

## **Durham** <sup>[1]</sup>

### **Durham**

by Steven Case

[NC Government & Heritage Library](#), <sup>[2]</sup> 2010.

See also: [Durham](#) <sup>[3]</sup> (UNC Press)



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

<sup>[4]</sup>

Durham is the county seat of [Durham County](#) <sup>[5]</sup>. Originally, the land--through which a major Native American trading route passed--was inhabited by such tribes as the [Occaneechi](#) <sup>[6]</sup> 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](#) <sup>[7]</sup> 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](#) <sup>[8]</sup>--founded by the [Duke family](#) <sup>[9]</sup>--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](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, whose ongoing endowment in part funds [Duke University](#) <sup>[11]</sup>. 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](#) <sup>[12]</sup>).

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

In the 1920s and '30s, musicians such as [Blind Boy Fuller](#) <sup>[20]</sup> and [Blind Reverend Gary Davis](#) <sup>[21]</sup> 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](#) <sup>[22]</sup>, the [Bull Durham Blues Festival](#), the [Full Frame Documentary Film Festival](#) <sup>[23]</sup>, the [Festival for the Eno](#) <sup>[24]</sup>, the [Nasher Museum of Art](#) <sup>[25]</sup>--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](#) <sup>[26]</sup> and the [Durham Performing Arts Center](#) <sup>[27]</sup> show that it remains a vital part of [Piedmont](#) <sup>[28]</sup> 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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Digital Durham: Life and labor in the new South. Duke University <http://digitaldurham.duke.edu/> [31]

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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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