

PIONEER PLAYBOY

by Mrs. Sylvan L. Mouser nee Evelyn Mae Shipman
Great-granddaughter of John Kennedy Graham

May 6, 1943

Menander meandered up and down the Ohio and the Mississippi Rivers more or less as a broker of produce which he bought up in large quantities and shipped down the river for sale or trade. This meant long stays away from home and, in January 1837, he was gone so long that his father, John K. Graham, became worried and wrote a postmaster friend at Evansville asking his whereabouts because he had had no communications from Menander who was ordinarily a good correspondent. Of course, the postmaster tried to ease a father's worries by this letter dated January 8, 1837:

"Dear Sir: Your letter dated 1st inst. enquiring after your son, came to hand by to-night's mail, and I hasten to steal a moment in which to answer you, inasmuch as I am aware you must be anxious to learn something of your son; of whom I chanced to know something, for I find on examination of a file of memoranda in my office directions from your son to forward his letters by the bearer, to him at Mt. Prospect (about 10 or 12 miles above this place), to which said bearer I gave all letters (1 or 2) then in the office for him - and it strikes me, that I have, by his request, sent him a letter to the same place, since the date (Dec. 5, 1836) of his note addressed to me; but I can find no other note from him. - You need not have any uneasiness on acct. of hearing nothing from him, for if he is yet at Mt. Prospect, the situation of the roads between that place and New Albany has been such, that the mail could not be carried for some time; but a mail left here for your town on Thursday last, which would pass through Mt. Pl. & therefore I hope you will have had the satisfaction of hearing from him ere you undergo the task of perusing this ragged communication from
Yr obt. Servt, C. D. Bourne"

In the meantime no letters have been found until one dated Feb. 6, 1837 in which Menander writes to his father, evidently without knowledge that his father has been trying to communicate with him. It deals with the argument between the pioneer father, a college graduate and great scholar, and the son, also well-educated, about the education of Amanda, who is Menander's 17-year-old sister. We see as always the spirit of progress manifesting itself in the younger generation wanting to go ahead of the older. Menander tells what the well-educated pioneer girl should do:

Frisbies Mills, Ind., Feby. 6, 1837

"Dear Father, I read today a letter from Silas written at the express request of Amanda, which says she is deeply anxious to continue at school, but that you are of opinion it is not necessary, and advise her to give it over at the expiration of the present quarter. – It states, however, that you express yourself willing if it is my wish – and if I will write to you, to that effect, to let her continue. To express anything else than a wish that you will indulge me in my favorite scheme of educating Amanda, would be to dissemble my sentiments – I do most ardently desire your permission to let her continue – at least until my return – I ask it however with reluctance, as I well know your views of the utility of such a course, are at variance with mine – and nothing but a belief that you err in your notion of the kind of an education I wish her to have, would induce me to make the request – As an explanation of my motives for soliciting in the first place your permission to let me send her to school; and now your permission to continue her there – I will state that I desired her to become familiar with the most useful branches of Female Education – such an education as would assist her materially in the discharge of her duties as a good housekeeper, and enable her to appear to advantage in good company – I had proposed for her the following routing of studies – viz – reading – both Prose and Poetry, Arithmetic, Accounts, Geography, Grammar, History, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, something of Botany, Composition, and something of Painting – I was mainly bent, however, on the useful parts – and in all my conversations & correspondence with her, I have endeavored to

inculcate the importance of aiming at usefulness – of acquiring habits of industry & activity, and have proposed as models for her, such women as are best skilled in the management of their household matters – and for her reading and writings of such women as Miss Leslie, Miss H. F. Gould, Miss Cobbett &c. In short, I want her to be that person, who if it is necessary – can milk a cow – make butter – make a pie – do anything to make home sweet & pleasant without feeling ashamed of thinking it beneath their dignity – and if it is necessary can go into the parlour and engage in polite conversation – and all that appertains to the literary part can be acquired by an active mind like hers, in one year. The cost will probably be \$150. This is a considerable sum, it is true, but I could not spend the same amount in any other way so cheerfully – and should my scheme prove successful would it not confer greater pleasure than the accumulation of thousands – I am aware that I incur the charge of partiality in my proceedings – but I trust good will result from it to both Louisa and Angeline, by stirring up a spirit of emulation – I as sincerely desire to their advancement, and would if I were able to go as far as to promise it – I must make this letter short, as we are busily engaged in making preparations for going out. We have about 30 barrels flour and 150 sacks of corn meal to get in, and then if the water will admit of it we will get out. The prospect for trade on the river is good. Our trip so far has not been very advantageous – the remainder I hope will make amends. We have \$800 in cash – and flour & meal to the amount of \$300. How long we will yet be gone is very uncertain; probably until the 1st of June – sooner I hope – for I am getting tired of it and want to return home. We have had a remarkable pleasant weather for some two weeks – equal to spring. I will keep you informed from time to time of our progress. My health is pretty good. Give my love to all the family and in conclusion permit me to subscribe myself

Your Affectionate Son,
Menander Graham

P.S. I have left sufficient funds to defray Amanda's expenses in my absence in the hands of Silas Day."

