

## SAMUEL WATSON REAVES

*By his niece, Reaves Alford Salter (Mrs. Lewis B. Salter)*

*(Taken from Grateful Memories of James Robert and Sarah McMillan  
Reaves, November, 1962)*

Samuel Watson Reaves was born July 27, 1875, in South Carolina. His older sister, Sallie, remembers him as a "good boy," honest, conscientious, and dependable. She recalls an occasion when one of the boys had punched a hole in the ten gallon measure and their father was trying to find the culprit. He asked, "Sam did you do it?" Sam thought a moment, then said, "I don't think so, Pa. If I did, I don't remember it." This thoughtful consideration of every angle of the case was characteristic of him all his life. He was not the culprit, as was soon proved, but he considered before he spoke. The integrity, which was to be the moving force of his life, shone bright and clear even when he was a child, and his brothers and sisters were aware of it. He had a keen sense of humor and could remember a good story and told it well. His younger sister Bertha tells of the time when a colored boy on the place was minding the cows and let them get away from him and stray to a neighbor's farm. Sam quoted with relish the boy's explanation, "They wanted to went and I let them went."

Sam had a brilliant mind and desire to learn, and from the first he was a scholar. He, like his older sisters and brother, never attended high school but was taught at home by his father. When he was approaching his fifteenth birthday there was a scholarship available at the Citadel, the military college of South Carolina located at Charleston, and Sam was coached by his father to compete for this scholarship. Sam studied hard all summer and when he took the examination he won easily over his opponents. He had more trouble passing the physical examination than the mental because to enter he had to be a certain height, weight, and age. His growth at the time of his fifteenth birthday in July just barely sufficed to make him eligible. Sam had been a frail boy with a poor appetite at home and the family wondered how he would get along on the plain fare of the military school. However, when he came home for the first time a year later, the pale frail boy had become a robust young man. He had grown two-and-a-half inches, almost doubled his weight, had a healthy appetite (which he retained the rest of his life), and a fine glowing color.

Sam thoroughly enjoyed his four years at the Citadel. He soon adjusted to the stiff military regime and became a leader, both in his studies and in the activities of his classmates. He made many friends and led his class continuously, graduating in 1895 at the head of his class. After this he taught in the Marion public school for three years before going to the University of North Carolina, where he received the B. S. degree in 1899. He received an A. B. degree from Cornell University in 1900, and in 1912 and 1915 he received the A. M. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Chicago.

While he was teaching in Marion, Sam became interested in another teacher, a charming young lady, Ella Bethea, daughter of William Henry Bethea, a prominent business man of Marion, and after a long courtship they

were married in August, 1901. Sam had just received his degree from Cornell and, having been appointed to teach mathematics at Clemson College, he and Ella established their first home at Clemson. Sam's younger sister, Caroline, began teaching school that same year at Denmark, South Carolina. Some friends of hers, Mrs. Rice and Mrs. Hartzog, made frequent trips to Clemson to visit a relative, Dr. Henry Hartzog, on the faculty there and they told Caroline, "Of the many brides of faculty members who went to Clemson that fall there was much discussion as to which one was the prettiest, but all were agreed that Mrs. S. W. Reaves was the most charming, the most gracious, and the most loved." Those who knew Aunt Ella could readily believe this. Sam and Ella spent four happy years at Clemson where Sam was a very successful and popular teacher, and always afterward they remembered Clemson with affection.

In 1905 Sam received an offer to come to the University of Oklahoma as head of the mathematics department. This territorial (Oklahoma did not become a state until two years later) University was only thirteen years old with a total enrollment of 475, only about 300 of which were of college rank. At that time when trains were the sole means of long-distance transportation, Oklahoma seemed a long, long way from South Carolina. However, Sam and Ella were intrigued by the opportunity to pioneer. They accepted the offer and came to Norman, the town that was to be their home for the rest of their lives.

