

The Bull City—A Short History of Durham, North Carolina

by

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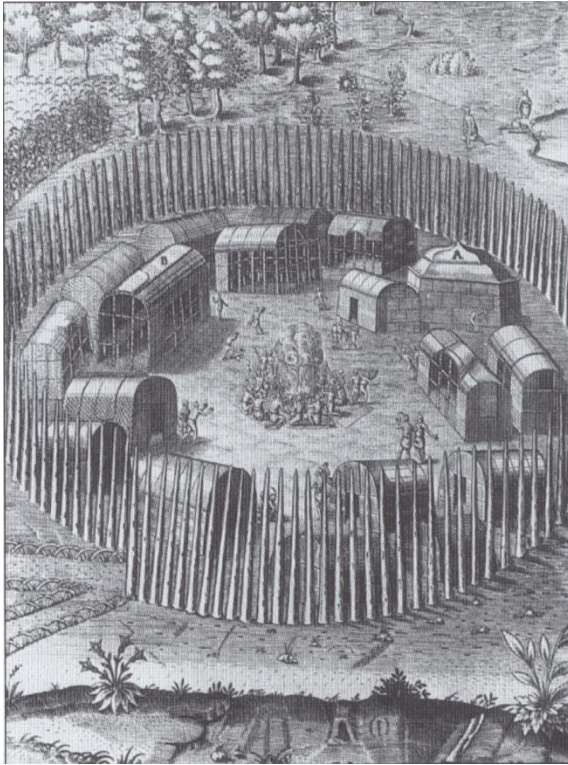
Content adapted from

Anderson, Jean. *Durham County*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 1990. 611 p.

In the beginning...

In the 1600s, men from Virginia were coming south to the Piedmont region of what would become North Carolina. Central North Carolina from around 1600 to 1750 was an isolated place that was home to a live-and-let-live society where Native American, white, and black freely mixed.

Indian Upheaval



Typical NC Indian village. Courtesy North Carolina Division of Archives & History.

Disease and alcohol introduced by Europeans were already taking their toll on the Indians, and European settlement up and down the eastern seaboard was causing tribes to relocate.

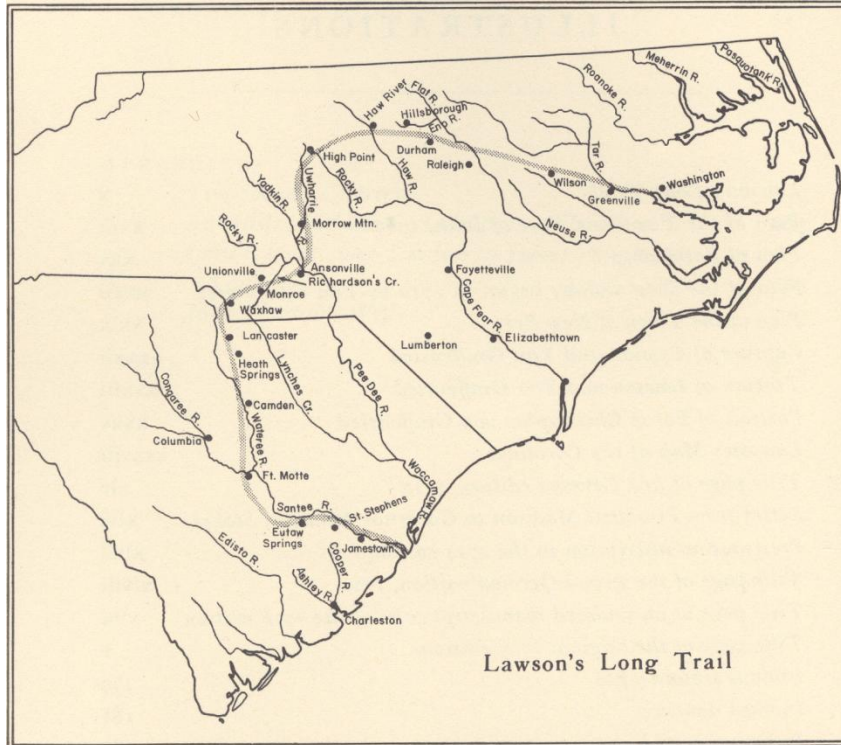
Exploring the Durham County Area: Lederer

John Lederer, a German doctor, is the first European to describe the land that is now Durham County, in 1670. Although a lot of Indian warfare was going on at the time, the inhabitants in the Durham area were said to be peaceable and industrious, with extensive commercial contacts.



