

Norwood, John Wall ^[1]

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by Mary Claire Engstrom, 1991

29 Jan. 1803–24 July 1885

See also: [Norwood, William](#) ^[2] [Norwood, William](#) ^[3]

John Wall Norwood, attorney, scientific agriculturist, and member of the General Assembly, was the oldest son of Robina Hogg (30 Dec. 1772–18 May 1860) and Superior Court Judge [William Norwood](#) ^[3] (15 Jan. 1767–29 Jan. 1842) of Poplar Hill, Hillsborough. He was the grandson of Leah Lenoir Whitaker (1737–1831) and John Wall Norwood (1728–1802), [Franklin County](#) ^[4] planter, and of Elizabeth McDowell Alves (d. 1801) and [James Hogg](#) ^[5] (d. 1805), Scottish merchant and planter.

Young Norwood was graduated from [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[6] with an A.B. degree in 1824 "in the group of third honor men" and received an A.M. degree in 1827. Although there appears to be no record of his preparatory schooling or legal training, it is likely that he attended the [Hillsborough Academy](#) ^[7] and read law with [Frederick Nash](#) ^[8]. He promptly began practicing law in Hillsborough and built a handsome Greek Revival office (now razed) just off Court Square.

In 1826 he married Annabella Giles (31 May 1805–28 Mar. 1876), of Wilmington, the daughter of William Giles of Wilmington and his wife Annabella Fleming of [Bladen County](#) ^[9], but both their lives were clouded for many years by her recurrent bouts of ill health. They had eight children: Hasell, William Giles, Annabella Giles, Robina, John, Margaret Yonge, James Hogg, and Alves. Throughout their marriage the Norwoods lived at Poplar Hill, the Eno River home of John Wall's parents and grandparents, inhabited by Hoggs and Norwoods for almost a century.

In 1832 Norwood was listed as one of the eighteen attorneys (county escheators) for The University of North Carolina, all of whom were considered to be ex-[Presbyterian Church](#) ^[10] ceptionally able lawyers and notable friends of the university. In 1834 he became treasurer of the Hillsborough Presbyterian Church, succeeding its longtime treasurer, silver-smith William Huntington. In 1835 Norwood was confirmed a ruling elder in the church, serving until his death, and from 1865 to 1884 he also was clerk of the Session. Like his older sister, Eliza Alves Norwood Bingham, John Wall Norwood had turned away from the family's traditional [Episcopal](#) ^[11] affiliation.

He served as trustee or patron of three Presbyterian schools. In 1839 he was one of the active trustees of the [Bingham School](#) ^[12] at the time of the so-called "Croom conspiracy." In the 1840s he was listed as a patron or trustee of the [Burwell School](#) ^[13], which his daughters attended, and in 1848–49 he served as trustee and secretary of the board of the [Caldwell Institute](#) ^[14] in Hillsborough. On 31 May 1843 he joined thirty other University of North Carolina graduates to form the first alumni association.

In the 1840s, after the death of his father, Norwood undertook a complete restoration of Poplar Hill, including the house and surrounding lawns and gardens. A collection of old roses was brought from Wilmington, new beds were laid out, and new hedges were planted. At about this time, Norwood joined forces with such powerful stockholders in the new [North Carolina Railroad](#) ^[15] as former governor [William A. Graham](#) ^[16], [Cadwallader Jones](#) ^[17], Sr., and [Paul C. Cameron](#) ^[18] to exert considerable influence in locating the railroad along the Hillsborough route rather than through Chapel Hill.

The reactivation of the [State Agricultural Society](#) ^[19] in 1852 under the leadership of Thomas Ruffin, Robert A. Hamilton, Frederick Hill, and John W. Norwood virtually amounted to a second absorbing career for Norwood. He made countless speeches before farmers' groups, pleading for better land use and promoting the annual agricultural fair in [Orange County](#) ^[20].

Norwood ventured into public life in 1856, when he was elected a representative of Orange County in the [General Assembly](#) ^[21]. He served until 1858. In 1872 he was elected senator for Orange. One of his speeches, *Speech of Senator J. W. Norwood, Delivered in the Senate, Jan. 27th, 1873, on the Amnesty Bill*, was published in pamphlet form. Another published speech, delivered on 20 Oct. 1871 before the State Agricultural Society at its annual fair, brought together the key recommendations he had made tirelessly for years: enrichment of the soil by the use of decaying vegetable matter, rotation of crops, and prevention of erosion. He himself demonstrated these sound land practices at Poplar Hill. Norwood also called for the creation of a [State Board of Agriculture](#) ^[22] and for courses in agricultural education to be taught in the schools. One of his sons, James Hogg, later became known for his experiments in meadow grasses.

During the [Civil War](#), ^[23] Norwood and [Paul C. Cameron](#) ^[18] acted as superintendents of relief for the families of Orange County soldiers and used Norwood's law office as their headquarters. In August 1864 the superintendents reported that between 1,500 and 2,000 Orange County citizens had fought in the Confederate army. After the war, Norwood joined with W. A. Graham, Thomas Ruffin, James Webb, Jr., H. K. Nash, and others in an effort to suppress the activities of the [Ku Klux Klan](#) ^[24].

Norwood died at Poplar Hill at age eighty-two. He was buried in the Hogg-Norwood plot in Hillsborough's Old Town Cemetery.

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