ABSTRACT

POTEAT, R. MATTHEW. “To the Last Man and the Last Dollar”: Governor Henry Toole Clark and Civil War North Carolina, July 1861 to September 1862. (Under the direction of Dr. Nancy Mitchell, with Joe A. Mobley, Co-Chair)

This thesis examines the life and political career of Henry Toole Clark, the second of North Carolina’s three Civil War governors. Clark served one term as the state’s chief executive from July 1861 to September 1862, a crucial period in which North Carolina established itself as a constituent member of the Confederate States and first suffered the hardships of war. As the leader of the state in that formative period, he mobilized thousands of troops for the Southern cause, established the first, and only, Confederate prison in North Carolina, arranged the production of salt for the war effort, created European purchasing connections, and built a successful and important gunpowder mill. Clark, however, found more success as an administrator than as a political figure. The Edgecombe County planter devoted over twenty years to the service of the Democratic Party at the local, state, and national levels, and over ten years as a state senator. As governor, he was unable to maneuver in the new political world ushered in by the Civil War, and he retired abruptly from public service at the end of his term. Clark’s life and career offer insight into the larger world of the antebellum planter-politician, that dominant group of southern leaders who led the region into dependence upon slavery and, ultimately, to war. Though the planter class was diverted from power for a brief time during Reconstruction, the political and racial ideology of that class would shape conservative white southern thought for the next hundred years.
“To the Last Man and the Last Dollar”: Governor Henry Toole Clark and Civil War
North Carolina, July 1861- September 1862.

by

R. Matthew Poteat

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
History

Raleigh

2005

Approved by:

______________________  _________________  ____________________
Joe A. Mobley, Co-chair    Dr. Keith Luria  Dr. William C. Harris

______________________
Dr. Nancy Mitchell, Chair
DEDICATION

For Katherine,

*She is all States, and all Princes, I,
Nothing else is.*
R. Matthew Poteat is a native son of North Carolina. He studies the political, cultural, and intellectual history of the American South from the nineteenth century to the present. He plans to extend his present work into a larger study of the early years of the Civil War, focusing on state governors, the planter aristocracy, and the construction of Confederate nationalism. Matthew is especially interested in vintage guitars, blues and bluegrass music, and the religious mysteries of Southern barbecue.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Great praise and thanks are due Joe Mobley for his patience, guidance, sage advice, and especially his old-fashioned hospitality and good humor, all of which contributed mightily toward the completion of this work. His keen historical insight into Civil War history was invaluable. Thanks also to William C. Harris, a true scholar and the very definition of a Southern gentleman; Nancy Mitchell, who is truly the hardest working historian in the known world; and Keith Luria, for introducing me to the virtues of a good historiography.

I wish also to thank the following for their instruction and their example. True historians all: John David Smith of UNC-Charlotte, David Gilmartin of NC State, Mi Gyung Kim of NC State, and William L. Barney of UNC-Chapel Hill.

For his friendship and critical opinion, a big “thank you” to my mentor, William Mitchell. Thanks also to: H. W. Hoffman, David Rieder, Kris Vincent Williams Esq., Krystal Kachnic, Chriss Hardison, Scott Hampton, Chris Meekins of the state Archives Office, Raleigh Central YMCA, Laura Farkas, and Coleman Mehta. I could not have done it without them. And, of course, much love and appreciation for Katherine, who provided inspiration, encouragement, a sharp eye, and, most of all, purpose.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge my father and mother, Richard and Judy Poteat, without whom none of this would be possible. To my father, who taught me the value of history, set the example of true manhood, and imbued me with an appreciation of intellectual curiosity and discovery. My mother, for she always knew my heart.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: “State Rights and State Remedies”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Antebellum Career of Henry Toole Clark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: “We rely upon his honesty”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevation to the Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: “North Carolina has been neglected”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coastal Defense and the Blockade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: “No man to protect us”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Home Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A good name is better than precious ointment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

*Figure 1:* Portrait of Henry Toole Clark  
124

*Figure 2:* Edgecombe County and North Carolina  
125

*Figure 3:* The Outer Banks and Roanoke Island  
126

*Figure 4:* Map of the Union and Confederate states  
127

*Figure 5:* Family Tree  
128
Introduction

A telegram arrived at the Department of Military Affairs in Raleigh on the morning of July 8, 1861, informing the state that Governor John W. Ellis was dead. Ellis was a popular leader who had led North Carolina out of the old Union and into the Southern Confederacy. He had also been sickly. The forty-one-year-old governor traveled to Red Sulphur Springs, Virginia, on June 21, 1861, in an attempt to restore his failing health from the ravages of tuberculosis, but the resort’s healing waters did nothing to assuage the effects of his “rapid consumption.”¹ Ellis died just two weeks after his arrival. The North Carolina Constitution did not provide for a lieutenant governor to replace a governor who died in office, but rather conferred the duties of the chief executive onto the president of the Senate. That man was Henry Toole Clark, a Tarboro planter and secessionist Democrat.

Clark is a little understood subject of Civil War scholarship, and his governorship is strangely neglected in the historiography of the period. Any discussion of North Carolina and its chief executive during the Civil War is framed within the context of governors Ellis and Zebulon B. Vance, prominent men who cast imposing shadows over the state’s political and military history. Indeed, much of the historical record begins with Ellis’s brusque rebuff of Lincoln’s request for troops only to continue with Vance and his often-stormy relationship with Richmond.

Clark served one term as governor from July 1861 to September 1862, a crucial period as North Carolina established itself as a constituent member of the Confederate States

and first suffered the hardships of war. He was instrumental in leading the state in that formative period, providing for the state’s defense, and mobilizing troops in support of the war effort. Yet historians have neglected the vital role that Southern governors, like Clark, played in the administration of the Confederacy.

When historians mention Clark, he warrants little more than a passing phrase, let alone a scholarly treatment of his administration. Despite a large body of Civil War literature, there is only one brief unpublished account devoted to him. All other references are buried in the text of peripheral works, and what little is written of him is often negative. In the scant references to his legacy, he is regarded as an ineffective “fill-in” who left little mark on the office, a weak leader who retired from public service after a short, unremarkable tenure. Previous accounts fail to place Clark in context, and none discusses his family history, background, education, political ideology, or experience in any depth. Such a narrow analysis does not explain why Clark failed as a political leader, or whether his efforts as the state's military commander-in-chief were adequate to the task.

Gary Mercer’s “The Administration of Governor Henry Toole Clark” (1965) examines the planter’s tenure as governor and concludes that he was a mediocre executive. Mercer argues that “Clark was not an outstanding governor. He possessed neither the necessary qualities of political leadership nor the desire to be governor. He was a man of high character rather than distinguished talent.”

---

4 Mercer, “The Administration of Governor Henry Toole Clark”, 80; Alan D. Watson, Edgecombe County: A Brief History (Raleigh: Office of Archives and History, 1979), 41.
Presenting Clark as a victim of his own inabilities, Mercer contends that Clark’s “lack of ambition” caused him to not seek another term, saying: “The demand of the state for more forceful leadership combined with his own lack of political ambition resulted in Clark’s retirement from political life after only one year in the executive chair.” Mercer views the governor as feeble and ineffective, but a man of “strong character,” personal worth, and indomitable work ethic. Acknowledging that he “did achieve a certain amount of success” in raising, equipping, and mobilizing the state’s troops, Mercer concludes that Clark ultimately failed to lead North Carolinians through the first year of the war.5

Mercer also believes that the governor was “sensitive to criticism” and that he “tried to remain aloof from politics and please all factions as far as his conscience would allow.” Clark’s actions suggest that he did indeed possess an aversion to political factionalism.6 The claim that he tried to “please all factions” or that he was “sensitive to criticism,” however, is not accurate. The suggestion implies timidity, or sycophancy, and Clark possessed neither of these traits. Rather, he was a rigid believer in the rule of law and an ardent opponent of political infighting. Historian Glenn Tucker’s observation that he was “devoted to routine” is particularly apt.7

The historian John G. Barrett reexamined Clark briefly in a chapter in The Confederate Governors (1985), edited by W. Buck Yearns. Barrett somewhat revises Mercer’s negative interpretation and concludes that “Henry Toole Clark was a capable individual devoted both to his state and to the southern cause. He performed his duties as

war governor faithfully. Yet he was never able to lead forcefully the people of North Carolina in time of civil crisis."  

Barrett blames Clark’s failures less on his personal traits and more on the Confederate government. The Richmond authorities siphoned the best men and resources for service on the Virginia front, leaving Clark in a “most difficult position” in defending North Carolina. As Union troops consolidated their hold on portions of eastern North Carolina, the governor could only press the need for more arms and troops from the Confederate government.

Though Barrett makes Richmond authorities complicit in Confederate blunders in eastern North Carolina, he does not absolve Clark for what he sees as the governor’s failure to lead. Barrett undoubtedly views the governor as a man unequal to the task set before him. He believes that Clark’s “partial term” limited his ability to mobilize public opinion and that he did not have enough time to form an effective policy to meet the demands placed upon him. He was simply unable “to come to grips with the monumental problems associated with guiding an independent-minded state through a bitter and devastating civil war.”

Glenn Tucker, a Vance biographer, expressed similar sentiments twenty years earlier and devoted less than a paragraph to Clark’s tenure, claiming that “[Vance’s] task was well near Herculean because the preceding governors, Ellis and Clark, served only partial terms and neither had sufficient opportunity--even had they possessed the capability--to come to grips with the stupendous task of organizing and conducting a populous and independent minded state through the [Civil War].” Vance’s most recent biographer, Gordon McKinney, claims that Clark’s administration was completely ineffective, contending that “[Clark’s] sudden

---

8 Barrett, “North Carolina,” 149.
9 Ibid., 148.
10 Ibid., 148.
elevation [to the executive] did little to improve the performance of the state’s
government.”

Many historians, including Barrett and McKinney, see Vance as a “redeemer” of
sorts, a political leader of commanding presence and skill who almost single-handedly
transformed the state’s ability to wage war. Barrett claims, “A majority of North Carolina’s
war measures consequently are attributable to Vance. Either their inception or their effective
implementation can be traced directly to him.”

Vance’s abilities and accomplishments as governor are well known. He was, and has
remained, one of the most compelling figures of Civil War history. Vance did, without
question, transform the executive branch with his dynamic, forceful style. In many respects,
Vance was the first modern governor in North Carolina history. To suggest, however, that
North Carolina was devoid of competent administrative leadership at the beginning of the
war, or that Vance’s success can be attributed to his skill alone, is an oversimplification.
Clark left the executive department with certain positive achievements for Vance to build
upon. At the outset of the war, Clark, with the help of North Carolina Adjutant General
James G. Martin, succeeded in equipping the state’s troops to the best of their ability. In
addition, Clark established the first, and only, Confederate prison in North Carolina, arranged
the production of salt for the war effort, created European purchasing connections, and built a
successful and important gunpowder mill—all notable administrative achievements.

It is true, however, that Clark failed as a “political” leader. The party did not offer
him, nor did he seek, the nomination in 1862 for another term as governor. Military defeats

Gordon McKinney, Zeb Vance: North Carolina’s Civil War Governor and Gilded Age Political Leader (Chapel
in eastern North Carolina created furor and disaffection among the state’s citizens. The increasing scarcity of goods, rising prices, and resentment over conscription all combined to create a difficult political situation that Clark failed to manage. Growing pockets of Unionist sentiment in extreme western portions of the state, and in the Quaker Belt of the Piedmont region, furthered his troubles. Unlike Vance, Clark made no effort to unite in the common cause of Southern independence the state’s two contending political factions--the secessionist Democrats and the Conservatives, a coalition of former Whigs and Union Democrats.¹³

As governor, Clark faced many of the same problems Vance would encounter: conscription, suspension of habeas corpus, impressment of goods, and disaffection with the Confederate cause. Though Clark questioned certain hegemonic Confederate policies, most notably the Confederacy’s decision to defend Virginia at the cost of North Carolina’s coastal defense, as governor he generally cooperated with directives from Richmond and enforced the law. Contrary to historian Frank Owsley’s contention that Confederate governors hindered the war effort, Clark usually supported the laws and policies as dictated by the Confederate Congress and President Jefferson Davis. Though Clark was wary of the increasing centralization of Confederate power, he would assert “state rights” in defense of the individual, especially in cases of impressment of arms and goods.¹⁴

Clark was a third-generation plantation aristocrat who possessed considerable administrative ability and intelligence, graduating at seventeen from the University of North

---


Carolina, and who was a member of the state bar. He was widely read and a subscriber of many, varied newspapers from throughout the country.\textsuperscript{15} He was also a slave owner who possessed over twenty-five years experience in running a successful and extensive plantation and a slave-hire operation. These enterprises made him a wealthy man. Clark also claimed over twenty years of service with the Democratic Party as a writer, local party chairman, national delegate, and eventually as an elected official, serving over ten years in the North Carolina state Senate, and rising to the speakership of that body.

In \textit{The Confederate Republic} (1994), historian George Rable describes men like Clark as ideological Confederate leaders dedicated to preserving the conservative principles of America’s founders. Rable argues that the architects of the Confederacy sought to rescue the republican values of their Revolutionary War forebears from the modernizing, dominating, and increasingly politicized federal Union. Many Southern leaders rejected partisan politics in favor of unity, believing themselves the inheritors of the founders’ revolutionary tradition. Such men envisioned a “pure” republic, devoid of the corrupting stain of politics, and wedded to the prospects of a limited government dedicated to the protection of “life, liberty, and property.”\textsuperscript{16} But perhaps Rable emphasizes too strongly the depth of antiparty rhetoric of Confederate politics. His notion of unity among Confederate leaders overlooks certain evidence of strong partisanship in areas of the South, including North Carolina, partisanship which Clark experienced firsthand.

\textsuperscript{15} Clark saved newspapers and news clippings as his private papers attest. His newspapers were donated to the state library and copied for microfilm purposes in the twentieth century. Several copies of the Raleigh Standard and many of the Tarboro Free Press and Southerner bear his signature. See also James Hair to Henry T. Clark, March 25, 1853, Henry Toole Clark Papers (microfilm), Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Henry Toole Clark Papers, Private Collections, State Archives, Raleigh.

Though Clark displayed administrative skill, he failed as a political leader because of his rigid, conservative ideology, and his unwavering vision of a “pure” Confederate republic—a republic supported politically by a white-male democracy and financed by the slave economy. Much like George Washington and other Founding Fathers, Clark was opposed to what he believed were the corrupting influences of factional party politics. In many respects, he was an idealist, a man who envisioned America as modern Roman republic, ruled by enlightened, benevolent paternalists. Like many Southerners, he supported a conservative government of strong states and limited federal powers, and maintained a utopian vision of the agrarian, Jeffersonian democratic ideal.¹⁷

Clark’s major intellectual influences derived from the political philosophies of Nathaniel Macon and Willie Jones, two conservative antebellum firebrands from the northeastern region of North Carolina. Clark inherited and willingly supported the state rights ideological traditions propounded by the anti-federalist “old republicans.” Macon and Jones, like Clark, possessed an undeviating adherence to the fundamental principles of strict economy and avoidance of debt. Each desired a government conducted with honesty, transparency, simplicity, virtue, and maximum liberty for the white individual, for the community, and for the state. As the historian Drew McCoy states, “[such men] assumed that a healthy republican government demanded an economic and social order that would encourage the shaping of a virtuous citizenry.”¹⁸

Although Clark failed as a political leader, his performance as the state’s military commander was more than adequate to the task. He possessed military experience as an adjutant and a colonel in the state militia and was competent in military affairs, frequently issuing clear, sensible orders to subordinates, and offering sound advice to Confederate authorities.\(^{19}\) He did not, however, receive sufficient support from Confederate authorities to perform his job as North Carolina’s commander-in-chief. Given the Herculean responsibility placed upon him, Clark did as well as any Southern governor could be expected to have done in preparing his state for armed conflict.

In the final analysis, Henry Toole Clark was typical of that class of men who led North Carolina during the antebellum period and into a devastating civil war. As historians Donald Butts and Ralph Wooster have noted, members of the planter class made up a small percentage of the state’s white population yet held over a third of all legislative seats before the war.\(^{20}\) A survey of the 1850 North Carolina legislature reveals that more than 80 percent of its members were slave owners, the highest ratio in any southern state.\(^{21}\) Clark was part of that antebellum order of slaveholders who, as the historian Drew Gilpin Faust points out, “successfully dominated the [South] through their ability to elicit the consent and cooperation of the largely enfranchised masses of the nonslaveholding whites.”\(^{22}\) The Civil War, however, disrupted the traditional ruling equilibrium that allowed the planters to exert hegemony over the yeoman class. Clark was unable to maneuver in the new political

---


\(^{21}\) Marc Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*, 47-49.

environment in which the old “complex rules, bargains, and limits” had changed. As governor, he never formulated a compelling vision for the future; rather, he strived to maintain the conservative values of the Old South. Clark’s story reveals much about that class of men who once controlled North Carolina’s destiny and led the state into a devastating civil war.

---

Chapter One
“State Rights and State Remedies”: The Antebellum Career of Henry Toole Clark

Henry Toole Clark was born February 7, 1808, to a prominent Edgecombe County planter family. The Clarks were members of that elite planter class which dominated social and political thought in eastern North Carolina. Census records of 1860 list an inventory of twenty-five slaves with personal and real property valued at just under $70,000.¹ Though not extravagantly wealthy by South Carolina low country standards, the family had earned a solid reputation through trading, education, and public service.

Henry’s paternal grandfather, Christopher Clark, created the family’s wealth as a shipper and trading merchant in the years after the American Revolution. Much of his business involved trade between London, England, and Edenton, North Carolina. With proceeds from this commerce, he purchased land in Bertie County and established “Elmwood,” a plantation near Salmon Creek, where his son James was born in 1779.²

James West Clark was a 1797 graduate of Princeton University, establishing his family as members of an educated, landed elite. James served as a Democrat in both houses of the state General Assembly, and in the U. S. House of Representatives from

² Second Census of the United States, 1800: Bertie County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (microfilm, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh) 34; Southerner (Tarboro), February 27, 1908.
1815 to 1817. He was later appointed as the chief clerk to the Navy Department, serving for four years until 1831.\(^3\)

James married Arabella Toole, the daughter of Colonel Henry Irwin Toole of Edgecombe County in 1802. The Tooles were prominent members of the community and several members of the family had served in various local, state, and national offices. Arabella Toole was a descendant of William Haywood, a member of the 1776 Provincial Congress at Halifax who helped author the original 1776 North Carolina Constitution. James and Arabella moved from Bertie to Edgecombe County, where the new couple made their home near Walnut Creek, “eight or ten miles above Tarborough.” There the Clarks maintained thirty-nine slaves and raised their four children: Henry Toole, Laura, Maria, and Mary.\(^4\)

The Clarks were afforded high social standing and moved among the state’s elite social and political circles. As the eldest and only son of a longtime statesman and landowner, Henry Clark was raised a gentleman and educated at a local private school in Tarboro, gaining the liberal education befitting a young plantation aristocrat. He later enrolled at the state university in Chapel Hill, graduating in four years in 1826 at age seventeen. As a student, he was bright and showed an interest in history, poetry, and Latin. The university curriculum at that time, as historian Eugene Genovese describes, focused heavily on the classics: “History, ancient and medieval as well as American, fascinated educated southerners. College students got large doses of Greek and Roman

\(^3\) Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, s.v. “James West Clark.” James Clark resigned his post as a result of the Peggy Eaton Affair—a scandal that rocked Washington society and Jackson’s cabinet.

history as well as literature, and many retained a lifelong interest.” Clark’s academic record was good enough to earn him the designation of “honor man,” allowing him the privilege to make an “Intermediate Oration” at graduation. Though Clark enjoyed history, business matters dictated his career path. After graduation, young Henry read law under his uncle, William H. Haywood Jr., though he would rarely practice. His legal training, however, served him well as a clerk and justice in the Edgecombe county courts and as the executor of the family business.

The Clarks had wide ranging interests in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Alabama, and Henry often undertook arduous journeys on horseback to attend to the family’s affairs. The young planter possessed a talent for business and, as his papers prove, his accounts usually remained solvent. Unlike many planters, Clark did not overextend himself financially in the purchase of slaves or land. Rather than borrow money to buy more slaves or increase his cotton acreage, much of his business involved land speculation in Dyer County, Tennessee, and in slave hire operations, using a Sumter County, Alabama, based agency, which proved an extremely profitable affair.

The 1808 federal prohibition on the importation of African or other foreign slaves substantially increased the value of Upper South bondsmen. Many owners profited handsomely from the selling or hiring of slaves as cotton plantations grew larger and

7 Haywood would later serve as a senator from North Carolina. *Southerner*, February 27, 1908; *Alumni Directory of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill: Alumni Office of the University of North Carolina, 1954), 161.
8 Will of James W. Clark, November 1, 1843, Record of Wills, Edgecombe County 1810-1885, (microfilm), State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh; Reel Index, Henry Toole Clark Papers (microfilm), Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1-2.
moved deeper south and west into the Mississippi and Texas deltas. Clark often made trips to the cotton region of Alabama to oversee his affairs and visit relatives. As profits increased, the astute businessman employed a slave agency, Hair & Hair of Sumter County, to manage the operation. James Hair was a conscientious and communicative agent, sending Clark frequent updates on his slaves and helping keep his employer’s accounts in order. Hair also supervised the health and well-being of Clark’s bondsmen and Clark seems to have been a particularly attentive slave master, often hiring physicians to attend to sickly servants. For example, one slave, Ned, whose “hands and feet were swelled and unable to work,” was allowed to live in a “small house and cultivate a small piece of [Hair’s] land.” Ned’s swelling eventually degenerated into a life-threatening form of “dropsy,” a disease from which “Doctor Smith [had] no expectation of his ever getting well.” Clark, however, allowed Ned to remain with Hair and paid all medical bills in connection with the slave’s illness.9

Though Clark may have acted kindly toward certain slaves, he nevertheless exploited them for their capital and labor potential, possessing little compunction in leasing them to the highest bidder. Indeed, Clark made a substantial profit from slave-hire. In one transaction, the planter hired out twenty-one slaves in October 1844, at a total value at $8,960, or approximately $175,600 in today’s monetary equivalent. Many of these slaves were hired by the month at an average of ten dollars per month, or about $200 today.10

---

9 James Hair to Henry T. Clark, December 20, 1858, Henry Toole Clark Papers, Private Collections, State Archives, Raleigh.
10 James Hair to Henry T. Clark, October 9, 1844, Henry Toole Clark Papers (microfilm), Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Dollars of 1844 adjusted for inflation based on the multiplicative factor for conversion of dollar amounts of 19.6 (K factor). Multiply the K factor by the dollar amount. See Clark, “Historical Price and Wage Indices,” 255.
Slavery was an integral portion of Clark’s income and the planter was involved in the business throughout the Civil War, when, in spite of threats to the abolition of the institution, the price of slaves rose to exorbitant levels. Clark, seeking to take advantage of the seller’s market, inquired of his friend, Confederate congressman Robert Rufus Bridgers, of the high prices to be fetched in the Richmond slave markets. “I have received your favor,” Bridgers replied. “Negroes are selling higher here than ever known before. Likely Negroe men will readily sell for $1500 to $1600. Some sales as high as $1700. I can not say how much higher Lewis [Clark’s slave] would sell for being a carpenter, but as a field hand I think he would bring $1500 or there about. I do not know what to say of the woman & child, but all negroes sell well.”

