

James Archibald Meriwether

Born: 08 September 1832 Eatonton, Putnam County, Georgia
Married: Lorena Elizabeth Black 30 May 1867 Lowndes County, Mississippi
Died: 20 February 1912 Gainesville, Cooke County, Texas
Buried: Fairview Cemetery, Gainesville, Cooke County, Texas,
GPS coordinates 33.629909, -97.1250702

United States, Confederate Officers Card Index, 1861-1865

MERRIWETHER, JAMES ARCHIBALD
Georgia (OR MERIWETHER)
Acting Midshipman, CSN, from May 16, 1861;
C.S.S. Gaines, 1862-63;
Passed Midshipman, CSN, from Oct. 3, 1862; re-
signed Feb. 11, 1863;
"engaged in 19 successful blockade running
trips";

Eatonton, Putnam Co., Ga.,
living Gainesville, Texas, 1910
(in Yeary, Boys in Gray, p. 513, erroneously as Archibald
J. Merriwether)
resigned as Acting Midshipman, USN, Jan. 14; accepted Jan.
22, 1861

Heroes, Scoundrels and Angels: Fairview Cemetery of Gainesville, Texas

CSA COMMANDER OF *NIOBE*

The story of A. J. (Archibald James) Meriwether (September 8, 1832 – January 20, 1912) is remarkable. His obituary appeared in numerous newspapers including the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *New York Times*.

Meriwether was born in Eatonton, Putnam County, Georgia, son of Judge A. and Rebecca Meriwether. He entered the United States Naval Academy at the age of fifteen.

Upon graduation, midshipman Meriwether served two years on the USS *Plymouth* in the African squadron and two years in the Mediterranean. After some United States coastal duty, he was promoted to master, the equivalent of junior lieutenant. He was stationed on the frigate *Niagara*, which brought seventy Japanese envoys to Washington in 1860. In promoting friendlier relations with Japan, Congress appropriated \$50,000 for their entertainment during their seven-week visit, according to Thomas Bailey's *A Diplomatic History of the American People*.

In May 1861, Meriwether learned about Southern secession when arriving at the Boston Navy Yard. He tried to resign his commission in Washington but was refused. He rode by horseback to Richmond to report to Jefferson Davis. Assigned to the CSA *Merrimac*, he was wounded in the famous battle between the CSA *Merrimac* and the USS *Monitor*, spending three weeks in the hospital.

His next assignment involved blockade running out of Havana, Cuba. There, he received orders to sail for Marseilles, France, on the next available ship. He was ordered to the home of Confederate Colonel Livingston in Marseilles, who was married to the former Clara Gervase, whom Meriwether had rescued when she had fallen off the *Powhatan* into the Mediterranean in 1854. Meriwether jumped in after her and held her until she could be rescued. She was eternally grateful to him for saving her from a "watery grave." Now, in 1863, she, with the assistance of an uncle in the French army, insisted on giving the Confederacy a swift ship for blockade running purposes, with the provision Meriwether be made captain.

For almost two years, Meriwether commanded the French gift, the *Niobe*, on eighteen missions between Havana and various Southern ports. He lost only nine men under his command. Due to Confederate surrender, he was under orders to scuttle the ship and its cargo out of Havana. On May 25, 1865, he put his crew into quarter boats and sank the *Niobe* at latitude sixteen degrees, ten minutes north and longitude eighty degrees, fifteen minutes west in the Caribbean. He and his crew made it to Veracruz, Mexico.

Captain Meriwether moved to Gainesville in 1868 with his wife Lorena Elizabeth Meriwether (1844-1925). In his later years, Meriwether served as a police judge. He was instrumental in the movement to erect the Confederate soldier statue on the northeast corner of the courthouse square in October 1911.

Reminiscences of the Boys in Gray, 1861-1865

ARCHIBALD J. MERRIWETHER, Gainesville, Texas—Born at Eatonton, Putnam County, Ga. At the beginning of the war between the States I was in the United States Navy and was at Cuba on sick leave of absence. As soon as Georgia withdrew from the Union, I tendered my resignation as midshipman and reported to Gov. J. E. Brown for duty. As soon as he was authorized to do so, he commissioned me in the Georgia Navy and ordered me to Savannah to report to Commodore Tattnal for service.

