

Simpson, Herbert Woodley ^[1]

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Simpson, Herbert Woodley

by Janet K. Seapker, 1994

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19 Jan. 1870–21 Oct. 1945

Herbert Woodley Simpson, architect, was born in [New Bern](#) ^[3], the son of John Archibald, a builder and undertaker, and Mary Elizabeth Higgins Simpson. No information has been discovered about Simpson's early education, but it is assumed that he attended the [New Bern Academy](#) ^[4]. In August 1888 he was accepted for a year of study with W. Claude Frederick, an architect in Baltimore. Simpson studied with Frederick from October 1888 to October 1889 and received a recommendation from him in March 1890.

The first evidence of Simpson's architectural practice appeared in 1896, when he advertised "plans prepared on short notice." It is likely that before that time, he assisted his father in the construction and undertaking business. One of his first commissions (1896) was to prepare plans for the rectory of St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church. Fortunately for the young architect, New Bern was experiencing a building boom. The economic stimulation of the town was largely a result of the lumber industry, which produced magnates desirous of building the most impressive residences and commercial structures that money could buy. Simpson is credited with the design of almost every important structure built in New Bern in the first two decades of the twentieth century. A versatile designer, he excelled in the Queen Anne and neoclassical revival styles and often combined the two. The profession of architecture in the United States was still rather new, and few architects were available to eastern North Carolinians in the early twentieth century. Consequently, Simpson produced designs for buildings in other eastern North Carolina towns as well. A list of Simpson-designed buildings, organized by town, can be found in the North Carolina State Archives.

On 21 Apr. 1897, shortly after entering his profession, Simpson married Nettie Tolson. They had two children, John Arch (14 Jan. 1898–January 1968) and Helen Elizabeth (22 Feb. 1900–May 1968). His [American Institute of Architects](#) ^[5], North Carolina Chapter, registration was dated September 1913. He was also a member of the Methodist church and of the [Masonic order](#) ^[6].

Simpson left New Bern in 1914 and took up residence in Norfolk, Va., where he continued his architectural practice until his death. Despite the move, he still designed buildings for North Carolina clients. In the 1920s John Arch joined his father's firm, Herbert W. Simpson and Son, and together they designed buildings until Herbert's death in 1945. Most of the structures fashioned by the two Simpsons were built in the Norfolk area.

Herbert Woodley Simpson was buried in Cedar Grove Cemetery, New Bern. A photographic portrait of him exists in the [Herbert Woodley Simpson Collection](#) ^[7], North Carolina State Archives.

References:

St. Paul's Catholic Church records (New Bern).

Herbert Woodley Simpson Collection (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Charlotte E. (Mrs. John Arch) Simpson (West Pittstown, Pa.), personal contact, 30 Nov. 1971–15 Sept. 1975 (correspondence), May 1972 (interview).

[Simpson Scrapbook](#) ^[8] (possession of Shirley Tucker Beckton, New Bern).

Additional Resources:

Bishir, Catherin W., Michael T. Southern, and Jennifer F. Martin. 1999. A guide to the historic architecture of western North Carolina. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. <https://www.worldcat.org/title/guide-to-the-historic-architecture-of-western-north-carolina/oclc/39442990> ^[9] (accessed July 23, 2014).

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[Architects](#)^[15]

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Origin - location:

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[New Bern](#)^[20]

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[1] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/simpson-herbert-woodley>

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[4] <https://ncpedia.org/new-bern-academy>

[5] <http://www.aia.org/>

[6] <https://ncpedia.org/freemasons>

[7] <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/search/searchterm/Herbert%20Woodley%20Simpson/order/nosort>

[8] <http://newbern.cpclib.org/digital/nbhs/simpson/index.htm>

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[16] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term>

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