



225th Anniversary
1789-2014



Samuel Rossiter Betts

Born:

June 8, 1786
Richmond, MA

Received Commission:

December 21, 1826

Died:

November 3, 1868
New Haven, CT

Samuel Rossiter Betts was the son of Judge Uriah Betts and Sarah (Rossiter) Betts. He attended Lenox Academy in Lenox, Mass., and graduated from Williams College in 1806. He then moved to Hudson, N.Y. where he read law. After being admitted to the bar in 1809, he established a private law practice in Monticello, N.Y. which he maintained until 1812 when he enlisted in the army to serve in the War of 1812. His military service lasted until 1815, including a period as judge-advocate.

Betts was elected to Congress in 1815 from Sullivan and Orange Counties, but only served one term and re-established his private practice in Newburgh, N.Y. between 1815 and 1823. For part of this time (1821 – 1823) he also served as District Attorney for Orange County. He was well-liked and industrious, leading to his appointment as Circuit Judge for the New York Supreme Court in 1823. Judge Betts's growing reputation led to his appointment to the Federal District Court in 1826.

During Judge Bett's forty-year career on the Southern District Court, the Court's admiralty case load quadrupled. He became renowned for his maritime decisions and wrote an early and respected treatise on admiralty law: *A Summary of Practice in Instance, Revenue and Prize Causes, in the Admiralty Courts of the United States, for the Southern District of New York; and also on Appeal to the Supreme Court: Together with The Rules of the District Court.* (1838). Upon his retirement (1867), the Court honored him for his "industry, ability, and fidelity,"... "clear and cultivated intellect"... and "enlightened love of justice".

Sources:

Biographical Directory of Federal Judges, available at <http://www.fjc.gov/>

Dictionary of American Biography. Allen Johnson, ed. (New York, N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons) (1929)

Benedict, Erastus C. *The American Admiralty its Jurisdiction and Practice: with Practical Forms and Directions* (New York: Banks and Brothers) (1870) pp. v-vi.