At first they lived in Mrs. Williams' boarding house, where several other young faculty couples, not yet able to acquire homes, lived. This gave them an immediate place in a group of their own age and friendships were formed which lasted throughout the years to come. The next year Sam and Ella found a house to rent and in 1910 they built their own home, a Dutch Colonial house of cream stucco with a gambrel roof of brown shingles. This was a charming house with a pretty garden. It was directly across the street from the campus near a main entrance, and was in the most convenient location possible to the university. Later, though, the property became so valuable for business purposes and so noisy, because of its proximity to the growing "Campus Corner" business center, that they sold it in 1921 and built another home on Chautauqua Avenue. This is a handsome New England Colonial brick house for which Aunt Ella carefully collected through the years antique furniture in keeping with the period of the house.

Uncle Sam was an unusually good teacher. He liked young people and had a talent for guidance. He worked hard in his classes, on the campus as a faculty leader, in town as a civic leader (he was a charter member of the Lions Club), and in the First Baptist Church as a deacon, superintendent of the Sunday School, chairman of the Pulpit Committee, and chairman of the Building Committee.

Aunt Ella was, to me, the ideal lady. She was dignified and gracious and kind, not losing her temper and never raising her voice. She had a knack of making people feel at ease with her and she often in a crowd managed to seek out the shy person and somehow in her conversation build up the other's ego. She was a wonderful cook herself, but she was most appreciative of the cooking of everybody else. She was charming and capable in her own right but she had a way of constantly focusing attention away from herself and on someone else. She had no affectations and no false pride. She was a true Christian, and she and Uncle Sam were good for each other--each helping



the other in every possible way. There was perfect understanding and rapport between them and their marriage was a very happy one.

It was a disappointment to Uncle Sam and Aunt Ella that they had no children, but they decided to do what they could for the children of others. Helping a young person obtain a college education seemed to them a good way to help, so they began with me. When I became ready for college in South Carolina, my sister was already in college and another sister was almost ready. Uncle Sam and Aunt Ella, knowing that my father might have some difficulty in sending three of us at once to college, wrote my parents asking them to lend me to them for the duration of my college career. This was a very generous offer and of course it was a wonderful opportunity for me. I came to Oklahoma in 1916 and spent four memorable years in their home attending the University of Oklahoma until I graduated in 1920. Uncle Sam and Aunt Ella paid for all my clothes (and they were pretty, if I do say it), encouraged me to join a sorority (for which they also paid) because they thought it would help break down my shyness, gave me an attractive room with plenty of time and opportunity to study, and (even better than the rest) I was given the opportunity to live with them, know them, and love them. I studied hard and tried to justify their faith in me. After I graduated and taught at Coker College for two years, Uncle Sam and Aunt Ella urged me to come back for a year of graduate study and I was happy to do this. I lived with them the first year after they moved into the Chautauqua Avenue home and got my master's degree in mathematics in 1923.

I wasn't the only student in the family to benefit from the generosity of Uncle Sam and Aunt Ella. After I got my degrees, they made the same offer to two of Aunt Ella's nieces, Hattie Bell and Ella Bethea. Hattie Bell came for one year and Ella came for four years until she graduated. Later they brought Uncle Sam's niece, Elizabeth Coker, here for a year of graduate study and her brother, Reaves Coker, for three years of undergraduate work. All four of these can confirm me in saying that it was a wonderful opportunity for us to live in the home of our beloved Uncle and Aunt, and have the benefit of their love and influence. My two younger brothers, George Robert and Leonard, who lived with my husband and me while attending the University of Oklahoma, also had the benefit of close association with Uncle Sam and Aunt Ella.

Uncle Sam and Aunt Ella loved children and the desire grew in them to have one of their own. They applied to adoption agencies for a child just past babyhood and in May, 1920, they received a call to come to Oklahoma City to see a boy about five years of age. This was near the end of my senior year and I was almost as excited about their plans as they were. About six o'clock that afternoon, I stood at the living room window eagerly awaiting their return--perhaps with a small boy. When they arrived in a taxi, Aunt Ella had in her arms a crying baby boy only ten days old! This was the arrival of Henry Willson Reaves. He was an adorable baby, but he was such a surprise to the whole household that no layette or bed or even big safety pins awaited him. With him was only a bare change of clothes and a blanket loaned by the agency. However, the news that the Reaves had a baby spread over the community like wildfire and friends rallied around. Mrs. Monnet, a good friend next door who had a grandchild just past the infant stage and who knew about the new generation from him, came bearing some of his clothes with an offer to help Aunt Ella with Henry's bath. Other friends came with

clothing, baby furniture, and all the essentials, so it never mattered that Henry was not expected. The older child they had gone to see had been taken by someone else, but when Uncle Sam and Aunt Ella saw the appealing infant they simply couldn't resist him. It was love at first sight. They named him later on "Henry Willson" for Aunt Ella's deceased brother and adopted him legally as soon as possible.

