

II. HISTORY OF CARY'S GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT



Royal Governor William Tryon (Courtesy of North Carolina History Project).



Wake County was named for Tryon's wife, Margaret Wake Tryon (Courtesy of North Carolina History Project).

Cary is located in north central North Carolina, just southwest of the state capital at Raleigh. Today, Cary is situated in the middle of the state's 'Research Triangle' and is widely considered a good place to raise a family with its excellent schools and easy access to Raleigh, Chapel Hill and Durham. While the town has grown enormously since the end of World War II and the creation of the Research Triangle Park in 1959, the location, ease of transportation and education system have been Cary's defining characteristics throughout its history.

Settlement and the Early Years

In 1749, Francis Jones received a 640-acre land grant along Crabtree Creek in what is now Cary. Though the area was largely unsettled at the time of the grant, it had the advantage of being well-situated on the main road between New Bern and Hillsborough, two of North Carolina's largest colonial towns, so settlers began arriving soon thereafter. In 1771, this area became part of the new Wake County, named for Royal Governor William Tryon's wife, Margaret Wake Tryon. The area was primarily populated by small subsistence farmers at this time. The first business in Cary was Bradford's Ordinary, an inn operated by the 'colorful' John Bradford and established sometime between 1760 and 1794.⁶ Thus early references to Cary sometimes call the settlement 'Bradford's Ordinary.'

After the Revolutionary War, the settlers here found themselves on the road between the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the new state capital at Raleigh. While the typical settler in the area owned a small farm, several large landowners emerged who commonly held slaves. One such example was Wesley Jones (no relation to Francis, though his sister married Francis's grandson), who in 1850 owned 1,720 acres of land and 37 slaves.⁷ The first public school in the area was begun in the 1840s. It held a two and a half month school-year and served forty-some children.⁸

In 1854, the area's fairly flat and dry topography made it

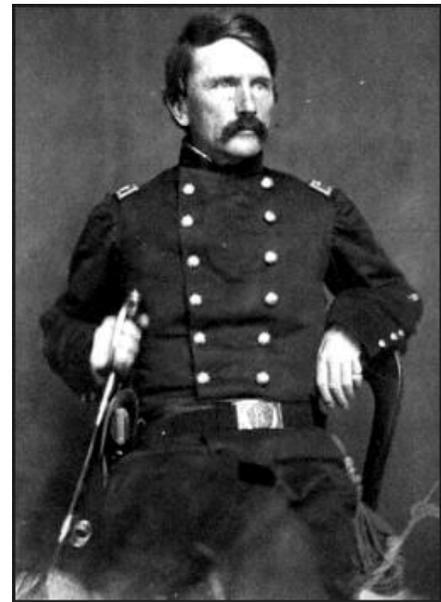
the chosen route for the North Carolina Railroad which linked Goldsboro and Charlotte. There was no station in Cary - - one was built in nearby Morrisville - - but the train would stop for passengers if signaled. Soon after the railroad tracks were laid here (largely by slave-labor), Frank and Kate Page purchased 300 acres on both sides of the track. Allison Francis (Frank) Page was the founder and father of Cary. He was staunchly Methodist and disapproved of cursing, dancing, card-playing and most of all, drinking. Page was the town's first postmaster, railroad agent and mayor. He owned a dry goods store beginning in the 1850s and built a saw mill in the 1860s. It was Frank Page who first began to refer to the area as 'Cary,' after a national prohibition leader he admired, Samuel F. Cary. Cary visited the area two or three times in the 1850s and was well-respected by the locals. The town began to grow during this time: the first post office was established in 1856 and a Masonic Lodge was formed in 1857.⁹



Samuel F. Cary was a leader in the temperance movement and served in the US Congress from Ohio. Cary was named in his honor by Frank Page.

