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## Elinor Graham Correspondence

Elinor Mish Graham 1905-1983

Hilda McLeod Jacob  
*Maine State Library*

Maine State Library

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GRAHAM, ELINOR (MRS.)

Born in Hagerstown, Maryland.

# Buttons Only an Excuse For Elinor Graham's Book About Flying Point Folk

Buttons were only an excuse to meet more of her Flying Point neighbors, explains Elinor Graham, whose latest book will be published by Macmillan in the Spring. Her button collection and the adventures she had adding to it form the background for the sketches which are, thus far, nameless.

There's some difference of opinion between Mrs. Graham and her publishers relative to the title, for while the author favors a slightly flippant name, the publishers think it only fitting that Capt. Stephen Merryman, whose pre-Revolutionary coat button, unearthed in the Graham garden started Mrs. Graham on her quest for more and more buttons, should be immortalized on the cover caption.

However, there's apparently little in a name, for the new book is far from flippant and devotes very little space to the venerable captain, or to buttons, as it presents a series of sketches about Maine folk and their traditions that have the charm and sensitive insight evident in Mrs. Graham's earlier work, "Our Way Down East."

A whole family once more, Elinor Graham, her husband David, recently returned from service with the United States Navy, and Lani, almost-four-year-old daughter, have settled down to the rugged life of a Maine family on a salt water farm. While David is busy shingling the hen house, putting fertilizer on the garden and stacking the tremendous wood pile that will see them comfortably through a long cold Winter, Elinor is hard at work at her desk. For of course there's another book on the way, commenced as

soon as the button book was in the hands of the publishers. This time it's an entirely new venture—fiction, and Mrs. Graham is struggling with plots and subplots which will one day grow into a story of social significance, developed against the background of Maine and Alabama, for the southern state follows closely after Maine in Mrs. Graham's affections.

During the past Winter, while her husband was in the service, Mrs. Graham spent four months in a small Alabama town, renewing friendships she made there in the days when she headed the department of the drama in a progressive school.

She found time last winter, also, to work in silver and the result has been many interesting combinations of her more precious buttons and silver to form pins, earrings and bracelets.

Lani is no unimportant part of the Graham family. Born on Pearl Harbor Day, she was formally named Florence Beale Graham, but for all practical purposes is known by the diminutive of the Hawaiian name.

Although the Grahams are planning to stay on their South Freeport farm until after Christmas, (in fact they are already beginning to arrange the Christmas greens about the house), by the time the hay at the bottom of the field has frozen over, they will probably be off to



**ELINOR GRAHAM**, author of "Our Way Down East," whose new book about her Flying Point neighbors will be out in the Spring, enjoys the Fall sunshine with daughter, Lani, on the doorstep of her South Freeport home.

warmer places. Possibly they will make another trek to Alabama where Mrs. Graham will gather more material for the first novel which gives every promise of being as successful as her original venture into the personal essay field of writing.

Lewiston Evening Journal  
November 10, 1946



# FINDS FREEPORT AUTHORESS A MOST DELIGHTFUL WOMAN

DEC 27 1943

## Elinor Graham's Our Way Down East in Fourth Printing

By Rosemary Clifford Trott

I drove down the silent, white blanketed road to Flying Point, a little breathless still with the impression of Elinor Graham's living charm upon paper, for I had just finished the reading of her book, "Our Way Down East," which is in its fourth printing. There was a hush upon the land as if it were, instead of a living scene, a portrait out of a Christmas story book. It was far away, and long ago, and lovelier than any painting has a right to be, and yet I could reach out my hand, and feel the realness of it. There were the little dark pines set in the pristine crystal of the snow; there was the calm vividness of blue bay set against curving shoreline, and topped with the glistening whiteness of the rolling hills.

I remembered the clean-cut Yankee farmwife's crisp directions, the warm smile that broke like sun out of shadow when I mentioned Elinor Graham.

"Yes, she lives in the fifth house below the schoolhouse on the left." "Thomas Means Hall," was inscribed above the schoolhouse door, and I knew that this was the meeting house so warmly described in "Our Way Down East." It really was like a story-book coming true, and I eagerly scanned each mailbox for the legend "David Graham." Then before a house I knew must be the one, I read the legend "D. L. Graham." I stopped for a long moment, looking down the blue, blue bay, imagining Elinor skating with David here on that day before Pearl Harbor, on that day when little Lani was still only a sweet dream, prolonging the anticipation of meeting this attractive personality who had shown out so vividly from the pages of a book.

