

George Graham

(1772 – 9 Aug 1830)

Graham. Yesterday morning at 2 o'clock, at the residence of Mr. Robert Y. Brent, near this city, George Graham, Esq. Commissioner of the General Land Office. -- An obituary notice will be attempted by the writer of this article, for an early number of the National Intelligencer, which may, in some measure, be suitable to the melancholy occasion, and exhibit a faint outline of the distinguished merits and character of this most valuable and estimable gentleman.

The National Intelligencer, August 26, 1830

The Late George Graham

The short notice which was published of the death of George Graham, Esq., late Commissioner of the General Land Office, immediately after it occurred, has served to spread the intelligence of that event, and to excite the sympathy and regret of as numerous and respectable a portion of the whole community, as the death of almost any other individual belonging to it could occasion. It took place, as has been already stated at the house of a friend and relative, Robert Young Brent, Esq. in the neighborhood of this City, in the morning of the 8th inst.

The union of the highest intellectual endowments, with a correspondent cultivation and improvement of them, by assiduous study, judicious research, and an extensive experience in useful and honorable pursuits, eminently distinguished and characterized the deceased, in private and in public life but these qualifications, valuable and useful as they are in themselves, were in him adorned, in a most eminent degree, by the qualities of a heart of the purest benevolence, and by an innate and a lofty sense of honor, which served to invest them with their true value, and to give them their proper efficiency and direction, within the sphere of his means and opportunities.

Mr. Graham was the eldest son of Richard Graham, Esq. of Dumfries, in Virginia, from his marriage with Miss Brent, the fourth daughter of George Brent, Esq. of that neighborhood and much of the excellence and undeviating correctness of his character and conduct, in every stage and vicissitude of his subsequent life, may be justly ascribed to the truly maternal fondness and solicitude of that estimable lady, in training his youthful mind to the principles of virtue and truth, and above all, to the brightness of the model, which she, herself, exhibited, in her own life and character, in all the excellencies peculiar to her sex.

After having accomplished his academic and collegiate studies in the then best institutions of the United States, with great advantage and improvement, he was for several years employed by his father in superintending the location and survey of extensive tracts of land, which he owned in the Western country and, soon after his return from this service to Dumfries, his native place, he married the widow of George Mason, Esq. of Lexington, in the neighboring county of Fairfax, of which county he then became a resident. Here his merits and talents soon pointed him out to the freeholders of that county, as a fit person to represent them in the Legislature of their State, and he was accordingly almost unanimously elected for several successive years, as one of the delegates of that county, to the General Assembly of Virginia. He served as elector, also, of President and Vice President of the United States twice or thrice during this time, giving his vote upon the first occasion to Mr. Jefferson, and upon the others to Mr. Madison, for the office of President. During the late war between the United States and Great Britain, and at a very gloomy period of the contest, it is understood that President Monroe, then acting as Secretary of War, who had known him intimately and thoroughly from his earliest youth, and was well acquainted with the sterling worth of his character in all its bearings, offered him a high

military rank in the service of the country, and the circumstances prevent him at the time from the acceptance of it but an occasion soon afterwards happened, which enabled Mr. Monroe, to evince a still higher confidence, perhaps, in his talents and knowledge of public affairs, by associating him with himself in the care of the Department of War, that he might devote more of his own attention to his duties as Secretary of State. He was employed in this way, greatly to the advantage of the public service, and to the satisfaction of those who had transactions with the Department of War, for a considerable length of time when the then President Madison, assigned all the duties of that Department to him, as acting Secretary of War. Throughout the war, and for some time after its termination, he continued to be employed in this and other stations of trust and confidence in the public service, at the Seat of Government and upon the establishment of the present Bank of the United States, or soon afterwards, and the location of a branch of it in this city, he was appointed to the presidency of the branch, which he retained until he was appointed Commissioner of the General Land Office, upon the transfer of Judge McLean from that station to the office of Postmaster General of the United States, and he occupied this place till the time of his death.

From what has been said, it would be superfluous to add, that in the relations of domestic, social, and public life, the deceased fulfilled, with exemplary kindness and philanthropy, and with the soundest judgment and discretion, all the obligations incident to these several relations.

Having become a widower by the death of his first wife, he married some years ago Miss Jane Watson, the daughter of James Watson, Esq. of this city, and from both his marriages he has left small but interesting families, with an afflicted widow, to every individual of whom his lamented death will prove one of the severest and most trying calamities which can ever befall the domestic circle.

The writer considers it a tribute which he owes to the memory of the deceased to record this imperfect sketch in relation to his character and service and it may likewise serve as a faint memorial of the high and distinguished estimation in which they were so justly held.

Cyclopedia of American Biography

Graham, George, cabinet officer, was born in Dumfries, Va., in 1772. He was graduated at Columbia in 1790, practiced law in Prince William county, Va., removed to Fairfax county and on the declaration of war against Great Britain in 1812 he recruited the "Fairfax light-horse" and commanded the troop during the war. When General Armstrong retired from the war department in 1813, Graham took charge of the office as chief clerk and continued in that office under Secretaries James Monroe, 1814, William H. Crawford, 1815-16, and Isaac Shelby, 1817, and when the latter declined the nomination Mr. Graham was secretary of war ad interim until the office was assumed by John C. Calhoun, the same year. He continued as chief clerk under Mr. Calhoun and in 1818 at the request of the secretary, visited the threatened French armed settlement at Orcoguis Bluffs, Texas, and finding the colonists on Galveston island en route for the bluffs, he induced them to abandon their plans. He was president of the Washington branch of the Bank of the United States, 1819-23, and commissioner of the U.S. land office, 1823-30. He died in Washington, D.C., in August, 1830.