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Dorman Winfrey*

Among the small number of persons of French Huguenot ancestry who came to Texas during the periods of Anglo-American colonization and the Republic were such well-known figures as David Crockett, defender of the Alamo; Mirabeau B. Lamar, second president of the Republic of Texas; John C. Duval, first Texas man of letters; Pleasant W. Kittrell, educator and champion for the University of Texas; and the father and son team of John William and Julien Sidney Devereux.

The background of the Texas branch of the Devereux family has been rather well recorded. John William Devereux in his writings gave information on Huguenot history and the traditions of his own family’s flight from France, and wrote:

"The family of Devereux was driven out of France by Louis XIV when he revoked the Edict of Nantes. The Edict of Nantes was passed by Henry IV in the year 1598 of the Christian Era which secured to the Protestants religious liberty, or a free exercise of their religion. When Louis XIV revoked that edict the Roman Catholics commenced a persecution which compelled thousands to fly to other countries for refuge, and our family went to Britain—that part of them from which I am descended have been long established in North Wales in the county of Montgomeryshire and own a valuable free hold estate."

The first name recorded in the Devereux genealogy is that of Morgan Devereux (grandfather of John William and great-grandfather of Julien S. Devereux) who "was a native of Montgomeryshire North Wales." Morgan Devereux married Elizabeth Hughs whose brother Sir Edward Hughs was a noted admiral in the British Navy. Morgan and Elizabeth Devereux were parents of a son Charles Devereux, who was born in 1740 in Glamorganshire, Wales, and was named for the mother’s brother who "was a considerable freeholder." In 1763, this Charles Devereux, in his twenties, left Wales and came to the then British colony of Virginia, becoming the first recorded member of the family to arrive in the New World.

Charles Devereux, a smelter and mineralogist by trade, married Nancy Woods on October 7, 1766. Eight children were born to Charles and Nancy Devereux and one of these, a second child, was John William, born March 15, 1769. Seventy-one years later on May 20, 1840, Devereux recorded: "I, John William Devereux, was born among romantic scenery in the wildest part of the state of Virginia at Chiswell’s lead mines."

*Speech delivered to the East Texas Historical Association Meeting in Nacogdoches, October 1, 1966.
Charles Devereux rendered service to Virginia troops at Chiswell's Mines during the American Revolution, and records in the Virginia State Library reveal that Devereux provided "lead to the army."

Identified also with the vicinity of Chiswell's Mines were two of the most significant persons ever to appear on the Texas scene—Moses Austin and his son Stephen F. Austin. In 1791, some thirty years after John William Devereux's birth, Moses Austin and his wife, Maria, moved from Richmond, Virginia, to Chiswell's Mines, and at this locality on November 3, 1793, Stephen F. Austin was born. At the time of Stephen F. Austin's birth the country was on the southwestern frontier of Virginia, for as late as 1790 the frontier line had moved just west of the locality. On January 1, 1785, young Devereux moved with his family to Columbia County, Georgia.2

John Devereux, on April 19, 1795, married Elizabeth Few, daughter of Ignatius Few of American Revolutionary fame, and niece of William Few, a member of the Continental Congress and a delegate from Georgia to the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Devereux's wife died while giving birth to a son. His second marriage in 1801 resulted in a family of three children, including Julien Sidney Devereux, who was born on July 28, 1805.

The Devereuxs moved to Alabama in 1817. Father John William served for eleven sessions as state senator in the Alabama Legislature, and for ten years as judge in the county court of Covington County.

Julien S. Devereux, meanwhile, had become well established during the years the family lived in Covington County. In 1826, after he had reached the age of twenty-one, he was appointed to fill a vacancy as clerk of the circuit court of Covington County. Before the end of the year, on December 28, 1826, he married Adaline Rebecca Bradley. A newspaper account of the wedding titled Devereux as "colonel" and referred to his bride as the "daughter of Samuel Bradley, deceased, late of South Carolina." The marriage would end in a separation some fourteen years later and then in divorce after Julien Devereux came to Texas.

In Alabama Julien Devereux served in the Alabama Legislature, was a trustee of the University of Alabama, and had Federal military service during the Creek Indian War.

