

HENRY WATKINS COLLIER

Sixth Chief Justice - 1837-1849

BORN: January 17, 1801; Lunenburg County, Virginia
DIED: August 28, 1855; Bailey's Springs (Florence), Alabama

Although born in Virginia, Henry Watkins Collier grew up in Abbeville, South Carolina. In 1818, he moved to Madison County, Alabama Territory, where he was admitted to the Alabama Bar in 1822. Collier began practicing law in Huntsville, but shortly afterwards, he moved to Tuscaloosa, then the state capital.

Collier embarked upon a noteworthy career in public service in 1827 upon being elected to represent Tuscaloosa County in the state legislature. In 1828 the legislature elected him circuit judge, and in that capacity he also sat as an associate justice on the state's highest court until 1833. When a separate three-judge supreme court was created in that year, Collier continued as circuit judge.

Governor Clement C. Clay appointed Collier to the Supreme Court as associate justice in 1836, and the following year Collier was chosen chief justice, a position which he held for twelve years. During his tenure on the court, he authored 1,165 opinions.

Elected governor of Alabama in 1849 and again in 1851, Collier, as a compromise candidate, won both contests by overwhelming majorities. His administration was marked by caution and moderation during the turbulent period preceding secession. He promoted the development of Alabama's textile industry, the improvement of the state school system, and prison reform.

Henry Watkins Collier was married on April 25, 1826, to Mary Anne Battle, from North Carolina. They had four children.

Portrait by NICOLA MARSCHALL, 1819-1917, American artist, born Prussia
Working in Alabama circa 1849-1873 (and later visits)
Late nineteenth century oil on canvas after an original by William Carroll Saunders