

HENDERSON MIDDLETON SOMERVILLE

Associate Justice - 1880-1890

BORN: March 23, 1837; Madison County, Virginia
DIED: September 15, 1915; New York, New York

For all practical purposes, Henderson M. Somerville was an Alabamian, having moved to this state before he was a year old. He graduated from the University of Alabama in 1856 and completed his law studies at Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee, in 1859. He then moved to Memphis to practice law and two years later assumed the editorship and management of the ***Memphis Appeal***.

In 1863, Somerville moved to Tuscaloosa. He taught mathematics and classics at the University of Alabama until the school burned in 1865 and then established a law practice in Tuscaloosa. In 1873, he founded the law school at the University of Alabama and became its first head.

Governor Rufus W. Cobb appointed Somerville to the Supreme Court in 1880 as successor to Amos Manning. He was popularly elected in 1886 and remained in office until 1890 when he resigned in order to accept an appointment by President Benjamin Harrison to the Board of Customs Appraisers. He then moved to New York, where he remained until his death in 1915.

Somerville's opinion in ***Parsons v. State***, 81 Ala. 577 (1886), which announced the modern doctrine of insanity as a disease of the brain, was met with great acclaim in both the medical and legal communities.

Henderson Somerville married Cornelia Banks Harris of Tuscaloosa in 1862. They had seven children.