

Magnolia Messenger

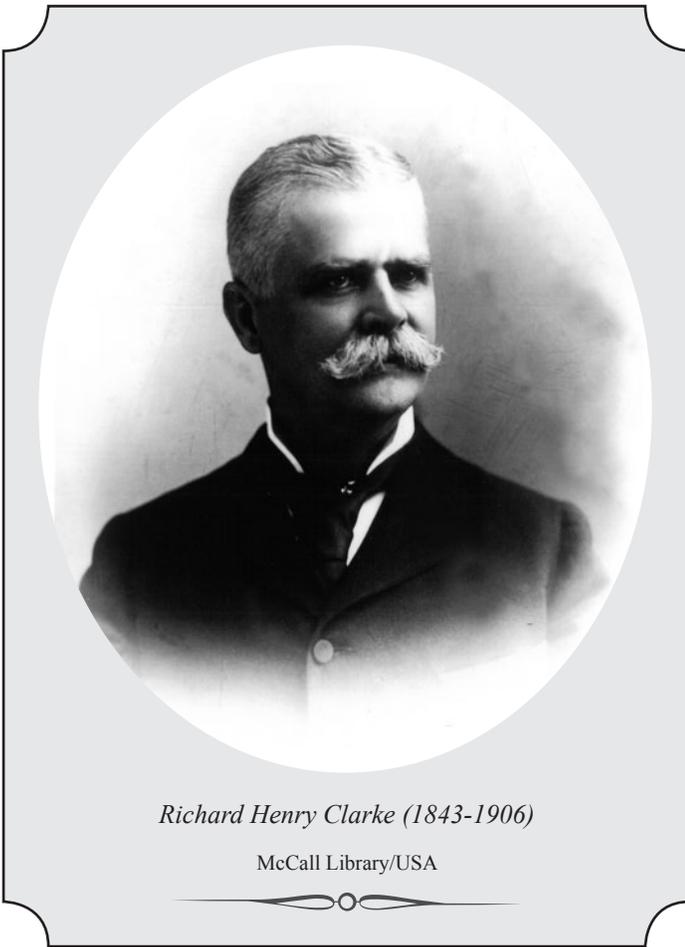
THE FRIENDS OF MAGNOLIA CEMETERY
NEWSLETTER

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"Remove not the ancient Landmark"

Spring/Summer 2014

Richard Henry Clarke, A Forgotten Statesman



Richard Henry Clarke (1843-1906)

McCall Library/USA

The members that night inspected the interior which featured oak woodwork and electric lights shaded by "opalescent globes." The first floor held double parlors, a reading room, and a "social hall," while the second held a billiard room, a barroom, card rooms, a telephone room and the governing committee's room.

Those attending that housewarming on that winter evening, were served hot oysters, turkey sandwiches, cakes, punch and beer. Local attorney Daniel Perrin Bestor was called upon and he thanked the building committee for the results of their hard work. Former congressman Richard H. Clarke was also asked to speak. According to the *Mobile Register*, "Mr. Clarke spoke on the benefits of a club: the hearthstone of the bachelor and the refuge of the married man."

Although the newspaper reporter noted that the well received speech had been delivered in "a witty vein," one person would find it less amusing.

When Clarke arrived at the breakfast table the next morning, his wife, the former Helen Gaines Foote met him, newspaper in hand. Rather than wish him a good morning, Mrs. Clarke icily told him he could leave and return to his "damn refuge."

A Black Belt Native

Richard Henry Clarke had been born in Dayton, a small town in Marengo County. In July of 1861 he graduated from the University of Alabama. According to his biography he was immediately appointed a second lieutenant in the Confederate Army.

In October of that year, Clarke married Mary Kate Burke, a native of Tuscaloosa. Clarke was a member of the 1st Battalion of the Alabama Artillery which had been formed at Fort Gaines in February. His battalion would later be recognized for their bravery during the terrific bombardment of Fort Morgan in August of 1864.

Mary Kate Clarke was apparently living in Mobile during the war years, although at present it is unknown just where. In 1863 she gave birth in Mobile to a daughter, Kathleen Mary.

At war's end, Clarke and his family made their way to Demopolis where he studied for the bar exam in his father's law office. In 1867 he was admitted to the bar and a year later the couple welcomed a second daughter, Mabel Radford Clarke.

Alabama's First Congressional District has been represented by a variety of men over the years. Some like Frank Boykin are remembered for their larger than life personalities or is it their notoriety? Others have led exemplary lives and sadly the memories of their accomplishments have faded with time. One such man well worth remembering is Richard Henry Clarke.

