

Graham, Robert Davidson ^[1]

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by W. Conard Gass, 1986

5 Dec. 1842–27 June 1905



Robert Davidson Graham. Image courtesy of Histories of the several regiments and battalions from North Carolina, in the great war 1861-'65.

^[2]Robert Davidson Graham, lawyer, was one of the ten children and the fifth son of Susannah Sarah Washington and [William Alexander Graham](#) ^[3], governor of North Carolina, U.S. secretary of the navy, lawyer, and [Whig politician](#) ^[4]. He attended the classical school conducted by [Alexander Wilson](#) ^[5] at Melville in eastern [Alamance County](#) ^[6]. Graham entered the freshman class of [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[7] in 1859 and was one of the freshman declaimers at the commencement of 1860. He left the university to take up farming in [Mecklenburg County](#) ^[8]. Upon North Carolina's secession in 1861, he joined Company D, Fifty-sixth North Carolina Regiment, of which his brother [John Washington](#) ^[9] became captain in 1862, advancing to the rank of major in September 1863.

Graham succeeded David S. Ray as first lieutenant of Company D upon Ray's death in the [Battle of Gum Swamp \(22 May 1863\)](#) ^[10] and later attained the rank of captain. He served in eastern North Carolina and in the Petersburg-Richmond area, and was especially commended for his performance during the Confederate attack on Plymouth (April 1864). Wounded seriously in the left leg during an attack on Grant's lines in March 1865, he was hospitalized near Richmond at the time of Lee's surrender on 9 April. Paroled by the Federals as soon as he was able to travel, Graham made his way back to North Carolina and resumed farming in Mecklenburg County.

In 1868, Graham was graduated with a bachelor of arts degree by The University of North Carolina; he later studied law and was admitted to the bar. In 1884 he was named secretary of the [U.S. Civil Service Commission](#) ^[11], and in 1886 he became chairman of the U.S. Board of Pension Appeals. From 1888 to 1898 he was the principal examiner of titles and contracts, U.S. General Land Office.

Each of Graham's six brothers who lived to maturity served in the Confederate armies, and each survived the war. The oldest, Joseph, became a physician in [Lincoln County](#) ^[12] and later in [Charlotte](#) ^[13]. Another brother, George Washington, also became a physician. Augustus Washington, James Augustus, and John Washington, like Robert Davidson, were attorneys. [William Alexander, Jr.](#), ^[14] successfully combined agriculture and politics. As a Lincoln County farmer he was elected to two terms in the state senate and one in the house. From 1908 until his death in 1923, he served as North Carolina's commissioner of agriculture.

Robert Davidson Graham never married.

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Subjects:

[Civil War \(1861-1865\)](#) [19]

[Biographies](#) [20]

[Farmers](#) [21]

[Military personnel](#) [22]

[Public officials](#) [23]

Authors:

[Gass, W. Conard](#) [24]

Origin - location:

[Alamance County](#) [25]

[Mecklenburg County](#) [26]

From:

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1 January 1986 | Gass, W. Conard

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