While living in Macon County, which bordered on the Creek Indian Country, Julien S. Devereux did considerable speculating with Indian lands.

Most probably there were losses in the land speculating business and perhaps also in the operation of his Alabama plantation, for Julien S. Devereux was faced with heavy financial obligations in the late 1830's and early 1840's.

Devereux's financial worries were typical of those faced by individuals during the general Panic of 1837, which was most severely felt in the West and South, and lasted until 1843. Two main causes of the panic—expansion of credit and land speculation—were in large measure responsible for Devereux's precarious financial condition.

Perhaps the separation from his wife, along with heavy debts, caused Julien S. Devereux to look westward, and in October of 1841 he headed...
for "Jasper County in Texas." His reasons for leaving home and moving to Texas to get a new start in life were similar to situations faced by men like Sam Houston, Anson Jones, Mirabeau B. Lamar, and others who had also experienced marital problems and political and financial reverses. Devereux was "well known in Alabama" in the early 1840's, and an acquaintance once stated that "a more honorable man than he while here could not have been found." Devereux may have debated at some length about staying in Alabama, for he wrote: "Reconsidered the matter (of removal), declined making a crawfish of myself, and finally came to Texas." Father John William Devereux was not far behind; he left "Valverdi Macon County Alabama on the 26th of April, 1842, for the Single-Star Republic of Texas," and across the detailed description of his log cabin on the pages of his "Memorandum and Common Place Book" he wrote in huge letters what so many pioneers would say with "G.T.T." on the door of a cabin:

Built it
Occupied it &
left it and
gone to Texas
fool move.?

Thirty-six year old Julien Devereux was in Jasper County, Texas, in November of 1841, where at that time he took an oath of allegiance to the Republic of Texas. The next month he moved west some 125 miles to establish a home in Montgomery County, situated in the flat prairie and rolling wooded plains of Southeast Texas. For the next four and a half years Devereux would attempt to operate a plantation in this area.

Julien Devereux filed a divorce petition on February 10, 1843, against his wife, Adaline Rebeccah, from whom he had separated in December, 1840, and who had remained in Alabama.

Patrick C. Jack, member of Stephen F. Austin's second colony and an important figure in the period of colonization and the Republic, presided as judge of the Sixth Judicial District and heard the divorce case at the spring term of 1843. The jury on March 29, 1843, ruled for the plaintiff and granted the divorce.

Three months later on June 27th, Julien Devereux was married to Sarah Ann Landrum. The bride, who described her husband at the time as "a man of wealth and high standing," was sixteen years old and twenty years younger than Julien.

During these first years in Texas, Julien Devereux must have been kept busy operating his Terrebonne Plantation. ("Terrebonne" is French for "good land.") Unfortunately, the records for this plantation are not extant and almost no generalizations can be made concerning the actual operations at Terrebonne itself.

Julien S. Devereux had little leisure time in Montgomery County to record the details of either his work or business, or his general observations. Conditions of the times, and especially those in Terrebonne and Montgomery County, have been recorded at some length by the aged father who was then
in his seventies. John W. Devereux recorded what many Texans felt during the period of the Republic when he wrote, “Our Continent can boast of having the largest Rivers—the largest Lakes—the largest Cateracs & the highest mountains in the world (and their men particularly in Texas can whip their weight in wildcats).”

The environments of Montgomery County produced a special breed of Texans and there was a

“Toast to suit Lake Creek & San Jacinto Citizens of Montgomery County—they have hearts for their friends as warm as the sun in their clime and hands for their foes as deadly as their night dews and morning fogs.”

Attitudes of the Devereuxs toward this “land of promise” began to change. The rains, northers, mosquitoes, malaria, and other hardships recalled fond memories of the earlier home in Alabama. Scorpions were a constant problem and persons were advised to “come to Texas to see real scorpions plenty.”

The country offered little hope for survival and Devereux cautioned: “Fly from extremes of wet & dry, or stay & live until you die,” because “you will not live out half your days.” The situation became more and more unbearable:

“O! Texas
You vex us
& perplex us
how it rains
how it rains.”

