

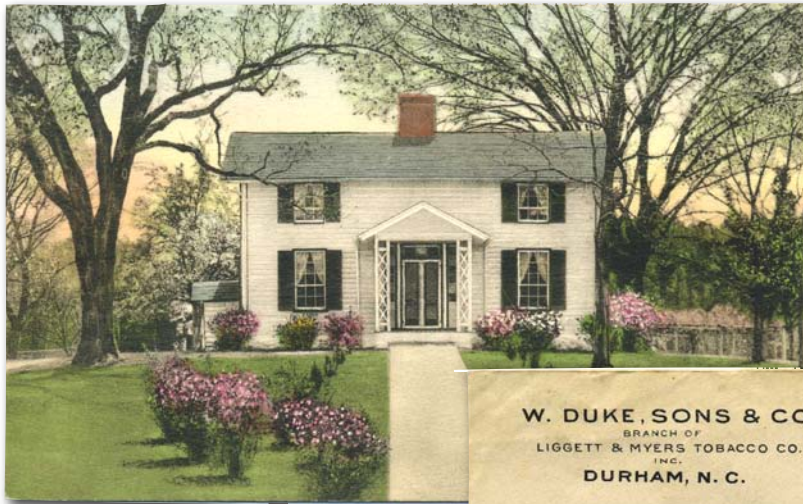
# North Carolina's Tobacco Advertising Covers

by Tony L. Crumbley

When the Union soldiers occupying Durham left to head back home after the war, they emptied the warehouses of locally-cured tobacco and carried it back home. They had never experienced such a quality of tobacco from anywhere else in the world. Anticipating a market for Carolina tobacco, Washington Duke invested his only silver currency of value in Duke Tobacco Company (Figures 1-4). J. R. Reynolds followed suit. Shortly there was a cluster of tobacco manufacturers throughout the Piedmont competing with

those in Richmond and Danville, Virginia. What had been the South's oldest staple crop would soon become North Carolina's largest cash crop.

The success of Duke and Reynolds brought Durham and Winston (Figures 5-7), the communities to which they located their enterprises, to the forefront of the state's emerging cities.



◀ **Figure 1.** Home of Washington Duke located near the railroad in Durham where he built his first plant in 1874.

**Figure 2.** ▶  
Fatima cigarette ad from W. Duke & Sons Company, a division of Liggett & Myers. Durham, NC 1917 to Boone Mill, Va.



◀ **Figure 3.** Manufacturing plant of "Fatima" cigarettes located in Durham, NC.



By the 1880s the growing tobacco industry also began to shape the development of a number of smaller eastern North Carolina towns. Greenville, Goldsboro, Kinston, Tarboro, Rocky Mount and Wilson all began to grow (Fig 8-13). The cotton

**Figure 4.** ▶  
Inside view of "Fatima" cigarette manufacturing operations, ca. 1920.

industry was no longer king. The price of cotton had declined to less than 5 cents a pound after being over 25 cents a pound in 1868. Without



The soil and climate of southern Virginia and northern North Carolina favored the production of the bright

◀ **Figure 5.** Advertising cover from H.H. Reynolds, manufacturer of Red Elephant chewing tobacco. Winston, NC, August 13, 1888 to Blowing Rock.

leaf tobacco, which had revolutionized the tobacco industry. By the 1880s the yellow leaf was sought by Americans and Europeans alike. Thus, the poor soil of

cheap, slave labor, farmers could not produce a viable crop.

**Figure 6.** ▶  
Scene of tobacco trading in Winston Salem, ca. 1915.



the Piedmont and eastern part of the state proved to be the catalyst for the development of "The Old Bright Belt" as these counties would be called.

◀ **Figure 7.** Ca. 1940 view of the massive facilities of the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company which opened the first factory in Winston in 1870.

