THE DUKES OF DURHAM 1865-1929



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This book is dedicated to
W. B. H., M. S., and R. L. W.,
three who have loved and
nobly served an institution
that the Dukes befriended.

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PREFACE

This is the history of Washington Duke and two of his sons, Benjamin Newton Duke and James Buchanan Duke. Although numerous other members of the family play their parts in the story, it focuses primarily on the three men who were at the center of the economic and philanthropic activities which made the Dukes of Durham one of America's famous families.

Several years ago my friend and colleague, Frank deVyver, who was then chairman of the committee for the Duke University Press, suggested that the time had come for a scholarly biography of James B. Duke and asked if I would be interested in tackling the project. My immediate reaction was that I would not. Why? Because I suspected then, as I now know, that the Dukes operated closely and constantly as a family and that only in that context could their full story be told fairly and effectively.

In the years after the Civil War, Washington Duke proved to be an unusually able industrialist and a conscientious Methodist philanthropist. He was, in fact, a major Tarheel, even Southern, pioneer in both industry and philanthropy. Because of circumstances explained later in this book, his two sons by a second marriage were remarkably devoted to each other as well as to their father. Both sons also reflected traits of their father. While Benjamin N. Duke and James B. Duke had lifelong involvement with the business world—first in tobacco, then textiles, and finally electric power—as well as with philanthropy, they actually developed complementary specializations. That is, Benjamin N. Duke, the older of the two, served as the family's primary agent for philanthropy from his early manhood in the late 1880's until he gradually became a semi-invalid after 1915. James B. Duke, on the other hand, early displayed a marked talent, even a genius, for business. Toward the end of his life, with the establishment of The Duke Endowment late in 1924, he emerged as one of the nation's major philanthropists, ranking alongside Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller. A central theme of this book is, however, that The Duke Endowment, despite its magnitude and far-reaching scope, was essen-

tially the institutionalization and culmination of a pattern of family philanthropy that emerged in the 1890's and for which the older brother had always been the primary agent. In other words, the story of James B. Duke, who was and has remained the more well known of the two brothers, cannot be told properly out of the family context from which he emerged and in which occurred most of the important phases of his life.

There are already two biographies of James B. Duke, one by John Wilber Jenkins published in 1927 and the other by John K. Winkler published in 1942. Jenkins' portrait tends toward adulation and Winkler's toward melodrama, and neither study is documented. Vast amounts of rich manuscript materials, largely in the William R. Perkins Library of Duke University and much of which has never been used by historians, are now available. These bibliographical matters are discussed more fully in the note on sources at the end of this volume. Suffice it to say here that ten letterbooks of James B. Duke that have only recently been "rediscovered"; the massive collection of Benjamin N. Duke Papers (which, in part, are really the family's papers); the voluminous papers of Richard H. Wright, an early partner of the Dukes and then their business rival; the papers of John F. Crowell, John C. Kilgo, William P. Few, and Robert L. Flowers—successive presidents of Trinity College and Duke University—all these plus other manuscript sources cast important new light on the Dukes.

The source materials are not complete, however. Because there are too few records for the period prior to the Civil War, I have had to settle for a hasty survey of Washington Duke's life between his birth in 1820 and his return from the war in 1865. Yet, as a small, landowning, yeoman farmer, he was typical of the great majority class not only in antebellum North Carolina but in the South as a whole. Only after the war, when he and his sons emerged as large-scale industrialists and philanthropists, did the Dukes become atypical. Their story is, then, both agricultural and industrial, both Southern and national. Born Tarheels, they moved on to a national, even global, stage. Yet all the while they kept deep roots, as well as vast investments of capital, in the Old North State, and they poured many millions into philanthropy, largely in the two Carolinas.

This book is neither authorized nor in any sense an official study. As a student of American history in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, I undertook to write the book because I was attracted by

this family as a subject, because the materials were here and had not been tapped, and because I knew that the academic climate of Duke University, not to mention my professorial tenure, made the writing of valid history, as I saw it, quite feasible—even essential.

This is not to say that innumerable persons, both in and out of Duke University, have not assisted me in many different ways. Frank deVyver not only triggered the whole thing but continued to encourage and aid me at various stages. Paul H. Clyde has helped from an early phase, and the late Thomas L. Perkins facilitated several aspects of my work, as did John Day, John Spuches, and Richard Henney. I am especially grateful to my colleague and longtime office neighbor, William T. Laprade, who came to Trinity College to teach history in 1909 and who has taught me a good many things during the past twenty-two years.