Land speculation also provided Clark with substantial income. His land operations were based in Dyer County, in western Tennessee, bordered by the Mississippi River and just north of Memphis near present-day Dyersburg. According to receipts from December 1846 to February 1850, he traded or sold land for a total of $11,555, or about $215,000 today.

Clark was also charged with the maintenance of his Edgecombe County plantation. Because his father was often away on business and political matters, many of the day-to-day farm operations fell to the son. Personal correspondence reveals that the

\[11\] Approximately $20,000 to $25,000 in 2000 dollars, using a K factor of 13.4.
\[12\] Robert R. Bridgers to Henry T. Clark, September 6, 1862, Henry Toole Clark Papers, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University Manuscript Collection, Box 1; Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, s. v., “Henry Clark Bridgers.” Bridgers was an Edgecombe County native, wealthy planter, and railroad official. Interestingly, Bridgers’ nephew, John Bridgers Jr. married Clark’s daughter, Laura. The marriage produced a son, Henry Clark Bridgers, who is credited with introducing golf to the University of North Carolina in the 1890s. The Hilma Country Club golf course in Tarboro, named for the governor’s old plantation, was built in 1894 and is still in use today.
\[13\] Daniel E. Parker to Henry T. Clark, March 26, 1850, Henry Toole Clark Papers (microfilm), Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Parker was Clark’s land agent and much of the land was sold for $3-$4 an acre, about $75 today, using the average K factor of 18.6 from 1846-1850, from Clark, “Historical Price and Wage Indices,” 255.
young scion was involved in the management of both the family plantation and distant business operations beginning in his twenties, and when his father died in 1843 the business fell entirely to the thirty-five-year-old. The plantation at Walnut Creek, later renamed “Hilma” for Clark’s children, was modest, even by Edgecombe county standards–330 acres, of which 170 were unimproved. With twenty-five slaves on the property in 1860, thirteen of whom were male, much of the income was derived from livestock and small grain production. Cotton was grown, but not significantly. The 1859 crop produced twenty 400-pound bales.

Clark took special interest in his plantation and the agrarian life, and his knowledge in agrarian matters was known throughout the county and the state. He participated in the Agriculture Society and like many “gentleman farmers” he enjoyed employing the latest scientific agricultural discoveries. He was one of the first agriculturists in North Carolina to experiment with “marl,” a lime fertilizer, at a time when the use of commercial fertilizers was little known. His agent in Alabama, James Hair, even solicited his knowledge of crops. Hair asked his opinion in growing the famed Southern muscadine grape and requested that seedlings be sent for planting, writing,

---

14 Ninety-two percent of Edgecombe County farms in 1860 were less than five hundred acres, and 46 percent of all farms were between one hundred and five hundred acres. Clark’s farm was very much average for his area of the state, though considered large by farms located in the western regions of North Carolina where the majority were fewer than one hundred acres. “Concentration of Agriculture in Edgecombe County, Table 4,” in Paul D. Escott, Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 14.

15 Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Edgecombe County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (microfilm, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh); Will of James W. Clark, November 1, 1843, Record of Wills, Edgecombe County 1810-1885, (microfilm), State Archives, Raleigh.
“How are the Skupernoge \textit{sic} vines planted apart, how are they cultivated, [and] what quality of wine will they produce per acre?” Clark obliged with vines and advice.\footnote{James Hair to Henry T. Clark, September 1, 1848, Henry Toole Clark Papers (microfilm), Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; J. Kelly Turner and John L. Bridgers Jr., \textit{History of Edgecombe County, North Carolina} (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing Co., 1920), 333; See also, Clarence Gohdes, \textit{Scuppernong: North Carolina's Grape and Its Wines} (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982). The scuppernong, or “Big White Grape,” is a variety of the muscadine.}

The Edgecombe aristocrat, like many men of his time and place, served as both planter and political leader. Throughout his life, Clark took an interest in matters political and, also like men of high station, he gave the appearance of disinterestedness towards political ambition. His actions suggest that he preferred life as a working planter to that of a politician. It was, as a relative recalled, his “unselfish interest in the history and affairs of the county which drew him into public life.” More likely, he felt it his duty as a member of the landed gentry to protect the interests of the slave economy, believing slave labor to be an integral part of the “Southern way of life,” and to protect conservative principles for future generations. And, like many antebellum southern aristocrats, he was imbued with a sense of \textit{noblesse oblige}, entering a political career by virtue of his social standing and education. Despite his apparent distaste for political ambition, he nevertheless sought political office and was exposed to statecraft at an early age. Many family members had served in some political capacity and it was expected that Henry would follow in his forebears’ footsteps.\footnote{Southerner, February 27, 1908. The relative, Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire (1850-1932), was a well-known Episcopal clergyman and published historian. Cheshire’s mother was Clark’s younger sister, Mary.}

As a young man, he followed political matters and did in fact express strong convictions. Clark, like his father, was a traditional Democrat-Republican. In his late twenties and thirties, however, he temporarily sympathized with the new Whig party—a party formed in opposition to President Andrew Jackson’s anti-internal improvement

\footnote{McCoy, \textit{The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America}, 250-251.}
policies and his expansion of federal power, especially the power of the presidency. Jackson was a popular leader in the South, but certain actions of his had alienated some supporters by 1834. Jackson vetoed an 1833 bill that would have distributed monies raised from the sale of public lands, angering Democrats in the West and parts of the developing South. The subsequent destruction of the Second Bank of the United States and the removal of government deposits in 1833 dealt a blow to certain commercial interests throughout the nation.\(^\text{19}\)

Clark was not a Henry Clay nationalist, or a supporter of Clay’s “American System,” but rather was a committed state rights advocate. Though he did not necessarily disagree with Jackson’s bank policy, he was extremely sensitive to the president’s extension of federal power. As a result, he looked favorably on the new party, sympathizing with the Whig contingent of southern planters opposed to the Force Bill of 1833—a federal bill passed in response to South Carolina’s ordinance of nullification. The law empowered the president to use the military to enforce the laws of Congress, specifically the tariff measures to which South Carolina had so vehemently objected. The young Clark was distrustful of this expansion of federal hegemony, believing it to be the first step toward federal legislation opposed to slavery, and expressed his antipathy for Jackson’s “overbearing” policies.\(^\text{20}\)

In a burst of enthusiasm that offers a rare insight into his beliefs, Clark praised North Carolina’s Whig senator Willie P. Mangum for his anti-Jackson, anti-party, pro-state rights stance:


I cannot omit this opportunity of adding a ‘well done’ to your course as a North Carolina Senator. Disdaining the ‘shackles of party’ at home and abroad you have acted as a highminded independent Representative of a Sovereign State. However such a course may draw you the rancour of those who are thwarted, it must ultimately prevail and gain you the commendation of your people -- The freedom of these remarks may subject me to the suspicion of flattery or pertness as my acquaintance with you is so slight. But Sir you are executing a public trust, and it certainly is becoming to express our satisfaction & opinions about public acts. I live in a strong Jackson county, the Politicians aware of the influence of Jacksonism nourish it for their own support & protection and endeavour to spell-bound every subject by the magic of a name – But the future is more promising to freedom of opinion. For which we may feel indebted to the example set us in high places. I myself belong to the school of ‘States-rights and State-remedies’ -- and the proclamation formed the epitaph of my Jacksonism -- So I cant speak “By authority on the subject of ‘the party’”. But if an alternative which can possibly be acceptable to North Carolina is presented, the influence of Jackson will certainly expire with his term – and the “malign influence” K. C. Regency et id omne genus will cease.21

In the 1840s, Clark began his role as a community leader. During that decade, he was appointed colonel in the 21st Regiment, North Carolina militia, and served on the board of trustees of the Tarboro Male Academy, a local private school.22 Though

---


22 Free Press, June 24, 1848. Clark had previously served as an adjutant in company C of that regiment.
undoubtedly busy with his civic and personal duties, he remained attuned to political matters and it was during this time that he began moving away from the Whig Party. As threats to slavery and sectional animosity increased, he aligned himself with the Democrats, as did much of Edgecombe County. As one Whig voter exclaimed before the 1842 elections, “the Democrats would only receive the support of the State of New Hampshire and the County of Edgecombe.”

In probably his first political assignment, Clark attended a public dinner at Nolley’s Crossroads on October 15, 1841, where he was asked to help draft a proposal of the local Democratic platform. He and four other men were selected to craft a series of resolutions outlining the “sentiment of those present.” Clark, on behalf of the committee, “reported the following preamble and resolutions, prefacing the same with appropriate remarks.” The resolutions were decidedly republican and proslavery, and were unanimously adopted:

*Resolved*, That we view with much alarm and concern, the union of Whigism and abolitionism at the North; while our present President [John Tyler] stands pledged to vote any interference with our domestic institutions from the fanatic abolitionists, General [William Henry] Harrison is ominously silent on it – and the Whig party at the North have pursued such a course on this subject that no southern man should trust them with power. *Resolved*, That we feel grateful for the firm and manly stand assumed by northern democracy in favor of southern rights and the Constitution, and we feel indignant at the boastings of southern Whigs for the northern Whigs who are avowed abolitionists. *Resolved*, That the independent treasury bill, delivering us from the unholy alliance of

---

corporations and the money power, is the plain interpretation of the Constitution and the true policy of the Government as marked out by our forefathers, and should be the uncompromising creed of the Democratic party.\textsuperscript{24}

Earlier that year, the young aristocrat was called to assist with the local July 4\textsuperscript{th} celebration. At the completion of the day’s festivities, a “profuse and sumptuous” dinner was prepared at Mrs. Gregory’s Hotel in Tarboro and officiated by the local gentry. The young Clark served as an assistant to the presiding officer, George Howard, where no less than twenty-five rousing toasts were made by the dignitaries in honor of the Revolution, the founding fathers, and American liberty. Proclaiming that day the “political Sabbath” of the nation, the men entertained the guests in a feast of Jeffersonian rhetoric that included affirmations of white supremacy. Indeed, Clark’s good friend, William Dancy, had begun the day with a “stirring, classical oratory” praising the freedom won for all white men. “But yet [the Magna Carta],” Dancy professed, “was reserved for the free Anglo-Saxons of America, to give birth to that great principle of popular liberty–the right of the people to govern–now regarded as the fundamental maxim of all free government.”\textsuperscript{25}

Flush with pride, the men took turns giving the celebratory toast to the young nation’s past, present, and future. As the turn fell to Clark, the planter stood amidst the revelry with glass held high and reverently acknowledged: “The Constitution of the

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Free Press, July 9, 1842; Joe Gray Taylor, Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the South: An Informal History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 53-67. Taylor’s text offers an excellent discussion of feasting in the Old South.
United States! Preserved from the constructions and misconstructions of the designing and ambitious, it will long guide us on to prosperity and happiness!”

While such amicable bipartisan scenes were common at national fetes, the animosity between Democrats and Whigs had reached fever-pitch by the mid-1840s. Clark was, by this time, a firm Democrat. His classical education and his sterling reputation won him an election as secretary for the local party in 1844, and later as an Edgecombe delegate to the state Democratic convention in 1845.

1845 proved a busy political year for the Clark family as Clark’s cousin, Henry Irwin Toole, found himself embroiled in a vitriolic congressional campaign. Toole had been a longtime Democratic leader in the Edgecombe community. An avowed “Democrat in principle,” he was regarded by others as a man of strong, unflappable resolve, and was later seen as having become a victim of party factionalism.

Toole was “an able and prominent man though never a successful one,” a “skilled public speaker,” though a “very deaf man who used a large ear trumpet.” His only real political experience came from his service as a presidential elector, though, in 1845, he was asked to seek the Democratic nomination for congressional representative from the Eighth District. The convention, however, nominated Henry Selby Clark (no relation) of Beaufort County, in what some Democrats regarded as a rigged election. Cries of “Justice to Toole!” resounded. Toole and his supporters, derisively called “coons” by

26 Free Press, July 9, 1842.
27 Free Press, November 9, 1844, March 15, November 26, 1845.
28 Toole and Clark shared the same grandfather, the namesake of both men. The first Henry Irwin Toole was a Revolutionary War officer and hero, and a member of the state General Assembly.
29 Turner and Bridgers, History of Edgecombe County, 129.
their detractors who likened them to a raccoon trapped in a tree, believed the convention had been “packed” to ensure Henry S. Clark’s nomination. As it turned out, relatives of both men, including Henry Toole Clark, had participated as convention delegates, which resulted in the claim that the nomination had been compromised. Facing the loss of personal prestige, and believing himself the legitimate choice, Toole risked splitting the party over what he believed to be a matter of principle. He announced his candidacy as an independent Democrat, inadvertently garnering the support of the Whig Party. His enemies unfairly claimed he had formed “an unholy alliance.” The Democrats hurled invective at him, claiming he was now “shaking hands with Federalism.”

This acrimonious situation was more than the high-minded, quixotic Toole could bear. He wrote to his cousin as the charges became increasingly personal and rancorous: “Please say whether you did not immediately inform me after the primary popular meeting in Edgecombe [that] you did not inform me that you had been appointed a delegate and whether I did not say instantly and earnestly that I regretted it because you are my cousin. I know you too well to suppose that consanguineal relations influenced your course.” Despite his appeals to his cousin and to the public, and believing himself a paragon of democratic virtue, Toole offered to withdraw “as soon as a Whig candidate is presented” so that the people might have a choice. True to his word, he withdrew when Richard Donnell of New Bern entered the race. Taking his leave in a letter to the Tarboro *Free Press*, he affirmed his honor and denounced those factions which had placed party over principle. “I make to you my strongest avowal,” proclaimed Toole,

---

32 *Free Press*, March 8, April 26, 1845; Turner and Bridgers, *History of Edgecombe County*, 130.
33 Henry Irwin Toole to Henry T. Clark, May 17, 1845, Henry Toole Clark Papers (microfilm), Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
34 *Free Press*, May 10, 1845.
“that I have never at any time, or at any place, or to any person, compromised in the slightest manner my democratic principles. My only fault is that I have appealed from a packed caucus to the people. For years I have been the object of the political and personal vituperation of our adversaries. Strangely enough, I am now marked as the victim of the party that I have faithfully served, the target of democratic abuse.”

His adversary, Henry S. Clark won the election, and Toole retired to his plantation. Toole’s political misfortune was a lesson in party factionalism that Henry T. Clark would undoubtedly remember. Toole’s failed appeal to the public for sympathy must have stuck with Clark, for, unlike his cousin, he would never call upon the public for empathy or understanding.

Yet, the future governor remained in the good graces of the Democratic Party. Perhaps in an effort to assuage the local rancor resultant from his cousin’s ill-fated campaign, the benevolent Clark presented Tarboro with “a demijohn of [James K.] Polk and [George M.] Dallas wine,” referring to the current president and vice-president. Taken by his gift, the town returned its thanks by proposing to bake “an old fashioned pumpkin pie” to match the wine, which was probably some sort of sweet Madeira type spirit made from the local muscadine grapes.

With his gift of wine, Clark perhaps was also belatedly thanking the town for giving him the honored position of “Orator” during the community’s most recent July 4th celebration in 1845. The town of Tarboro had asked him to give a eulogy on the death of former President Jackson, an odd choice given Clark’s antipathy to Old Hickory in the past. He accepted “with reluctance, not from any want of disposition, but from a distrust

---

35 *Free Press*, May 24, 1845.
36 *Free Press*, November 26, 1845.
in my ability to discharge the duty in a manner worthy of the great occasion.” The speech was well received, those present noting that he delivered a “beautiful and chaste Eulogium on the life, character and services” of the seventh president.37

By 1847, the Democratic Party was ascendant and had become the dominant faction in Edgecombe County. National political issues centered around slavery, territorial expansion, and the war in Mexico. Though a colonel in the state militia, Clark did not serve in Mexico, but he faithfully supported the war. He did, however, travel south of the border. The former state senator from Edgecombe and speaker of that body, Colonel Louis D. Wilson of the 12th U. S. Infantry, died from “the malignant fever” in August 1847 while serving in Vera Cruz. The death and subsequent return home of this “ornament of his State” made headlines. The people of Edgecombe, “determined to bring his remains home,” asked Colonel Clark to fetch the body. Accompanied by another militia officer and friend, William Norfleet, the men brought the body from Mexico to Wilmington, where they were greeted in that city with great fanfare on February 6 “by the largest concourse of people that has assembled in Wilmington for many years past.”38 Bells tolled, flags flew at half-staff, and a great military procession of Wilmington’s leaders escorted the group to the train station, where it departed for Tarboro.39

Later that same year, Clark was again asked to exemplify the community’s patriotism. Upon the return in 1848 of the Edgecombe companies that had served in Mexico, he addressed the victorious veterans with a lengthy, jingoistic speech. Congratulating them on their safe return home, he reminded them of their country’s call to arms, thanking them for their unswerving, if not unquestioning, response. “You did

37 Free Press, July 9, 1845.
38 Journal (Wilmington), February 11, 1848.
39 Standard (Raleigh), February 21, 1848; Free Press, February 19, 1848.
not hesitate when the appeal was made to North Carolina,” Clark sermonized. “You never stopped to make the treasonous enquiry into the justice and constitutionality of the war, whether Mexico or your own country was in the wrong; but like true patriots you rushed to the side of your country, to fight her battles right or wrong.”\textsuperscript{40} Such stern, unyielding rhetoric would undoubtedly guide the uncompromising planter during his tenure as North Carolina’s Civil War governor.

In 1848, Clark was again nominated by the Edgecombe Democrats to serve as a delegate to the state convention to be held in Raleigh the following April. The local party approved a series of resolutions, which Clark probably helped draft, which included support for President Polk and the war in Mexico, thanking the president “for his able, energetic and faithful administration of the Government, according to the principles of Thomas Jefferson.”\textsuperscript{41}

Clark apparently made the right impressions in Raleigh, and the president of the convention, Weldon N. Edwards, appointed him to serve on a committee of thirteen to “prepare resolutions for the action of the Convention.” The ensuing eighteen resolutions attacked the Whig Party for their tax-and-spend policies: “\textit{Resolved}, That when the Whig party first obtained power in North Carolina our State was free of debt; that by their unwise, extravagant, or injudicious use of the public monies she became involved in debt; and that this same party shrunk from meeting the danger face to face.” The Democrats also informed Congress that it had no legal control over the expansion of slavery, exclaiming “That the Congress has no control, directly or indirectly, mediately or

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Free Press}, August 26, 1848; “Speech to the returning veterans,” Henry Toole Clark Papers (microfilm), Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Free Press}, March 18, 1848.
immediately, over the institution of Slavery; and that we are opposed to the Wilmot, or Winthrop, or Webster Provisio, in whatever shape in may be presented.”

Because of his role in drafting the resolution, Clark was elected by the state party to attend the Democratic National Convention in Baltimore in June, along with twenty-two other delegates, including Clark’s future nemesis, William Woods Holden. The North Carolina delegation voted overwhelmingly for James Buchanan and James McKay as the presidential and vice-presidential candidates respectively, though they both lost the nomination to Michigan senator Lewis Cass and Kentucky’s William Butler.

Until 1850, Clark served the Democratic Party as a writer and a delegate, having yet to seek elected office. That year, however, proved to be one of change, and indeed an important one for the future governor. For in that year he was elected to his first political office, and he married.

The Edgecombe County planter must have been quite a catch for any single young woman. He was educated, handsome, socially well connected, and wealthy, though thoroughly immersed in his business and political affairs. He married his distant cousin, the widowed Mary Weeks Hargrave, thirteen years his junior, on February 11, 1850, in Lexington, North Carolina. Both seemed to have enjoyed a happy, prosperous marriage and Clark’s letters reveal him to be a dedicated family man. They raised five children together—Haywood, Henry Irwin, Laura, Maria Toole, and Arabella—all of whom were active, prominent members of Tarboro’s Calvary Episcopal Church.

42 Free Press, April 22, April 29, 1848.
44 Free Press, February 23, 1850; Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, s.v. “Henry Toole Clark.”
On March 12, shortly following his marriage, Clark was named a delegate to represent Edgecombe County at an upcoming “Southern Rights Meeting.” This meeting of local citizens met in response to the national furor over a series of Congressional debates that became known as the Compromise of 1850. At that meeting, the pro-slavery Edgecombe citizens passed a series of nine resolutions that outlined their position. The preamble claimed that the citizens “feel alarmed for the Safety of the Union, and have witnessed with deep regret the continued assaults and aggressions of the free soilers, abolitionists, and fanatics of the North, upon the property and institutions of the South. The history of Northern action for ten years past is one of unmitigated insult and aggression. Congress in our opinion, possesses no constitutional power to legislate on the subject of slavery.” The nine resolutions passed foreshadowed the acrimonious debates that would continue throughout the decade and lead to the Civil War.

The Edgecombe meeting garnered support for a state delegation to be sent to a Southern-wide convention in Nashville, Tennessee, the following June. Clark was one of thirty-four county delegates selected to travel to Raleigh and endorse North Carolina’s participation in the Nashville Convention, which promised to lodge formal protests to Congress against the Compromise of 1850. As one ardent state rights supporter argued, “I regard the admission of California as the great question which must decide the fate of the South. I hope to see every slave state represented in the proposed Nashville

---

45 Standard, March 27, 1850; Free Press, March 16, 1850.
46 Free Press, March 16, 1850, July 13, 1850.
William Holden, editor of the Raleigh Standard, echoed that sentiment, earnestly proclaiming: “The time has come for [the South] to UNITE AS ONE MAN.”

Holden had urged Democratic Party unity over the slave question for some time, often publishing hyperbolic editorials condemning the “abolitionist” Whigs for their willingness to support the Wilmot Proviso. Holden had contacted Clark some months earlier to ask if the Edgecombe planter might “find time to give some numbers on the Slavery question.” “Your esteemed favor,” he continued, “came duly to hand. I feel much gratified that my articles on the Slavery question meet your commendation and the approval of the Edgecombe Democracy.”

Unlike Holden, Charles Manly, the Whig governor of North Carolina at the time, did not support the Nashville meeting and hesitated to call a convention. Thus, the state legislature never convened to consider the proposal, and North Carolina was not represented at the Tennessee meeting. The Edgecombe Democrat was undoubtedly disappointed.

