Elinor Graham Correspondence

Elinor Mish Graham 1905-1983

Hilda McLeod Jacob

Maine State Library

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Recommended Citation

Graham, Elinor Mish 1905-1983; Jacob, Hilda McLeod; and Maine State Library, "Elinor Graham Correspondence" (2014). Maine Writers Correspondence. 61.

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GRAHAM, ELINOR (MRS.)

Born in Hagerstown, Maryland.
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 barn 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 one day may 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 bay at the bottom of the field has frozen over, they will probably be off to 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.
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. This impression 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 world that has a right to be and yet I could reach out on my hand, and feel the reality of its dream. There were the little dark pines set in the pristine crystal of the snow, Pastor was the calm vividness of blue bay, not the arcing 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 on the other side of the road..." Thomas Means Hall, was inscribed above the schoolhouse door, and I knew that this was the meeting house as 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 in the moonlight on that day before Pearl Harbor, on that day when little Lani was still only a child. 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 their 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 Maryland..."—just a yellow quilt thrown across the conservatory white one—like sunshine on snow. And through another door I could see the great old-fashioned Elinor with its modern touches in the form of gleaming enameled cabinets, and other "conveniences." And then Elinor came in. Instantly every..."
ning 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 everyday 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 Liliuokalani 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.
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

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SECRETARY
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
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
Freeprt, Me.

Mrs. F. W. Jacob
Maine State Library
Augusta, Maine
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  
Secretary

Encl--4$ postal refund