

**Landmark Designation Report**

**Date: November 2, 2015**

<b>Case</b>	LD1500003	<b>Jurisdiction</b>	City
<b>Project Name</b>	Imperial Tobacco Building		
<b>Request</b>	Historic Landmark Designation		
<b>Site Characteristics</b>	<b>Tier</b>	Downtown	
	<b>Site Acreage</b>	2.447	
	<b>Existing Use</b>	Commercial/Office Building	
	<b>Date Constructed</b>	ca. 1916	
	<b>National Register District</b>	Brightleaf Industrial	
	<b>National Register Individually Listed</b>	No	
	<b>Local District</b>	No	
<b>Applicant</b>	Measurement Incorporated	<b>Submittal Date</b>	March 26, 2015
<b>Location</b>	215 Morris Street		
<b>PINs</b>	0821-08-88-3602		
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Staff</b>	Approval	
	<b>Historic Preservation Commission</b>	Approval	

**A. Summary**

The owner, Measurement Incorporated, requests that the City designate the Imperial Tobacco Building as a Durham Historic Landmark. The structure is a contributing structure within the Brightleaf National Historic District.

**B. Historical Context**

The Imperial Tobacco Building, constructed in 1916, housed the British tobacco manufacturing giant, The Imperial Tobacco Company Ltd. of Great



Image 1: Imperial Tobacco Building, ca. 1920

Britain and Ireland for several decades. This company formed in 1901, in response to the sudden incursion of the Duke family enterprise (American Tobacco Company) into the British market. As described by Preservation Durham in *The Herald-Sun* on Sunday, June 22, 2014:

Between the end of the Civil War and 1890, the Duke family of Durham had gobbled up 40 percent of all of American tobacco production. By 1900, the figure was 80 percent. The commercial genius of the operation was, of course, James Buchanan “Buck” Duke, Washington Duke’s youngest son. In 1890, Buck forced the consolidation of the five major U.S. producers into the American Tobacco Company with himself as president. His shrewd use of advertising, which included baseball cards and billboards, his insistence on the vertical integration of production, and his development of the factory-made cigarette as the new and dominant tobacco product, made him and his business immensely wealthy.

But Duke wasn’t satisfied with control of American tobacco production; he fully intended to conquer the world. In 1901, Duke went to England with a war chest of \$30 million—a fabulous sum at the time—to buy up British tobacco companies. Within days of landing at Liverpool, Buck bought up Ogden’s Ltd., for \$5 million and change. Buck wrote his father back home, “We have bought one of the best concerns in England, and it has raised a great howl. They call us American invaders.” He was right, the British were genuinely alarmed. When Buck went to another big outfit, John Player & Sons, the story goes that he boasted to owners, “Hello, boys, I’m Duke from New York, come to take over your business.” He was shown the door, however, and within a few months, 13 of Britain’s largest tobacco companies combines [sic] to form the Imperial Tobacco Company Ltd., of Great Britain and Ireland. It was the only way they could stop Duke from swallowing them one by one.

Once combined, the British companies didn’t just breathe a sigh of relief; they decided to flex their new muscle. In 1902, Imperial sent agents to the U.S. to scout factory sites from which to invade the American market. Fearing a costly trade war, Buck came up with a new idea. If Imperial would leave American markets to Buck’s American Tobacco trust, he would let Imperial have exclusive rights to Britain and Ireland. The tobacco market for the rest of the world would be managed by a joint operation. The British agreed and by the end of 1902, the British-American Tobacco Company was formed.

Durham was a central point of sale for North Carolina’s coveted “Bright Leaf” tobacco, and so the Imperial Tobacco Company struck a deal with Duke to set up part of its leaf-buying business in Durham. The company then hired a Durham firm, Fallon and Martin Tobacco, to run its leaf-buying operation, eventually taking over that firm along with its building in 1908. In 1915, the building burned in a fire, and Imperial built a much larger factory on the site.<sup>4</sup>

This new factory is the building for which landmark recognition is now sought. The Imperial Tobacco Company constructed a number of other leaf-buying establishments throughout the southeast, including its headquarters in Richmond, Virginia, and facilities in Greenville (North Carolina), and Mullins (South Carolina).<sup>2</sup> The Durham facility is distinguished from other tobacco factories in the city by the fact that it was designed and built at one time, without later additions; furthermore, its architecture and furnace system remain largely intact.

By the 1960s, the Imperial Tobacco Company had diversified outside of the tobacco trade and, in 1965, sold Durham's Imperial Tobacco Building to the D.C. May Company, a well-reputed local interior design retailer. In 1987, the building interior served as a film set for the baseball movie *Bull Durham*. D.C. May operated out of the facility until its merger with another company, and the applicant purchased the building in 2003.<sup>3</sup> The applicant runs an academic testing service from the building and also rents to several tenants, including a landscape architecture firm and a veterinary hospital.