Clark, now forty-two-years-of-age, had faithfully served his party and his state in the militia for over a decade, and local party leaders asked the planter to run for office. By virtue of his education, military service, social standing, and legal experience, he had indeed influenced local events, but had yet to hold an elected post. Thinking him the best man to fill the Tenth District state Senate seat vacated by the incumbent Wyatt Moye,

---

49 The Nashville Convention, or “Southern Rights Convention” was proposed by Mississippi in an effort to present a united Southern front against the 1850 Compromise. By the time that nine states met from June 3-11, 1850, the Congress passed the law and the Southern movement lost momentum. Standard, January 16, 1850; Gail O’Brien, “Power and Influence in Mecklenburg County, 1850-1880,” North Carolina Historical Review 54 (April 1977), 131(n).
local party leaders asked him to think about filling the vacancy.\textsuperscript{51} The future governor, showing his typical antipathy to party politics, and displaying the aloof character that he thought befitted a plantation aristocrat, said that he would “consider the idea” if no one else wanted the job.\textsuperscript{52}

Clark, however, was forced to leave home for several weeks on business matters. During that time, a local magnate and friend, William F. Dancy, placed his own name on the ballot.\textsuperscript{53} Upon his return home, Clark learned of Dancy’s announcement. In a letter to the Tarboro \textit{Free Press}, he praised his friend and wished him luck in the election. “Mr. Dancy’s course toward me has been fair and honorable,” Clark professed, “and it would be ungenerous in me now to array myself in opposition to him. He among others solicited me to be a candidate before my departure and it would be a want of good faith in me to oppose him on my return.”\textsuperscript{54}

The next week, feeling he had slighted a friend, Dancy replied in an equally magnanimous letter, bowing to Clark and withdrawing his name from consideration. Disavowing rumors of treachery, Dancy was compelled by both public opinion and his own conscience to leave the race. “I had scarcely [announced my candidacy],” he declared, “before it was busily bruited about that Col. Clark had declared he would be a candidate upon his return and that I had come out to forestall him in his intentions, and to thwart the wishes of the people and especially his friends. Nothing has occurred which

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Free Press}, July 20, 1850.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{53} Dancy was a prominent Edgecombe aristocrat from an eminent family. Like Clark, he was educated at Chapel Hill, a lawyer, planter, and a Jeffersonian Democrat. He served in the House of Commons as a “strict constitutionalist,” and voted consistently for “sound money,” and against government involvement in business. Also, like Clark, had he been “inclined to mingle with the people generally, and to court their favor, he would have been among our great men.” He died in 1860 at age forty-one, having served two terms in the state House. Ashe, Weeks, and Van Noppen, \textit{Biographical History of North Carolina}, 6:171-175.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Free Press}, July 20, 1850.
has given me more annoyance that this deliberate charge of treachery to a friend. This state of things shall exist no longer. I retire from the canvass.” He went on to praise Clark for his “gentlemanly behavior” and to extend hopes for his success.55

Between these two friends, both members of the local antebellum plantation gentry, such polite behavior was not uncommon. As leading members of the planter community, saving face was often more important that political gain. For two old friends to battle for a state Senate seat would have been uncharacteristic considering the unwritten campaign rules of the day. In 1850, only white males who owned at least fifty acres of land could vote for state senators—the same class of men as both Dancy and Clark. Consequently, one’s peers would have frowned upon any public show of selfish ambition.56

Clark won the August 1, 1850, election by defeating William D. Petway, the former sheriff of the county, 326 votes to 200.57 The freshman senator was thus duly elected to his first political office, bypassing the lower House of Commons and moving directly to the upper chamber—not entirely untypical of landed, socially respected men of his stature.

The Edgecombe senator spent his years in the General Assembly supporting Democratic legislation. In fact, his Edgecombe constituency was decidedly Democratic. That party swept not only the county in 1850, but the entire state of North Carolina. Their gubernatorial candidate, David Reid, defeated the Whig incumbent Charles Manly

55 Free Press, July 27, 1850.
56 Southerner, August 21, 1858; Turner and Bridgers, History of Edgecombe County, 451; see also, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics And Behavior in The Old South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) for a discussion of the planter mindset. Dancy and Clark were both active members of Calvary Episcopal Church and had served in some capacity together at virtually every civic event in the 1840s.
57 Free Press, August 17, 1850.
by a large majority, and the party won both the executive and large majorities in the state legislature. In fact, Edgecombe County’s vote total gave David Reid the largest majority of any of North Carolina’s counties. The Democrats of that period gained majorities in both legislative houses as the national debate over slavery became increasing rancorous and sectional. Reflecting on the Whig defeat, the Raleigh Standard proclaimed, “The state is redeemed from federalism with a Democratic governor and Democratic legislature. North Carolina is at last completely and gloriously redeemed!”

Clark served his district well, and Edgecombe County would return him to the Senate for six consecutive legislative sessions. The local newspaper endorsed Clark, praising him and saying, “Col. Clark is one of the most attentive and faithful, as he is amongst the most useful members of the Senate.” Indeed, Clark’s record in the Senate is one of consistency and quiet dependability. He regularly voted with the Democrats for lower taxes and reduction of the public debt. He only occasionally introduced legislation, and periodically proposed amendments, usually items of a procedural nature. He is particularly noted for introducing points of order and objecting to bills that increased taxes or government spending. In one motion, he moved to lower taxes on real property from twelve cents to ten cents on every hundred dollars of real property. His motion lost. He also voted against the ad valorem tax (equal taxation of slave property), a position he maintained throughout his political career.

58 Ibid.
59 Standard, August 10, 1850; Free Press, August 17, 1850; Richard W. Iobst, Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, 374-375. Iobst claims that Clark was elected due to “the overwhelming strength of the Whig party in Edgecombe at the time,” but actually the Democratic Party dominated the county, and indeed the state.
60 Southerner, January 17, 1857.
61 Journal of the Senate of North Carolina, 1854-1855, 149, 305.
A typical pattern of Clark’s legislative action occurred during the 1854-1855 session. An amendment was proposed to an internal improvements bill to complete the North Carolina Railroad. The attached amendment asked that $15,000 of public monies, “in the manner as other moneys are raised by provisions of this act be appropriated for the purpose of cleaning out and improving the navigation of [the] Tar river, between the town of Washington and the falls of said river; and that His Excellency, the Governor, is hereby empowered and required to appoint suitable commissioners to carry into effect the requirements of this section.” Clark motioned to “disagree to said amendment.” A voice vote was taken, but the vote was too close to call. He then asked for a division of the house, demanding “the yeas and nays.” The amendment failed 24 to 18.

It seems odd that Clark would disagree with an attempt to improve the Tar River, especially as the section targeted for improvement ran through his district, thereby improving commercial trade for his constituents. The conservative senator distrusted the expansion of the governor’s powers in regards to spending public monies for internal improvements. More likely, he rejected the amendment on grounds of principle and tradition. Since colonial times, the North Carolina legislature consistently constrained the powers of the state executive. He simply distrusted any expansion of that power, even if such expansion might benefit his own district.

---


63 *Journal of the Senate of North Carolina, 1854-1855*, 295-296. The “falls” of the Tar River are located in Rocky Mount, northwest of Tarboro, bordering Nash and Edgecombe Counties.

Such voting should not suggest that Clark was averse to all internal improvement projects. As his record reveals, his association with anti-improvement Democrats was not always steadfast. During the 1852 session, Clark pushed for the construction of a plank road to run from Tarboro to Jamesville, about forty miles in length. Not simply a case of local porkbarreling, Clark frequently supported efforts to construct plank roads throughout the east. He served on the Committee on Corporations, often recommending passage of improvement bills, and made a motion to “encourage the investment of capital for mining and manufacturing purposes,” which, however, was later tabled. Clark apparently voted “nay” for public projects in western areas, though he participated in the “logrolling” of bills. His increasing support for internal improvements represents a trend among legislators of the 1850s as state funding for transportation projects found wide bipartisan agreement.

Clark’s record concerning internal improvements, however, also reflects his strong state rights, “home rule” perspective. While Clark supported certain state-funded projects that might benefit North Carolina, like banking legislation and public education, he was entirely opposed to federally funded public works. As Clark said as a young man, he supported “State rights and State remedies.” Like many southern planters, Clark considered any increase in federal power, or any law that might set a “dangerous”

65 Journal of the Senate of North Carolina, 1852, 80, 424; Turner and Bridgers, History of Edgecombe County, 351.
66 Kruman, Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 81.
precedent, to be the first step in federal legislation against slavery. Undoubtedly, much of Clark’s political action involved the protection of slavery from federal intrusion.\textsuperscript{68}

Clark, however, exhibited a more radical nature in his support for “free suffrage.” Since the 1840s, Democrats and Whigs had fiercely debated the relative merits of extending voting rights to more taxpaying white men. Whigs opposed the idea, while Democrats endorsed it. In 1848, the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, David Reid, campaigned for a constitutional amendment to eliminate the fifty-acre property requirement for voters in state senate elections, a notion he called “free-suffrage.” For years, white males who had property or paid taxes, but did not own fifty or more acres, possessed the right to vote only for representatives to the House of Commons. By the 1840s, North Carolina remained one of the least democratic states in the nation and one of the few states to retain property qualifications for voters and officeholders.\textsuperscript{69} As it stood, the property qualifications for voting for senators eliminated more than half of the state’s voters. An amendment would undoubtedly fuel support for the Democrats, as the majority of Whig constituents met the landholding requirement. Reid, however, lost the 1848 election and the bill failed to pass the Senate, though the issue remained broadly popular.\textsuperscript{70} Reid ran again in 1850, still advocating “free suffrage,” and this time he was elected governor.

When Clark entered the Senate in 1850, fewer than 600 Edgecombe voters had made the choice for their senator, as opposed to over 2,200 for their representative in the

\textsuperscript{68} William Freehling, \textit{Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836} (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) offers an excellent discussion of state rights and how federal intrusion during the nullification crisis was perceived as a threat to slavery.


\textsuperscript{70} Kruman, \textit{Parties and Politics in North Carolina}, 87; \textit{Standard}, May 17, 1848.
The freshman legislator, however, supported extending suffrage to white, tax-paying males during his first term, and served on the Committee on the Amendment of the Constitution. Taking the floor to report the committee’s recommendation, Clark stated his “support for the abolition of the freehold qualification” and recommended the passage of the bill. Every single Democratic senator, a full 100 percent, supported the passage of the amendment, as opposed to only 23 percent of Whigs.

Clark and the Democrats also supported the amendment because support of suffrage extension did not threaten the interests of the Democratic landed class to which they belonged. Because the amendment did not abolish the property requirements to hold office, passage of the bill guaranteed that landowners would not lose power by retaining the redistricting rules that favored the status quo. Furthermore, the amendment “provided equality without changing power relationships in the state,” and serves as an example of how the ruling, slaveholding class enlisted support from the white yeomanry, resulting in continued political hegemony by the planters. This sort of political maneuvering was an object lesson in the “complex rules, bargains, and limits” that governed antebellum North Carolina society. A society where, as Paul Escott and Jeffery J. Crow observed, “structural and behavioral conditions had allowed functioning patterns of lower-class autonomy and upper-class control to operate simultaneously.”

On the other side, Whigs and nonslaveholding westerners desired representation according to a district’s white population, a proposed system called the “white basis of

---

71 Free Press, August 17, 1850.
72 Journal of the Senate of North Carolina, 1850-1851, 117.
73 Kruman, Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 95.
representation.” They hoped to replace the current system based on the “federal population basis,” which included the numeration of three-fifths of slaves and served to increase the power of wealthy slaveholding districts, especially in eastern black belt counties like Edgecombe. A change in redistricting based on the white population would favor the Whig Party. It was on this issue that Whigs supported an open, popular convention. The Democrats opposed the “white basis” and defeated the proposed convention bill.  

Passage of the “free suffrage” amendment required a two-thirds majority vote of the legislature. For a time, the Whigs were able to thwart a majority vote for the amendment. Support for the bill, however, grew among North Carolinians, and its opposition became increasingly difficult to support. Whig representatives in the House of Commons now began supporting the bill, but the traditionally conservative Whig senators, the group most affected by the amendment, consistently blocked its adoption. Not until 1856 did the amendment pass the Assembly and pass to the voters for ratification. On August 6, 1857, North Carolinians overwhelmingly voted to abolish the property requirement for senate electors. Voters in Edgecombe County passed the measure by a vote of 749 to 240.  

But Clark did not always vote along party lines. While he supported the extension of suffrage to senatorial electors, he did not support the proposal to make judicial offices elective, though the Democratic Party recommended its passage. Often a defender of the status quo, rather than a blind supporter of Democratic legislation, Clark

---

75 Clark voted against the convention. *Journal of the Senate of North Carolina, 1850-1851*, 111.
76 *Free Press*, August 9, 1857.
was usually consistent in his rigidly conservative outlook, as his view on the protection and extension of slavery attests.

Clark’s view of slavery was in line with most men of his day. Coming from a black belt region of North Carolina, the planter believed, as did most other whites in his district, that slavery was a necessary and just institution, and considered it the basis for the South’s social and economic systems. Conservative white southerners, like Clark, thought slavery was the foundation of republican virtue, necessary to maintain the social order, and an engine of human moral and material progress. Clark also held the view that free blacks represented a threat to the white male democracy, and was no doubt supportive of the opinion held by the editor of his hometown newspaper, who proclaimed, “The free negro population entails more crimes and nuisances upon us than all other classes together.” Clark saw much of the world in black-and-white terms, both literally and figuratively. He believed the American democracy was a government of and for white men, to be led by white patriarchs. Any blacks freed from slavery should be colonized outside the United States, and he encouraged the state to relocate free blacks to Liberia. He felt so strongly on this point that he introduced a resolution calling for state aid in the recolonization of freed African-Americans.

Recognizing Clark’s conservatism and dependability, and also his service to the Democratic Party, the Senate elected him speaker of that body in 1858 by a wide majority. In that same year, Democrats elected John W. Ellis governor. Upon taking the

---

79 Free Press, March 17, 1849.
80 Journal of the Senate of North Carolina, 1850-1851, 42.
speaker’s chair, Clark thanked his colleagues with a short, gracious speech that revealed his commitment to conservative government:

The flattering vote which has just elevated me to this high and honorable position I must regard as an evidence of your partiality, and not my merit. It shall be my steady purpose to administer these laws faithfully and impartially -- to ensure the most general satisfaction by being plain and direct in their interpretation, and *rigid* in their enforcement. The obedience of the citizens to your legislation demands of you in return a full and ample protection of their interests and rights. We live in times of great political embarrassment, when not only our rights but the very principles of our Government are imperiled; and while in our own borders we are endeavoring to reconcile apparently conflicting interests, we are equally bound to protect our rights to a fair and equal participation in all the benefits of this great confederacy of States. We have inherited from our ancestors the most inestimable blessings of liberty, and a system of government the parallel of which is not found in the history of the world, and we are bound by every consideration of duty and patriotism to preserve these blessings and this government, sound, unimpaired, and without blemish to our posterity. 81

Two years later, Edgecombe voters reelected Clark, facing no opposition, to the Senate. Democrats in 1860 again swept the state, returning Governor Ellis to the executive. The Senate retained Clark as speaker. Upon his election to the chair in November, he rose and gave a short speech. He thanked the Senate for returning him to the Speaker’s chair, reminding his colleagues

---

81 *Journal of the Senate of North Carolina, 1858-1859*, 3-6; *Standard*, November 17, November 24, 1858.
of their duty to press and carry out those interests [of their constituents] with zeal and the most jealous vigilance. But experience had taught us that party strife is the bane of legislation, and that the surest way to ensure wisdom and success in our councils is by calm consideration and mutual forbearance, and that due respect for all differences which must prevail in consultative bodies. This was essential, not only to the harmony of the body, but to the dispatch of business. No rules were required for the deportment of an association of gentlemen, but for the regulation and dispatch of business it would be necessary to prescribe proper rules. The rigid and faithful enforcement of the rules was the best guarantee he could offer for the approbation and support of the Senate.\textsuperscript{82}

By 1860, the sectional conflict had reached an explosive point and Clark’s call for “calm consideration” was apt, given the high level of emotion running throughout the state, and indeed the country. North Carolina Democrats had survived a strong challenge from a resurgent Whig Party during the August elections, a campaign which had divided the state over issues of equal taxation of slave property (ad valorem) and against charges of corruption in President James Buchanan’s administration, charges that Tar Heel Whigs had attempted to pin on their political nemeses.\textsuperscript{83} At the national level, the major question, again, was slavery and its expansion into the territories.

The national Democratic Party split over the issue. At the party’s convention in Baltimore, disgruntled Lower South delegates, including all but three North Carolinians, broke with the party after the convention failed to seat the secessionist delegation from Charleston, South Carolina. Northern members, and a few moderate southern

\textsuperscript{82} Standard, November 21, 1860. The quote is the speech as reported in the newspaper. Clark’s words were not reprinted verbatim because of the amount of space dedicated to the national election.

Democrats, nominated Stephen A. Douglas on his “popular sovereignty” platform. Southern Democrats reconvened in a separate convention and nominated John C. Breckinridge on a platform demanding federal protection of slavery in the territories. Meanwhile, the new Republican Party opposed any expansion of slavery into the territories and nominated Abraham Lincoln.\textsuperscript{84}

Fearing any threat, real or perceived, to the institution of slavery, the fire-eaters of the Deep South pledged to leave the Union if the “Black Republican” candidate was elected. Such extreme rhetoric alarmed cooler heads. A large group of former Whigs and American Party members joined together to encourage support for the old Union, and advocated continued compromise between the nation’s sections. This new faction called itself the Constitutional Union Party and nominated John Bell of Tennessee.

Clark endorsed the Breckinridge ticket, as did the whole of his district on election day.\textsuperscript{85} John Hill, a former principal clerk of the Senate, wrote the Edgecombe planter shortly before the election expressing “the earnest hope that Breckinridge and Lane may carry this State November next.”\textsuperscript{86} Though he won North Carolina, Breckinridge, lost the election to the Republican Lincoln, who, ironically, did not appear on the ballot in any southern state. With Lincoln and the “Black Republicans” in the White House, the secessionists were convinced that the federal Union would no longer protect slavery and


\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Southerner}, November 10, 1860. Clark’s own district of Tarboro voted 196 for Breckinridge, 53 for Bell and Douglas combined. Edgecombe County voted 1789 for Breckinridge, 213 for all other candidates.

\textsuperscript{86} John Hill to Henry T. Clark, October 22, 1860, Henry Toole Clark Papers (microfilm), Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
they pressed for secession. By early December, seven lower southern states were calling
conventions to consider leaving the Union.

Though a secessionist, Clark advocated a “watch and wait” policy. Clark, like
many North Carolinians, took a cautious approach to the crisis during the secession
winter of 1860-1861. He believed Lincoln’s election an inadequate excuse for leaving
the Union.\textsuperscript{87} Though he did not deny the South’s constitutional right to secede, the future
governor bowed to the reality that most Tar Heels did not favor an immediate dissolution
of the Union. As a result, he publicly supported a statewide convention to settle the
question.

On the evening of February 13, 1861, two weeks before the first convention was
scheduled to convene on the 28\textsuperscript{th} instant, the North Carolina General Assembly received
Samuel Hall, a “commissioner” from the state of Georgia. Hall was sent to encourage
support for secession among Tar Heel legislators.\textsuperscript{88} He addressed the group “in behalf of
Georgia and Southern Rights,” and his speech was “characterised with great beauty,
eloquence, and ability.”\textsuperscript{89} At its conclusion, Mr. Speaker Clark rose and said to the
gathered body:

\begin{quote}
Senators and Gentlemen of the House of Commons, in times of ordinary
embarrassment we are prone to turn to those for counsel who are in similar
difficulties. But now when we are in the midst of dangers, threatening our
dearest rights and even the very existence of our government, we must
welcome with great satisfaction, the mission of our sister State of Georgia,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{87} David Potter, \textit{Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942),
208; John G. Barrett, \textit{The Civil War in North Carolina} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,
1963), 4.
\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Journal of the House of Commons of North Carolina, 1860-1861}, 592.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Southerner}, February 23, 1861.
whose common interests with us indicate too plainly a common fate. These times call forth the undivided heart and best abilities of every patriot of the land, and no exertion should be left untried, on an occasion fraught with such deep and lasting consequence to us and our posterity. After giving this momentous question our best and most anxious deliberations, we have referred it to the sovereign people in convention assembled. Their judgment and decision will form and guide our faith and the rule of our conduct; and to that tribunal alone can we look for any authorised response to the friendly counsels and suggestions of our fellow suffering sister State. But without reference to the amount of sympathy or the extent of our co-operation with her in her present struggle, we at least will assure her that no hostile foot shall ever march from or through our borders to assail her or hers! (Cheers)

The impromptu speech reveals the Edgecombe senator’s commitment to “Southern rights” within a framework of vigilant caution. Though never a radical fire-eater in the mold of the extremist William Lowndes Yancey, Clark undoubtedly believed in the constitutional right of a state to secede. Clark’s support of the right of secession dates from the beginning of his political career. His views regarding “Southern rights” never wavered, regarding secession as a tenet of political faith. The conventional and cautious Clark, however, met the current crisis with his customary cool, methodical manner, and only publicly supported North Carolina’s decision to leave the Union after the firing on Fort Sumter in April 1861. [Figure 4]

---

90 Ibid.
91 The “right of secession,” as opposed to the “right of revolution,” as a basis for a state to leave the Union was a point of serious legal contention among secessionists and Unionists. The issue, as revealed in the Badger Amendment, would become more pronounced in the secession convention of May 1861. See Wooster, The Secession Conventions of the South, 198-199.
Chapter Two
“We rely upon his honesty”: Elevation to the Executive Office

By 1861, state senator Henry Toole Clark had served the tenth district for over ten years. In that time, he rose steadily through the ranks, gaining the respect of his colleagues through his hard work and dependability. He rarely spoke on the floor of the Senate, preferring to lead from behind the scenes rather than by force of words. And, like virtually all state senators, he was a man of property, a slave owner, and inclined to conservative thought. Despite his strict conservative views, or perhaps because of them, Clark obtained the most powerful, influential position in the Senate, becoming next in the line of succession to the governorship.

Clark’s thirteen-month tenure as North Carolina’s governor is marked by overwhelming, unprecedented demands on the state executive office. Clark assumed the gubernatorial chair at a very difficult time. The state had seceded and joined the Confederacy only six weeks earlier, and thousands of raw recruits were entering Raleigh for muster into national service. The state needed to equip, arm, clothe, and organize these volunteers as quickly as possible before the governor, by law, could tender them to the Confederate government. Clark faced other serious and pressing issues. Immediately upon taking office, the legislature challenged Clark’s legal status as governor. Simultaneously, he had to plan his predecessor’s state funeral, deal with Union prisoners, establish a Confederate prison, and make prompt, judicious appointments and military commissions. For the first time in his political career, the Edgecombe planter occupied center stage on a state, if not national level, and faced the glare and scrutiny of the larger public eye.
Upon the death of Ellis in July, the fifty-three-year-old Clark became the first governor not elected by popular vote since the state constitution was amended in 1835, and the first to assume the office upon the death of an acting chief executive. There was, however, some confusion as to whether “His Accidency” was actually governor and if so, the extent of his powers, and length and permanence of his tenure.¹ Some legislators believed the General Assembly should elect a governor to fill what they believed to be a vacancy in the office. The General Assembly would not convene until August to take up the matter. In the meantime, Clark continued to exercise the duties of governor, a role he had assumed since June 27 when he was informed of Ellis’s departure for Virginia.

At issue was the wording of the state constitution. That document, which had been in force since 1776, stated, “On [the governor’s] death, inability, or absence from the State, the speaker of the senate, for the time being, shall exercise the powers of government, after such death, or during such absence or inability of the governor, or until a new nomination is made by the general assembly.”² Josiah Turner, the caustic senator from Orange County and a former Whig, thought it prudent to challenge Clark’s role as chief executive. He made a motion to form a joint select committee to “investigate and report whether or no it be the Constitutional duty of this General Assembly to elect a Governor for the State of North Carolina, to fill the vacancy caused by the death of his Excellency, John W. Ellis.”³

¹ The term “His Accidency” is usually associated with Vice-President John Tyler who became President upon the death of William Henry Harrison in 1841. The comparison was not lost on some North Carolina observers in 1861.
Clark, continuing in his role as speaker and acting governor during the August session, viewed the matter rather plainly. His legal mind believed that the powers of the governor devolved to him until the end of his elected term as senator from Edgecombe. He rose from the speaker’s chair in the Senate and said, “A difference of opinion may exist in the minds of some about what the Constitutional powers are, devolving to duties of the Executive of the State. So our Constitution [of North Carolina] says the powers of the Governor shall be held and exercised by the Speaker ‘after the death’ or ‘during the absence’ of the Governor. The Speaker does not become the Governor. He still holds his original office, which enables him to exercise the duties of the other.” After his speech, Clark “called Mr. [James P.] Speight to the chair and withdrew from the Senate chamber.”

