

Photocopy of the original Certificate of Incorporation of Bluffton  
issued April 22, 1903 by J. T. Gantt, Secretary of State

THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA  
BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

Whereas, A petition was filed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of March, 1903, A.D. 1903, by ten  
freehold electors in the precinct in which the town of Bluffton is situated, setting forth the  
corporate limits, the number of inhabitants of the proposed town, and that they desired to be incorporated.

AND WHEREAS, A commission was issued on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of March, A.D. 1903  
to G. S. Guilford, J. S. Graves and R. W. Bailey  
empowering them to provide for the registration of all electors within the proposed corporate limits of said town, and to  
appoint managers to hold the election, and to have them to certify the result under oath to the Secretary of State.

AND WHEREAS, A. A. Graves, Wm J Fripp and A. Fischer  
managers of election duly appointed to hold the election for the purpose of determining the incorporation of the town of  
Bluffton  
did, on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1903, am file with the Secretary of  
State a written declaration of the result of said election under oath signed by the electors, setting forth:

FIRST: In favor of corporation.

SECOND: The name of the proposed town to be

THIRD: That

Bluffton  
G. S. Guilford was duly elected Intendant, and  
W. J. Fripp, R. W. Bailey, A. H. Leachy and A. Fischer  
were elected Wardens.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, J. T. Gantt, Secretary of State, by virtue of the authority vested  
in me by an Act of the General Assembly, entitled "An Act to Provide for the Incorporation of Towns of Less Than One  
Thousand Inhabitants," do hereby issue to the Intendant and Wardens elect this Certificate of Incorporation, with the  
privileges, powers and immunities, and subject to the limitations prescribed by law

GIVEN under my Hand and Seal of the State, this the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of  
April in the year of our Lord one thousand 2003 hundred and 22<sup>nd</sup>  
thru and in the one hundred and 27<sup>th</sup> year of the Independence  
of the United States of America.

J. T. Gantt  
Secretary of State.

# Bluffton's Fateful Election of April 1, 1903

## Part II of *the story of the incorporation of Bluffton*

by John Samuel Graves III

(The final *Certificate of Incorporation* of Bluffton is shown below, retyped for clarity.)

## THE STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE

**WHEREAS**, A petition was filed on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of March, 1903, by ten freehold electors in the precinct in which the town of Bluffton is situated, setting forth the corporate limits, the number of inhabitants of the proposed town, and that they desired to be incorporated.

**AND WHEREAS**, A commission was issued on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of March, A. D. 1903 to G. S. Guilford, J.S. Graves and R. W. Bailey (George Sewell Guilford, John Samuel Graves, Sr., & R. W. Bailey) empowering them to provide for the registration of all electors within the proposed corporate limits of said town, and to appoint managers to hold the election, and to have them to certify the result under oath to the Secretary of State.

**AND WHEREAS** A. A. Graves, Wm. J. Fripp and A. Fischer (Andrew Asbury Graves, William J. Fripp & A. Fischer) managers of election duly appointed to hold the election for the purpose of determining the incorporation of the town of Bluffton did, on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1903, file with the Secretary of State a written declaration of the result of said election under oath signed by the electors, setting forth:

FIRST: In favor of corporation.

SECOND: The name of the proposed town: Bluffton

THIRD: That G. S. Guilford (George Sewell Guilford) was duly elected Intendant, and W. J. Fripp, R. W. Bailey, I. H. Crosby (sp?) and A. Fischer (W. J. Fripp, R. W. Bailey, I. H. Grosby & A. Fisher) were elected Wardens.

**NOW THEREFORE, I, J. T. Gantt** (J. T. Gantt), Secretary of State, by virtue of the authority rested in me by Chapter XLIX, Code of 1902, do hereby issue to the Intendant and Wardens elect this Certificate of Incorporation, with the privileges, powers and immunities, and subject to the limitations prescribed by law.

**GIVEN UNDER MY Hand and Seal of the State**, this 22<sup>nd</sup> day of April in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and three, and in the one hundred and 27<sup>th</sup> year of the Independence of the United States of America.