Two friends of mine and well known experts in the history of tobacco, Nannie M. Tilley and Joseph C. Robert, have been generous with their time and most helpful with their suggestions about my manuscript. For assistance of various kinds, including in some cases a close reading of my manuscript, I am also grateful to Jean Anderson, James Gifford, Craufurd Goodwin, Hugh Hall, I. B. Holley, William Jennings, Richard Knapp, Richard Leach, Harold Lewis, Stuart Noblin, Patricia O'Connor, Richard Pierce, Earl Porter, David Ross, and Thomas Terrill.

Jeffrey Crow, Paul Escott, and Larry Nelson, three of my students who have been writing their doctoral dissertations as I labored on this book, have been good library companions as well as sharp-eyed critics. I owe a special thanks to Larry Nelson for his capable research assistance on matters related to the Duke Power Company. Other former students who have assisted me at one time or another over the past several years and whom I thank are Mary Louise Briscoe, Edward Burgess, Bruce Clayton, Patricia Hummer, Heather Low, Linda McCarter, Anne Trotter, and Edie Wolfeskill. Dorothy Sapp typed most of the manuscript and did it with great efficiency and speed that were matched by good humor and kindness.

The library of Duke University has always been a fine place to work, partly because of its extensive holdings but more especially because of the invariable helpfulness and kindness of its staff. Aside from my friends in Reference, I am especially indebted to the director of the Manuscript Department and my good friend, Mattie Russell, and to the members of her staff, David Brown, Paul Chestnut, William

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William Baxter, a senior in Duke University, skillfully reproduced the photographs and prepared them for the printer. Ashbel Brice and John Menapace of the Duke University Press are old friends from earlier projects, and I appreciate their contributions to this book as well as the editorial talents of William Hicks and Joanne Ferguson.

Outside of my debt of gratitude to Anne Oller Durden and other close friends who have been generous with their interest and encouragement, I am most obliged to the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation for enabling me to stretch a sabbatical semester into a full year's leave, a year during which I finally had the freedom to write this book.

The research for it began more years ago than I care to admit (although there were several unavoidable interruptions), but the Research Council of Duke University stood behind and encouraged the work with great patience. Next to the library, the Research Council is scholarship's best friend at Duke University, and I thank all the members of the Council, especially its chairman, Charles Bradsher, and its secretary, George Williams.

ROBERT F. DURDEN

Perkins Library
Duke University
June, 1974

THE DUKES OF DURHAM, 1865-1929

CHAPTER 1. YEOMAN FARMER HOME FROM THE WAR

Footsore veterans of the Confederate army dotted the Southern landscape in the early summer of 1865. Thus Washington Duke's trek of some 130 miles from New Bern, North Carolina, to his inland home in what was then Orange County was not unusual. Nor was it out of the ordinary that he had virtually nothing in the way of material possessions awaiting him at his home. Even the relatively few Southerners who were rich before the Civil War faced destitution in the summer of 1865, and Washington Duke had never belonged to that class anyhow. Poverty would be no novelty to him. The prospect of regathering and then rearing his four, motherless children must have been both heart-warming and frightening as he tramped homeward.

The eighth of ten children, Washington Duke was born to Taylor Duke and Dicey Jones Duke on December 20, 1820. Taylor Duke's father had been born in Virginia, where the family had come from England in the seventeenth century, but Taylor Duke was born in Orange County, North Carolina, on the eve of the American Revolution, and Dicey Jones was of Welsh ancestry. Other than that they owned and tilled their modest farm along the Little River near his birthplace, only a few scattered facts are known about Taylor and Dicey Jones Duke. As a captain of the militia in his district and a constable, Taylor Duke was clearly a person of substance and one respected by his neighbors.[1]

Washington Duke later recalled that he grew up in a section where there were no extremes of wealth or poverty. He meant, of course, that everyone had enough to eat, since beyond that, life was hard. Hillsborough, the nearest town and the county seat, was some twelve miles away, and Raleigh, the state capital, about twice as far. In the early part of the nineteenth century, the lack of transportation facili-

1. B. N. Duke to James T. White and Company, January 6, 1897, in the Benjamin N. Duke MSS, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University. Memorandum by the late Dr. Virginia Gray on "The Dukes in America, 1670–1870," in the Washington Duke MSS. Certified copy from Orange County Court Minutes, 1815–1818, in Charles Caldwell Research Papers, James B. Duke MSS. All manuscripts cited, unless otherwise noted, are to be found in the Manuscript Department and the University Archives, Perkins Library, Duke University.

ties bought special problems and hardships for North Carolinians in the Piedmont and mountain regions, and Washington Duke had little choice but to spend most of his early life behind a plow. "I have made more furrows in God's earth than any man forty years old in North Carolina," he later declared.[2] Receiving only a few months of formal schooling, he spent his days laboring. For some years prior to his eighteenth birthday, he and one of his brothers lived with their oldest brother, William James Duke, who was born in 1803, but Washington Duke soon began to farm on his own.