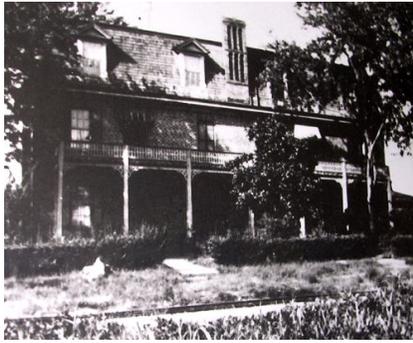
In its last month, the Civil War came to Cary. On April 16, 1865, the same day that word of Lee's surrender at Appomattox reached North Carolina, General Wade Hampton's Confederate forces passed through Cary. That night about 5,000 Confederate troops camped in and around Cary as Raleigh surrendered to Sherman's army, which was following close behind the Confederates. The next day, Union troops send a report to Sherman from Cary. On April 15th, Major General Francis Blair led the XVII Corps into Cary and set up headquarters at the Nancy Jones House. Blair, having some affection for the area because he spent a year studying at the University of North Carolina in the 1830s, tried to protect the citizenry from looting. Prior to entering Cary, Blair ordered that:

*Foraging will be done by detachments in charge of good officers... No mills, cotton-gin presses, or produce will be destroyed without the orders from these or superior headquarters. The people must be treated kindly and respected. Care must be taken in foraging to leave some provisions for the families, and especial care must be taken with the poor people, not to deprive them of the means of subsistence.*¹⁰



Major General Francis Blair and his Union troops occupied Cary during the last days of the Civil War (courtesy of the National Archives).

While Cary did sustain some damage, particularly the loss of silver, crops and foodstuffs, the town was treated far better by Union troops than much of Georgia and South Caro-



This historic photo (ca. 1914) of the Page-Walker Hotel depicts its original design and two-story porch on the main façade. (Photo courtesy of Friends of Page-Walker Hotel)



The Maynard-Stone House (ca. 1860) was recently relocated to allow for development at its original site. (Photo courtesy of Friends of Page-Walker Hotel's "What Have We Got To Lose?" presentation.)

lina. The day after Blair's troops entered Cary, emancipated local slaves left for Raleigh. Some enlisted with the Union Army and formed the 135th U.S. Colored Troops. The Union Army remained in Cary off and on until April 27th when an acceptable surrender agreement was signed by Confederate General Johnston.¹¹

A Railroad Runs Through It

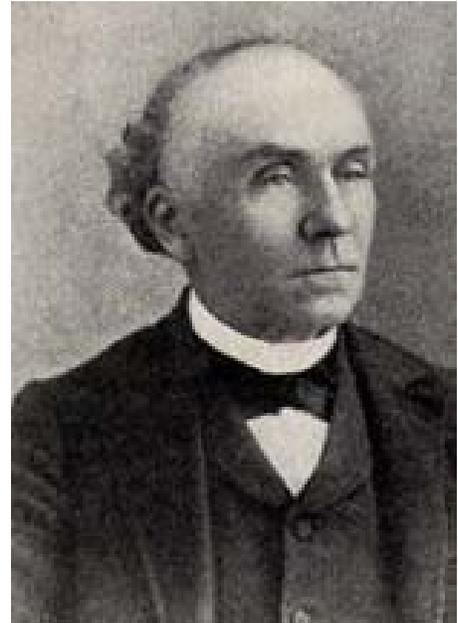
In 1868, a second railroad, the Chatham, met the North Carolina Railroad at a junction in Cary. The new railroad ran from Raleigh to the coal fields of Chatham County. Regular railroad passenger service began in Cary in late 1867, and by 1871, the year the town was incorporated, the Chatham Railroad owned a warehouse with a passenger waiting room.¹² Frank Page built a hotel in the Second Empire style around 1869 to serve railroad passengers.¹³

The Town of Cary was incorporated on April 3, 1871. The boundaries were set at one square mile, as measured from the Chatham Railroad warehouse. Immediately following the description of the boundaries, the Act of Incorporation establishes Cary, as a 'dry' town. The Act forbids anyone to "erect, keep, maintain or have at Carey (sic) or within two miles thereof any tippling house, establishment or place for the sale of wines, cordials, spirituous or malt liquors."¹⁹

After the end of the Civil War and the completion of the railroad junction, Cary experienced its first boom during the 1870s. In 1870, Frank Page, Adolphus Jones and Rufus Jones erected a new private school for their children called Cary Academy. The public school system had collapsed during the Civil War and a new free school was not erected in the area until 1892. Thus, when Cary Academy was constructed, it was the only educational option in Cary. It was originally a two-story wooden boarding school which enjoyed an excellent reputation from the beginning. Academic standards were high and the teachers were well-respected.

