

Devereux, John, Jr. ^[1]

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by Terrell L. Armistead, 1986; Revised October 2022

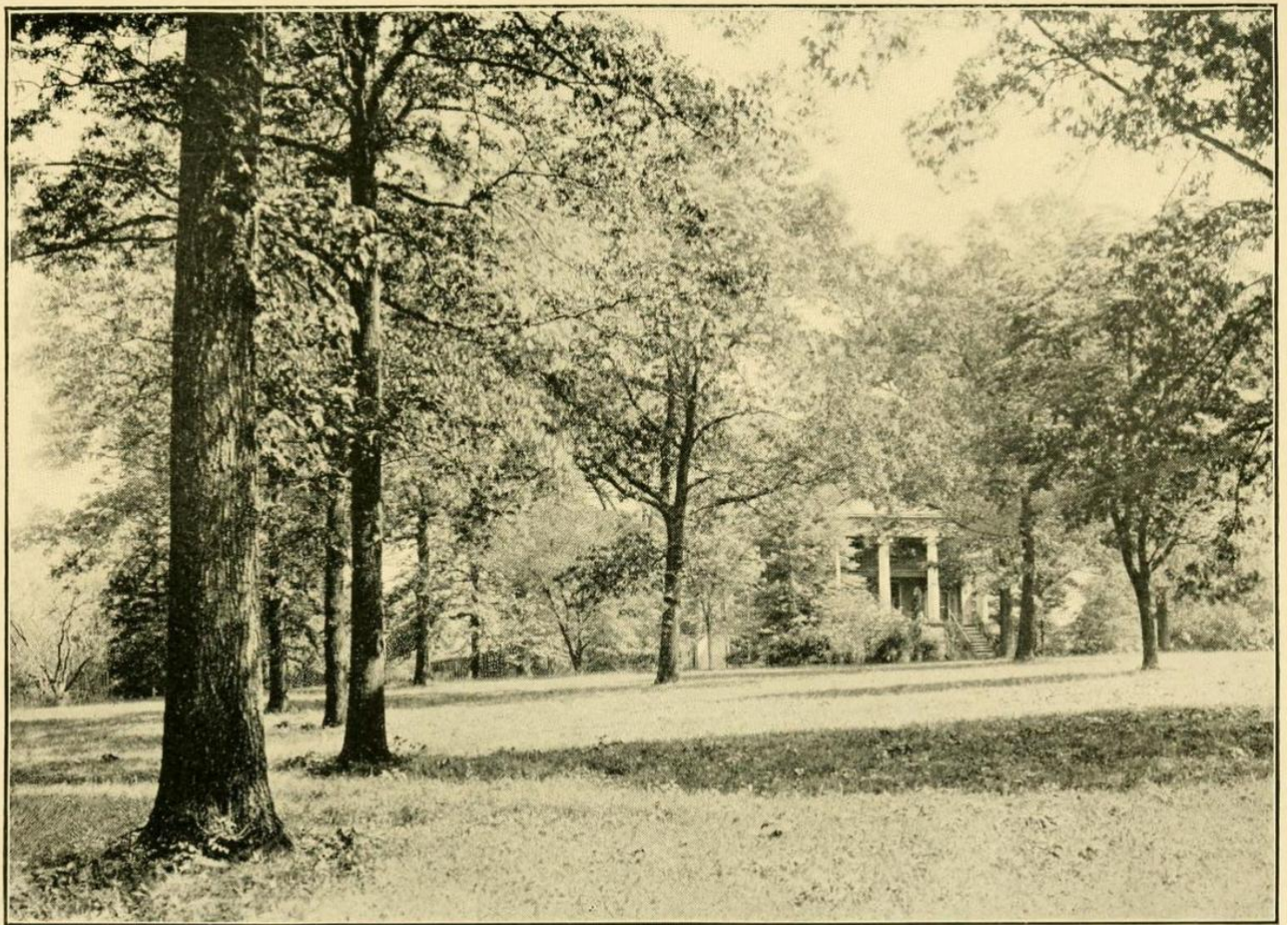
17 Dec. 1820–10 Apr. 1893



Portrait of Major John Devereux, Quarter Master General. From Walter Clark's *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War 1861-65*, Volume I. [p. 22-23], published 1901 by E. M. Uzzell, Printer and Binder, Raleigh, North Carolina. Presented on [Archive.org](#).

^[2]John Devereux, Jr., planter, enslaver, and chief quartermaster for the Confederacy in North Carolina during the [Civil War](#) ^[3], was born in [Raleigh](#) ^[4], the only surviving son of Thomas Pollock (17 Nov. 1793–7 Mar. 1869) and Catherine Ann Bayard Johnson Devereux (1796–18 July 1836). His mother was from Connecticut; his father, the son of John and Frances Pollock Devereux, was a native North Carolinian who resided at his plantation, Conneconara, in [Halifax County](#) ^[5]. [Thomas P. Devereux](#) ^[6] had practiced law and served as reporter for the state supreme court (1826–39) before he decided to concentrate on farming. John Devereux had six sisters, Frances, Elizabeth, Catherine Ann, [Mary Bayard](#) ^[7], Honoria, and Sophia Chester, among whom Mary Bayard (Mrs. William J. Clarke) became a noted North Carolina poet and writer. Little else is known about Devereux's early life except that he and his sisters received extensive educations during adolescence.