A Memorable Toast

In February of 1902 a group of Mobile's most prominent gentlemen gathered to tour the newly completed home of the Athelstan Club on St. Francis Street. The club, founded in 1872, had previously occupied a three story structure on the north east corner of Dauphin and St. Joseph streets which had been completed three years later.

According to the 1870 Federal Census, the Clarke household consisted of the 28 year old attorney, his wife, two daughters, and three domestic servants. His career was apparently doing well and in 1872 Clarke was named solicitor for Marengo County.

Tragedy struck in 1874 when Mary Kate Clarke died at the age of 31. The circumstances of her death are unknown. Three years later he married Helen Gaines Foote, a daughter of Mobile merchant Charles King Foote. Their first daughter, Helen Gaines Clarke, was born in May of 1879.

A Move South

In 1881, the 38 year old widower moved to Mobile. After four years as Marengo County solicitor, Clarke had been appointed a state prosecuting attorney, a position he held until 1879. Just what prompted the successful attorney to pull up stakes and move to Alabama's port city remains unknown. Perhaps his wife was just homesick.

Clarke went into practice with Thomas Knowles Macartney that year. His partner was married to the former Josephine Emanuel, whose father Jonathon had built a palatial home on the south west corner of Government and Joachim streets. According to the 1882 city directory, the firm of Macartney and Clarke was located at 40 St. Francis Street.

A year later, Clarke's 43 year old partner died. The next year's directory listed him in practice by himself with the office on St. Francis eventually moving to 52 St. Michael Street. He and his wife's home address was given as North Joachim Street but they were apparently living on St. Louis Street by 1886, the year their second daughter, Mary Morris Clarke arrived.

With four daughters, the couple may have decided a larger home was necessary. In any event the city directory in 1888 shows the family as residing on the north side of Government Street, two doors east of Hallett. That was also the year that Helen Clarke gave birth to William Edward Clarke, who would die at the age of just 13 months.

Congress

In 1889, Alabama's First Congressional District elected Richard Henry Clarke, replacing another Demopolis native, James Taylor Jones. Mobile's 1890 city directory lists him as a congressman as well as a partner in the law firm of Clarke, Clarke and Webb. His partners were his younger half-brother Norborne, born in 1863 and James H. Webb.

A Groom for Two Sisters

Clarke served in congress for four terms – from March of 1889 until March of 1897. During his term he introduced a bill making Rural Free Delivery (RFD) of the mail a reality in Alabama. He also worked to successfully deepen Mobile's shipping channel.

In April of 1893, Kathleen Mary Clarke married Tuscaloosa attorney John Manley Foster in what was termed "a brilliant wedding" at Trinity Church in Demopolis. The couple had one

son, Richard Clarke Foster born in 1895 who would later graduate from Harvard Law School before being named president of the University of Alabama in 1937. He died in office in 1941 and Foster Auditorium – the backdrop to George Wallace's infamous "school house door" stunt was named in his honor.

A year after her son's birth, Kathleen Mary Clarke died. And in 1898, just two years later, Foster married his sister-in-law, Mabel, in a ceremony in Demopolis. The couple had a daughter, Kathleen Mary Foster, born in 1903.

The Great Debate

In 1895, the same year his grandson was born, Richard Henry Clarke was invited to debate William Jennings Bryan over the federal gold standard. Following a financial panic, the nation's reliance on the gold standard was being debated against one based on both gold and silver.

On a hot July night the two men paired off against each other in the Mobile Theatre which was packed for the occasion. Bryan was a proponent of bi-metalism, a stand which would propel the young Nebraskan to the Democratic nomination for president within a year. The older and distinguished Clarke argued for the gold standard.

The audience was boisterous and as the two men verbally sparred on stage, the crowd got rowdier. On several occasions they were so loud that Clarke turned to address them, at one point branding them "cowards and Populites" and another time calling out "Jeer on you Republicans!"

As the men left the theatre a band played and Bryan received a streetside ovation as he headed to the station for the Birmingham bound train. Although nominated for the presidency three times, he lost every time. Historically he is far better remembered for his participation in the great Scopes' "Monkey" Trial of 1925 in which he helped prosecute a Tennessee high school instructor who had taught Darwinism. The rigors of that trial and being cross examined by Clarence Darrow have often been blamed on his death a few days later.

The Legislature and the Archives

Although Richard Clarke never set his sights on the White House, he did run for Alabama's governor in 1896, without success. That did not slow his law career – he was elected president of the Alabama State Bar in 1896 and in 1900 began a two year term in the state legislature.



The Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery was established thanks to legislation introduced by Richard H. Clarke. It was the nation's first.



During his term in the legislature, Clarke sponsored the 1901 legislation which created the Alabama Department of Archives and History. This became America's first publicly funded independent agency to be charged with the collection and care of artifacts relating to a state's history. Other states saw the need and many patterned their archives after the example set in Alabama.