**J. T. Gantt** (J. T. Gantt)  
Secretary of State



How much do we really know about the lives of our ancestors? Very often the answer is “Not much.” It took a fair amount of digging for me to learn as little as I did about my two great grandfathers, *George Sewell Guilford* (the Yankee from Maine) and *Andrew Asbury Graves* (uncle to *James Wilton Graves*), and my grandfather, *John Samuel Graves, Sr.*, Andrew Asbury Graves’ son. They were all on my father’s side of the family and all three of them were instrumental in getting Bluffton incorporated in 1903. As stated in Part I of this article, that fateful election took place on April 1, 1903, 119 years ago come 2022. The tally of that election—only 34 votes—is shown below. The incorporation charter of 1903 still stands today.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA,  
County of Beaufort. }

To the Secretary of State of South Carolina:

The undersigned, duly appointed Managers of Election, at Bluffton, held on the 1st day of April, A. D. 1903, in the County aforesaid make the following statement and return of Votes given at the aforesaid election upon the following questions, which were severally submitted:

Total number of Votes cast, - - - - - 34  
FIRST-For Corporation, - - - - - 34  
Against Corporation, - - - - - 0  
Majority. (For) (~~Against~~) Corporation, - - - - - 34

SECOND-Name of Town-  
Bluffton, - - - - - 34

THIRD-For Intendant,  
G. S. Guilford, - - - - - 34  
Plurality for G. S. Guilford, )- - - - - 34  
For Wardens,  
W. J. Fripp, - - - - - 34  
R. W. Bailey, - - - - - 34  
N. H. Crosby, - - - - - 34  
A. Fischer, - - - - - 34

Given under our hands and seals this 1st day of April A. D. 1903

R. A. Graves (Managers  
William J. Fripp of  
A. Fischer ELECTION.

Sworn to and subscribed  
before me this 1st day of April A. D. 1903

E. M. Pinckney  
NOTARY PUBLIC

Results of April 1, 1903 election, notarized by E. M. Pinckney.

Why were there so few votes? For one thing there were very few people living in Bluffton at the time. Many of the residents were either children or women (women could not vote in 1903), or old and infirm, and men had to be twenty-one to vote. And, then as now, some eligible persons did not wish to go through the trouble to either register or vote. Other reasons require a review of the impact of the Reconstruction Period in South Carolina and the revised voter qualifications of the 1895 Constitution.

The state legislature had been controlled from 1865 to 1876 by Republicans. Many survivors of the war viewed Republicans as “carpetbaggers” and “scallywags,”

neither of whom had the interests of the average South Carolinian at heart. Many people came to believe that much that had taken place during Reconstruction had been destructive rather than constructive. They also felt that they had lost control over their everyday lives. Resentment and mistrust of the state government was rampant.

Consequently, when the Democrats recaptured the State Legislature in 1876, and by 1895 had ratified a new constitution, change was in the air. In the succeeding years the Democrat controlled legislature passed many new laws, and revised many old ones in an attempt to restore a sense of justice to those who felt they had lost much in the years following the end of the war.

In an effort to establish an electorate qualified for the task of “turning things around” the requirements in the 1895 Constitution for voting and voter registration were tightened up considerably. There was also a need to obtain an updated demographic make up of the counties and cities throughout South Carolina, and a need to register voters in accordance with the 1895 Constitution.

Prospective voters had to submit to complicated registration procedures. They had to be male and twenty-one or older. They had to live in the state two years, in the county one year, and in the polling precinct four months. They had to register every ten years and had to pass difficult literacy tests. (The voter had to be able to read any section of the new Constitution and be able to explain it, or had to be able to explain the meaning of any section that was read aloud to them.) They also had to pay all collectible taxes during the previous year and poll taxes six months in advance of an election. The literacy test could only be waived if the voter owned property assessed at \$300 or more and had paid all taxes on that property. Many potential voters in those days could not meet these requirements.

Persons specifically disqualified from registering or voting in the 1895 Constitution were “persons convicted of burglary, arson, obtaining goods or money under false pretenses, perjury, forgery, robbery, bribery, adultery, bigamy, wife-beating, house-breaking, receiving stolen goods, breach of trust with fraudulent intent, fornication, sodomy, incest, assault with intent to ravish, miscegenation, larceny or crimes against the election laws.” Also persons who were “idiots, insane, paupers supported at the public expense, and persons confined in any public prison” were disqualified.