Map of Lederer's travels. From The Discoveries of John Lederer.

Exploring the Durham County Area: Lawson



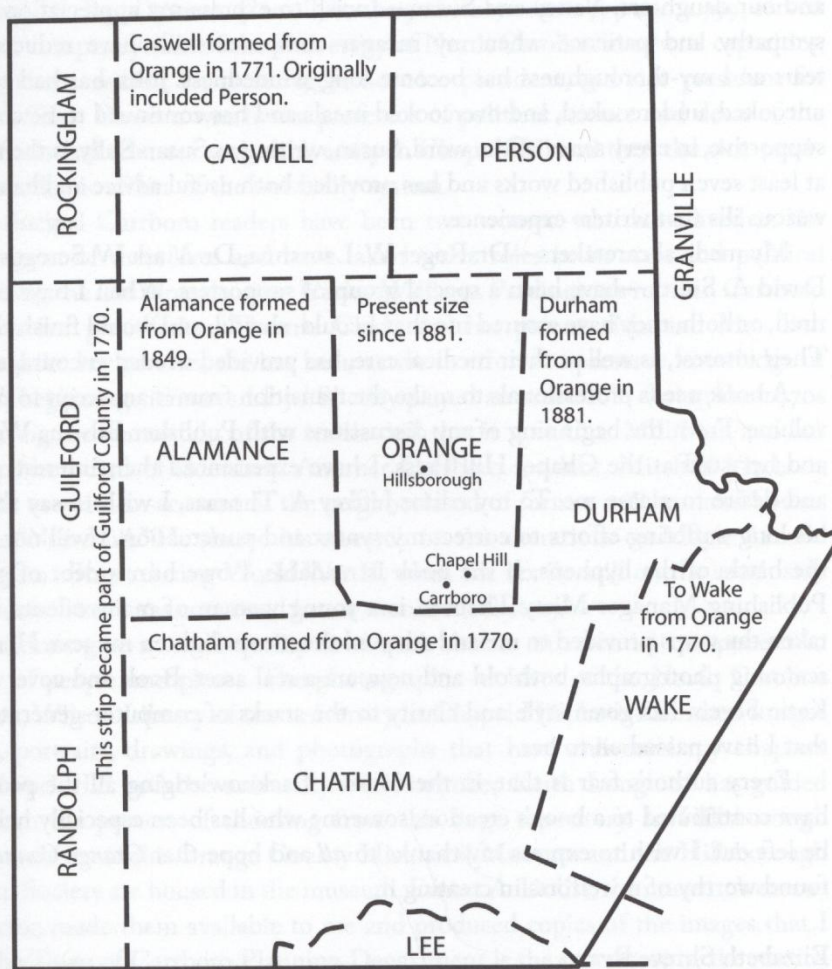
In 1701 another explorer, John Lawson, spent time in an Eno Indian village that was in or near present-day Durham County. His guide to the area was an Indian called Enoe Will, who treated him to hot bread and bear oil after a 14-mile trek from one village to another.

Lawson's route. From [A New Voyage to Carolina](#).

Where They Came from

Settlers used several main routes as they came into North Carolina. People who came to Durham were almost exclusively moving west from the older North Carolina counties or traveling down the old Indian Trading Path from Virginia.

Before Durham Was Durham



Orange County, as founded in 1752 and subsequently divided

Adapted by the author from Orange County—1752-1952, edited by Hugh Lefler and Paul Wager.

Durham did not exist as a county until 1881. Before that it was part of Orange.

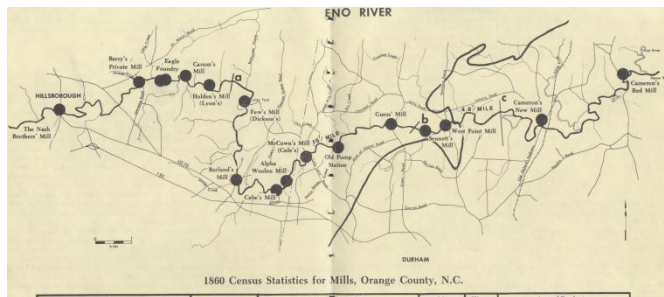
The American Revolution

When the American Revolution came in 1775, no major battles were fought in Orange County, but the inhabitants experienced the usual ills of war—shortages of money, manpower, food, and supplies of all kinds, as well as worry and heartache. Because Hillsborough was a military and political center, people in Orange County were very much in the thick of things.