After the Georgia forces were turned over to the Confederate States I was commissioned by the President in the Navy as was retained at Savannah, Ga., till after the Port Royal fight, after which I was ordered to report to Commodore Franklin at Mobile, Ala. Commissioned "Passed Midshipman" and received my rank as No. 5 on the list.

In May, 1863, I resigned from the Navy and engaged in "running the blockade" between Havana and any port I could get into. In the twenty-four months of this service I made nineteen successful trips, bringing in many needed supplies. I flatter myself that I was the cause of much good in the Confederacy and by my untiring energy was the cause of the struggle being prolonged for some time longer than it would have been, for I recall that twice the supplies were reduced to that extreme state that serious thought was entertained of abandoning the struggle, but bringing in the necessities caused the hearts of the desponding ones to revive and the contest to continue.

Dallas Morning News (Dallas, Texas), 25 February 1912

Was Blockade Runner

Commander of *Niobe*, Donated to Confederacy, Which Vessel He Scuttled and Sank After Surrender

Gainesville, Tex., Feb. 24 — The following biographical sketch was found among the papers and other belongings of the late Capt. A.J. Meriwether, who died at his home here Feb. 20, after a notable career as a soldier and business man.

Capt. Meriwether had said on several occasions that all Confederates should write up a sketch of their lives so that when they are gone their widows and other relatives could trace up the proper data in securing pensions and keeping green in memory their heroic deeds.

Besides the sketch of his life a letter from Admiral Winfield Scott Schley and one from General J.B. Gordon will be found interesting, as well as a short sketch of the life of Lieut. D.R.A. Meriwether, his brother. The sketch is as follows:

A.J. Meriwether was born Sept. 8, 1832 in Eatonton, Putnam County, Ga. My parents were Judge A. and Rebecca C. Meriwether. At the age of 15 years, I received the Presidential, Senatorial and Congressional appointments to the United States Navy, and I entered the naval school at Annapolis, Md., Sept. 10, 1847, as "acting midshipman." After the regular course at the academy was finished, I received commission as midshipman and was ordered to sea under Capt. T. T. Craven on the old sailing thirty-two-gun sloop of war *Plymouth*, which at that time was attached to the African squadron. After two years I was ordered to the Mediterranean squadron under Com. Ingraham (a veritable marionet), saw two years under him and was then recalled to the United States and was ordered to report to Capt. Maury for duty in coast survey at Washington. I was ordered before examining board for final examination, passed and was commissioned "passed midshipman" to rank five.

Was Commissioned Master

After nine months' service as passed midshipman I was commissioned a Master (now Junior Lieutenant). I remained with Capt. Maury one and half years and then was ordered to the Washington Navy Yard to report to Commanders Dahlgren and Page for duty in ordinance department; remaining there eighteen months was ordered to report to Capt. Rhodes for duty on "special service."

Which service I found, after reaching the Brooklyn navy yard, to be for the purpose of carrying our Minister Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ward of Savannah, Ga., to Japan, and if successful in his mission to bring to the United States the accredited embassy of the Japanese Government. We brought them (a monument to American statesmanship). Afterward, as especial guests of this Government, they were wined and dined in all the principle cities. We embarked then on board the first-class frigate *Niagara* and steamed out of New York harbor July 4, 1860, for Japanese waters. We left New York with sealed orders to be opened after disembarking the embassy on their native land.

After landing them, we discovered that we had orders to cruise off the western and northern coast of Alaska to look after the seal and other interests the United States had in these waters.

On The Eve of Great War

Through at the time of leaving the United States the storm clouds of political war hung low around the horizon, little did we think we were on the eve of a bloody fratricidal war.

On May 12, 1861, going into the coaling station, Franklin—in the Fox Islands—we found orders to report without delay to the commanding officer of the Boston Navy Yard. And as soon as we could, we put to sea for the South Pacific, and after doubling Cape Horn we steered for Boston.

