

Joseph L. Clark

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Written by Erin Cassidy, Reference Librarian, based on sources from the SHSU University Archives and the Special Collections at the Newton Gresham Library, especially "Mr. Sam Houston," *Alumnus* Vol. 27, No. 19 (1951) and "Former History Professor Dies," *Houstonian* (23 Sep. 1969).

Read by Cheryl Spencer, Library Associate in Special Collections.

Joseph L. Clark was born July 27, 1881, at Thorp Spring in Hood County, Texas. Clark was not the first prestigious educator in his family: his father, Randolph, and uncle, Addison, together operated Add-Ran University, which took its name from both men. The university eventually moved from Thorp Spring to Waco, at the same time changing its name to Texas Christian University—the same institution now located in Fort Worth.

Joseph later attended college at TCU, where he played shortstop for the school's baseball team and worked in the business office. He graduated with a degree in history and a minor in English. During his college years he became involved in local government, serving as both Deputy County Clerk and District Clerk in Deaf Smith County, as well as Deputy County Clerk and stenographer in Johnson County. He also helped to create and served as vice president of the Texas Intercollegiate Athletic Association, or TIAA, the state's first intercollegiate athletic organization.

Clark began teaching in Hereford in 1903, first in elementary subjects and then in high school history. From 1907-1910, he taught English and history at John Tarleton College in Stephenville.

In 1910, Clark received a letter from Harry F. Estill, President of Sam Houston Normal Institute in Huntsville, Texas, offering him a position as secretary to the president and librarian. At that time the small school served just 400 students. Though Clark was also responsible for registrar, purchasing agent, and bookkeeper duties, his real interest lay in teaching, and he soon began substitute-teaching during President Estill's brief absences. Additionally, he found time to coach baseball at SHNI from 1911 to 1914.

In 1913, Clark wed Sally Chism, a fellow graduate of TCU whom Clark had known since 1898, when he first encountered her singing with the choir at West Texas religious camp meetings. Sally and Joe, as they were affectionately known to the SHNI community, often opened their home to students and alumni.

Clark left SHNI to pursue a Master of Arts degree and teaching certification in history from Columbia University. He returned to Huntsville in 1917, at which point he began teaching history fulltime and became the head of the History Department. From 1933 until his retirement in 1951, he served as the first director of the Division of Social Science. He wrote extensively on Texas history and government, including elementary and high school textbooks which were adopted by thousands of schools across the state. Avidly interested in the preservation of local history, he contributed tirelessly to the development of the Sam Houston Memorial Park and Museum. Clark was instrumental in acquiring the contents of the Texas Room in the Estill library, one of the largest collections of Texana in the state. The materials from the Texas Room became the nucleus of the Special Collections department which is now housed in the Thomason Room of the Newton Gresham Library.

Humanitarian interests were an important aspect of Clark's life. After serving as an officer in the college YMCA while attending TCU, he went on to found the Sam Houston campus' YMCA chapter—one of the first such groups in the state—and spent many years as chairman of the faculty Y committee. His wife, Sally, served for 12 years as the associate dean in charge of the college women's social and religious life. Clark also dedicated considerable effort toward improving race relations and improving living conditions for African Americans. In 1923, he co-organized and became the

first director of the Texas Commission on Interracial Cooperation, an organization which he supported for more than 28 years, 20 of which he served as President. The state's first college course on race relations owes its creation to Clark as well.

During his 41-year career on the Sam Houston campus, Dr. Clark became known to many as "Mr. Sam Houston." He finally retired from teaching on July 27, 1951, at the age of 70. On July 21st of that year, the university community threw a birthday and retirement banquet to honor the noted historian and teacher. It was estimated at that time that, since coming to Huntsville in 1910, Clark had taught 10,000 students in his various classes and given lectures and programs before an additional 30 - 40,000.

In 1941, TCU awarded Dr. J. L. Clark an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. Clark was a lifetime member of the Texas State Teachers Association and a member of that association's Teacher Welfare Committee. He also served as President of the College Classroom Teachers Association and Chairman of the History Section of the Southwestern Social Science Association. He was a member of the board of trustees of Jarvis Christian College, an African American college located in Hawkins, Texas. Outside of academia, he served on the board of trustees of the First Christian Church and for many years as superintendent of that church's Sunday school.

Mrs. Sally Chism Clark died in January 1961; the couple never had children. Dr. Joseph L. Clark died on Saturday, September 13, 1969, at M.D. Anderson hospital in Houston, TX. He was buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Huntsville after church services held on September 16 at the First Christian Church.

Clark is often quoted as saying that teaching was his greatest satisfaction, and the late university president Harmon Lowman praised Clark as one of the finest educators in the history of the school. Ex-students and friends commissioned a portrait of Dr. Clark by Emily Guthrie Smith which now hangs in the Thomason Room in the Newton Gresham Library on the Sam Houston Campus, as a testament to the late professor's long commitment to this university.