

# Durham A-Z: **B is for Brick**

Look around you; how many brick buildings do you see?  
Durham's brick tobacco buildings are distinct  
and memorable. Who made this brick, and why is it  
so common in Durham architecture?



# Brick-making in Durham: Early Brick-making

Prior to the 1880s, there was not much brick manufacturing or building in the sleepy hamlet of Durham Station. Brick-makers in Orange County (which at the time included Durham) did most of their business in antebellum towns such as Chapel Hill, Oxford, and Hillsborough.

Enslaved brick-makers at Stagville plantation used clay from the land to make bricks for shoring up foundations or insulating wood-frame buildings. These bricks were shaped by hand, sun-dried, and baked near a fire or in a kiln.

Dial 919-246-9998 ext. 121 to hear excerpts from historical letters about brick-making at Stagville.



The fingerprints of enslaved brick-makers can be seen today on bricks at Historic Stagville.

Courtesy of Daylan Montgomery

Abner Jordan, once enslaved at Stagville, was listed as a brick-maker in Durham in the 1880 census.

Courtesy of the National Archives

Name of Street	Home Number	Dwelling houses numbered in order of visitation Families numbered in order of visitation.	The Name of each Person whose place of abode, on 1st day of June, 1880, was in this family.	Color, White, W.; Black, B.; Mulatto, M.; Chi- nese, C.	Sex—Male, M.; Female, F.	Age at last birthday prior to June 1, 1880. If under 5 years, give month and day, as follows: 3 y., 6 m., 15 d.	If born within the Census year, give the month	Relationship of each person to the head of this family— whether wife, son, daughter, servant, boarder, or other.	single, /	Married, /	Widowed, /	Divorced, F.	Married during Census year /	Profession, Occupation or Trade of each person, male or female.	Number of months this person has been un- der the care of a physician during the Census year.	Is the person (on the day of the Enumera- tor's visit) sick or temporarily disabled, so as to be unable to attend to ordinary business or duties? If so, what is the sick- ness or disability?	Blind, /	Deaf and dumb, /	Idiotic, /	Insane, /	Mutilated, Crippled, Deaf-Blind, or otherwise dis- abled
		1	Jordan, Abner (son)					son													
	1871/87		— Cole	m	m	23		son	/					Factory hand							
			— Abner	B	m	22		son	/					Bricks maker							
			— Dicy	B	f	14		Daughter	/					nurse							
			— Emma	B	f	14		Daughter	/												
	18 188		Mitchel, Willis	B	m	50			/					Drayman							
			— Willis	B	f	50		Wife	/					Widow							

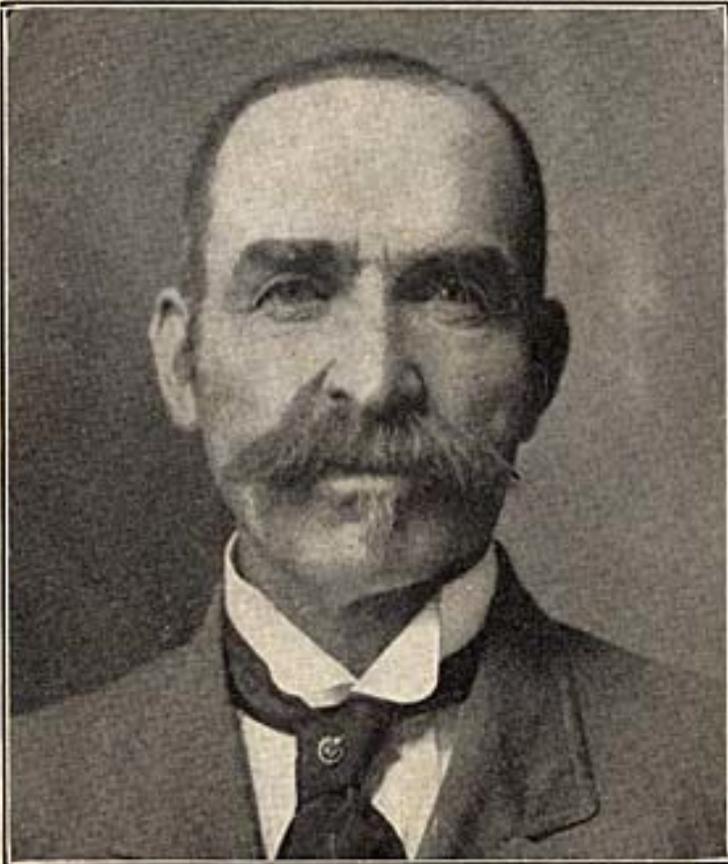
# Supplying a Boom Town

Brick manufacturer Richard B. Fitzgerald supplied brick to Durham during a time of extraordinary growth. Between 1873 and 1885, tobacco entrepreneurs built eight new tobacco factories and seven sales warehouses. Gradually, builders switched to brick rather than wood, especially after back-to-back fires in 1880 destroyed three blocks of wood-frame buildings.

