

**(DRAFT)**

## **Floyd Freeman Graham**

**1902-1974**

*Historical Narrative researched and written*

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*For Texas Historical Commission Subject Marker Application, Denton County*

### **I. CONTEXT**

In 1918, as citizens of Denton, Texas celebrated the ending of World War I,<sup>1</sup> a young man by the name of Floyd Freeman Graham was entering his senior year at Denton High School. In the last will and testament of the Class of 1919, Graham would leave his ability as songster for the entertainment of the students. Little did he know he would take that ability with him and share it with students for many years to come.<sup>2</sup>

The 1920's era would bring a new genre of music to the city known as "Jazz Music." Jazz music was different, it featured performer over composer and improvisation over the traditional structure. Some said this new sound was devil music, and educators feared that this type of music would destroy young people's interest in classical music.<sup>3</sup>

One educator, "Fessor" Floyd Graham, saw it as something different. He became a pioneer in the introduction of popular and jazz music in the curriculum of UNT. With the help of Robert L. Marquis, president of North Texas State Teachers College (1923-1934), Graham organized the dance band, pit orchestra, and stage band at the college.<sup>4</sup>

The collegiate bandleader and music educator founded and directed the Aces of Collegeland in 1935, who were the forerunner to the current One O' Clock Lab Band that still exists at the college today. Graham also laid the groundwork at North Texas for what became the first college degree in jazz studies.<sup>5</sup>

Little did Floyd Graham realized the impact that his legacy would leave not only the City of Denton, but also the University of North Texas where he would teach for 46 years.

## **II. OVERVIEW**

Floyd Freeman Graham was born October 15, 1902.<sup>6</sup> His parents Schuyler Colfax Graham (1869-1931), a Denton grocer, and Rockie Virginia Freeman (1879-1954)<sup>7</sup> came to Denton, Texas when Floyd was 2 years of age.<sup>8</sup>

He discovered an interest for music at an early age by making a violin out of a cigar box while in grade school.<sup>9</sup> He made his first public appearance as a violinist at the age of nine, playing at club functions and church services.<sup>10</sup>

In 1926, he was elected to lead the band at Denton High School where he became the high school's second band director. Graham followed E. M. Woods who organized "The Boys Band" there in 1923.<sup>11</sup>

Hired by Dr. R. L. Marquis in 1927, he began his teaching career as the band and orchestra director at the North Texas State Teachers College (UNT). He would divide his time that year between his two positions at Denton High School and the Teachers College.<sup>12</sup> Later on, Graham would receive his B.A. degree from Chicago Musical College in 1931, his M.A. from the American Conservatory of Music in 1936, and did additional work at Juilliard in New York. He also conducted the Pit Orchestra, the Aces, and planned the stage shows while teaching music theory, conducting, public relations, and music education.<sup>13</sup>

Before Graham was appointed director, the leader of the college orchestra was a member of the regular faculty of some other department, who accepted the position as a hobby. No courses were offered and no credit was given to students for participation. Raymond Riggs was director of the orchestra in 1924 and later came Amos Barksdale, a member of the mathematics

staff, who assumed the directorship. Since its beginning in 1927, Floyd Graham shaped the course of the orchestra. <sup>14</sup>

On October 18, 1928, in the presence of a large crowd, Graham's 40-piece band of the North Texas State Teachers College played a concert that received generous applause as the new band shell in the City Park was formally presented to the city. <sup>15</sup> The pit orchestra would play at special occasions and for the silent pictures each Saturday night at the College of Industrial Arts. With the innovation of talking pictures, there was no further demand for the pit orchestra. It was at this time the Stage Band was organized. <sup>16</sup>

The stage band's initial members included Floyd Brooks, Milner Sandifer, Bob Marquis, Alonzo Davis, Wendell Keith, Homer Ritchie, J.B. Woodrum, Mrs. Lois Dickson, Tommie Rose, Amos Barksdale, Tom Lawhorn and John Broun. Each member of the stage band was able to play at least two instruments. The band included three violins, one banjo, piano, double bass, two trumpets, trombone and three saxophones. Graham devoted 13 hours a week to rehearsals of his various musical organizations. Not only did the band provide entertainment, but it also gave the boys in the band an opportunity to earn money to help pay their school expenses. <sup>17</sup>

In the fall of 1929, Graham arranged for a house on the campus of the Teachers College, owned by the State to be occupied by 16 boys, students of the college who played in the band, free of charge. The college wanted to aid the boys as much as possible. <sup>18</sup> The house would become the school's first music building. <sup>19</sup>

In 1934, for the first time, the college offered courses leading to the headmaster's certificate, and fifteen persons qualified for the certificate. <sup>20</sup>

