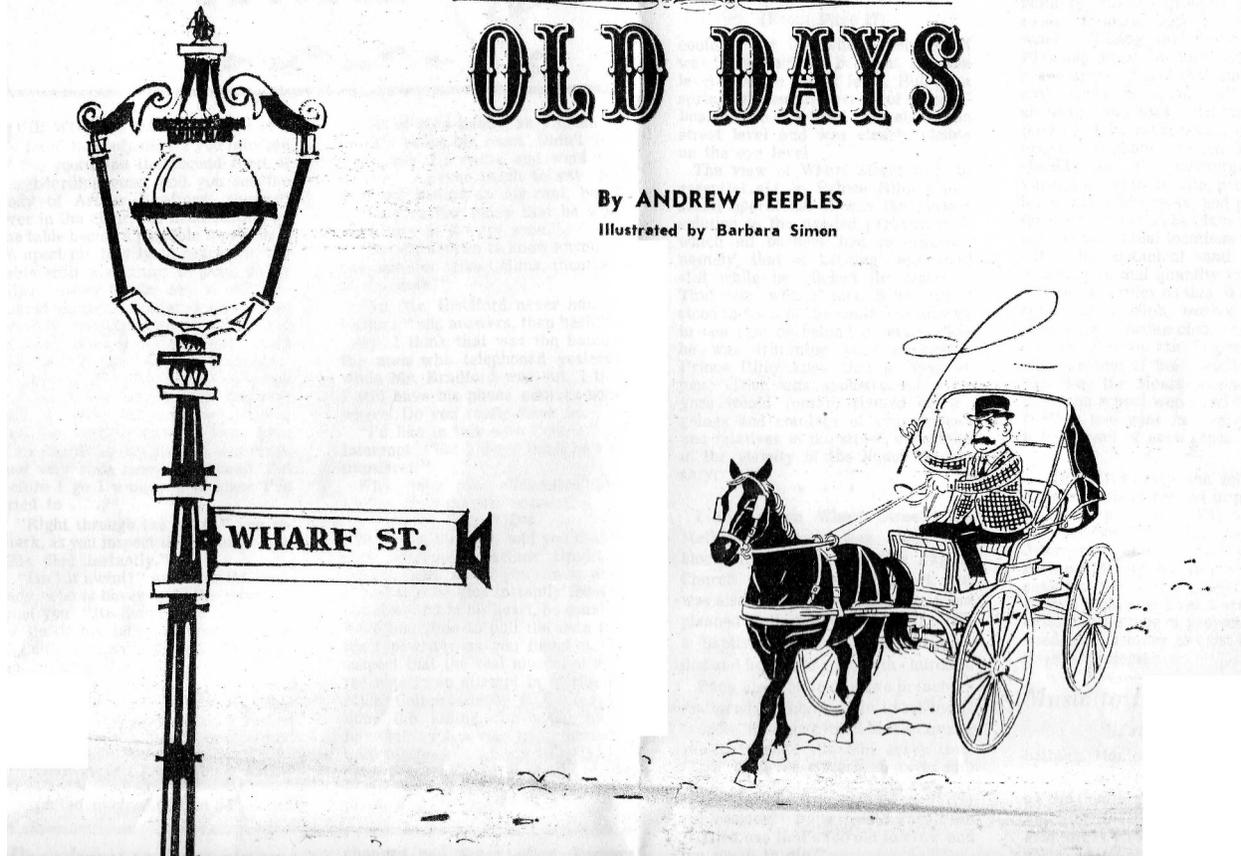


THE GOOD OLD DAYS

By ANDREW PEEPLES

Illustrated by Barbara Simon



When I was a boy and lived in Bluffton the little town then, as now, was on a river. But it wasn't on a road map, which didn't matter, because Savannah was the nearest city and you had to get there by steamboat, unless you had a rowboat. That was before the bridge was built across the Savannah River so that refugees fleeing from a heat wave in the city could get to the breezes in Bluffton in a hurry.

At low tide it was 35 miles from Bluffton to Savannah. At high tide you could save 10 miles by going through Ram's Horn Creek. For a duck or a marsh hen traveling the way a crow flies, the distance was

reduced another 10 miles. Except that crow's wouldn't fly in that direction, because the corn on the islands between Bluffton and Savannah came up only at night. From sunrise to sunset it stayed in the ground—in jugs.

Bluffton boasted two oyster factories. They weren't called plants in those days. People in Bluffton understood the science of semantics well enough to know that it would have been ridiculous to say, for example, "The law requires an oyster plant to plant oyster shells so that there will always be oyster shells for the oyster plant to plant."

Besides, most of the oyster shells weren't planted anyway; they were scattered all over the town. Some north and south, some east and west. It was a good practice, because after we barefooted boys tramped them down and wore off the sharp edges, shells made very pretty streets to walk and ride on.

All of the streets in Bluffton were named so that you could tell where somebody was going. For example, the steamboat wharf was at the river end of Wharf Street. Prince Riley's barbershop was at the woods end, and some people thought the street should have been called Prince Riley's Barbershop Street. But Wharf Street won out, because most of the people who went to the wharf never went to the barbershop.