Also during the 1870s, Frank Page built a tobacco warehouse (which may have never actually operated), the Methodists built the first church in town at 117 South Academy Street and soon thereafter, the Baptists built their church at 218 South Academy Street. Three general stores were also opened.

Initial growth in Cary was short-lived, partially due to the Panic of 1873; most businesses moved away or closed within a decade. Frank Page relocated his lumber business to Moore County, to land that is now Pinehurst.²⁰ The rest of the Page family left Cary in 1881 and slowly sold off their land in Cary. By 1886, Frank Page had sold his entire interest in Cary Academy to the Jones family. With most industry leaving, the Academy became the primary business in the town. The Jones family sold Cary Academy to a group of local citizens interested in education, and in 1896 the school had a new charter and a new name: Cary High School. Still a private boarding school, it continued its reputation for excellence begun when it was Cary Academy, and drew boarding students from across the state and from some nearby states as well. By the turn of the century, Cary High School contained a primary school as well, and was offering two five-month terms per year. The student body, at 248 students, was almost half the size of the University of North Carolina.²¹



Rev. Solomon S. Pool was an early teacher at Cary Academy and later served as President of the University of North Carolina. (courtesy University of North Carolina).

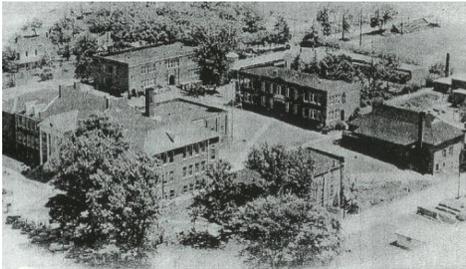
Of course, not all residents could afford to attend Cary Academy or were welcome there. By 1877 there were four free schools in the township: two for whites and two for African Americans. In 1895, the children at the white school in District 2 were sent to Cary Academy, by special arrangement. The white school building in District 2 was then given to African Americans.

Yet even with the free schools and the African American schools available, only a small percentage of school-aged children initially attended classes. This low attendance rate was partially due to the fact that children were needed to help work the family farms. In fact, the free schools only operated during the farming off-season, thus a school ‘year’ lasted about four months. By 1900, only about fifty percent of eligible children attended school at all.

During this time, religious life was very important to both the African American and white communities. Up until the late 1800s, African Americans and whites worshipped together in Cary, sitting in separate areas of the church sanctuary, but as the 20th century approached, African Americans began acquiring their own churches. The first of these appears to be the Cary Colored Christian Church, which first held services in 1869.¹⁴ In the 1890s, the Union Bethel

African Methodist Episcopal Church was formed and the Cary Colored Christian Church was given a new lot of land by Frank Page.¹⁵ There was soon a Baptist Church as well. Sunday church services rotated between the African American denominations. Church-goers would attend Sunday school each week at their own church and then travel to whichever church building was holding services that day.¹⁶

In addition to building churches in the late 1800s, African Americans began to purchase large tracts of land, primarily in northern Cary.¹⁷ Farming was the chief source of income for African Americans in Cary from the 1860s to the 1940s.¹⁸ Fathers and children commonly worked the family farm, while mothers kept the house and prepared the meals. These small farms provided the bulk of the family's food and often produced excess crops or livestock that could be sold.



This photo depicts the campus of the former Cary High School in 1957-58. (Photo courtesy of Friends of Page-Walker Hotel's "What Have We Got To Lose?" presentation.)