By 1938, the North Texas music department had greatly expanded. The school began offering five degree in music: bachelor of science in music education, bachelor of music in music

education, bachelor of arts in applied music, bachelor with a theory major, and a band master's certificate. At this same time the college had a marching band, a symphony orchestra, a college band and a stage band called the "Fessor Floyd Graham and his Aces of Collegeland."<sup>21</sup>

In January 1944, the Aces of Collegeland swing band directed by Graham, students, and faculty members on the North Texas State campus began to give Uncle Sam's men, located in Texas, well rounded recreational programs. Every Saturday night after playing for the college stage show, they would play for the USO in Denton.<sup>22</sup> The Aces of Collegeland toured the country. During World War II, their music was broadcast to military camps and hospitals throughout the state.<sup>23</sup> Graham's Variety Show, a group of 30 student entertainers, took to the air in 1945 and traveled by an army transport plane for a 10 day tour of army hospitals in Texas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Colorado, and Oklahoma playing to the injured and sick GI's. Some of the hospitals played on the tour included Camp Hood, Ashburn General, Fort Sam Houston, Camp Swift, and Camp Maxey.<sup>24</sup>

Not only did Graham direct music, he spent many years fighting fires. Joining the volunteer fire department as a 13 year old Boy Scout, fire fighting became a hobby for him. He road with the Chicago Fire Insurance patrol for six months while attending the Chicago Musical College. He served as the chief of the Denton Fire Department for 13 years.<sup>25</sup>

### **III. SIGNIFICANCE**

Graham became a member of the first Boy Scout troop established in Denton, Texas in 1915. Troop number 77, organized by W.A. Combest, the principal of Stonewall Jackson Elementary School, included Floyd along with seven more boys for its first membership. A few weeks after the troops organization, the Denton Kiwanis became their sponsor.<sup>26</sup>

In recalling his years in scouting, he said he remembered the steps to advance earning merit badges for different projects. When it came time for him to work on the swimming badge, his mother wouldn't let him near the water. It was then he started carrying his violin around with him.<sup>27</sup>

Graham would continue the relationship with the Kiwanis throughout his life. He emceed almost every Denton Kiwanis Variety Show since its beginning in 1927 to 1970.<sup>28</sup> Graham once said, "This show is a good thing. It gives the kids and the amateurs, a chance to go on stage and possibly to go on to greater things."<sup>29</sup>

Often called "Starmaker", Floyd saw several of the Variety Show local performers go on to stardom; Joan Blondell, Ann Sheridan, Nancy Gates, Pat Boone, Louise Tobin, and Vaughn Monroe's Moon Maids.<sup>30</sup>

Graham was named Denton's "Kiwanian of the Year" in 1953, received a Legion of Honor Award in 1971 for 45 years of outstanding service, and served as the president in 1961 for the non-profit organization. The Kiwanis program for underprivileged children grew to a full time Children's Clinic which was mainly funded by the variety shows in its early years.<sup>31</sup>

During World War II, the band traveled over five thousand miles, giving some three hundred performances at Texas army camps. Some of the original 11 members of the band were Dr. Robert Marquis of the education faculty, Amos Barksdale of the math department, and Tom Rose of the business administration faculty. Other members were W. F. Brooks, owner of a local drug store, Alonzo Davis, tile contractor in Denton, and Sandy Standifer, a Fort Worth resident who had his own orchestra. The early band's uniforms included green smocks and tams. They would later change to tuxedos and blue coats or white dinner jackets and tuxedo trousers. Several members of the Aces of Collegeland went on to play with name bands such as Woody

Herman, Benny Goodman, Fred Waring, Harry James, and Tommy Dorsey. The band was selected as a model orchestra during the 1936 Texas Centennial and had stories about it in the newspapers throughout the United States.<sup>32</sup>

The Aces of Collegeland was one of the most widely known college orchestras in the state of Texas in 1941.<sup>33</sup> Members of the band were chosen on musical ability, character, and personality. Once a member of the band, a player could remain until he graduated provided he lived up to the standards that has been set through the years.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout his life, Graham was recognized for his civic and community involvement through organizations including:

- **1927** Organizing the Aces of Collegeland Band as a Saturday night dance band at the North Texas State Teachers College, now University of North Texas (UNT).
- **1936 - 1949** Served as Denton's Volunteer Fire Chief
- **1953** Named Denton's Kiwanian of the Year.
- **1958** Presented the first "Fessor Graham Award," given annually to the outstanding faculty member by the NTSU student government. The college continues to present this award each year.
- **1969** The Friend of the City Award for volunteer work with the Denton Fire Department was given to Graham for his service of 13 years.
- **1970** Honored by the NTSU Alumni Association as "Mr. North Texas."
- **1970** Awarded the Lab Band Award for bringing popular music to NTSU School of Music.
- **1971** Received the Legion of Honor Award for 45 years of outstanding service to the Kiwanis.

