

Bridgers, Henry Clark ^[1]

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by H. C. Bridgers, Jr., 1979

7 Jan. 1876–13 Oct. 1951

Henry Clark Bridgers, athlete, attorney, railroad man, and entrepreneur, was born just west of Tarboro, at Hilma, the home of his parents, Laura Clark and John L. Bridgers, Jr. ^[2] He attended school locally and as a youth was noted for his collection of several hundred varieties of birds' eggs. At age sixteen he entered the University of the South at Sewanee, Tenn., and from there went to The University of North Carolina ^[3]. At Chapel Hill he was a member of Sigma Nu Fraternity and the German Club, but his chief fame lay in his ability in tennis ^[4], trap shooting, and golf. He helped represent the university in tennis and shooting, and he is credited with having introduced golf ^[5] at Chapel Hill. He received his law degree in 1895 and returned home to join his father's law firm.

Within a few years he had converted the western portion of his father's homeplace into a combined pasture-golf course and had built a railroad. The golf course, now Hilma Country Club, was one of the first in the state and has been played continuously since 29 Apr. 1899. When he was only twenty-two, he was elected president of the East Carolina Railway, which eventually ran from Tarboro to Hookerton, in Greene County ^[6], and literally created the towns of Pinetops, Macclesfield ^[7], and Fountain. As an attorney, he became local counsel for the Southern Railway ^[8]. He let none of these activities interfere with sports, managing over the next twenty years to gather a large number of trophies in shooting, golf, and tennis and to achieve a modest national reputation in all three.

Along with his railroad operation, he became active in banking; by 1913 he had been made president of the First National Bank in Tarboro and the banks of Conetoe, Pinetops, Macclesfield, Fountain, and Hookerton. He was also president of ten other companies. In addition, he had acquired substantial farm lands, which he operated successfully; but unlike his father and grandfather, he had no inborn love of the soil. Briefly he ventured into publishing, acquiring a short-lived control of the Tarboro Southerner ^[9]. He had a keen mind, a driving energy, and diverse interests.

On 12 Jan. 1912, Bridgers married Mary Meade Bernard (10 Oct. 1887–14 May 1930), of Petersburg, Va., daughter of Lucia Beverly Morrison and Judge David Meade Bernard II. They had a son, Henry Clark, Jr. ^[10], and a daughter, Lucia Beverly. In 1924 they completed a Georgian-colonial home in Tarboro called Merriemeade, for which the architect, Dwight James Baum of New York, received national recognition.

Both Mary Meade and Henry Clark Bridgers died at Merriemeade and were buried in the yard of Calvary Episcopal Church in Tarboro. A portrait of each is in the possession of their children.

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