

Shanks, Henry Thomas ^[1]

Shanks, Henry Thomas

by Maud Thomas Smith, 1994

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Henry Thomas Shanks, historian, author, and teacher, was born in [Vance County](#) ^[2], the son of Henry Taylor and Maude Jenkins Shanks. He was educated at Buies Creek Academy and at [Wake Forest College](#) ^[3], where he received a bachelor of arts degree in 1918 and a master of arts degree in 1920. During [World War I](#) ^[4] (1917–18) he served in the U.S. Navy. After attending [Columbia University](#) ^[5] in the summer of 1921, he entered the [University of Chicago](#) ^[6] and, working under William E. Dodd, earned a master of arts degree in history in 1923. He received a Ph.D. from [The University of North](#)



Image of Henry Thomas Shanks, from *The Howler* yearbook at Wake Forest College (University), [p.20], published 1917 by Wake Forest College (University). Presented

[Carolina](#) ^[7] in 1929. on Digital NC.

^[8]

Shanks began his teaching career at [South Georgia State Woman's College](#) ^[9], Valdosta, where he was professor of history and political science from 1920 to 1922. From 1923 to 1929 he was an instructor in history at The University of North Carolina; he also taught at [East Carolina Teachers' College](#) ^[10] (summer 1923) and Wake Forest College (summer 1927). In 1930 he joined the faculty of [Birmingham-Southern College](#) ^[11], Alabama, where he taught history for thirty years, fifteen of which he held the position of dean. In the summer of 1930 and 1931 he taught at [West Virginia University](#) ^[12], and in the summers of 1934, 1935, 1937, and 1939 he taught at [Emory University](#) ^[13]. In 1958 he retired as dean at Birmingham-Southern and returned to full-time teaching as head of the Department of History. "Modest but strongly principled, genial but exacting in standards," scholarly and dedicated, Shanks inspired students to strive to attain his level of academic quality. Some of these were not young college students, for Shanks directed many night study groups, especially in Civil War history.

His dissertation, *The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847–1861* ^[14], was published in 1934. In 1935–36 he received a grant-in-aid from the Social Science Research Council and a General Education Board Fellowship while working on the papers of [Willie Person Mangum](#) ^[15]. Selected to edit the Mangum papers, he spent several years on the project; the first volume was published in 1950 and the fifth and last, in 1956. He also was the author of numerous articles and book reviews in scholarly and church journals.

Shanks was an elder in the Independent Presbyterian Church in Birmingham. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Omicron Delta Kappa, and Phi Gamma Mu honorary fraternities and of Pi Kappa Alpha social fraternity. In addition, he was a member of the Alabama Historical Association, [American Historical Association](#) ^[16], [Southern Historical Association](#) ^[17], [North Carolina Literary and Historical Association](#) ^[18], and Association of Alabama Administrators (president, 1956–57). He served on the board of editors, *Journal of Southern History*, 1946–50; on the Alabama Historical Association Council, from 1947; and on the advisory committee, Carraway Methodist School of Nursing, from 1955. He read papers and presided over meetings in the Alabama, North Carolina, and Southern historical associations.

On 31 Aug. 1929 he married Anne Graham, and they had one son, Alexander Graham. Henry Shanks was buried in Chapel Hill. The Henry Shanks Memorial Collection in American History at the M. Paul Phillips Library of Birmingham-

Southern College was established in commemoration of his three decades of unstinting service to the school.

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