Renting land at first, he worked hard and lived frugally. When he married Mary Caroline Clinton in 1842, her father gave the couple land, and by the time of the Civil War Washington Duke owned some 300 acres, on the cultivated parts of which he grew corn, wheat, oats and, on the eve of the war, a little tobacco. Two sons were born to the young couple, Sidney Taylor Duke in 1844 and Brodie Leonidas Duke in 1846. When the latter was only a little more than a year old, his mother died.

With his small sons in the care of relatives, Washington Duke toiled away on the land. In the early 1850's he built a modest frame house of hand-dressed lumber and brought to it in December, 1852, his second wife, Artelia Roney, from nearby Alamance County. A year later, a daughter, Mary Elizabeth, was born and then two sons, Benjamin Newton on April 27, 1855, and James Buchanan on December 23, 1856.

Tragedy soon again struck Washington Duke, however, for his oldest son Sidney died of typhoid fever in the late summer of 1858, and the same disease killed Artelia Roney Duke some ten days later. Two of her unmarried sisters, first Elizabeth and later Ann Roney, with Malinda Duke, a maiden sister of Washington Duke, took turns helping with the four children, and the three youngest may have spent some time with their Roney grandparents in Alamance County. Having grown up motherless, all four were to display in their later lives, as will be shown, a special sympathy and benevolence toward orphans.

Outside of his family, clearly the most important institution for Washington Duke and the one which exerted the greatest influence on him from his childhood was the Methodist church. The impassioned evangelical movement that swept through American Protestantism in the early decades of the nineteenth century retained its

2. Washington Duke to John W. Wright and the Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, November 1, 1890, in Durham *Daily Globe*, November 5, 1890.

full vigor in Piedmont North Carolina during Washington Duke's youth. Converted at an early age in Mount Bethel Church at a crossroads settlement known as Balltown (later Bahama), he, like so many of his kinspeople and neighbors, enjoyed both the spirited singing of such hymns as "Amazing Grace" and the fiery preaching that characterized early Methodism. William J. Duke so liked one particularly moving hymn, "The Old Ship of Zion," that he acquired the nickname of "Uncle Billy of the Old Ship."

In the latter part of the 1830's, William J. Duke constructed an arbor on his land where outdoor services and "protracted meetings," or extended revivals, could be held. Then about 1840 he donated an acre of land and helped to build a rough log structure which became the home of the small congregation of Mount Hebron Church, to which Washington Duke and his family belonged.[3] Served by circuit-riding preachers who made up in zeal what they lacked in formal training, Methodism of the variety that he embraced from his childhood gained a powerful and lifelong hold on Washington Duke.

The Church not only provided the spiritual focus for Washington Duke's early life but also served as the principal center for socializing. With its "dinners-on-the-grounds" and all day meetings, a church like Mount Hebron understandably loomed large in this simple, rural society.

Civic and reform activities were apt to be church-based, too. Reflecting a widespread, national movement against the alleged evils of intoxicating drink, William J. Duke early in 1842 presided over a meeting that organized the Mount Hebron Temperance Society. Among the members of the standing committee for the society was twenty-one-year-old Washington Duke.[4]

Alongside the crusade for temperance another important reform movement of the era was reflected in the strong hunger for schools that many North Carolinians were beginning to manifest. With its high rate of illiteracy and steady out-migration of population, North Carolina had become known to many outsiders as "the Rip Van Winkle state." One who determined to change that situation, and the most famous educational pioneer in North Carolina, was Calvin H. Wiley, a native of nearby Guilford County. While Wiley fought his

3. M. R. Dunnagan's historical sketch of Mount Hebron Church, which became Duke's Chapel after Wm. J. Duke's death in 1883, in Greensboro *Daily News*, October 24, 1926.

4. *Hillsborough Recorder*, January 20, 1842. Mrs. Jean Anderson kindly provided the lead for this information.

successful battles in the state legislature and became the first state superintendent of schools in 1853, Washington Duke and his neighbors struggled, with only limited success, to provide for their children the educational opportunities that they and the vast majority of Tarheels had never known.

