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**February 17, 2016**

**THIS WEEK:**

## **Alexander Clark, Iowa Diplomat Who Served as United States Minister to Liberia**

**BACKGROUND:**

The Clark family moved from Washington County, Pennsylvania, to Cincinnati, Ohio, when Alexander was 13 years old. In Ohio, Mr. Clark studied with an uncle to become a barber.

Mr. Clark came to Iowa at the age of 16. His family settled in Bloomington (now Muscatine) in 1842. Mr. Clark took advantage of every opportunity to establish himself as a businessman in Iowa. He began his career as a barber, invested in real estate, and sold wood he harvested from land he owned near the Mississippi River.

In 1848, Mr. Clark married Catherine Griffin. They had five children, three of whom survived childhood.

### ***Mr. Clark Fights for Equality, Becomes U.S. Minister***

Mr. Clark helped to organize the only black regiment from Iowa in the Civil War—the First Iowa Volunteers of African Descent. In 1863, Mr. Clark enlisted in the war, but a disability kept him out of active service.

Mr. Clark was also a Mason, eventually becoming Grand Master. President Ulysses Grant offered Mr. Clark the post of U.S. Minister to Haiti, which he declined because of the meager salary.

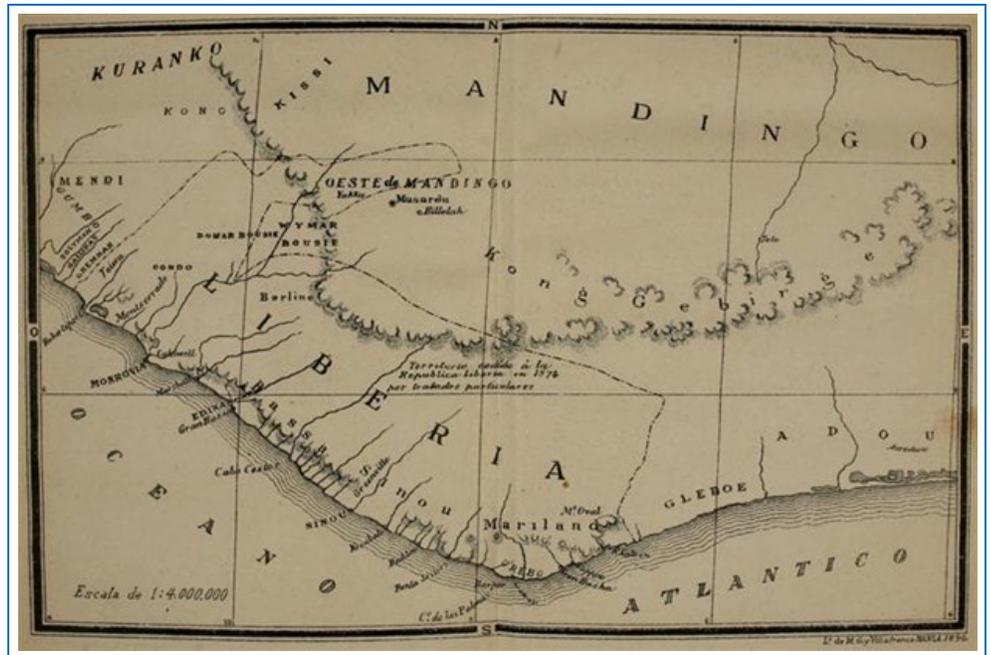


**Alexander Clark  
1826-1891**

In 1867, Mr. Clark's daughter, Susan, was denied access to the school nearest their home because she was black. Mr. Clark sued, and the Iowa Supreme Court ruled on the case. The Court ruled in Mr. Clark's favor stating, "The Iowa Constitution guaranteed all Iowa children the right to attend Common Schools." Susan became the first African-American to graduate from Muscatine High School. Two years later, in 1873, Mr. Clark's son, Alexander Clark Jr., became the second to graduate. The younger Mr. Clark was denied admission to the University of Iowa Law School because of his color. Mr. Clark again worked to end this discrimination and eventually gained admittance to the law school for his son. In 1879, Alexander Clark Jr., became the first African-American to graduate from the University of Iowa Law School.

Following his son, Mr. Clark became the second African-American to graduate from the University of Iowa Law School in 1884.

While in law school, Mr. Clark became co-owner and editor of *The Conservator*, a newspaper published in Chicago.



**Map depiction at the time Clark was United States Minister of Liberia in 1890.**

President William Henry Harrison appointed Mr. Clark U.S. Minister to Liberia on August 16, 1890.

Mr. Clark died while in Monrovia, Liberia, on May 31, 1891.

He is buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Muscatine, Iowa.





**In 1849, at the age of 23, Mr. Clark purchased his first home in Muscatine, Iowa. Fire destroyed that house in 1878. Mr. Clark then built this two story brick house in 1879. Located at 203 West Third Street in Muscatine, it is on the National Register of Historic Places.**

Iowa Public Television has produced a documentary about Mr. Clark. The documentary can be viewed here: <http://site.iptv.org/video/story/4902/lost-history-alexander-clark>