The majority of legislators agreed with Clark. Turner’s motion was tabled by a vote of 24 to 16, allowing the Edgecombe senator to serve in the dual role of acting governor and speaker of the Senate. The Raleigh Standard reported that “this action of the Senate settles the question; and Gov. Clark is, therefore, acting Governor.”

Clark’s term, however, was not officially defined until the state ratified a series of amendments in May 1862, which clarified the wording of the original constitution to state that the speaker of the senate “shall exercise the powers of Governor [until] the election of his successor in the next succeeding Senate.” The amendment also specifically declared that Clark would hold the office of governor until the “second Monday in September [1862],” at which time, a new governor would be sworn into office. Clark,

---

4 Journal of the Senate of North Carolina, Second Extra Session, 1861, 5-8; Journal (Wilmington), August, 17, 1861. Mr. Speight was the senator from Greene County.
5 Standard, August 17, 1861.
recognizing his status as “acting” governor, occasionally signed correspondence from the Executive Department as “Henry T. Clark, Governor Ex-Officio.” Within a few weeks, however, all communication was signed simply “Governor,” announcing that Clark was in fact the chief executive.

Citizens of the State wasted little effort in debating the matter and believed Clark was indeed the governor upon the death of his predecessor. Tar Heels were shocked at the death of the young Ellis. He had been a popular, vigorous leader. The newspapers lamented his passing but reassured readers that a capable successor would take his place. Assessing the character of the state’s new chief executive, the Raleigh Standard commented, “We have known Mr. Clark for many years. He has been a good deal in public life, has been observant of men and things, and brings to his aid a knowledge of our public men, the character of our people, and the demands of the present crisis. He has a cool judgment, a modest estimate of his own abilities, an honest heart, and a purpose to do his duty to his entire State and the South. We rely upon his honesty, his prudence, his cool judgment, his patriotism, his readiness to counsel with the wise, and more than all, upon his will and ability to do right.” The State Journal concurred: “[Clark possesses] large experience, honesty above suspicion, capacity beyond doubt, and fidelity whom all can trust.” Clark’s reputation was such that he was nominated as a senatorial candidate for the Confederate States Congress in the summer of 1861, but withdrew his name from consideration in August.

Clark’s first order of business as governor was the preparation of his predecessor’s state funeral. He ordered all military posts to fire guns on the half hour

---

7 Standard, July 17, 1861; Journal (Wilmington), August 17, 1861.
8 State Journal (Raleigh), July 10, 1861.
from sunrise to sunset and, display colors at half-staff. State militia officers were to wear “usual military mourning for thirty days.”¹⁰ All regimental standards were shrouded and virtually every business and public building in Raleigh draped itself in somber black bunting.

North Carolina state troops received Ellis’ body on Tuesday evening July 9 at the train station in Petersburg, Virginia, and escorted it to Raleigh where it arrived the next morning under armed guard. A great cadre of mourners, “the largest ever witnessed in a Southern city,” including the now-governor Clark, greeted the train upon arrival. The funeral procession escorted the body past the Capitol building and to the Executive Mansion, where it lie in state for twenty-four hours until transported for burial in Davidson County.¹¹

Clark approached the situation with a gracious, dignified, and genuinely concerned manner. Upon assuming the duties of the state’s highest office, he immediately contacted Ellis’ young, grieving wife and offered her the use of the Executive Mansion, writing to her through her servant: “I will thank you to convey to Mrs Ellis,” said Clark, “in the kindest terms, my deep sympathy with the great affliction which has fallen upon her in the death of Governor Ellis and how gratifying it would be to me to offer a word or an act which would alleviate her distress. I desire to tender to her the continued use of the Executive Mansion. It would gratify me, if it would prove

¹⁰ State Journal, July 10, 1861; Daily Progress, July 11, 1861.
¹¹ State Journal, July 17, 1861; Telegraph from Petersburg to Graham Lawes, July 10, 1861, Henry Toole Clark, Governors Papers, State Archives, Office of Archives and History, Raleigh; Cheney, North Carolina Government 1585-1974, 605-612. The executive mansion, or “Governor’s Palace” as it was called, was then located at the foot of Fayetteville Street on the site of the present day Memorial Auditorium.
agreeable to her to do so. Assuring her that it would not in the least interfere with any personal arrangements, I shall have made for my own residence in Raleigh."\textsuperscript{12}

Taking up residence in the capital city, Clark immediately set to work, seeking counsel and surrounding himself with the business at hand. As one friend said just days after Clark assumed office, “I called this morning to see Gov. Clark, but found company with him, and therefore had little opportunity of conversing with him. I know very little of how he is getting along–having seen but little of him since he became Governor.”\textsuperscript{13}

Indeed, the new governor had much to sort out. One of the more vexing problems was what to do with a group of forty Union prisoners “taken in the various skirmishes” in Virginia and unexpectedly shipped south to Raleigh.\textsuperscript{14} Confederate army regulations stated that prisoners of war were to be disarmed and sent to the rear of the lines. The Confederate Congress enacted rules in May 1861 clarifying that captives were to be transferred to the secretary of war.\textsuperscript{15} Because there were no proper prisons constructed at this early date of the conflict, Secretary of War Leroy P. Walker transferred the forty prisoners to North Carolina.\textsuperscript{16}

The Confederate army placed the prisoners under the guard of “a company of Irishmen commanded by a good officer the first lieutenant being a brother to Lincoln’s

\textsuperscript{12}Turner and Bridgers, History of Edgecombe County, 230-231.
\textsuperscript{13}Kenneth Rayner to Thomas Ruffin, July 18, 1861, J. G. de Rouleac Hamilton, ed., The Papers of Thomas Ruffin, 4 vols. (Raleigh: Publications of the North Carolina Historical Commission, Raleigh, 1920), 3:237. Rayner was a contemporary of Clark from Bertie County and was educated in Tarboro. Though an old Whig, he was a strong state rights supporter and secessionist. Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, s.v. “Kenneth Rayner.”
\textsuperscript{14}Rayner to Thomas Ruffin, July 18, 1861, The Papers of Thomas Ruffin, 3:237.
\textsuperscript{15}Official Records, Armies, ser. 1, 3:691.
wife.”\textsuperscript{17} The “good officer” was Confederate lieutenant David Todd, brother-in-law to the American president--the irony of which was not lost on North Carolinians, as newspapers and letters attest. The whole affair caused quite a stir among Raleigh citizens who were “curious to see a real live Yankee Lincolnite soldier,” the observers noting that the soldiers’ appearance being like that of “foreigners.”\textsuperscript{18}

Arriving in Raleigh on July 17, Todd was ordered to “turn over the prisoners to the State authorities, take a receipt for them, and return to [Richmond].”\textsuperscript{19} There were, however, no instructions or warnings as to what the “state authorities” were to do with them upon receipt. Finding the situation rather confusing, Todd contacted Governor Clark. The governor had the prisoners locked up at a local Raleigh church for the night until they could be transferred to the state fairgrounds the next day.\textsuperscript{20} The fairgrounds were now a “camp of instruction,” and had been transformed into a Confederate training base, not a military prison. The next morning, Todd escorted the Union prisoners to the camp and turned them over to the commanding officer, Major Henry King Burgwyn.\textsuperscript{21}

Governor Clark handled the problem with a stern, yet conciliatory approach. He wrote to Lieutenant Todd relieving him of his charges, saying sternly “Your arrival here with the prisoners was unexpected, and having received no notice of their intended transfer to this State, no preparation has been made. Under these circumstances I deem it


\textsuperscript{18}Standard, July 24, 1861.


\textsuperscript{20}Kenneth Rayner to Thomas Ruffin, July 18, 1861, Hamilton, The Papers of Thomas Ruffin, 3:237; Standard, July 24, 1861; Register, July 24, 1861; Elizabeth Reid Murray, Wake: Capital County of North Carolina, 1 vol, to date (Raleigh: Capital County Publishing Co., 1983), 460, 619. The local church was “Neville’s Church,” a “stone building located in the eastern suburbs” between E. Cabarrus Street and E. Lenoir Street, near Swain Street.

\textsuperscript{21}Sgt. W. D. Bishop to Susan Bishop, July 18, 1861, Poteat, “Papers of Sgt W. D. Bishop,” 4; Standard, July 24, 1861; Register (Raleigh), July 24, 1861.
advisable to receive them here, and relieve you of the further charge of them.” By accepting the prisoners, the governor had relieved not only Todd, but also the Confederate War Department, of the responsibility of their care and incarceration.

Clark kept the prisoners at Camp Instruction, reluctantly holding them there until more suitable confines could be arranged. The governor sent an agent, Colonel William Johnston, to Salisbury to investigate the suitability of a prison in that area. He also wrote Secretary of War Walker about the inconveniences of keeping prisoners. “I have the honor,” he informed the secretary, “to enclose you the Report of Col. Johnston, who was sent by me, agreeable to your request to examine the Salisbury Factory. [However] I must respectfully ask that no more prisoners be sent here unless I am notified in advance that preparation can be made. The prisoners brought here by Lt. Todd are most inconveniently situated here. Having no suitable place for them and being unapprised of their coming till they were present.”

Johnston found an old cotton-processing factory located on sixteen acres of land and adjacent to both the town and a rail line, which would facilitate the transport of prisoners. The lot and buildings were “shaded by a beautiful grove of oaks and well supplied with good water” and would maintain upwards of two thousand prisoners. The owners, being patriotic Confederates, offered the property at an agreeable rate, asking only fifteen thousand dollars in Confederate bonds. Clark estimated an additional two thousand dollars for repairs and fittings, such as iron bars for the windows, and calculated

---

23 Henry T. Clark to Leroy P. Walker, July 26, 1861, Governors Letter Books; Leroy P. Walker to John W. Ellis, July 8, 1861, Tolbert, *The Papers of John W. Ellis*, 2:884. Walker had contacted the governor’s office in July the day after Ellis’ death about the possibility of building a prison. He suggested Alamance County, near Greensboro. Clark and his administration located the Salisbury property.
the property would sell after the war for between thirty to fifty thousand dollars. The governor immediately contacted Richmond to close the deal.

Secretary Walker responded three days later, authorizing the governor “to have the purchase consummated at an early day, and to make arrangements for the necessary repairs and additions, so that the Building may be ready for early occupation.” As an addendum, apologizing for the difficult situation in which he had placed Clark, the secretary added, “In conformity with your request, you will be duly notified in future of the intention of the Department to forward prisoners to your Capitol, should that be again necessary, in order that you may have time to make arrangements for their reception.”

The Salisbury prison opened in December of 1861. Before the prison could become operational, however, guards had to be procured. The task of raising prison guards fell to Clark, as no Confederate troops would be assigned, nor would many volunteer to perform such an onerous, low-paid duty. Guards received ten dollars a month, a dollar less than a Confederate private. Clark wrote to Walker that “I shall meet with great difficulty in providing a suitable guard, as volunteers for the war entertain the greatest repugnance to such a confinement themselves, and it will be very difficult to enlist persons for the specific duty, and if other arrangements could be made, it would relieve me of an unpleasant and very difficult duty.” The secretary replied: “It is hoped that the difficulty of which you speak in procuring volunteers to act as guards for the building may soon cease to exist. Should it continue however, you are requested

28 Ibid., 46; Official Records, Armies, ser. 4, 1:130, 126-127, 827. Infantrymen were paid $11 a month.
to notify this Department as some arrangements must be made for this necessary service.”

The governor did eventually succeed in raising a guard force and the men were formed into companies and mustered into Confederate service. There was, however, as late as December, some confusion concerning the actual chain of command. The commander of the Salisbury post, Captain Braxton Craven, wrote Judah Benjamin, the new Confederate war secretary, asking, “I am commander of this post by appointment of the Governor of this State. Am I to report to you in reference to the prisoners and other matters connected with the post? Am I to be recognized by you as commander of the post? The Governor of the State does not know your intentions on this subject.”

Benjamin replied: “As soon as [I receive the muster roles] I will proceed to organize the command and send proper instructions.”

Governor Clark thus procured, helped establish, and raise a guard force for the first Confederate prison in North Carolina with little or no help from the Confederate War Department. In all respects, Salisbury was one of the first proper prisons in the Confederacy, as others before were simply unused buildings or tobacco warehouses. The Confederate government set policy in the administration of prisons, and the state governors executed and enforced that policy. Indeed, once the Confederate government authorized payment, the day-to-day operations fell almost entirely to the state, as Clark unhappily acknowledged. “The resources of our State,” he declared, “are being largely

---

33 Hesseltine, Civil War Prisons, 57.
called on for our troops and the support of a large army of prisoners is an exhausting and very profitless undertaking.”

The prisoners, however, proved less vexing a problem than the governor’s media relations. Clark was accustomed to conducting business, and showed great skill with figures, contracts, and accounts, as he had done when establishing the Salisbury prison. He showed no skill whatsoever in manipulating the newspapers to his advantage, as his relationship with his old acquaintance, William Holden, the powerful and influential editor of the Raleigh Standard, attests. Almost immediately upon taking office as governor, and while laboring on the prison problem, Clark ran afoul of the editor. Upon assuming office, Clark appointed former Democratic governor Thomas Bragg and Democratic Party leader Daniel M. Barringer as “aide-de-camps” to serve on the state Military Board, chaired by Democratic former governor Warren Winslow. The Legislature had established the Military Board on May 10, 1861, to assist the commander-in-chief with administrative duties and in the recommendation of civil and military appointments. The board was but a temporary measure. According to provisions established upon its creation, it was scheduled for dissolution on August 20, 1861. The board’s three members were to advise the governor on the organization of the military and assist in the appointment of officers. Of the three members, one was to be skilled in military affairs. It was on this point that Holden criticized Clark’s appointments.

36 State Journal, July 17, 1861; Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, s.v. “Daniel Moreau Barringer.” Barringer was also a friend and schoolmate of Clark’s, graduating with honors from Chapel Hill the same year as the governor.
37 Journal of the Senate of North Carolina, First Extra Session 1861, 61; Barrett, Civil War in North Carolina, 32.
In fact, the irascible editor, and many North Carolinians, thought the very idea of a Military Board wasteful and unnecessary. He believed its existence smacked of “favoritism and partyism” and wanted the money used for the councilors’ salaries better spent on the military itself. “The Governor appointed two civilians and one military man to comprise this Board,” Holden fumed, “neither of whom possessed peculiar qualifications for the position. It is to be regretted the Legislature did not take matters into its own hands. Dismiss the ‘parlor colonels.’ Let him dismiss the Military Board.”\(^{38}\) Holden’s criticism proved to be the first of many attacks on Governor Clark.

Despite Holden’s vituperative words, the Military Board was a timesaving government agency, making appointments and recommending commissions. The Democratic newspaper, the *State Journal*, responded to Holden, saying, “The people see that nothing is too gross for Mr Holden.” The newspaper further referred to Holden as a “civil dictator.”\(^{39}\) Clark, reacting to charges of political favoritism, appointed former Whig governor Charles Manly to replace Haywood Guion, a Lincolnton native and president of the Wilmington, Charlotte, and Rutherfordton Railroad. Guion had resigned his appointment from the state Military Board shortly after the death of Ellis.\(^{40}\)

As in the case of the Military Board, Clark appointments often provoked the ire of former Whigs and Unionists. Clark was a lifelong Democrat and secessionist, and the majority of his appointments to top government jobs and military positions were largely men of similar party affiliation. As historian Gordon McKinney has noted, “[Clark’s] appointment policies created a highly partisan atmosphere. [Clark] apparently distrusted anyone who had been a Whig or who had not been a proponent of secession before the

---

\(^{38}\) *Standard*, July 24, 1861.
\(^{39}\) *State Journal*, June 26, 1861.
\(^{40}\) *State Journal*, August 14, 1861.
firing on Fort Sumter.”\textsuperscript{41} But while the governor did appoint a majority of Democrats to many various positions, his nomination of Manly to the Military Board shows that Clark was not entirely oblivious to the charge of “partyism.”

Despite early criticism from Holden, the new governor enjoyed support from the public during his first weeks, helped no doubt by the fruits of the first Confederate victory at Manassas. The Union defeat near Bull Run Creek, Virginia, on July 21, 1861, sent a wave of excitement through the South, reinforcing Confederate delusions of a quick war while hardening Northern resolve. Adulations from all corners of Dixie flowed to Richmond as citizens heaped honors upon President Jefferson Davis, lauding him for the great victory won. Clark offered his congratulations, as did other Southern state executives.

The governor, however, used the opportunity to address a nagging complaint—the apparently deliberate refusal of the Richmond authorities to promote North Carolinians to high Confederate commands. Tar Heels were often bypassed for advancement while men of other states, Virginians in particular, received the lion’s share of appointments and recognition.\textsuperscript{42} Evoking his state’s pride, Clark wrote to the Confederate president: “The active participation of three North Carolina Regiments in that great triumph [at First Manassas] appeals to our State pride to claim to share in its trophies and hence I will respectfully submit to your consideration that No[rt] Carolina with 14 Regiments in the field and many others now ready as soon as equipped to join them, has some claim to

\textsuperscript{41} McKinney, Zeb Vance, 111; Kruman, Parties and Politics, 231.
have her Regiments commanded by her own sons. I need not speak to you of its influence on the soldiers, or on our State pride in a contest where equal states are struggling shoulder to shoulder in a common cause. No[rth] Carolina yields to no State in her loyalty to the common cause, and her sincere and ardent support of the administration.”

Clark was addressing more than an insult against state pride; he was also reaffirming North Carolina’s commitment to the Confederacy. Because North Carolina had been reluctant to secede, and only did so after Lincoln’s call for troops following Fort Sumter, President Jefferson Davis and members of his administration, as well as a number of Confederate generals, viewed the Tar Heel State as less than fully committed to the cause of Southern independence. Such suspicions persisted from the beginning until the end of the war. Clark went on record early to assure Davis that North Carolina was committed to the Confederate war effort.

The governor had many other pressing issues. Chief among these was the defense of the state, and North Carolina was ill prepared. Long regarded as the “Ireland of America,” the state was predominately agricultural, exceedingly rural, and devoid of heavy industry. As the historian John G. Barrett has stated, out of a population of almost one million people, there were fewer than 15,000 employed in any sort of industrial manufacture. Though North Carolina had made material gains in the preceding decades by virtue of the expanding cotton markets and railroad development, she could offer the Confederacy little more than soldiers. The state’s long coastline was virtually undefended and open to attack. Coastal batteries and forts, what few existed, were

---

44 Lefler and Newsome, North Carolina, 442.
45 Barrett, The Civil War in North Carolina, 17.
outdated and outgunned “sand castles” in need of serious repair. The state’s defense rested in a poorly trained and even more poorly equipped militia. What passed for an organized defense system was little more than local groups of men with fowling pieces who often passed the time socializing rather than training for any serious military situation.\textsuperscript{46}

As commander-in-chief, it was the governor’s prime responsibility to place the state on a proper war footing. Citizens expected the governor to defend the state, and part of the chief executive’s responsibility included the mobilization of volunteers. Being that there was no Confederate Army in early 1861, the Confederate government had adopted the method employed by the old Union. In the days before large standing bodies of troops, the President issued calls for volunteers and expected the state governors to raise, equip, and organize men into regiments before tendering them to federal authorities for national service.

Responding to the military crisis surrounding North Carolina’s borders, the state legislature met in special session on May 1, 1861, and on May 8, authorized the governor to raise ten thousand state troops for a three-year enlistment period. The executive was also given authority to raise an additional twenty thousand twelve-month volunteers. Volunteers thronged recruiting centers to tender their services to the Southern cause. The recruits were formed into regiments, equipped, and mustered into service.\textsuperscript{47}


North Carolina, however, did not secede until May 20, 1861, more than a month after Lincoln’s call for troops. Because of constitutional legalities (the General Assembly could only meet biennially), Governor Ellis had recommended that the legislature establish a convention of delegates to address the state’s political and military crisis. Such a convention, as historian Drew Gilpin Faust suggests, would also serve “to create the need for widespread political consensus on secession.” A convention of 120 delegates was approved and less than two weeks later, the convention met and unanimously passed an ordinance for secession (Clark did not serve as a delegate). The convention also transferred all state troops raised under the General Assembly’s Act of May 8 to the authority of the Confederate government. The act would “muster out, disband or dismiss from the service of the State” all volunteer companies and regiments. The convention did not provide a substitute bill to regulate the raising and equipping of troops for service within the state.

Clark responded to this oversight after he became the governor in his “state of the state” address, which was read to the House of Commons on August 16, 1861. In this address, the governor asked that the legislature correct this “injurious” state of affairs and requested a more equitable form of recruitment for state volunteers. Because the

---


50 *The Journal of the House of Commons*, Second Extra Session, 1861, 9-15; *State Journal*, August 21, 1861. The address was communicated to the House in writing and described as “Business-like. No display is made. It is a plain, straightforward, commonsense document.”
constitution authorized him to provide for the defense of the state, he suggested the state call directly upon the counties that had furnished few men by “pointing out the mode of enrolling them from those counties.” Clark believed it “fair and equitable, that in each county a just proportion should be observed between those who remain to take care of the homes, and make provisions for the absent soldiers, and those who go forth to risk their all for the country.” The General Assembly obliged Clark, authorizing him in September “to credit the respective counties, as to place them as near as practicable on an equal footing.” The law also gave the governor the authority to raise men, if necessary, by draft.

Clark had no trouble finding volunteers for either Confederate or state service at the beginning of the war, a process that Ellis and the legislature had already begun, and his office was bombarded with requests for authority to raise companies of troops. There was, however, a shortage of uniforms in which to clothe the troops and Clark resolutely met the challenge. His work was instrumental in inaugurating trade with England through a purchasing agent and establishing North Carolina as the only state to supply clothing for its troops for the whole of the war. The state wasted no expense in outfitting her volunteers and over the course of the war spent over $4.5 million in furnishing its soldiers. Because the state clothed its own troops and cloth remained a scarce commodity, demand for fabric skyrocketed. Early in his tenure, Clark recognized the need and issued a circular to the state’s sheriffs, asking them “as agents of the State,

---

53 The vast majority of correspondence in the governor’s letters concerns commissions and requests to raise companies of men.
to solicit a contribution of [clothing].” Clark ordered the sheriffs to collect donations of woolen goods and handmade items from families to supply North Carolina troops for the coming winter, stating that “The scarcity of material for sale in this State, and the uncertainty of procuring supplies from abroad, force us to rely on our domestic resources. Transportation of all goods will be at the expense of the State.”

