

Durham, Carl Thomas ^[1]

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Durham, Carl Thomas

by Warner Wells, 1986

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Harris & Ewing. "Only Druggist in Congress. Washington, D.C., Feb. 13. While many professions and businesses are represented in the 76th Congress, Rep. Carl T. Durham, democrat of North Carolina, is the only pharmacist in that august body. He ran a drug store at Chapel Hill before his election to the house, 2-13-39". Photograph. 1939 February 13. LC-H22-D- 5782. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

^[2]Carl Thomas Durham, congressman, was born in the White Cross community six miles west of Chapel Hill in the house built by his great-great-great grandfather, Matthew Durham, when he moved from New England in 1734 to settle on a plantation near the Haw River. He was the oldest of six children of Claude and Delia Ann Lloyd Durham. Young Durham attended White Cross School and the Manndale Academy at Saxapahaw, and in the summer of 1913 began work at Eubanks Drugstore in Chapel Hill. By 1916 he had sufficiently qualified himself as an apprentice in pharmacy to be admitted to [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[3] as a special student in pharmacy, pursuing the course of instruction during the next two years. A popular student, he became a member of the Kappa Psi fraternity and was elected president of his pharmacy class. Toward the end of 1917 the war in Europe brought his academic career to an end; on New Year's Day 1918, he enlisted in the Navy Hospital Corps for the final period of World War I. Released from the navy the following Christmas Eve, he returned to Eubanks Drugstore as a professional pharmacist.

From an early age Durham took an active interest in community life. In 1914 he helped organize the Men's Bible Class in the Chapel Hill University Baptist Church; he also served as a deacon in the church and was a president of the Bible class. He was a member of the Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen from 1921 to 1930 and of the Chapel Hill School Board from 1924 to 1938. Serving for eight years on the Orange County Board of Commissioners, he proposed and secured in 1935 \$22,000 in federal aid for a rural electrification line in the Calvander–Orange Grove area of Orange County [4]. He was a charter member of the White Cross Junior Order of United American Mechanics and of Post Number Six of the American Legion in which he was commander. He belonged to the University Lodge, No. 408, of Masons [5] in Chapel Hill. In 1937 Durham was elected to The University of North Carolina Board of Trustees and served for many years; in 1958 the university conferred on him the LL.D. degree.

A Democrat [6], Durham was a member of the North Carolina State Democratic Executive Committee and managed the congressional campaigns in Orange County for Frank Hancock [7] of Oxford and William Umstead [8] of Durham. In 1938 he was elected to the Seventy-sixth Congress and served twenty-two years during eleven terms. He was a member of the House Military Affairs Committee and the House Armed Services Committee and in 1945 became a charter member of the Joint Atomic Energy Commission. At the beginning of World War II, he sponsored a bill in Congress creating the U.S. Army Pharmacy Corps. In 1949 he won unanimous approval in the House for a bill to support a \$161,000,000 radar network around the United States and Canada. On passage of the bill he remarked laconically: "It seems to give more protection for less money than anything else I have seen." At the end of the war Congressman Durham was appointed to the new Joint Atomic Energy Committee and later, as a senior member, served as its acting chairman. He sponsored civil defense legislation and was coauthor of a bill tightening drug laws. In 1955 he was a U.S. delegate to the Atoms for Peace conference in Geneva and in 1957 attended the first meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. Durham retired from public life in 1961, at the end of the Eighty-seventh Congress. In 1964 the American Pharmaceutical Association elected him honorary president and retained his services as a special consultant.

Durham was in the forefront of polity at the beginning of the Atomic era. His longtime service in the Joint Atomic Energy Commission during three administrations afforded him a unique perspective on global accommodation to the splitting of the atom. His reaction was one of restraint in the military use of atomic power, caution in its application as a domestic energy source, and enthusiasm for international diplomacy in its control. He was a leader in the congressional battle for the civilian control of atomic energy.

On 30 Dec. 1918 Durham married Margaret Joe Whitsett of Guilford County [9]. They had five children: Celia (Mrs. Gregg Murray), Mary Sue (Mrs. Willard Sessler of Asheville), Carl Durham, Jr., of Wilmington, Peggy (Mrs. Joe Thomas Wall of Chapel Hill), and Ann Durham Wyatt of Durham. Mrs. Durham died on 10 Jan. 1953. On 8 June 1961 Durham married Louise Ashworth Jefferson of Chapel Hill. They had between them eight children and twenty-six grandchildren.

Carl Durham died in Duke Hospital in his eighty-first year. Funeral services were held in the Chapel Hill University Baptist Church and burial followed in the churchyard of the Antioch Baptist Church in the White Cross community.

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