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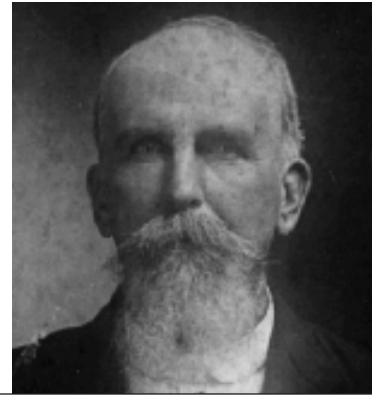
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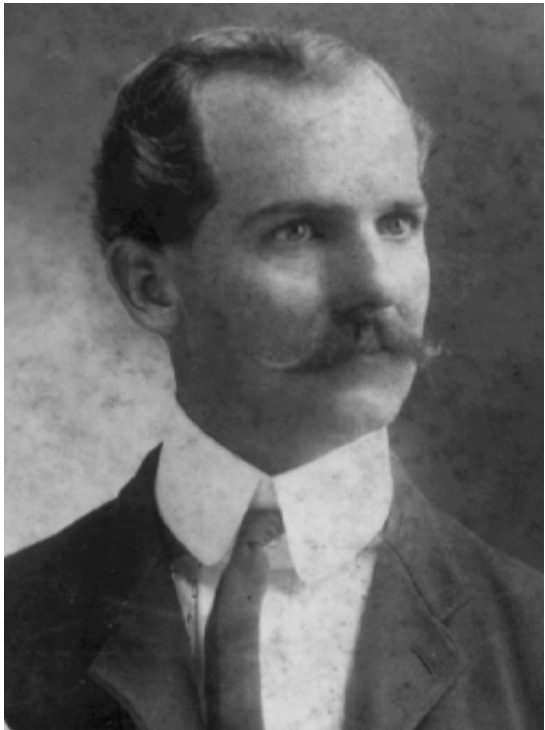
THE FAMILY OF FRANCIS MARION SHAW



Love Letters of Chester D. Shaw

Volume 2 Number 2
April 1994

The Family of Francis Marion Shaw is a non-profit newsletter published semi-annually, or more frequently, for the benefit of the descendants of Francis Marion Shaw and his wife, Rachel Moore Allen Shaw.



Chester D. Shaw about 1905

In December of 1895, Chester D. Shaw, the youngest son of Francis Marion and Rachel Allen Shaw, gathered together his sparse belongings, bid his family and friends farewell, and left Ray City, Georgia, destined for Louisiana. He was not quite 21 years old, and had been pondering his continued schooling in Georgia, and was in some youthful turmoil with family or girlfriend. His decision to head west seemed to be a surprise to many including himself. After a brief visit with relatives in Alabama, he arrived in Louisiana,

faced with limited resources and surrounded by a whole new culture. How he came to choose Louisiana, or what connections he may have had there is not sure, but he wrote letters back home to his mother and sisters, and many more letters to his friends, mostly of the female gender.

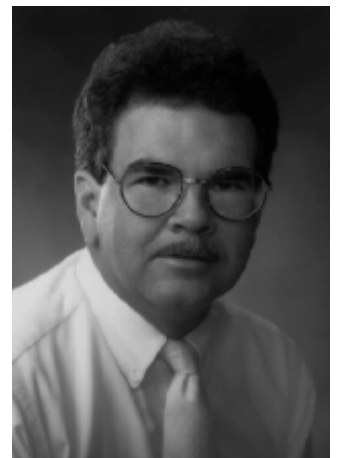
Through the fortunate affections of one of those young women, fifteen-year-old Louannie Webb, several of those letters were saved and handed down to Chester's son, Chester D. Shaw, Jr., then on to Chester Jr.'s daughter, Betty Jean Hughes. Though Louannie was only one of several of Chester's pursuits, she eventually fell favor above all, and became his wife in 1898.

