

Henry, Louis Debonair ^[1]

Henry, Louis Debonair

by Gertrude S. Carraway, 1988

1788–13 June 1846

Louis Debonair Henry, state legislator, was a native of New Jersey, the son of Michael D. Henry (A.B., Rutgers, 1783); his mother was the daughter of Edward and Elizabeth Batchelor Graham of New Bern. After graduating from Princeton College in 1809, he studied law in New Bern under his uncle, Edward Graham (1764–1833), who had been a law pupil of John Jay, first chief justice of the United States Supreme Court.

One of Henry's best friends at New Bern was a Princeton classmate, Thomas Turner Stanly (1789–1813), the youngest son of [John Wright Stanly](#) ^[2], who was studying law with his oldest brother, [John Stanly](#) ^[3], a state legislator and former congressman. Edward Graham had been John Stanly's second in the 1802 political duel at New Bern when former Governor [Richard Dobbs Spaight](#) ^[4], Sr., was fatally wounded.

At a party in the home of [William Gaston](#) ^[5], Thomas Stanly wanted to attract the attention of Lucy Hawkins, a visitor from [Warren County](#) ^[6], who was with Henry on the other side of the tea table. Picking up a small piece of cake, Stanly flipped it across the table and it fell into a cup of tea. Some of the liquid splashed on Henry's vest. The lady exclaimed, "Do you stand that?" Henry took her question seriously and challenged Stanly to a duel.

The pistol duel took place Sunday afternoon, 14 Feb. 1813, a few miles south of Suffolk, Va. Stanly's second was his eighteen-year-old first cousin, [George E. Badger](#) ^[7], who became a Superior Court judge, secretary of the navy, and U.S. senator. On the first fire Stanly was killed instantly by a shot in his right side. Henry lost a finger on his left hand in the duel. He fled to New York but, without threat of prosecution, returned to North Carolina and practiced law at Fayetteville. It is reported that for the rest of his life he never would sleep alone in an unlighted room, perhaps in fear that Stanly's ghost would come to haunt him or that a Stanly relative or friend might seek revenge.

During December 1814, in Warren County, Henry married Lucy Hawkins. She was the youngest daughter of Colonel [Philemon Hawkins, Jr.](#) ^[8], Revolutionary patriot, and the sister of Mrs. [William Polk](#) ^[9] and of [William Hawkins](#) ^[10], who the previous month had completed his third term as governor of North Carolina.

In 1821 and 1822 Henry represented [Cumberland County](#) ^[11] in the state House of Commons, and from 1830 to 1832 he was the legislator from the borough town of Fayetteville, serving in the 1832 session as speaker of the house. The 1834 and 1835 assemblies elected him as a councillor of state. He declined an offer to be minister of Belgium, but in 1837 accepted President Martin Van Buren's commission to settle claims arising from a treaty with Spain.

On 10 Jan. 1842, the Democratic state convention nominated Henry as its candidate for governor. His campaign was hampered by illness, and he was defeated by the [Whig](#) ^[12] incumbent, [John Motley Morehead](#) ^[13]. Two years later at Baltimore he was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, which nominated [James K. Polk](#) ^[14], a native Tar Heel, for president. His last official act was to preside over the Democratic state convention at Raleigh in January 1846. Death came suddenly five months later at his home in Raleigh, where he had moved some years before from Fayetteville.

Henry's wife had died on 17 Feb. 1819, at Raleigh, without issue. On 27 Dec. 1821, at Fayetteville, he married Margaret Haywood, the only child of Adam John Haywood, by whom he had seven children: Louis D., Virginia (m. Colonel [Duncan McRae](#) ^[15] of Wilmington), Caroline (m. Colonel John H. Manly of Raleigh), Augusta (m. Captain Robert P. Waring of Charlotte), Margaret (m. Colonel Edward Graham Haywood), Mary (m. General Matthew P. Taylor), and Malvina (m. Douglas Ball of Norfolk, Va.). She died on 3 Apr. 1874 at Raleigh.

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