The Importance of Mills



Flooding of Eno mill, 1899. Courtesy Helen Liantis.



Mills on the Eno, 1880. From Papers from the Seminar on Waterwheels...

Gristmills and sawmills were essential to the 18th-century agricultural economy. They provided the farmer with cornmeal to make his bread, and lumber to build his home and farm buildings; they allowed him to participate in the market economy with his corn, wheat, and lumber. Mills also played a social role. A settler with enough money and a good location for a mill on his land was quick to request permission to build one.

Slavery in Orange County



Bennehan Plantation House. Courtesy Duke University Archives.

By the end of the 1700s slavery was an integral part of the lives of the Orange County settlers. Slaves on plantations worked from dawn to dusk six days a week, were permitted off the plantations only with passes, and could not hold unauthorized meetings, carry arms, or engage in commerce with whites. The daily lives of slaves on small farms were very similar to their masters. They lived in a cabin similar to the master's and labored alongside the white family. While their lot was often less cruel than plantation slaves, they experienced the same psychological constraints and frustration.

Dilliardsville: A Durham Precursor

William Dilliard, a Wake County landowner, bought land in Orange County from Absalom Alston in 1819 where the Hillsborough to Raleigh road and the Roxboro to Fayetteville road crossed. The area was called Dilliardsville, and Mr. Dilliard was the postmaster. The town was short lived and the post office closed in 1827.

Prattsburg

Much of the Dilliard land was bought by William Pratt, who established a store known as a place for “evil-disposed persons of evil name and fame and conversation to come together,” for “drinking, tippling, playing at cards and other unlawful games, cursing, screaming, quarreling and otherwise misbehaving themselves,” a reputation that unfortunately clung to Durham.

Durham Is Born



Bartlett Leonidas Durham.
Courtesy Duke RBMSC
Library, W. T. Dixon papers.

When the railroad approached Pratt about selling his land for a rail station, he asked too much, and they went to Dr. Bartlett Durham. He donated about four of his 100 acres in 1849, the town that would come to be called Durham was born, and the community of Prattsburg began to fade.

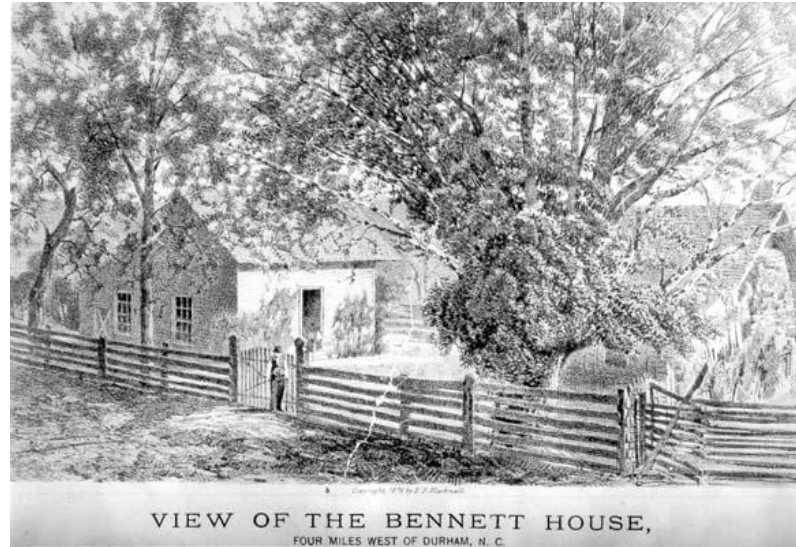
Railroad Enables Tobacco Industry

With the railroad came the tobacco industry, which needed access to transportation in order to thrive. In 1858 a Virginian, Wesley Wright, established the first tobacco processing factory in Durham with Thomas Morris.

Civil War—1861-1865

One of the last skirmishes of the Civil War in North Carolina occurred at Leigh Farm in the southern part of the county. The largest troop surrender of the war occurred in Durham County—at Bennitt's farmhouse 3 ½ miles west of town.

