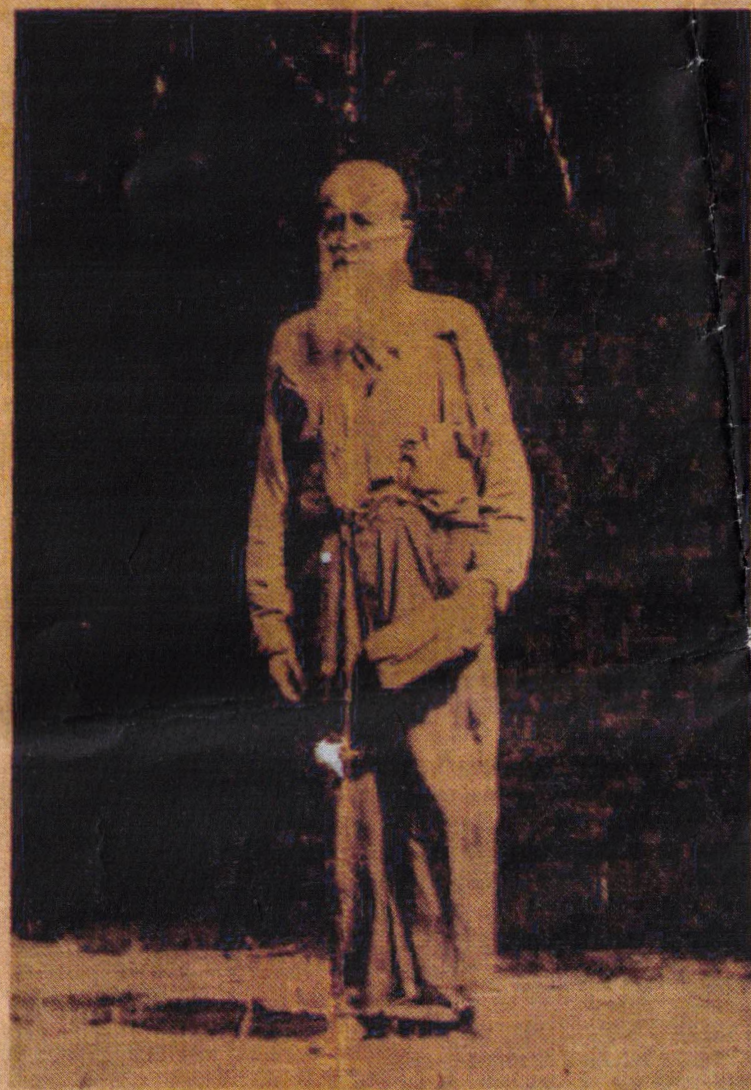




THE HERMITAGE . . . Known locally in Montrose as the Round House, the Hermit House, the Beehive, or igloo, this was the Hermit's home for 18 years. Evidence found suggests this house was built

Mobile Press Register Photos By Tony Manuppelli
by him in a race with a hurricane. This house is on property now belonging to Mrs. Connie Strength, who resides with her family in a nearby home.



THE HERMIT OF MONTROSE—The late H. J. Stuart shown in a snapshot owned by M. E. Blake of Fairhope. Mr. Stuart was in his 82nd year when this was taken in 1938, according to his shaky penmanship on the back of photo. Bare feet, long beard and homespun clothes attest to his happy non-conforming

The Hermit Of Montrose

The Hermit Of Montrose

By VIRGINIA GREER

Press Register Reporter

Tracking down the story of "The Hermit of Montrose" has been like trying to solve a mystery story, without the guidance of the author.

The facts are scattered like poppy seeds sown in a wind. They're there. But hard to find.

There is concrete evidence of The Hermit, one Mr. H. J. Stuart. It is in the strange looking little house resembling a beehive or round house made of concrete, on Parker Road in Montrose.

Among the compelling facts this reporter unearthed was dated evidence in concrete that this little house resembling a beehive or an igloo was built in an actual race against time with a hurricane. The facts bear out that it was a nip-and-tuck race.

Ask anyone across the bay in Montrose about The Hermit. Those who don't remember him personally, usually remember hearing of him, or seeing him, or hearing this or that strange story of him.

Such as the tale told that he fell out of his hammock in the round house and hurt his back. And that that was why he built his concrete boxes waist high to plant his vegetables in so he wouldn't have to stoop over to weed them.

The truth appears to be that he was smart enough to think it foolish to lean over to weed his vegetables when he could just "plant them high!"

Those who did not know him, or only saw him, recall him as an "oddball." "crackpot." say he looked like Santa Claus with his

begins in a busy way in closely narrow layering of brick, curving upward for about five feet.