Julien, Sarah, and John William Devereux left Terrebonne Plantation on June 13, 1845, for southwestern Rusk County to occupy a place rented from Colonel Robert W. Smith, participant in the battle of San Jacinto and first sheriff of Rusk County. The Devereux party arrived at the Smith place on June 27, after fifteen days of travel. In addition to the Devereuxs, there were ten slaves and “forty-head of cattle (cows and calves) . . . and a wagon heavily loaded with Bacon etc. drawn by 4 pair of oxen . . .”

In Rusk County Julien Devereux would live for the next ten years and operate his Monte Verdi Plantation.

Located in the northeastern part of Texas, the new home was in the “Red Lands” section of East Texas on the divide between the Sabine River on the east and the Angelina River on the west. The physical setting of Rusk County must have been inviting to the Devereuxs who were totally dissatisfied with Montgomery County. The new locality had gently sloping hills, narrow valleys, and dales, and the 750-foot altitude in the southwestern part, where the Devereuxs settled, was considerably higher than was Terrebonne in Montgomery County. The new area had good drainage, rich soils, adequate rainfall, an abundance of mineral and forest resources, and excellent game range—all factors which were considered by early settlers.
Julien Devereux had ample reason to feel good about things as the decade of the 1840's came to a close. He may have expressed his feelings at the time in a “Texas Toast” he composed, which read:

“Wealth by our Labor
Independence by our Sword
Honey in the Bee Gum
& Sugar in the Gourd”

During the 1850's, when Texas experienced rapid growth, Devereux, with his operations at his Monte Verdi Plantation, would assume a position as a major cotton planter in Texas.

Plantations which were established in Texas and the Old South before the Civil War, were organized to facilitate large scale production and the accumulation of wealth. No doubt, Devereux had these two purposes in mind when he undertook the establishment of Monte Verdi.

One cannot be certain whether Julien Devereux had the French or Spanish language in mind when he named his plantation, for the word verdi, meaning green, becomes verte in French and verde in Spanish. A literal French translation would mean green elevation, while a recent Spanish dictionary defined monte as “a high natural elevation of land; virgin land covered with trees and underbrush.” Probably Devereux intended to use French spelling because his subtitle to Monte Verdi of Terre Le Oriente is French for “Land of the East.” “Green wooded area,” a most appropriate and descriptive translation, has been selected by one person to describe the area where Julien Devereux lived in 1849 when he determined that:

“Monte-Verdi”
Is the name I have concluded
to give my place of Residence
in Rusk County Texas.⁵

In the successful operation of the plantation there were three human factors: the master, the overseer, and the slaves. The plantation owner was the master, and full responsibility for success or failure depended on his decisions. He was responsible for the care of his slaves; he had to go in debt to make the crop for the ensuing year; and he always was concerned about too much rain or a lengthy drought. With good management and reasonably favorable weather, a plantation like Monte Verdi had many compensations for its owner.

A main factor in the success or failure of a plantation was the overseer, and Devereux was fortunate much of the time in his choices to fill this most important position. The ideal qualifications for an overseer were honesty, industriousness, and to know farming and be able to handle Negroes.

The overseer was an intermediary between the master and slaves, and at times he faced many problems. The overseer had long hours; he was the first to get up and was late to bed.
The third human element in the operation of a plantation was that of the slaves, and the Negroes at Monte Verdi accounted for a huge investment. On August 3, 1850, Devereux listed seventy-four slaves; in 1853 the total number of slaves had increased to 84. Total numbers do not indicate a working force, however, because there were children and many old slaves who could not do manual labor. The Devereux family frequently mentioned that their slaves were “family Negroes” and took pride that their Negroes were well treated. Julien’s sister, Mrs. Louisiana Holcombe, once wrote to her brother that “you know well that any slaves we have ever had in possession are well treated and only a reasonable service required of them.” The Devereuxs had a strong attachment to their slaves and, in Alabama, when the sister was considering a move to Texas, she wrote Julien that she had no intention of parting with her slaves while she lived and added that, “The children all love Jincey and call her Granny and she takes care of them and loves them.” Louisiana also remarked that, “Family negroes are the most unenviable property that we can own, as we cannot bear to separate them and... we do not like to hire them out for fear of not being treated well.”

