

ISABEL GRAHAM

1871–1954

Isabel Graham represents all that is good about our community.

Isabel Graham was an educator, independent woman, and visionary philanthropist. Those familiar with Douglas United Church of Christ may know her name through its connection to the fund used to support charitable causes across the community. In 1954 upon her death, she left \$5,000 to the church her father built, \$50,000 in today's dollars. At Isabel's request, the money was to be invested and go untouched for 50 years. By 1998, her fund had grown to \$750,000 and today has a value close to \$1,000,000. The fund now yields \$30,000 annually to give to local charities.

She was born in 1871 to Hugh and Josephine Sill Graham. She was born and raised here and is buried in the Douglas Cemetery. Her family owned acreage on Union and Wylie and their home, which is still standing today, at 400 South Union street was called Bonnie Meadows. The family farmed corn, oats, buckwheat and apples.

Isabel went to college at the Michigan State Normal School—today it is called Eastern Michigan University. After graduating she went on to become a school teacher in the Chicago area. She lived in various places on the near south side of Chicago where eventually she served as principal at Fiske Elementary. In the 1930 census, she was living with Nona Butterfield. When asked in the 1930 census what her relationship was to the head of the household, Isabel listed her relationship as "partner". They continued to live together for over 44 years.

Isabel Graham died on May 7, 1954; she was almost 83 years old. On a macro level, she lived through some of our nation's most historically significant periods—the second industrial revolution, the Great Depressions, prohibition, women's suffrage and two world wars. She represents all that is good about our community. Her family sowed the ground, her father built parts of the town and the church, her mom taught the youth and taught her children to be engaged in civic activities. Her legacy lives on as her donation continues to positively impact the area every single year.

Isabel Gramh researched by fellow Team HerStorian,
Ruth Crowe based on work by Elizabeth M. Estes.

R. C.



Artwork created by artist Ruth Crowe depicting Isabel and Nona outside their home on Union Street.



Bonnie Meadows—childhood home of Isabele and her family.



United Church of Christ Church that Isabel's father built in Douglas. Upon her death Isabel donated money that has grown to over \$1,000,000 and continues to serve the area.