Surrender at Bennett Place



Courtesy NC Division of Archives & History.

Lee had surrendered 26,000 troops at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia, but many more southern troops were still in the field under the command of General Johnston. Purely by chance, James and Nancy Bennitt's house was where Johnston and General Sherman rendezvoused on April 17, 1865. The lenient terms the two men negotiated did not fly in Washington, and Jefferson Davis told Johnston to continue the war, but Johnston disobeyed orders and asked to meet with Sherman again to arrange surrender terms.

Tobacco Booms

Meanwhile, a week had passed, with soldiers from both armies camped around the countryside. Durham was neutral ground during the truce, and soldiers from both armies fraternized. The storehouse of J. R. Green's small tobacco factory was soon emptied of its entire contents, and Green thought he was ruined. When the thousands of soldiers returned to their homes all across the United States, they wrote to Durham's Station for more tobacco, and Green—and Durham's—tobacco boom was off and running.

The Bull Is Born



Durham Smoking Tobacco
Label, mfg. Blackwell, ca.
1870. Courtesy NC Division
of Archives & History.

When all the orders came pouring in, Green realized he needed a specific name and trademark for his product. Over a lunch of oysters with his friend James Whitted of Hillsborough, Whitted pointed to the bull's head on the Coleman's Durham brand mustard jar, suggested Ruffin also use a bull for his trademark, and Bull Durham was born.

William Blackwell Buys the Bull



William Blackwell. Courtesy Duke University Archives.

Green died in 1869 and William T. Blackwell became owner of Bull Durham Tobacco.

Julian Carr Paints the Pyramids



Blackwell took on Julian Carr as a partner. Carr would become a major force in Durham as a marketing whiz, industrialist, philanthropist, and colorful character. As part of one marketing campaign, it is said that Carr had the Durham bull painted on one of the pyramids of Egypt.

Julian Carr. Courtesy Laura Noell Carr Chapman.

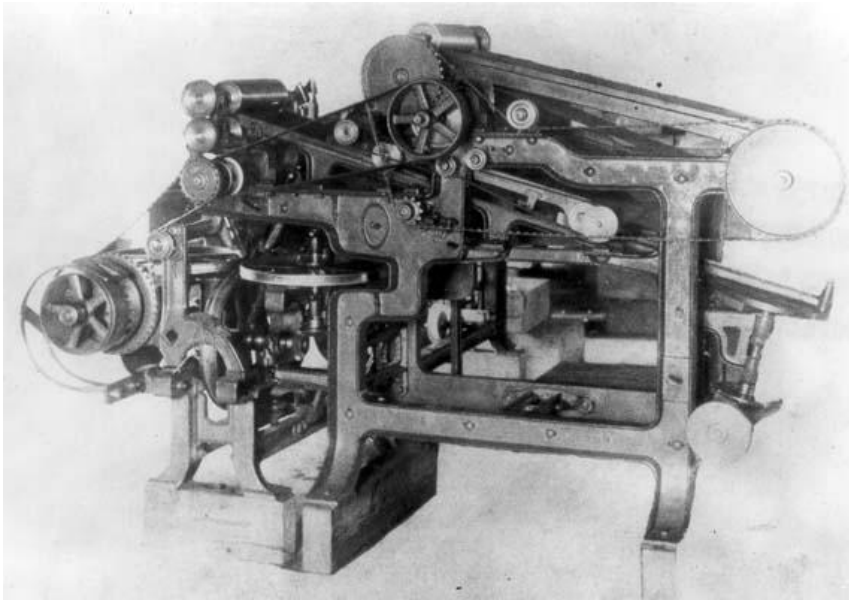
Washington Duke, Duke Family Patriarch



Washington Duke by door to his tobacco barn, ca. 1890. Courtesy Jonathan Cicero Angier Papers, Duke University Archives.

Washington Duke was the patriarch of what came to be the preeminent tobacco family in the United States. When the war was over, he headed out on the 134-mile walk home to his farm near Durham, where he began building the tobacco business that would make him and his sons, James Buchanan, Benjamin, and Brodie, famous.

Cigarette Making Comes to Durham



Bonsack cigarette machine, 1888. Courtesy
NC Division of Archives & History.

