

# Clarke, McDonald collection

McDonald Clarke collection

1815-1837

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## Title Statement

Clarke, McDonald collection Guide to the McDonald Clarke collection MSS 7546

**Subtitle:** A Collection in the Clifton Waller Barrett Library of American Literature

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## Profile Description

**Creation:** This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2026-03-05 17:46:51 +0000.

**Language Usage:** Description is written in: English, Latin script.

**Descriptive Rules:** Describing Archives: A Content Standard

## Descriptive Summary

**Unit ID**

MSS 7546

**Unit ID**

[Archival Resource Key](#)

**Unit ID**

/repositories/3/resources/1796

**Unit Date**

1815-1837

**Language**

English

**Creator**

Clarke, McDonald, 1798-1842

**Extent**

0.16 Cubic Feet Four legal file folders

**Condition Description**

Fair.

**Repository**

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

# Administrative Information

## Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research use.

## Conditions Governing Use

The Library believes that all or nearly all material in this collection is likely to be in the public domain, free of copyright restrictions. Visit our Permissions and Publishing page for more information about use of Special Collections materials. The library can provide copyright information upon request, but users are responsible for making their own determination about lawful use of collections materials.

## Immediate Source of Acquisition

The bulk of the collection is a gift from Clifton Waller Barrett to the Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia on 1964 May 26. One item was purchased from James Cummins Bookseller by the Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia on 26 July 2024.

## Processing Information

This collection was originally cataloged in Virgo. In August 2025, an addition was acquired and an ArchivesSpace finding aid was made. Metadata from the original MARC record was migrated and was combined with the new accession to create this finding aid in August 2025. As the bulk of the collection was from the Clifton Waller Barrett Library, items that were part of the Barrett collection were clearly identified in acquisition notes.

## Preferred Citation

McDonald Clarke Collection, MSS 7546, Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

# Biographical

McDonald Clarke (1798-1842) was an American poet, sometimes called the "mad poet of Broadway," who belonged to the Bohemian circle in New York. He was born in Bath, Maine, in 1798, the son of John Clarke, Jr., a sea captain, and Ann McDonald. They moved to New London, Connecticut, in Clarke's childhood. His parents both died when Clarke was young, his mother in 1810 from consumption while on a sea voyage, and his father in 1813 at sea. It is unclear exactly where he lived after his parents' death, but he appeared in New York City around 1819, where he began to pursue a career as a poet. Clarke was also a regular attender of Grace Church, an Episcopal parish, where he came into contact with some of the city's prominent and wealthy families. He married an actress, Mary Brundage, in 1820, but they soon separated due to Clarke's financial instability. Clarke's books sold marginally well, but most of his income was from selling his poems to newspapers, magazines, and journals. In 1842, found destitute by a police officer, Clarke was taken to a New York City jail before removal to an asylum on Blackwells Island (now called Roosevelt Island). Clarke drowned on March 5, 1842, in his cell by water from an open faucet. Posthumously, Clarke's work and life circumstances influenced later poets, most especially Walt Whitman.

## References

Matteson, John T. "Clarke, McDonald (1798-1842)." The Walt Whitman Archive. Gen. ed. Matt Cohen, Ed Folsom, and Kenneth M. Price. Accessed 27 August 2025. <<http://www.whitmanarchive.org>>.

Sturr, Robert D. "Clarke, McDonald (1798-1842), poet." American National Biography. 1 Feb. 2000; Accessed 27 Aug. 2025. <https://www.anb.org/view/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-1600310>.

# Content Description

This collection of McDonald Clarke papers contains one autograph poem titled "Midnight" from 1815, an undated manuscript poem fragment beginning "They tell me we shall never meet" from Clarke's *Afara*; receipts for the sale of books to William Gowans from Clarke dated October 28, 1837, and from Francis G. Dorr, dated October 25, 1837; and an undated lithograph of the head and upper torso of Clarke.

# Keywords

poetry

American Literature--19th Century--History and Criticism

Poets

Gowans, William, 1803-1870

# Description of Subordinate Components

## "Midnight" poem

**Unit ID** [Archival Resource Key](#)

**Unit ID** /repositories/3/archival\_objects/281319

**Unit Date** April 10, 1815

**Mixed Materials [X032784983]** 96 (box)

**Container** 001 (folder)

**Language** English

### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from James Cummins Bookseller, 26 July 2024.

### Scope and Contents

The poem is addressed to Susan Barton with the theme of Clarke's unreciprocated love for Barton. Clarke's signature appears under the date at the bottom of the poem.

## "They tell me we shall never met" [Poem fragment]

**Unit ID** [Archival Resource Key](#)

**Unit ID** /repositories/3/archival\_objects/281320

**Unit Date** [1829]

**Mixed Materials [X032784983]** 96 (box)

**Container** 002 (folder)

**Language** English

### Immediate Source of Acquisition

This makes up a Collection in the Clifton Waller Barrett Library of American Literature, Accession number 7546, Deposit, [1963 Dec 17], 1964 May 26.

## Receipt, McDonald Clarke to William Gowans

**Unit ID** [Archival Resource Key](#)

**Unit ID** /repositories/3/archival\_objects/281321

**Unit Date** October 28, 1837

**Mixed Materials [X032784983]** 96 (box)

**Container** 003 (folder)

### Immediate Source of Acquisition

This makes up a Collection in the Clifton Waller Barrett Library of American Literature, Accession number 7546, Deposit, [1963 Dec 17], 1964 May 26.

### Scope and Contents

The receipt was for sale of books, with another receipt to Gowans signed by Francis G. Dorr on verso.

## Lithograph portrait print of McDonald Clarke

**Unit ID** [Archival Resource Key](#)

**Unit ID** /repositories/3/archival\_objects/281322

**Unit Date** undated

**Mixed Materials [X032784990]** Barrett Prints 004 (box)

**Container** 004 (folder)

### Immediate Source of Acquisition

This makes up a Collection in the Clifton Waller Barrett Library of American Literature, Accession number 7546, Deposit, [1963 Dec 17], 1964 May 26.