

**Name:** Clarke, George Johnston (Hon.)

**Riding:** Charlotte, County of

**Party:** Conservative

**Date Elected:** GE 28 Feb. 1903. GE 3 Mar. 1908. GE 20 Jun. 1912. BY-EL 19 Feb. 1914.

**Positions Held:** Elected Speaker of the House of Assembly, 18 Mar. 1909 - 22 Jan. 1914. Appointed to Executive Council as Attorney General and Commissioner of Provincial Hospital, 22 Jan. 1914 - 17 Dec. 1914. Acting Premier of New Brunswick, Mar. 1914 - 6 Dec. 1914. Leader of the Conservative Party, 6 Dec. 1914 - 1 Feb. 1917. Premier of New Brunswick, 6 Dec. 1914 - 1 Feb. 1917. Appointed Minister of Lands and Mines, 17 Dec. 1914 - 1 Feb. 1917.

**Cabinet Shuffle:**

**Retired:** Resigned as Premier due to ill-health on 1 Feb. 1917.

**Defeated:** GE 18 Feb. 1899.

**Died:** Died at the age of 59 on 26 Feb. 1917 in St. Stephen, NB, after a lengthy illness.

**Notes:** Born on 10 Oct. 1857 in St. Andrews, NB. Before entering the practice of law, Clarke taught school in a number of Charlotte County schools. He was admitted to the Bar as an attorney on 29 Apr. 1885, and as a barrister on 23 Jun. 1887. He then moved to St. Stephen to establish a practice. He also served as editor of the "St. Croix Courier" newspaper in St. Stephen. Clarke first attempted to enter politics at the federal election of 1891 but was unsuccessful. His next foray was at the municipal level, when he became Mayor of St. Stephen in 1898-1899, and Warden of Charlotte County. In 1899 he unsuccessfully contested the provincial election

Clarke was eventually elected to the Legislature in 1903 and would remain in office until early 1917. He was appointed King's Counsel in 1907. In 1909 he began the first of two terms as Speaker. He was appointed to the Hon. J.K. Flemming's (q.v.) Executive Council in 1914, just as scandal began to swaddle the administration. The Premier himself was implicated in wrongdoing, and as a Commission began its investigation of Flemming, Clarke was named Acting Premier in Mar. 1914. By Dec. 1914, Flemming resigned and Clarke was chosen as his successor as Premier.

In complete contrast to the personable Flemming, Clarke was seen as "a mild, colorless personality with limited political skill or appeal." Some suggested that he was unsuited to be Premier. Clarke, however, should have been exactly what the scandal-ravaged Conservatives needed. Never having been implicated in graft or corruption, Clarke had an impeccable reputation of upstanding integrity.

Throughout his administration, however, Clarke was inundated with opposition from all sides. He was tormented in equal parts by his own discontented caucus and the particularly ruthless Opposition. Furthermore, Clarke's health was so poor that he was absent from his legislative duties for much of 1916, replaced by his eventual successor, James A. Murray (q.v.).

In spite of all this adversity, Clarke's legacy is the wide range of progressive legislation for which he was directly responsible as Minister of Lands and Mines. At the time, his reforms were considered the most advanced policy of any Canadian province. Clarke was meant to have been rewarded for his service to his scandal-ridden party with his appointment as Lieutenant Governor. The details were being arranged, and his official portrait had already been completed when his health worsened again.

His poor health forced his resignation as Premier in Feb. 1917, just weeks before the general election. For the last six days of the 1917 campaign, Clarke lay unconscious in bed. He died on 26 Feb. 1917, unaware of his Conservatives' resounding defeat at the polls.

For more information see also: "Premiers of New Brunswick" (971.5 D754 NB Coll.); "Front Benches & Back

Rooms"" (320.9715 D754 NB Coll.); ""Speakers of the Legislative Assembly Province of New Brunswick, 1786-1985"" (328.71505 N532Sp NB Coll.); and ""The History of New Brunswick Provincial Election Campaigns and Platforms, 1868-1974"" (329.023 W899 NB Coll.)

*Last Modified:* 2005-05-05