A New Century Begins: Progress and Pain

In 1907, the Wake County Board of Education purchased Cary High School from the stockholders for \$2,750. Half of the purchase amount was provided by the state of North Carolina as a part of its new commitment to public education. Cary High became, if not the first, one of the first public high schools in North Carolina, and became the model throughout North Carolina for other schools being established with state funding. The school had a Department of Teacher Training which allowed graduates to begin teaching careers right out of school. In 1913 new vocational programs including home economics and agriculture were begun. For nearly a decade the school operated a 15-acre farm in town through the agriculture program. The town was proud of the school and its growing reputation, as was evidenced in 1907 when it voted overwhelmingly to establish a special school tax for the construction of a new brick building. This new school building was completed in 1913.²⁶

In the early 20th century Cary offered services and retail for local residents and the school community. In 1909 the Bank of Cary was chartered; other businesses included small grocery stores, a drug store and Frank Page's old hotel, now known as the Page-Walker Arts and History Center. For items that could not be purchased in Cary, there was daily passenger service to Raleigh on both railroads.

Local telephone service was established in 1915, further connecting residents to the outside world. Religious life continued to be very important in Cary, and the churches were strict. In 1914 alone, Cary Baptist Church expelled 24 members for such infractions as drinking, dancing and not attending meetings.²⁷ A fire in 1908 destroyed the largest commercial building in town (Frank Page's former tobacco factory building), which housed the Episcopal chapel, mayor's office, the post office, a grist mill, a cotton gin and two lodge halls.²⁸

With the completion of the paved Western Wake Highway (the current Western Boulevard) in the early 1920s, transportation to and from Raleigh became even easier. Most Cary residents began working in Raleigh, and some people employed in Raleigh opted to live in Cary. The state paved the roads to Durham and Apex in 1921, further easing regional mobility. The residential development that continues to define Cary today began during the 1920s, a decade during which the town grew 64 percent. The first real subdivisions were constructed as large landowners began to sell off home sites. The Adams family, who began selling lots to African Americans two decades earlier, continued to subdivide their land along the new Durham Highway to the north. Other 1920s subdivisions include one along East Chatham Street from Hunter family holdings, and a third along Dixon Street. To keep up with the growing population, local services were improved. A volunteer fire company was created in 1922 and two years later municipal water and sewer systems were approved by voters. Deep wells were initially used as Cary's water source. With increasing numbers of citizens commuting to work and with growing residential neighborhoods, Cary was becoming a bedroom community for Raleigh.²⁹

As residents began looking to Raleigh for retail needs, local businesses started catering to passing highway traffic. Western Wake Highway turned into East Chatham Street as it entered Cary, and most businesses migrated there. Gas stations, garages and restaurants all thrived along the highway. Other businesses which did well in Cary were those servicing the farming community. By 1930, Cary had a gristmill, fertilizer dealership, building supply firm, and a cotton gin. Changes were also occurring in agriculture: during the 1920s, the boll weevil destroyed cotton farming in the area, and tobacco became the primary cash crop.³⁰



Subdivisions in the early 20th century led to construction of Bungalow style dwellings at 302 Wood Street (above) and 305 S. Walker Street (below).





*Wake County farmer plowing fields in the 1930s.
(Photo courtesy of North Carolina State Archives.)*



Built in 1931, the Ashworth Drugs building in downtown Cary was originally built as a Masonic Lodge.

Like elsewhere in the United States, the Depression hit Cary hard. The Bank of Cary failed on June 10, 1931. By October 1932, the town was bankrupt due to poor management and bookkeeping. Cary went through four mayors in two years during the mid-1930s, and in 1937 the mayor, the town clerk, and the police chief all resigned.

Cary High School was impacted as well. The need to board students had dwindled with the growing progress of the public school system and the introduction of school buses. Thus, Cary High ceased to board students in 1933, but did not suffer greatly because large numbers of students were bussed in from outlying areas.³¹

Despite these troubles, the 1930s did see some economic growth in Cary. The Cary Masons managed to construct a new lodge hall, which was the largest building in town upon its completion in 1931 (now occupied by Ashworth Drugs). Two years later, Durham Life Insurance Company purchased 138 acres on East Chatham Street and erected a radio transmission tower, developing the remainder of the land as the Urban Terrace subdivision. Under the New Deal, the federal government invested in the area during the mid-1930s as well. The Resettlement Administration began purchasing worn-out farmland along Crabtree Creek to develop into a park. The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration constructed camps and picnicking areas. The park opened in 1937 and was deeded to the state for one dollar in 1943. The park was later named William B. Umstead State Park after a conservationist governor.³² The late 1930s also saw the development of two research farms near Cary, one run by North Carolina State University and the other by the State Board of Health.³³

