

Air-Conditioning ^[1]

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Stuart W. Cramer,
coined the term "air
conditioning". Image
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by Michael Hill, 2006Mecklenburg County. ^[2]

Air-conditioning greatly changed the nature of life in North Carolina and the rest of the South. Willis H. Carrier ^[3], who had created an experimental cooling system in New York in 1902, installed the first air-conditioning system in the South in 1906 at [Chronicle Cotton Mills](#) ^[4] in Belmont. Prior to the 1920s, the use of air-conditioning was restricted almost entirely to industrial settings, where it was hailed as a boon to worker productivity; by the 1930s, however, air-conditioned movie theaters and railway cars became common. After [World War II](#) ^[5] commercial use increased, and, with the invention of the window unit in 1951, residential application boomed. While it is difficult to quantify the effects of the widespread availability of air-conditioning, historians have recognized it as an important contributor to the reversal of migration from the South in the latter half of the twentieth century. It also helped spark a variety of other social and cultural changes as increasing numbers of North Carolinians moved off their porches during the hot summer months, choosing instead the comforts of controlled indoor temperatures.

[Stuart W. Cramer](#) ^[6], born in Thomasville, played an important role in the development of air-conditioning. A leading figure in the textile industry at the turn of the twentieth century and the holder of more than 60 patents, Cramer pioneered humidity control and ventilating equipment for cotton mills and installed scores of such systems across the South. In a paper read before an [American Cotton Manufacturers Association convention in 1906](#) ^[7], Cramer—for whom the [Gaston County](#) ^[8] town of Cramerton is named—is believed to have coined the term "air-conditioning." The industry's trade organization within the state, the [North Carolina Association of Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors](#) ^[9], was formed in 1910; L. L. Hackney of Charlotte was the group's first president.

References:

Raymond Arsenault, "The End of the Long Hot Summer: The Air Conditioner and Southern Culture," *Journal of Southern History* 50 (November 1984).

Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, eds., *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (1989).

Additional Resources:

[Stuart W. Cramer](#) ^[2], NC Historical Marker O-76, North Carolina Office of Archives & History.

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Stuart W. Cramer, coined the term "air conditioning". Image courtesy of Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County. Available from <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=O-76> ^[2] (accessed August 28, 2012).

Subjects:

[Cotton](#) ^[10]

[Science, technology, and innovations](#) ^[11]

Authors:

[Hill, Michael](#) ^[12]

Origin - location:

[Davidson County](#) ^[13]

Gaston County ^[14]

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Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.^[15]

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