Durham is a result of the needs of the 19th century railroad industry. The wood-burning steam locomotives of the time had to stop frequently for wood and water and the new North Carolina Railroad needed a depot between the settled towns of Raleigh and Hillsborough. The residents of what is now downtown Durham thought their businesses catering to livestock drivers had a better future than a new-fangled nonsense like a railroad and refused to sell or lease land for a depot. Eventually a railway depot was established on land donated by Bartlett S. Durham in 1849. As Durham Station’s population rapidly increased, the station became a town and was incorporated by act of the North Carolina General Assembly, on April 10, 1869. It was named for the man who provided the land on which the station was built, Dr. Bartlet Durham. Durham is a city in the U.S. state of North Carolina. It is the county seat of Durham County, though portions also extend into Wake County in the east and Orange County in the west. It is the fourth-largest city in the state, and the 85th-largest in the United States by population, with 287,252 residents as of the 2011 United States census. It is the home of Duke University and North Carolina Central University, and is also one of the vertices of the Research Triangle area (home of the Research Triangle Park).

Durham is the core of the four-county Durham-Chapel Hill Metropolitan Area, which has a population of 534,578 as of U.S. Census 2013 Population Estimates. The US Office of Management and Budget also includes Durham as a part of the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill Combined Statistical Area, which has a population of 2,037,430 as of U.S. Census 2013 Population Estimates.