



## **"Uncle" Luke Peebles A Personal Remembrance**

*By John Samuel Graves, III*

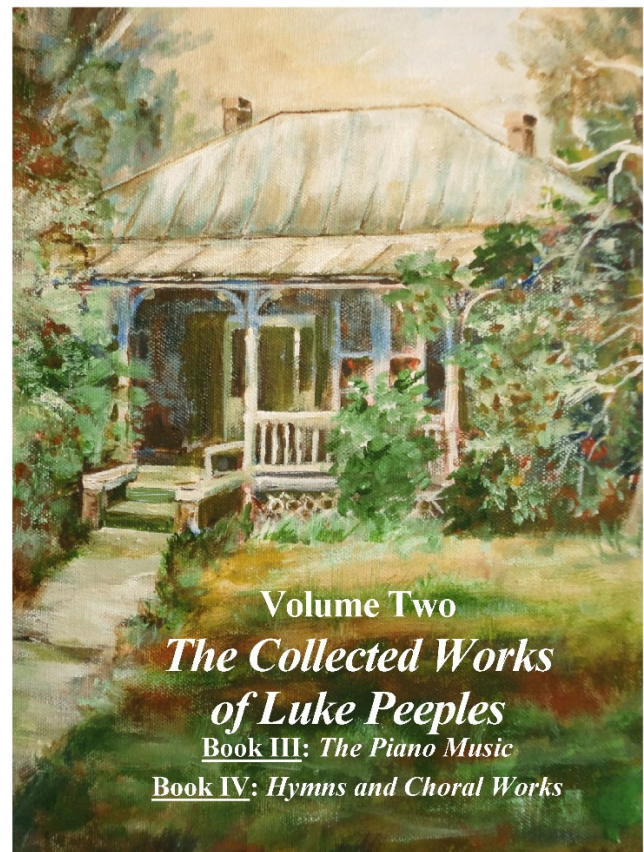
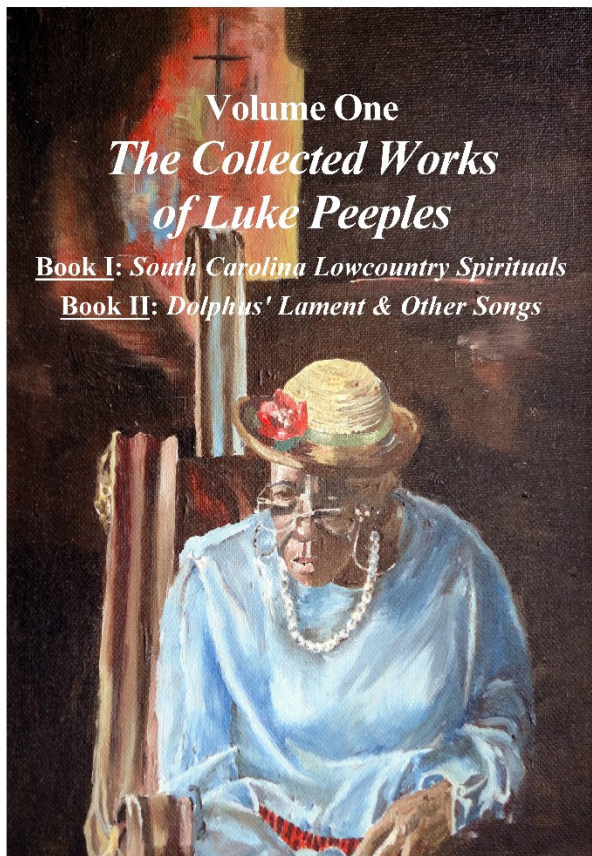
My father's first cousin, Luke Peebles, was truly one of the most remarkable human beings that I have ever met—poet, musician, composer, story teller, mentor and friend. He has remained one of the most influential people in my life for over sixty years. Hardly a day goes by that I do not think about him and remember him talking about his music and the many experiences he had with people and animals around Bluffton.

In 2014, Luke's first cousins, sisters Estella Saussy Nussbaum and Jeanne Saussy Wright wrote and published ***A Gullah Psalm, The Musical Life & Work of Luke Peebles***. ***A Gullah Psalm*** presents and explains much about the life, poetry and music of Bluffton's local composer and poet, but at the time of its publication, the editing of Luke's music had not yet been completed. That task has now been accomplished and Luke's music is available in two volumes. ***Volume One and Volume Two*** of ***The Collected Works of Luke Peebles*** contain some thirty-six pieces of Luke's music: spirituals, original songs, piano compositions, hymns, choral works and arrangements. Both volumes of Luke's music and ***A Gullah Psalm*** can be seen and purchased at ***Stock Farm Antiques***. The two music volumes are also available online at ***astarfell.com*** and ***thebookpatch.com*** (go to their bookstore and search by author). More information about the music books and their contents can be found on ***astarfell.com***.

Each volume of ***The Collected Works of Luke Peebles*** is comprised of two books. ***Volume One*** contains ***Book I: South Carolina Lowcountry Spirituals*** and ***Book II, Dolphus' Lament and Other Songs***. ***Volume Two*** contains ***Book III, The Piano Music*** and ***Book IV, Hymns and Choral Music***. Most of Luke's compositions were not dated so no effort was made to place them in chronological order. They have mainly been organized by subject matter or music type. ***Volume Two's*** cover is a painting of Luke's home on Calhoun Street, where he was born in 1906. His grandmother, "Doctor" Jane Guilford, assisted in his delivery. (See ***Remembering "Doctor" Jane Guilford*** under "Articles" on ***graveshouse.org***.)

