

Clark, James West ^[1]

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by Roy Parker, Jr., 1979

15 Oct. 1779–13 Dec. 1843

James West Clark, congressman, legislator, and chief clerk of the U.S. Navy Department, was born in [Bertie County](#) ^[2], the son of Christopher Clark of [Elmwood](#) ^[3] on Salmon Creek, "a merchant of North England & Edenton," and his second wife, Hannah Turner. He was graduated from Princeton College at the age of eighteen in 1797 and in 1802 and 1803 represented Bertie County in the General Assembly. In 1802 he married Arabella, daughter of Colonel Henry Irwin Toole, a prominent planter of [Edgecombe County](#) ^[4]. The couple lived first on Walnut Creek, eight or ten miles from Tarboro, but in 1830 built a house that still stands in Tarboro. Clark represented Edgecombe County in the General Assembly in 1810 and 1811 and in the senate in 1812, 1813, and 1814. He was a Madison elector in 1812. He was elected to Congress, served during 1816–17, but declined to run for a second term. In Congress he served on the Committee on Private Land Claims.

Remaining active in local politics, Clark was clerk of the North Carolina Senate for two sessions, 1827–28 and 1828–29. He became a strong Jacksonian and during the period 1829–31 served as chief clerk of the Navy Department under his friend, Secretary of the Navy [John Branch](#) ^[5], leaving when Branch resigned as a result of the Peggy Eaton affair, which sundered the Jackson cabinet. In 1837, Clark was appointed a member of the council of state to replace someone who declined to serve, but the constitutionality of his appointment was questioned and his name was withdrawn.

Clark and his wife were the parents of one son, [Henry Toole](#) ^[6], who became governor of the state, and three daughters, Laura (Mrs. J. W. Cotten), Maria (Mrs. Matthew Weddell), and Mary Sumner (Mrs. William George Thomas). Clark was buried in Calvary church cemetery, Tarboro. In 1844, perhaps as a posthumous honor, he was awarded an honorary M.A. degree by Princeton.

References:

Biog. Dir. Am. Cong. (1971).

Joseph B. Cheshire, *Nonnulla* (1930).

Family letters (possession of Jaquelin Drane Nash, Tarboro).

John H. Wheeler, *Historical Sketches of North Carolina* (1851).

Additional Resources:

"Clark, James West, (1779 - 1843)." *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Washington, D.C.: The Congress. <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000438> ^[7] (accessed January 9, 2014).

Clark Family Bible Records. 1758-1944. N.C. Family Records Collection, State Archives of North Carolina. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/clark-family-bible-records/1377906> ^[8] (accessed January 9, 2014).

Fleming, Monika. "The political Clarks and their contributions." *The Daily Southerner* [Tarboro, N.C.]. September 10, 2007. # (accessed January 9, 2014).

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Origin - location:

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[Edgecombe County](#) ^[12]

[Tarboro](#) ^[13]

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[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#),^[14]

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Links

[1] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/clark-james-west> [2] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/bertie> [3] <http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/nr/BR0047.pdf> [4] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/edgecombe> [5] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/branch-john> [6] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/clark-henry-toole> [7] <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=C000438> [8] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/clark-family-bible-records/1377906> [9] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [10] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/parker-roy-jr> [11] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-29> [12] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-20> [13] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-62> [14] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>