

Devereux, John ^[1]

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Devereux, John

by Terrell L. Armistead, 1986

11 Mar. 1761–1 July 1844

John Devereux, merchant, planter, and influential citizen of New Bern and Raleigh, was born in County Wexford, Ireland. According to family sources Devereux, a younger son, was sent to St. Omar in France to prepare for the Roman Catholic priesthood. He rejected that profession while still quite young, but he remained a [Roman Catholic](#) ^[2] throughout his life. He apparently obtained a commission in the British navy sometime before the [American Revolution](#) ^[3] and saw action with the royal navy in that war and elsewhere, eventually attaining the rank of lieutenant. Several years later, however, Devereux resigned his commission and settled in Charleston, S.C., where he joined a "Mr. Fitzsimmons" as partner in a shipping and trading firm.

During one business trip on board a company ship in the late 1780s, Devereux was shipwrecked off Cape Hatteras and forced to remain in North Carolina while determining the company's losses. During this period he visited New Bern where he decided to settle and where he met his future wife, Frances Pollock (18 Mar. 1771–3 June 1849), whom he married in 1790. She was the daughter of Thomas and Eunice Edwards Pollock, the granddaughter of theologian Jonathan Edwards, and the great-granddaughter of Governor [Thomas Pollock](#) ^[4]. Through her father's estate she eventually inherited eight plantations plus "7500 milled Spanish pieces of eight." This wealth, coupled with the capital accumulated by Devereux, firmly established them in the upper economic level of the state.

Devereux continued in the mercantile business with two partners, Stephen M. Chester and Robert V. Orme, trading between New York, Charleston, and the West Indies. He also managed his wife's estate and purchased land and slaves himself in Craven and Wake counties. His success in business was widely recognized by his contemporaries, one description by Stephen Miller stating that "His wealth and dignified character had a sensible influence on society, and in business circles his name was similar to that of Rothschild in Europe." Devereux apparently studied law as well because he bequeathed his law library to his only surviving son, [Thomas Pollock Devereux](#) ^[5]. His other son, George Pollock Devereux, died in 1837 after a short illness; his only daughter, [Frances Ann Devereux](#) ^[6], married [Leonidas Polk](#) ^[7], the Episcopal bishop and Confederate general, and lived in Louisiana.

In addition to his business enterprises, Devereux supported various educational institutions in North Carolina—among them [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[8] and the Griffin Free School for "indigent Scholars," New Bern, where he was a trustee. He also insisted on good educations for both of his sons, sending them to Yale for their degrees and legal training. Frances Devereux, who supported several charitable institutions with her own money, was one of the founders of the First Presbyterian Church in New Bern. Her will enumerated a long list of institutions and people to whom she bequeathed money.

When Thomas Pollock Devereux moved to Raleigh to live while serving as a federal district attorney and as clerk for the state supreme court in the 1820s, John and Frances Devereux accompanied him, purchasing a two-acre lot near the present [Peace College](#) ^[9]. John Devereux later added other city property to his holdings, and sold portions of it to the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad in an effort to promote its success. He continued his interest in the New Bern business but left its immediate control to his son, George.

Devereux died in Raleigh and was buried in the family plot at the City Cemetery. He directed that his Raleigh house and property be left to his wife. The proceeds from the sale of his New Bern house and business property were ordered combined with the remainder of his North Carolina estate, except for one hundred slaves bequeathed to Frances Devereux Polk, all of which was to be divided between his son Thomas and his grandson and namesake, John Devereux. The estate amounted to approximately \$800,000 due to the inclusion of his wife's Pollock property, which they jointly agreed should descend to their heirs. Frances Devereux continued to live in Raleigh until her death; she was buried next to her husband in the City Cemetery.

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Authors:

[Armistead, Terrell L.](#) ^[18]

Origin - location:

[New Bern](#) ^[19]

[Raleigh](#) ^[20]

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