As I sat in Betty Jean's kitchen last fall, and poured over the beautiful handwritten messages, I discovered more about the feelings and circumstance that made up the character of Chester Shaw than any second hand account could ever reveal. Though most of the prose is filled with youthful expressions of passion, some of the details that linger between the lines show us what hopes and concerns a young man from Ray City had at the turn of the century. There is a contrast that exists between the homesick boy who acknowledges the disappointment and hardships he faces in the new country, and the self-confident romantic who sees love and beauty abounding in the same.

In a couple of different letters he encourages Louannie to keep his thoughts and expressions from the eyes of any other reader. Perhaps nearly a hundred years later he will forgive Louannie, Betty Jean, and me for breaking that trust. I hope you enjoy these few excerpts from these most charming and wonderful treasures. (*Spelling and punctuation have been retained. Continued on page 2.*)

*Historical contributions are requested. Your family histories including character traits, religious affiliations, professional pursuits and vital information such as birth dates and places, marriage dates and places, and death dates and places, are all welcome. Photographs help make the newsletter come alive. If you have some special photos of your ancestors which you would like to share with all of the family, please make a copy print of it and send it on to the address below. Do not send the original photo unless you have no desire to have it returned. Send your non-returnable manuscripts and photo submissions to:
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Bryan Lee Shaw, Editor



LOVE LETTERS OF CHESTER D. SHAW



Thomasville, Ala Dec 14 / 95
 Miss Louannie Webb, Lois Ga
 Kind Friend
 You will no doubt be surprised to get a letter from me at this place. when I saw you last I had no Idea that I ever would be here myself. I am staying here with one of my cousins. I am having a verry nice time.
 P.S. Excuse pencil. I have not got a pen handy.
C. D. Shaw

Crowley, La. Jan. 25, / 96
 Miss Louannie Webb, Lois Ga
 Kind friend
 I will write you a few lines in ans. to yours of the 23 inst. And was more than glad to hear from you. Your letter found me well hoping this will go safe to hand in due time and find you enjoying your self and the best of helth.

Miss Louannie I havent any news that would interest you. Although if I could see you I could tell you a lots. Yes I would love to be there to go to some of those weddings. I know you all are having a nice time. I expect the next time I hear from you, you and your fellow will be going to get married. There is some pretty Girls out here I have not got acquainted with but few. But there is none that is as pretty as the Ga. Girls.

The prettiest Girls I have seen since I left home was in Ala. I did have the nicest time xmas I nearly ever had in my life I was in Ala.

Although I would of loved to a been with you in Adel. I know you had a nice time I have met with some disappointments since I left home But this life is made up of disappointments although I do not dispair There is a silver line to every cloud. And fortunate favers the brave.

I wish that I was there to go to old Pleasant to Preaching I know that I could have a nice time. I heard that Miss Vina Futch was to get married the (15) of this month. Did she get married I never had any thing to take me on such a surprise.

Well I guess I had better close I guess you are tired of reading unless it was more interesting hoping to hear from you soon I remain your true friend
Chester D. Shaw

Crowley, La Feb 8, / 96
 Miss Louannie Webb, Lois Ga
 Dear Friend

Again the dying day have wrapped her self in somber fold of darkness and I by my lamp light will try in my Poor simple way to write you a few lines in answer to yours of the 5 inst. Never did a letter reach its destination that was more interesting and gladly received.

I know you will get tired of reading or at least trying to read my scratching But if I write any too much you will have to excuse me. your letter found me well hoping this will go safe to hand in due time and find you enjoying the same Blessings. Miss Louannie who is a going to teach school at the Pine Grove Acadamy this year? I would love to be there and go to school. But I dont guess I will go home any

Crowley, La.
 Mon. Jan. 25, 96.
 Miss Louannie Webb,
 La. Ga.
 Kind friend
 Again the golden sun has closed it self in the silver west. and the dying day has closed it self in the somber fold of darkness. and by my lamp light will try to write you a few lines in ans. to your most highly appreciated letter of the 14 inst. will say in

One of the envelopes and pages from the Chester Shaw collection. Note the embossed postage on the envelope. The cost of sending these affectionate notes: 2 cents.

time soon. I hardly expect I will go before next xmas But I think I will go then I would of loved to a been at old Pleasant with you I know I could have enjoyed it I go to Preaching out here nearly every sunday But it is not like going to Pleasant I have thought of old home severel times since I left. Though I am varry well satisfied out here.

