

## What's in your Attic?

By Doug Graves  
with Frank Hyland

You never know, so your prospects for playing a part in historical preservation are *incredibly* exciting! As an example, in the spring of 2009, a friend of VA Society member Douglas Graves asked him to look at a cardboard box full of old business/day-book journals, personal notes, assorted loose documents, and one hard-bound book, to determine if they had any merit. All items, it turned out, were ***original 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century documents!*** The friend stated that he and his wife had discovered the box in the attic of his father-in-law's home place in Madison Co., VA, a few years earlier. The books appeared to be business/accounting records for a grist mill somewhere—possibly in Madison County. Upon reviewing the materials, to Doug's utter shock, he found that the business journals represented the activities of members of Doug's immediate paternal line (Thomas and Sarah Graves), in Graves Mill (Madison Co., VA), from the late 1700's through the 1880's. Madison became a county in 1792 -- prior to that the area was part of Culpeper County. The vast majority of the business journals and day books pertained to the daily operation of the Graves Mill grist mill, then known as Beech Grove Mill. There were also journals from the Reedy, Graves, and Goodman mercantile store located at Wolftown, Va. The materials provide a "picture" of the day-to-day operations of the grist mill, to include amounts of wheat and corn ground into flour and corn meal, and the subsequent payments made in pounds, pence, and shillings. Additionally, numerous "IOUs" were found, describing personal loans that had been made by the patriarch--Thomas Graves (Doug's 5<sup>th</sup> g-grandfather) -- to various individuals in the area. Also found were shopping lists of goods purchased from the nearest deep-water port—Fredericksburg, VA -- some 60-plus miles away. At the time, that would have meant a three-day journey! The numerous journals and assorted documents provide a 'Who's-Who' of present-day Graves Mill and the Wolftown area of Madison County. The documents portray the economic wealth of the community, derived primarily from its extensive farming operations, to include the Graves Mill grist mill. The Thomas Graves family was responsible for the construction and operation of this historic mill from the late 1700's through the late 1800's. In 1889, ownership of the mill left the Graves family permanently; however, it continued in operation until about 1940. The mill is presently listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register--June 8, 2006--#0560015 as well as the National Register of Historic Places--August 30, 2006--#06000754.

Perhaps the single most exciting find in the cardboard box provided to Doug, because of its historical significance, was the aforementioned hard-bound book entitled, ***"CATALOGUE OF THE LIBRARY OF THE UNITED STATES" to which is annexed a copious index alphabetically arranged—Washington--printed by Jonathan Elliot 1815.*** As you know, during the War of 1812, the British burned our nation's capital, including the Library of Congress. At that time, Thomas Jefferson, third President of the United States, had acquired the largest personal collection of books in the United States. President Jefferson offered to sell his library collection to Congress as a replacement for the collection destroyed by the British. Congress purchased Jefferson's library for \$23,950 in 1815. George Waterson, then the Librarian of Congress, published the aforementioned book which was printed by Jonathan Elliot. The book was "issued from Washington." The book is 170 pages in length with a 32-page index. It is a catalogue of the books Thomas Jefferson sold to the United States -- the "foundation of the present-day Library of Congress." On the inside cover is handwritten the name, "John J. Ambler December 8, 1846."

On February 15, 1828, in Washington, D. C., Madison County resident John J. Ambler married Elizabeth Barbour, the niece of James Pendleton Barbour, the Governor of Virginia from 1812 to 1814. John and Elizabeth then resided at Jaquelin Hall within Madison County, located just a short distance from Frascati (Somerset, Madison County) where Elizabeth had lived.

Doug facilitated the generous donation of all of the business journals and assorted papers to the Library of Virginia for posterity purposes. The book described above, appraised at \$50,000.00, was donated to the Jefferson Foundation in Charlottesville, Va.

You just never know-what could be in ***your*** attic!