In 1850 the *Hillsborough Recorder* reported that the board for the "common schools" of Orange County had met in Hillsborough and appointed committees in fifty-one districts to take a census of the white population between the ages of five and twenty-one years. In district number six, "W. Duke" was listed as one of the three committeemen, but whether that was Washington Duke or his older brother William is not known. In 1851 and 1852 "Wm. Duke" served on the school committee for the district.[5] At any rate, it is clear that, though genuine public schools for most rural North Carolinians were still at least a half century away, the idea was indeed alive. In the case of Washington Duke, he saw to it, through his own efforts combined with those of some of his neighbors, that his children at least received a bit more schooling than he had enjoyed.

With schools not yet in existence to rival the churches as key institutions, Methodism remained the true passion of Washington Duke's life, and unlike many of his contemporaries he apparently took little part in antebellum politics. Benjamin N. Duke later asserted that his father had been an "ardent Whig" before the Civil War.[6] Professor John Spencer Bassett, however, came to know Washington Duke rather well in the 1890's and wrote a biographical sketch of him which, according to Bassett, was based partly on their conversations. In that sketch, Bassett declared that up to the Civil War Washington Duke had "been a Democrat, and in his loyalty he had named his youngest son James Buchanan, after a Democratic President."[7]

Both Taylor Duke and William J. Duke in 1840, at a time when Washington Duke was still too young to be actively involved in politics, served on a "committee of vigilance" for the Democratic party and the presidential candidacy of Andrew Jackson's successor, Martin van Buren.[8] And as for the youngest son's name, William J. Duke later asserted that he had picked the name, with the "James" repre-

5. *Hillsborough Recorder*, February 13, 1850; January 8, 1851; and January 7, 1852.
6. B. N. Duke to James T. White and Co., January 6, 1897, B. N. Duke MSS.
7. J. S. Bassett, "Washington Duke," in Samuel A. Ashe, ed., *Biographical History of North Carolina* (Greensboro, N.C., 1905), III, 85–86; and Bassett to C. E. Mapes, August 29, 1927, J. B. Duke Estate Papers.
8. *Hillsborough Recorder*, June 4, 1840.

senting his own middle name and only the "Buchanan" representing the new president.[9]

The fact that Washington Duke became a staunch and well-known Republican soon after the Civil War is firmly established. Republicanism was, at least in its economic orientation toward a high protective tariff and "sound" currency, much closer to pre-Civil War Whiggery than to Jacksonian Democracy. Thus Benjamin N. Duke may simply have unconsciously "read backwards" when he identified his father with the Whigs. The scanty evidence suggests that before the war Washington Duke belonged, however tenuously, to the Democratic party that he came to oppose bitterly later in the century.

However little he may have involved himself in the stormy politics of the 1850's, Washington Duke, like the vast majority of his fellow North Carolinians, opposed secession. Nevertheless, the Confederate firing on Fort Sumter and President Abraham Lincoln's ensuing call upon the various states for troops to be used against "rebels" seemed to leave North Carolinians no alternative but to throw in their lot with their fellow Southerners.

Not until the Confederacy in late 1863 moved to draft men up to forty-five years of age did Washington Duke make his preparations to enter the Confederate service. With a teenage son, Brodie, and three small children to care for, he may well have resented the necessity that confronted him. But on October 7 and 14, 1863, the following advertisement—one of many of a similar kind as men readied to leave for the war—appeared in the *Hillsborough Recorder*:

PUBLIC SALE

I will sell at my residence, on the 20th of this month, about one hundred bushels of corn, my entire stock of Cows, Hogs, Farming Tools and Wagon, Oats, Fodder, Hay, Wheat, and many other articles too tedious to mention; and perhaps some eight or ten likely NEGROES will be sold the same day.

Terms made known on the day of the sale.

Washington Duke

The announcement about the "eight or ten likely NEGROES" poses another problem, for before the war Washington Duke briefly owned only one slave, not necessarily because he may not have wished to own more but because he did not have enough money.