To say that North Carolina’s troops were always properly equipped, however, is not entirely accurate. Tar Heel troops were often crudely clad and lacking in essential equipment such as blankets, underclothes, and rifles. Under its commutation policy, the Confederate government was to provide payments to the state for each soldier the governor could provision. The War Department failed, however, to meet its payments. Nevertheless, Clark did a reasonably adequate job of clothing and equipping North Carolina troops, given the resources available to him. The state’s lack of industry, a decrepit transportation system, and rampant poverty among large groups of citizens exacerbated an already difficult situation. Though Tar Heel soldiers went into the field with equipment that was often homespun or less-than-regulation, they were sufficiently equipped to fight the war during Clark’s tenure. In fact, the state benefited from the superb adjutant general and quartermaster’s offices led by James G. Martin. Recognizing Martin’s skill, the governor reorganized the state’s various war departments under one command in September 1861 and placed Adjutant General Martin in charge.

Arming the troops proved as challenging a task as providing clothing. Rifles were difficult to procure and some new recruits were drilling with spears and pikes in the

54 Standard, August 17, 1861; Clark, Histories of the Several Regiments, 1:25-27. The money figure is equal to approximately $67.5 million in year 2000 dollars.

55 Barrett, Civil War in North Carolina, 26-28; McKinney, Zeb Vance, 111.
spring of 1862 for want of proper weapons. Recognizing the dire need, Clark appointed an agent, John L. Peyton, to purchase arms for North Carolina. Peyton departed Charleston, South Carolina, for Great Britain in late October 1861. His vessel, the \textit{Nashville}, was “out from Charleston 26 days, six of which were passed at Bermuda.” A haggard Peyton landed at Southampton in November after a harrowing journey that he found “very disagreeable, owing to headwinds and storms.” Upon arrival in London, he contacted Clark, informing him of the dearth of proper weapons to be had. “I regret to have to inform you,” he wrote the governor, “that I have not been able to get anything here upon credit. At the period of my arrival, there were no arms to be had here.” Peyton was, however, able to place an order for arms later that winter, which he paid for with funds from the state. The first installment of two thousand English Enfield rifles arrived in Wilmington the following spring.

Peyton’s shipment was sent via steamer and the weapons, “stamped with N. C. on the rifle stocks,” shared space with materiel purchased by the Confederate government. Writing the Secretary of War George Randolph, who had replaced Benjamin, about the forthcoming shipment destined for both North Carolina and the Confederacy, Clark reported, “I am notified of the shipment from England on board of the \textit{Southwick} of a lot

\footnotesize{56} Clark, \textit{Histories of the Several Regiments}, 1:25.
\footnotesize{59} John L. Peyton to Henry T. Clark, December 31, 1861, Governors Papers.
of Enfield Rifles for the State of North Carolina bought by her agent [John Peyton]; and I understood the Steamer was also loaded with arms and munitions for the Confederate Government. Will you be pleased to forward me the earliest information you may receive of the fate of the Southwick?"\textsuperscript{60}

When arms were not to be had from his overseas connections, Clark took what he could find at home. In one incident he accidentally appropriated a shipment of Confederate arms intended for Virginia. When a supply of rifles en route from Charleston to Richmond stopped at the Goldsboro, North Carolina, depot, Clark believed the shipment to be a long-awaited supply of arms from the Confederate government, and he ordered the weapons dispersed to North Carolina troops.\textsuperscript{61} When the arms failed to arrive in Virginia, President Davis, Secretary of War Randolph, and even General Robert E. Lee, telegraphed Clark, lambasting him for the purloin of arms, believing the governor had hijacked the shipment. Clark claimed a misunderstanding had occurred, rather than an intentional disregard for the law. He wrote President Davis explaining the situation in a characteristically assertive tone:

\begin{quote}

The telegraphic dispatches recently received from yourself, Genl Lee and the Secretary of War induce me to believe there is some misapprehension prevailing. Under your direction and in compliance with your requisition I have established here a Camp of Instruction and made a call upon the State for her quota of five Regiments which has been handsomely responded to by the tender of more than a hundred companies – besides filling up ten War Regiments with new enlistments. When I saw a lot of arms stopped accidentally at our Depot, I supposed they were intended for
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{60} Henry T. Clark to George Randolph, April 23, 1862, Governors Letter Books.

\textsuperscript{61} Henry T. Clark to General Richard C. Gatlin, March 24, 1862, Governors Letter Books.
our Regiments. I am fully aware of the scarcity of arms and would have quietly acquiesced in the loss of these arms, had not their removal to a post where they were not then needed led me to regard it as a mistake on part of the [Confederate War] Department. North Carolina will report her quota [of men] ready as soon as they are furnished with the indispensable requisite of arms. [North Carolina’s] own arms have been exhausted by furnishing all of her own Regiments with arms and thirteen thousand stand to other troops in the Confederacy, and I know of no reason why she should be slighted now.62

Davis acknowledged the support he received from Clark, thanking him for his efforts to arm Confederate troops, replying, “I did not know before the receipt of your letter, that your State had done so much for the Confederacy in the way of arms.”63 The state, under Clark’s leadership, spent $512,713 on arms and ammunition from October 1861 to September 1862.64

Clark cooperated with the War Department’s efforts to make up shortages of arms by purchasing the private weapons of North Carolinians.65 When, however, the Confederate government, through its Quartermaster Department, attempted to seize or impress without payment the arms of private citizens, Clark protested vehemently.66

William S. Ashe, a colonel in the Confederate Quartermasters Department, was asked by

---

63 Jefferson Davis to Henry T. Clark, April 15, 1862, Governors Letter Books.
66 Impression was legalized on a national level by the Confederate Congress in March 1863, but was done by military order or by order of state authorities throughout the war. Quartermaster-General Circular, November 1861, Official Records, Armies, ser. 4, 1:767; Special Orders No. 86, Adjutant and Inspector General’s Office, April 15, 1862, Official Records, Armies, ser. 4, 1:1059-1060; Frank E. Vandiver, “Makeshifts of Confederate Ordnance,” The Journal of Southern History 17 (May 1951), 183; Charles W. Ramsdell, Behind the Lines in the Southern Confederacy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944), 93, 117; Bensel, Yankee Leviathan, 135.
President Davis to “collect guns from the citizens for the soldiers until the blockade runners could provide the needed rifles.”

Colonel Ashe enthusiastically executed the order and rounded up all the weapons he could find, seizing arms when citizens refused to surrender their guns. Such usurping action infuriated Clark who consistently defended the individual’s right to keep and bear arms. He fought with Confederate authorities over the seizure of private weapons because he believed an armed citizenry the foundation of the nation’s defense. In an address to the state House of Commons, he said, “A militia system, with arms in the hands of the people, should be sustained as one of the main institutions and props of a free country. They are the volunteer national guards of a republic, a substitute for the standing army of despotism.”

Illegal impressments became common enough that Clark issued a proclamation on April 12, 1862, informing citizens of their legal rights and declaring that “Any attempt [by agents] to seize the arms of our citizens is directly at variance with the Constitution, and in opposition to the declared policy of the Government.” He reminded them, however, “as an act of the highest patriotism and duty, that you should discover to the proper State authorities all public arms, muskets or rifles within your knowledge, and of selling to the State all the arms, the property of individuals, [that] can be spared.”

Clark’s response drew the ire of Ashe. Ashe seized the weapons because he thought the governor had no money to buy any arms. Clark shot back:

---

67 Standard, April 5, 1862; Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, s. v. “William Shepperd Ashe.” Ashe (1814-1862) was a wealthy rice planter from the Cape Fear region. By the spring of 1862, when much of the eastern portion of the state came under attack, he pressed his long-time friend, President Jefferson Davis, to allow him to get involved in direct military affairs. He was killed in a train accident in September.


69 “To the People of North Carolina,” April 15, 1862, Governors Letter Books.
I could not have said so, for at that time and for six months previous, I had been buying and paying for them, and in some instances advancing money for them; and in making known to the President [Davis] as you say you did, that ‘I had no means to purchase the arms,’ you greatly mislead [sic] him and did a great injustice to both me and to the State, which has been so liberal in procuring arms and so generous in supplying other States, and the Confederacy itself with them. My objection was not to your purchasing any arms that could not be spared, but to impressing whether they could be spared or not. To disarm a country is the first step towards its subjugation! The spirit of a freeman is gone when he is not allowed to keep his arms! You say it is ‘useless to discuss the Constitutional rights of impressment.’ I say ‘tis equally useless to discuss it on any other consideration, for ‘tis a question of might not right—the power alone confers the right. ‘No one refused to sell’ because the threat was made and a sale was preferred to a seizure, others have concealed and some have refused. These are the representations made to me; and I want it understood in North Carolina that private arms—one for each man—cannot and shall not be seized. My card was so worded as to produce or invite no collision or controversy with the Confederate Government, or its agents, and regretted the necessity for it, but the exercise of such a power must be stopped at once, and complaints and appeals from various quarters called for my interference.  

Clark’s dispute with Ashe demonstrates that although he was committed to Confederate war aims, such commitment was not at the expense of what he perceived as individual liberties and state rights. Despite Clark’s quarrel with the Quartermaster’s Department,

---

70 For example, in one transaction, Clark issued “500 flint and steel muskets” to Florida troops. Madison Stark Perry to Henry T. Clark, July 21, 1861, Governors Letter Books.
the governor generally supported Confederate requests for more men and arms, and he worked diligently, and within the law, to arm and equip North Carolina’s troops.

Fastidious and attentive to detail, Clark succeeded in mobilizing soldiers for the Confederate cause. Almost every one of North Carolina’s seventy-two Confederate regiments was organized under Clark’s leadership, and though successful in fielding an army, the governor did so at the expense of his own state’s defense.72 His decision would have disastrous effects for certain portions of North Carolina, and Clark’s own political career. As the war expanded and more men were called to the front, the governor faced mounting challenges at home, and Clark was virtually swamped with demands upon his office. The governor, however, continued in his dual role of speaker of the senate and chief executive, dutifully attending to matters of state and items of military importance. While he succeeded in accomplishing certain troublesome administrative tasks, Clark would soon face problems of increasing difficulty, and meet with mixed success.

---

72 Barrett, The Civil War in North Carolina, 29.
Chapter Three
“North Carolina has been neglected”: Coastal Defense and the Blockade

Perhaps the most pressing problem facing Clark early in his administration was the defense of coastal North Carolina, and he quickly made it a chief priority. He recognized the need for proper engineers, good gunpowder, and heavy cannon; and he urged the General Assembly to fund the construction of batteries and the purchase of ordnance, pointing out that “the great length of coast that requires guarding has also drawn largely on our funds, but not larger than its immense importance deserves; and whatever amount of men and money its needs must be furnished.”¹

North Carolina provided the manpower to construct and man the shore batteries, but Clark had to rely on Confederate officers to plan and supervise the construction of coastal fortification. The Confederate government, however, was slow to provide trained officers and skilled engineers. The Confederate authorities’ delay in providing any assistance troubled Clark from the beginning. In August 1861, he informed the North Carolina legislature that “An officer of the Confederate States has also been sent to inspect our coast defenses and batteries, preparatory to assuming control of them, but as yet it has not been accomplished. I have lately addressed a communication to the President on the subject.”² The Confederate War Department was consistently slow in responding to North Carolina’s defense needs and rarely supported Clark in his efforts to defend the state.³

² Ibid.
Clark realized that a properly fortified military force on the coast of North Carolina could play a vital role in the Confederate war effort. The state’s vast network of inland waterways afforded the protection of intrastate trade and provided opportunities for raiders to harass Union shipping routes. [Figure 3] Recognizing the region’s great advantage for a smaller naval force, North Carolina purchased a fleet of old merchant ships in early 1861 and converted the vessels into scrappy gunboats, nicknaming the little flotilla the “mosquito fleet.” The first commissioned steamer, the *Winslow*, was a speedy two-gun “public armed vessel” that proved highly successful in capturing enemy prizes. In only six weeks of operating out of Hatteras Inlet, the steamer bagged sixteen enemy merchant ships.\(^4\)

The small fleet had been organized under the leadership of Governor Ellis, who had contacted Marshall Parks, an agent in Norfolk, Virginia, concerning the purchase of ships. Ellis had also asked President Davis in April 1861 for “blank letters of marque” to issue to willing raiders. Ellis had taken an active role in the state’s navy, but such matters concerned Clark less, for by the time he became governor the tiny North Carolina navy was transferred out of his hands and placed under the authority of the Confederate States. Clark was, however, concerned about the privateering trade and worked diligently to upgrade coastal defenses, in part to protect such activity.\(^5\)

Like pirates over a century earlier, these roving bands of Southern privateers used the North Carolina Outer Banks as a base. The raiders would “dash out” from the inlets, capture a prize, and dart back behind the dangerous shoals, using their shallow draft

\(^5\) John W. Ellis to Jefferson Davis, April 25, 1861, Ellis to Marshall Parks, April 25, May 9, 1861, Ellis to Walter Gwynn, June 6, 1861, Tolbert, *The Papers of John W. Ellis*, 2:618, 678, 733-734, 826.
sloops to evade the heavier Union warships. The raiders organized an elaborate system of signals to coordinate attacks on merchantmen while the Union blockaders patrolled other areas. Storms, gales, and not infrequent rough water also kept the blockaders far out to sea, increasing the difficulty of Federal surveillance.\textsuperscript{6}

United States Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles wrote Flag Officer Silas H. Stringham, commander of the Atlantic Blockading Squadron, informing him of the attacks by these privateers. He told Stringham of the United States schooner \textit{Transit}, which had traveled from Key West to New York, transporting “Government stores.” The \textit{Winslow}, armed with one mounted swivel gun and a crew of forty men, captured the \textit{Transit}. The \textit{Transit}’s master complained to Union authorities that the mosquito fleet was seizing vessels and outfitting them for privateering service. He reported that sailors from these captured vessels were taken “to a masked [Confederate] battery which was being constructed on Hatteras Inlet, and that some of his own crew joined the pirates.” The master also reported that “a large number of privateers [from] the Gulf, and even as far as New York” were using Hatteras as a base of operations.\textsuperscript{7}

Like all captured ships in this area of the Atlantic, the \textit{Transit} was taken to New Bern and sold at auction under authority of the Confederate Admiralty court. The \textit{Transit} was sold for $3,053. Of that amount, almost $1,400 was paid to the state of North Carolina and “a similar amount was distributed to the officers and men of the \textit{Winslow}.” The \textit{Transit} was a relatively small catch; other prizes could fetch upwards of $20,000.

\textsuperscript{7} Gideon Welles to Silas Stringham, August 20, 1861, \textit{Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion}, ser. 1, 6:100-101. Hereafter cited as \textit{Official Records, Navies}. There is some dispute over the actual number of guns aboard the \textit{Winslow}. Some primary sources say one, others two.
The prize business was lucrative, and the North Carolina Outer Banks began attracting privateers from all over the South.\textsuperscript{8}

The location of Hatteras Inlet at the midpoint of the eastern seaboard represented the most effective position from which privateers could harass Union shipping. The increasing frequency and success of piratical activity, and the growing boldness of the crews, concerned the New York Board of Underwriters and other insurance syndicates, which demanded the Union navy intervene.\textsuperscript{9} As the Wilmington \textit{Journal} reported, “One dismal universal howl has gone up from Yankee-land for giving shelter to a nest of pirates who slide out and in ‘confiscating’ the property of the Lincolnites in the coolest manner imaginable.”\textsuperscript{10}

Like Clark, the Union navy also recognized the tactical value of coastal North Carolina. Control of the North Carolina coastal region could serve as a springboard for larger operations and facilitate a Federal push into lower Virginia and possibly the capture of the Confederate naval yards at Norfolk. On August 26, 1861, a combined amphibious expedition, led jointly by the Union army’s Major General Benjamin Butler and the navy’s Commodore Silas Stringham, left Hampton Roads, Virginia, with 900 men and the intention of capturing Hatteras Inlet. The determined force arrived off the often-stormy cape two days later. Four battleships soon began firing on the Confederate forts of Hatteras and Clark, and 320 Yankee troops swarmed ashore. The small landing force was aided greatly by the accurate and withering fire of the Union warships and, no doubt, by the negligence of the Confederate War department. The small Southern “forts”

\textsuperscript{9} William M. Robinson, \textit{The Confederate Privateers}, 110.
\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Journal} (Wilmington), August 24, 1861.
lacked good water, good powder, ammunition, and long-range cannon to seriously threaten the gunboats, which had simply sailed to a safe point beyond the reach of the Confederate smoothbores. Once finding their mark, the Union ships maneuvered in a circle formation and fired at will. The next day, on August 29, Colonel William F. Martin surrendered the Confederate garrison of 670 men. The Federals lost only one man.\(^{11}\)

The capture of Hatteras was the first Union victory of the war and provided the Northern public a much-needed boost in morale. North Carolinians, however, were stunned. The glorious victory won at Manassas seemed a distant memory as newspapers from around the globe reported the Confederacy’s first loss. A foreign correspondent, observing the glum mood among Southerners in Richmond, wrote, “The gleam of sunshine from Hatteras has thrown a dark shadow across the South.” The fall of Hatteras denied Confederate marauders the use of the Outer Banks as a base and strengthened the Federal blockade, effectively rendering the Pamlico Sound region defenseless. As the Wilmington Journal stated before the capture of the inlet, “Privateers are the militia of the seas. They are the protection that a nation that does not keep a standing navy has against one that does.” The smaller, weaker Confederate navy lost a key advantage in the naval war. As the London Times prophetically observed after learning the fate of Hatteras, “The South may resist long, and will certainly do so with energy, [but] her troubles will come by water.”\(^{12}\)


Clark responded to the loss with a workman-like approach. He wrote Secretary of War Walker immediately after the inlet’s fall, asking for troops to protect North Carolina from any further “Hessian” advance. “The loss of Fort Hatteras,” he told the secretary, “exposes so many points of attack and invasion, some of them of great importance from their connection with the railroads and public works, that I must ask for the immediate assistance of four regiments.”\footnote{Henry T. Clark to Leroy P. Walker, September 2, 1861, \textit{Official Records, Armies}, ser 1, 4:638.} After the passage of several weeks without getting any troops, Clark wrote again, asking for a shipment of powder at least. He requested that “if soldiers can not be spared [from Virginia], I may at least hope that the requisitions for arms and powder and other munitions may be speedily and favorably attended to. I desire to impress upon the Confederate Government the great and pressing importance of defending the coast of North Carolina.”\footnote{Henry T. Clark to Judah P. Benjamin, September 25, 1861, \textit{Official Records, Armies}, ser. 1, 4:658.} Clark’s requests did little good, though General Benjamin Huger in Norfolk did send a disgruntled detachment from the Third Georgia Regiment to Roanoke Island. The whole force available in North Carolina by the end of September 1861, however, equaled “seven regiments, one battalion, and one light battery.”\footnote{Henry T. Clark to Leroy P. Walker, September 8, 1861; S. Cooper to Brig. Gen. Joseph R. Anderson, September 3, 1861, \textit{Official Records, Armies}, ser 1, 4:639.}

After writing letters to various Confederate commanders, continually pressing the issue of the state’s defense, or lack thereof, Clark suggested that the command be divided and made more efficient. The governor wrote President Davis: “Sir, the possession of Hatteras affords the enemy a position or nucleus to form expeditions, almost without observation, to radiate to different points, even in opposite directions. A glance at the map will satisfy you it is too extensive a command even if it were readily accessible. Let
me therefore respectfully ask of you to divide our coast defense (now two divisions) into three or more. An examination of the map will satisfy you of the propriety of this suggestion.”16

Clark especially stressed the need for qualified military men to assist in the coastal defenses. Most of the troops available to the governor were untrained recruits and inexperienced officers. They were, he lamented, “taken from the ordinary occupations of civil life, with no military instruction or education except what they have acquired amidst the labors of camp life, and I hear serious complaint of the inefficiency of all the gun batteries from the want of instructors or suitable drill masters.”17 The governor again reiterated the need for multiple command posts, recommending Major General D. H. Hill to the Cape Fear forces. Confederate authorities acquiesced by sending Brigadier General Joseph Anderson, but never properly responded with enough men, guns, or engineers.

The loss of Hatteras also unleashed disaffection among the residents of the Outer Banks and other isolated coastal areas. The commercial fishermen who inhabited this region had little or no financial stake in the war and little love for the Confederate cause. The war, if anything, disrupted their livelihood. Describing the lack of “patriotic” ardor among the bankers, Confederate diarist Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, complained that “[the people] in that region are mere nomads owing allegiance to Neptune & Boreas only selling their services to the highest bidder.”18 As Flag Officer Louis M. Goldsborough, now commanding the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron,

---

18 Neptune was the Roman god of the sea and Boreas the Greek god of the north wind. Beth Crabtree and James W. Patton, eds., *Journal of a Secesh Lady: The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, 1860-1866* (Raleigh: Office of Archives and History, 1979), 86.
observed, “Five of the enemy’s soldiers came to us yesterday from Middletown, Hyde County, N. C., in a small schooner, loaded with wood, which they had taken, without authority, to effect their escape. They tell us that at least two-thirds of the population of both Hyde and Beaufort Counties are in favor of the Union, but that the poor are held in entire subjugation by the rich.”

Also noting the disaffection among the residents, Governor Clark wrote the secretary of war informing him that “seven or eight islanders had come over into Hyde County, bringing proclamations with them, and offering inducements to the citizens to take the [United States] oath of allegiance. These persons were immediately arrested, and are now held as prisoners.”

Clark’s arrest of the Unionist islanders reflects his possible response to the suspension of habeas corpus. Though the Confederate Congress would not authorize the suspension of habeas corpus until February 1862, making it an issue that Clark never really had to address, the governor had little compunction in turning dissenters over to Confederate authority. Indeed, Clark was supportive of aggressive action against “traitors.” While the islanders were under guard, Clark wrote Secretary Benjamin, asking, “In our State there is no law of treason which will reach these men, and as they are now held by the officers of the Confederate Army, I should like to know what disposition to make of them.” And, he continued, “I wish especially your opinion as to the legal course to be taken against these prisoners. I herewith inclose a copy of our [North Carolina] law of treason against the State, as defined by the recent Convention of our State.”

---

19 Louis M. Goldsborough to Gideon Welles, February 1, 1862, Official Records, Navies, ser. 1, 6:540.
The Hatteras affair dealt a blow not only to the Confederate war effort, but also to Clark’s political career, as attacks upon the governor increased. Confederate officer John W. Graham wrote his father, William A. Graham, former governor and prominent politician, saying that Clark “seems to be still in a stupor” after the fall of Hatteras. David Schenck, a Lincolnton judge, opined that “[Clark’s] incapacity is so enormous that it is becoming the subject of everyday remark.”22 The Wilmington Journal thought both Clark and his advisors were to blame. “Thank God the Military Board is gone,” proclaimed the editor. “Let Governor Clark do something to redeem the state from the disgrace inflicted upon her by the disaster [of Hatteras]. Brave men have fallen into the hands of the relentless [Benjamin] Butler while men lean back in their chairs at Raleigh and poo-poo at any demand for adequate protection.”23 But not all North Carolinians blamed Clark for the fall of the coast. Confederate colonel William J. Clarke (no relation) believed the governor had done all he could to protect the area. He wrote his wife, the journalist-poet Mary Bayard Devereux Clarke, that “I don’t think Gov. Clark is to blame about the coast defences & I hope you will always defend him. [Warren] Winslow [of the Military Board] is a rascal and unfit for his position.”24

Though the attacks upon the governor and his advisors were misguided, the chief executive made no attempt to defend himself publicly. Probably more than Clark, the Confederate War Department should have shouldered the blame for the fall of Hatteras.