When off Cape Hatteras we heard what we thought was cannonading, but were not sure. We knew nothing of the secession of the Southern States nor the effort of the Federals to coerce them back to the Union.

When the pilot came on board to pilot the ship into the port was our first knowledge of the crisis.

Resigned Commission

As soon as possible I left for Washington to hand in my resignation. Upon entering Washington and tendering my resignation, it was politely but positively refused, and I was ordered back to the *Niagara*. Instead of obeying the order I mounted a horse and steered for Richmond, where I landed after many narrow escapes from the Federals and reported to that illustrious statesman and matchless chieftain, Jefferson Davis.

My first service was on the *Merrimac* in her fight with the *Monitor*. After that engagement, being wounded, was in the hospital three weeks, and then reported for duty. Was ordered to report to Com. Josiah Tatnall at Savannah, Ga. After the Hilton Head fight was ordered to New Orleans to remain to such time as I could get shipping on Havana, Cuba. The fight coming on, I attached myself to the *Sumpter*. In the engagement, Capt. Semmes seeing the long hoped for opportunity to go to sea and prey upon the enemy's commerce, as it were, thrust upon him, gladly accepted the inevitable and made a dash for the deep blue sea. The world knows the sequel.

Upon reaching Havana I found orders to report to Capt. Bullock, the Confederate purchasing agent abroad.

Served Under Bullock

None can realize the happy emotion that permeated my every being on the receipt of them and the gratitude that possessed my heart on recognizing the handiwork of President Davis and that grand old commoner, John H. Reagan, in getting me assigned to the man of all men I preferred to serve under. I remained under Bullock till after the 290, afterward the *Alabama*, was turned over to Semmes in the Azores waters.

About this time Col. Livingston and Capt. DeMaury formed a joint purse and purchased the *Sea Witch*, a steam two-masted yacht, from some parties in Marseilles, France, and tendered her to the Confederate Government for service in running the Federal blockade in bringing in supplies that were purchased by Bullock in England and elsewhere, conditioned only that they should have the exclusive right to name her commander. The tender was accepted and they submitted my name as their choice.

Sailed For Marseilles

May 23, 1863, while standing on the deck in Havana, the *Leatherwing*, an old Mobile pilot boat, and the captain, J.C. Askew, handed me the official documents which proved to be orders to sail for Marseilles, France, on the first vessel out of Havana. The third day after the receipt of orders I left on a three-masted schooner engaged in the wine trade. After a very stormy time we reached Marseilles in due time, where I opened the sealed order package enclosed in the original and found that I must report to Col. Livingston at Rue d' Place 725 M. Upon going there, I learned the whys and wherefores of the whole arrangement from Col. Livingston.

Rescued French Belle

Col. Livingston had married a very charming young lady, Miss Clara Loroche Gervase, a sister of Lieut. Haward Gervase of the French Navy, a warm personal friend of mine, and was also a niece of Capt. DeMaury of the French Army. Miss Gervase, when returning from a dance on our ship on the 9th of May, 1854, fell from the staging of the *Powhatan* into the waters of the Mediterranean Sea; being by her side I plunged in after her, and when she arose to the surface laid hold of her and kept her head above water till a boat could reach her. Being petite and very pretty she was more than grateful for my act and would have nothing than that I had saved her from a watery grave, and as the whole was, Frenchlike "the whole thing or nothing," I was made much of, feted day by day, whenever the ship was in port, and being a young American proud of my nativity and of the adulation bestowed by such a pretty girl upon me, I very naturally did nothing to disparage the act.

Vessel Gives Confederacy

Mrs. Livingston having seen my name among the C.S. naval officers on duty aboard conceived that idea of purchasing and offering the C.S. a fast vessel for the purpose of carrying supplies to the Confederacy; a doting husband, a loving uncle; no sooner does that wife and niece propose a thing that a plan for gratifying her wish is conceived and put into operation. She it was who suggested my name and through her uncle, the Colonel, was prevailed upon to join them in petitioning the President to assign me to command of the *Niobe*.

