

CLEMENT COMER CLAY

First Chief Justice of Alabama - 1820-1823

BORN: December 17, 1789; Halifax County, Virginia
DIED: September 7, 1866; Huntsville, Alabama

Born in Virginia and raised in Tennessee, where he was admitted to practice law in 1809, Clement Comer Clay moved to Huntsville in the Mississippi Territory in 1811. He fought in the Indian uprisings, served in the Alabama territorial legislature in 1817 and as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1819 and also chaired the committee which drafted the first constitution of Alabama.

In 1819 Clay was commissioned a circuit judge, and on May 10, 1820, was chosen as the state's first chief justice by his fellow circuit judges. As chief justice, Clay wrote the first three reported opinions in Alabama, and during his tenure delivered twenty opinions in reported cases. He resigned in December, 1823, to practice law in Huntsville.

In 1827 Clay represented Madison County in the state legislature and was unanimously elected speaker. From 1829 to 1835, he served his district in Congress. He became the Alabama's eighth governor in 1835, serving until July, 1837, when the state legislature elected him to fill a vacancy in the United States Senate. Although he resigned his senate post in 1841 to resume his law practice in Huntsville, he remained active in public affairs. He was commissioned by the legislature to prepare a digest of state laws. In 1843 he was appointed to fill an unexpired term as an associate justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama, and in 1846 he helped to wind up the affairs of the State Bank.

Clement C. Clay was married in 1815 to Susanna Claiborne Withers, also formerly of Virginia.

Clay was elected to the Alabama Hall of Fame in 1953.

Portrait by WILLIAM FRYE, 1822-1872
Alabama artist, born in Germany
Oil on canvas, signed on back and dated 1853