

Dixie Dynamo ^[1]

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Dixie Dynamo

by Michael Hill, 2006

Dixie Dynamo, the nickname given North Carolina in a 1962 article in *National Geographic* ^[2] magazine, was widely adopted by the state's political leaders, businesspeople, and journalists as a way of advertising the state's newly prospering economic environment. The article by that title, touting an image of the state based largely on industrial gains over the preceding decade, was a public relations dream come true. Not since 1949 when political scientist V. O. Key termed North Carolina's political culture "progressive" had the state received such widely distributed favorable comment. Malcolm Ross, the author of the 44-page illustrated feature, was a newspaperman and New Jersey native but frequent visitor to North Carolina. "There is something inspiring about the State at this point in the twentieth century," he wrote, "something exciting, dynamic and somehow youthful."

Ross visited with leaders such as [Research Triangle Park](#) ^[3] executive George Herbert, [North Carolina State University](#) ^[4] dean [Henry Kamphoefner](#) ^[5], [journalist Jonathan Daniels](#) ^[6], and [University of North Carolina](#) ^[7] president [William C. Friday](#) ^[8]. He found particular promise in the Research Triangle, which he believed typified the "forward-looking, eagerly progressive state." Beyond its recent economic gains, Ross was entranced by the "varied resources and geography" of the state. His travels took him from the coast to the mountains, to practically every major tourist destination, and he "loved every minute of it."

Most of the industrial advances cited by Ross had come about under Governor [Luther Hodges](#) ^[9], whose term of office extended from 1954 to 1961. During Hodges's administration, investments by business in the state increased by \$256 million. Also in those years more than 1,000 new industries located in North Carolina, and an additional 1,400 enlarged their facilities in the state. Not since the 1840s had North Carolina experienced such an era of expansion.

North Carolinians, who had long sought to establish an identity separate from other southern states that were struggling with economic hardship and racial discord, welcomed the publicity. Governor [Terry Sanford](#) ^[10], in a February 1963 speech to the Sales Executives Club of New York, contrasted North Carolina's "Dixie Dynamo" image with its onetime reputation as the "[Rip Van Winkle State](#)" ^[11]. Journalists and cultural leaders adopted the moniker. The [North Carolina Museum of History](#) ^[12] for years thereafter captioned the exhibit covering the modern period of the state's history with the phrase.

References:

Memory F. Mitchell, ed., *Messages, Addresses, and Public Papers of Terry Sanford, Governor of North Carolina, 1961-1965* (1966).

Malcolm Ross, "North Carolina: Dixie Dynamo," *National Geographic* (February 1962).

Additional Resources:

"NC's business reputation becomes issue in governor's race," *Raleigh News & Observer*: <http://www.newsobserver.com/2012/07/22/2212655/is-north-carolina-still-a-dixie.html> ^[13]

National Geographic Issue: <http://nationalgeographicbackissues.com/national-geographic-1960-1969-back-issues/national-geographic-february-1962.html#.UE5EL1H4JCI> ^[14]

Subjects:

[Post War 20th Century \(1946-2000\)](#) ^[15]

[Culture](#) ^[16]

[UNC Press](#) ^[17]

[Science, technology, and innovations](#) ^[18]

Authors:

[Hill, Michael](#) ^[19]

Origin - location:

[Durham County](#) ^[20]

[Orange County](#) ^[21]

[Wake County](#) ^[22]

From:

Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.^[23]

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