

Barringer, Victor Clay ^[1]

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by Mary Richmond Keating, 1979

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Victor Clay Barringer, lawyer, state senator, professor, and U.S. representative to the International Court in Egypt, was born at the family home, Poplar Grove, in Cabarrus County ^[2], near Concord. Of German and English ancestry, he was the youngest child of Paul Barringer ^[3], prominent businessman and state legislator, and Elizabeth Brandon, the daughter of Matthew Brandon of Rowan County ^[4]. He was baptized Victor in St. John's Lutheran Church, which had been founded by his grandfather, John Paul Barringer. He adopted Clay as his middle name after hearing a speech by Henry Clay ^[5], while visiting an older brother who was a U.S. congressman.

Barringer was educated in Concord and attended Gettysburg College ^[6] in Pennsylvania. He later entered The University of North Carolina ^[7], from which he was graduated in 1848. While there, he served as president of the Dialectic Society ^[8], and his farewell address before the society was acclaimed as a remarkable example of public speaking. Following his graduation, he began the study of law with his congressman brother, Daniel Moreau ^[9], but his study was interrupted when Daniel was appointed U.S. minister to Spain in 1849. Victor accompanied his brother to Spain and served as his private secretary for five years. During his stay there he wrote a series of articles entitled "Letters From Spain," which were published in the *Pilot*, a Concord paper.

In 1854, Barringer returned to Concord and resumed his practice of law. This was interrupted again when he accepted an offer to become professor of belles lettres at Davidson College ^[10]. He resigned from the college faculty in 1860 to serve as a senator in the North Carolina legislature and was one of several state senators who urged that a state convention be called to deal with the impending crisis of the Civil War ^[11]. When North Carolina seceded in 1861, he accepted a commission as a major in the First North Carolina Cavalry. He served with this regiment for only a few weeks, however, mostly in battles around Petersburg, Va. Forced to resign because of poor health, he returned to Concord and remained there for the duration of the war, practicing law when his health permitted.

Following Lee's ^[12] surrender to Grant in April 1865, Jefferson Davis ^[13], president of the Confederacy ^[14], moved south with his cabinet from the Confederate capital at Richmond. Davis knew Barringer's brothers Daniel and Rufus ^[15], a general in the Confederate Army, and when he reached Concord, he sent a message requesting permission to spend the night at Barringer's home. The Barringers were pleased to open their home to him, and Davis stayed at least one night, possibly two. Just before his arrival, the Barringers had heard rumors of President Lincoln's ^[16] assassination; and Barringer discussed the matter with Davis, who had not heard the rumors. After Davis left Concord, Barringer learned that the assassination stories were true and rode to Charlotte ^[17] to inform Davis, fearing that Lincoln's murder would increase the danger to the Confederate president.

In 1868, Barringer was appointed by the governor to serve on the Code Commission of North Carolina, whose function was to adjust the state laws to the code of civil procedure under the new state constitution. Barringer was one of three authors of the first Code of Civil Procedure for North Carolina ^[18]. A few years later, he was appointed by President Grant to be one of the commissioners responsible for condensing the U.S. statutes into the present Revised Statutes of the United States ^[19].

In 1874, the khedive of Egypt requested President Grant to appoint an able jurist to serve as the U.S. representative to the International Court at Alexandria, Egypt, and Grant appointed Barringer. The purpose of this court was to hear cases involving foreigners in Egypt. During his stay in Egypt, the Arabi Pasha Rebellion ^[20] destroyed the Barringer home in Alexandria, Barringer's collection of oriental art, and his nearly completed manuscript entitled "The Relation of the Mussulmen and the Roman Law." He never tried to reproduce his work.

After serving two ten-year terms on the International Court, Barringer returned to the United States in 1894. When he left Egypt, he was awarded the Order of the Osmanieh, the highest decoration given by the khedive. A former U.S. consul general to Egypt said of him: "Justice Barringer lived in Egypt for twenty years, and during that time enjoyed the confidence and had the appreciation of all those with whom he came in contact. . . . He was a jurist of high ability, a scholar of considerable attainments, an entertaining conversationalist, and above all a loyal, intense American, who dignified the position he held, and his decisions were always regarded with respect."

Victor married Maria Massey of North Carolina; they had no children. Following their return from Egypt, the Barringers settled in Washington, D.C., and lived there until Victor's death at age sixty-nine. He was buried in the Rock Creek Cemetery, Washington.

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Additional Resources:

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