9. Mrs. J. C. Angier to C. E. Mapes, November 29, 1927, J. B. Duke Estate Papers.

Benjamin N. Duke's later contention that his father was "opposed to slavery and [was] a Union man" is not as convincing evidence as the census returns for 1850 and 1860. These listed no slave property for Washington Duke, though the census of 1850 showed that a "mulatto laborer" by the name of Alexander Weaver lived on the premises, and "laborer" clearly meant hired hand rather than slave.[10]

Also arguing against his ownership of any eight or ten slaves is the fact that during the war Washington Duke hired the use of a slave named "Jim," a practice that was widespread throughout the South. When "Jim" ran away, apparently briefly or at least not permanently, Washington Duke notified the owner. And then as the Confederate draft threatened, Duke sent the following letter to the owner of "Jim":

> Having to brake [sic] up and go into the Service, I let Mr. Wm. E. Walker have your boy Jim until his time would be up—he, Jim, went to sulking last night and is absent this morning, his clothes is gone. I expect therefore he will go to see you—if he should you will please send him down to Mr. Walker who will take care of him until his time is up—unless he should run off.
>
> Yours respectfully
> Washington Duke[11]

The census returns, the hiring of "Jim," and the tentativeness of the wording in the advertisement— ". . . and *perhaps* some eight or ten likely NEGROES will be sold the same day"—suggest that Washington Duke, possibly hoping to attract more people to his own sale, allowed one of his neighbors or an acquaintance to employ the occasion for the sale of the slaves.

At any rate, he had to "brake up." The three small children were sent to live with their Roney grandparents on their farm in Alamance County, and Brodie, weighing only ninety-six pounds and too thin

10. B. N. Duke to E. L. Vaughan, February 25, 1925; certified copies of the census returns of 1850 and 1860 for W. Duke, J. B. Duke Estate Papers. On October 15, 1855, at a sale of slaves in Hillsborough, Washington Duke purchased a slave woman named "Caroline" for $601.00. "Orange County Estate Records, Inventories, Sales and Accounts (1853–1856)," p. 390, North Carolina Department of Archives and History. Though Washington Duke had apparently sold or freed "Caroline" before the census of 1860 was taken, a black woman named Caroline Barnes was a longtime cook for the family.

11. W. Duke to James W. Cox, June 15 and October 27, 1863, James W. Cox Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

for the regular army, served with a Major Gee in the Confederate prison at Salisbury, North Carolina.

With the children arranged for, Washington Duke departed for the war. On April 4, 1864, he signed a receipt for a private's uniform at Camp Holmes in Raleigh.[12] Many North Carolina conscripts received some basic training at Camp Holmes before being sent to the front; in Washington Duke's case he either requested or was assigned duty in the Confederate navy. Some time shortly after the middle of June, 1864, he reported for duty aboard a Confederate receiving ship in the besieged port of Charleston, South Carolina.

Many years later a wartime comrade wrote that he had been aboard the *Indian Chief* at Charleston with Washington Duke and would be glad to see him and "talk about old times in the Confederate navy."[13] But reminiscing about the war was not, apparently, something that Washington Duke enjoyed. Perhaps because the Confederate veterans' organization acquired in later years a partisan Democratic tinge (as the Grand Army of the Republic in the North became a powerful ally of the Republican party), Washington Duke never became a professional "Wearer of the Gray." Few stories of his wartime experiences survive.

One story that does survive, and which has the ring of truth about it, concerns his dread of a certain part of the duty involved on the receiving ship. At night small boats were secured to long beams of the ship, and the beams extended high over the water. Washington Duke, who had probably never seen the ocean before the war, nervously observed the men who had to go out on the beams and disconnect the lines holding the boats. When the dread day came and an officer ordered him to proceed out on the beam, the Orange County farmer at first refused and declared that it was impossible for him "to walk that sleek log." When the officer began to curse and finally to threaten punishment, Washington Duke summoned his courage and, probably praying to the God of all good Methodists, executed the order.[14]

His duty at Charleston was cut short, however, by needs that grew out of the desperate situation of the Confederate forces near Rich-

12. The fullest and most accurate study of Washington Duke's Confederate service, and the source for the account which follows, is Dr. Virginia Gray, "Some Obscure Facts About the Military Career of the Man Whose Gift Brought the College to Durham," *Duke Alumni Register* (December, 1967), III, 23–25.

13. W. B. Fort to Washington Duke, October 14, 1898, W. Duke MSS.

14. *Durham Recorder*, April 16, 1900.

mond, Virginia. The James River squadron of the Confederate navy finally had to man artillery batteries on the banks of the river, and in September, 1864, Washington Duke, together with additional men from Charleston, was transferred to Virginia. There he became an able artillerist, was promoted to the rank of orderly sergeant, and survived the rain, mud, and flood waters that harassed the men at Battery Brooke on the James. Rear Admiral Raphael Semmes, the famed Confederate seaman who assumed command of the James River squadron late in the war, noted in his diary that supplies were exhausted and that the command was merely living "from hand to mouth."[15]

In the confusion surrounding the Confederate evacuation of Richmond on April 1 and 2, 1865, Washington Duke was captured by Union troops. He was imprisoned in Richmond only a week before General Robert E. Lee's surrender on April 9 at Appomattox Court House. Gaining his parole later in the spring or early summer, Washington Duke was sent by ship to New Bern. From there he walked home to his reunion with his children—Brodie, Mary, Ben, and "Buck."