But there is no place like home. Tell Luther I know just how he and Lacy looked the other sunday for those Girls I dont have to look for any one if I was to I would not see them or at least I could not see the one I wanted to. Miss Louannie you have no Idea how bad I want to see you I have often thought of the good nice times we have had to gether or at least I did enjoy it so much. I dont guss you did enjoy it varry much. There are a lots of Girls out here but none of them as pretty as the Ga. Girls. Well I know you are tired of reading my scribbling I dont want to tire you so I had Better close hoping to hear from you soon. I remain as ever your truest friend Til death.

Chester D. Shaw

Crawley, La Mch 1st, /96
Miss Louannie Webb, Lois Ga.
Kind Friend

Never was I so delighted as I was to Peruse the contense of your most highly appreciated letter. Your letter was safely conveyed to its destination in due time and found me well. Hoping this will find you enjoying The sweet blessings of life. Well Miss Louannie I havent much news to write, every thing is so dull. I thought I would go to preaching today but the measles is raging so around here til I am a fraid to go any where. They or all over this section of country, and I dont want to get sick so far from home. Yes I expect I would be Prouder to see the Ga. People than they would me. I know I could have spent a happy day with you at old Pleasant. I can see in my mind how you all looked walking around there. Although I hear some very good preaching out here But it is not as good as the old Primative Babtist. The people are all Mishionaries and Methodist out here and you know that dont suit me. We are having a lots of Bad weather out here it just rains so much til we cant do much. Miss Louannie you need not be a fraid you will tire me of reading your letters. I want you to write me long ones for I do appreciate them so much. I get lots of letters But I do enjoy reading them so much. especially those from Ga. from my Relatives and friend that feel so near and dear to me.

I guess that all the Ga. Girls and Boys will be married before I get Back. I never heard tell of as many weddings in my life. There is some Pretty Girls out here But none of them as Pretty as the Ga. Girls. But I like this country mity well everything is Prospering and doing well out here. I thought I would go on out in Texas But I dont guss I will go any time soon. I may go out there in the fall and stay a while. But I think I will go back home a bout xmas to make that my future home through life. But the longer I stay out here the better I like this country. But there is No Place like home where there is a loving Father and a fond Mother and dear Brothers and Sisters. When any on gets a

way from home and meets those that they are not acquainted with I'll tell you it is bad. Well I guess I had better close for this time.

Hoping to hear from you soon remain your Truest friend.

Chester D. Shaw
Crowley, La
Box 382

Crowley, La. Mch. 24, /96
Miss Louannie Webb, Lois Ga.
Kind friend

Again the golden sun has closed its self in the silver West. And the dying day has closed its self in the somber folds of darkness. And I by my lamp light will try to write you a few lines in ans to your most highly appreciated letter of the 19 inst. will say in reply that it was safely conveyed to its destination in due time and found me enjoying the best of health. hoping this will find you enjoying the same sweet blessings. Well Miss Louannie I havent much news to write every thing is verry lively a round here. I have been to too Barbacues and one Ball for the fast 2 weeks and think I will go to a Play next saturday night. we are having the most bad weather out here I ever saw. but it is very cold tonight. I was very glad to hear that Mrs Outlaw was mending.

Miss Louannie if you will not Think me impolite I will ask you a few questions. you may have never thought of such a thing. But it is in my heart and you can exercise your own judgement. I have learned to love you most dearly. Oh! it would make me rejoice to know that you cared any thing for me. it is beyond my Power to express my feelings with a pen. if I was where I could talk to you I would be much better satisfied. If you will Prove true to me some sweet day I will be as happy as happy can be. Although if there is some one else that you think more of than you do me I cant blame you for going for some one else.

But I will assure you I will Prove True to you. what I tell you is true. dont think I am trying to flatter you for I am not. I hope you dont think that I am that kind of a boy. hoping to hear from you soon. I will have to close for this time as it is late and I am sleepy. write soon and a long letter to your affectionate friend til death.