There is little doubt that out of perhaps 350 residents only 34 were deemed qualified to vote in Bluffton’s April 1, 1903 election. Some simply did not wish to go

through the process of registration for whatever reason. Mistrust of the government ran high and many felt that the less the government knew about them the better. Similar sentiments exist today.

### **Further facts about the Graves and Guilford families**

*George Sewell Guilford* was my grandmother Graves' father. He later built the Graves House in 1908 for his daughter *Cora Jane Guilford* as a wedding gift when she married *John Samuel Graves, Sr.* She raised eight children there. One was my father, *John Samuel Graves, Jr.*, who owned and operated the Bluffton Oyster Factory for over 30 years.



My grandmother, *Cora Jane Guilford Graves*, was born on August 9, 1884 and died in Bluffton on October 7, 1951. She suffered a stroke upon learning of the death of her youngest son, *Frederick Wallace Graves*, in the Korean War. His name is on the newly placed war memorial at the Promenade in Bluffton.

My other great grandfather was *Andrew Asbury Graves*. His brother was the father of *James Wilton Graves*, the state representative. Andrew came to Bluffton in the late 1800's. He and his ancestors of many generations had come from the Colleton County area. He and his wife, *Agnes Mae Forrester*, had ten children, one of whom was my grandfather, *John Samuel Graves, Sr.*, the original owner of the Graves House on Calhoun Street. "Sam" Graves, as he was affectionately called, lived the majority of his mature years in the Graves House and died there at age 85 in 1963. He too was mayor of Bluffton in the 1940's and often an alderman (warden). He loved to discuss and argue about politics and had a wonderful sense of humor about life.

Another daughter of George and Jane Guilford, *Maud Estella Guilford*, married *Jesse Peeples*. *Luke Peeples*, one of their sons, was the much loved Bluffton composer. Another of their sons, *Andrew Peeples*, was the writer of the ***Bluffton Boy*** stories. All of his stories can be found on [graveshouse.org](http://graveshouse.org). Their sister, *Estella Peeples Saussey*, had two daughters, *Estella Saussy Nussbaum* and *Jeanne Saussy Wright*. They recently published ***A Gullah Psalm, The Musical Life and Work of Luke Peeples***. Their father, W. Hunter Saussy, founded ***The Bluffton Historical Preservation Society***. More information about their book and Luke's music books, ***The Collected Works of Luke Peeples***, can be found on [astarfell.com](http://astarfell.com).

A third daughter of George and Jane Guilford, *Gertrude Snowden Guilford McCreary*, was *Naomi McCracken's* mother and *Emmett McCracken's* grandmother. George Sewell Guilford was therefore Emmett McCracken's great grandfather.

George and Jane Guilford loved music, poetry and the theater. They owned one of the earliest wind-up Victrola record players and loved to put opera recordings on and have friends and family over for evenings of music, dance and dramatic readings or presentations. George and Jane also loved their church. George was considered an authority on the Bible and taught Sunday School. He also taught regular public school and he enjoyed directing and putting on plays. George was an accomplished carpenter and built the Graves House, The Guilford House, and much of Bluffton's Methodist church as it existed before its destruction in the hurricane of 1940.



*George Sewell Guilford* died on January 16, 1917, ironically, on my mother's birthday. *Florence Lillian Rubert* (1916-2010), also a Yankee but from New York City, would one day marry George Guilford's grandson, my father, *John Samuel Graves, Jr.* Some of *Florence Rubert Graves's* poems are on [graveshouse.org](http://graveshouse.org). I

have set many of my mother's poems to music. She and Naomi McCracken were life long friends.

**Notes about the author:** As the reader can surmise I am half Yankee and half Southerner. Had George and Jane Guilford never moved to Bluffton and had their grandson, my father, John Samuel Graves, Jr., not married a Yankee, I would never have existed. Apparently I have inherited some of the Guilford music and literary genes, as well as interests in creative writing from my mother. I hold degrees in English and Music Composition and Theory. ***A Starfell and Other Songs***, my book of songs, can be found on my website, [astarfell.com](http://astarfell.com). My compositions can also be found at [jsgraves.musicaneo.com](http://jsgraves.musicaneo.com). More information about the Graves, Guilford and Peeples families can be found on [graveshouse.org](http://graveshouse.org). Also, information about my recent book, ***Testimony of the Infant Children, The Untold Story***, can be viewed on [graveshouse.org](http://graveshouse.org).