Negro morale probably was high most of the time at Monte Verdi plantation. Julien Devereux would not compel his Negroes to work when sick or in bad weather, and the house servants, when ill, were not to do washing and milking. John William Devereux wrote on January 2, 1846, that “all (slaves) in good spirits and happy singing and carolling at their work,” and on May 30, 1847, that he “heard the hands carolling their melodies and at 12 heard their large horn call them off and on to their labours.”

Proper management of a slave force of the size existing at Monte Verdi was no small problem for Devereux or his overseer. The Negroes had to be fed, clothed, and housed during the years of lean crops as well as in seasons of abundance, and care was necessary for those slaves too young or too old to work. With a large labor force it was essential to have a proper division of work laid out at all times. Most of the time was spent in the fields, but when there was no field work to be done, and in bad weather, slaves had to be kept busy splitting rails, killing hogs, shelling and grinding corn, building fences, or burning brush.

Cotton was the most important crop grown on the Monte Verdi plantation, and Devereux followed the plan of most planters to break the land in December or January so that the earth could mellow and permit early planting. Devereux frequently planted some fields early and some late so that if there should be a frost not all the crop would be lost.

Since the year of 1850 has been considered an average one for cotton production in Texas, Devereux’s operations on his ten thousand acre plantation in this year may be examined to see where he ranked as a planter on the Texas scene.

The Census of 1850 reveals that there were 375 planters in Texas; only ninety-one of whom produced one hundred or more bales of cotton or hogsheads of sugar. Devereux ranked with the top ninety-one planters in Texas,
for during that year he produced one hundred and twenty 400-pound bales of cotton.

Devereux's rank among slave holders in Texas is also interesting. With seventy-five slaves in 1850, Devereux was among the ninety-two slave holders in Texas who owned fifty or more slaves.

Management of Monte Verdi during the first few years occupied most of Devereux's time. He did like to fish and hunt, and there were wolves, bears, wildcats, turkeys, ducks, deer, and panthers in the nearby "Angelina bottoms."

Devereux could afford to travel and stay in fine hotels, but no where was he so happy and contented as in the serene and peaceful life at Monte Verdi. He loved the out-of-doors of his plantation and the kind of life it had to offer. Perhaps Devereux expressed his feelings best when, as a member of the Texas Legislature, he declared that, "I would greatly prefer to forego all this honor and glory and be places where I could step to back gallery of an log cabin and call out to Bill to feed them hounds and saddle old John for a hunt at the pine Island or the pine log crossing or any where on my own dominions."

As mistress of Monte Verdi, Sarah Devereux had to supervise the care of her own household while frequently playing the role of mother and nurse in the care of slaves. Guests dropped in often at Monte Verdi and sometimes there was overnight company for weeks at a time. Monte Verdi gained a reputation as a place for friendly hospitality and good food, as exemplified in a friend's letter to Sarah:

"I am sorry that I am not with you to enjoy some of the green peas, but the tommatos [sic], and egg plant will still be plentiful. O how I wish I were with thee to get some nice clabber, and butter milk."

Sarah Devereux enjoyed pleasures at Monte Verdi. She went to quiltings and sometimes Julien would share her company at a Baptist preaching. Occasionally the family could get together and hunt chinquapins.

Monte Verdi Plantation had the usual heavy responsibilities for its owner, but it did provide wealth and comfort and other compensations. Julien Devereux assumed the position of "citizen planter" in the true sense of the word, and while residing at Monte Verdi he reared a family, held political offices in Rusk County, promoted local industry, helped build schools, traveled, and eventually sat in the state legislature.

