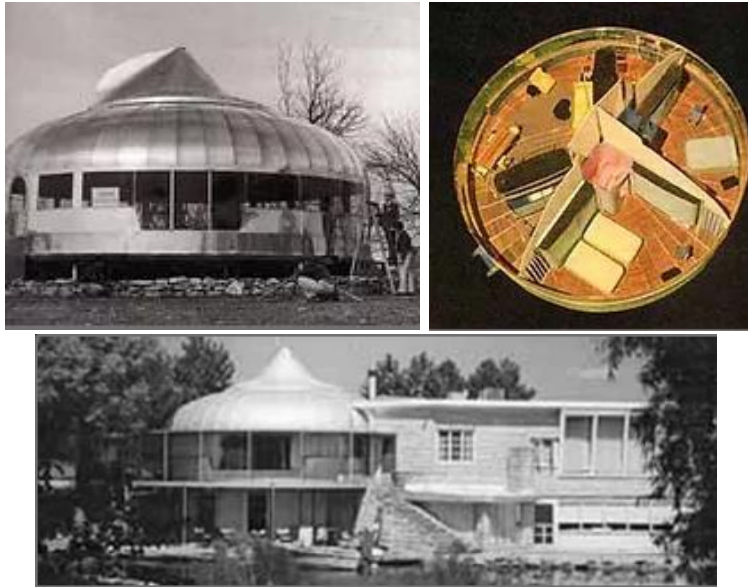


William L. Graham

1911 - 1981



BIOGRAPHY

William Lyman Graham was born on January 26, 1911, on a farm near El Dorado, Kansas, the third son of William and Minnie Peterman Graham. In El Dorado, the family lived at 216 North Vine. Besides two brothers, he also had two sisters.

Following high school, William attended El Dorado Junior College (now Butler Community College), graduating in 1932. During his time there, he played on the basketball team and was in charge of memberships while a member of the Young Men's Christian Association.

His father, a local grocer, had always advised Bill to aim for jobs where he would be his own boss. He worked his way through college by selling razor blade sharpeners. After college, Bill moved to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where he met and married Marjorie L. March in 1937. They returned to Kansas, where they began a lucrative real estate business in Wichita.

Here they raised a family of three girls (Rebecca, Constance, and Marjorie) and three boys (Theodore, William Lyman, Jr., and Jack) on farm in Butler County, near Wichita (south of present-day Andover). According to Time magazine, dated Aug. 12, 1957, Bill renumbered his home address every year; in 1957, it was 1957 Easy Street.

Eventually, Bill ventured into the oil industry, creating Graham Oil Company, a business later inducted into the Wichita Business Hall of Fame. Bill was known for his support of young, ambitious businessmen, especially those not given equal opportunities.

Many news articles were written about Graham, from local Kansas newspapers to Ladies Home Journal and Time Magazine. An article in the Wichita Beacon told of the “around-the-world fling of the lively Grahams” in an article entitled “The World is Their Oyster”, about the travel adventures of the Grahams with their six children. The story also told of the unusual Dymaxion house the family lived in on their farm in Butler County.

Marjorie March Graham died in 1974. Later, Bill married Betty Harrison of Augusta, Kansas in 1977. No longer living in the Dymaxion house, they now lived in an unusual triangular-shaped redwood house built over a lake.

As an oil producer, Graham was a member of the Kansas Independent Oil and Gas Association (KIOGA). He died on February 4, 1981 in Wichita, Kansas.

CONNECTION TO BUTLER COUNTY

Bill was raised in El Dorado, where he attended local schools. He graduated from El Dorado Senior High School in 1930. In 1960, the Grahams hosted the Class of 1930’s thirtieth year reunion at their famous aluminum house and pond home, featured in the Ladies Home Journal article.

While in high school, Bill was treasurer of the senior class, as well as playing football, basketball (forward or guard position), E Club, and serving as president of the student advisory committee.

Later he chose to raise his children in Butler County, where they attended local schools in Augusta and Andover.

Bill’s father, William Graham, was a grocer in El Dorado. The world came to know of Graham’s grocery and the innovative methods the elder Graham introduced in running the business. Possessed with a gift of making rhymes, he wrote and published “Graham’s Jingles”, which were often seen in local newspapers and sold as standard advertising to grocers nationwide.

COMING TO / LEAVING THE AREA

William L. Graham was born and raised in Butler County. Except for a few years living in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and times spent in worldwide travel, rural Butler County and Wichita was Graham’s home base for his entire life.

ACHIEVEMENTS

After having founded a successful real estate business in Wichita, Kansas, Graham established an oil and gas company in Wichita as well. He was also a partner in the Graham-Michaelis

Drilling Co., an oil-drilling operation. He later added banking to his many business ventures, having major interests in five Kansas banks, as well as warehouses throughout Kansas and Ohio. He also owned apartment houses in Wichita and Dallas.

Beginning with a \$200 bank loan in 1936, by the age of 46, he was worth an estimated \$20 million in Kansas oil and real estate. Along the way, his talents for enterprise and friendship proved so overpowering that he once sold the late Dale Carnegie a house in Wichita only one hour after they met. "If I couldn't be myself," Carnegie is reported to have said, "I'd want to be Bill Graham"

In June of 1957, Graham began a leisurely round-the-world trip with his wife and six children. But he could not relax and enjoy his vacation when he saw the grinding poverty, stifling state control, and huge shortage of capital throughout Asia. "Everybody seemed to be sitting around without hope. Nobody seemed to know about free enterprise and what made it click," Graham said concerning what he saw.

