

JAMES RENDER DOWDELL

Twentieth Chief Justice: 1909-1914

BORN: April 2, 1847; Chambers County, Alabama

DIED: June 28, 1921; LaFayette, Alabama



*Portrait by PAUL E. MENZEL, German
1875-1944
Oil on Canvas*

James Render Dowdell attended the University of Alabama during the last year of the Civil War but graduated from East Alabama College at Auburn in 1867. He taught school at LaFayette while he read law, and he was admitted to the Bar in the fall of 1869. The next year he began practicing law in Opelika with his cousin William. J. Samford.

Dowdell was connected with the judicial history of the State throughout his life. He was elected solicitor of the Ninth Judicial Circuit in November, 1876. In 1880 he established a law practice in LaFayette. Eight years later he was appointed judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit. In 1892, He returned to LaFayette to resume his law practice.

In 1896 Dowdell was appointed Chancellor of the Northern Division, resigning in 1898, when he was elected associate justice of the Supreme Court. In 1909 Governor Braxton Bragg Comer appointed Dowdell to succeed John Tyson as chief justice, a position which he held for five years. He resigned in January of 1914 and returned to LaFayette where he remained until his death.

James Render Dowdell married Ella May Ware, of LaFayette, in December, 1878. They had three children.

Junius Moore Riggs Collection

Location: Hallway Outside Antebellum Gallery, 3rd Floor, Heflin-Torbert Judicial Building