Cigarettes had become popular in Europe in 1860 and began to be made in New York in 1863. When the Dukes decided to get into the cigarette business, they imported Polish Jews from New York, who, discontented with their pay and working conditions, soon headed back north. As a result, in 1884 the Dukes bought a new cigarette rolling machine called the Bonsack machine, which revolutionized cigarette making and helped make the Duke family fortune.

Hayti Emerges

Preacher Edian Markum bought a piece of land in 1869 at the angle formed by Pettigrew and Fayetteville streets and organized a church and a school. This church became St. Joseph's AME. This construction seems to have formed the nucleus around which the African-American community of Hayti grew.



Edian Markum and his wife Mollie.

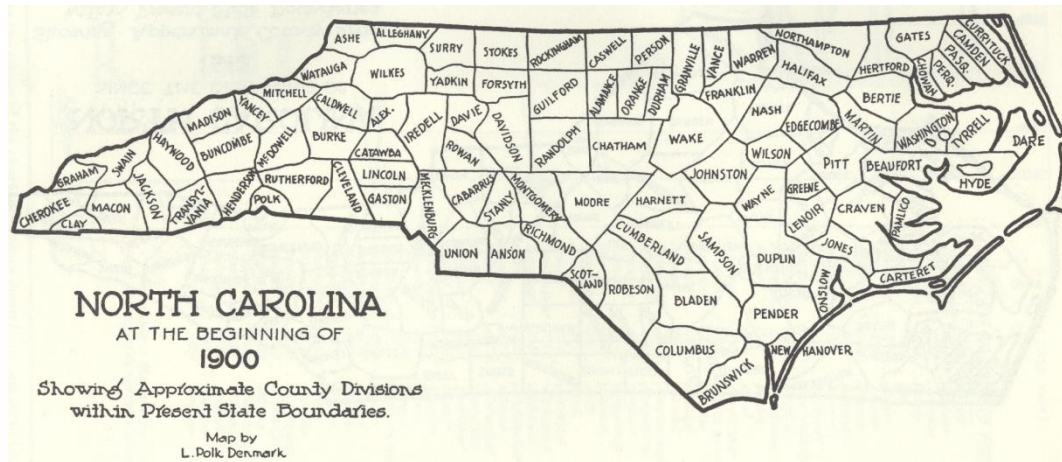
Where Did the Name Hayti Come from?



Hayti in foreground. Courtesy John Schelp,
Historic Postcards of Durham web site.

The first documented use of the name Hayti in Durham is found in an 1877 deed. There are various stories, but no one is sure how the neighborhood got its name.

Durham Becomes a County



As business, industry, and population grew, people became aware of the disadvantages of being 14 miles from the county seat in Hillsborough. Those who had business in Hillsborough could lose whole days, since one train left Durham in the morning and another did not return until night. The bill to make Durham a separate county passed February 28, 1881, and on April 16, 1881, the governor proclaimed the county established.

Textile Mills Come to Town



Cotton mills of Durham. Courtesy John Schelp, Historic Postcards of Durham web site.

In 1884, Julian Shakespeare Carr established the Durham Cotton Manufacturing Company in what was then Prattsburg. This was the beginning of the cotton industry in Durham. *The Durham Daily Sun* rejoiced: "In place of this dark hole of iniquity and infamy, there will be a busy, bustling manufacturing community." By the early 1900s, more people were working in textile mills in Durham than in tobacco factories.

Dukes Form American Tobacco Company



W. Duke, Sons & Co., branch of American Tobacco Co., ca. 1900. Courtesy NC Division of Archives & History.

The 1890s began with the formation of the American Tobacco Company, which made the Dukes among the richest men in the country. The company was eventually sued for violating antitrust laws and broke into separate companies in 1911.

