

REED BUILDING HISTORY

Originally built in 1902, Reed was intended to be a tobacco storage warehouse consisting of three “bays”, each with its own loading dock. By the mid 1930s, it had been repurposed as a rehandling and redrying facility. When tobacco was purchased at auction, the moisture level varied. In order to provide a consistent product, one of the first steps in processing tobacco was called redrying. The tobacco would be dried down to almost 0% moisture, then rehydrated to a uniform moisture. By 1937, the third floor of Reed was home to four massive dryers.

The first floor was used as a cooper shop where wooden “hogshead” barrels were constructed and maintained for storing tobacco. The typical hogshead had a volume of approximately 145 gallons and, when fully packed with tobacco, weighed about 1,000 pounds. Loaded hogsheads could be moved throughout the factory by rolling them on their side.

By the 1950s, a majority of the rehandling operations moved next door to the larger Strickland redrying plant, and Reed served as a stemmery, responsible for separating the stiff stems from the delicate tobacco leaves. The stems would then be ground up and further processed for use in a variety of tobacco products. This process of stemming tobacco and processing the stems led to extremely dusty air, and stemmeries were notorious for their noxious air and their adverse health effects.

By 1957, smoking tobacco production was moved to Richmond, VA, and the Durham campus was responsible for only cigarette production. By the time of American Tobacco’s departure from the Durham location, Reed’s third floor was one of the last stops for cigarette packages, where they received their cellophane wrapper. Reed is now home to McKinney’s lobby, the majority of creative offices, the studio, as well as meeting rooms, a café, mail room and IT department.

