

## **Percival, William** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Percival, William**

by William B. Bushong and Lawrence Wodehouse, 1994

**fl. 1853–60**

William Percival, architect and civil engineer, was said to have been a British army officer who retired with the rank of cornet. According to his advertisements he had professional architectural training and by 1858 more than sixteen years of practical experience in Europe, Canada, and the United States in both public and private building. The Royal Institute of British Architects has no record of him; nor does the Ministry of Defence Library in London, which has army lists of the period, have any record of an officer by that name in the Royal Artillery or the Royal Engineers, which were the technical arms of the period. He completed several engineering commissions in Virginia prior to opening an architectural and engineering office in Richmond in 1855. Among them were the Keysville and Christiansville Plank Road, the Richmond and Danville Railroad, and a private railroad for William Allen of Surry County, Va.

In 1855 he received an award for his architectural drawings from the Virginia Mechanics Institute of Richmond. During the year 1856–57 he was an instructor in design at the institute, and the term ended in May 1857 with an exhibition of the work of Percival's thirty pupils.

In 1857 Percival formed a partnership with John Grant in Richmond and obtained architectural commissions for the First Baptist Church in Raleigh and New East and New West buildings on the campus of [The University of North Carolina](#) <sup>[2]</sup>. They opened a branch office in [Raleigh](#) <sup>[3]</sup> in January 1858 but the partnership apparently was dissolved that May. Thereafter Percival devoted his energies to new commissions in North Carolina. He negotiated contracts with [Rufus S. Tucker](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, [William M. Boylan](#) <sup>[5]</sup>, and [William S. Battle](#) <sup>[6]</sup>. Construction on the Tucker villa began in the spring of 1858 and was soon followed by construction of The University of North Carolina buildings in June and the Boylan mansion in September 1858. Construction on the villa for William S. Battle in [Tarboro](#) <sup>[7]</sup> probably began a few months later.

Meanwhile, Percival received a contract for the [Caswell County](#) <sup>[8]</sup> courthouse and exhibited the design for it at the North Carolina State Fair in October 1858. The architect also installed water closets in the state capitol in Raleigh. Percival's work continued to flourish as construction began on Carter B. Harrison's villa in Raleigh (1859), the Calvary Episcopal Church in Tarboro (1860), and the First Baptist Church in [Hillsborough](#) <sup>[9]</sup> (1860).

Percival's architectural designs followed the mandate established in the writings of Andrew Jackson Downing (1815–53) and as seen in the North Carolina work of Richard Upjohn (1802–78), [Ithiel Town](#) <sup>[10]</sup> (1784–1844), and [Alexander Jackson Davis](#) <sup>[11]</sup> (1803–92). His drawings, watercolors, sketches of English pastoral scenes, and engineering plans were consistent winners at the state fairs of 1858 and 1859, and he was acclaimed for his use of North Carolina sandstone, the material for most of his important structures in the state. His Baptist church in Raleigh and the Episcopal church in Tarboro are in the Greek Revival style expounded by Upjohn, notably in the exposed interior roof structure. New East and New West buildings on the campus of the university were inspired by the classical state capitol by Town, and the Davis design of Blandwood in Greensboro for Governor [John Motley Morehead](#) <sup>[12]</sup> was a prototype in the Italianate style for the five houses by Percival: Montfort Hall in Raleigh for William Montfort Boylan, The Barracks for William S. Battle, and the William L. Dozier houses at Tarboro (the latter attributed to Percival by Arthur J. P. Edwards, who surveyed the area for the North Carolina Division of Archives and History), and the Carter B. Harrison and Rufus Sylvester Tucker houses (both demolished).

The dates of Percival's birth and death are unknown, and his career prior to 1853 and after 1860 remains a mystery. He does not appear in the census returns for either Virginia or North Carolina and no obituary for him has been found.

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