Devereux, whose "predominate trait was a genuine love of books," was graduated from Yale with distinction in 1840. Returning to North Carolina, he briefly practiced law and helped manage his family's extensive Devereux-Pollock estates. In 1842 he married Margaret Mordecai (19 Oct. 1824–10 Mar. 1910), the daughter of Moses and Ann Lane Mordecai of Raleigh, after which he relied on farming as his major source of income. His plantation, Runiroi Meadows on the [Roanoke River](#) ^[8] in [Bertie County](#) ^[9], had belonged formerly to John Devereux, Sr., the grandfather after whom John Devereux, Jr., was named. It then passed to his father, Thomas P. Devereux, who sold it to John Devereux in 1846. The elder Devereux also left his grandson a sizable inheritance in 1844, independent of that which descended to his own son. This inheritance enabled the Devereux to live at Runiroi during the winter and in R



WILLS FOREST

Photograph of Wills Forest, the Lane Family home in Raleigh inherited by John Devereux's wife, Margaret. From Margaret Devereux's *Plantation Sketches*, [p. 45-55], published 1906 by the Riverside Press, Cambridge. Presented on Archive.org.

^[10]Raleigh during the summer season. From her mother Margaret Devereux had inherited an old Lane family home in Raleigh, Wills Forest, which became the favorite residence of the Devereux family. The Devereux attended Christ Church in Raleigh, and John Devereux served as a trustee for the Griffin Free School both before and after it was moved from New Bern to Raleigh.

The seemingly stable and prosperous life of John Devereux, Jr., became, by the 1850s, increasingly mired in debt. His farming partnership with his father and their joint and individual enslavement of over fifteen hundred enslaved people left little liquid cash for other expenditures unless crops were consistently good. The 1850s were lean years in crop production, however, and Devereux grew increasingly concerned about the fact that both he and his father had to "live by borrowing," despite their low labor costs. The advent of the Civil War and the drive to outlaw enslavement and slavery multiplied these problems and led to the financial ruin of the family.

Upon North Carolina's secession, Devereux considered raising his own volunteer infantry company or joining his brother-in-law's (Patrick M. Edmondston, who married Catherine Ann Devereux) volunteer cavalry troop. Instead, he accepted a commission as assistant commissary of subsistence with the rank of captain in May 1861. His competent performance that summer earned him a promotion to chief quartermaster with the rank of major in September 1861, although he personally felt that the Commissary Department was "reaping the fruits of political favoritism" and that "the whole concern Confederate and State is going or rather has already gone to the dogs."

As chief quartermaster, Devereux was responsible for supplying North Carolina troops with numerous provisions, clothing, and food. He also hoped to meet the needs of private citizens as much as possible. His agents canvassed North Carolina and other southern states for goods, and contracts were established with factories and private citizens to manufacture a variety of items. One of the most time-consuming and important areas Devereux managed was the state's blockade-running ^[11] business, which brought goods from the West Indies into Wilmington ^[12] in exchange for cotton. The state's blockade-running account required floating loans, buying cotton, procuring ships for transportation, and other details; it eventually totaled over \$12 million and was a resounding success. The proficiency of the Quartermaster Department's work was reflected in the quantity of goods and food flowing not only to North Carolina's troops and citizens, but also to the armies in Virginia and Tennessee. In 1863, Devereux was offered the post of tithing collector for the state of North Carolina by the Confederate Government. Devereux declined the post, however.

When the state's Confederate government collapsed, Devereux served as a member of the Raleigh delegation sent to General Sherman to arrange terms for the city. This was his final act as the state's chief quartermaster. After the war he lived quietly in Raleigh with his family and struggled to keep ahead of debts incurred before, during, and after the war. These problems, compounded by the loss of capital invested in slavery, enslavement, and the sale of enslaved people, and his inability to profitably operate his plantations thereafter, forced him to seek work within the city. He opened a small insurance company and worked briefly as clerk to the superintendent of public instruction, but this failed to produce the required income. Equally troublesome was the bankruptcy in 1868 of his father, whose debts totaled over \$257,000. John Devereux had to pay these along with his own; this required him to sell most of the land that had been in his family since the early 1700s. Upon his death, his wife Margaret was obliged to sell Wills Forest as well as its surrounding 150 acres to meet the remaining demands on his estate.

The Devereux's private lives after the war were not entirely happy either. Their six daughters—Annie Lane, Katherine (Mrs. J. J. Mackay), Ellen (Mrs. John Hinsdale), Margaret (Mrs. Samuel Ashe), Mary Livingstone (Mrs. Arthur Winslow), and Laura—all remained deeply attached to their parents. But the two sons—Thomas Pollock and John Devereux—were viewed as "disappointments" by the family. Thomas, a lawyer and the eldest son, joined the Republican party "which was a disgrace to the family," whereas John, who was "bad through and through," eventually left the state and moved to Oklahoma.

Devereux died in Raleigh after a long illness and was buried in Oakwood Cemetery ^[13]. His wife continued to live in Raleigh in a house on North Person Street until her death.

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Clark, Walter. *Histories of the several regiments and battalions from North Carolina, in the great war 1861-'65* Raleigh: E.M. Uzzell, Printer and Binder. 1901. [22-23.] <https://archive.org/stream/cu31924092908536#page/n45/mode/2up> ^[2] (accessed June 13, 2014).

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Authors:

[Armistead, Terrell L.](#) ^[23]

Origin - location:

[Bertie County](#) ^[24]

[New Bern](#) ^[25]

[Halifax County](#) ^[26]

[Wilmington](#) ^[27]

[Raleigh](#) ^[28]

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[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[29]

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