

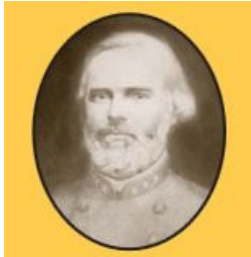
Bridgers, John Luther ^[1]

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Bridgers, John Luther

by H. C. Bridgers, Jr., 1979

29 Nov. 1821–22 Jan. 1884



Potter's raid" Civil War
Trail marker courtesy of
the North Carolina
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^[2]John Luther Bridgers, attorney, agriculturist, and soldier, was born on a farm on Town Creek in southwest [Edgecombe County](#) ^[3]. His father, second generation of the Bridgers family in the area, was the son of Briton Bridgers, who as a youth was brought there from [Northampton County](#) ^[4] by his stepfather, Joseph Pender, in about 1770. The Bridgers in Edgecombe are descendants of Colonel Joseph Bridger, prominent seventeenth-century colonist of Isle of Wight County, Va. The "s" was first added to the name in court records of [Bertie County](#) ^[5] in 1725.

John Luther Bridgers's mother was Elizabeth Kettlewells Routh, who, following the death of her husband, John Bridgers, married Elder Mark Bennett; young John studied under Bennett at the Town Creek Academy. In 1843, Bridgers was graduated with honors from [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[6], delivering the required commencement speech in French.

He settled in Tarboro, joining his brother, [Robert R](#) ^[7], and Robert H. Pender in the practice of law and in the mercantile business. County records attest to his success and prominence as an attorney. Throughout their lives, Robert and John Bridgers were friendly rivals, especially in agriculture. During the 1850s, they owned together more than six thousand acres, which they farmed with scientific fervor. Two of John's plantations, Strabane and Middleplace, frequently set production records. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the [State Agricultural Society](#) ^[8] and a welcomed principal speaker at the annual state fair.



Rebecca Louisa Dicken Bridgers.
Courtesy of the Edgecombe County
Memorial Library.

^[9]Bridgers was a director of the Tarboro branch of the [North Carolina State Bank](#) ^[10]. He was the first University of North Carolina escheator appointed in [Greene County](#) ^[11]. He served as a member of the state legislature and from this body was elected a councilor of state. He was a major subscriber to the construction of Calvary Episcopal Church in Tarboro. For most of his adult life, he lived at [the Grove](#) ^[12], a house built by [Thomas Blount](#) ^[13] in 1808. Still standing and well preserved today, it once enjoyed a sweeping, unbroken view of the common of the town

of Tarboro.

As war threatened, Bridgers was one of three delegates sent by North Carolina to Montgomery, Ala., to try to effect an amicable solution. Failing in this attempt, he was unanimously chosen captain of the Edgecombe Guards, an organization that had the unfortunate distinction of suffering the first southern casualty, Private Henry L. Wyatt ^[14], at the Battle of Big Bethel. Captain Bridgers was cited for gallantry in this action and promoted to lieutenant colonel of Heavy Artillery (Tenth Regiment, North Carolina Troops). As such he commanded Fort Macon until ill health forced his resignation. He subsequently served on the staff of Lieutenant General D. H. Hill ^[15] and also assisted his brother, Robert, in managing the vital High Shoals iron furnace in Gaston County ^[16].

On 20 Apr. 1847, Bridgers married Rebecca Louisa Dicken (25 Feb. 1829–30 Oct. 1865) of Halifax County ^[17]. She was a great-granddaughter of Benjamin Dicken, one of the commissioners who laid out the town of Tarboro. They lost a son, Charles, in infancy; surviving were another son, John Luther, Jr. ^[18], and a daughter, Routh E., who married Algernon E. Hassard-Short, an Englishman. On 4 Apr. 1867, Bridgers married his second wife, Mary Elizabeth Battle (10 Jan. 1844–19 July 1918), daughter of Joseph Sumner Battle and his wife, Mary Ann Horn. Children of this marriage were Marcus Milton, Loulie, Whitney, and Mary Horn. The Misses Loulie and Mary Bridgers were beloved, lifetime grade school teachers in Tarboro, and one of the schools there is named for them.

Plagued throughout his life by poor health and suffering severe financial setbacks in his old age, Bridgers in 1881 sold the Grove and retired to his Strabane farm, now a fraction of its former size, where he died three years later. He and both his wives were buried in the yard of Calvary Episcopal Church. There is a portrait of Colonel Bridgers by R. N. Brooke in the White House of the Confederacy in Richmond ^[19] and another in the possession of his great-grandson.

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