



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

**Media Contact:** Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152

**For Immediate Release:** May 4, 1964

[Print PDF](#)

John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1933 to 1945, has been named to receive the Distinguished Service Award, the highest honor the Department of the Interior can bestow. The award will be presented by Commissioner of Indian Affairs Philleo Nash, acting as the personal emissary of Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall, in a ceremony at Mr. Collier's home in Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico, on May 4, his 80th birthday.

The honor, given in recognition of Mr. Collier's extraordinary leadership in the field of Indian affairs, also commemorates the 30th anniversary of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. He was the chief philosopher and advocate of the Indian Reorganization Act, and its passage was an outstanding accomplishment in his career as Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

The 1934 Act is significant in several respects. It brought a quick halt to a process of allotting property to individual Indians which resulted in the permanent loss of much land from Indian ownership. It provided a foundation for tribal economic self-sufficiency by the establishment of chartered corporations, the extension of credit from Federal funds, and the fostering of tribal enterprise. It also brought about home rule through an increased measure of tribal self-government, and established the present-day policies of conservation and development of Indian lands and resources.

The citation to Mr. Collier accompanying the gold medallion reads in part:

"John Collier has always been a vigorous champion of religious freedom, defending the Indians' right to continue their traditional ceremonies and to choose freely among the religions offered them.

---

<https://www.bia.gov/as-ia/opa/online-press-release/john-coller-receive-interior-departments-highest-award-80th>