The Clarke House at 1060 Government Street, ca. 1902. Subsequent owners would spend fortunes to obliterate this classic French design.

McCall Library/USA

The Clarke House

As previously noted, the Clarkes' residential address in Mobile changed a number of times according to city directories ranging from 158 St. Louis Street to 257 North Jackson in 1901.

In September of 1902 – the same year as his famous quote at the Athelstan Club – the *Register* noted that the Clarkes had moved into a French Renaissance mansion. A former frame house standing at 1060 Government Street, opposite George Street had been enlarged into a mansion honoring the taste of Louis XIV.

Within its cream stuccoed walls was an interior which the newspaper described in great detail. Guests entered a vestibule with wine colored walls leading to a reception hall finished in tones of cream and ivory. Double parlors to the right featured a color scheme of pink and salmon with the ceilings "tinted to match."

The dining room was to the left and was wrapped in cypress wainscoting beneath an embossed red and gold leather wall covering. Here the ceiling had been tinted a shade of olive green while light came in through stained glass windows. The first floor also held an "American Colonial style" library with crimson walls and gleaming white trim.

The newspaper further reported that the house was equipped not only with the most modern of heating systems but also had a speaking tube connecting to the kitchen.

A Mardi Gras Tradition Is Born

The Clarkes were no doubt pleased in 1905 when their daughter Mary Morris was crowned queen of Mobile's Mardi Gras. Her king was Orville Cawthon, Jr. whose name would be synonymous with both Carnival and a Bienville Square hotel for the next five decades.



Mary Morris Clarke reigned as queen of the 1905 Mardi Gras with Orville Cawthon.

Wilson Collection, HMPS

In anticipation of the crowds expected at the Athelstan Club, its board approved the construction of viewing stands at street side. Although the clubhouse was just three years old it had been determined that its porches were insufficient to hold the members and their guests as they watched the Mardi Gras parades.

Nearly 110 years later the tradition of erecting a curbside viewing stand is a Carnival tradition for the club.

A Summer Escape and A Funeral

In the decades before air-conditioning, well-to-do Mobilians escaped the summer by traveling to cooler climes. In September of 1906 a newspaper in Colorado Springs reported that Mrs. Richard H. Clarke and her two daughters were staying at that city's Antlers Hotel, a fashionable watering spot at the time.



Helen Foote Clarke and her two daughters were enjoying the cool summer of Colorado Springs in September of 1906 at this hotel. The former congressman was to join them but only made it as far as St. Louis. Fate would make him miss his own funeral.



A Washington, D. C. artist created this likeness of Clarke. His widow donated it to the Archives in 1907.

Clarke traveled north later that month to join his wife and daughters. At St. Louis he fell ill. According to a front page article in the *Mobile Register* of September 26, Clarke had died the night before from pneumonia. He had been sick for several days and was surrounded by his family when the end came.

The *Register* noted that the body of the former congressman was being shipped to Mobile for a funeral service to take place at Christ Church. Later that day, Mobile was visited by one of the worst hurricanes of the century. Winds toppled the steeple of Christ Church, destroying its beautiful sanctuary. Train service was disrupted and so were plans for the funeral.

As Mobile dug out from under hurricane debris, train service from the north was restored and the late congressman's body arrived in Mobile a day later than anticipated. The funeral was conducted from the parlors of his former residence on Government Street and he was buried in Magnolia Cemetery.

The death of the well respected former congressman prompted a full editorial in the *Mobile Register* which labeled him "Mobile's foremost citizen. His personality was so engaging, his frankness and courtesy so genuine, and his wisdom so profound that he made a host of friends."

In March of 1907 a large oil portrait of Clarke was shipped to the Alabama Department of Archives and History from his widow. Although currently resting safely in storage that canvas has hung in a prominent location in the halls of the archives for many years.

Weddings for Two Clarkes

1907 was also the year that both of Richard and Helen Clarke's two daughters married. In April, Mary Morris married Carl H. Seals of Birmingham at St. Paul's Church in Englewood, N.J. in front of what one newspaper termed "a large and fashionable gathering."

Seals presided over a Birmingham cigar company as well as a real estate firm and would rise to the rank of general during the Second World War. Just why the couple selected a church in suburban New Jersey is unclear, but the marriage did not last. Mary Morris Clarke Seals lived the rest of her life in Manhattan where she taught English at Barnard College. She died in 1981 and is buried in a New Jersey cemetery.

In October of that year, Helen Gaines Clarke married a native of Rutland, Vermont – a town known today for being home to the Vermont Country Store. Henry George Smith was a Vermont banker and vice president of the Rutland Railroad. After selling his share of the railroad to William S. Webb, (son-in-law to William H. Vanderbilt), Smith had turned his attention to the hotel business.