The upper dome continues in a gentler curving of stacked layering of wide brick, like an upside-down circular staircase. The dome comes to completion in an inside flat wood ceiling with two air-and-light vents. Outside, the dome is completely rounded, and completely concreted.

Six screened windows, with hook latches, are placed at intervals around the lower wall, creating a cross-ventilation for the outside breeze from tree-shaded grounds.

The Hermit was not without electricity. There are seven double-plug electrical outlets. A tall narrow flue extends upward near the front door.

He used wood in the little stove on which he likely cooked his home grown vegetables, along with herbs and berries.

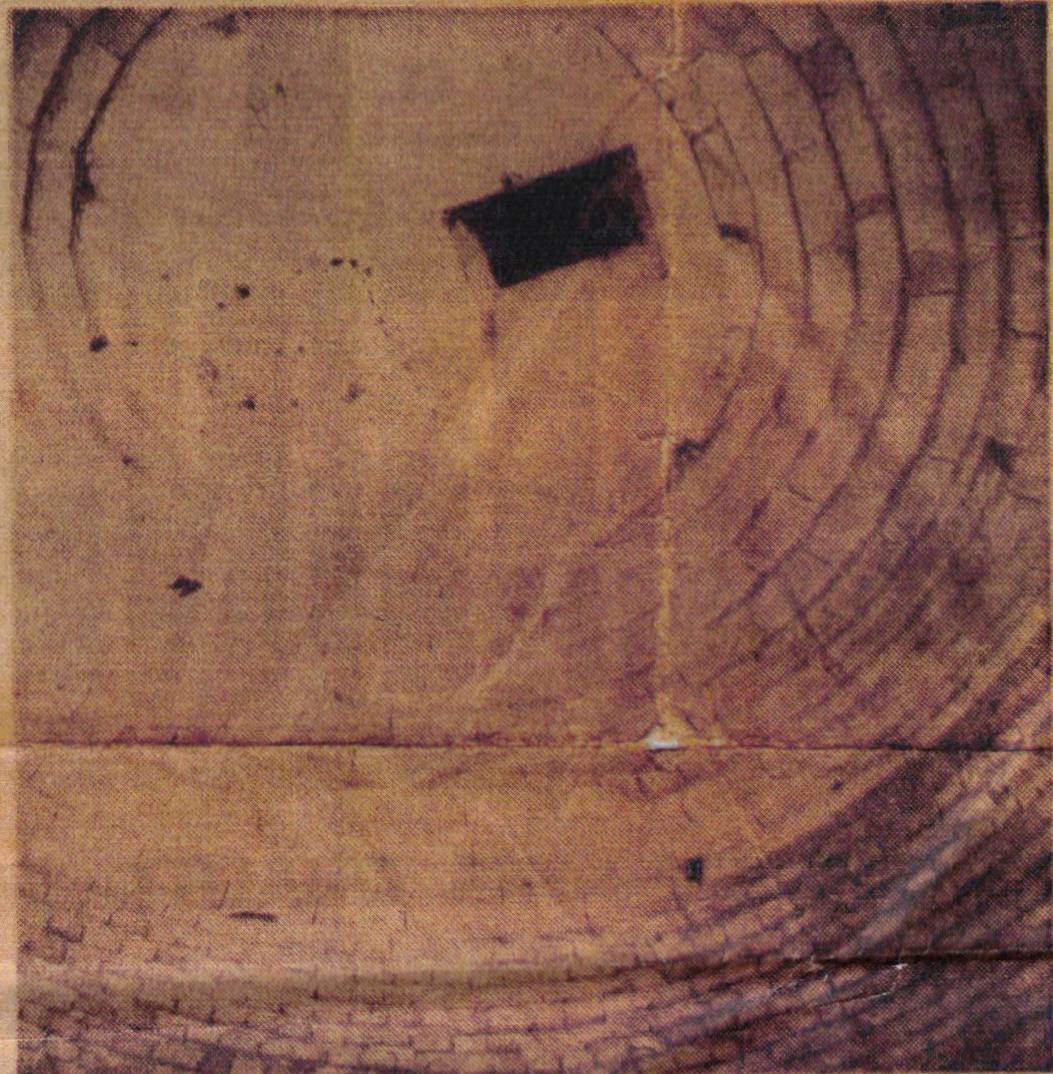
He had a library of good books. He installed his loom.

He slept in a hammock strung across the mid-dome section, high in the air. The hooks, secure in the lower dome are still visible today.

The round house of The Hermit is as sturdy and odd looking today as it was when he built it in 1926. Ivy tendrils trail around the lower back wall of the house. Near the front door, a wisp of a small sickly cedar has thrust its way up through the dirt.

