

# Duke home tows past

By DEBBIE PASSMORE

Tucked away in one of Durham's residential streets is the history of one of North Carolina's most esteemed families and the story of one of the state's foremost crops. The two are synonymous in North Carolina: the Washington Duke family and tobacco.

The history of the two is being preserved at the Duke Homestead, located on Duke Homestead Road in Durham. The Homestead is the original home of Washington Duke, one of North Carolina's first smoking-tobacco manufacturers.

Dale Coats, director of the site, said the state had spent a great deal of money on the development of the Homestead.

"We're trying to develop the Homestead into living history. We hope to recreate the farm life here as it was in the Civil War," said Coats.

Duke's home still stands on the homestead. A white, two-story wooden structure, the house dates back to 1852. The house is furnished with period furniture and even contains several original pieces of the Duke family.

The old house is surrounded by a sprawling yard, dotted with pecan, elm and cedar trees which are older than the house.

Also located on the Homestead is a tobacco factory, a well house, a smoke house, a tobacco pack house and a spring house.

The Homestead has been state-operated since 1974. It was previously owned and operated by Duke University. Under the university, the site was open April through November. The site is now open year round, daily except Mondays.

The Tobacco Museum, which is located at

the Homestead's visitor center, provides an overview of the history of the Duke family. An orientation film about tobacco is shown throughout the day. Guided tours are conducted through the Homestead by staff members.

Coats said special events are held at the Homestead periodically. In the spring, an open house is held at the old Duke home. A crafts festival is also held at this time. In October, a mock tobacco auction is held on the picnic ground adjacent to the visitor center. This includes the auction, a tobacco spitting contest and exhibitions by clogging groups.

Coats said a great deal of work has gone into the Homestead in the past decade.

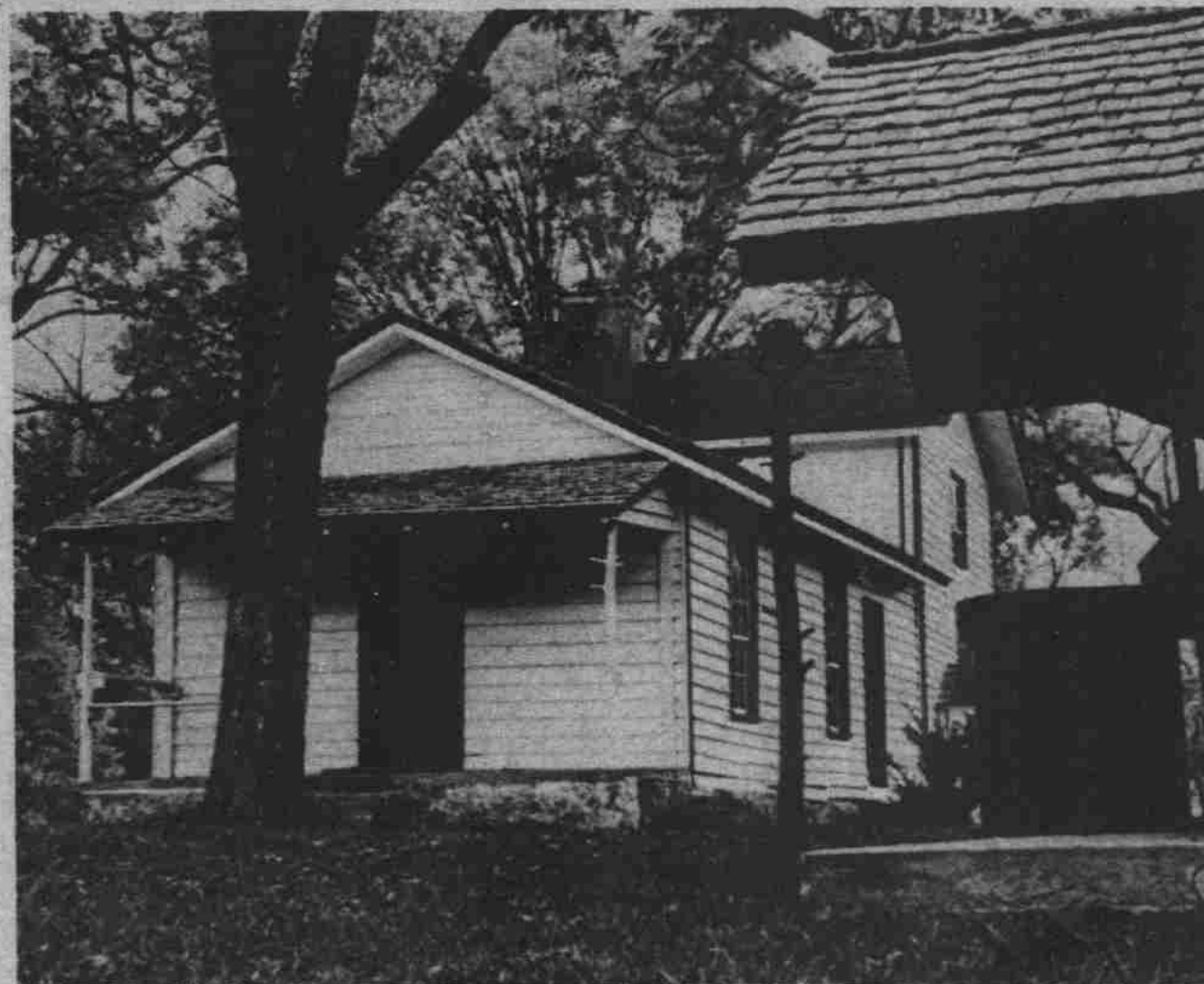
"In the early 1970s, a group of local men in the tobacco industry felt a need for a museum to preserve the history of tobacco," Coats said.

"They formed a corporation, the Tobacco History corporation, and began a fund raising for a museum."

Coats said the corporation raised the money to build the visitor center-museum and financed the production of the film. He said the corporation finances special projects, such as expansion of the museum, promotion and publicity.

Mabel Jeffries, a staff member conducts tours through the Homestead. Throughout the tour, Jeffries informs visitors of the history surrounding the Duke family and their rise to power in the tobacco industry. She points out the root cellar, where women of the 1800s stored their fruits and vegetables. A "dinna" bell hangs outside the house, and Jeffries explains the bell was used to call men from the fields and to serve as an SOS for emergencies.

Jeffries recounts the history of Washing-



Duke Homestead, the original home of Washington Duke ... the Homestead is being developed into "living history."

ton Duke returning from war to find his home and fields devastated by Union soldiers. Duke gathered what was left of his crop and traveled across the eastern part of the state to sell it.

From these meager beginnings, Duke and his sons created a tobacco industry which is still influential in today.

The Duke family, having started with little, were quick to share their fortune. They made major contributions to religious, educational and medical groups.

"Because he once had nothing, it was Duke's desire that no one do without because of lack of money," said Jeffries.


Jeffries said that can be seen in all the contributions made by the Dukes.

"That's why we're here," she said. "We want to show people just what tobacco and the Dukes have done for North Carolina."

If you're going ... follow 15-501 South by-pass from Chapel Hill to Durham. Take a left off Guess Road exit. Continue on Guess

Road for 1 1/2 miles. Take a right at Duke Homestead Road. Go 1/2 mile. The Homestead is on the right side of the road. It is open Tuesday-Saturday 9-5 and 1-5 on Sunday.

Debbie Passmore is a contributor to Spotlight.



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