Their wedding took place at the Church of the Heavenly Rest, which at the time was on 5th Avenue and 46th Street. According to a small article appearing in the *New York Times*, "the bride was given in marriage by her mother, Mrs. Richard H. Clarke. Her sister was matron of honor. As the bride is in mourning the wedding was quiet and attended only by relatives of the families and intimate friends."

The Smiths moved into the Woodstock Hotel on West 43rd Street, in which the groom owned an interest. Smith enlarged the hotel which earned a reputation for its luxury, attracting such notables as Diamond Jim Brady, Lillian Russell and future president Woodrow Wilson. The couple later moved to Westchester but finally made Rutland their home. The Woodstock Hotel still stands, but after suffering from the dramatic decline of Times Square it has yet to benefit from the area's gentrification.



The Woodstock Hotel near Times Square after its enlargement by Henry George Smith.

A Christ Church Funeral



Clarke's daughter, Helen Gaines Clarke married in a quiet ceremony in Manhattan just a year after her father's death.

McCall Library/USA

Helen Foote Clarke sold her home in Mobile to banana baron Ashbel Hubbard in 1907 and apparently moved north to be with her daughters. In 1925 her former home was remodeled with the help of architect George B. Rogers who covered the cream terra cotta exterior with brick beneath a new hipped roof of red Spanish tile. In the 1950's the YWCA would add a large motel-like wing to the west making it even more unrecognizable should a Clarke ever revisit.

Helen Foote Clarke was in Vermont when she died in June of 1927 at the age of 72. Her funeral took place in Christ Church and among the prominent men selected as her pallbearers were Albert Peyton Bush, Jack Ross, Daniel P. Bestor, Hammond Gayfer, Waring Harrison and Orville Cawthon who had been her daughter's king in 1905.

Helen and Richard Clarke rest under matching granite markers, overlooking the expanse of the National Cemetery. Their simple epitaphs offer no clue as to the positions of prominence each held in this city as well as state during their lifetimes.

Tom McGehee



Detail of the stairs leading to the Clarke gravesite.

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

In London riders on the "tube" are constantly reminded to "mind the gap." Our motto these days at Magnolia Cemetery is "fill the gap" – that gap in the fence along Virginia Street. In between the long row of custom iron fence is a dilapidated rusty stretch of chain link which was installed in 1967 and looks it!

The board is getting bids to finish that gap as part of our restoration efforts. If you have any interest in honoring or memorializing a loved one with a fence section, this may be your last chance. Call the Friends' office (251) 432-8672 for more information.

*And we have received another generous grant from the **Ben May Trust** as well as a donation from the **Eichold Foundation Fund**. This money will allow six more sections of fence to be installed to front Old Hebrew Rest, one of the most historic sections of Magnolia Cemetery. Designed to match the long missing fence, this restored feature is adding much to the site.*

*Another new feature that you will notice in the cemetery is the **new lot designation signage**. Each square in the cemetery now has two handsome black posts holding black markers with white numbers or letters. These replace the previous single signs in green which could only have appealed to a highway engineer. Those will be removed as time allows. Our thanks to immediate past president **Douglas B. Kearley** for his assistance in getting this done!*

*On Saturday, March 15 two walking tours were conducted for those touring Mobile's historic homes. Each year the **Historic Mobile Preservation Society** conducts a much anticipated tour and the Friends have joined with them to provide a tour of another sort. Our*

organization was created by members of HMPS. Despite threatening skies two large groups enjoyed a walk listening to yours truly. Janet Savage assisted and had water as well as membership materials for the Friends.

*And on May 15 a group of 22 alumni of Virginia Military Institute met at the cemetery to lay wreaths on the graves of three of their alumni who had taken part in the Battle of New Market, Va. on May 15, 1865. Honored that day were **William Henry Barney, Gaylord Blair Clark and Collier Harrison Minge**, and several of their descendants were on hand for the event.*

The Battle of New Market took place on the same date, 150 years ago when a small group of Confederate soldiers were joined by cadets from Virginia Military Institute. They heroically forced Major General Franz Sigel and his much larger army out of the Shenandoah Valley.

I also wanted to report that I heard from the Ulysses S. Grant Library after the last issue and learned that while no correspondence from Mobile's Charles K. Foote has been found, the autograph book from Grant's visit to New Orleans is kept within that city's library archives. (And Helen Foote Clarke was a daughter of Charles K. Foote.)

And finally please visit the cemetery soon. Just don't drive on the unpaved rows. They look deceptively firm but with the amount of rainfall we are getting could quickly trap a vehicle.

Tom McGehee
President

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