- **1972** Chosen as Honor Professor by the students at NTSU.
- **1972** The Floyd Graham Society was formed to honor him and promote music education.
- **1973** “Fessor” Graham retired in August 1973 after 46 years on the faculty.
- **1973** Received the title of NTSU's first professor emeritus.<sup>35</sup>

Graham’s philosophy was, “you ought to do something you’re proud of, not something you’re sorry for.”<sup>36</sup>

Floyd Freeman Graham passed away on August 18, 1974, leaving behind his wife Pat who he married in 1942 and a daughter Patricia Haworth.<sup>37</sup> Many people have left their mark on North Texas, but few as indelible as "Fessor" Graham. From his early days at the college, he built the music department into a national standard of excellence. His work set the stage for the college's jazz music education program, still renown throughout the world.<sup>38</sup>

The Quakertown Park (formally the City Park) holds many memories of Floyd Graham. Some as a young Boy Scout from the first troop in Denton in 1915 to the early concerts performed by him at the band shell that was dedicated in 1928, but mainly the jazz music he gave to our city. To honor Fessor Graham for the legacy he left Denton the historical marker for him will be placed in the park where the annual Denton Arts and Jazz Festival is held each year. This two and a half day event every April brings in over 200,000 people. The festival is a major regional music event that attracts crowds from around the state.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Delashaw, Irene. *Armistice Day in Denton: 1918*  
<http://www.dentonhistory.net/page43/>

<sup>2</sup> Denton High School. The Bronco, Yearbook of Denton High School, 1919, yearbook, 1919; Denton, Texas. p.22, p. 41, p.44  
[http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth743012/m1/44/?q=1918%20denton%20bronco:](http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth743012/m1/44/?q=1918%20denton%20bronco)

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accessed November 2, 2017), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, [texashistory.unt.edu](http://texashistory.unt.edu); crediting Denton Public Library.

<sup>3</sup> Carter, María Agui, and Lindsay, Calvin A. The Devil's Music, Web. 30 Oct. 2017.  
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/beyond/jazz.html>

<sup>4</sup> T.C. Stage Band Outstanding Musical Organization; Widely Known Over State.  
*Denton Record Chronicle*, 19 Sept. 1935, p. 3, Web Oct. 30, 2017

<sup>5</sup> Caraway, Georgia. *Legendary Locals of Denton*. Arcadia Publishing, 2014. p. 51

<sup>6</sup> IOOF Cemetery, Denton, Denton County, Plot: Section E, Block 20 Grave 1

<sup>7</sup> IOOF Cemetery, Denton, Denton County, Plot: Section E

<sup>8</sup> "Fessor Floyd Graham Dies at 71." *The North Texas Daily* Vol. 58, No. 1, Ed. 1 Tuesday 3 Sept. 1974, p. 5  
<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht723861/m1/5/zoom/?q=the+north+texas+daily+vol+58+no+1+sept+3+1974&resolution=1.5&lat=5069.129678761853&lon=3110.390177686076>

<sup>9</sup> Fessor's 100th, *The North Texan*, Vol. 52, No. 3, Fall 2002, p. 34  
<https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc38292/m1/34/zoom/?resolution=2&lat=3021&lon=750>

<sup>10</sup> "Unusual Success Attained By Stage Band at Teachers College, Directed By Floyd Graham, Talented Violinist." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 15 Apr. 1932, p. 9, Web. 30 Oct 2017

<sup>11</sup> McMath, Carroll. *A brief oral history of the Denton High School Bands, text, July 17, 1988; pg. 2*  
[texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht404287/m1/2/?q=history%20of%20denton%20high%20orchestra](http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht404287/m1/2/?q=history%20of%20denton%20high%20orchestra); accessed August 8, 2017), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, [texashistory.unt.edu](http://texashistory.unt.edu); crediting Denton Independent School District.

<sup>12</sup> *Denton Record Chronicle*, 19 Sept. 1935, p. 3

<sup>13</sup> "Fessor To Give 27th Annual Show," *Campus Chat*, 13 Nov. 1953, p. 5  
Kirkland, Tom. The Campus Chat (Denton, Tex.), Vol. 37, No. 15, Ed. 1 Friday, November 13, 1953, newspaper, November 13, 1953; Denton, TX.