Luke's brother, Andrew Peeples, was the well known Bluffton author. (See the March 2015 issue of *The Bluffton Breeze* for one of Andrew's stories, *Grandpa Guilford's Horseless Buggy*.) Luke, Andrew and my father, John Samuel Graves, Jr., were first cousins—grandsons of George Sewell Guilford—the first mayor of Bluffton after its incorporation in 1908, and the builder of the Graves House. My two brothers and I affectionately called Luke "Uncle," but he was actually our first cousin once removed.

Over the years, since Luke's death in 1994, and even before that, Estella, Jeanne and I struggled to find and preserve all of Luke's music. Sadly, some of what we found was incomplete, with a page or two missing. We had heard about other works but could not find them. We believe that we have not discovered all of his music. If any of our readers know of the existence of any of Luke's music, please contact us at [LPcollections12@gmail.com](mailto:LPcollections12@gmail.com). You may also leave comments at my website, [astarfell.com](http://astarfell.com).



Fully understanding Luke, his music and poetry requires some knowledge of his life. Except for his college days at the Atlanta Conservatory of Music, where he graduated with honors in piano performance in 1928, he spent all his working life in Bluffton. Boats, horses, mules, buggies and wagons were the primary means of transportation at the time of his birth. Travel to Savannah meant using wagons and mule drawn ferryboats to get across the Savannah River. The trip would take all day, and often require an overnight stay in Savannah.

Despite Bluffton's remoteness during Luke's early years, life there was anything but dull. Interests and activities revolved primarily around family, making a living, and church life. Recreation and entertainment often came from making music. Luke felt especially connected to his immediate family of thirteen brothers and sisters, his many cousins, aunts and uncles, and his grandparents. Many of them lived close by, often within blocks. Luke's mother, Maud, and my father's mother, Cora Jane, were sisters, children of George Sewell Guilford and his wife, "Doctor" Jane Guilford. Both of Luke's parents and his Guilford grandparents were musical. Each of them considered religion and education, especially in music, primary values. George Guilford was an authority on the Bible, taught Sunday school and in the public schools. Jane Guilford, who came from England, brought a love of literature and music with her. Many of their children and grandchildren received musical instruction. Grandpa and grandma Guilford loved to recite poetry and put



on dramatic presentations. Luke's mother played the piano and his father, Jesse Peeples, played the violin. Words and music became the central focus of Luke's life from his earliest days.

Luke also deeply respected and loved the local Gullah people. He was fascinated by their language and their music. These were ubiquitous and powerful influences on his intellectual and creative life. Luke especially admired the Gullahs' ability to sing multi-part harmony *a cappella*, and spent hours transcribing the words and music of the spirituals that he heard. Many of his arrangements of those songs are included in ***The Collected Works of Luke Peeples, Volume One***. Luke also wrote original songs, like ***Trusin' In Duh Lord*** and ***Dolfus' Lament***, and these are included in ***Volume One***. They are not spirituals but show direct Gullah influence, especially the words and themes. Luke was a "regionalist" in the best sense of that word. He took great pains to accurately present real people and real situations in his songs using the exact Gullah dialect that he was so familiar with.

Learning to play the piano, or any instrument, teaches us forcefully that "we get out of any endeavor exactly what we are willing to put into it." During summer months, when I was in Bluffton away from college, Luke would give me Bach ***Inventions*** to work on. They are technically and artistically challenging. Studying music and the piano with Luke taught me much about discipline, commitment, endurance, perseverance and how to express emotion in soul satisfying ways.

Luke, my father and I often took leisurely walks around the streets of Bluffton. We would end up sitting on Luke's front porch, passing the evening with "small talk," often about "large" things. Those walks and talks provided me with some of my fondest memories of Luke and my father. Luke read widely, had an endless curiosity about life, a wonderful sense of humor, and loved to tell stories. All of these influenced his creative work. Occasionally, he would play one of his songs for us, and explain its context and meaning. For example, all the church bells of Bluffton, the exact tones, can be heard in his ***Wouldn' Tu'n Back***. His attention to details like that, and his later use of them as artistic materials, would appear repeatedly in his songs and poems. Like most good artists, he would take these small details and build them into emotionally satisfying music and poetry about life's central dramas. Luke's artistic works demonstrate the truth of the statement: "Good art imitates life."

I remember my "Uncle" Luke as a very loving man, who always had a warm spot in his heart for his large extended family and who was at all times gracious to strangers. His love for people and his hometown was incontestable. Human and Divine love are the two main themes that run throughout his music and poetry. The two new volumes of ***The Collected Works of Luke Peeples*** are dedicated in loving memory to him, in the hope that he, his times, and his creative output will not be forgotten. Luke is buried in the Bluffton Cemetery. His head stone says simply: "Poet and Composer." And I would add, "Dear, dear friend and mentor." ***Requiescat in pace.***

Today, all that remains of Luke's home are the brick front steps.