There is the same tranquility to the scene today as apparently in the early quarter of the century.

The only things missing today are the strange concrete planting boxes, long angular affairs and



LIKE A CRUDE CATHEDRAL—
The view of the interior dome of the Hermit's House on Parker Road in Montrose resembles a me-

ticulously-crude cathedral dome. The wide upper bricks carry concrete dates which tell of his race with the hurricane of 1926.

in the Hermit House. The next to us from Mrs. Matt Rutherford, famed poem by James Russe

to lean over to weed his vegetables when he could just "plant them high!"

Those who did not know him, or only saw him, recall him as an "oddball," "crackpot," say he looked like Santa Claus with his long white beard, his sack over his back, his feet bare.

Those who did know this well-educated old gentleman, who dared to live his life as a free man, close to nature, speak of him almost with reverence in their voices.

They recall that he had a bachelor's degree in divinity from a Missouri College, that Clarence Darrow, the famous lawyer, was a friend of the old man and visited him on several occasions, that the old man had left his grown children in a distant state and come to Alabama to live in his own individual way.

They tell of his loom, his weaving of rugs, how he built his odd steel-reinforced house refusing help, at the past-retiring age of 68.

They speak of his philosophy of life, his joy in people—he was no recluse — his self-reliance, his cheerfulness, his delight in talking about nature, plants and animals.

M. E. Blake of Fairhope, who knew Mr. Stuart, said, "Mr. Stuart was a patriarchal-looking man, with his white beard, when I first saw him after he'd already

There is the same tranquility to the scene today as apparently in the early quarter of the century.

The only things missing today are the strange concrete planting boxes, long angular affairs and waist-high square ones in which he planted his vegetables, so he wouldn't have to stoop over to weed them. And the man himself The Hermit.

Mr. Stuart appeared suddenly on the Montrose scene, in the mid-1920's, when he was nearly 68 years old. He was of medium height, about 150 lbs. He had white, slightly untidy, hair, and a white beard, nearly to his waist.

He had corresponded with the late P. A. Parker, regarding living close to nature, raising one's own food.

He first built a frame house, decided that a round concrete house would withstand hurricanes better. He proceeded to build one, a very odd one.

Mr. Blake said of The Hermit, "He dug a round house because he said that's the way a house ought to be built. No corners to collect rubbish."

And there, in the construction, lies a gripping drama.

For Mr. Stuart, The Hermit, began building his round house in April, 1926. That was the year of The Hurricane.

LIKE A CRUDE CATHEDRAL—

The view of the interior dome of the Hermit's House on Parker Road in Montrose resembles a me-

in the Hermit House. The next date is marked 9-27-16, nine days later. Who knows what hurricane damage was done to his frame house and to his vegetables? The very top dome date of his concrete house is 9-28-26.

The final date, 10-1-26 is marked on the top concrete step leading from the two feet below level ground. It had taken The Hermit six months to build his house.

This then was to be his home for the next 18 years. Time was to bear down harder on him, a mortal, than it would on his round house. Time would force him later to leave his little sanctuary of forest, friends, peace and freedom from conforming restraint to return to the watchful loving eyes of his children in a distant state.

Although Mr. and Mrs. Converse Harwell were the old man's closest friends, since the Harwells are now in Pennsylvania, Mr. Blake served as our closest source of information.

Mr. Blake continues, "Mr. Stuart lived simply, built his cement vegetable pots high, ate outdoor

to us from Mrs. Matt Rutherford, whose father, the late P. A. Parker was The Hermit's first contact here. In the diary of Mrs. Rutherford's mother, dated June 11, 1944, is the notation that "Mr. Stuart stopped by today to tell us goodbye. He's returning to his children." Mr. Stuart was then 86 years old.

He died within a few years from then.

This is the picture that we can piece out of Mr. Stuart. The Hermit of Montrose, from memories and legends.

Remembered as an old man with a beard and bare feet, a sack over his shoulder, walking to the store to get a loaf of bread, picking up bricks, working his vegetables without stooping, talking his philosophy, not defending his behaviour to his children in another part of the country, just living his life.

There was a hint of the Pantheism reminiscent of the poet, Coleridge, the free-thinking of Emerson, not to forget mention of his friend, Clarence Darrow.

The Hermit's philosophy was summed up in a script copy of a

ticularly-crude cathedral dome. The wide upper bricks carry concrete dates which tell of his race with the hurricane of 1926.

famed poem by James Russ Lowell which hung in his concrete house, and which he gave to M. Blake before he left.