Interrupting his vacation, he called in reporters in Bangkok, announcing a plan to give five willing and able local enterprisers "the same chance I had when I was young." His terms: a \$5,000 loan to get started with profits to be shared 50-50 until the borrower could buy out Graham by returning the original loan. Said Graham, "This is business, not charity."

Ideas poured in; some were rejected immediately and some encouraged. When he reached India, offering to launch five more borrowers, his picture hit the front page of the Times of India; his mailbox at the Imperial Hotel was jammed before he arrived and the telephone never stopped ringing.

Though the socialist-minded Indian government viewed him with undisguised distaste, a dozen prominent private Indian businessmen eagerly offered to co-invest some \$140,000 in the venture. The Punjab National Bank offered to investigate loan candidates free of charge, with a promise to consider later loan requests from Graham selectees.

Aspiring borrowers lined up outside Graham's hotel suite for four days, displaying every conceivable idea for possible marketing. "I haven't had as much fun in years," said Graham. He deposited \$25,000 of his own money in the Punjab Bank, as the start of a lending fund that he hoped would continue to grow.

Graham realized that his loans would be only a drop in the bottomless Indian bucket and perhaps 20% of the borrowers were likely to fail in their businesses. But as he moved on to continue his interrupted family vacation, his open-handed demonstration had been worth a hundred propaganda pronouncements on U.S. capitalism.

He continued to make many trips to India and other third world countries in a tireless effort to sell free enterprise to under-developed countries of the world. At first, Indian officials refused to see Graham, but eventually Pundit Jawaharial Nehur himself sat down with Graham, discussing his plans and wishing him success.

Graham's idea was to finance worthy businessmen in foreign countries where local financing was either impossible or too expensive. He created Public Enterprise, Inc., an American company organized to carry out this idea of creating "more capitalists" in countries where capitalism was not popular.

In 1948, Graham built a hybridized version of the only Dymaxion house to ever be built and lived in, on a 640-acre farm in Butler County, 2 ½ miles south of the Andover and Kellogg intersection.

The only one of its kind, the round house made of aluminum and Plexiglas looked like something out of a science fiction movie. Buckminster Fuller, a philosopher, inventor, and designer best known for inventing the geodesic dome, had designed the house in 1927. Fuller, who campaigned his entire life for responsible conservation of the earth's resources, planned it to be environmentally friendly, efficient and self-sustaining.

The house was one of two prototypes built by Beech Aircraft Corporation following World War II. The term "Dymaxion" was a combination of three of words: dynamic maximum tension. The house used tension suspension from a central column or mast.

The theory behind the house's design was that it would be mass-produced, affordable, easily transportable and environmentally efficient. Lightweight, only three tons compared to a normal 150-ton house, it would be sold for the price of a Cadillac and could be shipped worldwide in its own metal tube. Beech became involved in the project after World War II in an effort to employ airplane factory workers and meet a severe housing shortage.

Fuller designed several different versions of the house through the years, with the intent that they be suitable for any site or environment and use resources efficiently. He chose aluminum for its lightweight, high strength and long-term durability.

The final design of the Dymaxion house was built out of stamped sheet metal and held together by a suspension system that radiated from a column in the center containing all utility lines. It had a diesel generator for power. The roof was designed to wick water inside to drip into a rain-gutter, then into a cistern. A passive air conditioning system, based on what was termed as the "dome effect" of a domed roof, provided natural heat and cooling. The Dymaxion house was the first conscious effort at an autonomous building in the twentieth century.

With approximately 1,100 square feet of living space, an unusual feature was the ability to move the interior walls of the home, changing the size of each of the rooms according to need.

Although several magazine articles were written about the house and plans made to market it, with 30,000 people expressing interest in purchasing it, the project fell through, Disagreements between backers and partners led to the dissolution and bankruptcy of the newly formed Fuller Houses Inc.

William Graham, as one of the original investors of the project, purchased both of the original prototypes following the venture's failure. He built the house on his lakefront property, although he disabled the ventilator and other interior features of the original design. The second prototype was stored for parts. The home was built as an extension to a more traditional ranch-style house, rather than standing alone as intended by Fuller. A wing on the back of the lower floor of the round house opened to a lakeside patio. The Graham family lived in the house for three decades.

After having sat empty for several years, the Graham family donated the historic house to the Henry Ford Museum. Dismantled in 1992 for moving and repair, it has been completely restored to the original design and placed on exhibit in the Ford museum located in Dearborn, Michigan. It is now part of an indoor exhibit, protected from the elements.

AWARDS, RECOGNITION

The Kansas Independent Oil and Gas Association named Graham "Oil Man of the Year" in 1957. In 1958, he was awarded the Brotherhood Award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews, given for distinguished service in the field of human relations.

A memorial in Graham's name was established with the Myrrl Houck Scholarship Fund in El Dorado, Kansas. Also established in Bill's memory was the William L. Graham Scholarship at Wichita State University.

William Graham and the Graham Oil Company were inducted into the Wichita Business Hall of Fame in 1997.

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