



Commissioner James Allen Graham, universally known as Jim Graham, was born in Cleveland, North Carolina in 1921. He grew up on a 250-acre farm where his family raised cattle and grew cotton and grain. Although his mother wanted him to go to Davidson College to study for the ministry, Graham chose to attend NC State (then called State College) and graduated with a degree in agricultural education in 1942. After graduation he worked as a teacher in the Celeste Henkle School in Iredell County, having been disqualified for military service because of vision problems. He taught for several years before accepting a job running a test farm in Ashe County. There he worked on experiments related to raising beef cattle and sheep. Subsequently, he managed the Dixie Classic Fair in Winston-Salem and the Farmers Market in Raleigh.

In 1964 then governor Terry Sanford appointed him to fill the unexpired term of L. Y. "Stag" Ballentine, who died while in office as North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture. Since then, Graham has been elected to that office every four years until the year 2000. He has become, with thirty-six years in office, the longest serving commissioner of agriculture in the United States. In this capacity, he has emerged as a national figure, holding the presidency at one time or another of the National Association of State Department of Agriculture, the Southern Association of State Departments of Agriculture, and the Southern United States Trade Association.

Jim Graham has made it very clear over the years that he loves his job, and his dedication manifests itself in the department's (and the state's) accomplishments during his tenure as commissioner of agriculture. Farm income has increased from \$1 billion per year to \$8 billion. The state's farmers now earn the third-highest net income in the nation. As Terry Sanford wrote: "All citizens, businesses and institutions [in North Carolina] will long benefit from his career of service."

Although this exhibition celebrates a legacy, it also highlights several initiatives of the NCSU Libraries to expand and enhance its resources on the history of North Carolina agriculture. The centerpiece of the Special Collection Department's research collections will be Graham's personal papers and memorabilia. Additionally, Graham's friends and family have created the Jim and Helen Ida Kirk Graham Agricultural Heritage Endowment to acquire books, journals, and electronic media relating to agriculture for the general library collections.

This exhibition documents and celebrates Graham's career and reveals the positive societal impact of an inspired public official. The NCSU Libraries, using photographs and documents, traces the development of Graham as an individual and a public servant. From an image of the commissioner as president of the Cleveland High School Chapter of the Future Farmers of America, to a photo of the 1978 dedication of the Jim Graham Building at the North Carolina State Fairgrounds, the exhibit illustrates the trajectory of Graham's involvement with agriculture.

To document Graham's campaigns for public office, there are photographs showing him with Terry Sanford, former secretary of state Thad Eure, and former governor Bob Scott. In the latter image, his trademark cigar serves as an emblem of his electoral victory in 1969. The only thing missing from the exhibition is a recording of his famous laugh. These visual materials are complemented by documents from the library's Special Collections Department, dating from the commissioner's student days at NC State.

