



Remembering “Doctor” Jane Guilford, Spirit-Driven Healer of Old Bluffton

By
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We experience many, many miraculous things in this life during the short time we are here on this earth. We do not fully comprehend or understand much of it, but “the accidents of our birth” are some of the most strange and fascinating. The mysteries and delights that surround our origins intrigue us to the end. Not one of us would be here now had it not been for predecessors that go back hundreds of thousands of years, perhaps even millions as is now believed by most scientists. No matter how self reliant and individual we feel, we are all linked genetically and culturally to a unique ancestral tree. We are all tribal, related to a particular family. “No man is an island entire of itself.¹” The irony is that there is so much inter-tribal conflict when, in truth, we are all probably related at some distant point in time.

In the South relatives are everything! This story

¹ *No Man is an Island* by John Donne

is about one of mine, Jane Hore Guilford, my great grandmother, and wife of George Sewell Guilford, the builder of the Graves House. By all accounts, she was a truly remarkable woman. Her life began on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1856 in Liverpool, England, and ended in the Guilford House on Boundary St. in Bluffton on February 12, 1938. She had lived twenty-two years beyond her husband. (Both George and Jane are buried in the Bluffton Cemetery.)

There is a strangeness about the origins of our names and the keeping of records about the dates of births, marriages and deaths. One of the oddest synchronicities of my own life concerning dates is the fact that George Sewell Guilford, my great grandfather, during his twelfth term as mayor of Bluffton, died on January 16, 1916.² That was also the exact same day and year that my mother, Florence Rubert, was born.³ She would later be destined to marry George Guilford’s grandson, my father, John Samuel Graves, Jr., the son of the original owners of the Graves House. A further strangeness involves the understanding that neither I nor my two brothers would even exist had this same young U. S. Navy sailor from Maine, George Guilford, not met and married Jane Hore (the *H* is silent), a young English woman in Liverpool, England, while staying there for ship repairs. They were married in Liverpool on February 23, 1872, a little more than a week after St. Valentine’s Day.

Because George was in the U. S. Navy, he and Jane traveled widely before settling in Bluffton. They would have eight children in all, one of them being Cora Jane Guilford Graves, my grandmother. She too was a marvel of a person who raised eight children of her own in the Graves House on Calhoun Street. (See *Guilford and Graves genealogies* on graveshouse.org.)

Great grandmother Guilford became widely known around Bluffton as “Dr. Guilford” because she had a real gift for helping and healing people

² Actually, there is conflicting data about George Guilford’s death date. His tombstone says January 16, 1916; his death certificate says January 16, 1917. Mary Graves, his niece, maintained that it was indeed 1917.

³ See the poems about Bluffton by my mother, Florence Rubert Graves, on graveshouse.org.

who were sick or ailing. Her skills and passion were a natural outcome of her Christian faith. She and George attended the Bluffton United Methodist Church for years. Their daughter, my grandmother Graves' sister, Maud Guilford Peeples, was the church organist there. Many of the Graves, Guilford and Peeples families were members of the Bluffton United Methodist Church and were buried from that church.

My great grandmother Guilford practiced a largely self taught, many would have said "spirit-driven," even "spirit-led," form of naturopathy, homeopathy, herbology and osteopathy. She mid-wifed most of the Graves children in the Graves House, and she delivered many others in and around Bluffton. She did much of this during a time when most Blufftonians did not have indoor plumbing, electricity, phones or cars. It is a sad thing to realize that, besides their relatives, often all that remains of well lived and productive human lives are their tombstones, sometimes their home, and sometimes their obituary. Below is the notice that came out in a local newspaper at the time of Jane Guilford's death.

Special, February 23, 1938

Dr. Guilford died in Bluffton, Greatly Beloved English Born Woman Had Helped Many Persons Without Pay⁴

Mrs. Jane Hore Guilford, affectionately known in this community as "Doctor" Guilford, died at her residence here following an illness of several months. She was 81 years old.

Mrs. Guilford was born and reared in Liverpool, England, but came to this country to live after her marriage to the late George S. Guilford, a native of Portland, Maine. She moved to Bluffton fifty years ago,⁵ shortly after which her strange career as a medical practitioner began with no training either in medicine or nursing. Mrs. Guilford effected several miraculous cures among her neighbors and her fame as a wonderful doctor began to spread throughout the countryside.

It was not long before buggies and wagons from homes many miles in the country began bringing the sick and afflicted to her home for treatment. There were babies with colic, young people with measles, mumps, and chicken pox, and old people with diverse pains and aches. All to be treated by this little woman doctor who had neither experience nor training to qualify for the overwhelming task.

But Mrs. Guilford was not daunted. If the Lord wanted her to be a doctor, a doctor she would be. She would roll up her sleeves and go to work. Sometimes with a cathartic of her own compounding. Sometimes with a salve or liniment she had made herself. Sometimes with nothing but her bare hands. There were few pains she said that couldn't be rubbed out provided you knew how to rub.⁶

As time went on her practice grew to such an extent that her husband was forced to build an office in the yard to keep the patients from running the house. No sign was tacked up on that little office, nor office hours kept, but morning, noon, and night patients would come and knock with a big stick on its front door until "Doctor" Guilford would show her head from the kitchen window.