During the 1850's Rusk County ranked as a leading Texas county in population and wealth and could count among its citizens some of the most important persons on the Texas, as well as the East Texas, scene. Because of his position as a leading Rusk County planter in 1850, Devereux was known throughout the county, and his associates included, in addition to planters, prominent business men, educators, newspaper men, lawyers, and politicians.
Devereux traveled extensively through the South for his health and recreation. On one of his trips in 1853 elaborate plans were made, and Rusk County merchants and residents wrote letters of introduction for Devereux to use in the various states he planned to tour. In these letters Devereux was described as "one of our most respected and valued citizens," and "a fine specimen of the southern planter and gentleman." Another letter of introduction stated that, "Colonel Devereux is one of the most respected and opulent planters of our neighborhood, is a man of cultivated mind, and a perfect type of the Southern Gentleman."

In the summer of 1855 Devereux was elected to the Texas House of Representatives.

Devereux found Austin was not too different a town than he had expected and observed that, "The capitol is a very pretty white rock house situated on a knob of a hill about 300 yards from my boarding house..."

Among the early legislation considered in November was the election of Thomas J. Rusk as United States Senator by the unanimous vote of members of both houses in a joint session. On November 21, Julien wrote his wife that, "the great men of the country are congregating about Austin. Sam Houston, Commodore Moore, Genl McCloud (Hugh McLeod?) and many other prominent men are here..."

There were many things about Austin Devereux did not like, and the water in the capitol city was not so good as that back home. Some water was brought from the Colorado River, and cisterns were also in use. Devereux wrote that, "The cistern water is all that I can drink and they took a large hog (dead) out of one of the state house cisterns yesterday, but as good luck I did not drink any of the water." Food was far from satisfactory:

"Our fare here is only tolerable (I mean in the eating way). I have heard much said about the fine beef of this part of the country, but the beef we have on the table is nothing to compare with what we have at home, and our Landlord pays 5 and 6 cents a pound for it at that—I have not seen any fresh butter since I have been here and no cream for our coffee. Our bacon costs 22 cents a pound and old at that."

Besides legislative matters, Devereux was concerned with the plantation operations at Monte Verdi and the erection of his mansion house. Julien Devereux was anxious to have news of what was going on at Monte Verdi, and Sarah often wrote about the work that was being done. On December 6, 1855, she remarked that the hands "finished picking cotton today and came out of the field shouting and blowing their horns like there had been a democratic victory." By December 20 some 7160 pounds of pork had been secured "out of the woods." William Howerton, Devereux's former overseer, had helped with the hog killing and remarked that, "There is more wild hogs than I have ever seen." Christmas week usually meant no work on most plantations, and on December 28, Sarah wrote that, "The black ones have all been very healthy and enjoy Christmas [sic] as much as ever as cold as it is."
Julien Devereux's health was such that he probably shortened his life by serving the one term in the legislature. His "enlarged spleen" continued to give him trouble. He was in pain most of the time he was in Austin and his condition grew worse each week. In his first letter home Devereux stated that if he lived through the session it would be his "last voluntary exile from home and family." Julien was homesick most of the time for Sarah and the boys and he once remarked to his wife, "My seat in the Legislature poorly repays me for my absence from you and our little boys."

As hard as he tried, Julien Devereux could not last until the session ended on February 4. On January 9 he wrote to Sarah that he had requested to be excused from attending sessions on January 20, and that he would return home when the carriage arrived.

Julien Devereux returned to his Monte Verdi plantation before the end of January, 1856, and resided for the first time in the new mansion house, still uncompleted. For the next three months he lived there but was so ill that he could not enjoy the fruits of his years of labor or supervise the completion of his dream. On May 1, 1856, at the age of fifty, Julien Devereux died.

In the role of plantation planter, local citizen, and public servant Julien Devereux in ten years' time had left his area a better one than he had found it. The prosperity Rusk County enjoyed in the 1850's was, in large part, because of successful planters like Devereux. Of importance also to the county and its residents was the time Devereux devoted to bringing in industry and erecting schools; the services he rendered as justice of the peace, county commissioner, and legislator; the good neighbor he was in times of sickness; and the able provider he was for his wife, children, and slaves, as well as for the less fortunate in his midst.

One other contribution Devereux made was the erection of his mansion house, still standing today in Rusk County after more than a century "on that same beautiful hill." A main reason Julien Devereux has earned a permanent place in Texas history has been his Monte Verdi Mansion House.

