

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## The Career of a Pioneer

*This story is based upon letters, diaries, journals, and various legal papers in the possession of Dr. H. R. Graham of Elberon, Iowa. — The Editor.*

Restlessness — the restlessness of the pioneer spirit — seized James R. Graham in the spring of 1852. Opportunity beckoned from the "golden" West, and her call could not be denied. Wealth, fame, adventure — everything that an ambitious, determined, and intelligent man could want — awaited the first claimant. The staid security of a small Eastern farm held little attraction for a man with such visions.

Born in Kortright, Delaware County, New York, on May 31, 1812, James Graham was raised on his father's farm. He was fortunate in securing a good education for the times, and his father's means enabled him to adopt stylish tastes rather out of the ordinary in a country lad.

In 1837 he was united in marriage with eighteen-year-old Margaret Pound, of Warwick, Or-

ange County, New York, and established a home in Delaware County. During the years following, to 1852, two sons and two daughters were born. The elder son died in infancy.

Meanwhile, the Grahams had moved to Davenport, in Delaware County, where they had purchased a farm. It was there that they decided to go West. The impending birth of another child, James H., delayed their departure until the fall of 1852. Then, at the age of forty, Graham cast his lot and that of his family into the tide of the westward migration. Every asset beyond personal effects was converted into cash, and the entire family took passage for Chicago. From there they went to Plainfreto, Illinois, where the country seemed attractive, and rented a small farm.

Winter passed. Spring revived the old feeling of discontent. Summer saw the family again moving westward. The goal was at last clear, and Graham was eager. Iowa was to fulfill his dreams.

At Davenport, Iowa, he purchased a young mare and colt, and a buggy for conveyance. Good horses, fast horses, were Graham's weakness. He was never long without one, and would race "anybody, anywhere, at any time". Despite his pioneering he was known as a "very toney old boy". His tall figure was arrayed in fine "store" clothes. His face was smooth-shaven, except for long dark

sideburns worn in the approved Eastern style. His thin hair was carefully parted. Steady, clear eyes, a firm mouth, and a determined chin characterized the man himself.

The family tarried a while in Iowa City while Graham "looked for land". Chance led him into acquaintance with a surveyor who had recently worked in Tama County. Of the land he had measured, the surveyor declared that he "liked the northeast quarter of section 25, township 83 north, range 13, best." Graham made immediate arrangements at the Iowa City office of the Register of the Land Office to buy that quarter section, together with the available northeast quarter of the northeast quarter of section 26 (40 acres) and the southwest quarter of the southwest quarter of section 35 (40 acres). The standard governmental price of \$1.25 an acre was paid. Then, with 240 acres of rich Iowa land awaiting, the Grahams, accompanied by a brother, Thomas A., began the last portion of the journey to their new home.

Iowa City was left behind sometime in September, 1853. At Cedar Rapids, Graham acquired another horse, four oxen, and "necessary articles". Included in this latter item were such items as seed, a "John Deere" plow, a cradle and sickles, other small tools and implements, and winter supplies. Two families, those of James Shugart and

Z. T. Shugart, with their wagons and oxen, joined the party. With them was Levi March, out "to look at land" with a view to later settlement.

The halt at Cedar Rapids was much longer than had been expected because of an untimely accident. Sometime during the night the mare and colt purchased at Davenport broke loose and started for home. Graham had to pursue them on horseback, and succeeded in recapturing the recalcitrant animals about halfway between Iowa City and Davenport. Thus it was not until almost the first of October that the little party actually struck out along the "Transcontinental Road".

On October 3rd the emigrants encountered a woman, eastward bound. Ragged and barefoot, she rode a heaped-up wagon pulled by a milch cow and an ox. Greetings were exchanged and queries made. "This country ain't no good", she said, "and I'm gittin' out. It got my husband but it won't git me." Before she resumed her exodus, however, she signed with her mark a quit-claim deed to the homestead of Stephen and Phoebe Fowler, being the "South West quarter of Section 24 and North West quarter of Section 35 Likewise one Log Cabin & about 1000 fence Rails the above Claim is Situated in Township 83". Graham got this place "for the Sum of Thirty five Dollor to me in hand paid."

His first task was to remove the cabin so recently acquired to his "homestead" on the adjoining quarter section he had bought at Iowa City. Much of the surrounding territory was prairie, but timber was not entirely lacking. Wooded Salt Creek and its many small tributaries were close by. Preparations for the winter were immediately begun. The cabin was repaired and rendered more habitable, and a small addition was built. A stock shed was constructed. Supplies were stored. Game, which abounded in the vicinity, found its way into the family larder. Sweet-smelling hay, made from the long wild grass that grew by the acre, was stacked for the stock. Finally, the sod was broken. Everyone helped. Life was rough and rude; loneliness and hardship were the common lot of all. But the future was rosy with promise.