[Note: John K. Graham had marvelous library, and he taught his children at home, according to constant diary references. The sons were sent away to school later – but the daughters' places were in the home! In spite of this attitude they all received unusual education – several were teachers prior to their marriages. He was financially well situated and so it was not a question of not being able to afford Amanda's education.]

But here's the secret – Menander was 24 years old and he was far too busy to write to Father because he was otherwise occupied as you will see by his next communication to his father, dated Feb. 13, 1837.

“Dear Father, I received to-day a letter from Amanda which while it does credit to her head and heart, conveys one of the most cutting reproofs I ever had – I trust I shall not soon forget it. She spoke of the advantages she possessed through my instrumentality and the gratitude she felt towards me but said she was afraid she had been wanting in proofs to you of suitable affection – that she thought your opposition to her continuance at school was founded in the opinion that her stay in Town could have a tendency to create in her a disrelish for home, and home pursuits, and estrange her affections from you. Such she said was not the case – that the reason of her not visiting you oftener – and the want of company – she then alluded in the most delicate terms to conduct of mine which she thought had left an unhappy impression on your mind – I confess this touched me – I saw at once my error – I had neglected writing to you – but my error was never before unfolded to my view in such glaring colours. I saw that I was under obligations to use every exertion to promote your happiness – and that I was criminal in neglecting any opportunity of ministering to that end, however trivial. I saw too that I had not only neglected opportunity when it was a privilege, but when it was my duty to write – Dear Father will you forgive me my error – I do promise most positively, never to be guilty of neglect to you again – I hope you will forgive Amanda too – charge her indiscretion to the score of youth – I do not think she could find it in her heart to designedly give you pain in any way – To speak more particularly of myself, my neglect of

writing was the result of peculiar circumstances – I will ingenuously confess the whole to you – and you shall judge whether they furnish any excuse of my neglect – about the time I received yours at Evansville – I enlarged my correspondence. You enlarged your correspondence, did you? – hm hm – Yes – Sir – Pray Sir, who favors you with a correspondence? – honored Sir – I blush to tell you that – it – is – a young Lady – Aye, and she is handsome. Aye, and she is accomplished too – And you love her I suppose? Hm – hm – I cannot say sir that I dislike her particularly or that I like her not particularly – Well, but what about her – Why Sir her heart and affections are given to me – But the half is not told – I am likewise corresponding with a young lady in Maukport – do not be hasty to accuse me of treachery – this last was not solicited by me – She is a young lady of high respectability and talents – educated at the Bloomington Female Academy – I boarded with her father while in Maukport – I was often in her company and indeed was fond of it, and she was sprightly, sensible and intelligent – I soon found I was insensibly starting her affections and prompted by a spirit of pride and self-gratulation I contribute too often to that end – she frequently intimated a desire to have me write in my absence, but as I had already solicited and obtained a correspondence with the young lady first mentioned, I could not with propriety make any bargain with her – Finding that I was not going to propose a correspondence – she said in a very delicate manner that in case of disaster, sickness, etc., she would expect me to write – I promised to do so – and accordingly about the 20th Dec. wrote her a letter. Time, absence and distance, together with disappointment in (not) getting a letter from the first-mentioned young lady so soon as I expected – wrought a considerable change in her favor – and I requested her to reciprocate – she did so – her letter came to hand – and by the same mail came the other too – you may readily suppose I was placed in a bad [*illegible – torn*]. I was situated like the horse that perished standing between two haystacks – his inclination being so well balanced that he could proceed toward neither of them – the conclusion of the whole matter shall be laid before you in due time – The names of the young ladies I beg permission to keep concealed at the present – The circumstances of my correspondence with the last mentioned young lady is known to no one but myself – please keep the whole substance of this letter to yourself. I write in

great haste as there is a man waiting who will take it to Louisville.
Please write to me at Paducah, Kentucky.

Your affectionate son,
Menander Graham"

Now how do you suppose Menander was able to extricate himself from the results of his playboy tendency? In his father's diary we find an entry that he returned home April 7th, and then no mention made of him until the following note:

Monday Morn, Oct. 2, 1837

"Father, I thought on Saturday evening an opportunity to speak to you personally on the subject of this note, but unsuccessfully – It is my intention to be married on Thursday evening next, and it is my wish, and the wish of the family that you &c be present – communicate to Ferdinand* (who will hand you this note) what you will do – I hope you will attend and will feel disappointed if you don't – I would like to know immediately.

Menander"

**Ferdinand – his older married brother whose wife was Abbie Day, sister of Silas C. Day*

Then a note in another's handwriting was at the bottom of this note: "Menander and Lavinia McClung were married by S. S. Sneed Oct. 5, 1837 at Tabor Valley. At the same time and place were also married S. C. Day and Harriet N. McClung." John K. Graham's diary shows that he went to the wedding as per his son's wishes.

Now I wonder which of the two girls this playboy won? I hardly think it was the one in Maukport, because the McClung girls lived in Floyd County, not far from Menander's home – and perhaps Lavinia was a third solicited correspondent. But, at any rate, it all goes to show how times have changed - sailors "with girls in every port", and soldiers and marines running competition.