

Calvin Graves Found His Niche

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It took Calvin Graves some time before he found out the place he belonged.

Born to life on a tobacco farm in Caswell County in the late 1870s, Graves and his brother, George, spent most of their youth laboring among the numerous fields of the plantation.

His schooling was a mere three months a year in a small log cabin, but Graves managed to continue his education even to the collegiate level.

He went on to New York and studied at the Poughkeepsie School of Business. From there, Graves returned to the world of tobacco — this time from behind a desk.

He took a job with the American Tobacco Company in New York and worked there for several years. But he felt that New York wasn't providing the life he needed.

Graves' brother, George, had kept in touch, and he constantly wrote Calvin, urging him to return to North Carolina and join him in his company, the Mount Airy Mantel and Table Company.

George O. Graves had started the company with just a few workers. Day and night they worked to turn out hand-made table tops and mantels. Eventually, the company would grow into one of the area's largest furniture companies, merging with Bassett Furniture Company in the 1970s into National Furniture.

Eventually his brother's tales of the virtues of his home state wore Graves down.

Shortly after arriving here, he met a local English teacher and the anchor dropped for Graves in Mount Airy. Within a year he married Mary Eli-



Calvin Graves

zabeth Johnson and worked as vice-president of the company.

Together, the two brothers turned the company into one of the fastest-growing companies in the region.

Graves died in 1939, leaving four children behind: Calvin Graves Jr., Mary Elizabeth

Graves, Florida Warren and Dorabell Sykes.

"He was loved and liked by everyone who met him," Sykes says of her father. "He was a humble person. His actions were almost always anonymous. They spoke for themselves."