A big man in his prime years, nearly six feet tall and with a large muscular frame, Washington Duke was a person of few words, dignified, and possessing a dry, laconic sense of humor. He would live to a venerable old age and be widely respected in his community and state, known to many as "Wash" Duke or "the Old Gentleman." But in 1865, as he approached forty-five years of age, he had a new life to start.

15. Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

CHAPTER 2. BEGINNING ANEW IN 1865: THE EARLY PHASE OF W. DUKE, SONS AND COMPANY

Washington Duke, unlike more privileged Southerners of the antebellum upper class, had no reason at the end of the war for nostalgia about the "old days." It was true that the war had disrupted his family and left him penniless. But in starting over, he would labor under no psychological burden produced by a sense of a "golden age before the war" that had passed forever.

Most North Carolinians, especially in the hitherto undeveloped Piedmont region, would, in fact, find the new era which began after Appomattox less traumatic than it proved to be for many of their neighbors to the immediate north and south. Residing in an area sometimes known jokingly as the "valley of humility between two mountains of conceit," North Carolinians actually did not carry the burden of past glories—some quite real and some romantically fanciful—that oppressed many Virginians and South Carolinians.

Less than two decades after the war a campaign newspaper which Washington Duke helped to support, the *Durham County Republican*, boasted that the raw, new factory town of Durham had "no aristocracy but an aristocracy of labor." Durham, the *Republican* asserted, "is the pride of that middle class who when the shock of war had passed burned their bridges and set their stake forward. . . . Where now is the old slave-holding aristocracy? We answer, plodding along in the old ruts, clinging to past traditions, cursing the hand of destiny: their savings from the wreck held in [Confederate] government bonds —no ray of hope in sight; nothing to do but live in despair and vote the Democratic ticket for pastime."[1] If the partisan zeal be discounted, the campaign newspaper had a valid point, one that sheds light on both Washington Duke and Piedmont North Carolina.

The coming of the railroad, no less than the destruction of the old slave-holding society, made the new era possible for the Piedmont region of North Carolina. By 1854 the North Carolina Railroad, advancing westward from Goldsboro through Raleigh, had reached the land which Dr. Bartlett Durham had given for a station. Here a

1. *Durham County Republican*, July 29, 1884.

small village—known variously as Durhamville, Durham's Depot or Station, Durham's, and finally just Durham–grew up around the railway stop. When General William T. Sherman accepted the surrender of General Joseph E. Johnston and the last major Confederate force east of the Mississippi at a nearby farmhouse, Durham gained its first claim to the world's attention. Consisting of fewer than a hundred people at the end of the war, the hamlet lay some four miles to the south of Washington Duke's farm.[2]

In addition to the coming of the railroad, the development of a new variety of tobacco, bright leaf, had a great deal to do with the rise of Durham and the postwar career of Washington Duke. Pioneered by, among others, the four Slade brothers of Caswell county in central North Carolina along the Virginia border after the late 1830's, the new variety of tobacco flourished in relatively poor soil which contained silica. The best curing process, found only after much experimentation with charcoal and other fuels, proved to be a system of flues conveying heat from a wood fire throughout a simply built tobacco barn or shed in which the tobacco leaves were hung for curing. By the time of the Civil War, the lemon-yellow and mildly fragrant tobacco that resulted from the combination of the siliceous soil and careful curing was finding an ever-widening market, first as wrappers for plug or chewing tobacco and then especially for pipe-smoking. With bright-leaf tobacco and the railroad, Durham had both a product for the outside world and a method of getting it there.[3]

As a seller of tobacco, Washington Duke's first foray into the postwar commercial arena involved not the railroad but a wagon and two decrepit mules that he somehow acquired from the abandoned supplies of Sherman's army. While Brodie Duke, the oldest son, tried farming on shares with his uncle, William J. Duke, for a year or so, Washington Duke brought the three younger children back to the home he had been forced to break up in 1863–64.

Possessing in ready cash only a fifty-cent coin for which he had swapped a five-dollar Confederate bill with a Union soldier, Washington Duke found his farm stripped and bare—save for a quantity of dried leaf tobacco. One traditional story, which cannot be docu-

2. The standard source for the early history of Durham and the one on which the above is based, is William K. Boyd, *The Story of Durham* (Durham, 1925).