---

22 John W. Graham to William A. Graham, September 22, 1861, Williams, Hamilton, and Peacock, Papers of William Alexander Graham, 5:296; David Schenck Papers, September 11, 1861, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library at Chapel Hill.
23 Journal (Wilmington), September 15, 1861.
24 William J. Clarke to Mary Bayard Clarke, September 21, 1861, Terrel A. Crow and Mary M. Barden, eds., Live Your Own Life: The Family Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke, 1854-1886 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).
The shortage of men, heavy artillery, and trained engineers were responsible for the quick collapse of the inlet’s fortifications. The responsibility of providing proper ordnance, skilled labor, and well-trained soldiers fell to Richmond authorities. The Confederacy had siphoned the best men to the Virginia front, leaving North Carolina virtually defenseless. In August 1861, before the loss of Hatteras, only six regiments defended the length of the state’s 400-mile-long coastline. The Confederate government, however, absolved itself of any fault in the matter and allowed Clark to suffer the full force of public opinion.25

North Carolina remained without sufficient troops because Confederate military strategy called for the consolidation of men on as few fronts as possible, and deemed North Carolina a secondary theatre of operations. Clark, however, thought that the Confederate government was ignoring serious problems in all parts of the Confederacy. He believed President Davis was failing to live up to his promise to defend North Carolina. In June 1861, the state Convention had sent Thomas Ruffin and William A. Graham as commissioners to Richmond to confer with Davis on his plans to defend North Carolina after the transfer of its state troops. The president told the commissioners not to worry about the defense of the state, saying, “the Confederate government will defend every part of all the States.” Secretary of War Walker reinforced the president’s commitment at the same meeting when he announced that “it is unnecessary for a State to keep up a separate force for its own defense” and “proper measures would be duly provided by the common government.”26

25 Browning, From Cape Charles to Cape Fear, 12.
26 “Report of the Commissioners sent by the Convention to confer with the President of the Confederate States in regard to the transfer of the troops raised by North Carolina to that Government, June 1861,”
“Proper measures” never materialized. Clark continually pressed the point of his state’s defenseless condition upon Richmond, but his pleas for assistance fell on deaf ears. He angrily wrote the War Department that “Besides the arms sent to Virginia in the hands of our volunteers, we have sent to Virginia 13,500 stands of arms, and we are now out of arms, and our soil is invaded and you refuse our request to send us back some of our own armed regiments to defend us. We have disarmed ourselves to arm you.”\textsuperscript{27}

And, writing again the next month, he complained that “We see just over our lines in Virginia, near Suffolk, two or three Regiments, well-armed, and well-drilled, who are not allowed to come to the defense of their homes. This is not a criticism of the military position, but rather a suggestion of anxiety to have their services when we are so seriously threatened.”\textsuperscript{28} As one diarist noted, “No[rth] Ca[rolina] has been neglected, her troops sent to other points, while she is left to the tender mercies of the enemy.”\textsuperscript{29}

Nevertheless, Clark continued to press for aggressive action. He encouraged the recapture of Hatteras Inlet before Union troops could solidify their foothold on the Outer Banks. Writing President Davis in December 1861, Clark said, “My favorite idea of defending the towns, rivers, and sounds on our coast was to recapture Hatteras. I don’t think there has been a day since its capture that 3,000 men could not have retaken or destroyed it.”\textsuperscript{30} But Clark’s advice about recapturing Hatteras went unheeded. In the end, the Confederate War Department ignored his suggestions and requests, and the defense of North Carolina remained secondary to the needs of the Virginia battlefront.

\textit{Documents of the Convention of 1861}, North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.


\textsuperscript{28} Henry T. Clark to Judah P. Benjamin, October 26, 1861, Governors Letter Books.

\textsuperscript{29} Diary of Thomas Bragg, entry of February 14, 1862, Southern Historical Collection.

The Confederacy’s decision not to defend coastal North Carolina to any appreciable degree led to further Federal encroachment in eastern North Carolina and gave the Union army a base from which to threaten vital railways, ports, and even the Confederate capital itself.

After the capture of Hatteras, the next most obvious point of attack in North Carolina by Union troops was Roanoke Island. [Figure 3] The island was strategically situated between the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds, a vital link in the system of waterways that connected the state’s river network. More importantly, ownership of the island ensured control of direct links to Norfolk, the Confederacy’s most important naval base. Recognizing the need to hold such a strategic point, Clark wrote to Davis:

> I will invite your special attention to Roanoke Island. It was understood that [its fortification] was to have been done immediately after the fall of Hatteras, but yet it is so imperfectly done as to amount to no protection. A little promptness may even now effect much; for the possession of Albemarle Sound would entail one of the heaviest calamities of the war, not only to North Carolina, but would cut off Norfolk, and ensure its capture or starvation. The direction of a superior engineer officer at Roanoke Island for a few weeks might now render the most material service of the war. Having failed to impress these views [to undertake offensive action] on the various commanders, I must now urge the fortification of Roanoke Island to defend one-half of the exposed territory; and it is necessary for the superintendence of a separate command, as the other positions on Pamlico require.\(^{31}\)

---

Despite Clark’s pleas, Roanoke Island easily fell to Union troops under the command of Ambrose E. Burnside in February 1862.\(^{32}\)

Still, President Davis was unwilling to comply with Clark’s advice or his requests for troops because he believed any withdrawal of troops would “weaken and demoralize the army in Virginia.”\(^{33}\) Clark finally realized that after the Roanoke Island debacle the defense of the North Carolina coast would not be a high priority for the Confederate government. Rather than waste further time making requests that were not likely to be granted, the governor acted on his own volition to improve the state’s defenses. The absence of soldiers in North Carolina prompted Clark to enact a statewide draft on the militia in early March 1862, more than a month before the Confederacy adopted the Conscription Act.\(^{34}\) Soldiers were desperately needed, as one zealous Confederate colonel, William J. Clarke of the Twenty-Fourth North Carolina, let the governor know. “I need men,” proclaimed the colonel. “Militia will answer my purpose. I do not, as many do, undervalue the militia. With them we could line the banks of the rivers and kill every man who exposed himself.” Apparently the colonel preferred to blame the governor rather than Confederate authorities for his shortage of troops. Closing with an ominous warning to the governor, he declared: “It rests with you to succor me. But if you neglect to do so, remember that my blood and that of my men lies at your door.”\(^{35}\)

By calling up the militia, Clark hoped to raise enough troops to repel Union forces from the coastal regions of the state. But the militia proved to be too little too late. Since

\(^{32}\) Barrett, *Civil War in North Carolina*, 74-84; Browning, *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 24-27. The fall of Roanoke and New Bern required the state to abandon the large salt works operation in Morehead City and relocate to Wilmington. Ella Lonn, *Salt as a Factor in the Confederacy* (University of Alabama Press, 1965), 99.


\(^{35}\) William J. Clarke to Henry T. Clark, March 1, 1862, Governors Papers, State Archives, Raleigh.
Roanoke Island, the Federals had steadily tightened their grip in the east and by March 1862, Union troops under the command of Burnside had captured New Bern, a key river port town and commercial center for eastern North Carolina. Soon, all ports in North Carolina, except Wilmington, would be captured and closed to Confederate intercourse. From its toehold in eastern North Carolina, the Union army would launch raids into the interior of the state and threaten the supply line and rear of troops in Virginia.

In addition to his concern about the threat posed by a Federal army entrenched in much of the Tar Heel State’s Coastal Plain, Clark worried about the devastating effect that the Union blockade would have on commerce and supplies for North Carolina as the U. S. Navy tightened its cordon on the Southern coastline. But unlike his successor, Zebulon B. Vance, who became governor in September 1862, Clark did not develop an effective blockade-running system. In his address to the General Assembly in August 1861, Clark encouraged self-reliance. He maintained that southern dependence upon northern industry had been a severe weakness. “It is mortifying to our State pride to think that we have hitherto been so dependent on the Northern States,” he insisted. Clark told the state legislators that North Carolina should strive not only for political independence, but economic and industrial self-sufficiency, and he encouraged the state to fund the production of war material. Self-reliance, Clark declared, would render the blockade ineffective:

The blockade of our coast and the non-intercourse around our borders have established two very important facts. First, we have become entirely dependent on the North. The second and more important fact is that we

---

have the means and material for supplying all these wants within our own borders. The continuance of this war and the blockade for two or three years may inflict much personal suffering, but it will surely accomplish our national and commercial independence. Once check and turn off the great flood of northern trade, and southern labor, southern trade, and southern capital will roll their strength together to establish southern prosperity and independence.”

Clark reminded the legislators that the war could last for “two or three years” and that North Carolina must develop the industry necessary to offset the blockade. Adjutant General James Martin, however, suggested a more immediate solution. Martin believed the state should purchase a ship to transport supplies from England, rather than rely on the shrinking cargo space the state was forced to share with the Confederate government. The governor, however, believed such a venture beyond the state’s constitutional authority, and he continued to cling to his scheme of self-sufficiency. His successor, Vance, did indeed buy a blockade-runner. The iron-hulled sidewheel steamer, the Advance, was the most successful blockade-runner of the war.

Despite his failure to recognize the importance of a state blockade-runner, Clark did monitor shipping that passed through state ports, especially Wilmington, the state’s largest, most important port. He actively attempted to prevent foreign vessels from leaving Wilmington loaded with cargoes that ship owners intended to sell to Northern states. This monitoring of trade included support for the Confederacy’s “cotton diplomacy” policy, which restricted trade in an effort to enlist foreign assistance in lifting

the blockade. Clark revealed his sentiments in a letter to Confederate Secretary of State Robert M. Hunter, saying, “I approved of the policy of controlling the exports of cotton and naval stores as based on the doctrine of self-preservation.”

Clark’s enforcement of a tight export policy, however, placed the governor on a collision course with Great Britain, and in the middle of an international, diplomatic incident. In August 1861, overly excited members of the Wilmington “Committee of Safety,” a quasi-legal body of “patriotic citizens” led by the mayor of the city, passed an ordinance forbidding vessels entering town “in ballast” to leave the port with cargo. One of the first ships detained under the new “law” was a British vessel, the Carrie Sanford, recently arrived from Havana, Cuba. Inflaming matters more, the zealous citizens believed the schooner to be a Yankee ship carrying on illicit trade under a false flag. The Safety Committee agreed only to release the ship if it could be proven that the vessel was indeed British.

Captain Daggett of the Carrie Sanford contacted the British vice-consul in Wilmington, Donald McRae, and appealed for assistance. McRae contacted his superior, Robert Bunch, chief consul for the North and South Carolina Department in Charleston.

---

40 Henry T. Clark to Robert M. Hunter, October 15, 1861, Henry Toole Clark Papers (microfilm), Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
41 For a discussion of British attitudes toward the South, see Christopher Ewan, “The Emancipation Proclamation and British Public Opinion,” The Historian 67 (Spring 2005), 1-19; R. J. Blackett, Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).
42 Henry T. Clark to Jefferson Davis, September 14, 1861, Official Records, Armies, ser. 2, 3:720; Journal (Wilmington), August 1, 8, 1861; Milledge L. Bonham, Jr., British Consuls in the Confederacy (New York, Columbia University, 1911), 97. The Safety Committee had gathered in August “for the purpose of taking into consideration measures essential for their own security,” and was comprised of zealous Confederate patriots.
43 McRae appears not to have been British. Clark said, “Vice-consul D. MacRay [sic] of Wilmington, I only know as a citizen of North Carolina.” Henry T. Clark to Robert M. Hunter, October 15, 1861, Henry Toole Clark Papers (microfilm), Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Bonham, British Consuls in the Confederacy, 97.
Bunch, furious at the detaining of a British ship by a “self-constituted body” of unruly Wilmingtonians, decided first to confer with Governor Clark rather than Confederate authorities in Richmond. He immediately wrote the governor, asking “that the intended wrong to a British vessel will be promptly and efficaciously addressed by Your Excellency.” More than a month passed and Clark did not respond. The British consul then directed a letter to Confederate Secretary of State Robert M. Hunter. The Confederate government attempted to turn the letter into an incident that would force British recognition. Bunch’s correspondence apparently failed to acknowledge the official nature of the Confederate State Department. He had addressed Hunter as “Mister,” rather than “Confederate Secretary of State” and did not write “Confederate State Department” anywhere on the letter. Hunter thus ignored the correspondence because, as it was claimed, Bunch had not “properly addressed Mr. Hunter’s official character.” Allowing the British consul some time to fume over this legality, Hunter finally did reply, suggesting the British consul rewrite his letters by addressing them to a de jure Confederate government. Bunch claimed that he could not do so, or admit to any intent of making a mistake, because the letters were addressed to a “de facto government.”

While this diplomatic wrangling continued, Clark finally replied to Bunch after more than a month, revealing the governor’s support of Confederate authority and pressing for official British recognition of the Confederacy as a legitimate nation:

---

Information has been laid before me that an illicit trade was carrying on between our ports and the United States under the protection of the British flag, and that Mr. Vice-Consul McRae either failed to sustain the good faith of his government, or was himself implicated. The investigation of this has occupied my time, but for want of intercourse with parties in the United States, I have made no satisfactory conclusions. I trust this will account for my delay. You allude to the ‘disagreeable necessity’ of making a remonstrance to the authorities in Richmond. That is the proper tribunal, and I see nothing disagreeable in resorting to it. It certainly would be agreeable to me that you should pursue that course. The ‘claim for damages’ which you notify me will probably be made against us, I would suggest that they would be more suitably be brought against the United States, with whom you have a treaty to trade with Wilmington, but who you allow to block you out the Port, and despite the terms of the treaty refuse you to load in or sail in or out of Wilmington. You will not make a treaty with us and consequently trade becomes a matter of policy – and it surely is not our policy to allow vessels to come in ballast and load out with that which alone sustains our trade or renders it desirable. Free trade is our cherished policy but there must be reciprocity. We would be glad to establish some relations of trade with you and we would faithfully carry out all such and would always listen and respect which you as Consular Agent would bring before us.\footnote{Henry T. Clark to Robert Bunch, October 4, 1861, Governors Letter Books. Bunch did press the claim for damages to the Confederate government, but to no avail. See Henry T. Clark to Robert Hunter, October 15, 1861, Henry Toole Clark Papers (microfilm), Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.}

Though British recognition never materialized, the \textit{Carrie Sanford} was eventually released. The ship ran the blockade a second time into Wilmington the following November.\footnote{Bonham, \textit{British Consuls in the Confederacy}, 99(n).}
Chapter 4
“With no man to protect us”: The Home Front

As war governor, Clark faced overwhelming responsibilities and unprecedented challenges within North Carolina. As the war stretched into its second year, the people of the Tar Heel State came to expect more and more from their governor, and they increasingly looked to him to provide strong, active leadership. The new problems created by the great sectional conflict placed on Clark’s shoulders a greater burden than had ever weighed upon any prewar chief executive. The role of antebellum governors had traditionally been confined to administering and enforcing the laws of the state legislature and the legal decisions of the state courts. The circumstances which Clark faced, however, called for him to think and act anew in order to deal with the many difficulties inflicted upon a state caught in the upheaval and devastation of a modern war. The Civil War affected every aspect of North Carolinians’ daily lives. The ever-growing scarcity of food supplies and the shortages of essential commodities such as salt, medicine, leather, and cloth, as well as the drain of men from the home front by the unpopular Confederate conscription acts, created hardship and disaffection among the populace. Speculation by some merchants and impressment of supplies by armies in the field exacerbated the problem of shortages.

Faced with such conditions, Clark gave a creditable performance as the administrative head of North Carolina’s wartime government. With stubborn determination, he prosecuted the war effort, supporting and enforcing the Confederate government’s policies, including the unpopular conscription laws. But Clark failed to adapt the traditional role of governor to meet the war’s challenges within North Carolina.
As did his antebellum predecessors, Clark relied almost exclusively upon existing laws for guidance in dealing with wartime demands and crisis. Unlike his successor, Zebulon B. Vance, he did nothing to mobilize public opinion or support. Nor did he attempt innovations such as Vance’s state-operated blockade running system to alleviate home-front shortages and keep North Carolina soldiers adequately supplied. Clark’s naïve belief that the state possessed the “means and material for supplying all wants within our borders” did not take into account the state’s lack of specie, rail transportation, and industrial infrastructure.

The governor did, however, work diligently within the law to alleviate certain shortages, especially those which had a direct effect on the overall prosecution of the war effort. One of the most serious shortages faced by the state was of salt, one of the most important commodities of the day. Salt was required in the preservation of food and was an essential substance in the maintenance of life. Much of the commercial salt used by North Carolinians came overland from Saltville, Virginia, and from small-scale sea salt operations scattered about the coastal region. With its large expanse of coastline, and utter lack of industrial salt mines, Clark believed the state must increase its salt production from all sources. As a result of Clark’s leadership, North Carolina was one of the most proactive states in the Confederacy in supplying its salt needs.

The governor took an active and aggressive stance in meeting the state’s salt demand and appropriated money for the purpose of salt production. He employed

---

1 For Vance’s performance as governor, see McKinney, *Zeb Vance*; also Joe A. Mobley, “War Governor of the South: North Carolina’s Zeb Vance in the Confederacy” (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, forthcoming).
scientific help from the state’s geologist, Professor Ebenezer Emmons of the University of North Carolina.\(^5\) Emmons investigation of underground salt-water deposits in Chatham County prompted Clark to contact John M. Worth, the state’s salt commissioner, who was given wide latitude by state authorities to obtain this most vital of substances.\(^6\) The state convention had incorporated the “Chatham Salt Mining and Manufacturing Company” in January 1862, and Clark asked Worth to procure a boring machine to assist the company in extracting salt from ground deposits, writing, “Let me therefore urge you to use the authority and means in your hands to bore in that region [Chatham County] and do so immediately. I want to leave no expedient untried for the supply of salt and I will render you every assistance in my power.”\(^7\)

Clark appointed two commissioners to travel to Saltville, Virginia. “I desire to lose no time in carrying out the manufacturing and supplying of salt,” he instructed the commissioners, N. W. Woodfin and George W. Mordecai, who negotiated a contract with Stuart Buchanan and Company for enough salt brine to produce 300,000 bushels a year at a charge of 75 cents per bushel, and a supply of cast iron salt pans used in its manufacture.\(^8\) The state was required to construct furnaces and kilns to boil the brine into

---


\(^8\) Henry T. Clark to N. W. Woodfin, July 5, 1862, Governors Letter Books; Contract with N. W. Woodfin, Salt Commissioner for the State, July 1, 1862, Governors Letter Books.
a usable commodity. Clark advanced $35,000 from the state treasury to encourage the work.⁹

Finding labor to manufacture, pack, and ship the salt, however, presented a problem. Many laborers were often conscientious objectors, such as Quakers, or disaffected citizens, but their numbers did not meet the need. To make up the shortage, the state impressed the labor, often from its small free-black community. Clark agreed with Commissioner Worth’s recommendation to impress free blacks as laborers, granting the commissioner “authority to impress one hundred and fifty free negroes as requested.”¹⁰

Clark was keen on ensuring the success of the state’s salt production and urged the work to continue, even into the last days of his tenure. The governor wrote Worth in late August 1862: “Put everything to work and make salt and you will receive the thanks and commendations of the people. So let me urge you to spare no labor, money, or pain in making salt.”¹¹ Governor Vance acknowledged Clark’s success and reported to the General Assembly November 17, 1862, that due to his predecessor’s efforts, the state was producing over 1200 bushels of salt a day.¹² Clark’s business acumen in procuring salt was successful and his work provided a solid foundation for Vance to supply the state with salt for the remainder of the war.

Gunpowder was another scarce, yet sorely needed, commodity and its manufacture offers an excellent example of Confederate-State relations in prosecuting the

---

war effort. In September 1861, the North Carolina General Assembly passed an act to “encourage the Manufacture of gunpowder,” and Clark advanced ten thousand dollars to George Waterhouse and Michael Bowes, presidents of a Raleigh construction firm, to construct a powder mill.\textsuperscript{13} The mill was located on House Creek in Wake County and by the middle of 1862 was producing 2,000 pounds of powder a day. An explosion in June, however, destroyed the original mill, killing four laborers. Not to be deterred, Clark had the state purchase a paper mill and advanced twelve thousand dollars to convert the mill for powder production. The mill proved a success, and by the winter of 1862, the factory had doubled its production to 4000 pounds per week.\textsuperscript{14}

The lion’s share of powder, however, was sold to the Confederate government. By the end of 1862, the state had “turned over to the Confederate government over half a million dollars’ worth of powder.” Though the powder was turned over to the Confederate Ordnance Bureau, the governor pressed his concern for his state’s defense. “I suppose,” he wrote to Josiah Gorgas, chief of the Ordnance Bureau, “it is part of your duty and wishes to supply powder to the N[orth] Carolina batteries and will readily sanction my course in giving them the preference under present circumstances.” Clark also made considerable efforts to locate sources of saltpeter and niter, sending agents throughout the state. He informed Gorgas that “I am very solicitous about the supply of Salt Peter and designed sending agents in any and all directions that will not conflict [with] your purchases. Send me transportation tickets for [my agents]. I shall send out

\textsuperscript{13} Journal of the Senate, Second Extra Session 1861, 74; Public Laws of the State of North Carolina, Second Extra Session, 1861, 3.

\textsuperscript{14} Zebulon B. Vance to the General Assembly, November 17, 1862, Official Records, Armies, ser. 4, 2:184.
these agents, but will instruct them not to enter into competition with the Confederate States if they can discover it.”

Clark was less successful in dealing with North Carolinians’ disaffection with the Confederate war effort. Citizens in the Quaker Belt in the central Piedmont of the state, and in the western counties, disapproved of the governor’s call for militia. One Polk County man wrote Clark warning of the disaffection there, saying “your proclamation calling for volunteers will not receive a cordial response in those counties along the blue-ridge [mountains]. There are some among my acquaintances who say that they never will go into the army unless compelled to do so. And that the war is on account of slavery and the rich may fight it out.” Other disaffected citizens held public meetings to protest the militia draft. Eventually a sizable peace movement arose in the Quaker Belt. John Hilton, a renowned Unionist whom Clark had jailed earlier in 1861 for leading anti-Confederate meetings, denounced conscription and agitated for peace in a series of meetings in Davidson County, near Thomasville. According to historian William T. Auman, these “peace meetings” became the “forerunners of the meetings that inaugurated the peace movement in the state during the summer of 1863.”

Immediately upon taking office, Clark had been informed of a particularly vocal group of dissenters in the Quaker belt. The group of about one hundred and fifty men led

---

15 Standard, June 11, 1862; Clark, Histories of the Several Regiments, 1:44; Barrett, Civil War in North Carolina, 25; Henry T. Clark to Josiah Gorgas, January 10, 1862, Governors Letter Books; Murray, Wake: Capital County of North Carolina, 469.
17 Henry M. Earle to Henry T. Clark, March 8, 1862, Governors Papers.
by Hilton (the same) proclaimed its “[opposition] to the Southern Confederacy, and openly advocate the Union.” These were men of “considerable property (not slave owners)” who mustered under the United States flag and drilled with muskets. A Confederate sympathizer, James Moore of High Point, wrote the governor, saying “[I think] it best to inform the Executive of the State of the condition of affairs, and let him take the necessary legal steps to investigate and suppress the movement.” Clark replied, “I have written to John W. Thomas Esq on the subject of your communication and requested the immediate action of the Civil Authorities of Davidson [County], [requesting] the arrest of the offenders and binding them to the next Superior Court, and in the meantime for their good behavior, failing which that they ought to be committed to jail.” Clark sent state troops to put down the disturbance and had Hilton arrested and jailed for “making many threats of violence.”

