

## **JOHN DENNIS PHELAN**

Associate Justice: 1852-1854 and 1864-1866

BORN: March 23, 1809; New Brunswick, New Jersey

DIED: September 10, 1879; Marion, Alabama



***Portrait by SAMUEL HOFFMAN,  
American, 1854-1931  
Oil on Canvas***

A native of New Brunswick, New Jersey, John Dennis Phelan grew up in Huntsville, Alabama, and attended the University of Nashville. He studied law in Virginia and was admitted to that bar in 1830. In 1832, he returned to Alabama and became editor of the Huntsville Democrat. He was admitted to the Alabama State Bar in 1837.

From 1834 to 1835, He represented Madison County in the state legislature. Two years later the legislature elected him attorney general. In 1838, he resigned but was elected the next year to the legislature and chosen speaker of the House.

Phelan was a circuit judge from 1841 until 1851. When the Supreme Court was expanded to five members in 1851, the legislature elected him to the court. In 1853, the size of the court was reduced to three, thus he lost his post, but was appointed clerk of the court. When he was disqualified from office by Congressional Reconstruction legislation, he moved to Sewanee, Tennessee.

Phelan first married Mary Ann Harris in 1836, and they had twelve children. After her death, he married Maria Shelby in 1872.

***Junius Moore Riggs Collection***

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