

Durham ^[1]

Durham

by Steven Case

[NC Government & Heritage Library](#), ^[2] 2010.

See also: [Durham](#) ^[3] (UNC Press)



Panoramic photograph, American Tobacco factory in Durham looking to the East, 1926 (Courtesy Digital Durham)

^[4]

Durham is the county seat of [Durham County](#) ^[5]. Originally, the land--through which a major Native American trading route passed--was inhabited by such tribes as the [Occaneechi](#) ^[6] and Eno. The town grew up around the railroad station (on the Raleigh-Hillsborough rail line) that was built on 4 acres of land sold to the railroad by [Dr. Bartlett Durham](#) ^[7] in 1854. It was incorporated in 1866.

After the Civil War, tobacco trading began to expand, and Durham became a major center for the industry. The [American Tobacco Company](#) ^[8]--founded by the [Duke family](#) ^[9]--was headquartered in the city for almost a century. The sale of tobacco spurred economic growth in the area and influenced the fortunes of families like the [Dukes](#) ^[10], whose ongoing endowment in part funds [Duke University](#) ^[11]. Tobacco also indirectly led to Durham's nickname of the "Bull City," after a Durham bull became the advertising emblem of Durham Smoking Tobacco ([Wise 2002](#) ^[12]).

Durham also became a vital center for African Americans in the state. Such institutions as the [North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Co](#) ^[13], (founded 1898--the first such African-American owned company in the country), and the [Mechanics and Farmers Bank](#) ^[14] (founded 1907) were the nucleus of what came to be known as [Black Wall Street](#) ^[15]. In 1910, the first publicly supported liberal arts university for African Americans ([NC](#) ^[16] [Central University](#) ^[17]) was founded. Later, during the [Civil Rights era](#) ^[18], an early sit-in, which occurred at the [Royal Ice Cream Company](#) ^[19] in 1957, tested the legal limits of segregation.

In the 1920s and '30s, musicians such as [Blind Boy Fuller](#) ^[20] and [Blind Reverend Gary Davis](#) ^[21] helped create the Bull City Blues. The following video is a short documentary on Richard Trice and the Bull City Blues.

The [American Dance Festival](#) ^[22], the [Bull Durham Blues Festival](#), the [Full Frame Documentary Film Festival](#) ^[23], the [Festival for the Eno](#) ^[24], the [Nasher Museum of Art](#) ^[25]--all of these show that Durham was and remains a vibrant center for culture and the arts. Despite the departure of the tobacco giants and the manufacturing sector, Durham has continued to grow. Revitalization projects such as the [American Tobacco Historic District](#) ^[26] and the [Durham Performing Arts Center](#) ^[27] show that it remains a vital part of [Piedmont](#) ^[28] North Carolina.

Durham's estimated population:

1980: 101,149
1990: 136,612
2000: 187,035
2008: 228,480
2009: 234,140
2010: 229,466

Durham's land area (square miles):

1980: 42.32
1990: 70.218

2000: 94.636
2008: 105.502

References and additional resources:

Data from the NC State Data Center: <https://www.osbm.nc.gov> [29]

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"Durham History at a glance." Durham Convention and Visitors Bureau. <https://www.discoverdurham.com> [32]

Educator Company. 1895. Hand-book of Durham, North Carolina: A brief and accurate description of a prosperous and growing southern manufacturing town. Durham: Educator Co. <https://archive.org/details/handbookofdurham00educ> [33]

Powell, William Stevens, and Michael R. Hill. 2010. The North Carolina gazetteer: a dictionary of Tar Heel places and their history [34]. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. p. 162.

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"A Short History of the Bull City." Preservation Durham. <https://www.preservationdurham.org/> [35]

Wise, James E. 2002. Durham: A Bull City story. Charleston, SC: Arcadia. <https://search.worldcat.org/title/50700961> [36]

Image credits:

Panoramic photograph, American Tobacco factory in Durham looking to the East. 1926. Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce papers, oversize, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library [37], Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. <http://digitaldurham.duke.edu/hueism.php?x=photograph&id=500> [4]

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