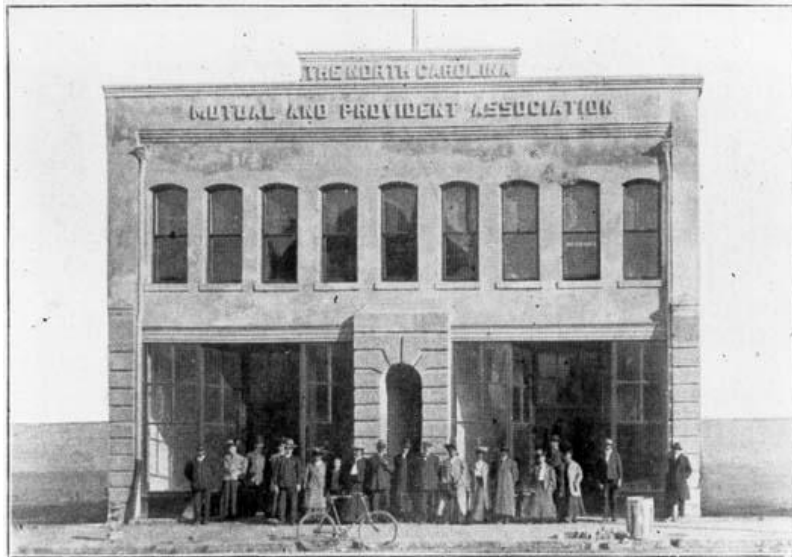
Durham Courts Trinity College



Trinity College. Courtesy John Schelp, Historic Postcards of Durham web site.

Durham tried to get Meredith College to locate here, but the Baptists declared Durham unsuitable. Durhamites had their civic pride wounded by this slight, and they went all out when Trinity College's president decided to move it from Randolph County. Washington Duke matched Raleigh's offer of \$35,000 and threw in \$50,000 for an endowment. Julian Carr, who would not be outdone in generosity, especially by the Dukes, offered the 67.5 acres of Blackwell's Park (which contained the finest horse-racing track in the state), to the college. The college opened in Durham in the fall of 1892.

Black Entrepreneurs Seize Opportunity



FIRST HOME OFFICE BUILDING, DURHAM, N. C.

N.C. Mutual Life Insurance Co. First Home Office, 1906. Courtesy NC Division of Archives & History.

Just as a small group of white entrepreneurs had seized opportunity in Durham and become very successful, so did a similar group of black men. All of these men had multiple business interests, but the one that was to prove most successful was the North Carolina Mutual and Provident Society.

North Carolina Mutual Thrives



N.C. Mutual Life Insurance Co. officers, ca. 1911. From
Black History Exhibit, Durham County Centennial, 1981.

It began business April 1, 1899, with John Merrick as president and Dr. Aaron Moore as vice-president and medical director. A year later Moore brought in his young cousin, Charles Clinton Spaulding, to take care of the office. The company survived, then thrived as North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company.

Origins of North Carolina Central University



James E. Shepard, founder of NCCU, ca. 1925.

In 1908 James Shepard began working to raise money for a Bible school to train Sunday school teachers and missionaries. He decided on Durham as the location for the National Religious Training School and Chatauqua. The school opened in July 1910.

Race Relations in the Early 20th Century

This achievement—establishing a black school through black initiative—took place when race relations in the South were abysmal. Although Durham had a prosperous black business class, the large black labor force had pitifully low pay and almost no opportunities to better their lives. The white community looked to the black leadership—essentially the Mutual leadership—to ensure the boat wasn't rocked, to keep a lid on black anger, to go to the rescue in crises, and to find ways to help the mass of poor blacks.

The Duke Endowment



James B. Duke, circa 1924. From Bold Entrepreneur.

In December 1924 James Buchanan “Buck” Duke created the Duke Endowment of \$40 million, the income from which would be distributed annually to specified educational, religious, and medical institutions—black and white—in North and South Carolina. Trinity College, whose name was to be changed to Duke University, would receive 32% of the yearly income.

Modern Phase of Civil Rights Struggle Begins



Durham Committee on Negro Affairs with Luther Hodges, 1955.
From Black History Exhibit, Durham County Centennial, 1981.

Pressure mounted in the 1930s for blacks to receive the same city services and civil rights whites took for granted, although few gains were made. In 1935 the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs was formed, which marked the beginning of the modern phase of the civil rights struggle in Durham. Its efforts in the 1940s to get blacks into jobs as policemen, managers of Hayti ABC stores, magistrates, and to have them registered as voters were the first steps toward much broader advances.