Please let no C D Shaw
one see this Crowley, La
C.D.S. Box 382

Crowley, La May 31, /96
Miss Louannie Webb, Lois Ga.
Dear Friend

I this lonely but beautiful Sabbath morning will write you a few lines in ans. to yours received some time since. It found me enjoying good health. I was glad you was well but was sorrow indeed to hear that you had been sick. Well every thing is so dull a round here til I dont think I can stand it much longer. for I never was much of a boy for lonesomeness. I know if I was in old Ga today I would have a big time. Although I went to a Party last night and had a very nice time. But that is not like being at home with a Father Mother and dear (Continued on page 4.)

A REMINDER OF SOCIAL GRACES LONG PASSED

Mixed among the letters of Chester's correspondence were two notes that were in envelopes that were not stamped or postmarked. They were merely addressed:

Miss Louannie Webb
City

Inside each of these envelopes was a quaint reminder of the social propriety of asking for the privilege of seeing someone of the opposite sex for the purpose of social association. One of the notes is not dated and reads as follows:

Monday Evening
Miss Louannie,
If agreeable would like to call on you to night.

Your friend
Chester Shaw

The second note is dated September 30, 1897, and suggests that even though the couple had been socially interactive for several months, the manners were still politely offered. It is also interesting to see that the note was sent to Louannie by hand through one of their common friends.

Thursday Evning
Miss Louannie
If agreeable would be pleased to see you out to Prayer meeting to night
Your friend
Chester
Adel Ga
Sept 30 1897

Miss Maggie is going down to mr Jones' and I will send this by her and you can let me know. If agreeable you and miss Jennie and I will all go. C.

It makes one wonder what we have gained and indeed, what we may have lost in advancing to the hurried up life of telephones, faxes, and automobiles.

—BLS

LETTERS—
WINDOWS OF LIFE

If you have enjoyed reading these letters as much as I have, you can't help but think how fortunate we are that the family of Chester Shaw was thoughtful enough to preserve them and pass them on down to his descendants. I suppose that they were saved out of affection in the beginning, but as they were handed to Chester Jr. and then to Betty Jean, they became more a study of a bygone way of life. The references to the illnesses, the politics, the social behavior, and the family relationships gives us a peek through the windows of their day.

I can recall as a young boy, going to the mailbox and seeing the familiar handwriting on a letter from my grandmother, Charlie Ruth Griffin Shaw. The letters were filled with accounts of family events, weather, and fishing excursions. I could almost hear her rich southern accent and see her round spectacled face as I poured over each sentence. They were a casual diary of her simple life, sent to her children and grandchildren to share and enjoy.

It is tragic that we did not have enough foresight to gather and save those entries so that the great grandchildren and their children could know her a little the way we did. Today the only handwritten account I have from her is a brief family pedigree on a piece of wrinkled yellow paper which she shakily drafted in her later years.

My point being that I hope that each of us, as we read these accounts of Chester Shaw, will realize how precious the common language of a letter is when we read it decades and nearly a century later. I hope that we have the wisdom to gather and preserve our own family correspondence. And even though they may take up a boxful of space in the dark corner of a closet as they accumulate over the years, when future generations tenderly unfold and read each line, the windows of their hearts will be opened and the rooms of their minds will be filled with the simple but wonderful life of their ancestors.

Bryan Lee Shaw, Editor

LOVE LETTERS OF CHESTER D. SHAW
(continued)

Brothers and sisters so loving and dear. every time I get a letter from my dear old Mama she is Begging me to go back home, and I think I will before long But I cant tell yet when I will go. Well we are having a long dry spell of weather now everything is just ruining for the want of rain. I wish I could have been with you at old Pleasant I know I would of injoyed it verry much. Well Miss Louannie you need not expect a long and lively letter from me I have go to write so many today and my mind is all tore up so til I cant think of any thing to write. so you must excuse a short letter and a badly written one. I will try to do better next time. write soon and all the news to your friend.

