

A Short History of The Graves House, 85 Calhoun St., Bluffton, S. C.

by John Samuel Graves, III

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The Graves House is over 100 years old and was hand built with hand tools from heart pine between 1905 and 1908 by George Sewell Guilford (my great grandfather—he was, among other things, a good carpenter) for his daughter, Cora Jane Guilford Graves (my grandmother), and her new husband, John Samuel Graves, Sr. (my grandfather). George Guilford came from a shipbuilding family in Maine. He had enlisted in the Union Army, and had been stationed for a time during the Civil War on Hilton Head Island where he came to love South Carolina's lowcountry. He was mustered out of the army while still serving on Hilton Head. He returned to Maine, enlisted in the US Navy, and spent much of that enlistment time sailing back and forth across the Atlantic. While on leave in England, he met and married Jane Hore (pronounced "orr") in Liverpool, England, in 1872, and brought her back to live in the U. S. After George retired from the Navy, and because of his fond memories of the South Carolina lowcountry, Jane and George eventually decided to move to South Carolina. They settled in Bluffton around 1887.

George Guilford was very instrumental in getting the town of Bluffton incorporated in 1903, and was elected the first mayor of the newly incorporated town. (See [Bluffton's Fateful Election of 1903, Parts I](#) and [Part II](#), under the Articles tab of [graveshouse.org](#)) He served 11 terms as Mayor of Bluffton and died during his 12th term in 1916. My great grandparents, George and Jane Guilford, appear in several of the stories in the book [Bluffton Boy](#), a collection of short stories about Bluffton by his grandson, Andrew Peeples. (See the Bluffton Boy tab on [graveshouse.org](#) for the complete book.)

The Guilford House, another home that George built, sits diagonally from the Graves House on the corner of Boundary St. and Bridge St. He and Jane lived there together until his death in 1916; she remained there until her death in 1938. After Jane Guilford's death my father, John Samuel Graves, Jr., lived the remainder of his adult life in the Guilford House. Before that, except for the three years that he was attending college, my father lived in the Graves House, where he had been born in 1910.

My grandfather, John Samuel Graves, Sr., was also a mayor of Bluffton. He was a prominent merchant, a real estate developer, a long time official with the South Carolina Board of Fisheries, and owned and operated the Bluffton Seafood Co, now called the Bluffton Oyster Co, for many years. His son, my father, John Samuel Graves, Jr., later took over the operation of the Bluffton Seafood Co. and ran it for over thirty years. During that time he was the major employer in Bluffton. He and most of his seven brothers and sisters were all born in the Graves House. Most of the children were midwived by my great grandmother, Jane Hore Guilford. Great grandma Guilford was a well known and much loved "country doctor" around Bluffton in those days. She was known for her herbal and holistic remedies and was often seen driving her horse and buggy at all hours of the day or night tending to the health needs of Blufftonians. For a detailed look at Jane please read my article [Remembering Doctor Jane Guilford](#) under the Articles tab on [graveshouse.org](#).

My aunt, my father's sister, Mary Elizabeth Graves, was the last person to live in the Graves House. She had lived there alone for many, many years. She died in January of 2009 and was often called "a Bluffton original." She was known for her fierce integrity and for standing her ground on issues that she felt passionate about—no matter who opposed her. See my article, [Mary Graves, Fierce Defender of Old Town Bluffton](#), and [Bluffton's Thorny Rose](#) by J. Mitchell Brown under the Articles Tab on [graveshouse.org](#). Her story is also in *Remembering the Way It Was, Vol. II*, by Fran Heyward Marscher.

The Graves House was one of the few original homes left in Old Town Bluffton that remained in the same family for over 100 years. The house has long been listed as a “contributing structure” in the Bluffton Old Town Historic Preservation District. (For the reasons the house was so listed see “[Why a contributing structure?](#)” under the same Articles tab.) The Graves House was sold with the strict understanding that it could not be torn down, and that it must be restored. It was further understood that all repairs and updates on the house had to be approved by the Planning Department of the City of Bluffton. However, in 2012 an unfortunate and short sighted decision to allow the home to be demolished came close to consigning another significant piece of Bluffton’s colorful history to the bottom of the May River. If it weren’t for Bud and Shirley Mingledorff’s herculean efforts at restoring the house, the home would now be gone.

It is a great irony that *The Mary Elizabeth Graves Endowment* was established in 2009 at the *Community Foundation of the Lowcountry* with the specific intent to promote historical preservation, environmental protection and conservation efforts, and animal rights within the town of Bluffton. (The Foundation can accept contributions from any interested party.)

Four of the Graves children served overseas in WWII. A fifth child, Fred, their youngest brother, died in combat in the Korean War. Their mother, Cora Jane Guilford Graves, died a few weeks after learning of her son’s death. Many people are descended from Jane and George Guilford and from John and Cora Jane Graves. Many would never have existed but for the marriages of these four remarkable people. Just to name a few of the related families: Peeples, Saussey, McCracken, McCreary and Graves.