Before I saw the house I think I saw Toby, or rather Toby saw me, and I can testify that he is everything as a watchdog that Elinor describes in her book, but "Heaven Bless him," I just fell in love with him,—bark, or no bark, and he couldn't remain hostile long. My little girl who went with me to call on "Lani," was in awe of him to begin with, and she remained so through the visit, though she fell in love with Lani at first sight.

Elinor, and David's house sits on its own ledge above the road, and beams benevolently down upon you. It is distinctly a friendly house. Its windows seem to wink at you, and it has those darling Christmas trees around it, and you go in the back door just as you would expect to enter a real down-east farmhouse. I saw little Lani before: I saw Elinor, and I wanted to pick her up, and cuddle her, and tell her stories. She is that kind of a fairy book child, with dainty features, and the sweetness of the "Age of Innocence." She peeked out at me in the friendliest way, and I just enjoyed making an acquaintance through the window there in that impossibly lovely dooryard.

Toby stood beside me, his shining blackness contrasting with the whiteness of the Winter's day. I liked listening to the stillness of things disturbed only by your breathing, and the faint tick of the grandfather's clock inside. Then staccato heel taps came quickly across the house, and there, at the door, saying,

"Come in, come in," was Elinor Graham,—the real Elinor Graham of the pages of "Our Way Down East," only more real, and more electrically alive. Her blue eyes shot sparks of animation, her vivid face was asparkle with sheer love of life, and she radiated interest in, and about you, and the whole wide world. Elinor was in a hurry. She was packing to go South, and had an appointment in Brunswick that afternoon. She was dressing to go out, not that she needed to change. For she was charming as she was. I really didn't notice what she was wearing, though they say that is the first thing one woman notices about another—her clothes. Elinor is that kind of a girl. You just don't care what she's wearing. She's a personality. Her smartness is a part of her, and she is like the little girl you once read a poem about. It ran like this—"The little girl who lives next door—if she stuck a broom straw in her hat, we'd think it was a feather—she's like that."

I was almost glad she was going to leave me alone in her charming living room. I wanted to feel her animation in the furniture arrangements, in the gorgeous view of the bay, as blue as her electric blue eyes. I wanted to look at her collection of buttons set in an oval frame between the two windows overlooking the water. And I wanted to feel the unseen presence of the women who had made this exciting life for herself with her David against the background of pines, and water. It was like an introduction to the real Elinor Graham apart from the conscious exercise of her charm. There is gallantry about this house, and about the brown-haired girl who is its heart-beat, the absurd gallantry of little tapping heels, of slim feminine hands tending fires, driving back country,

snowbound roads, keeping her watch with little Lani for the David, whose very living presence is in her eyes, and in his baby's eyes, whose footprints are in the dooryard, and whose heartbeat keeps time to Elinor's. A Navy wife, so chic, so feminine, and so sure, and steady about life—she is. "We are not to be hysterical," she said, "Just to go on living as always." That is the very essence of America. That is what we are fighting for—just to go on living as always. And what good words those are—what perfect words for our purpose. It's been like that from away back in this country of ours. Didn't pioneer women think that once? In the face of hardship, death, and privation, they just "kept on living." That is the gallant thing to do. Elinor Graham is a gallant lady. What greater compliment can one woman pay another?

There were two white leather armchairs Elinor had brought from Maryland in her living room that especially caught my eye. They matched the outside whiteness. She had captured color in this room, and sunshine, and a little shadow too. She says she can't paint, but I think she can—with effects, with furniture. She had been silvering some branches, and had placed them in her fireplace. She had stopped to silver branches to take with her, this girl who sends apple blossoms through the mail. She captures beauty, and holds it naked in her two hands, and each time she does this some of it sifts into her personality, is imprisoned in her smile. Through one of the colonial doors I could see her canopied bed which she had brought "from home," with its yellow quilt thrown across the conservative white one—like sunshine on snow. And through another door I could see the great old-fashioned kitchen with its modern touches in the form of gleaming enameled cabinets, and other "conveniences." And then Elinor came in. Instantly every-



thing seemed alive. It was as if she had waved a magic wand, and brought the very pictures on the wall to life. She is slim and graceful. She walks like a dancer, and sits like a model, and yet none of this is consciously done. It is part of Elinor. She looks at you so directly. She speaks to you so frankly. You feel that you have always known her, but that you'd like to know her for a long time, and longer. She was motoring to Maryland in order that Lani could have a family Christmas even though David has left for sea action. Everything was to be as usual, though Daddy could not be with his little girl. Do we appreciate this? All of us? The grandness of girls like Elinor who are making Christmas without their men for the children, so that there shall be no empty Christmases for children to remember in spite of war, in spite of world catastrophe? Times like these make you so proud to be a woman.