Commander of Niobe

For twenty-two months I had command of the *Niobe*. I made eighteen round trips between Havana and some of the southern ports, making successful deliveries each time with the loss of only nine men of the original crew. Three of these men were killed in running the Federal blockade at Mobile a few days prior to the engagement at that port.

Two of them were killed by Confederate pickets below Fort Jackson below Savannah, Ga. The killing was nothing more or less than cold-blooded murder, committed by two of the most arrant cowards that God ever permitted the life blood to course through veins.

I had the exquisite pleasure of hearing their doom read out on dress parade and the next day seeing them shot. When my men were shot down they were standing on the deck of the vessel chatting with no arms in their hands or about their persons; the vessel was flying the Confederate colors at the mizzen and the regulation signals on the fore, and without even hailing us they fired upon us and desisted only when I ordered a gun fired into the party, when they ran like a set of dastard scoundrels, the Lieutenant in command of the scouting squad being in the lead. The other four on my men died of Yellow Jack in Havana.

Sank Vessel At Sea

At the date of the final surrender I was in Havana, partially loaded with supplies, and as my orders from the owners were not to surrender the vessel into the hands of the Federals under any circumstances, but to sail into deep water and sink her with all her cargo, I left Havana and sailed south into the Caribbean Sea and after putting all my men into the quarter boats, scuttled her, and I saw her go down in seventy fathoms of water with the Confederate Ensign flying from the mizzen staff. (See below.) After seeing her properly buried, I pulled out for Vera Cruz, Mex., with all the boats in the wake, where we landed the eighth day after the burial of the *Niobe*, and made a formal, full and complete report of all my actions from the time I was assigned command till the last act in the drama was

performed. In due time I received a reply from the owners and a full and complete endorsement signed by each of the owners of all my acts.

Knocked Out Mud Valve

May 25, 1865, 8 bells p.m. (4 o'clock) scuttled the *Niobe* by knocking out mud valve and staving in her bottom. She filled and sank in twenty minutes in latitude 16 degrees 10 minutes N.; longitude 80 degrees 15 minutes W.

His Brother's Record

Lieut. D.R.A. Meriwether, who has charge of all the carpenter and plumbing repair work at the State Confederate Home at Austin, returned to his home, after having attended the funeral of his brother, Capt. A.J. Meriwether.

He, too, has a war record. He joined the Confederacy at Eatonton, Ga., when he was 18 years old, and was elected First Lieutenant of Company B. On account of his youthful age, he refused to accept the honor but was elected again. Seeing gray-headed men under him, he still refused the honor and fought throughout the war as a private, being wounded seven times. He lost two fingers and had the balance mangled on the left hand in the battle of Chancellorsville on the Sunday following the Saturday night that Stonewall Jackson was killed.

Met, Without Recognition

The last time he and his brother met was during the war in the spring of 1864, when the two had furloughs home.

In May, 1911, D.R.A. Meriwether came to visit his brother in Gainesville. He learned of his whereabouts from a soldier in the home—John McCarty, formerly of Gainesville. When the brothers met some strange coincidences were found. They both had attended some fifteen different United Confederate reunions held throughout the South, but never recognized each other.

At Chattanooga, in the 80's they stood at the same table side by side and did not know it at the time, but recalled it upon meeting last year, by the incident of the remarks made by a certain lady guest with whom they both talked concerning a plate of pie handed to her by Capt. Meriwether. Lieut. Meriwether thinks the reason he missed recognizing his brother at the reunion was that he was all the time looking for him to be wearing the navy insignia, when in fact he wore the regular army badge. Lieut. Meriwether has quite an interesting

history. Besides being wounded as already related, he received scars in other battles and was shot twice at the battle of Appomattox.