Fitzgerald moved from Pennsylvania to North Carolina after the end of the Civil War. He sold bricks in Durham as early as 1869, and in 1880 he purchased a brickyard on Chapel Hill Road (now Kent Street). By 1885 Fitzgerald was producing 4,000,000 bricks per year at his Chapel Hill Road brickyard, including pressed brick molded by machine. Fitzgerald became a prominent businessman and was a leader in Durham's African American community until his death in 1918.

You can see Fitzgerald bricks at St. Joseph's AME, Emmanuel AME, and 700-702 Kent Street.

What was Durham like in Fitzgerald's day? Dial 919-246-9993 ext. 122 to hear how it was described by his grand-niece, Pauli Murray, in her memoir *Proud Shoes*.



R. B. FITZGERALD

ONE OF THE INNER GROUP WHOSE BRICKYARD CAN  
MAKE 30,000 BRICKS A DAY

Courtesy of UNC Chapel Hill,  
North Carolina Collection

R. B. FITZGERALD,  
**Brick Manufacturer**

$\frac{1}{2}$  of a Mile S.<sup>W.</sup> of Durham, on Chapel Hill Road.

A No. 1 Standard Brick, guaranteed to stand all kinds  
of weather. Compact and well burned.

**Fine Pressed Front Brick a Specialty!**

Small or large orders filled promptly. Making capacity,  
**4,000,000** per year. Special contracts taken. Address

**R. B. FITZGERALD,**

*Lock Box 282, DURHAM, N. C.*

From Chas. Emerson's North Carolina  
Tobacco Belt Directory

# Borden Brick & Tile in Durham

The Borden family starting making bricks in Goldsboro in 1911 using river-bottom clay placed in molds by hand. As Borden Brick and Tile grew, the company responded to changes in manufacturing methods including pressed brick and end-cut brick. These methods made shale, rather than clay, the ideal raw material. In 1929, the company moved to Durham where shale was plentiful.

What is end-cut brick? Dial 919-246-9993 ext. 123 to find out.

The Great Depression of the 1930s was devastating to the building and construction industry. Borden Brick and Tile supplied bricks for Liggett and Myers and American Tobacco Company, both of which continued to expand in spite of the Depression. During World War II, the company supplied brick for Camp Butner, an infantry training camp built in 1942, before closing for the duration of the war. Economic growth followed the end of the war; many homes, businesses, and university buildings from this time were made with Borden bricks.

Brothers Frank Kennon "K" and John "Jack" Borden, grandsons of the company's original founder, learned the brick business from the ground up during the 1950s when they joined the company. Kay oversaw production while Jack managed the sales team. Durham was still a tobacco town, and Jack always kept a pack of Lucky Strike and a pack of competing Chesterfield in his car for sales calls.



In 1959 Borden upgraded from beehive kilns to long tunnel kilns. Both are pictured here.  
Courtesy of the Borden family.

Have you ever wondered why older brick walls contain many shades of brick? Michael Borden explains: Dial 919-246-9993 ext.124 to hear.

# Triangle Brick

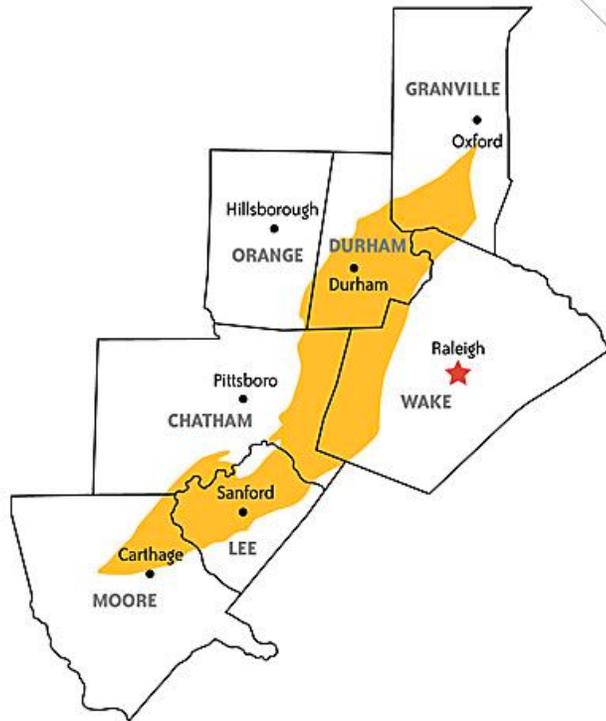
Triangle Brick was founded in 1959, around the same time as the Research Triangle Park. The Durham plant was phased out of operation in the 1990s, but the company is still headquartered in Durham off of Hwy 55. Triangle brick has furnished bricks for the Durham Bulls Athletic Park and many buildings in Research Triangle Park.

# A Little Geology

The Triassic Basin is a prehistoric fault that runs through Durham County. The shale found in this area makes it an ideal location for brick mining and manufacturing. The eastern border of the Triassic Basin is evident on Highway 70, where the Angus Barn sits on a high ridge.