Clark eventually issued a proclamation denouncing the peace conspirators as traitors. He authorized the militia to “procure such proofs as may be legally used to establish the guilt of the parties.” He further directed the sheriff “to prepare for the arrest of any of the parties implicated and to notify [the governor] that if necessary for this purpose, a sufficient force will be at [the sheriff’s] disposal.” Two days later, on March 6, Clark ordered 300 state troops into Davidson County to aid in “keeping the peace,” authorizing Colonel Spier Whitaker to “capture all the arms in the infected district,” and

---

to “send down whatever information you may collect. If necessary we may increase our force. If any force is used we desire it to be effectual.”24

North Carolinians in all parts of the state, but especially those in the west, became increasingly critical of the Confederacy. Many westerners, no doubt, agreed with one man from the region who, reporting the sentiments of his neighbors, complained that “We have many Union men under guise among us [saying they] have no negroes to defend and will not take up arms for the South.”25 Clark, however, believed that much of the problem relating to disaffection in the west came from “traitors” in east Tennessee who were crossing the border into North Carolina and encouraging Unionism. He asked the Confederate War Department for assistance in halting such activity. In November 1861, for example, he informed Secretary of War Judah Benjamin that “For the last few days I have received numerous communications from the North Carolina counties bordering on East Tennessee asking assistance. That portion of North Carolina is now very weak and exposed from the large and undue portion of volunteers furnished from this section. There are now two Regiments just organized [in the western areas]. I can arm these Regiments with some Flint & Steel muskets and some Hunting Rifles I have bought in the Country. Shall I send the Regiments to East Tennessee? All the Western border of North Carolina are demanding prompt assistance, this is all I can offer.” Receiving no assistance, Clark ordered one regiment of state troops under Robert B. Vance to Madison County to check further Unionist activity.26

---

24 Henry T. Clark to Spier Whitaker, March 6, 1862, Governors Letter Books.
25 Alex J. Cansler to Henry T. Clark, August 20, 1861, Governors Papers.
As the war expanded, the need for additional troops became more apparent, and by January 1862, Clark had very few men left that he could call upon. Militia companies were being called up, sworn in as state troops, and transferred to regular Confederate army units. Many of the men who volunteered for militia service had done so to stay close to home where they could more easily defend their kith and kin. These men may have thought they could escape the distant, deadly battlefields of Virginia but soon discovered they were not exempt. It was Clark’s responsibility to enforce the transfer of troops, and his enforcement of the law was not popular among the militia. Clark’s compliance with Confederate directives undoubtedly damaged his political standing. A state militia officer wrote his brother telling of the discontent among the rank and file with Clark’s severity:

I have never seen so much disaffection among men at the manner in which they have been treated. They do not do that much but abuse Gov Clark and the County Court of Edgecombe. About ½ of our company has been sworn in as state troops. I understand there is great dissatisfaction in Edgecombe at this thing as well as in the Companies. They are now talking of getting up a petition to send to Gov Clark remonstrating against the thing. And if they do every man in each company will sign it. I think our County has not been treated right and must confess I do not feel satisfied as having to stay here. I am in hopes that Gov Clark will take some steps to have this company sent home as nearly all the men have families.27

27 Richard H Garrett to Charles Garrett, February 6, 1862, Miscellaneous Papers, 1861-1912, series 1, vol. 4, p. 9, State Archives, Raleigh. Garrett was a 1st Lieutenant in the 30th Regiment of state militia and from Clark’s home county of Edgecombe.
Clark, however, was not about to send any soldier home. The need for men was constant, and of the many problems that Clark faced during his short term as governor none was greater than the difficulty of enforcing the Confederate Conscription Act. To acquire the large numbers of men needed to maintain the war effort and fearing the loss of thousands of the twelve-month enlistees, the Confederate Congress enacted the Conscription Act in April 1862.\textsuperscript{28} The law called into service all white men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, and subsequent legislation in September 1862 would extend the age of service from eighteen to forty-five, and ultimately from seventeen to fifty by February 1864. By the end of the war, conscription had effectively mobilized nearly one million Southern men, or 80 percent of its eligible white manpower. In North Carolina alone, over 21,000 men were conscripted: one-quarter of all conscripts enrolled in the Confederate army.\textsuperscript{29} The act touched virtually every white family in the South and proved to be the most hated of all Confederate policies. As one North Carolina soldier writing home said, “I am doing pretty well only for one thing and that is Congress is about to pass a bill to keep all of the men in the field that have not enlisted for the war and bring out all the men between the ages of 18 and 35. But I hope they will not do it


for I want to come home. But if they do press us I dont know what will be the consequences for the men seem to think it is not justice and that is what I think.”

Some soldiers, upon hearing the news that they were to be pressed into service for the duration of the war, simply took leave of the army, if only for a few weeks. More than 23,000 North Carolinians deserted during the war, and estimates claim that the Army of Northern Virginia was deprived of one-third of its effective fighting force during the September 1862 Antietam campaign because of straggling and desertion. To counteract the effects from this loss of manpower, Secretary of War George W. Randolph wrote Clark for help in capturing violators. “Our Armies,” Randolph explained, “are so much weakened by desertion and by the absence of officers and men without leave that we are unable to reap the fruits of our victories. I must therefore beg your Excellency’s aid in bringing back to our colours all deserters.”

Clark made a concerted effort to apprehend deserters, but it proved difficult in some parts of the state where disaffection ran high, especially in the Quaker belt counties. To entice deserters in that area back into the army, Clark offered a reprieve to violators in Randolph County, proclaiming, “all such persons as are absent from the army without leave, if they will report themselves to me [or to other authorized agents] and return to their duty on or before the 15th day of August [1862], they shall be received and restored

without any punishment.” Those who refused the governor’s pardon, however, “will be captured and punished as the law provides.”

The draft was a difficult adjustment for the independent-minded southern soldier, and a radical departure from the volunteer method of raising an army. Confederate conscription took recruiting out of the governor’s hands, ending the volunteer system and making Confederate military service compulsory with few exceptions. Clark had no control over the conscripts or their destination: this limited his ability to defend the state. As he stated often, “The passage of the Conscript Act takes all further control and management of the military out of my hands.” The Confederacy shipped the conscripts north to Virginia, or to the western theatre, leaving North Carolina depleted of manpower. Reacting to their weakened condition, state commanders bombarded the governor’s office with requests for more troops. Clark, however, had no troops to send, telling one militia officer in Kinston that “I would gladly comply with your request [for troops] but I have none. Neither have I any control over the conscripts to say where they shall go. I can only recommend you to keep a bold and threatening front, and keep Burnside [in New Bern] restless.”

Though conscription placed Clark in a difficult political situation, he nevertheless enforced the Confederate conscription law and believed it to be necessary in the successful prosecution of the war. Whatever doubts he may have harbored over Confederate hegemony, he was willing to set aside his belief in state rights to support the

33 Henry T. Clark to the People of Randolph, August 4, 1862, Governors Letter Books.
34 Albert Burton Moore, Conscript and Conflict in the Confederacy (New York: Macmillan Co., 1924), 16; David Donald, “Died of Democracy,” Why the North Won the Civil War, 90.
national war effort. Declaring his intention to support the draft shortly after the Confederate Congress passed the conscription act, Clark wrote, “I desire to carry out the Conscription Act fairly and to the fullest extent of the wants of the country.” He informed President Davis in April 1862 that “I propose to turn [the 12 thousand] over to you for service in the State, as designed by the law. My design was to furnish the full quota required for the Confederate States, and also to furnish any additional quota that might hereafter be required.” With the passage of the conscription act, Clark quickly mobilized an additional 12,000 men. Proclaiming his support more emphatically to President Davis a few months later, the governor declared that because he was “Feeling a deep interest and even anxiety in the speedy and faithful execution of the conscript law, I cannot allow myself to be represented as opposed or even neutral toward it.”

Clark recognized the prevalence of opposition to conscription in the Tar Heel State, but he believed his stern enforcement of the law was effective in controlling disaffection. In a report to the Council of State in March 1862, the governor proclaimed, “The draft which has been ordered in conjunction with the recent disasters on our coast has developed a spirit of disloyalty in a few sections of some of our middle counties. I have taken prompt measures and with much success putting these manifestations down.”

Conscription, though despised by many, filled the ranks. Some men enlisted before the law went into effect, volunteering rather than waiting to be drafted. Some of the twelve-month enlistees rejoined, if only to get the thirty-day furlough. Men had

37 Henry T. Clark to George W. Randolph, April 24, 1862, Governors Letter Books.
40 Henry T. Clark to the Council of State, March 18, 1862, Governors Papers.
thronged the enlistment centers in the early days of the war when enthusiasm ran high and the harshness of warfare had yet to be realized, but as time passed, many began to resist army service.

Some men, however, signed on voluntarily with the more adventurous, mounted units called “Rangers.” Authorized by the Confederate Government in April 1862 under the Partisan Ranger Law, these bands of irregulars harassed Union troops and their supply lines in eastern North Carolina, often capturing arms and munitions. The Confederacy offered monetary rewards for all war matériel turned over to the government. Critics claimed that the rangers disrupted regular army enlistments and that their guerilla actions exceeded the intent of the law.\(^{41}\)

Clark was such a critic. He thoroughly disliked ranger units, believing their existence was a drain on the treasury (the state had to furnish the horses) and, more importantly, interfered with the prosecution of the Conscription Act. Writing Secretary of War George W. Randolph, Clark said tersely (if not rudely), “I called your attention to the great number of partisan-ranger companies getting up in every section of our State [and] their inefficiency unless well officered. I greatly regret that it cannot be made manifest to you what little service they are and what a great and serious damage they are doing to the conscript act and through it to the whole country. Disband them and return them to the conscripts. If that cannot be done it would be of some service to the country and save a deal of expense if they were dismounted.”\(^{42}\)


The Conscription dragnet also rounded up non-citizens. Confederate agents would scour the country and press eligible men into service, and those pressed quickly made appeals to civil authorities. Agents drafted a Mr. Robert Gadd, “a subject of her Britannic majesty’s,” who was “called upon to do military duty for the Confederate States.” Gadd was living in Cabarrus County near Charlotte, but had remained a British citizen. Claiming immunity, he appealed his conscription to Confederate, state, and British authorities. Investigating Gadd’s appeal, Clark wrote Robert Bunch, the British consul in Charleston South Carolina, telling him, “I will further state to you that other persons claiming to be British subjects have appealed directly to me. In all such cases I have ordered an immediate enquiry to ascertain the facts and where they really are British subjects, their rights shall be respected.” An investigation revealed that Gadd was indeed a British citizen, and Clark had him released from military duty.43

For draft-eligible men, however, avoidance of military service was difficult. There were only two ways to escape the draft, substitution and exemption, and both created serious problems throughout Confederate society. Substitution, the practice whereby a conscript hired someone to take his place in the army, proved unpopular with the poor who could not afford a substitute. To legally acquire a substitute, the draftee and the man paid to take his place visited the nearest camp of instruction, and if the substitute was found to be exempt from service, and deemed fit, the principal would receive a discharge from the camp commandant.44 The law, however, remained confusing to

---

44 Official Records, Armies, ser 4, 1:694-695, 975, 1099. Substitution was allowed by most states early in the war before the draft law was enacted. The infamous “Twenty-Negro rule” that exempted one white man for every twenty slaves was not passed until October 1862, and therefore was not an issue Clark faced.
many. As historian Albert Moore observed, the law “was not generally understood or accepted.” Clark received frequent inquiries concerning substitution, and the governor informed the correspondents that he simply had no control over the matter. Replying to a Bladen County citizen, the governor explained, “In answer to your enquiry on the subject of substitutes, I reply that the Conscript Act is a law of the Confederacy and the State authorities have no control over it, consequently appeals to me are useless—all the information I have is what has been published by Richmond authorities.”

Exemption was the other avenue for those wishing to escape military service, but exemption was virtually impossible for those persons not employed in capacities specifically exempted by the conscription act. The wide scope of the draft drained men from all walks of life, increasing difficulties at home and creating disaffection with the Confederate cause. Average North Carolinians, a large proportion of whom already lived on the margins of existence, felt more acutely the hardships caused by war and the drain of labor from their communities. Virtually every aspect of daily life was disrupted and basic public services were curtailed for want of qualified personnel. Persons seeking an exemption not covered by the law, or those suffering an extenuating circumstance, had little recourse except to petition civil authorities, many of whom were often intent on simply filling the army’s ranks. Entire communities would form a petition to keep skilled laborers or professionals at home in an attempt to stem the loss of manpower. For


Moore, *Conscription and Conflict in the Confederacy*, 27.


example, more than a fifty people in a Chatham County community signed a petition to have Joshua C. Causey discharged from the service, as he was “the only public blacksmith in our District.” The petitioners entreated the governor to exempt Causey, claiming “there will be no one that can shoe our horses or keep our tools in order,” and without proper tools, the community would “therefore be unable to make bread to feed our families,” or “support our gallant soldiers in the field.”

Citizens in Asheville petitioned the governor to allow exemptions for doctors, pleading, “the undersigned citizens of the County of Buncombe take the liberty of representing to your Excellency that the Conscription Act will deprive the County of Physicians sufficient to supply the wants of the people.”

Though the Confederate Congress eventually exempted blacksmiths, physicians, and some others from military service in October 1862, Clark enforced the conscript law to the letter during his tenure and did not plead with the War Department on behalf of those requesting an exemption—a decision that undoubtedly undermined public support for his administration.

Clark also received petitions from women saddled with the burdens caused by the drain of men taken from home. Women suffered greatly when their husbands and sons were called to the battlefields, leaving many wives vulnerable and often overwhelmed with the added responsibilities of maintaining a home or farm with little support or protection. A letter to Clark from a High Point woman is a typical expression of the difficult circumstances endured by women and their families: “I am a poor woman with one daughter,” she writes. “My present husband is afflicted so that he cannot make a

---

48 Petition from Chatham County to Henry T. Clark, March 11, 1862, Governors Papers.
support of me. I have five sons [that] have all volunteered and have been in service ever since the War commenced. Their [sic] has been no provision made for my support. If you can contribute any thing to me I will ever be grateful to you.” In July 1862, more than a dozen “Ladies of Halifax County” petitioned the governor to exempt “J. C. Randolph” from military service, asking that he “may be left at home for our protection. We all reside within a mile and a half from his farm with no man to protect us.” But Clark could do little to aid the destitute families of soldiers because the state legislature did not pass a state law providing for poor relief until December 1862, about three months after he left office.51

Basic commodities, which were in limited supply before 1861, became increasingly scarce as the war continued, worsening the plight of North Carolinians. Inflation, speculation, and extortion were common, exacerbating the situation. Parts of North Carolina had suffered also from various debilitating livestock diseases and crop blights, which limited the availability of corn and grain, meat, and leather. The dire situation fueled high prices and created circumstances rife for speculation. As the Wilmington Journal reported in the summer of 1861, “The supply of meat demands grave attention. Hogs have been terribly thinned out by disease. The scarcity of food for several past winters has greatly diminished the number of cattle.”52 With the approval of the legislature, Clark issued a proclamation in November 1861 prohibiting “the exportation beyond the limits of the State of all Bacon, Pork, Beef, Leather, men’s shoes,

---


52 Journal (Wilmington), July 18, 1861.
Woolen Goods, Jeans, Linseys, and Blankets, etc., etc., except through the orders of the proper Officers of the Confederate Government or of the State Government.”

Procuring enough cloth for the state’s troops remained a priority, and because cloth was in such high demand, Clark issued an additional proclamation in March 1862, declaring that, “I do hereby prohibit the exportation of beyond the limits of the State of all cotton and woolen goods.” To offset the shortages of woolen goods, the governor asked the state’s women to help: “Let the Ladies and their friends prepare for such underclothes as [the Confederate soldiers] need and, for their coats and pants. Let their Captains make a requisition on Richmond and if Richmond can’t furnish right off, bring the requisition to Raleigh and we will.”

Clark also sought the assistance of other states in the enforcement of his proclamations against exportation. Governor Francis W. Pickens of South Carolina agreed. He had asked Clark for cooperation between the states. “We desire to act in concert,” remarked Pickens, “I would be glad if you would inform me if the exportation of any provisions of any kind has been prohibited from North Carolina. The strength and support of one state is the strength of every other state in this great revolution. We should stand together, as far as our mutual supplies are concerned, as one in the same.”

Despite such efforts by southern governors, shortages continued. The blockade tightened, further limiting goods and commodities. Inflation rose and extortion became endemic throughout the Confederacy. The lack of supplies, labor shortages, and the want

53 Proclamation by the Governor of North Carolina, November 7, 1861, Governors Letter Books. “Linseys” refers to coarse linen fabric, also known as “linsey-woolsey.”
54 Proclamation by the Governor of North Carolina, March 28, 1862, Governors Letter Books; Journal (Wilmington), April 10, 1862.
56 Francis W. Pickens to Henry T. Clark, April 18, 1862, Governors Papers.
of manufacture in the state created a difficult, if not insurmountable, situation for Clark. Writing Weldon N. Edwards, president of the state convention, Clark recommended that the legislative body authorize him to set maximum prices on goods to limit price gouging. “There must be some corrective for an evil which is now drawing the very life-blood of the community, feeding on the distresses of the people and growing, and increasing with their distresses,” he told Edwards. Clark claimed his earlier embargo on trade and woolen goods was but a “partial remedy” and an “imperfect corrective.” He desired stronger means to control speculation by suggesting “a regulation of prices on some of the prime necessities of life, by establishing a maximum price, which shall not be exceeded.” The governor also suggested that North Carolina work in concert with other states, such as Virginia and South Carolina, in setting a cap on pricing. He insisted that “if a joint action can be had with those States, of which there seems no doubt, it must prove highly beneficial.”57 The convention granted Clark the power “to regulate” prices of essential commodities such as food and clothing by “fixing the highest price at which any of the said articles may be bartered or sold.” The governor was given the additional power to “draw upon the Public Treasury” to enforce the act.58

The embargo of trade and the setting of maximum prices, however, did little to alleviate suffering, and Clark was not without concern for the state’s suffering population. He urged leniency in the punishment of some citizens engaging in illicit trade with the enemy for such essential items as medicine and salt. Because of the blockade and faltering Confederate fortunes in eastern North Carolina, essential items

---

58 “An Ordinance for enabling the governor to regulate the price of provisions and clothing, and to cause them to be seized for public use,” April 1862, Henry Toole Clark Papers, Private Collection, State Archives, Raleigh.
were prevented from reaching the general public. Areas in eastern North Carolina controlled by the Union army had access to at least some of these supplies, and citizens near these localities often risked capture and arrest from both Confederate and Federal forces if found trading with the wrong side. One such citizen, William Atkinson, was arrested and jailed by Confederate soldiers for allegedly trading with Union forces near Plymouth. Atkinson appealed to Governor Clark, assuring him that he had only crossed enemy lines to purchase salt. Clark was sympathetic, though stern, replying to Atkinson’s Confederate captor, “if his offence is only the trafficking of salt or passing the lines for that purpose, he should be discharged with a proper caution as to the impropriety of passing the lines.”

Other items in high demand were horses, carriages, and wagons, and army officers of both sides had little compunction in impressing these necessities. Citizens near the Virginia border or near Union lines in disputed regions of eastern North Carolina were particularly vulnerable to the depredations of army units sent out to scavenge provisions.

One plantation owner, Richard Paxton of Edenton, whose slaves and property had been previously pressed into Confederate service, wrote Clark informing him of his latest dispossession. Confederate raiders had called on Paxton’s plantation and confiscated his horses and other needed items. Paxton wrote the governor, demanding protection from raiders, or at least compensation. “Yesterday,” he complained to the governor, “I was visited by a company of dragoons from Smithfield, Virginia, who have come to impress horses in Eastern Carolina, a district almost depopulated in consequence

---

60 For a general discussion of depredations and hardships visited upon North Carolinians in disputed areas of the east, see Alex Christopher Meekins, “Caught Between Scylla and Charybdis: the Civil War in Northeastern North Carolina” (master’s thesis, North Carolina State University, 2001).
of prior impressments made for the State and Confederacy. These dragoons took my two carriage horses. As a compensation they furnished me with a script payable at Suffolk [Virginia], to which I have no means of getting.” Paxton was also worried that the close proximity of Federal troops and the disruption of the plantation economy in eastern North Carolina might lead to slave unrest in the region. “Is it designed,” he asked Clark, “that we shall abandon our farms, omit cultivation, and permit the negroes to run wild to commit depredations for the want of employment? Are we to be reduced in this manner?”61

Sustained Confederate loyalty often wavered when the struggle for independence interfered with the strict maintenance of the racial order. Paxton had addressed the fear of every slaveholder, if not that of every white Southerner: that of blacks, slave or free, operating independently of white supervision. African-American chattel slavery, and the inherent racial caste system created by its existence, was the bedrock of the Southern social and economic way of life. As Governor Ellis had exclaimed on the eve of war in November 1860, “our whole social fabric is based upon and sustained by slave labor. There is scarcely an occupation of our people, whether mechanical, manufacturing, mercantile, or professional, that does not mainly depend upon it for support.”62 The idea of “wild Negroes” free to commit “depredations” upon the country was cause for serious alarm among the state’s white population.63

Clark harbored such fears himself. As governor he sought strong, overarching powers to maintain intact the slave system, despite disruptions caused by the war. He

---

62 Governor’s Message, November 20, 1860, Executive and Legislative Documents, 1860-1861, Document 1, 25.
consistently supported impressment of free black labor and desired a state-wide slave patrol system to keep “law and order” on the plantations. With the loss of overseers and the manpower to continue local slave patrols, the potential for escape or “insurrection” increased. For example, one slaveholder in Gaston, North Carolina, in Northampton County near the Virginia border, had begged the governor for a detachment of troops to put down a slave disturbance. Clark replied:

Yours of the 11th instant is received asking for a detachment of soldiers to aid in seizing and bringing off Mr. Capehart’s negroes who are represented as in a state of quasi-insurrection. I fear it is too generally the case with the large plantation of slaves in that portion of the country. I have no force now that I can detail for that service, and the Convention declined to legislate on that subject, or in aid of the planters. South Carolina has an armed police to remove the negroes into the up country and provide for their support. But the North Carolina Convention refused to give me any power or means to move in this matter. It is a most important matter, and should be considered. It is nothing more nor less than an institution of the greatest wealth and prosperity to the Southern Confederacy—not merely in danger of being, but of being converted into an engine of destruction to us. 64 [emphasis added]

Clark suggested the slaveholder might obtain some troops of cavalry from units nearby, on permission of their commanding officer, or by writing the secretary of war. The governor closed with a piece of advice, recommending that white authority be reestablished at once. “At the first instance of opposition, [a slave] should be shot,” Clark advised. “Some act of this sort will resuscitate your authority. I think the men

particularly the slave holders, unless in the service, should remain on their farms, and keep order not only among the negroes but among the disaffected.”65 Indeed, Clark believed all blacks, slave or free, should serve as laborers in the Confederate war effort. He also maintained that any incident or indication of possible slave unrest or violence should be dealt with summarily. For example, in July 1862 he ordered Lieutenant Speir Whitaker of the Thirty-Third Regiment North Carolina State Troops to “proceed to Kinston, the Head Quarters of General [James G.] Martin, and consult with him about the proper disposition to be made of negroes arrested with arms in their hands and supposed to be emissaries from our enemies.”66

By mid-1862, the political and military situation had worsened in North Carolina. Clark’s rigid compliance with Confederate policy, coupled with the Union victories in the east, placed his political career in jeopardy. Though he had met with a degree of administrative success, he was losing the support of both the planter and yeoman classes. His administration became increasingly unpopular, yet the governor did little to mold or alter public opinion. The August elections loomed, but Clark made no effort to win his party’s nomination or the public’s confidence. Clark continued to work diligently and dutifully, often spending long hours addressing the business at hand. The people, however, sought more forceful, reassuring and “public” leadership. Clark’s constituents rarely saw him and he never made public speeches as governor. One disgruntled citizen, calling himself “Gaston” in an April 1862 letter to the Raleigh Standard, was so unsupportive of the current administration that he suggested an early election to replace

65 Ibid.
the governor, and claimed that, “if the war lasts, greater wisdom and a greater reach and quickness of intellect if possible will be required in the Gubernatorial chair.”\(^{67}\) Other North Carolinians criticized Clark for not defying oppressive acts by the Confederate government. One disgruntled Tar Heel complained to the \textit{Standard} that “There is so much disaffection as to the manner in which the revolution has been conducted. Those late oppressive laws which have been passed have very much alarmed the people, they say we are tending to a perfect despotism.”\(^{68}\)

Holden, the \textit{Standard}’s editor, agreed. Clark’s promise to resist the Union to the “last man and the last dollar” failed to win over the public mind; and Holden repeatedly attacked the governor and the “original secessionists.” He blamed them for “neglecting the coast defences, injustice to the soldiers, advocating martial law, and abusing the privileges of office,” and bluntly called them “traitors to the South.”\(^{69}\) Clark’s seeming inability to check Union advances, combined with growing disaffection, high prices, and scarce goods, damaged the political chances for the Democrats. The influential editor was convinced that the Democrats had driven the state to ruin, and he encouraged disgruntled Unionists to form a new political coalition, calling themselves the “Conservative Party.”