3. Nannie M. Tilley, *The Bright-Tobacco Industry, 1860–1929* (Chapel Hill, 1948), is definitive, and pages 3–36 provide detailed information on which the above is based. Joseph C. Robert, *The Story of Tobacco in America* (Chapel Hill, 1949, 1967), pp. 181–189, has a condensed version.

mented, has it that he had stored the tobacco after purchasing it with the proceeds from the sale of his livestock, grain, and farming tools in October, 1863. At any rate, Washington Duke, aided by ten-year-old Ben and nine-year-old "Buck," proceeded to launch his manufacturing career. In a crude log shed which stood close by the dwelling, they beat the tobacco with wooden flails, sifted it by hand, and packed it in cloth bags labelled "Pro Bono Publico." Loading the smoking tobacco and two barrels of flour in his wagon, which was also equipped with a "victuals box" for simple cooking along the roadside, Washington Duke in the autumn headed into the eastern part of the state and proceeded to peddle and barter.[4]

Selling his smoking tobacco at a good price, Washington Duke traded his flour for cotton and sold the cotton for $40.00 in gold. Some of the proceeds from the tobacco he invested in a side of bacon, which he sold in Raleigh. Then remembering that his children, like many other impoverished Southerners during the war, had gone without certain kinds of sweets for several years, he purchased a wooden bucket filled with brown sugar. He carried this prize home, placed it in the middle of the floor, and happily watched as his children attacked it with their spoons.[5]

Pleased with the results of his venture, Washington Duke continued to buy tobacco from his neighbors and to manufacture the "Pro Bono Publico" smoking tobacco. While father and sons, aided by occasional hired laborers, worked long hours in the "factory" and in the fields, young Mary Duke attended to many of the housekeeping chores. A glimpse of her at age eighteen has been provided by a traveler, who as a schoolboy in 1871, was making a trip by buggy in cold, rainy weather and stopped at Washington Duke's place to thaw out. "It was a simple house," the autobiographer remembered,

> two frame buildings of two stories each, joined by an open covered way (known as a "dog-trot" porch). We were hospitably taken into a room with a large open fireplace, where Sam [Samuel Tate Morgan, a friend of the Dukes] and I warmed ourselves against the further journey. . . . A young woman, I think Mr. Duke's daughter, sat at a table where, by the light of a lamp, she was filling little cotton bags from a pile of finely-shredded tobacco before her. These little bags, stuffed to bursting, were drawn up

4. The Durham *Recorder*, April 16, 1900, has a detailed account based on an interview with Washington Duke.

5. *Ibid.*

with a sturdy string run through the top and tied with a bow knot. From time to time she took a pen and wrote in ink "Pro Bono Publico" on an oblong yellow label which she pasted on the filled bag of tobacco. The lamplight on this table and her quiet deftness and complete absorption . . . held our fascinated attention. At last we were thawed and departed.[6]

That the family's tobacco business prospered, however modestly, is suggested by the fact that it required more and more space; finally a two-story frame building near the two older factories was constructed. Washington Duke later recalled that immediately after the war he and his sons could prepare from 400 to 500 pounds of smoking tobacco in a day; in 1866 they manufactured altogether some 15,000 pounds, which they sold for fifty to sixty cents a pound. But on every pound sold, they were required to pay a federal revenue or excise tax of twenty cents. By 1872 they were producing some 125,000 pounds a year.[7]

Although every member of the family worked hard, the children received some schooling too. Ben and Buck Duke attended sessions at the academy in nearby Durham, the only school then available in the village. And in 1871 Washington Duke enrolled Mary and Ben Duke in the New Garden School (later Guilford College), which was run by the Quakers and located near Greensboro. They enjoyed their year at New Garden, and shortly after returning home Ben exclaimed to a former classmate: "It has just been one month since I parted with all my dear friends at N.G. and it seems as though it has been 3 months . . . ."[8] Buck Duke, on the other hand, who was sent to New Garden in 1872, missed the farm and factory; and though he had earlier proved quick in his school work and especially in arithmetic, he had no interest in literary studies. Coming home from New Garden before the term was half completed, Buck Duke later attended the Eastman Business College in Poughkeepsie, New York. The bookkeeping and other skills which he acquired at the business school may have proved helpful to him, but Washington Duke's youngest son clearly learned most and fastest from his deep engrossment in the family's business—

6. Paul B. Barringer, *The Natural Bent: The Memoirs of Dr. Paul B. Barringer* (Chapel Hill, 1949), pp. 163–164.
7. Durham *Recorder*, April 16, 1900; Boyd, *Story of Durham*, p. 83.
8. B. N. Duke to Miss Katie Reynolds, June 24, 1872, B. N. Duke MSS.

in farming and in helping to produce and sell "Pro Bono Publico."