At first things were not easy. The baby began having digestive problems and kept his parents walking the floor at night. For weeks they couldn't find just the right formula for him and he grew thin while they grew hollow-eyed from lack of sleep and worry about the baby. During this period Grandma Reaves came for her only visit to them in Oklahoma. I graduated from the university in June but seeing me graduate was only incidental to her visit. She came to see the baby and do what she could to help. Unfortunately, though, she had had no experience with formulas. Finally the formula was worked out, the baby stopped crying at night and began to gain weight, and his parents were happy. From the very first, Henry was the pride and joy of his parents and the only worry he ever gave them after his babyhood was their fear for his safety during the time he was in combat in World War II.

When Henry became old enough to go to Sunday School, Uncle Sam and Aunt Ella sent him to the Baptist Church. Uncle Sam was at that time a pillar of the Baptist Church and, while Aunt Ella belonged to the Episcopal Church, it had no Sunday School at that time. Henry seemed to enjoy Sunday School until he was about sixteen years old and then suddenly he lost interest and didn't want to go any more. Soon after he stopped going to the Baptist Sunday School, Henry became a friend of the Episcopal rector, Marius Lindloff, who had just married and come to live only a block from Uncle Sam's home. Mr. Lindloff gave Henry the job of washing his car and Henry enjoyed keeping it bright and shining. As Henry's friendship for Mr. Lindloff grew, Uncle Sam made a decision that was to affect both his life and Henry's. He suggested to Henry that both of them join Aunt Ella's church and go with her to church as a family unit. During all the previous years, Aunt Ella had gone with them to the Baptist Church more than they had gone to her church, and so this seemed a fair proposition. Henry agreed and after talks with Mr. Lindloff, he and Uncle Sam joined the Episcopal Church together. The three of them were happy in the Episcopal Church. Uncle Sam had been a good and faithful Baptist and now he became a good and faithful Episcopalian--his good judgment and financial sense were recognized by his appointment to the Bishop's Committee.

When Henry graduated from the university in 1941, his parents gave him the thing he so greatly desired, a car of his own, as a graduation gift. It was a Mercury convertible and Henry was supremely happy with it. Having been commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the army as a result of his R. O. T. C. training, he had to enter the army immediately after graduation. He was sent to Fort Ord, California, and took his car with him. After Pearl Harbor, Henry was alerted to go overseas, and, since he hadn't had a leave to see his parents in a whole year after he graduated, they decided to go to California to visit him. They went on the train and were able to visit him for three days before he went overseas. They came home by way of the Grand Canyon, which they had never seen before, and saw it in mid-winter, covered with snow.



During the last ten years of her life, Aunt Ella's health declined. She developed tuberculosis and had to spend six weeks in a sanatorium. Her case was arrested but she remained frail. In 1940 she developed a malignancy which required a serious operation and five years later this trouble recurred to claim her life. She died April 8, 1945. She suffered much during her illness but through it all she was cheerful, uncomplaining, and full of interest in the lives of others. Henry's service in the army in the capture of Leyte and the occupation of Okinawa was a worry to her, but she, like Uncle Sam, bore it uncomplainingly and showed it only by her anxiety to hear from him. About Christmas, 1944, Henry's turn for a leave in rotation came, and he took the leave and came home. It was a great joy to all concerned. His parents could see how he had matured and were pleased with his development. He enjoyed his car (which had been sent back from Fort Ord when he left) and made several short trips in it. The month was over all too soon, and he returned to active combat duty. At the time of Aunt Ella's death, no word had come from Henry in weeks and we all knew that he was in combat. We awaited the mail each day with anxiety and wished with all our hearts that Aunt Ella might have the comfort and assurance that Henry was safe. The last time I saw Aunt Ella, on the day she died but before she lapsed into a coma, she said with a faint smile, "Maybe tomorrow we'll hear from Henry." The next day Aunt Ella was gone, but a few days later Uncle Sam received the word that they had been hoping to get. It proved to be Henry's next to last letter too, because on May 21, 1945, he was shot down over Okinawa.