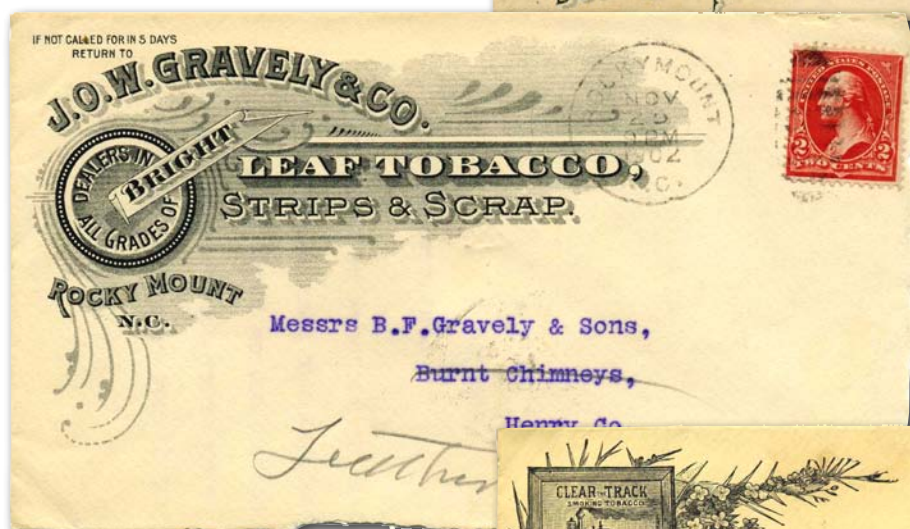




◀ **Figure 8.** A.H. Motley Company produced Plug & Smoking tobacco from the 1880s to the 1890s. They along with R.P. Richardson, S.C. Penn and six other tobacco manufacturers were the backbone of Reidsville's economy in the 1890s. Reidsville, NC July 17, 1894 to Winston.



**Figure 9.** ▶ J.S. Lockhart, Banner Warehouse, Durham, NC. Postmarked Goldsboro and Greenville railroad agent, August 11, 1888 to Washington, DC.



◀ **Figure 10.** J.O.W. Gravely & Co., Rocky Mount, NC, dealt in bright leaf tobacco. The process had been discovered by a slave who switched from wood fire curing to charcoal curing. This fast process caused the leaf to stay a bright yellow color. Rocky Mount, NC November 25, 1902 to Leatherwood, Va.

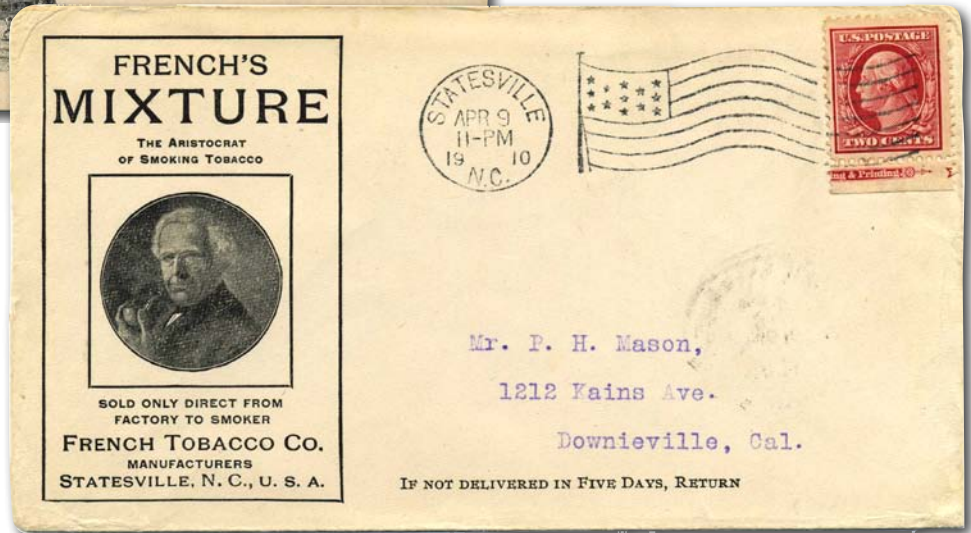


**Figure 11.** ▶ The Henderson Tobacco Co., Henderson, NC, producer of clear-track smoking tobacco. Henderson, NC, May 29, 1890 to Lancaster, Ma.





◀ **Figure 12.** Irvin & Postone Tobacco, Statesville, advertising cover posted on the Salisbury & Knoxville Railroad, July 12, 1898 to Connelly Springs.



**Figure 13.** ▶ French's Mixture, a Statesville pipe tobacco manufacturer. Statesville, NC April 9, 1910, to Downieville, California.

After the Civil War, freed blacks in eastern North Carolina had limited opportunities. Many toiled as sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Leaders of the black community such as Postmasters Samuel Vick of Wilson and Weeks Armstrong of Rocky Mount encouraged the entire community to move towards tobacco farming. The first recorded tobacco cultivation east of the Piedmont was in 1878 when a farmer in Wayne County harvest several crops.

By the 1890s it seemed that everyone was encouraging farmers to plant tobacco. The Atlantic Coast Line Railroad launched a campaign to grow tobacco. In 1890, the expansion of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad from Halifax to Kinston via Scotland Neck and Greenville created greater market potential. Even the owners of the Rocky Mount Mills, the second oldest cotton mill in the state, supported the expansion of the tobacco industry.

In 1891, the Greenville tobacco warehouse handled 200,000 pounds of tobacco. By the end of the 1890s, Greenville had four warehouses handling millions of pounds each year. By 1900, Wilson was the most lucrative tobacco market in the country with more than 15 million pounds passing through the five warehouses.

