

## **Graham, John** <sup>[1]</sup>

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**1 Aug. 1847–6 May 1921**

John Graham, educator, was born in Fayetteville, the son of Archibald and Ann McLean Graham. He inherited the red hair, fair complexion, and Presbyterian faith of his Scot-Irish forebears. Graham claimed among his ancestors Alexander McAlister, a signer of the [Halifax Resolves](#) <sup>[2]</sup> and patriot officer. Prepared for college by [John DeBerniere Hooper](#) <sup>[3]</sup> and Jesse R. McLean, he chose instead to follow in the footsteps of his Revolutionary ancestor and in 1863, at the age of sixteen, enlisted in the Confederate Army.

In 1865, four months after his parole, Graham began the career that was to make him one of the outstanding educators in North Carolina. On the recommendation of Hooper, Charles M. Cook of Warrenton hired Graham to prepare his son [Charles Alston](#) <sup>[4]</sup> for [The University of North Carolina](#) <sup>[5]</sup>. When Cook left for Chapel Hill three years later, Graham's reputation had been established and he opened Fork Institute, which attracted students from Warren and surrounding counties. In 1877, he succeeded [John E. Dugger](#) <sup>[6]</sup> as principal of the Warrenton Male Academy. Dugger returned from the Centennial School in Raleigh in 1880, and Graham went back to Fork Institute. After a fire at the Institute in 1890, he became principal of Ridgeway High School.

When another disastrous fire in 1897 destroyed the Ridgeway school, Dr. J. P. Macon, a former pupil, persuaded Graham to resume his former position as principal of Warrenton Male Academy. Graham changed the academy's name to Warrenton High School, purchased an additional building to serve as a dormitory and dining hall, and erected suitable outbuildings. As a result of this expansion, enrollment increased to over 100 boarders. In 1903, the school became coeducational and Graham purchased the home of William Plummer for a girls' dormitory, which he called Mordecai House after the earlier Warrenton girls school immortalized by [Ellen Mordecai](#) <sup>[7]</sup> in *Hastings*.

Graham, who had specialized in Latin, believed in the value of the traditional studies of Latin, Greek, and mathematics as the basis of a sound education. According to one of his students, he "possessed unusual power of imparting knowledge and teaching his pupils how to study . . . he gripped the interest and attention of his classes." He had a reputation for instilling discipline as well as learning, and it was said that "a large number of bad boys were reformed under his tutelage."

Described by a contemporary as "a small man but of impressive manners, a careful dresser and sensitively handsome," Graham also won a deserved reputation for classical scholarship and educational leadership. He served one term as president of the [North Carolina Teachers Assembly](#) <sup>[8]</sup> and held office in state and local agricultural organizations. The success of his students, including state supreme court justice [Charles A. Cook](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, editor [William Polk](#) <sup>[9]</sup>, actor [Sidney Blackmer](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, and two administrators of The University of North Carolina, [Frank Porter Graham](#) <sup>[11]</sup> and [Robert B. House](#) <sup>[12]</sup>, attests to the effectiveness of his methods and curriculum.

On 28 Dec. 1868, Graham married Frances Gideon Daniels of [Halifax County](#) <sup>[13]</sup>. "Miss Frankie" and three of their children, William Alexander, Amma, and Maria, worked with Graham at the school. When an attack of influenza impaired his health in 1914, Graham's son became acting principal. John Graham returned to the helm briefly when his son entered the army in 1917, but at the end of the next academic year (June 1918) he closed the doors of "the last of Warrenton's great private high schools." He died three years later and was buried in the family plot at the Episcopal church in Ridgeway.

Graham was survived by his wife and five children: William Alexander, who was to become superintendent of schools in Wilmington and Kinston; Amma, a longtime member of the Warren County Board of Education; Maria, later head of the English department at East Carolina Teachers College; Flora (Mrs. William Henry Horne); and Virginia (Mrs. Phillip G. Alston). In 1929, in recognition of his service to education, his former students presented a portrait of Graham by William Steen to the high school in Warrenton.

#### **References:**

[Charles A. Cook Papers \(Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill\)](#),<sup>[14]</sup>

Lizzie W. Montgomery, *Sketches of Old Warrenton* (1924).

*Raleigh News and Observer*, 18 Apr. 1920, 8 May 1921, 24 Nov. 1929.

*Warrenton Warren Record*, 13 May 1921.

Manly W. Wellman, *The County of Warren* (1959).

#### **Additional Resources:**

"Former Warrenton (John Graham) High School (Warrenton, N.C.)." Built Heritage of North Carolina: Historic Architecture in the Old North State. North Carolina State University Libraries. Special Collections Research Center.

<http://images.lib.ncsu.edu/luna/servlet/view/all/what/Former+Warrenton+%28John+Graham%29+High+School+%28Warrenton,+N.C.%29>  
<sup>[15]</sup> (accessed March 21, 2014).

#### **Subjects:**

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[Educators](#) <sup>[17]</sup>

[Military personnel](#) <sup>[18]</sup>

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Cumberland County <sup>[20]</sup>

Fayetteville <sup>[21]</sup>

Warren County <sup>[22]</sup>

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