

Clark, Thomas ^[1]

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by Hugh F. Rankin and Ida Brooks Kellam, 1979

August 1741–25 Dec. 1792

Thomas Clark, planter and Revolutionary War officer, was born in Wilmington, the son of Thomas Clark, merchant, and his wife, Barbara Murray, sister of Loyalist [James Murray](#) ^[2]. Clark's sister, Ann, married [William Hooper](#) ^[3], a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Clark was sent to England to be educated and there learned the watchmaker's trade. He practiced this trade for a time in Boston, but in 1769 he returned to the Cape Fear to take charge of the estate of his uncle, James Murray. He participated in the [Regulator campaign](#) ^[4] in 1771, listed first as "Provost Marshall General" and, several weeks later, as aide-de-camp to Governor [William Tryon](#) ^[5]. He was wounded during the [Battle of Alamance](#) ^[6] and received a legislative pension of ten pounds a year for the duration of his disablement.

In 1772, Clark was acting clerk of superior court for the Hillsborough District. His home, however, was at Point Repose Plantation, which had been bought by James Murray in 1739. Point Repose was purchased by Clark in 1783 after it had been confiscated by the state and sold as [Loyalist](#) ^[7] property.

At the outbreak of the [Revolution](#) ^[8], the North Carolina [Provincial Congress](#) ^[9], acting on a resolution of the Continental Congress, created two Continental regiments of five hundred men each. The First Regiment was commanded by Colonel [James Moore](#) ^[10], with [Francis Nash](#) ^[11] as lieutenant colonel and Thomas Clark as major. In this role, Clark participated in the [Moore's Creek Bridge campaign](#) ^[12], although neither he nor the regiment was engaged in the actual battle. On 10 Apr. 1776, when Moore was made a brigadier general, Nash was promoted to colonel and Clark to lieutenant colonel. At the siege of Charleston in 1776, Clark was in command of the 750 men of the First Regiment, 200 of whom he commanded in guarding the rear approach to the fort on Sullivan's Island.

After the repulse of the British at Charleston, the regiment was ordered north to join General Washington. Nash was promoted to brigadier general and Clark to colonel of the First Regiment on 5 Feb. 1777. At the Battle of Brandywine, Clark's regiment covered the retreat of the American army. At the Battle of Germantown the regiment was held in reserve, and Clark missed an opportunity to distinguish himself, a fact later used against him when he was considered for promotion. The North Carolina Continentals spent that winter at Valley Forge.

After General Nash was killed at Germantown, Clark and [Jethro Sumner](#) ^[13] were both recommended for promotion to brigadier general by the North Carolina legislature. But [Thomas Burke](#) ^[14], delegate to the Continental Congress, worked against the elevation of Clark, and as a result, Sumner and [James Hogun](#) ^[15] were made brigadiers on 9 Jan. 1779.

On 15 May 1778, Clark was given command of the North Carolina brigade without a promotion. On 29 May the Continental Congress consolidated the Fourth North Carolina Regiment into the First, with Clark designated as commanding colonel. The brigade was involved in the near-battle at Barren Hill and in the Battle of Monmouth fought on the right of the American line, although its only two casualties were a result of heat and fatigue. Clark was appointed a member of the court-martial board that tried and convicted Major General Charles Lee for misbehavior on the battlefield and disrespect to the commanding general at Monmouth.

Assigned to Baron von Steuben's division, Clark and his men were stationed at White Plains. Later the brigade was assigned to the division of Alexander MacDougall and stationed at Smith's Clove, but on 11 Dec. it was shifted to Paramus to block communications with the British in New York. It was pulled back to Smith's Clove and then recalled to Paramus. On 16 May 1779 the First and Second regiments, under Clark, were stationed near West Point to protect it and there bore the brunt of the British spring thrust. The enemy was turned back with the aid of the local militia.

In late 1779, Clark's First Regiment marched south with the North Carolina Brigade under James Hogun to aid in the defense of Charleston. On 12 May 1780, when the defenders of Charleston surrendered, Clark and 287 of his men became prisoners of war. Confined on Haddrell's Point, Clark became the acknowledged leader of the North Carolina prisoners after Hogun's death. When the North Carolina Line was reorganized, Clark, although still a prisoner of war, was given the command of the First Regiment. When finally exchanged, Clark was so ill that he was confined to his bed for some time. He was separated from the service on 1 Jan. 1783, and on 30 Sept. of that same year the legislature breveted him a brigadier general of the military district of Wilmington.

Clark was married to Sarah Moore Nash, the widow of General Francis Nash, in 1782; she died 6 Apr. 1783. There were no children. He afterward lived for a time in Hillsborough in the home of his sister, Ann Hooper. On 23 Oct. 1783, in Hillsborough, the North Carolina [Society of the Cincinnati](#) ^[16] was organized with Brigadier General Jethro Sumner as president, Clark as vice-president, and Chaplain [Adam Boyd](#) ^[17] as secretary.

While in Hillsborough, Clark became ill and remained so for a long time. He woke one morning suddenly blind and for

much of the remainder of his life was cared for by servants. At his death, Point Repose was left to his nephew, William Hooper, Jr.

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Nina Moore Tiffany, ed., *Letters of James Murray, Loyalist* (1901).^[18]

Additional Resources:

"CSR Documents by Clark, Thomas, 1741-1792." Colonial and State Records of North Carolina. Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/creators/csr10973>^[19] (accessed January 10, 2014).

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