### C. Architectural Description

The Imperial Building is an industrial building incorporating round-topped arches over windows and extensive corbeling in a rich red-brown brick. The style is similar to other structures built by the company in Virginia and South Carolina<sup>2</sup> but is far more ornate, perhaps motivated by Imperial's rivalry with the Dukes, who had already set a precedent for attractive industrial tobacco buildings downtown.<sup>3</sup>



Image 2: Imperial Tobacco Building, ca. 1920s

The three-story Imperial structure consists of a large main block fronting Morris Street. To the side of the main block is an attached smaller office with steps leading up to an arched portico. Behind the main block are two 2-story parallel wings, one of which fronts Fernway



Avenue. At the rear, a shorter wing encloses a central courtyard (formerly a mechanical pit).



Image 4: Imperial Tobacco Building, 2010s

Each of the street-facing blocks consists of a series of recessed bays across the length of the facades. Within the bays are three rows of nine-over-nine arched windows with stone sills, spaced evenly in pairs. The most prominent decoration consists of rounded and gabled brick parapets at either end of the

main block, embellished with a contrasting stone inlay of squares and diamonds. A band of decorative recessed panels encircles the main block at the cornice. An iron fence shields the street-level windows along the east elevation.

The north elevation, along Fernway Avenue, contains a series of smaller entrances with porticos. Four window openings above the first portico contain brick infill. The grade change of the street along this elevation is gradual but remarkable, in that the relation of the entrances to window height changes substantially from one end of the building to the other.



Image 5: Imperial Tobacco Building, 2010s

The west elevation contains the loading area on the far left, which is notably decorated with corbelling and a stepped parapet to match the rest of the building. Eight smaller window openings on the left side of this elevation have been infilled with matching brick. A large loading entrance on the right has been infilled with darker cement blocks and contains two smaller door openings. On the far left side is a small rear entrance with a modern canvas awning positioned at the lowest grade. One small bay juts out from the complex to the right of the loading area, containing a tall cylindrical smoke stack and a series of arched windows, larger and more elaborate than those on the street-facing elevations. The other wings visible from this perspective are mostly devoid of windows although the corbelling

continues along the facades at the cornice level. The complex abuts a courtyard area and a parking lot that wraps around to the south.

Finally, the south elevation contains an additional loading area, covered by a bright blue modern aluminum awning. Above the awning are two rows of the same nine-over-nine arched windows found on the street-facing elevations. The side of the office structure is visible from this perspective and contains two rows of four-over-four arched windows, with additional utilitarian entrances at the parking level.

#### **D. Alterations and Condition of Structures**

The building is in excellent condition inside and out and retains much of its original appearance and details. According to the applicant, the complex underwent a \$4 million restoration, receiving historic preservation tax credits, shortly after it was purchased in 2003. Some of the improvements included:

- Removal of the 1960s stuccoed facade installed by the D.C. May Company;
- Replacement of 1960s front entrance doors with divided-light doors;
- Unboarding of window openings;
- Restoration of original wood windows;
- Replacement of old roof with a new rubber membrane roof system;
- Installation of custom remanufactured gutters and downspouts;
- Replacement of elevators, plumbing, and HVAC system;
- Repainting of steel trusses;
- Stripping and cleaning of interior masonry; and
- Power-washing of exterior masonry.

In 2013 and 2014, the applicant claims to have updated bathrooms; improved the first-, second-, and third-floor lobby areas; and converted 3,500 square feet of basement into usable office space. Additional tenant-specific renovations are underway on the third floor to accommodate a new tenant.

#### **E. Criteria for Landmark Designation**

The Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), Section 3.16.4 *Designation of an Historic Landmark*, includes the following criteria to qualify for the landmark designation:

A building, structure, site, area, or object may be considered for designation as an historic landmark only if all of the following three criteria are met:

1. The property must not currently be undergoing renovation unless it has been approved for state or federal tax credits in accordance with the Secretary of Interior Standards;
2. The HPC must deem and find that the building, structure, site, area, or object meets at least one of the following criteria:
  - a. Individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places or on the Study List;
  - b. Statewide Significance status granted by the State Historic Preservation Office;
  - c. Integrity of location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship, feeling and association on the whole, and:
    - i. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local, regional, or national history; or
    - ii. Is associated with the lives of persons significant in local, regional, national history; or
    - iii. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; represents the work of a master; possess high artistic values (i.e., the architecture alone is significant in its own right); or
    - iv. Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important to Durham's history or prehistory.
3. The governing body must deem and find that the property possesses distinction within the context or period of significance.

#### **F. Property Significance**

The Imperial Tobacco Building is one of the most visually compelling converted industrial buildings in Durham; it is furthermore the city's only building directly associated with the Imperial Tobacco Company, a significant protagonist in Durham's tobacco history. The Imperial Tobacco Company headquarters in Richmond, the only structure more ornately constructed than the subject site, has been demolished.



Image 6: Imperial Tobacco Building (company headquarters), Richmond, Virginia, 1977. The structure was demolished shortly thereafter.