Dallas Morning News (Dallas, Texas), 21 February 1912

Gainesville, Tex., Feb. 20 – Capt. A. J. Meriwether, 89 years old, and City Police Judge, died this morning after several days illness from paralysis of the heart. He had been a resident of this county for forty-five years. He was educated at the Naval Academy at Annapolis, graduating in the same class with Admirals Dewey, Schley and Sampson. He entered the navy as Lieutenant and served ten years before the breaking out of the Civil War, when he, with 249 out of 250 men, left the United States Navy when their resignations were refused by President Lincoln and joined the Confederate forces. A French woman named Lizzie De Maurie presented the Confederacy a battleship with the provision that Meriwether should be made Captain in charge. This was granted and the ship was used as a blockade runner in bringing supplies to the Confederate army from Cuba and South America. The ship was named *Niobe*, and while off the Cuban coast near Havana Capt. Meriwether blew it up to prevent its capture by Federals.

Capt. Meriwether formulated and carried to successful completion a move to build a beautiful monument here to the memory of the Sons and Daughters of the South, and in this undertaking, which was completed only a few months ago, he was helped financially by Admiral Winfield Scott Schley.

A brother, Robert Meriwether, aged 76, of Austin is here. He was a member of the staff of Gen. A. R. Wright and took part in the battles of Chancellorsville and Appomattox court house, in both of which he was badly wounded.

The funeral will be held here tomorrow afternoon.

Washington Post (Washington, D.C.), 21 February 1912

Confederate Captain Dead

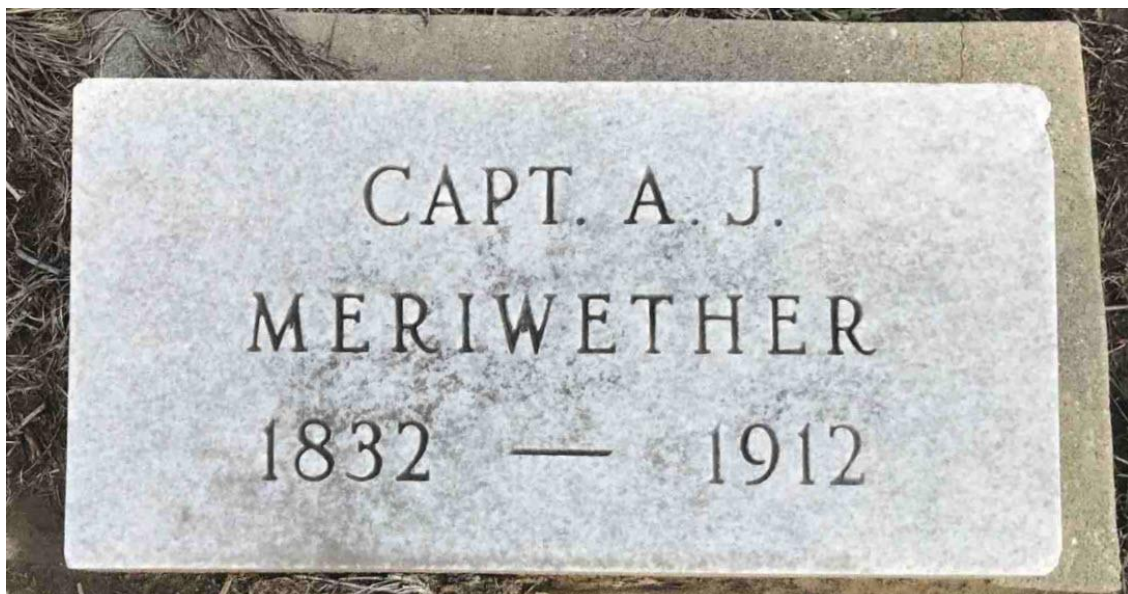
A.J. Meriwether Commanded the *Niobe*, Which He Later Blew Up.

Gainesville, Tex., Feb. 20. – Capt. A. J. Meriwether, 79 years old, died from paralysis of the heart today.

Capt. Meriwether was graduated at Annapolis in 1856, and, entering the navy, he became a lieutenant and served until the outbreak of the civil war, when he, with 250 others, entered the Confederate service.

A French woman gave the Confederacy a ship with the provision that Meriwether should be the captain. This was granted, and the vessel, the *Noibe*, was used as a blockade runner in bringing supplies to the Confederate army from Cuba and South America.

When the vessel was about to be captured Capt. Meriwether blew her up off the coast of Cuba, near Havana.



He is buried in Division 22 of Fairview Cemetery:

