

Edmondston, Catherine Ann Devereux ^[1]

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By T. L. Armistead, 1986; Revised October 2022.

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Catherine Ann Devereaux Edmondston, diarist and member of the planter aristocracy of [Halifax County](#) ^[3], was one of six



"Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston," Photo courtesy

daughters of Thomas Pollock (17 Nov. 1793–7 Mar. 1869) and of Civil War Time Blog. ^[4]Catherine Ann Bayard Johnson Devereux (1796–18 July 1836). Her sisters included Frances Ann (Mrs. Henry W. Miller), Honoria (Mrs. Robert Cannon), Sophia Chester (Mrs. Josiah Turner, Jr.), [Mary Bayard](#) ^[5] (Mrs. William J. Clarke), Elizabeth (Mrs. Thomas F. Jones), and Susan Devereux, a half sister through her father's second marriage. Her only brother was John Devereux, chief quartermaster of North Carolina during the Civil War and a planter in [Bertie County](#) ^[6].

Catherine Ann ("Kate") Devereux was an educated woman of strong character whose intelligence and prejudices surfaced repeatedly in her letters and Civil War diaries. Raised at Conneconara, her father's major plantation in [Halifax County](#) ^[3], she and her sisters were thoroughly tutored in literature, mathematics, science, and philosophy. Catherine also attended Belmont, a school near Leesburg, Va., where she finished her formal education. On 19 Feb. 1846 she married Patrick Mair Edmondston (1 Aug. 1819–19 Aug. 1871), a younger son of Charles and Mary Pratt Edmondston of Charleston, S.C. Charles Edmondston, a wealthy merchant and planter, had formed business contacts with the Devereuxs as early as 1819 through his shipping firm. This, presumably, led to the initial meeting and subsequent marriage of Patrick and Catherine.

Patrick Edmondston evinced a lifelong interest in "scientific farming" and eventually served on the executive committee and as vice-president of the Scotland Neck Agricultural Society in the late 1860s. Shortly after their marriage, however, the Edmondstons moved to Charleston where Patrick served for a time as an "aid to the governor" of South Carolina. They stayed there until 1848 when Catherine's dislike of city life, her poor health, and her father's inducement of a plantation of their own in North Carolina led them to settle permanently in [Halifax County](#) ^[3]. Initially, they apparently rented from [Thomas P. Devereux](#) ^[7] part of the extensive estate Devereux inherited from his mother, called Barrows, but financial reverses forced them to seek other arrangements. Devereux then offered them the Looking Glass plantation, which adjoined Conneconara, plus another tract of land that the Edmondstons called Hascosea, in final execution of a \$10,000 marriage settlement he had promised them but only partially paid. These two pieces of property formed the nucleus of the Edmondstons' home life and figured prominently in Catherine's diaries.

During the 1850s the Edmondstons, who remained childless, enjoyed a calm, fairly prosperous life although crop losses caused by the frequent flooding of the [Roanoke River](#) ^[8] forced them to economize occasionally. Patrick served as a county justice of the peace, joined the state militia, and helped organize the Scotland Neck Mounted Riflemen, a volunteer cavalry company. By 1860 they owned eighty-eight enslaved people and a 1,894-acre estate valued at \$19,600.

Both Edmondstons were ardent secessionists, and once the Civil War began Patrick entered Confederate service while Catherine contributed clothing and food to the army. Her diaries provide detailed accounts of this period and also describe her passionate interest in the war and her home. She composed patriotic poems of dubious quality, scrutinized military and political figures in both the North and the South, and championed her husband's futile efforts to raise a cavalry

battalion. She expressed little sympathy for those who deplored the dissolution of the Union, and she never reconciled herself to the South's defeat, bitterly recording her antagonism toward the North in a short essay she published anonymously in 1872 entitled *The Morte d'Arthur*.

Financially, the Edmondstons suffered greatly from the war. Depreciated currency and high taxes had led Thomas P. Devereux to revise the deed under which they controlled Looking Glass. The value of Hascosea and Looking Glass, when combined with Devereux's earlier payments on the marriage settlement, surpassed \$10,000. The Edmondstons, therefore, had agreed to pay the difference from their yearly share of the Looking Glass profits while Devereux retained title to the land until the final payment. Devereux was not anxious to accept depreciated Confederate currency for his land, however, and he obtained the couple's grudging consent to revoke the sales bond on Looking Glass until after the war. In 1865 and 1867, various deeds noted that Edmondston then rented the Looking Glass tract from Devereux, but stated further that Devereux was indebted to the Edmondstons and that he had agreed to apply this debt, or any future ones he might owe them, toward their purchase of Looking Glass.

Unhappily for the Edmondstons, Devereux's bankruptcy in 1868 resulted in the confiscation of his entire estate for distribution to his creditors. The North Carolina Supreme Court ^[9] included Looking Glass in the distribution despite persistent appeals by the Edmondstons that the land belonged to them via the 1865 and 1867 deeds. In 1872 the court agreed that Devereux, since dead, owed Edmondston over \$4,000, but ruled that the debt did not constitute a legal claim to the land although Edmondston was entitled to collect the \$4,000 from the proceeds of the Looking Glass sale. He died before the final verdict on his appeal. After his death his wife managed Looking Glass and Hascosea while seeking to "prevent the crust of age & isolation thickening around & over me until I become self absorbed—self contained—hateful to myself & to all with whom I come in contact." At the Looking Glass sale in December 1874, less than a month before her own death, she returned the highest bid on the land. The bid was accepted and she won the fight to retain what she had always considered to be her property.

Catherine Edmondston's will, proved 1 Mar. 1875, left her real estate ^[10], including the then unpaid-for Looking Glass tract, to her brother's son, Thomas P. Devereux, Jr., bound by certain trusts. The will also provided legacies for several of her relatives and a yearly income and lifelong residence for two of her formerly enslaved people, Owen and Dolly Richardson. The monetary legacies she bequeathed to various members of her family, totaling \$7,000, proved larger than her personal estate, however, and required another case in the state's supreme court before the legacies were settled.

The Edmondstons, staunch Episcopalians, were buried in the cemetery of Trinity Church in Scotland Neck.

References:

Deeds and wills of Halifax and Wake counties (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh)

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James W. Patton, "Serious Reading in Halifax County, 1860–1865," *North Carolina Historical Review* 42 (1965)

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Additional Resources:

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