Chester

As noted in the previous letter, Chester was growing more homesick and was contemplating returning to Georgia soon. When he did return is not known exactly, but by evidence of the following letter dated November 17, 1896, he had found employment in Adel, Georgia and his affections for Louannie were intensifying.

Adel, Ga.

Nov 17, 1896

Miss Louannie Webb, Lois Ga.
Dearest Friend

I trust that you will not think me imprudent by writing to you without your consent. Although I guess you will pardon me for Doing so as I did not get to talk with you but a few minutes on sunday last. I thought maby you was going to stay a few days with Fannie. But to my sorrow I learned that you was gone Back home. I never Enjoyed myself one bit sunday. I regretted that I went to Preaching. I know if you had of been there I would of had a nice Time. I dont know when I will get to go down there any more. But I am going to try to get off the first sunday to Pleasant.

Miss Louannie I never hated to leave a Place as bad in my life as I hated to leave your home last Sunday morning. But I trust that the time will come when nothing But death will Part us. I believe that my happiest days has gone by in a single life. But I trust that my future life will be like a Ray of Sunshine on a cloudy day. I feel like I have ask you to much in regard to our future life knowing I have nothing in exchange But a most sincere affection and a great desire to make you happy. Trusting that we both will Prove true to Each other. I am as ever your affectionate friend Til death.

Chester Shaw

P.S. Please let no one see This. C.

Chester and Louannie continued to court "long distance" from Adel to Lois for another 16 months. Two other letters indicate that the infrequency of their visiting had intensified their relationship; absence made the heart grow fonder. They were married 16 March 1898 in Berrien County. Tragically, the young couple had been married only four years when Louannie suddenly died on 8 June 1902, age 21.

LETTER OF LOVE—TO MOM AND DAD

Also among the collection of letters was this single piece of correspondence from Chester to his mother and father. It carries a tone of homesickness, and also alludes to a spat between himself and a girlfriend identified as (H). It is possible this falling out may have contributed to Chester's decision to go out west for a spell. It is also interesting to see how his youthful manner in this letter contrasts with the self-assured romantic character of the letters to Louannie.

Crowley, La

May 9 / 96

Mr. and Mrs. F.M. Shaw. Ray's Mill, Ga
Dear Father and Mother

I to night will write you a few lines in ans. to yours received a few days a go. will say in reply that it found me enjoying the best of health. I was more than glad to hear that you was all well and getting along so well with your crop. We are not getting a long so fast. we have had to Plant some of our corn over twice. I have been Planting to day.

Well by the way I was a little surprised to hear that Bess was back in old Ga. again. the last letter I got from him he said that he may not go back in 5 years. Let me tell you I just laughed last night til I like to a Poped my sides. I got a letter from Ida, and she told me how Bess and Less got in to it at old man Johnies. all the Boys are Kindly getting in to it at Johnies arnt they? I reckon if I was there I would be in to it as deep as any of them.

I am glad that my old Girl (H) is getting along so well. I would love to see her now. But I cant help but think that she done me sorter sorry But she has wrote me such good letters I reckon I will have to forgive her.

Mother many many thanks to you for that money. it will help me out so much for every little is a help. well tell Dock I am sorrow he is so Pewney. tell him I have eat so much chicken til it dont take But a bout a half a one to do me. Mrs Wilder Kill about 2 a week and it is eggs every morning for Breakfast. Well By the way I knew that Ida would be fussing with me about not writing to her But I cant help it. tell her not to be mad with me for I have so many to write til I cant keep up with them all. Yes the small Pox have been through and I'll tell you I kept my self close. But I think they are about to sease.

What is the matter with sis. I wrote to her about 4 weeks ago and have not got any ans. yet. and I wrote to Effie and she have not answered neither. yes I wish I was there to go to school. I believe I could learn something now But you need not send me any money I think I can save up enough in a few more months. I have had to buy so many clothes til it takes nearly all my money to keep from going naked. Well let me Tell you Politics is not quite so hot now But the Republicans carried the state nearly solid except the Governor he is a Democrat Well it is late and I am sleepy. I will have to close for this time. write soon and a long letter to your loving Son

Chester