There was no contention about Bridge Street, because it crossed two coves on wooden bridges. Everybody got used to that name and nobody wanted to change it, not even after the bridges rotted away. They were replaced with solid roads on top of little culverts big enough for minnows to swim through. Crabs and crayfish had to turn back to open water.

The alleys in Bluffton had names, too. But they were not descriptive or even meaningful. Nobody ever knew why Bogie Alley was called Bogie Alley. A name like Bling Tiger Alley would have been more suggestive. But it didn't make too much difference, because most of the traveling in Bogie Alley was done at night and nobody could tell where you were going anyway. They could only guess.

Wharf Street was the main thoroughfare. The view of it from the chair in Prince Riley's barbershop was perfect. You could sit there and see all the way to the river. You couldn't see the wharf, because it was only halfway between the sea level and the street level. But on a spring tide the smokestack of a

steamboat on the sea level rose above the street level and was clearly visible on the eye level.

The view of Wharf Street was an essential aid in Prince Riley's tonsorial operations. It was the perfect solution to the age-old problem with which any barber had to contend; namely, that of keeping your head still while he clicked the scissors. That was why Prince Riley never stood in front of the chair, but always to one side or behind it, even when he was trimming your eyebrows. Prince Riley knew that as long as your vision was unobstructed, your gaze would remain riveted on the goings and comings of your friends and relatives in the street, especially in the vicinity of the liquor dispensary.

I lived on Calhoun Street. The Methodist Church was about two blocks from our house. The Baptist Church was on another street, but was also about two blocks away. Papa planned it that way, because he was a Baptist and Mama was a Methodist and he had to go to both churches.

Papa also had to pay two preachers and send his children to two Sunday schools. He didn't mind that so much. But it used to rile him every time Mama invited two preachers to dinner and Liddy, the cook, headed for the fowl house with the hatchet. "Get the rooster," Papa would say, "the frizzled one that's too old to crow and too tough to die."

One time a man asked Papa whether he was going to sit with the Baptists or the Methodists when he got to heaven. Papa cleared his throat. He always cleared his throat before he answered a stupid question. He cleared his throat and then he said he wasn't worried about the seating arrangement up there. "If I am lucky enough to make it through the pearly gate," he said, "I'll be happy if they put me down with the Holy Rollers."

Papa was farsighted with his religion, especially where his children and particularly us boys were concerned. He let Mama name the

three girls Jennie, Estella and Mildred, after relatives. But he saw to it that we 11 boys were named Mark, James, Paul, Peter, Philip, Thomas, Andrew, Luke, Nathaniel, Matthew and John after the saints. Papa was looking ahead all the way to Judgment Day. He had a feeling that when that great and terrible day came, we boys might need a word or two in our behalf from namesakes with high influence in the heavenly places.

Papa came to Bluffton after his sixth child was born. By that time he was beginning to think that some day he might have a large family, and he wanted to be sure that his children would never go hungry. He took

one look around Bluffton and decided that it was an ideal place in which to live. The river was full of fish and shrimp, the creeks were crawling with crabs, and the coves were popping with oysters “No matter how bad a famine gets,” he told Mama, “nobody in Bluffton will ever starve unless he's too old or too lazy to ride in a boat and bog in the mud.”

So we lived in Bluffton.

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The Good Old Days, written by Bluffton author Andrew Peeples, was first printed in 1968. It has been submitted here by John Samuel Graves, III, with permission from Andrew Peeples' daughter, Mildred Peeples Pemberton. John Samuel Graves, Jr., Naomi McCracken and Andrew Peeples were first cousins. Their mothers were sisters, all daughters of George Sewell Guilford (the builder of the Graves House) and “Doctor” Jane Guilford.

Andrew Peeples was born on Jan 30, 1905 in Bluffton in the Peeples' family home on Calhoun Street, just a block away from the Graves House. The Peeples house no longer exists, but it used to sit directly behind the Peeples' Store on Calhoun Street, which still stands. Andrew's grandmother, “Doctor” Jane Guilford, acted as midwife at his birth.

It is unclear why Andrew referred to the Wharf street landing as the main place that the steamboat from Savannah used to dock. We had always heard that it was the Calhoun Street public dock that the steamboat used. Perhaps both landings were used.

Over the years Andrew Peeples wrote many stories, often humorous, about growing up in Bluffton in the early twentieth century. They make up some of the best first hand reports about what it was like living in Bluffton in those days. In 1978, the same year of Andrew Peeples' death, many of his stories were collected in book form under the title of *Bluffton Boy*. Many of those stories, and others by him, are now viewable online without charge at graveshouse.org. Click on the *Bluffton Boy* tab.

Luke Peeples, Andrew Peeples' brother, was a composer and writer that lived all his life in Bluffton, South Carolina. For more information about him please visit graveshouse.org and astarfell.com. A book about his life and work, *A Gullah Psalm, The Musical Life and Work of Luke Peeples*, by Estella Saussy Nussbaum and Jeanne Saussy Wright, was published in 2014. *The Collected Works of Luke Peeples*, in two volumes, was published in 2015. All three books are available at local book stores and directly from the publisher, LP Collections, 12 East Jones Street, Savannah, GA 31401.