

Remembering a pioneer

Maurice R. Graham loved horses, farming ... and Farmington

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER
tsmith@ec.econet.com

Farmington almost meant as much to Maurice R. Graham as family, farming and horses — most notably his own mare known simply as "Bit O' Honey."

So it was fitting that "home" was the final stop of the Thursday, Jan. 13, funeral procession for Graham, who died of congestive heart failure on Jan. 7 at age 94, at a nursing care facility in Engadine, Mich.

A state police honor guard accompanied the procession as it made its way to the North Farmington Cemetery from the Elton Black & Son Funeral Home in Union Lake. Graham was a volunteer police officer in Farmington during the 1930s and 1940s.

"He was very traditional, very into the history of Farmington and his family," said 47-year-old son Danny Graham of Waterford.

Danny said his father also considered aspects of character, such as respect for others and hard work, more important than monetary gain.

Sweet friendship with his albino mare, "Bit O' Honey," also was worth considerably more than a pot of gold. From the late 1930s until the late 1950s, Maurice Graham and his trusty horse were virtually inseparable.

Graham, during the 1940s was grand marshal of the annual "Horse Show," a popular portion of the American Legion Gala Days. The Labor Day parade down a Grand River featured Graham and "Bit O' Honey," who apparently performed some of the same tricks Will Rogers famous horse "Trigger" did, recalled Danny, one of four children born to Maurice and his wife, the late Margaret.

Riding tall

It is rumored that the two white-haired horses and their owners rode side-by-side down Grand River during one of the Farmington parades, Danny said.

Actually, said another son, Randy Graham, 42, his father became interested in horses at a young age, because of his boyhood idol — Will Rogers.

"My dad idolized Will Rogers," said Randy, who lives near Engadine in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. "He used to train horses from all around this area, and (he) put on horse shows."

Maurice Graham's love of farming and horses went with him most of his long life. In 1942, after marrying Margaret Ford, the couple settled onto a farm in the area of 13 Mile and Farmington roads.

Then, in 1952, they moved to a 20-acre horse farm near the border of Rose-Highland townships.

"He rode the horse almost until he lost his farm" in 1960, lamented Danny.

It was the midst of a dark period for Maurice. "Bit O' Honey" died in 1959. Then, in 1962, his wife, Margaret, passed away

FARMINGTON, MICHIGAN, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 1943

FEATURED IN LABOR DAY PARADE



above picture was taken of Maurice R. Graham riding his prize horse "Bit O' Honey" during an American Legion parade on Labor Day in 1943.

parade, forming at six o'clock Monday evening, at the school. Entries in the horse show, the high school band, branches of the Civilian Defense and all patriotic organizations will participate. The pet and doll parade will be a part of this parade, too.

Leading the way: This newspaper clipping shows Maurice R. Graham riding his prized horse "Bit O' Honey" during an American Legion parade on Labor Day in 1943.

from cancer.

Those personal setbacks didn't keep Maurice Graham down for long. In the mid-1960s, near age 60, he turned to a number of other endeavors and vocations.

First, he opened Graham's Friendly Service, a Mobil gas station at Meadowbrook and 10 Mile Road, Danny said. The station remained open until 1968.

From 1968-75, Maurice worked for the Read Commission of Oakland County. Other jobs included part-time security officer and delivering newspapers for the Oakland Press, before finally retiring during the 1980s.

"He was a helluva man," Danny Graham said. "After losing his farm, his wife and his horse ... that was the first time I saw him break down and cry, when his horse was put down. But he was a man who was able to rise above all of those things."

Maurice probably did so because of his strong family foundation.

He was born Nov. 16, 1905, to Joseph and Ellen Graham, went to Farmington High School and worked on his parents' farm until he married Margaret at age 37.

Maurice also toiled in the blacksmith trade, at his family's Farmington shop called The Grand Brothers.

"He (Maurice) knew how to fix wheels and all of those things,"

Danny continued.

Going way back

The family's strong link to Farmington began in 1866. Maurice's grandfather John Graham and great-uncle James Graham emigrated from Ireland and "bought up all the property on Farmington Road between 13-14 Mile," Danny said.

There once was a time during the early 1900s, Danny added, when people couldn't go anywhere in Farmington without "bumping into a Graham."

The importance of the pioneering Grahams hasn't gone unnoticed. In 1994, a creek and pond at North Farmington Cemetery — on some of the Graham family's original property — was officially dedicated.

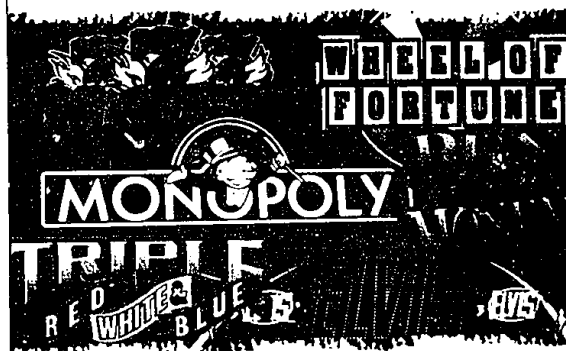
In July 1995, Gov. John Engler penned a special letter commemorating the Grahams' 100th family reunion. "The Graham family reunion is a shining example of the values that we, as Americans, hold dear — love that endures, friendship that grows, and family commitment that remains strong."

Besides Danny (Pamela) Graham and Randy (Linda) Graham, Maurice R. Graham is survived by his eldest son Maurice J. (Elizabeth) Graham, 49; daughter Kathi E. (Brian) Edwards, 43; 10 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.



Inseparable: For nearly 20 years, longtime Farmington resident Maurice R. Graham and his albino mare "Bit O' Honey" could be seen riding around town and at horse shows and parades.

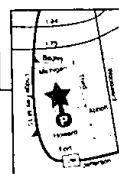
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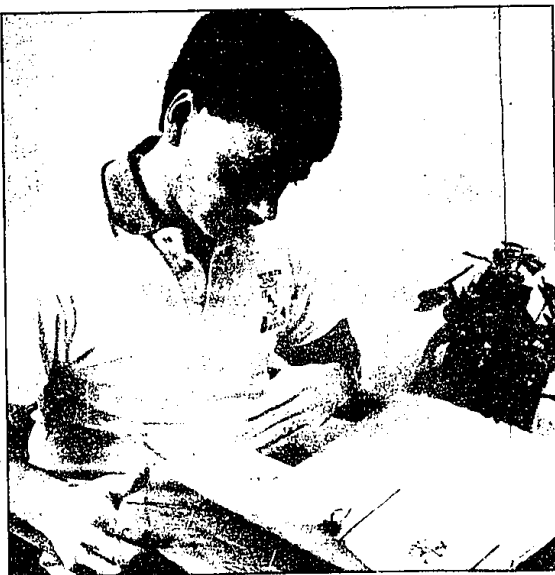
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Turning the pages of history:

Randy Graham, 42, one of four children born to Maurice R. and Margaret Graham, pores over a comprehensive family scrapbook. Graham family ancestors settled this area in 1866, buying a large amount of land.



STAFF PHOTO BY BIL BARNES