We talked about simple things—Christmas customs, recipes, peacetime celebrations versus wartime,—all the down to earth subjects women cling to because they are part of every day living, no matter what may come. And then she told we little Lani had been named so because of the song about Hawaii that goes, "Farewell to thee, Queen Lilliokalani of my heart." And Lani had been born on December 7th. She is a wartime baby, playing with wartime toys, of cardboard, and wood, lending her daddy to Uncle Sam, and she is a symbol of our times. We can be so glad of that better world she is going to live in because of our ultimate victory.

Elinor will spend the Winter in the South with other Navy wives, but somehow I am sure that she leaves the best of herself, the happiest of herself here in this storybook house in the pines, standing there—just as she was when I first saw her—waiting to open the door to David, and to life.

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September 8, 1943

Mrs. Elinor Graham  
c/o The Macmillan Company  
60 Fifth Avenue  
New York 11, New York

Dear Mrs. Graham:

When we learned of your book, OUR WAY DOWN EAST, we were excited, because it sounds like the sort of book which appeals to everybody for its humor, wit and charm. May we take this opportunity to wish it unbounded success.

It is also a pleasure to welcome a new name to the roster of Maine literary folk; and, although we suspect that Maine was not your birthplace, we shall take delight in claiming you through residence, as we have others such as Laura E. Richards, Gladys Hasty Carroll, Rachel Field and Louise Dickinson Rich.

In this connection we mention the Maine Author Collection. It is possible that you do not know of this exhibit, which is, briefly, composed of over a thousand inscribed presentation copies of books written by those born in Maine, resident here, or writing about the state. We also gather all available biographical, critical and photographic material about our authors; and, as a result, have a completely unusual and fascinating array of books and information. We shall hope that you may want to inscribe and present a copy of OUR WAY DOWN EAST for inclusion in the collection. It would be a distinctive addition.

Please accept our good wishes for the book, and a cordial invitation to visit the library when you are in Augusta.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY  
BY

SECRETARY

hmj  
Encl--1

March 31, 1944

Mrs. Elinor Graham  
c/o The Macmillan Company  
60 Fifth Avenue  
New York 11, New York

Dear Mrs. Graham:

OUR WAY DOWN EAST is never in the library. It is always in demand, and we have a long line of patrons awaiting their turn to read your fascinating book.

This is probably not a new story to you, but we thought you might like to know that, months after publication, your book is not waning in popularity in Maine.

We continue to hope that you may want to inscribe a copy for inclusion in the Maine Author Collection. It may be that you have laid aside our earlier letter about this exhibit for future attention. OUR WAY DOWN EAST would be a happy addition to these shelves.

Our good wishes for the book continue, and our invitation to call at the library and see the collection is cordially renewed.

Sincerely yours

hmj

Secretary

Elinor Graham

Freeprt, Me.

Mrs. F. W. Jacob

Maine State Library

Augusta , Maine

Dear Mrs. Jacob:

I am very sorry to have delayed so long about sending you OUR WAY DOWN EAST for your authors collection.

Alas I am a person with no system.

I put your request away, and ~~promptly~~ forgot all about it. There were many attendant circumstances that might justifiably explain the lapse.

I have written to Macmillan for a copy of the book ( I haven't even one in the house ). When it comes I will inscribe it and send it along.

Yours very sincerely,

*Elinor Graham*



May 3, 1944

Mrs. Elinor Graham  
Freeport  
Maine

Dear Mrs. Graham:

Such a friendly letter! We are so glad to know that an inscribed copy of OUR WAY DOWN EAST is to be in the Maine Author Collection. We didn't feel that we could be at all insistent, and we even thought that you might have deserted your lovely home and returned to Maryland for the "duration". It is good to know that you are in Freeport, and we look forward to the arrival of your book.

Sincerely yours

hmj

Secretary

May 16, 1944

Mrs. Elinor Graham  
Freeport  
Maine

Dear Mrs. Graham:

The Maine Author Collection copy of OUR WAY DOWN EAST has arrived, and we are delighted: with the book, of course; with your generosity; and with the modest inscription. "Slight" it may be to you, but we think it a charming and amusing story, and we are glad of the opportunity to add it to the collection. Please accept our thanks.

Sincerely yours

hmj  
Encl--4¢ postal refund

Secretary

