

Stronach, William ^[1]

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by Elizabeth Reid Murray, 1994

3 Nov. 1803–9 May 1857

William Stronach, state capitol stonemason, marble carver, Raleigh businessman, and founder of the family in North Carolina, was born at Stroneveagh (meaning "the place of the Stronachs") in Moray County (Elginshire), Scotland, the son of Ann Barron and Thomas Stronach. According to the minister of his home parish, Rafford, his parents "were respectable and bestowed upon him the ordinary advantages of education," and their son grown to manhood "conducted himself with undeviating propriety—so far as known to us—and creditably supported himself by his industry." Soon after the date of the foregoing letter of recommendation (20 Feb. 1833), young Stronach immigrated to America by way of Leith (now part of Edinburgh). By 1834 he was among those stonecutters brought "from the North" by the architects of the state capitol to construct that building. His name appears on the "List of stonecutters employed at the Capitol" in the 4 Dec. 1834 report of the superintending commissioners; his pay was two dollars a day. The following August, indicating his intention of settling permanently in North Carolina, he applied to the Wake County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions ^[2] for U.S. citizenship.

Prior to completion of the capitol in 1840, Stronach had opened his own "marble-yard" at his home, 554 East Hargett Street, opposite the southeastern corner of Raleigh's City Cemetery ^[3]. Among the tombstones he is known to have made is that of John Rex ^[4]. He carved tombstones and offered "all kinds of granite work, . . . plaistering and mason work of all kinds" and eventually "hearth[stones], paint-stones, slabs for Soda Founts, Baker's Slabs, and Nova Scotia grindstones"—all indicated in his local newspaper advertisements. The state employed him for "putting up Gothic Mantle Pieces in the Library" of the capitol and repairing other mantelpieces in the new building. In 1847 he won another state contract to construct, with Raleigh foundryman Silas Burns, the stone coping for the iron fence surrounding Union Square ^[5], which they completed in November 1848 and which was fifty years later (1898) removed to enclose City Cemetery.

In September 1836 Stronach married Sarah Eubanks Moody Savage (ca. 1814–18 Feb. 1866), a widow from Richmond, Va. The couple had four sons and two daughters. Three of the sons became well-known local business and civic leaders. William Carter (1 Nov. 1844–3 Mar. 1901) and Alexander B[arron] (29 Aug. 1847–2 June 1910), after serving in the Confederate army, opened the W. C. and A. B. Stronach grocery firm. They operated as many as three stores at one time but later formed separate businesses, including a cotton brokerage and commission houses. W. C. was an organizer of the North Carolina Confederate Veterans' ("Old Soldiers") Home ^[6] in Raleigh, which he served as executive director, succeeded by A. B. He also built a large warehouse at 319–323 South Wilmington Street; designed as a tobacco salesroom, it was also utilized for inaugurations, balls, and other state and community activities. An incorporator and eventually president of the Raleigh Savings Bank, W. C. was a Raleigh alderman from 1872 to 1876, serving once as mayor pro tempore, and from 1892 to 1896 he was chairman of the Wake County Board of County Commissioners. He was also a director of the Atlantic and North Carolina ^[7] and the Seaboard Air-Line railroads ^[8], of Oakwood Cemetery Association ^[9], and of Peace Institute ^[10].

For the W. C. Stronach family, Thomas Briggs ^[11] in the 1870s built the home known as Willowbrook or "Geranium Valley" at the northwestern corner of North Boundary and Bloodworth streets (601 North Bloodworth Street), still the residence of descendants a hundred years later. A. B. served one term (1905–7) in the North Carolina House of Representatives. Frank Stronach (4 Feb. 1851–8 Apr. 1934), who had an auction business and also dealt in wagons, buggies, and furniture, was elected to successive terms on the Raleigh Board of Aldermen, serving from 1891 to 1897. The eldest son, George Thomas (1842–10 Jan. 1887), served in the Confederate army, then became a cotton factor as well as a wholesale and retail grocer.

William Stronach, patriarch of the Raleigh family, was a member and elder of Raleigh's First Presbyterian Church. One of the organizers of a local chapter of the national temperance society, he served as its first vice-president in 1845. His strict family rules, as remembered by his son and namesake, were cited by a grandson, Alexander: "Sunday was one continuous session of Sunday school, church and religious instruction; no amusements, no reading of secular books or papers—a day to meditate upon your misdeeds, to fear Hell and perhaps to question the happiness of a Presbyterian Heaven 'where congregations ne'er break up and Sabbaths have no end.'" Even on Saturdays, "before there was any hunting or fishing or playing, a portion of the Shorter Catechism had to be memorized and recited" to the boys' father. A tribute of respect inserted in the *North Carolina Standard* by fellow members of the Sons of Temperance after his death noted that "he always had a word of counsel, admonition or reproof to administer in behalf of Temperance ^[12], and never let an opportunity escape unimproved for inculcating its sublime precepts." Politically, he was a Whig ^[13].

Stronach's death followed a lengthy illness. Buried in Raleigh City Cemetery, his body was later moved to Oakwood Cemetery ^[9], as was that of his widow, who survived him by nine years.

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Additional Resources:

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Murray, Elizabeth D. R. ^[22]

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From:

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