

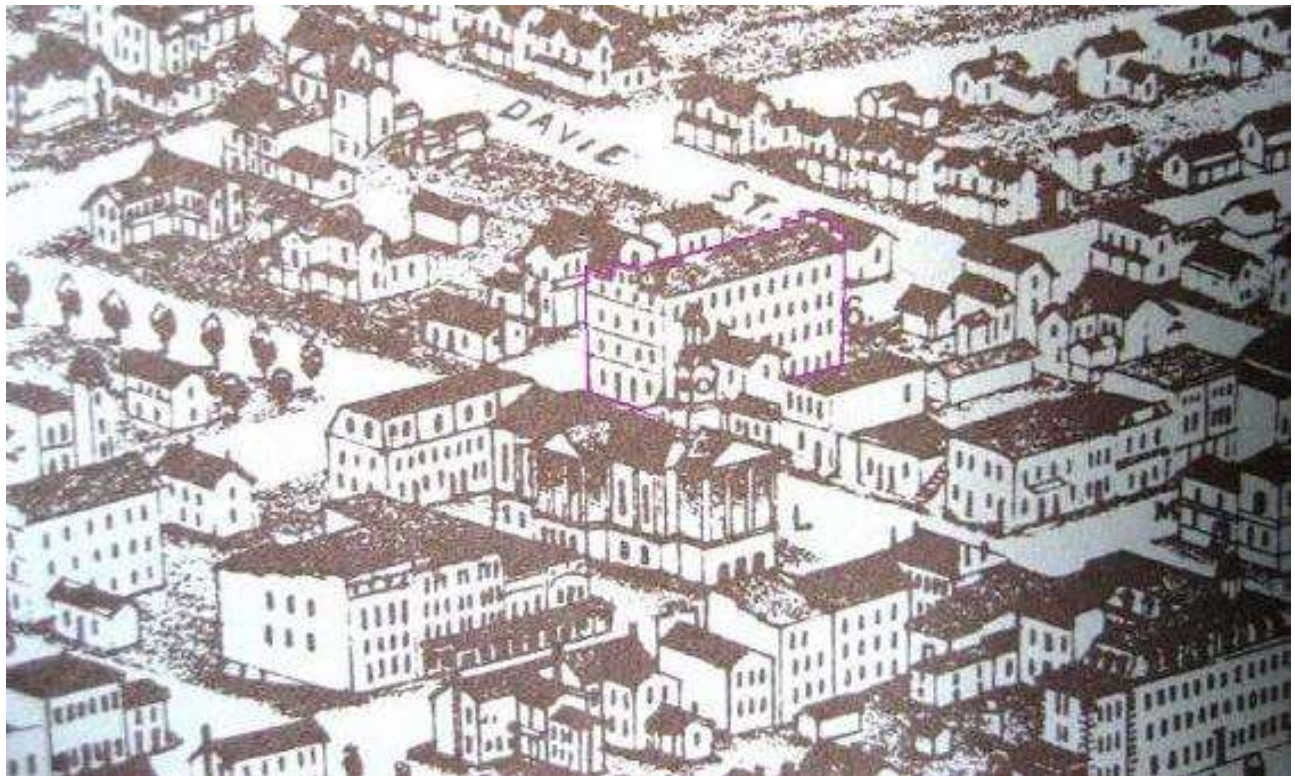


Established 1966

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Greensboro's Tobacco Heritage, Part 3



To paraphrase a popular proverb, "it takes a village to raise a cigarette"...or a tobacco product. Nineteenth-century Greensboro was certainly one of those villages, with all phases of tobacco

manufacturing (growing, brokering, and manufacturing) represented here. Certain phases of development grew in importance in the village, but in the end, consolidation changed the profile of the tobacco industry in Greensboro greatly.

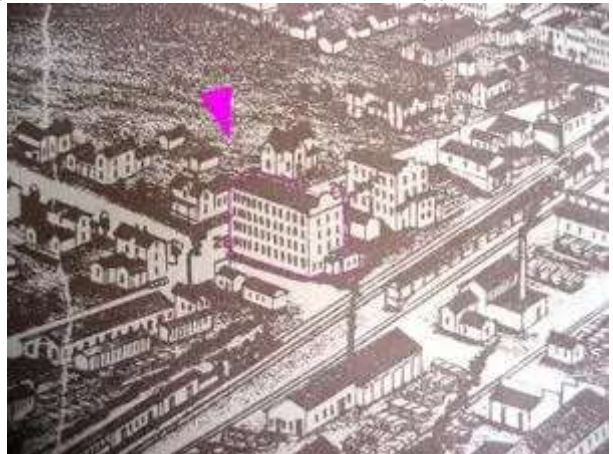
Use of smokeless tobacco, or chewing tobacco, was wildly popular throughout the south in the mid-nineteenth century, and interest in smoked tobacco (cigars, cigarettes, and pipe) grew rapidly after the Civil War. Greensboro found itself in the midst of a territory that favored cultivation of high grade Brightleaf tobacco. Coupled with



Greensboro's excellent rail system that stretched to places such as Chatham, Randolph, Davidson, Forsyth, Stokes, and Rockingham counties, Greensboro became a central market for tobacco leaves. By 1892, thirteen "leaf houses," such as the Cobb and Scott dealers of Tobacco Heritage, Parts 1 and 2, were located in Greensboro, each buying leaves locally and selling to manufacturers across the United States and even Europe.

As early as 1885, J. L. King and several partners established a plug and twist (forms of chewing tobacco) factory in Greensboro in a collection of brick buildings just north of the southern railway tracks. Unlike leaf buying houses, King and his partners produced a form of chewing tobacco in their steam powered factory. Stemming and clipping of the leaves occurred on the upper floor; the leaf room was on the second, and picking, casing, and storage took place on the first floor.

The main four-story building was surrounded by auxiliary buildings and featured an unusual segmental-arched parapet gable. By 1902 the building is no longer marked on city maps, likely destroyed by fire.



The climate for the tobacco industry began to change around 1900. Historian Aubrey L. Brooks promoted the idea that small independent manufacturers in Greensboro were crushed by tobacco "trusts" around the turn of the twentieth century. One such trust, the American Tobacco Company of Durham, was notorious for buying its rivals in order to reduce its competition. In the end, this consolidation of the trade coalesced the industry to Winston and Durham, leaving little remaining in the Gate City until Lorillard Tobacco Company opened a cigarette plant over 50 years later.

The changes at the site of the King factory are the most startling of this series. The image to the right was taken from the same location as the first; on the Southern Railway tracks. The factory was gone by 1902, but the area remained industrial through the 1960s. At that time, sweeping changes associated with urban renewal enabled city government to take an active role in redevelopment by acquiring private land for new roads, bridges, and buildings. The old grade crossing of Ash Street seen in the early image was replaced by an underpass in the 1920s, itself superseded by the Eugene Street overpass in the 1970s. Also in the 1970s, the 15-story Gateway Plaza was erected to provide public housing for elders.

Written by Benjamin Briggs

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