Green, John Ruffin [1]

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by Mattie U. Russell, 1986

23 Mar. 1832–25 July 1869

John Ruffin Green, tobacco [2]manufacturer, whose pioneering efforts in the production of bright-leaf smoking tobacco helped lay the economic foundation of the city of Durham, was the second of seven children of Mager A. and Ann Brooks Green of Person County [3]. Around 1856 Green bought a farm inOrange County [4] about five miles from Durham Station on the North Carolina Railroad [5]. After his house burned, he purchased a farm west of what is now Morris Street in Durham and moved there. No stranger to the production and marketing of tobacco, about 1862 he bought from Robert F. Morris the first tobacco factory operated in Durham Station. It was located where the American Tobacco Company [6] plant now stands.

Green recognized the growing trend toward switching from chewing to smoking tobacco, especially among students at the nearby University of North Carolina [7]. To cater to this changing taste he developed a high-grade smoking tobacco, which was produced by hand from the bright, mild leaf grown in the surrounding region that came to be known as the Golden Belt. His product did become popular with the university students. During the Civil War he often received orders from former students as well as from others in the Confederate Army. At the end of the war his well-stocked factory was too great a temptation to the armies of generals Joseph E. Johnston and William T. Sherman. While the troops were milling around in the Durham area during the generals' surrender negotiations, they ransacked Green's factory. However, what appeared at the time to be a disaster soon proved to have been a blessing. After the soldiers returned to their homes, Green began to receive orders from widespread sections of the country. He decided it would be well to associate his tobacco with its town of origin and one with which so many soldiers had become acquainted. Consequently, he renamed his product "Durham Smoking Tobacco" and adopted the Durham Bull [8]as his trademark, a symbol that his successors made known around the world.

On 23 Mar. 1856, Green married Mary Frances Chandler, daughter of Joel and Elizabeth C. Walker Chandler ofGranville County [9]. They had five children: John Morgan, James Randolph, Ida Frances, Lucius, and Viola. Green's death at age thirty-seven was attributed to tuberculosis. He was buried in Maplewood Cemetery, Durham.

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Records in the possession of Walter S. Lockhart, Jr., Durham.

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