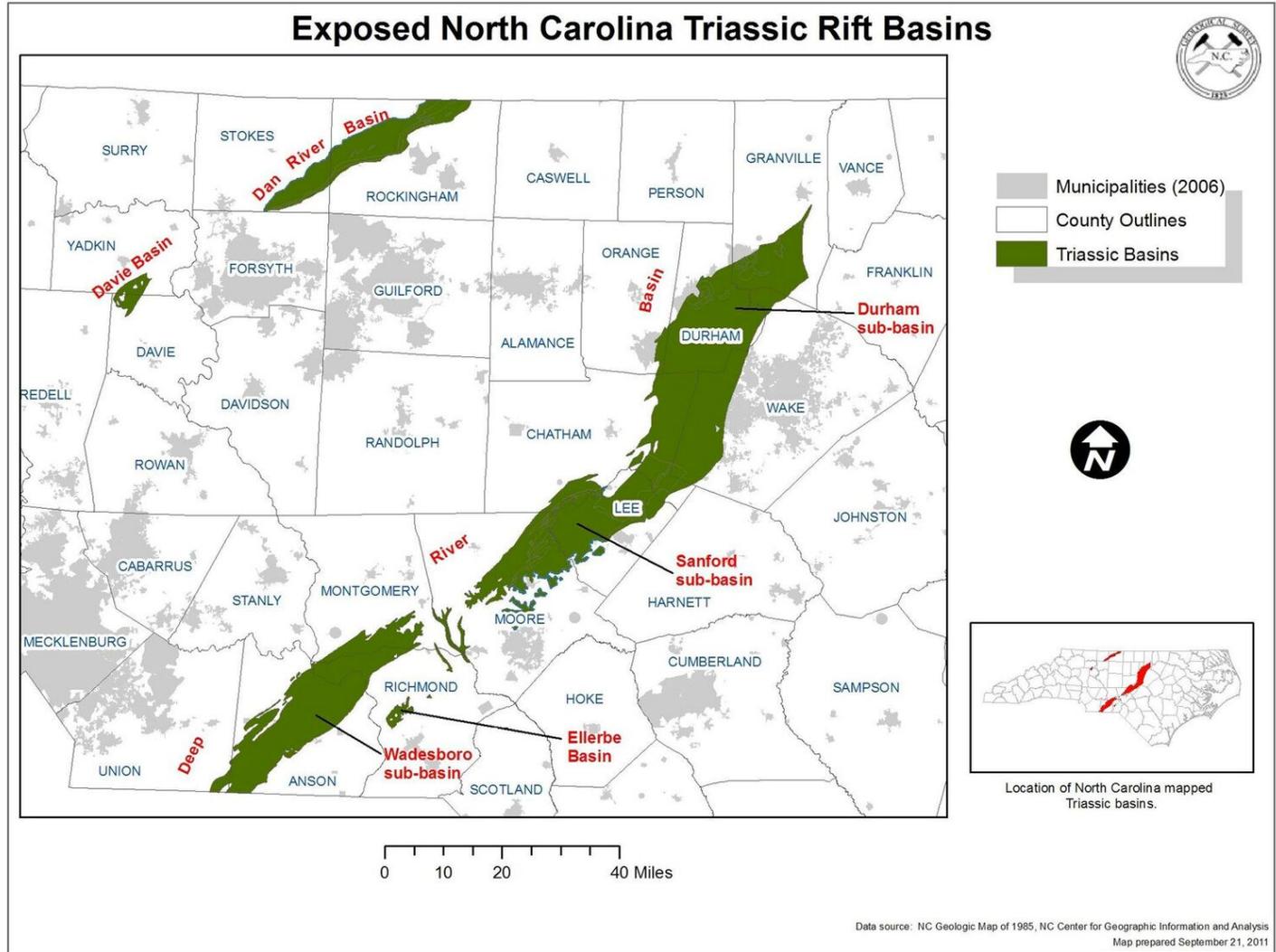
Have you ever gotten winded riding your bicycle up a long hill in Durham? The Triassic Basin contains gradual, terraced hills which flatten for a time before climbing again.

### Triassic basins



SOURCE: NORTH CAROLINA GEOLOGICAL SURVEY  
N.C. COUNTIES MAP © INDOS82 | DREAMSTIME.COM

### Exposed North Carolina Triassic Rift Basins



Data source: NC Geologic Map of 1985, NC Center for Geographic Information and Analysis  
Map prepared September 21, 2011

NC Geological Survey, and NC Center for Geographic Information and Analysis

# Bricks & Power

When the W. T. Blackwell Company built the Old Bull Building in 1874, it was one of the first brick tobacco factories in the U.S. Not to be outdone, the Dukes built their own brick factory in 1884.

By 1890, the Dukes' American Tobacco Company owned 90 percent of the tobacco business in the county. The ornate brick buildings at American Tobacco and on West Main Street were built between 1887 and 1906. They conveyed a corporate image of power and success.



Imagine seeing the Old Bull building in Durham among wood frame buildings in 1870s and 1880s.

*Bull City Bonanza*