

Primrose, William Stuart ^[1]

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by William S. Powell, 1994; Revised December 2021

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Portrait of W. S. Primrose, member of the North Carolina State Board of Agriculture. From *North Carolina and Its Resources*, by the State Board of Agriculture, Raleigh. Published 1896 by M.I. & J.C. Stewart, Public Printers and Binders, Winston, North Carolina. Presented on Archive.org.

^[2]William Stuart Primrose, businessman, member of the State Board of Agriculture, and North Carolina State College official, was born in [Raleigh](#) ^[3], the son of John and Eliza Tarbox Primrose. His father, a native of Scotland, was a merchant; his mother, a native of Hebron, Conn., went to Raleigh as tutor for the children of [John Devereux](#) ^[4]. Young Primrose's earliest education was in Raleigh, after which he attended [Davidson College](#) ^[5] for one year; otherwise, he was self-educated. As a young man he was assistant cashier of the State National Bank (1874–78), of which he later became a director. His interest in business inspired him to advocate and support the [State Exposition of 1884](#) ^[6], and he was elected president of the sponsoring body. When the North Carolina Home Insurance Company was organized, he was elected secretary and in 1885 he became president.

As a member of the influential [Watauga Club](#) ^[7] in Raleigh, a group of the state's leading citizens who sought ways to advance North Carolina, Primrose is said to have been the first person to propose creation of what became [North Carolina State College of Agriculture and Engineering](#) ^[8]. Because he did not have a college degree, he twice declined to be a candidate for president of the college. Nevertheless, he was a strong supporter of the institution and served as president of its board of trustees for twenty years. A building on the campus was named for him. He also served on the board of trustees of [Peace Institute](#) ^[9] and of [Davidson College](#) ^[5].

Primrose, like his parents before him, joined the [Presbyterian church](#) ^[10] as a youth. At age twenty-eight he became a ruling elder of Raleigh's First Presbyterian Church, a position he would fill for the remainder of his life. He also served as superintendent of the Sunday school and sang in the choir. He was an active [Mason](#) ^[11].

Primrose married Ella Williams, and they became the parents of six sons and a daughter: John Shelton, William S., Jr., Hugh Williams, Robert Owen, Henry Fries, Jesse Lindsay, and Helen (Mrs. R. Y. McPherson). After a funeral at the Presbyterian church, he was buried in [Oakwood Cemetery](#) ^[12], Raleigh.

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