Winter came all too quickly, though it did not put an end to the activity on the new homestead. Repairs had to be made and implements put in order. The opening of spring found the Grahams ready and eager to start the fight for existence against all the trials of a new land.

Road building was the leading topic of discussion and action in Tama County during the years 1853 and 1854. The settlers were determined to have the county open to travel and free communi-

cation. Three main roads were established in 1854. One of these, known locally as the "Ridge Road", was destined to have considerable influence upon Graham's future. It furnished, in effect, a further continuation of the old "Transcontinental Road", connecting Cedar Rapids and Marshalltown, and points west. Originally traced by the "bull-whackers" with their ox-drawn freight wagons along the line of least resistance, this highway has recently been included in the Lincoln Highway. The road ran along the southern boundary of Graham's homestead. Crossing it, and running north and south along Graham's eastern boundary, stretched the Tama-Benton county line.

Travel over the new road was increasingly brisk. With his usual foresight, Graham early saw the possibilities of his position, and proceeded to extract every possible advantage from it. He immediately started the construction of a tavern, using lumber that was rough-hewn from trees felled in the vicinity or purchased from neighbors. Finishing lumber was purchased at Iowa City, largely from Cotes Davis and Company, and laboriously hauled in ox-drawn wagons on week-long trips. The tavern, a three-story building, neared completion by early fall.

Meanwhile, Graham joined forces with his

southern neighbor, Simon Overturf, in a greater venture. After due deliberation a portion of the land of each, extending for one block on either side of the Ridge Road and two blocks westward from the county line, was platted into a village site. Thus was Redman founded. That portion of the Ridge Road which cut through the middle of the town became Main Street, crossed at its center by Gama Street; that portion of the county line that formed the eastern boundary became Greenwich Street; to the north lay Jefferson; to the west was Buckeye; and to the south, Washington.

Already competition threatened one and one-half miles to the south. Levi Marsh, a friend and immigrant companion of the previous year, had returned and begun platting his own town of West Irving, since known as Irving. As yet Redman existed only on paper — and that not recorded. Nevertheless, Graham turned his seemingly inexhaustible energies toward breathing life into it. His reward came in securing for Redman the establishment of the second post office in the county. His commission as postmaster, dated September 28, 1854, arrived in October, bearing a personal message of friendship and proffered service from Senator A. C. Dodge. A mail route from Maringo to Marietta, in Marshall County, had been established early in the year: Redman was to be

served by a branch route from Kozta, in Iowa County, through Redman, to Toledo, the county seat of Tama County.

A general store, if it might be dignified by that name, was included in the plans for the tavern. Graham's business sense caused him to lay in a small stock of merchandise. Trade was meagre, however, for a larger and more adequate stock was available at the Marsh store at West Irving. Furthermore, the larger "cities" farther east — Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, and sometimes Davenport — profited from the lion's share of trade from inland neighborhoods. Practically all transactions were by barter, for "hard" money was scarce and paper money depreciated so rapidly that it was a poor medium of exchange. Graham took a great variety of farm products in trade for his goods — grain, lumber, skins, hides, and livestock. He undertook on his own responsibility the resale of this miscellaneous produce in the "city". These transactions were profitable — returns of a hundred to two hundred fifty per cent being not uncommon.

In the spring of 1855 a stage line was established between Marengo and Waterloo, over the county-line road. Redman became a regular stop. Immigrants passed in ever-increasing numbers over the two roads, as the county "filled up".

Many were compelled to "wait-over" at the tavern, when spring thaws and rains caused a nearby tributary of Salt Creek to overflow. Indeed, so frequently did this occur that the stream was christened and still remains "Troublesome Creek".

Business flourished. Graham had to reserve accommodations for wagons near his tavern. A much-needed "wagon-shop", or blacksmithy, was set up on one of the adjoining town lots. Four other lots in the still unrecorded village were sold to neighbors and friends interested in the venture. Increasingly, Graham found himself seduced from farming, and therefore relied upon the work of his family and hired help for his tillage enterprises.

It has been said that the Iowa of the fifties lived in the future; that it was a land of poverty and small things, but withal a land of dreams. Land was the keyword in Iowa's development. In January, 1855, Graham received a power of attorney from Grover S. Breese, of Aurora County, Illinois, to dispose of certain holdings in Tama County. His negotiations were so successful that by mid-year he began seriously contemplating the inclusion of real estate business with his other affairs. The office was needed, for no local agent was located nearer than Toledo, the county seat. To this end Graham became the agent of Green and Stone, of Muscatine, who listed Tama County

lands at \$3.25 per acre. Later, he also represented another firm, Culbertson and Reno, of Iowa City.

However, certain affairs required more immediate attention. Several families were scattered throughout the neighborhood. Educational facilities were sadly lacking. A petition to the School Fund Commissioner of Benton County was drawn up, requesting the formation of a school district. Graham's name headed the list of twenty signatures, and the petition was granted on August 25th. Under his supervision work was begun immediately on the erection of a schoolhouse close to Redman. On November 17th the plat of the village was finally recorded.

The winter of 1855-56 was long and hard, but not uneventful. Unusually heavy snow stopped travel and business. Animal life and small game suffered. Deer, half-starved, were easily killed by man and wolves. Venison was cheap, "cheaper than gun-powder". While hauling in a fresh kill one evening, Graham found himself flanked by wolves, attracted by the smell of fresh meat. A race for safety ensued. The wolves, not particularly numerous or formidable, were nevertheless potentially dangerous. But Graham was determined to save the meat. Yelling at the top of his rather "big" voice, he urged his team to run. His wife, almost a half-mile away, heard the uproar

and hurried out with a lantern to meet her husband. The wolves, frightened by the light and the nearness of the buildings, reluctantly gave up the chase.

Work upon the new schoolhouse, suspended during the winter, was rushed to completion as soon as the weather permitted. Lumber and materials were purchased at Iowa City, Kozta, Muscatine, Grinnell, Toledo, and from local men. By early spring, with the aid of a community "raising", the building was finished and ready for use.

Graham's frequent absences and increased business necessitated the employment of an assistant, John Allen, at the post office. More supplies were brought from Iowa City, where new vigor had been imparted by the arrival of the railroad. Linseed oil, brushes, small implements, and lamp black were items included in the regular list. The tavern flourished. Prices were "good": Graham bought corn at 25 cents, hogs at  $5\frac{1}{2}$  cents, beef at 4 cents, and home-milled flour at  $3\frac{1}{4}$  cents per pound.

The harvest was small, in comparison with modern crops secured from the same land. In 1856, however, it was considered satisfactory. Graham recorded that his corn yielded "almost 40" bushels to the acre, his wheat "about 18", and his oats "about 30". A Wight reaper, imported

from Dayton, Ohio, was used to help harvest the crop that year.

Graham continued his association with the land companies of Muscatine and Iowa City, and also acted independently for several land owners "back East". Jesse Beeson, of Uniontown, Pennsylvania, was the first of his new clients. Graham himself purchased an additional eighty acres adjoining his holdings in Redman, for \$1000, from his old client, Grover S. Breese.

The year 1857 passed in marked contrast to its predecessor. Financial panic seized the nation. Business slumped everywhere and land sales stopped abruptly. Old settlers were debt-ridden, and new settlers were few. Even the winter of 1857-58 was severe, ending a "bad year" throughout. Heavy snows obstructed work until late in March. When they vanished, however, the new year showed more promise. The spring stock-up at the store was still composed mainly of staples but small quantities of leather and potash, and a number of chairs (on order) were also included, as well as "2 Rays Arithmetic No. 3." Most of the goods were traded out, for pork at 6 cents, lard at 10 cents, and oats at 25 cents. Hides, dry or green, were brought in regularly. One shipment alone, to W. P. Cook and Company, of Chicago, consisted of 41 dry and 21 green hides.

Redman gained a new and lost an old resident family. It is characteristic of Graham that he relieved those departing, the William Lamphier family, of their town lot.

Land again began to increase in value, and sales quickened. Several letters were received from Eastern landowners, anxious to sell their holdings in Tama County. Once more Graham turned his major attention to real estate deals. The following year brought a continued small but steady increase in the business, particularly with the Eastern clients. As agent it was his duty to look out for his clients' taxes, to attempt revaluation, and to keep the lands from being sold for arrears. Complaints of taxes were numerous. Jesse Beeson expressed the usual sentiment when he wrote: "I think the Taxes are very high for a New Country."

Although the land business showed a marked increase, it took second place during 1860. The railroad occupied everyone's attention that year. Graham was among the first to offer his services in helping to raise money for "preliminary surveys" of the Cedar Rapids and Missouri River Railroad. Subscriptions were liberal. It was a gala occasion when the road was finally completed to the newly platted town of Belle Plaine, six miles to the south — although that event was to mark the beginning of the end for Redman.

The railroad brought new markets to a county which was ready for them. New settlers followed. References to the railroad were made in every letter of land-seekers. Typical were the comments of C. N. Thompson: "Having once stopped over night with you I take the liberty . . . to make some inquiries in relation to a piece of land. . . . Please inform me in regard to whether the rail road prospects are at all good for a road to pass anywhere through that vicinity & whether land can be bought near there & at about what price as others will come if I do . . . if the rail road is located please let me know . . . where the nearest station will most probably be."

In June a tornado passed near Redman. Graham made unskilled observations of the phenomenon which he forwarded to the Smithsonian Institution at Washington, D. C. The information was warmly appreciated, according to a letter of thanks from W. L. Nicholson. Mr. Nicholson was careful, however, to state that while he was pleased to be of any service, his sphere of power "does not lay in the political line."

The excitement of the Civil War grew slowly in Tama County. Interest in the slavery question had not been high. War meetings were held throughout the county, to spur up enlistments, and the cry, "Save the Union", brought many volun-

teers. Redman community sent its share along with the rest.

Times were not too "easy" in the following two years. Collections were hard to make. Nevertheless, Graham continued to devote most of his time to the land business. On October 17, 1861, he bought an eighty-acre tract in Tama County for two dollars an acre, and on the following day he purchased 160 acres in Benton County for the delinquent taxes.

Early in the spring of 1863 a fire of unknown origin ravaged the struggling little town of Redman. Little beyond a few personal effects and Graham's "papers" was saved. The Grahams were received by the Marsh family at West Irving, where they were fed, clothed, and sheltered until new arrangements could be made. Graham later attempted to pay his business rival and personal friend for this act of kindness, but he could not prevail upon Marsh to accept a cent. Redman existed no longer. The post office was removed to West Irving. The few other shops and business concerns moved either to the same town or to the livelier and more enterprising Belle Plaine.

After studying the prospects, Graham decided to "follow the railroad". He, therefore, moved to the newly-formed town of Chelsea, in Tama County, where the C. R. & M. R. had just arrived.

There he began buying and selling grain, livestock, hides, and produce. Business was very good. Shipments, most of them handled by M. S. Nichols and Company, were made regularly to Chicago. The outlook was so promising that, on November 2nd, Graham purchased for forty dollars a town lot in the community. In the following year, on August 24th, he bought from Frederick Strobe a lot near the tracks, complete with a one-story frame warehouse and platform scales, for \$350.

In 1864 arrangements were made and work was begun on a project to rebuild a house on the old homestead. For the past year the Graham family had been forced once more to use the original log cabin. But by the fall of 1864 the new home, erected at a cost of about \$1500, was completed. Actual farm work still remained largely in the hands of hired help, but Graham displayed keen interest in "putting the farm in shape".

Business continued active during the years 1864 to 1867. On April 1, 1865, Graham joined in partnership with John Maholm in the business of "Buying and Vending all kinds of Grain". The firm, known as Graham and Company, operated in Belle Plaine during the two succeeding years. Graham maintained the Chelsea warehouse independent of the partnership and continued to buy

livestock, mostly hogs at \$4.50 a hundred, through this station.

The year 1869 saw Graham turning more and more to farming. On March 16th he commenced planting wheat, barley, oats, corn, and cane. The neighborhood was "filling up". In the vicinity of the former Redman were twenty families numbering fifty-five persons. Most of the available land was under cultivation, and the crops were good. Graham purchased an Aultman and Taylor thresher, imported from Mansfield, Ohio. With it he threshed 869 bushels of wheat and 169 bushels of oats on his first "set". Another purchase consisted of a "Williams' Combined Fanning Mill", distributed by Barr, Freeman, and Elsifer, of Vinton. So well did it work that Graham secured the agency for the mill.

Agricultural interests were dominant on the homestead. Nevertheless, a little land business occasionally interrupted the farm work. In 1866 Graham had disposed of some of his later acquisitions to Charles Hromatko and other clients, and in 1867 he had made a sale for an Eastern client. In 1869 he bought an adjoining fourteen acres from Lydia Wright, for \$20, and negotiations were begun with J. S. McVey, of Walhonding, Ohio, for a "big deal" that was never quite finished. Farming, however, continued Graham's

major interest following 1868. The family was well content.

The year 1871 dawned auspiciously. A proposed project for a north-and-south railroad from Waterloo to Belle Plaine was under way. Graham was active in arousing interest in the construction of this proposed branch, which was to be called the Waterloo, Belle Plaine, and North Missouri Railway, but the project failed.

Intermittent abdominal pains bothered Graham throughout the summer. They were diagnosed as "Inflammation of the Bowels", probably appendicitis. Gradually the pain and discomfort increased, culminating in a final attack to which he succumbed on August 17, 1871. After fifty-nine years, two months, and seventeen days of active life, the pioneer work of James R. Graham was ended.

WALTER E. KALOUPEK