

Clark, Henry Selby ^[1]

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by Roy Parker, Jr., 1979; Revised November 2022.

9 Sept. 1809–8 June 1869

Henry Selby Clark, congressman, legislator, and lawyer, was born at the family home near Leechville, Beaufort County ^[2], the son of Henry Clark and his wife, whose family name was Selby. The Clark family had owned land there for at least two generations.

Clark was graduated from The University of North Carolina ^[3] in 1828 and returned to his native county to practice law in Washington. At twenty-five he was elected as a Democrat ^[4] to the House of Commons, where he served three terms, 1834–36. He was solicitor for the district in 1842. In the fiercely contested two-party politics of the day, he was a frequent campaigner and orator. When Democrats gerrymandered congressional districts in 1842, he was chosen as a Democratic candidate for a sharply divided district. During the course of his campaign, he challenged Henry Dimock, editor of the *North State Whig*, to a duel, claiming that untruths had been printed about him. The affair was held outside Beaufort County, as duels were illegal there. Shots were fired, but neither man was wounded. Clark was elected and served a single term in the Twenty-ninth Congress, 1845–47. As a member of Congress he supported U.S. claims to Oregon, and his speeches, several of which were published in pamphlet form, were widely acclaimed. He was defeated for reelection by the Whig ^[5] candidate, Richard S. Donnell ^[6], whose measure he had taken in 1844.

The political ardor of "the chivalric Mr. Clark" cooled, and he moved to Greenville to practice law, taking little part in political affairs from that time on. During the early years of the Civil War he served as a member of a disbursing and safety committee of Pitt County ^[7]. He owned extensive land at Gourdin's Depot in South Carolina and was there in 1861 and 1864. He supervised farm operations as they were performed and executed by enslaved people.

Clark was married in 1835 to Alvaney M. Staton of Pitt County; they had no children. He was buried in the family cemetery near Leechville.

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.^[19]

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