

# Clark, Jerome Leslie (1928–1997)

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Brian E. Strayer, Ph.D. (University of Iowa). Strayer taught history at Jackson (MI) Junior Academy, the University of Iowa, Southern Adventist University, and Andrews University for 41 years. He has written 10 books, 120 scholarly and professional articles, 40 reviews and critiques in French and Adventist history and directed three Adventist heritage tours of New England. He writes a weekly column ("The Past Is Always Present") in the *Journal Era* and shares Adventist history at camp meetings, schools, and churches.

Jerome Clark was a history professor and author, who served for two decades as chair of the History Department at what is known today as Southern Adventist University.

## Early Years and Education

Jerome ("Jerry") Leslie Rapaport was born on July 6, 1928, in New York City, to Reuben Rapaport, a Russian immigrant medical doctor, and Eva M. (Clark) Rapaport, a Seventh-day Adventist nurse at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Montclair, New Jersey. Jerry completed his first eight grades in six years at several New York City public schools.

Jerry then attended Greater New York Academy (1940-1944), receiving his college preparation diploma in June 1944. Despite the offer of several scholarships to state colleges and universities, he chose to follow in his mother's footsteps and go to Atlantic Union College in South Lancaster, Massachusetts where he enrolled in the Bachelor of Theology program (1944-1948). Following graduation in June 1948, Jerry, his mother, and his sister Patricia moved to Takoma Park, Maryland, so that Jerry could attend the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and prepare for the ministry (despite strong opposition from his father, who was not an Adventist). Since Patricia, who had recently enrolled in the nursing program at Southern Missionary College in Collegedale, Tennessee, was now using her mother's maiden name as her surname, Jerry went before a judge in Rockville,



Jerome Clark (left) and C.L. Paddock, Southern Publishing Association book manager, with copies of Clark's three-volume study, *1844*, just off the press.

Photo courtesy of *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, July 29, 1968.

Maryland in 1949 and legally changed his last name from Rapaport to Clark.<sup>1</sup>

## Literature Ministry and Marriage

Clark's seminary professors, reluctant to graduate a twenty-year-old student, suggested that he first gain some "field experience." The Oklahoma Conference hired him in 1949 as the colporteur-pastor of the El Reno Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>2</sup>

That summer, while singing in the camp meeting choir near Oklahoma City, Clark met Ann Rorabaw, a Conference elementary school teacher. Jerry and Ann married on February 5, 1950 and moved to Takoma Park, Maryland the following summer. They had a son, Jerome William, and adopted two children, Alice Ann and Daniel Leslie.

From 1951 to 1954 the Clarks taught at Dayton Junior Academy and Monett Junior Academy in the Ohio Conference.<sup>3</sup> Jerry also completed his M.A. at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in 1953 and an M.A. in history at the University of Maryland in 1954.

## Academic Career

The Clarks then moved to southern California where Jerome taught history at Loma Linda Union Academy while working on his doctorate in history at the University of Southern California. After he completed the Ph.D. in July 1959, the Clarks moved to Collegedale, Tennessee, where Jerome taught American history courses and became chair of the History Department at Southern Missionary College (renamed Southern Adventist University).

Among the various roles he filled during his faculty career, Clark was a member of the popular Lyceum Fine Arts Committee, and in that capacity introduced several famous speakers and hosted "The Candlelight Hour" that followed each program. In addition, he sponsored the Colporteur Club, the Religious Liberty Club, the International Relations Club, the History Club, and Phi Alpha Theta (the international history honors society). As a member of the Chattanooga Civil War Roundtable, he frequently presented programs and conducted tours of Civil War battle sites. His Colonial American history tours were legendary for his fascinating insights and keeping costs low.

## Scholarship

Although teaching four courses every semester, Clark spent months researching and six intense weeks writing the three-volume set *1844* (published by the Southern Publishing Association in 1968) which focused on the religious, social, and intellectual reform movements in antebellum America. In 1972 he taught an upper division course, Jacksonian America, using this set as his text. Widespread publicity for *1844* within the Adventist Church soon launched Clark on a new career as a popular speaker at local churches and camp meetings in Tennessee,

Alabama, Mississippi, the Carolinas, Maryland, and Virginia during the late 1960s and 1970s.

In 1972 Clark completed an unpublished book manuscript titled *The Crusade against Alcohol*. He also served as a historical consultant to the Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and for the Review and Herald Publishing Association. In addition, he wrote several articles for the *Review and Herald* and a chapter ("The Crusade Against Alcohol") in *The World of Ellen G. White*, edited by Gary Land and published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association in 1987.

## Service

For many years, Clark served as an elder, parish leader, Sabbath school teacher, and board member in the Collegedale Seventh-day Adventist Church, where he sponsored the Spalding Senior Division Sabbath School. In addition, he raised funds to support mission work in India, Nairobi, and the Philippines. The Clarks helped provide a new oven for Solusi College in Africa and kitchen equipment for Mountain View College in the Philippines; sent copies of the *Church Manual* to all the pastors in Nairobi; helped build the East Asian Evangelism Center in Palau; and placed copies of Ellen White's nine-volume *Testimonies to the Church* in every church school in the Southern Union.

## Later Life

After teaching history courses and chairing the History Department at Southern Missionary College for twenty years, Clark served as director of the Lincoln and Civil War Library on the third floor of the college's McKee Library from 1979 to 1984.<sup>4</sup> There he hosted many school groups from all over the United States, showing students and teachers Civil War memorabilia and Abraham Lincoln artifacts. While serving in this role, Clark also completed an M.S. in special education at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, and spent a year at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville taking library science courses.

Dr. Jerome L. Clark died peacefully in his sleep from vascular occlusion at home on the morning of November 4, 1997, at the age of sixty-nine. Southern Adventist University pastor Rolland Ruf and president Gordon Bietz officiated at his funeral, and he was buried in the Collegedale Memorial Park two days later. To honor his decades of service to Southern Adventist University, the United States flag in front of Wright Hall was flown at half-mast for several days.

## Contribution

Jerome Clark's primary contributions to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to the profession of history in general are the hundreds of history majors he taught in his demanding courses, many of whom today teach history in high schools, academies, colleges, and universities around the world, the many articles he wrote for

church publications, and the scholarly three-volume set *1844* that sold widely in the 1960s and 1970s. His closest friends and former students remember him as one who held a deep love of baseball, music, books, and stamp collecting, and who enjoyed leading historical tours and research trips.

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## SOURCES

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Clark, Jerome Leslie. *1844*. 3 vols. Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1968.

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[https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/alumni\\_newsletter/150](https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/alumni_newsletter/150).

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## NOTES

1. In addition to sources specified in subsequent endnotes, this article draws throughout on Ann (Rorabaw) Clark, telephone interviews with the author, November 28, December 13 and 21, 2016.
2. Clark's sales totals appear in the "Report of Southwestern Union Literature Ministry" section in most issues of the *Southwestern Union Record* from May 24, 1949 to June 22, 1950.
3. E.J. Barnes, "Ohio Church Schools," *Columbia Union Visitor*, October 2, 1952, 2; "Monnett Church School," *Columbia Union Visitor*, February 4, 1954, 5.
4. "Jerome Leslie Clark obituary," *Southern Columns*, Spring 1998, accessed September 20, 2020, [https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/alumni\\_newsletter/150](https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/alumni_newsletter/150).

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