

Arkansas Grand Army of the Republic Commander 1891



## William Henry Harrison Clayton

Birth: Oct. 13, 1840, PA

Death: Dec. 14, 1920,  
McAlester, Pittsburg  
County, OK

Burial: Fort Smith National  
Cemetery, Fort Smith,  
Sebastian County, AR

The below bio was written by Lulu Bruns:

William Henry Harrison Clayton was born October 13 1840 in Bethel, Pennsylvania to John and Ann Glover Clayton. He was the twin of brother John Middleton Clayton .

He was raised on his father's farm and received his early education at the Village Green Seminary. In 1862, he raised a company in Delaware County and served as a lieutenant in the Union Army, taking part in the battles of South

Mountain, Antietam, Fredericksburg, and the Wilderness. After this service, he took a position as a teacher of military tactics and other subjects at the Village Green Seminary.

When the Civil War ended, W.H.H. Clayton followed his brother Powell to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and, with John M. Clayton, the three brothers purchased 2,000 acres of land on the Arkansas River.

He married a southern woman, Florence Barnes. To this union was born seven children, Mary Irene, Anne, Florence, Will, Jr., Melanie, Beatrice, and Adele.

In 1868, Powell Clayton was elected Governor of Arkansas, and W.H.H. Clayton, while studying law, was appointed circuit superintendent of public instruction for the Seventh Judicial Circuit of Arkansas and helped organize an education system for the newly freed slaves.

In 1871, He was admitted to the bar and was appointed prosecuting attorney for the First Judicial Circuit of Arkansas. In 1873, Governor Elisha Baxter appointed him a judge of the same Circuit Court, but, in 1875, he resigned this position to accept an appointment, offered by President

Ulysses Grant as United States Attorney for the Western District of Arkansas.

The United States District Court for the Western District of Arkansas had recently moved to Fort Smith, Arkansas, and W.H.H. Clayton moved to Fort Smith when he took the U.S. Attorney position. In 1882, Clayton purchased an old house in the downtown area of Fort Smith, which he enlarged and renovated. Clayton and his family lived in this house until he left Fort Smith for McAlester, Oklahoma in 1897 and owned it until 1912. The "Clayton House" has been restored by the Fort Smith Heritage Foundation and is an historical home that is open to the public.

W.H.H. Clayton served as the United States Attorney in Judge Parker's court from 1874 until 1893, with the exception of the four years comprising the first non-consecutive term of Democratic President Grover Cleveland. During his 14 years in this position, Clayton had charge of over 10,000 cases (including misdemeanors) tried before the court and, during that time, he convicted 80 men of murder—a number greater than any other prosecutor in the United States—and 40 of these men were executed.

Clayton was known as "the ablest prosecutor in the Southwest."

Clayton also enjoyed a very successful legal career in Fort Smith during the years that he was not serving as United States Attorney. Clayton handled both civil and criminal cases while in the private practice of law, including cases in front of the United States Supreme Court.

When William McKinley was elected President in 1896, he appointed W.H.H. Clayton as a United States federal judge for the newly created federal court for the Central District of the Indian Territory. Clayton moved to McAlester, Oklahoma, the site of the new federal court for the Central District. Congress had created this court in an effort to relieve the overworked Western District of Arkansas of some of its huge caseload, although Judge Parker was upset with this stripping of his authority. When Oklahoma became a state in 1907, Congress created a new set of federal District Courts and dissolved the old Indian Territory District Courts, causing Clayton to lose his federal judgeship. During his 10 years as a federal judge, Clayton had issued

important decisions defining Indian rights, which had long term affects [sic] on the future history of Oklahoma.

Clayton had been involved in a scandal relating to an alleged Oklahoma land grab in 1889. The charges were made by Democrats in 1889, after President Benjamin Harrison had nominated Clayton for re-appointment to his United States Attorney position, following the Grover Cleveland interregnum period. No formal action was ever taken on the charges, and the United States Senate confirmed President Harrison's nomination of Clayton.

In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed Clayton to serve on the Oklahoma Districting and Canvassing Board. Clayton had also been a delegate selected to write the new constitution for the State of Oklahoma. After his retirement from the federal bench, Clayton resumed the practice of law in McAlester with his son.

Clayton died in McAlester on December 14, 1920, and is buried in the national cemetery at Fort Smith

Parents: John Clayton (1793 - 1871) & Ann Clark (1803 - 1883)

Spouse: Florence Alabama Barnes (1846 - 1906)

Children:

Mary Irene Clayton (1870 - 1910)

Ann Clayton Parker (1872 - 1911)

Frank Clayton (1874 - 1875)

Florence Clayton Kaeiser (1876 - 1963)

William H H Clayton (1879 - 1942)

Melanie Clayton Lebosquet (1881 - 1917)

Adele Clayton Brink (1884 - 1960)

Beatrice Ann Clayton Brown (1891 - 1953)\*

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