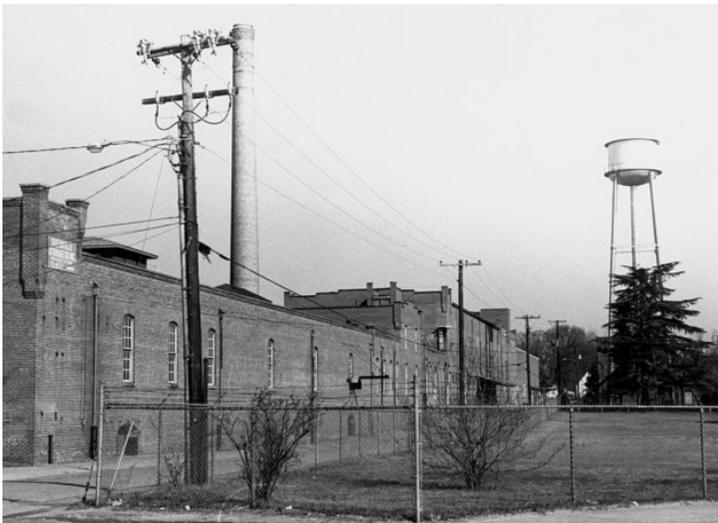


Image 7: Imperial Tobacco Processing Plant in Greenville, North Carolina, ca. 1980. The complex was gutted by a fire in 2008.



Image 8: Imperial Tobacco Company Building in Mullins, South Carolina stands vacant.



Image 9: Imperial Tobacco Factory in Rocky Mount, North Carolina was converted into the Imperial Centre for the Arts & Sciences ca. 2009.

## **VI. Recommendations**

**Staff.** The Imperial Tobacco Building is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broader patterns of Durham’s history. The structure contributes to the Brightleaf National Historic District and serves to remind the public of a formative period in Durham’s past.

The staff has determined that the Imperial Tobacco Building meets the UDO criteria. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the Imperial Tobacco Building exterior (LD1500003) as a Durham Historic Landmark.

**State Historic Preservation Office.** In accordance with the UDO, the Staff provided an opportunity for the NC Department of Cultural Resources (the State Historic Preservation Office) to review and comment on this proposed Historic Landmark Designation. The Department stated that the designation report provides adequate historical and architectural contexts for the property and that the report provides the Durham Historic Preservation Commission and the Durham City

Council with adequate information to determine whether Imperial Tobacco Building has the requisite special significance and integrity for landmark designation.

**Historic Preservation Commission.** The Historic Preservation Commission found that Imperial Tobacco Building meets the three criteria for Historic Landmark designation. On August 4, 2015 the Commission voted 5–0 to recommend that the City Council designate Imperial Tobacco Building (LD1500003) as a Historic Landmark.

#### **H. Alternatives**

As per UDO Section 3.16.4.D.2, the City Council may adopt the ordinance of designation as proposed, adopt the ordinance of designation with any amendments it deems necessary, or reject the proposal.

#### **I. Staff Contact**

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#### **J. Attachments**

1. Application Materials
2. Context Map
3. North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office Comments
4. Ordinance of Designation

## List of Images

### Image 1:

DMTW, Architects and Planners. Durham County Library Historic Photographic Archives. "Imperial Tobacco Warehouse, ca. 1920."  
<[http://durhamcountylibrary.org/exhibits/dhpa/photo\\_archives/e/e146.php](http://durhamcountylibrary.org/exhibits/dhpa/photo_archives/e/e146.php)>

### Image 2–3:

Open Durham. "The Imperial Tobacco Company."  
<<http://www.opendurham.org/buildings/imperial-tobacco-company>>

### Image 4–5:

Submitted by the applicant.

### Image 6:

Vintage Richmond. "Imperial Tobacco Building – 1977." <[http://www.up-front.org/vintage\\_richmond/Imperial\\_Tobacco\\_Building-1-1977.jpg](http://www.up-front.org/vintage_richmond/Imperial_Tobacco_Building-1-1977.jpg)>

### Image 7:

East Carolina University Digital Collections. File 605.1.a  
<<https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/4177>>

### Image 8:

Wikimedia Commons. "Imperial Tobacco Company Building." *Wikimedia.org*.  
<[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Imperial\\_Tobacco\\_Company\\_Building.JPG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Imperial_Tobacco_Company_Building.JPG)>

### Image 9:

2rw Consultants, Inc. "Our Work: Imperial Centre for the Arts & Sciences."  
< <http://www.2rw.com/projects/view/4d1a0a29-62dc-4140-af36-6fa8d8163038>>

## Bibliography

1. Brown, Claudia R. (1999). "Bright Leaf Historic District." An application for national historic district status submitted to the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, NC.
2. Kueber, Gary L. (2007). "The Imperial Tobacco Company." *OpenDurham.org*. Retrieved from: <http://www.opendurham.org/buildings/imperial-tobacco-company>
3. Measurement Incorporated. (2005). "History in Our Midst." *MeasurementInc.com*. Retrieved from: <http://staging.measurementinc.com/sites/default/files/HistoryInOurMidst.pdf>
4. Preservation Durham. (2014, June 22). "Preservation Durham Home Tour." *Durham Herald-Sun*.
5. Roberts, Claudia, Diane Lea, and Robert Leary. (1982). *The Durham architecture and historic inventory*. Durham, NC: The City of Durham.