City Council Diversifies



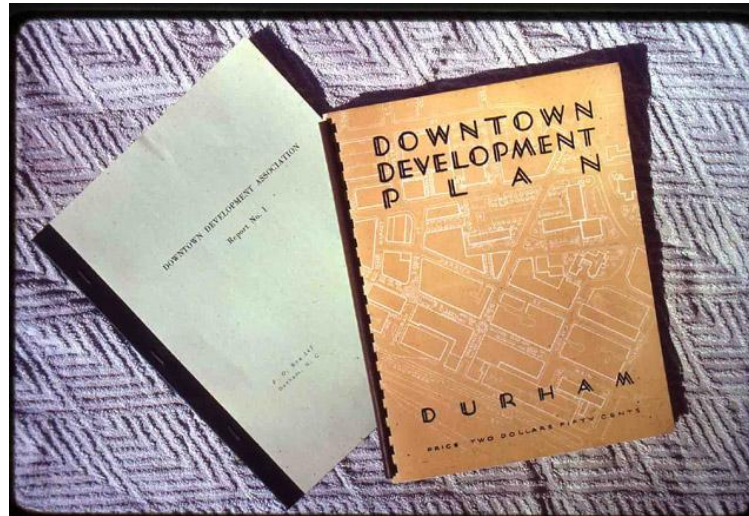
City council swearing-in; Mutt Evans, second from left, R. N. Harris, third from right. From Black History Exhibit, Durham County Centennial, 1981.

In the 1951 Durham election, a coalition of labor, blacks, and liberals made history by electing two white women to the city council, Kathrine Robinson Everett and Mary Duke Biddle Trent, Benjamin Duke's granddaughter. Emanuel J. "Mutt" Evans was elected the first Jewish mayor. In 1953 Rencher Nicholas Harris, the first successful black candidate, was elected to city council.

Durham's Economic Slide

In the late 1940s, Durham began an economic slide downward. Between 1947 and 1959, industrial employment in Durham dropped 19 percent, the city declined from second to fourth place among manufacturing cities in the Piedmont, and fell from third to last place as a wholesaler. The average weekly wage was \$64.41, the lowest of the five Piedmont cities.

Durham's Urban Renewal Plan



Downtown Durham Development Association publications. Courtesy Ralph Rogers.

In the 1950s, Durham's planning director asked students at UNC-CH's Department of City and Regional Planning to do a study showing how Durham might take advantage of urban renewal funds. They responded with a plan for a 200-acre blighted area of Hayti that could be renovated for \$600,000. A Durham Redevelopment Commission was created in 1958 and eventually oversaw seven different projects.

Strong Black Support for the Renewal Plan

The Durham Committee on Negro Affairs realized that black business would participate in the real estate transactions and borrowing and lending that urban renewal would engender. Also, Hayti, along with other decaying areas of the city, would benefit from being completely rebuilt. However valuable Hayti was as an expression of black culture and vitality, it was badly run down, and most of its many small businesses were shoestring operations. The larger and more prosperous black businesses were downtown. The people who would lose their homes and businesses were assured that they would be fully compensated and that equal or better accommodations would be provided for them. Although many conservatives opposed the bond issue, it passed by a small majority of about 3%.

Urban Renewal Does Not Live up to Its Promises



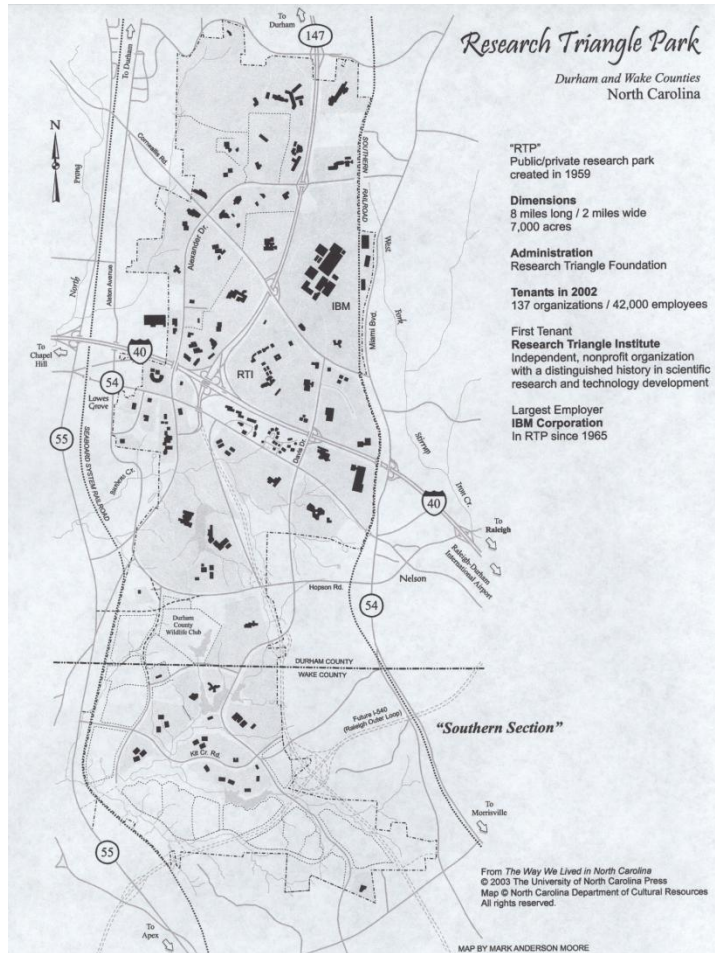
March protesting urban renewal. From Black History Exhibit, Durham County Centennial, 1981.

