

Purnell, Thomas ^[1]

Purnell, Thomas Richard

by Rosamond Putzel

10 Aug. 1846–19 Dec. 1908

Thomas Richard Purnell, jurist, was born in [Wilmington](#) ^[2], the son of Thomas Richard and Eliza Ann Dudley Purnell. His grandparents were John and Sarah Purnell and Governor and Mrs. [Edward B. Dudley](#) ^[3]. He was a great-grandson of the John Purnell who settled in North Carolina in 1780 and a descendant of John Haywood, one of the first settlers of [Edgecombe County](#) ^[4].

Purnell attended the [Hillsborough Military Academy](#) ^[5] and at age sixteen enlisted in the Confederate army, serving as an orderly to General W. H. C. Whiting at [Wilmington](#) ^[2] and later with a corps of topographical engineers in the Army of Northern Virginia. At the end of the war, he was paroled at [Greensboro](#) ^[6].

He was graduated from [Trinity College](#) ^[7] with an A.B. degree in 1869 and an M.A. degree in 1872. After studying law under Robert Strange in [Wilmington](#) ^[2], he was admitted to the North Carolina bar in 1870. He practiced in Baltimore, Md., for a year and then in [Salem](#) ^[8], N.C., from 1871 to 1873.

Purnell had a long career in legal and public service in North Carolina. He was state librarian from 1873 to 1876, a state legislator in 1876–77, and a state senator in 1883–84. He ran for attorney general in 1892 and for solicitor of the Fourth Judicial District in 1894. From 1877 to 1897 he was commissioner of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and an attorney in [Raleigh](#) ^[9]. On 5 May 1897 he was appointed judge for the U.S. District Court in the Eastern District, where he served until his death.

On 11 Nov. 1870 he married Adelia E. Zevely, of [Salem](#) ^[8], the daughter of Dr. Alexander T. and Lucinda Blum Zevely. They were the parents of three daughters and a son. His funeral was held at the [Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd](#) ^[10] in [Raleigh](#) ^[9].

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