The first member of the family to move into Durham, however, was Brodie Duke. In 1869, at twenty-three years of age, he purchased a small frame building on Durham's Main Street, and while living in the upstairs room began to manufacture in the ground-floor room his own brands of smoking tobacco, first "Semper Idem" and then the more famous "Duke of Durham." He lived frugally on fried bacon and "ash pone" or hoe cake, with molasses on occasion. Brodie Duke, who at some point along the way acquired what would become for him a tragic taste for whiskey, was later described in this beginning phase of his life in Durham as a teetotaler, "his only beverage . . . the pure unadulterated ale of father Adam—branch water."[9]

Inspired by Brodie Duke's move and lured by the larger business opportunities offered by bustling little Durham, soon to be the self-styled "Chicago of the South," Washington Duke sold his farm and moved his family into town in 1874. Numerous others were moving into Durham in the 1870's, as is shown by the fact that the town's population of 256 in 1870 had jumped to 2,041 by 1880, and it would continue to climb in succeeding decades. With yet-to-be paved streets and all manner of livestock enclosures and vegetable gardens interspersed with the residences, Durham after the Civil War was repeating a process of urbanization that was almost as old as the nation, though a process that was accelerating in the late nineteenth century. Yet in Durham's growth, tobacco provided a distinctive element.

Washington Duke and his sons built their frame factory on the south side of Main Street, approximately where a large plant of the Liggett and Myers company would stand in the next century. At first a partition separated that portion of the building to which Brodie Duke removed his business from the half where Washington Duke and his two younger sons established themselves. This arrangement was later replaced by separate, adjacent buildings, but the business from the first was a family affair, with Washington Duke selling goods for his son Brodie and vice versa.[10]

As wagon-borne peddler in 1865 and then a "drummer" or traveling salesman in the 1870's, Washington Duke covered many thousands of miles selling the family's various brands of tobacco. One of the ledgers for the 1870's lists the names and addresses of dozens of tobacconists from Maine to California with whom the Dukes did busi-

9. Durham *Recorder*, April 16, 1900. 10. Boyd, *Story of Durham*, p. 85.

ness.[11] In St. Louis, Missouri, some years after the name of Duke had become famous in connection with tobacco, a retailer remembered that his first contact with the firm had been through Washington Duke. As the Missourian recalled it, one cold morning an elderly gentleman, wearing a broad brim hat and soberly dressed, opened the door to the tobacco shop in St. Louis, walked half way down to the office, turned deliberately, and walked back to shut the door. Then, speaking slowly in a droll, broad accent, he said, "Good morning. I did shut the door and I'm from North Carolina." After putting down his worn black carpetbag, Washington Duke continued, "I've got some mighty good smoking tobacco in here and believe you could sell a heap of it if you had some of it in your store."[12]

Washington Duke was not the only member of the family who "drummed the trade," for young J. B. Duke also took to the road in the late 1870's. On one of his trips in 1880, when he was nearly twenty-four, he wrote Ben Duke a long letter, which is the earliest of J. B. Duke's letters known to survive as well as the longest of his few extant personal letters. "I have been very much discouraged ever since I left home," he declared, "knowing that I was not paying expenses, but there is one consolation[:] I have done my duty whether it was successful or not, & shall put in some very hard work from now until I reach home & if I do not succede better this shall be my last Trip. I will stay at home & work."

Even as he travelled, however, young "Buck" Duke pondered how the family firm might move ahead in the industry. He wrote his brother that he had thought up a process that would make the "finest smoke out." He would put the tobacco in a dry room and thoroughly dry it so that there would be no water left in it. Then he would dip it in boiling, flavored rum that would "give it a pleasant flavor & make it smoke sweet & uniform."

Most of his long letter was not about tobacco, but rather about the fine time he had just had visiting the family of his uncle, John Taylor Duke, in Milan, Tennessee. Among other things, J. B. Duke said he had met the "*liveliest girl I think God ever put breath in.*" There were also two young girl cousins about his own age, and the hilarity had ranged from water fights to much teasing, all of which he described in great detail. "We walked about 2 miles in the country one night to Church,

11. Ledger, 1873–1877, Washington Duke MSS.

12. Edward F. Small, "A Correct Version of the Beginnings of a Trust," unpublished memoir in the Edward Featherston Small MSS, Duke University Library.