

# The Last Leaf

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NAPA by Hugh Singleton at 6003 Melbourne Ave.,  
Orlando, FL 32835

## Old Things

**F**ROM TIME to time I have written about old things; old houses, old barns, and of course, old friends. With age comes a tendency to return to the times in one's life when the world was a place of enchantment and happiness a constant state of being. Too often, one does not recognize happiness when it comes at an early age, but with retirement and its periods of reflection, one can often find happiness in past years. I remember fondly some old places that were frequent haunts of mine; now long vanished. One such place was a group of buildings on the northern bank of Petaula Creek in southwest Georgia.

Years earlier a dam and powerhouse had backed up the waters of Petaula Creek. One of the landowners made an area of several acres along the creek available to a women's organization for a clubhouse and several cabins. When I first visited that place, the clubhouse was still in good condition, although the women's organization was no longer active. Grounds around the buildings were clean of undergrowth and cabins were occasionally used by friends of the landowner, who often granted permission for families to hold reunions on the site. Such was the occasion for my first visit there in 1936; the Singletons and many of their friends were meeting to share a meal, swim in the creek, take boat rides, and maybe fish awhile. My parents and I arrived early on that Saturday morning, along with the Wash family, who owned the land.

Mr. and Mrs. Jim Wash had been good friends of my parents for years, and they had two children, J. A., and Gaye, who were two and three years older than me—and who delighted in either being my teachers and guardians or my tormentors. On this day, they were glad to show me all the buildings and what fun it was to run around the porch of the large clubhouse. Then they decided to take me along the path that wound along the creek bank. This may have been an irresistible urge on their part, knowing that I would run afoul of either the sandspurs or stinging nettles that lined the path. I was wise to the nettles, but I collected quite a few sandspurs.

By midday, there were cousins and friends everywhere and games were being played non-stop. Adults were pitching horseshoes, fishing, or talking about Franklin D. Roosevelt while the women prepared lunch or cooed over the babies. There was a continuous line at the old water pump and the tub where a large block of ice was covered by burlap bags.

At some signal, everyone went into the large meeting room of the clubhouse where a couple of the older men spoke briefly, then Mr. Jim Wash "asked the blessing" and we filled our paper plates with food from a long table and began to eat. Kids circulated and told each other where the best fried chicken, biscuits, ham, potato salad and iced tea could be found. When your plate was empty you could have a slice of cake or a piece of pie. After lunch Cousin Juanita appeared in her bathing suit and yelled, "Let's go swimming!" Like many creeks in the spring, Petaula was muddy, but that never stopped a country kid from playing in its waters, and although I could not swim at age 5, I could wade by the shore. It was an old time event that has stayed fresh in my memory.