<sup>14</sup> "Started in 1924, Orchestra Has Had Three Directors." *Campus Chat*, 17 March 1938, p. 1  
Jamison, Alonzo, Jr. The Campus Chat (Denton, Tex.), Vol. 22, No. 22, Ed. 1 Thursday, March 17, 1938, newspaper, March 17, 1938; Denton, Texas.  
([texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht306389/](http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht306389/); accessed October 30, 2017), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, [texashistory.unt.edu](http://texashistory.unt.edu); crediting UNT Libraries Special Collections.



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<sup>15</sup> "Big Crowd At Band Shell Dedication." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 19 Oct. 1928, p. 1. Web. 1 Nov. 2017

<sup>16</sup> James L. Rogers, *The Story of North Texas from Texas Normal College, 1890, to the University of North Texas System*, 2001, (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 2002) p. 187

<sup>17</sup> *Denton Record Chronicle*, 15 Apr. 1932, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> "Teachers College Band Has Home On Campus; Many Boys Earn Own Way By Playing," *Denton Record Chronicle*, 04 Oct. 1929, p. 12. Web 30 Oct. 2017

<sup>19</sup> "Chapter of NT History Held For Fessor," *Denton Record Chronicle*, 09 Nov. 1969, p. 26, Web. 5 Nov. 2017

<sup>20</sup> *Denton Record Chronicle*, 1935, p. 3

<sup>21</sup> Handbook of Texas Music, Jasinski, Laurie E., Published by: The Texas State Historical Association, 1155 Union Circle #311580, Denton, Texas 76203-5017,  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=CE8xiT3pV6QC&pg=PT1597&lpg=PT1597&dq=fessor+floyd+graham&source=bl&ots=hCcAtKKUPK&sig=DE0XYSKxNDI6G7MP8IPpLeYEhcs&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjgk-Gd4orWAhUqj1QKHcy5A7UQ6AEIUzAH#v=onepage&q=fessor%20floyd%20graham&f=false>

<sup>22</sup> "Aces of Collegeland Orchestra Has Started Many on Road to Stardom", *Denton Record Chronicle*, 10 Sept. 1945, p. 36, Web. 30 Oct. 2017

<sup>23</sup> "Aces Leave Their Mark On Nation," *Denton Record Chronicle*, 28 August 1960, p. 27. Web. 2 Nov. 2017

<sup>24</sup> "Variety Show To Again Entertain Wounded Vets" *Denton Record Chronicle*, 10 Sept. 1945, p. 36 Web. 30 Oct. 2017

<sup>25</sup> *Campus Chat*, 13 Nov. 1953, p. 5

<sup>26</sup> "One of Eight Original Members of Boy Scout Troop 77, Denton's First, Is Now Scoutmaster." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 12 Feb. 1946, p. 4, Web 5 Nov. 2017

<sup>27</sup> "Hats Change, Spirit Same." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 29 April. 1973, p. 31, Web. 5 Nov. 2017

<sup>28</sup> In Memoriam Resolution, Kiwanis Scrapbook, 17 Sept. 1974

<sup>29</sup> "Fessor Never Volunteers." *Denton Record Chronicle* 21 Feb. 1965, p. 22, Web. 30 Oct. 2017

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<sup>30</sup> "Death Takes Legendary Fessor." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 19 Aug. 1974, p. 1  
Web. 28 Oct. 2017

<sup>31</sup> "16 Acts To Be Presented At Annual Minstrel Show, Charity To Get Proceeds of 35th Variety Program." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 22 Feb. 1961, p. 3, Web. 30 Oct. 2017

<sup>32</sup> Campus Chat, 1953, p. 6

<sup>33</sup> Denton Talent To Give Program For Henrietta, *Denton Record Chronicle*, 6 Feb. 1941, p. 5,  
Web. 30 Oct. 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Denton Record Chronicle, 09 Nov. 1969, p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> *The North Texas Daily* 3 Sept. 1974, p. 5

<sup>36</sup> "Fessor Notes Memories Scrapbook Recalls Good Old Days," *The North Texas Daily*,  
(Denton, Tex.), Vol. 56, No. 39, Ed. 1, 10 Nov. 1972, p. 5  
<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph760331/m1/5/zoom/?q=the north texas daily vol 56 no 39&resolution=2&lat=7378.314100580213&lon=3844.032158618382>

<sup>37</sup> *Denton Record Chronicle*, 19 Aug. 1974, p. 1

<sup>38</sup> "Floyd Fessor Graham." *Denton Record Chronicle*, 20 Aug. 1974, p. 4, Web 5 Nov. 2017

<sup>39</sup> *Handbook of Texas Online*, Matthew Doucette, "Denton Arts and Jazz Festival," accessed  
November 05, 2017, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/xfd02>.