Often she was called from her bed in the small hours of the morning to go on a maternity case ten or more miles in the country, or across the river to one of the islands. Once during a storm, she braved the mountainous waves of May River in a tiny bateau in the dead of the night to answer a call from General Cornelius Cottage on the other side. Rich or poor, white or black, Mrs. Guilford always answered her calls. Seldom did she charge and seldom was she given remuneration of any kind, but that was unimportant to her. She had a small though adequate private income⁷ and she gave all of her time, her energy, her skill because she was intensely interested in the practice of medicine and because she loved people.

Mrs. Guilford was a close friend of Dr. James H. Mellinchamp, eminent botanist and physician who lived in Bluffton until his death a number of years ago and he frequently complimented her medical ability by calling her into consultation on his more serious cases. Other doctors who came to Bluffton to practice likewise paid tribute to her knowledge and skill.

There will be no more of Dr. Guilford's compounds, no more of her salves, and liniments, no more of her

⁴ We are not certain who wrote this obituary.

⁵ We are not certain exactly when the Guilfords arrived in Bluffton, but they probably came around 1887 after George's naval career had ended.

⁶ It is almost a certainty that Mary Elizabeth Graves, the last resident of the Graves House, got her early start as a physical therapist by watching her Grandmother Jane Guilford perform some of her magic on her patients.

⁷ Jane received a small pension from the U. S. government for her husband's service in the Union Army. She also took in boarders.

inspiring optimism that would never "die" until the grim hand of death had actually struck, but the memory of the little woman by those who knew her will continue to live in the hearts of Blufftonians for generations to come.

Her sister, Frances Hore Hasel, her niece and grandniece are nurses. Her grandniece presently (1938) works in a doctor's office on the Isle of Man, British Isles.⁸

While "Dr. Guilford" had many successes, like most who work in the health fields, she also experienced some terrible defeats under circumstances beyond her control. We can be certain that the following two events caused Jane Guilford great suffering. One occurred when her little three year old grandson, John Peeples, contracted diphtheria and died within a few days. She diagnosed it correctly but was unable to treat it successfully. For an account that will truly touch your heart, please read *Bluffton Boy Grows up* by Jane Guilford's grandson, Andrew Peeples.⁹ A second terrible event occurred while Jane was attending the delivery of another grandchild. Her daughter, Gertrude Guilford McCreary, my grandmother Graves' sister and Naomi McCracken's mother, was delivering her fourth child.¹⁰ Sadly, the child was still born and Gertrude hemorrhaged to death while her mother helplessly watched. Grandma Guilford, who had been ill herself at the time, had gotten out of a sick bed to tend her daughter, but was unable to prevent the death. After Gertrude's death, Grandma Guilford raised Naomi and her sister, Gwendolyn. I am sure that great grandma Guilford was acutely aware of her own limitations. She simply did her best and it was not always enough.

⁸ The *Isle of Man* lies in the Irish Sea between Liverpool, England and Belfast, Ireland. It is about five times the size of Hilton Head Island. The *Titanic*, which sank on April 15, 1912, was built in Belfast and registered in Liverpool.

⁹ *Bluffton Boy Grows Up* is one of the short stories in Andrew Peeples' book, *Bluffton Boy*, published in 1979. This story and others from the book can now be found on graveshouse.org under the *Bluffton Boy* tab.

¹⁰ Gertrude was the organist for Bluffton's *The Church of the Cross*. Musicianship runs deep in the Guilford family. Please read the articles about Naomi McCreary McCracken, the Guilfords and Luke Peeples in *Remembering The Way It Was At Hilton Head, Bluffton and Daufauskie* by Fran Heyward Marscher, The History Press, 2005. My own musical compositions can be viewed at jsgraves.musicaneo.com.

Just as it is not always enough with any of us. We are all finite creatures, and cannot control many of the events in our lives. Nevertheless, Jane was an exceptional, gifted woman who loved and cared deeply for those about her. Consequently, she herself was deeply loved and respected.

The Accidents of Birth and the Ties that Bind

It is impossible to know all the facts about any of our relatives' lives, but in the end the love that these people showed and expressed for each other is all that we actually have that lasts. That love often passes unseen between generations. These older people really knew how to give and receive love. They measured all human experience by whether or not love was expressed or denied. Those of us who were lucky enough to be exposed to them and their descendants will forever be grateful for their supreme gift to us: unstinting love.¹¹ Today, in our "throw away" culture many seem to have abandoned their roots. They attempt to live only in the moment. They live in extreme danger of not fully knowing who they are. They do not know their own personal history nor the meaning of that history, and they do not seem to appreciate the gifts that were so freely given so long ago by their forbears, often at great sacrifice, for their benefit. In this sense we should all be "ancestor worshipers." We would not even exist had it not been for them. We need to honor them and their contributions to our lives.

The reader is encouraged to visit graveshouse.org for more information on the Graves and Guilford families. Their lives were filled with examples of their love for their families, their communities and their fellow men and women. It was impossible to live in Bluffton in those days and not feel that one was a part of a great, all encompassing extended family. Grandparents and grandchildren, parents, uncles, aunts, and cousins were everywhere! Often just blocks away! The wonderful book, *Bluffton Boy*, by Andrew Peeples, is a good place to get more of a feel for those past times in Bluffton, especially about Grandpa and Grandma Guilford.

¹¹ I did not personally know my great grandparents. They were dead before I was born, but their lives lived on in their children and their grandchildren, who were always eager to share stories about Grandma and Grandpa Guilford.