The words are, "They are slaves who fear to speak, For the fall and the weak; They are slaves who will not choose Hatred, scorn, and abuse, Rather than in silence shrink From the truth; The needs must think; They are slaves who dare not be In the right way two or three."

I wish I had known the Hermit. He demonstrated a courage to live his life unrestricted by narrow confines of his family and other people's opinions. There is richness and courage for us all, drawn from this man who left his concrete mark in Montrose.

In the book, Montrose, Mr. Stuart is quoted as saying with great reverence: "For orthodox churches, I have little use. I worship God in His own temples; see Him in every bush and eye of shrub when I walk through the woods."

This was The Hermit of Montrose, Crackpot or Patriarch? To your choice.

cheerfulness, his delight in talking about nature, plants and animals.

M. E. Blake of Fairhope, who knew Mr. Stuart, said, "Mr. Stuart was a patriarchal-looking man, with his white beard, when I first saw him after he'd already built and settled in his round house.

"And he looked like a patriarch the last time I saw him before he left to go back to his children when he was in his eighties."

But even Mr. Blake admits that his friend, The Hermit was a "curious sort of fellow."

For instance, take a look with this reporter at the house The Hermit built—the hermitage, if you please:

Hermitage, beehive or igloo, take your choice. Each is applicable.

Walk down three brick steps into the ground, through a center-opened wooden door, and you are inside the hermitage. It is like being inside a beautifully-but-meticulously crude small circular cathedral.

From the smooth round cement floor almost 14 feet in diameter, a brick wall cemented over, rises smoothly upward to about seven feet in height.

Then the mounding of the dome

ought to be done. The corners to collect rubbish."

And there, in the construction, lies a gripping drama.

For Mr. Stuart, The Hermit, began building his round house in April, 1926. That was the year of The Hurricane.

On the under doorway facing is the date in concrete, 4-3-26. As The Hermit progressed upward with the wall, meantime having to tend his garden and do his daily chores, time passed. Up went the 7-ft. wall, then the beginning of the lower part of the dome.

On the beginning of the upper dome section appears the next date, 8-13-26.

Then ominously and significantly, the next date, 9-13-26. Then in succession the next dates, 9-14-26; 9-16-26 and then, as evidently the uneasy September wind was whipping up and roaring into a hurricane force, the next date appears, 9-17-26.

Mr. Stuart, The Hermit, aged 68, was one layer of brick from the top of his dome, with only the flat interior and outside mounding to be done when the hurricane struck, Sept. 18, 1926. The hurricane in which 372 people on the Gulf Coast were killed.

There is no brick dated 9-18-26

est friends, since the Harveys are now in Pennsylvania, Mr. Blake served as our closest source of information.

Mr. Blake continues, "Mr. Stuart lived simply, built his cement vegetable pots high, ate outdoor plants. He had a loom and a library of good books.

"He had a wheelbarrow in which he'd wheel the broken and unbroken bricks he'd picked up down by the creek from old kilns of years past.

"He wasn't cracked. Just independent."

In the book, "Montrose" by Florence and Richard Scott who live at Montrose, Mrs. Scott states that Mr. Stuart (the hermit) was born in England in 1858, that he learned rug-weaving in Nampa, Idaho. She states, "A picture of him taken at Nampa, Idaho, at the age of 65, showed him as a handsome and scholarly gentleman."

She commented on his later appearance, his unshod feet, his sack over his shoulder to transport whatever he needed, "be it brick, bread or small stocks of wood for his fire." She noted that he called himself "Ye Olde Weaver" and that he walked the world with dignity.

The last piece in the link came

ism reminiscent of the poet, Coleridge, the free-thinking of Emerson, not to forget mention of his friend, Clarence Darrow.

The Hermit's philosophy was summed up in a script copy of a

see Him in every bush and every shrub when I walk through the woods."

This was The Hermit of Montrose, Crackpot or Patriarch? Take your choice.

Helpful Hints

Now is a good time to wash away grime from your furniture. Wood can take soap and water, but the secret is not to soak it. For carved legs, cabinet doors and woven cane, use a small, soft brush.

To keep candles from sticking together when stored, try waxed paper. Roll each candle in the paper. This also should help them retain their shape, since the paper keeps them from running together.

Use a clean lipstick brush to blend make-up erasure over convex scars and blemishes. The brush applies the erasure evenly, and the edges are blended with the finger tips.

Colored cotton quilts are doubling in brass this summer. They perk up a bedroom as spreads during the day and serve as light covers for night.

Perspiration weakens fibers, so summer clothes should be laundered as soon as possible after wearing.

AVOID putting wood kitchenware into a dishwasher because prolonged wetting causes wood to swell and crack.