In one month Uncle Sam sustained two shattering blows in the death of his wife and his only son. He proved now his rare stamina and courage, for he retained his poise and equilibrium and his faith in God. He said that he was fortunate to have had Aunt Ella and Henry, and to have only good things left to remember about them. He now lived alone in his home which was full of memories both sad and happy. We persuaded him to eat dinner with us each day at noon and he ate his evening meal at the Student Union cafeteria. This proved to be a good arrangement for him because here he had the companionship of other faculty members. Frequently he joined Ima James, the head of the Women's Physical Education Department, and Stella Sanders, a teacher of French, at their table, and these meetings became more and more frequent. Miss James of Corinth, Mississippi, a graduate of Mississippi State College for Women and of New York University, had taught in the University of Oklahoma for twenty-nine years and most of the time Uncle Sam had been her dean. He and Aunt Ella both admired, respected and liked her, and this was the ready-made foundation that Uncle Sam could now build upon. He and Ima came to love each other and in June, 1946, they were married in St. John's Episcopal Church in Norman. Ima had been a most successful and popular teacher and she now became also a successful wife and homemaker. She brought companionship, comfort, and happiness to Uncle Sam for the last four years of his life, for this second marriage was also a happy marriage. Uncle Sam told me that he was most fortunate to have had the love of two unusually fine women. His health began to fail in 1948, and when he and Ima went to the Mayo Clinic a malignancy was discovered. However, he continued to lead a normal life until July, 1950. He was ill then only for a short time when a heart attack ended his life on August 2, 1950.

Uncle Sam completed forty years of service in the University of Oklahoma. In 1923 he was appointed Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, the largest college in the university, and continued in that capacity for seven-

teen years. In 1940 he decided that he had had executive work long enough and that the two younger men who had been assisting him ought to receive recognition by being given the titles of the offices in which they had been serving as assistants. Accordingly he requested the president to accept his resignation as head of the mathematics department and as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and recommended that Dr. J. O. Hassler be appointed Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. This was done, and President William B. Bizzell wrote him as follows:

In the thirty years I have been a college president, I have never been more happily associated with any man than you. Your high integrity, your loyalty, and your devotion to duty, have been a constant source of satisfaction to me. You have done much through the years to improve the standards of the University, and the College of Arts and Sciences will in future years reflect the impress of your high ideals and scholarly attainments.

Uncle Sam was then appointed Dean Emeritus of the College of Arts and Sciences and resumed his former work as Professor of Mathematics. He retired from active duty in the University in June 1945. At that time a fund, contributed by friends and former pupils, was presented to the University to endow "The S. W. Reaves Scholarship Fund" to pay the tuition fees of talented and deserving students of mathematics. A committee selects the recipient each year.

In 1948 the university Board of Regents gave Dr. Reaves the title of "Professor Emeritus in Mathematics" in recognition of his long service in that field. President George L. Cross, writing him on October 5, 1948, to notify him of this appointment, said:

I am sure it is not necessary for me to tell you that I appreciate your loyalty to the University. When I meet with Alumni groups from the Pacific coast to New York City, I am always asked about you, and I am sure there is no one on the faculty who is held in higher esteem by the thousands of students who have gone through the doors of the University.

In addition to his duties as teacher and administrator, Uncle Sam served the university in many ways. He was chairman of the Student Conduct Committee, chairman of the Eligibility Committee, president of the Student Loan Aid Association, member of the Athletic Council, faculty representative and president of the Missouri Valley Intercollegiate Athletic Association, chairman of the Committee on Assignment Groups, a member of the Administrative Council and of the University Senate. My husband, Lewis B. Salter, as Dean of the College of Fine Arts, had the privilege of serving with Uncle Sam on the Administrative Council for several years, and on the Student Conduct and Student Loan Aid Committees, both of which were presided over by Uncle Sam as chairman, and was impressed with his fairness and his good judgment.

S. W. Reaves was a member of Sigma Xi, honorary scientific fraternity, and was elected by the local chapter to honorary membership in Phi Beta Kappa, scholastic honor fraternity. He was a charter member and past-president of the Norman Lions Club. He was a director of the Norman