Clark declined to seek office and the Democrats selected William Johnston of Charlotte, who served as the president of the Charlotte and South Carolina railroad. The Conservatives selected the popular war veteran and homespun Buncombe County native, Zebulon B. Vance. Holden stumped enthusiastically for Vance, endorsing him for governor, saying, “VANCE and VICTORY! Under that sign we will conquer, and

\(^{67}\) \textit{Standard}, April 2, 1862.  
\(^{68}\) \textit{Standard}, May 21, 1862.  
partyism, favoritism, and inefficiency in office will give place to wiser, better, and more patriotic rule.” Vance won the August election by the largest margin of victory in a gubernatorial election since 1776, and Clark retired to his Edgecombe county plantation.70

Conditions in the state by mid-1862 had deteriorated to such an extent that the Democrats lost their mandate to lead North Carolinians through the remainder of the war. Zeb Vance and the Conservatives won the August elections with sizable majorities, evidencing the high level of public discontent. When Clark’s term expired in early September 1862, he left Raleigh and returned to his Edgecombe County plantation. The former governor, however, did not retire to a life of leisure. He continued to support North Carolina's war effort, but he did so at the local level--returning to his role as plantation squire, Tarboro statesman, and justice of the peace.\footnote{As Justice of the Peace, Clark married several couples. On August 23, 1864, Clark married a couple “at the Edgecombe House in this place. Mr. C. N. Civial of Tarboro and Miss Myra E. Lee of Virginia.” \textit{Southerner}, August 27, 1864.}

The war visited Edgecombe County briefly in the summer of 1863. Union troops under the command of Brigadier General Edward E. Potter left New Bern on July 17, 1863, with orders to destroy a major rail bridge on the Wilmington-Weldon line which crossed the Tar River near Rocky Mount. A cavalry detachment from the Third New York arrived in Tarboro on the morning of July 20. The soldiers “charged into town,” where they were greeted by a small force of local Confederates “who fired some shots and fled across the [Tar] River.” Facing no organized opposition, the Federals destroyed “an ironclad steamer of the Merrimac model, together with some railroad cars, 100 bales of cotton, quartermaster’s subsistence, and ordnance stores.” The Union raiders destroyed the local bridge later that afternoon before rejoining the larger force in Rocky
Secondary sources report that soldiers looted Clark’s home and destroyed some of his property. Clark, it was also reported, “being in town, passed the first bucket to extinguish the blaze [that had engulfed the bridge].”

At the end of hostilities, Clark served a single term as state senator in 1866 and became an advocate for the University of North Carolina. As senator, he served on the “joint select committee of inquiry concerning the University of the State.” He treasured the university and, like Thomas Jefferson, believed in public education. The war created serious financial hardships for the school, and by 1866 accounts were in arrears and faculty salaries could not be paid. Funding at all levels became increasingly difficult and the quality of education suffered. The University’s future remained in doubt. Desiring to see his “old Alma Mater again in full sail,” Clark encouraged his former nemesis, the influential William A. Graham, to work diligently to increase funds and reestablish Chapel Hill as a true University “in fact as well as name.” “I feel a very great interest in our University,” the former governor admitted, “and I feel that its revival, if it ever succeeds, will owe it to your exertions.” Clark, ever the businessman, suggested several schemes to achieve solvency and increase scholarship funding. He believed the school should avoid any assistance from religious sources, saying, “In a State University it is desirable by all means to avoid sectarianism—to steer clear of any Church influence—and these officers [suggested for administrative positions] when they are qualified, are

---

3 Southerner, February 17, 1903, February 27, 1908; Turner and Bridgers, History of Edgecombe County, 229.
4 Journal of the Senate of North Carolina, 1866-1867, 287.
5 “Report of Charles Manly, Treasurer of the University of North Carolina, 1866,” Executive and Legislative Documents Laid Before the General Assembly of North Carolina, 1866-1867, Document 22 (Raleigh, 1867), 2; Battle, History of the University of North Carolina, 754.
recommended that they don’t belong to any pulpit or sect.” The University remained open despite its troubles and the old alumnus occasionally served as an honored dignitary at commencement ceremonies.⁶

Chapel Hill was a unifying force among the state’s ruling elite, as old political enemies like Clark and Graham warmed to each other after 1865. Ironically, the political unity Clark so desired as governor was realized only after the war, as white Southerners banded together to resist Republican rule. Former political enemies united in a common cause to prevent the overthrow of the social order, and Clark sided with the Conservative (or Democratic) Party, later known as the “Redeemers.”

Clark despised military rule and the constitutional reforms forced upon the defeated South by the Congressional Reconstruction acts of 1867. He remained active in local politics and fought to limit any change to North Carolina’s white-only government. Clark served on the “Executive Committee” of a political group calling itself the “Conservatives of Edgecombe,” an assemblage of old Democrats dedicated to opposing the “odious [state] Constitution which the people will probably soon be called on to ratify.” In 1868, North Carolinians, including the newly enfranchised former slaves, had to ratify a new state constitution that guaranteed the black vote and other reforms in order for North Carolina to be readmitted to the Union under the Congressional Plan. Clark and his committee pledged to “use every honorable means for the success of the party opposed to Radical rule in North Carolina.”⁷

Despite the opposition of Clark and his Edgecombe County associates, the new Constitution was adopted in March 1868, and military rule officially ended when the state

---

⁷ Southerner, March 12, 1868.
was readmitted to the Union in August of that year, as were most of the former Confederate states by 1870. After the 1870 elections, the Conservatives were returned to power. At that time, Clark reportedly proclaimed that “In the midst of bayonets and military prisons we have achieved a signal and bloodless victory with no crime on our hands and no blood on our flag. While we are proud of our people, we may safely trust them in the great contest for civil liberty.”

When not engaged in Edgecombe politics, the former governor spent his time indulging his passions--history and genealogy. Always an avid reader and fascinated by bloodlines, Clark researched his lineage and reconstructed in great detail his family tree, no small feat considering the size and interconnectedness of North Carolina’s aristocratic families. [see Figure 5] The old planter also longed for a fictional past. Drawing inspiration from Sir Walter Scott’s tales of chivalry, Clark drafted a two-page document entitled “Regulations for the Tournament”--a medieval festival complete with “knights,” “ladies,” and displays of sporting prowess. The event was held during the 1869 Christmas holiday season in Tarboro and proved a major social gathering, attended by “the fairest” spectators and participants alike from “all the adjoining counties.” Fifteen men signed up for the riding competition, identifying themselves with elaborate titles such as “Knight of the Scarlet Plume” and “Knight of the Conquered Banner.” The mounted cavaliers were given five opportunities to capture a ring with a pointed lance from a distance of ninety yards and a “time of running eight seconds.” The knight who “takes the ring the greatest number of times,” would win “the privilege of crowning the Queen of Love and Beauty.” In addition, the “three next most successful Knights would

---

8 Turner and Bridgers, History of Edgecombe County, 251-252.
9 Family Tree, Henry Toole Clark Papers, Private Collections (oversized), State Archives, Raleigh.
select the 3 maids of honor.” A ballroom “coronation and dance” was held later that evening, where the “Knight of Stantonsburg” selected Clark’s daughter, Laura, as “First Maid of Honor.” In celebration, town socialites danced the night away until “the wee hours.”

Although Clark may have played at enjoying the past, he lived in the present. He spent his days corresponding about current affairs and local politics with friends and political leaders, such as Jonathan Worth and William A. Graham, each former Whigs. Despite his long service with the Democratic Party and his abrupt retirement from statewide public service, Clark remained a respected figure among his contemporaries of all political stripes, both within the state and Edgecombe County.

Henry Toole Clark was more than a figure who, as historians have previously contended, simply occupied the governor’s chair. Clark served thirteen months as chief executive of the state of North Carolina, while still serving as speaker of the Senate. He assumed the governorship at the most crucial period in the state’s history, and despite overwhelming difficulties, he achieved certain remarkable administrative results. He helped raise, mobilize, and equip thousands of troops for Confederate service. He established purchasing connections in England, procured arms, built a successful powder mill, supplied essential salt, and established the state’s only Confederate prison. Clark was devoted to the Confederate cause and worked diligently to achieve Southern

10 “Regulations for the Tournament,” December 1869, Henry Toole Clark Papers, Private Collections, State Archives, Raleigh; Southerner, December 2, 23, 1869.
independence. Clark’s performance as governor belies the claim made by the historian Paul Escott that “probably no state raised more obstacles to the execution of policies of the central government [in Richmond] than North Carolina.”\textsuperscript{11} Even though Clark complained about and appeared to raise objections to the requests and demands of the Davis government, he usually supported Confederate policy. He was a committed Confederate nationalist who showed no hesitation in prosecuting the national war effort. Clark clearly understood that Confederate defeat would result in the end of slavery and thus, the end of the social, economic, and political world dominated by the planter class. Unlike many white Southerners, Clark never expressed doubts or ambivalence concerning secession and war. He was sure of his course and acted as a man sure of his duty. While Clark could not articulate his vision to the public, he knew that his political career rested with the success of Confederate fortunes on the battlefield, and hence supported unpopular measures like conscription.

Historians have speculated about why Clark left office without seeking his party’s nomination for the governorship, or even another term as state senator. Previous accounts of Clark’s retirement from public service focus on the planter’s “lack of ambition,” or his supposed “limited experience and ability.” One historian claims that Clark “lacked the clout with Richmond” to lead the people of North Carolina.\textsuperscript{12} Historian John G. Barrett incorrectly adds that “Neither did [Clark] take much interest in politics until 1850, when he was elected to the state Senate.”\textsuperscript{13} Such conclusions ignore Clark’s long political experience as a local party chairman, national convention delegate, and

\textsuperscript{11} Escott, “Unwilling Hercules,” 267.
\textsuperscript{12} Trotter, \textit{Ironclads and Columbiads}, 16; Mercer, “The Administration of Governor Henry Toole Clark,” 78.
\textsuperscript{13} Barrett, “North Carolina,” 143.
party writer; and his extensive political and social network. In truth, Clark was always interested in political matters, though he never considered himself a “politician.” He was a skilled businessman and planter, and that skill allowed him to achieve administrative success as governor. His official papers reveal that he acted with authority. He was an assertive and at times aggressive executive. Though his relations with Richmond authorities were usually cordial, Clark had little hesitation in confronting Jefferson Davis, his cabinet officials, or Confederate generals in matters of law, policy, and military strategy, especially in relation to North Carolina’s defense.

Although a capable administrator, Clark was a failure as a “political leader.” He never managed to overcome the fallout that blamed him for the Federal military advances in eastern North Carolina and the debilitating hardships caused by the increasingly protracted conflict. Clark also failed to effectively communicate with the people of North Carolina. He thought the effort beneath him. He was disinclined to manipulate the newspapers, or to make direct appeals to the public. He considered such tactics vulgar and dishonest. Clark was unwilling to adapt his antebellum leadership style to the new political realities of the Civil War, which required finesse, flexibility, and a willingness to form and manipulate political coalitions. Antebellum southern politics encouraged the appearance of disinterestedness and aloofness, while disapproving of public displays of ambition, tactics that were increasingly becoming necessary in the new political world ushered in by the Civil War. In contrast, Clark’s successor, Zeb Vance, was successful in keeping his state committed to the war effort, in large part because of his ability to communicate effectively with both Richmond and the people of North Carolina.

---

Clark was an idealistic planter-politician of the old order, and historians have failed to place him in this context. He was similar to Southern leaders described by historian William C. Davis as “pretend republicans,” leaders who paid lip service to republican values which “allowed them a cover for instincts so aristocratic that such men decried real democracy. If they mouthed the platitudes of democracy, it was only because a system that ostensibly kept everyone equal at least prevented anyone from becoming superior to themselves. These men were oligarchs in all but open avowal.”

But Davis’s characterization does not ring entirely true in the case of Clark.

Clark never sought lofty heights of power and he turned down legitimate opportunities for higher office. The Edgecombe planter truly believed in and practiced republican values of virtue, transparency, simplicity, and honesty in his daily life, and he expected the same from others. His political ambition came not from any inherent desire for power, per se, but from a sense of noblesse oblige. He believed it his responsibility to hold public office and to sustain for future generations the conservative, compact theory of government, albeit one that protected slavery. He was rigid and uncompromising in his beliefs, and he did not easily accept diverse opinion, if at all. Clark did not seek his party’s nomination in part because by 1862, neither the Confederacy, nor his party, displayed the political unity or integrity he felt was required to support his efforts as governor to wage war successfully.

Clark also fell victim to Richmond’s “Virginia first” policy. At the outbreak of the war, Confederate authorities had placed him in a difficult, if not untenable, position. President Davis and the War Department failed to support Clark militarily. The governor

---


never possessed enough men or arms to check the Federal occupation and raids in his state, just as he was unable to control the public’s increasing disaffection with the prosecution of the war. As an un-elected governor, he operated without the benefit of historical precedent. In addition, he was constrained by the legislature in the traditionally weak political role assigned to the North Carolina executive.

In spite of his idealistic and uncompromising views, however, Clark was a realist. He knew that he stood little chance of being elected governor in his own right. What appeared to be his blind support of Confederate war policies doomed him to political failure. As state senator in the 1850s, he had fought to protect slavery and retain traditional values. As governor, he never formulated a compelling vision for North Carolina, seeking rather to maintain the antebellum world of slaves and masters to “the last man and the last dollar.” But then, Clark had never needed to form a political vision. As a member of one of Edgecombe County’s leading families, the senator never faced any serious threat from a political opponent. A better businessman than statesman, he was unwilling to confront the social and political upheavals caused by the war and so retired from statewide public service until 1866, when, for a brief time, it seemed as if the old order might reassert its hegemony.

Clark’s reputation as a war governor has not fared well over the years. His abrupt retirement and political failure, and his refusal to publicly defend his administration have fostered a very negative perception of his tenure. This reputation is due in part to the failure of historians to look systematically at the source material. Clark has been overlooked because his papers are not collected or edited for easy study, and there is no monograph dedicated to his life. Also, his successor Vance lived longer and was able to
trumpet his accomplishments over a longer period of time. Vance remained in the public eye, while Clark retired from the larger public view, refusing to answer his critics or to stoop to the level of “stump politics.”

Clark never relished the glare of the public spotlight that the war turned upon him. He preferred the life of the dignified country squire, and in many respects he ran the executive department much as he would run his plantation – issuing orders and expecting them to be carried out with alacrity. Though he met with political failure as governor, Clark did find success as a businessman. Unlike many planters, Clark’s accounts remained solvent. Although Clark lost much of his income with the abolition of slavery, he maintained sufficient funds to keep his farm.16 He lived comfortably and educated his children privately. All of his daughters married and his sons found respectable employment. Indeed, all of his children seem to have found success and happiness in later life.17 Their success is due in part to their father, a dedicated family man who stressed good character and industrious habits, and set the example by the life he lived. In a rare personal, affectionate, and revealing letter written to his eldest son Haywood in 1873, Clark, less than a year before his death, advises the teenager about the value of honorable employment and good business practices:

    Your letter was unusually interesting from the information given me of a prospect of increased duties and pay in your official connection with the

---

16 Will of Henry T. Clark, n. d. 1874, State Archives, Raleigh; Business receipts, Henry Toole Clark Papers (microfilm), Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, s. v. “Henry Clark Bridgers,” “John Luther Bridgers, Jr.” According to will records, Clark’s real and personal property was valued at over $20,000 at his death, or about $260,000 in year 2000 dollars. His lands were bequeathed to his sons, Haywood and Irwin, and his son-in-law, John L. Bridgers, who had married Laura.

17 The daughters all married into prominent families. The sons worked in industry and railroads, never (not surprisingly) entering politics. Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, s. v. “Henry Toole Clark.”
R[ail] R[oad]. I know you have the capacity for business and I think your habits of punctuality and industry will qualify you for any duties you may think proper to undertake. And I will take an early opportunity to thank Col [Sewall L.] Fremont [superintendent of the Wilmington and Weldon railroad] for his kind consideration of you. Col F[remont] acquired in his early military education strict discipline and he is sometimes rough, but not unkind in his administration of business and control of subordinates and I trust you have learned to understand and appreciate such conduct and feeling. I am glad you have the offer of more employment. Take all you can possibly do. If it is not immediately profitable to you, it will ultimately prove of great profit in schooling you into industrious habits and give you the reputation of attention to business which will always avail you great profit hereafter. And employment is not only the school of good habits and the source of prosperity, but contributes to your happiness and gives you that independence of feeling and character which constitutes true manhood. So I say take any honorable position and employment. Get full and just compensation for your services. But if you get little, still accept that little. It will prove more profitable hereafter. The formation of little good habits will spread into a general character of usefulness. The utterance of little kind words will [be] heard and felt far beyond the place and occasion of the utterance. You are too young to know these things and must therefore heed the experience of others. If I had the wealth of the Indies, I could not give you a richer legacy.

Clark concluded his letter by saying, “If I don’t write to you often, it is not from neglect or want of love and consideration for you. You know my habits and this is one of my bad
ones.” There are few such personal letters in Clark’s collection, and none that voice so clearly his appreciation of a good name.¹⁸

The former governor suffered a “lingering illness of three months, of alternate pain and ease,” and died at his home on April 14, 1874. He was sixty-six years old. Commenting on his death, the local newspaper editor said of Clark, “His name was never once connected with aught that savored of corruption, he never betrayed a public trust, and he leaves the scenes of life with an untarnished [reputation] beloved by friends, respected by acquaintances, and honoured by all.” Clark is buried next to his wife in the Calvary Episcopal churchyard in Tarboro where his tombstone reads, “A good name is better than precious ointment.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Henry T. Clark to Haywood Clark, June 9, 1873, Henry Toole Clark Papers (microfilm), Davis Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, s. v., “Sewall L. Fremont.”
¹⁹ Southerner, April 17, 1874; Mercer, “The Administration of Governor Henry Toole Clark,” 80; Will of Mary W. Clark, June 19, 1893, State Archives, Raleigh. Clark’s wife Mary died in 1896. According to her will, written three years before her death, she left over $4,300 in personal property to her children.
FIGURE 2. Map of Edgecombe County and North Carolina. (Source: North Carolina information online map collection. Available at: http://www.ncinformation.com/Map.htm)
FIGURE 3. Outer Banks and Roanoke Island (circled). (Source: Confederate Occupation online map collection. Available at: home.earthlink.net/~sandfidler1/page1.html)
FIGURE 4. Map of the Union and Confederate States, 1861-1865. (Source: The Rise and Fall of the Old South online map collection. Available at: www.vcdh.virginia.edu/HIUS323/maps.htm)
FIGURE 5. Clark created well over two hundred similar family tree charts on a variety of paper sizes. The breadth, detail, number of families, and sheer volume of genealogical research completed by Clark is astounding. In an age before telephones, email, and official birth and death certificates, Clark would have had to travel and interview people, and recall data from an amazing memory, to obtain the level of detail he recorded. [Source: Henry Toole Clark Papers, Private Collections (oversized), State Archives, Raleigh.]
Bibliography

Primary Sources

*Manuscripts*

Duke University Library, Durham, Special Collections
    Henry Toole Clark Papers

North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, State Archives

    County Records
        Record of Wills, Edgecombe County, 1810-1885, microfilm.
        Will of Henry Toole Clark, April 23, 1874, Edgecombe County Original Wills.

    Governors Office
        Governors Letter Books
        Governors Papers

    Miscellaneous Papers
        Miscellaneous Papers, 1861-1912

Private Collections
    Henry Toole Clark Papers
    Miscellaneous Papers

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Davis Library
    Henry Toole Clark Papers, microfilm

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library
    Diary of Thomas Bragg
    David Schenck Papers

*North Carolina State Laws and Reports*

*Documents of the Convention of 1861-1862*
*Executive and Legislative Documents, 1860-1861, 1866-1867*
*Journal of the House of Commons of North Carolina, 1860-1861*
*Journal of the Senate of North Carolina, 1850-1851, 1852, 1854-1855, 1858-1859, 1861, 1866-1867*
*Ordinances of the State Convention, 1861-1864*
Public and Private Laws of North Carolina, 1861, 1862-1863

Federal Records


Newspapers

Daily Progress (New Bern), 1860-1862
Free Press (Tarboro), 1830-1852
Journal (Wilmington), 1860-1862
North Carolina Standard (Raleigh), 1840-1863
Register (Raleigh), 1858-1862
Southerner (Tarboro), 1852-1864, 1874
State Journal (Raleigh), 1860-1862
Times (London, UK), 1861

Published Documents and Diaries


### Secondary Sources

#### Books


McCoy, Drew R. *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America*. 134


**Articles**


Escott, Paul D. “Poverty and Governmental Aid for the Poor in Confederate North Carolina.” *North Carolina Historical Review* 61 (October 1984):


Scarboro, David D. “North Carolina and the Confederacy: The Weakness of States’ Rights During the Civil War.” *North Carolina Historical Review* 56 (April 1979), 133-149.


**Theses**
