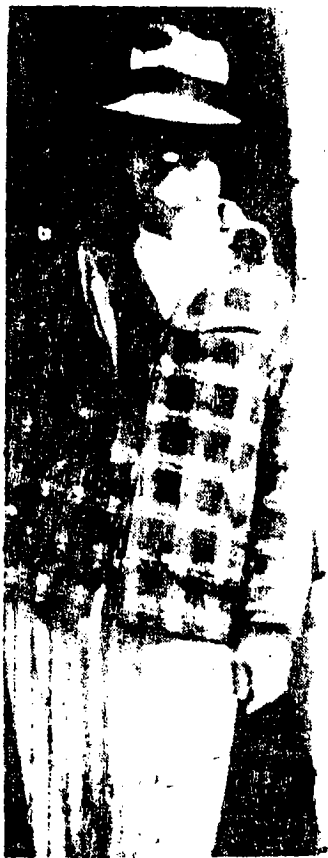


Story Of A Hermit

By Mrs. Frances Bass Rhoden

In the family cemetery plot in Laurel, Mississippi, is a marble marker as a memorial to Charles Samuel Weems who, for the last twenty-six years of his life, lived a hermit-like existence in a small cabin two miles east of Pachuta.

In Meridian, Mississippi, stands another marker--a building in marble and stone--the Weems Community Mental Health Center, which



CHARLES SAMUEL WEEMS

1886-1956

is a living memorial to the same man who left his estate trust for his brother who had been a patient in the East Mississippi State hospital since 1924.

Few facts are known about this stern individualist who, for reasons of health, left the pressures of the world and came back to the 640 acre family estate near Pachuta. He lived in four-room cabin on the edge of the woods a few hundred feet from the busy Highway 18 between Pachuta and Quitman.

Sifting facts from folklore and legend, Charles Samuel Weems was probably born in Ellisville or Meridian. His parents were Alonzo J. Weems-- originally from Mobile, Alabama, and Rebecca Adeline Gordon (Weems), whose home was near Pachuta. Charley has four brothers and one sister. His brothers were B. A. Weems of Purvis, H. J. Weems of Laurel, A. J. Weems, Jr., of New Orleans, and Talmadge D. Weems of Laurel and Meridian. His sister was Elena A. Weems Crook of Laurel, who died in 1968.

His father, Alonzo James Weems, was born in Mobile, Alabama, February 5, 1846. He served as a member of Company A, 7th Battalion Infantry of Mississippi in the Confederate Army. He came to Mississippi to live after the war and at various times lived in Shubuta, Ellisville, Meridian, Laurel and Mize. He operated a number of portable saw mills and had various interests. At one time he had a general store in Ellisville and an ice factory in Meridian. He also owned the old Weems Springs Hotel near Stafford Springs (Vossburg), where the family lived at one

time. There was a station on the NO & NE RR near this hotel, which was called "Weems" before the hotel burned many years ago.

Charley's schooling must have been in the schools of Ellisville, Meridian, or Shubuta. He assisted his father in the lumber business until his father died in 1912. Charley continued to live with his mother and

brother, Talmadge, until the early thirties at the home place at 1011 First Avenue, Laurel. His mother passed away in 1927, and he continued to live at this location until he moved to a farm two miles east of Pachuta, which was owned by him jointly and heirs of his mother. While in Laurel, he was president of the Laurel baseball club in the Old Cotton States League and took a very active interest in baseball. The Laurel Club was a farm of the St. Louis Cardinals and Charley and Branch Rickey of the St. Louis Club were very good friends.

After being told by his doctors that he must take it easy, he lived a secluded life in a cabin in the woods with a private drive. He operated a general farm for some years. There were five or six tenant houses on his place and the tenants did share crop farming for Mr. Weems. The sharecroppers, now very old, said that Mr. Charlie was "a straight man; he would take his share, but he'd give you yours". He would have the cotton hauled to Vossburg to be ginned, and he used oxen and mules for farming. When he quit farming with his eight or ten team of oxen, he kept them until they died. For a time he operated a saw mill on his, but when prices of farm lumber went down, he let the

mill rust away and the lumber rot before he would sell it at the price prevalent at that time. He then began to specialize in tree farming. As long as he lived in Pachuta, he went to Laurel once or twice a week. Many years he drove his car--first a Chevrolet, then later a 1950 Pontiac--but as he became older, he would ride the bus there and back. He was a keen trader in stocks and futures. The oil interests he owned were all developed after his death and were on property jointly held by his estate and the heirs of his father and

Charley never married and as far as is known, his hobbies were reading, hunting and sports. He especially liked to hunt. He had a number of fine bird dogs and a good selection of guns for hunting. Even though he liked to hunt, he had a great environmental concern for wild life. At one time he planted ten acres in wheat to preserve the game on his estate. His land was posted, and he permitted only friends to hunt on his land. He would shoot to scare intruders away. Mr. Weems had one route he would take every day over his place. He'd walk to the Pachuta Creek one way and would come back another way. He'd take a gun with him. Everyone knew that if he liked you, he liked you; if he didn't, he didn't. If he liked you, he would invite you to hunt on his land. It is said that after his death, all the game birds, turkeys, and squirrels--left his land.

Charley Weems was a well-read, well-informed man who kept up with world events. He could converse on most any topic. According to one citizen of Pachuta, he was one of the most interesting persons she had ever known. He subscribed to many magazines and to the New Orleans TIMES PICAYUNE. The back end of his 1950 two-door Pontiac was filled with copies of old magazines at the time of his death. He was often seen sitting by the side of the road near his home reading. Mr.

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Weems was a kind man. He was interested in the young people of the area and would always remember those who were graduating or getting married with a five or ten dollar check written in pencil and signed "C. S. Weems".

Mr. Weems was also a liberal contributor to community and church projects in the Pachuta-Quitman area and drew no denominational lines for aid to area churches.

Evidently, Mr. Charles had an intuition of his coming death for in July 1956—about months before he died—he wrote in longhand on a sheet of tablet paper in pencil his last will and testament leaving all his property both personal and real in trust to his brother, Talmadge, a patient in the East Mississippi State Hospital, to provide for his needs. After his brother's death the will instructed that the trust fund was to be used by the hospital for things that the State did not buy for the patients. The will was witnessed by two local Pachuta men.

On December 4th or 5th, when Mr. Charley failed to come for his mail, the postmistress realized something must be wrong as Mr. Charley came every day about the

same time. She notified his nearest neighbors who could get no answer from within the cabin. The sheriff was called and Mr. Charley was found dead. The doctor said that the death might be attributed to exhaustion from fighting a woods fire near his home the day before he died. He could have suffered a heart attack or died of suffocation as he kept himself locked in and his windows tightly closed.

Many people remember many things about Mr. Charley. The stories about him would fill a book. But his life fills more than a book as the money and the income that he left fills the needs of thousands of people who are helped through the Weems Community Mental Health Center each year, each month, each day.

In the meantime, as the Weems Community Mental Health Center ministers to the needs of people in the county area, the leaves of a live red oak tree fall gently on the modest marker of Charles Samuel Weems, 1885-1956, in the secluded family plot of a Laurel cemetery.

The Weems Center phone number is listed in our local telephone book. The Meridian number is 475-4821.