When completed under Mrs. Devereux's direction, Monte Verdi probably ranked among the finest of the plantation homes in East Texas. The house, an imposing structure with tall columns, was in many ways what is generally imagined as the "typical" home of the successful planter in the ante-bellum Old South.

On the eve of the Civil War Sarah Devereux was most probably in a highly solvent financial condition. The census of 1860 listed thirty-three year old Sarah with real estate valued at $70,000, the second highest figure recorded in Rusk County, and she had a personal estate of $66,000. With the outbreak of the Civil War, Sarah Devereux faced real hardships in running the huge plantation.

To exist and to manage a plantation the size of Monte Verdi during the Civil War must have been a real struggle. Tremendous supplies were needed for the working force of slaves, and shortages of all kinds became acute.
Huge requisitions were made on the produce at Monte Verdi; taxes increased each year.

Word concerning the collapse of the Confederacy was received in Rusk County on April 12, 1865, when Robert Bruce Richardson, a Henderson resident, wrote the following lines in his diary: "Oh, God Lee has surrendered! We are lost." The following month, on May 29, Richardson noted the Confederate Army had disbanded, and "We are a conquered people."

Sarah sometimes heard from her old friend, Mrs. M. A. Harcourt, who wrote on April 22, 1872, during the Reconstruction era:

"Spring Ridge
Caddo Parish (Louisiana)

Dear Friend,

Looking over my "old letters," I find one, that I prized highly, and had laid it with my other treasures, reading it over, it carried me back to our dear sunny faced, blue eyed friends whom I loved so well, those when happy days, before the hateful Yankee polluted our once happy homes it seems since they come among us, and have located themselves in our beautiful South, that their stinking, poisonous breaths turn to ice, and freeze every thing it touches, this has been the most severe Winter we have ever had at the South and I attributed it to the sojourn of the Yank's among us, Oh my Friend, when I think of the degradation of a surrender of our country to the Yankee's, I hate too much, to think of despising (sic) them, to have to submit to Yankee domination, is more than my proud Southern blood can bear at times, God only enable us to bear it with Christian fortitude but I may be tiring (sic) you, and will stop. My relatives are all on the other side of the question, and often tell me, I must stoop too, and kiss the rod with which I'm beaten. . . ."

The Monte Verdi Mansion House passed from ownership of members of the Devereux family and changed hands numerous times. By 1958 the house was owned by J. J. Sinclair of Minden, Texas. It was unoccupied for a number of years and was rapidly going to ruin. Bricks had fallen from the chimney, window panes were out, boards had fallen from the outside walls, wind blew rain into all the rooms, one column on the front porch had fallen, and the front porch was almost completely in ruins. Monte Verdi, after the winter of 1958-1959, was almost a total loss.

Then an event, almost miraculous, came about. The dilapidated Monte Verdi Mansion House came to the attention of Mr. and Mrs. Emmett Lowry of Texas City. With a true sense of historical appreciation the Lowrys bought Monte Verdi and began the laborious task of restoration.

Persons who visit the Monte Verdi Mansion House can readily understand why Julien Devereux chose this particular site for a home. The hill is beautiful and views from it in all directions are breathtaking. In one direction there is the distant haze of the Angelina River bottoms; in another, one can see Henderson, some twenty miles away. From the Monte Verdi Mansion House the view in all directions, including some of the most striking parts of Rusk County, is one of supreme beauty at any time of the year.
The house today serves as a fine monument to Julien Sidney Devereux and the members of his family who moved into the area at an early period and within a decade had established at Monte Verdi one of the largest and most successful of the East Texas plantations. Today, after more than a century, only the house and some ninety acres of the land serve to recall a by-gone era in Texas and Southern history.9

NOTES

'Dorman H. Winfrey, Julien Sidney Devereux and His Monte Verdi Plantation, 3.

'Ibid., 8.

'Ibid., 31.

'Ibid., 32.

'Ibid., 68.

'Ibid., 72.

'Ibid., 113, 114.

'Ibid., 124.

'Ibid., 140.