

De Rosset, Lewis Henry ^[1]

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ca. 1724–22 Feb. 1786

Lewis Henry De Rosset, planter-enslaver and colonial officer, was the son of Armand J. and Madeline De Rosset. His father was a Swiss-educated physician who immigrated to North Carolina about 1736. By 1741 the De Rossets were residing in Wilmington ^[2]. Lewis initially pursued a mercantile career but, like many colonial figures, he also had agricultural interests and referred to himself as a planter in a letter written in 1759. As was the case with his brother, Moses John ^[3], who was mayor of Wilmington during the critical period of the Stamp Act ^[4] crisis, Lewis was active in politics. He was sheriff of New Hanover County ^[5] in 1748, justice of the peace in 1751, and Assembly ^[6] representative from Wilmington in 1751–52. Early in 1753 he was elevated to the royal council, but he did not begin active service there until after the arrival of Governor Arthur Dobbs ^[7] in October 1754. From that time until the final executive session in June 1775, he was a regular participant in council meetings.

De Rosset was closely allied with Governor Dobbs and consistently supported his programs. In return, the chief executive rewarded the faithful councillor. De Rosset was appointed judge of the southern court of oyer and terminer in the summer of 1757 and replaced John Rutherford as receiver general later that year. He would hold that lucrative position until Rutherford was reinstated three years later by order of the Privy Council.

In addition to a house in Wilmington, De Rosset owned a plantation called Red Banks eight miles northeast of the town. He enslaved 31 people and owned about 3,000 acres of land. Married to the former Margaret Walker of Wilmington, the couple had no children. During the campaign against the Regulators ^[8] in 1771, De Rosset served as a lieutenant general. He had previously been a colonel of the Johnston County ^[9] militia as early as 1754.

On 30 Apr. 1779 De Rosset fled Wilmington for the loyalist sanctuary of New York with as many possessions as he could carry. However, his ship was captured by an American privateer and taken to New London, Conn. De Rosset was stripped of all his goods and sent to New York in June under a flag of truce. When Sir Henry Clinton sailed to attack Charleston late in 1779, De Rosset accompanied him after offering to lend his considerable knowledge of the area. Clinton made De Rosset chief commissary of prisoners in Charleston, a post that he held until evacuation of the city by British troops at the close of the war. De Rosset then went to London and in July 1783 claimed losses of £10,000 sterling on his confiscated North Carolina property. He further told the Loyalist ^[10] Claims Commission that when revolutionaries had ordered him to sign the oath of allegiance in Wilmington in 1779, he refused to do so and had been banished for it. Supporting letters from governors William Tryon ^[11] and Josiah Martin ^[12] attested to De Rosset's years of loyalty and service. On 22 Feb. 1786 De Rosset died in London with little compensation for his great losses in North Carolina.

References:

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William S. Price, Jr., "'Men of Good Estates': Wealth Among North Carolina's Royal Councillors." ^[14] *North Carolina Historical Review* 49 (1972).

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Additional Resources:

DeRosset Family Papers, 1671-1940 (bulk 1821-1877) (collection no. 00214). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
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Bond from Lewis Henry De Rosset for performance as commissioner to sign and stamp debenture bills. De Rosset, Lewis Henry, ca. 1724-1786; Sampson, John, d. 1784; Harnett, Cornelius, 1723-1781. December 23, 1771 Volume 09, Pages 73-74: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr09-0053> ^[16].

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

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