Buyers from firms like American Tobacco Company, Imperial Tobacco Company, R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, Liggett and Myers, and Universal Leaf Tobacco Company would flock to these tobacco towns each fall eager to buy the available crops.

The local warehouse owners were revered like local gods. It seemed, however, that they were the big local money makers. Farmers received payment for tobacco within minutes of its sale. Their checks were taken to the local bank for cashing and paying off the debt for the past year – much of it charged at an interest rate of 25%. Tenants and sharecroppers paid their landlords, their doctors, lawyers, merchants and anyone else they owed. By the end of the day, most tenants retained less than a fourth of their crops earning.

After paying their bills, many farmers would stay around town a few nights to enjoy themselves and celebrate a hard year's work. Taverns abounded in the tobacco towns at a time when most of the state was dry. In 1900, Greenville had more saloons than churches. The local "red light districts" boomed with business with the tobacco cash. Prostitution thrived in neighborhoods near the warehouses in all the tobacco towns. Kinston's "Sugar Hill" was noted for its variety of vice offer-

ings. At the end of the day, most farmers went back home to live on next year's credit (Fig 14).

By the end of the 1940s, mechanization had altered the tobacco business. Mechanical harvesters had reduced the ability of small farms to compete with the larger ones using mechanical production. Large tobacco companies had done away with the

need for auctions by contracting with local growers. An era of North Carolina began to change beyond recognition. From the 1880s through the 1940s the tobacco industries promoted their products in many ways (Fig 17-19). One was through the use of advertising on their mail. Some of the most colorful advertising covers from the state can be found on the tobacco company ads. ■

**Figure 14.** ▶

In 1890, Duke merged the five largest tobacco companies in the U.S. to form the American Tobacco Company. Intending to form a monopoly, he controlled 90% of the U.S. tobacco market. In 1911, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the breakup of this company to form American Tobacco, Reynolds Lorillard, Liggett & Myers and British American Tobacco. Greenville, SC, January 26, 1919 to Richmond, Va.



◀ **Figure 15.** One of the more striking advertising covers comes from Taylor Brothers Red Eye Tobacco, Winston, NC, a company that escaped the Duke mergers. Founded in 1885 in Winston, the company still employs 20 workers in Winston-Salem and recently announced an expansion of its facilities. Salem, NC, May 5, 1892 to Washington, DC.

**Figure 16.** ▶

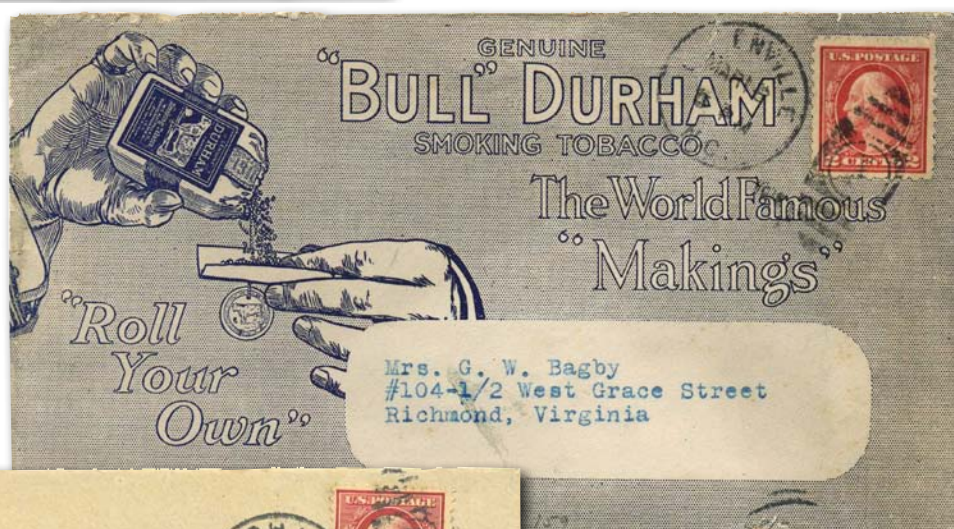
Taylor Brothers Red Eye Tobacco, Winston-Salem, NC, September 15, 1897 to Greenville, Ga., posted after the merger of Winston and Salem.







◀ **Figure 17.** Blackwell's Durham Tobacco Company manufacturing plant of world renowned Bull Durham Tobacco, ca. 1910.



**Figure 18.** ▶  
Genuine "Bull" Durham Smoking Tobacco, known the world over. Greenville, NC, March 18, 1918 to Richmond, Va.



◀ **Figure 19.** Genuine Durham Tobacco, a classic advertising cover from Blackwell's Durham Tobacco Co., Durham, NC, February 29, 1917 used locally.

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3:00 PM, 25 July 2009  
Harris Conference Center  
3216 CPCC Harris Campus Drive just off Billy Graham Parkway  
and close to Charlotte-Douglas airport