Unfortunately, the result of urban renewal did not match its promise for a number of reasons related to leadership, local management, unforeseen side effects, and racial bias. Many also felt that poor blacks were hoodwinked by their own middle- and upper-class leaders.

Urban Removal

In the end, what occurred in Durham was correctly called urban removal. Hayti was destroyed, and Durham's leaders did not fulfill their promise to rebuild it. In addition, downtown was torn up for nearly 15 years as buildings were razed for urban renewal. In the meantime, more and more shops moved to the shopping centers and never came back.

Research Triangle Park Takes off



Governor Luther Hodges set up the Research Triangle Development Committee in 1955. In 1959 Research Triangle Park took off. In the 1960s governor Dan Moore gave the federal government over 500 acres on which to build research agencies, which spurred more development and helped attract more companies. Most of RTP is located in Durham County.

Research Triangle Park, 2002.

RTP's Legacy



I-40 gridlock.



RTP rush-hour traffic.

The three nearby towns were beneficiaries of the park's success and also of the unrestrained construction, population growth, and strain on local services, roads, and schools. The area's unspoiled rural character was lost.

The Cotton Mills Are Gone



Erwin Mill, ca. 1920. Courtesy Duke RBMSC Library.

The last of the cotton mills closed in 1986. High labor costs, outdated, inefficient plants, and foreign competition contributed to the nationwide decline in the textile industry.

The Tobacco Industry is Gone



Liggett & Myers Tobacco Factory, shift change, ca. 1930. Courtesy Dr. Louise Hall.

The last tobacco manufacturing operation, Liggett and Meyers, moved out of Durham to Mebane in 1999.

Integrating the Schools

In the 1959-1960 school year, eight brave young black people began the school integration process. Anita Brame and Lucy Jones of Walltown were the first black students to enter a white school—Brogden Junior High. In the 1970-71 school year, court-ordered integration came to the Durham schools.



L-R: Henry Vickers and Floyd, Andree, and Evelyn McKissick approach Carr Junior High, fall 1959.
Courtesy *Herald-Sun*.

Sit-ins



L-R: Plainclothes policeman, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. Douglas Moore, and unidentified man visit Woolworth's. Photograph by Jim Thornton, courtesy *Herald-Sun*.

Martin Luther King, Jr., visited the Woolworth's lunch counter in downtown Durham, February 16, 1960, after sit-ins there the previous week. Dr. King visited Durham a total of five times.

Desegregation Comes

In 1962, Howard Johnson's restaurant on the highway between Durham and Chapel Hill became the target of repeated sit-ins and demonstrations. The struggle intensified in 1963, and by its end, many Durham motels, hotels, restaurants, lunch counters, and other facilities were integrated.



Howard Johnson's protests, part of the Freedom Highways campaign across the South. Courtesy *Herald-Sun*.

1960s and 70s Bring Progress

Like the rest of the country, Durham experienced many changes in the 1960s and 70s. Besides the Civil Rights Movement, much progress was made in the arts. The land along the Eno River was made a state park rather than a reservoir, and the Historic Preservation Society was formed in response to one too many buildings being razed.

School System Merger

The decision to merge city and county school systems came in 1991, mostly through county commission chair Bill Bell's strong leadership. The subsequent school districting and pupil assignment engendered strong emotions.

The End

Durham has seen many changes since the early nineties—among them a new athletic park and a new performing arts center, the beginnings of a downtown renaissance, and an influx of new residents, many from south of the US border. Which of these and other recent events in Durham history will be written in future history books?