

Drew, John ^[1]

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by Ernest Rawls Carter, Jr., 1986

ca. 1719–26 July 1819

John Drew, merchant and ship owner, was born in Virginia but died in [Bertie County](#) ^[2], N.C. The son of William Drew (1682–1739) and Judith Wood, daughter of Thomas Wood of Isle of Wight County, Va., John Drew was an early inhabitant of land acquired by his father in the [Roanoke River](#) ^[3] valley in northeastern North Carolina. He also seems to have owned land in [Edgecombe County](#) ^[4] as well as in Surry and Nansemond counties, Virginia. The Drew family was well represented in southeastern Virginia and held great tracts in North Carolina as well. John's brother, Dolphin, represented Isle of Wight County as a burgess in 1766 and as a militia colonel in 1772. John's sons, John, Jr., and William, were quite successful in the mercantile business and law, with [William](#) ^[5] serving as attorney general of North Carolina in 1815.

Drew's educational interests are vague but, according to the Harris Letters, he gave sixty-four dollars to [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[6] upon subscription in 1793–94. His financial endeavors were numerous: among them, he owned stud horses, sailing ships to Barbados and London, and mercantile establishments in [Halifax](#) ^[7], Scotland Neck, and Louisburg. He also seems to have bought and sold vast tracts of land in Virginia and North Carolina. Advertisements from North Carolina newspapers offer sales of coffee, rum, sugar, molasses, and other commodities that arrived on brigs such as the *Betsy*, the *Poll Carey*, and the *Jonathan Jacocks*. Drew evidently offered young men the chance for apprenticeship in his business. Charles Harris arranged for his brother, Robert, to work under Drew, and Dolphin Samuel Pete, the son of John, Jr., died of yellow fever in St. Bartholomew aboard his grandfather's ship.

Perhaps the greatest of Drew's accomplishments was his incredible longevity. According to the obituary appearing in the *Raleigh Register*, he died a "very old and respectable inhabitant." Simple calculations reveal him to have lived eighty years after his own father's death. Moreover, Drew survived two wives, two children, and one grandchild.

Drew married Patience Brewer, daughter of Thomas Brewer of Nansemond County, Va., and after her death, Winifred, who died on Salmon Creek, Bertie County, in 1810. Four children were born to Drew, but it is not known to which wife: William, John, Dolphin, and Mary, who married Starkey Armistead of Bertie County.

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