Construction of Raleigh-Durham International Airport was begun in 1941, the day before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. It was built by the United States Army as part of the war effort on a site just a few miles northwest of Cary. By 1946, the facility was completely converted to civilian use.³⁴ During the early 1940s, the young men were nearly all away at war, leaving young boys and older men to tend their business. One such boy, Robert Heater, remembers being “trained with the fire department when I was twelve years old. I answered my first fire call when I was fifteen.”³⁵

Boom Times

After World War II, Cary began to develop industry of its own, no longer relying on Raleigh for most of its employment opportunities. In 1947, the Taylor Biscuit Company (now Austin Foods) located a bakery in Cary and became the largest employer in town with as many as 150 people staffing the production lines and an additional 50 salesmen. A Planning and Zoning Board was established in 1949 and quickly passed a land use plan to assist in addressing growth. And growth came rapidly. That same year, Cary began annexing land, starting with the subdivisions Urban Terrace and Forest Park. During the late 1940s and early 50s, the streets in town were all paved.³⁶

The post-World War II growth in Cary began with the initial development of the residential suburbs around downtown. In 1945, Russell Heater (father of the 12-year old firefighter) began developing the aptly named Veteran Hills subdivision with home sites intended for returning soldiers. After purchasing the land, Heater immediately sold the timber off the site and made back almost half of his money. Then he paved the streets and put in water lines.³⁷ In the 1950s, Heater developed Russell Hills (which was soon annexed into the town), Jeff Sugg built a Russell Hills Extension and developer George Jordan developed the Montclair subdivision. Due to this growth and increasing annexation, Cary's population doubled during the 1950s from 1,496 to 3,356 in 1960.³⁸

The population of Cary doubled again in the 1960s, aided by the construction of the Research Triangle Park and the arrival of such companies as IBM and Chemstrand Corporation. In an effort to stay ahead of the development, Cary adopted its first subdivision regulations in 1961, and in 1963 updated the zoning ordinance and land use plan. George Jordan developed Meadowmont and Tanglewood during this time and began Northwoods as well. Meanwhile, J. Gregory Poole, Sr. began buying land south of Cary around 1962 where he eventually sold lots and constructed a lake, golf course and club house to create the upscale 700-acre MacGregor Downs. Poole requested inclusion in the town water and sewer systems and consented to annexation as a part of the agreement. Also annexed were the developments that sprang up along the two Cary exits from the new US 1-US 64 bypass, which opened in 1962.³⁹



The WPTF radio station building on E. Chatham Street dates to the 1940s.

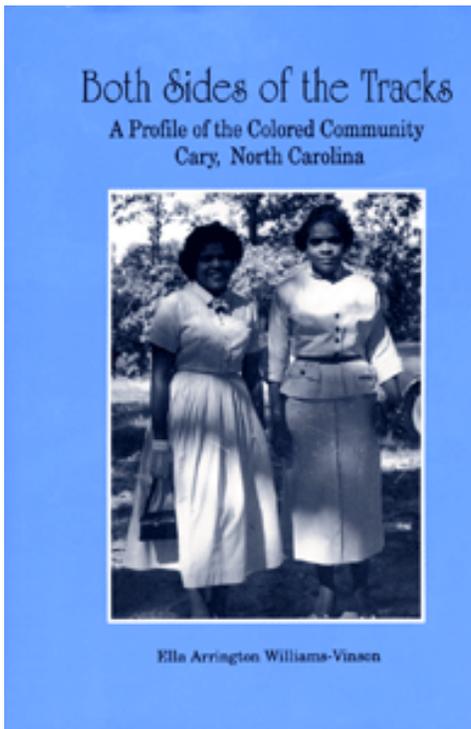


Cary's residential areas expanded in the 1950s through developments such as the Russell Hills Extension which included properties along Ann Street.



In the 1960s, the development of MacGregor Downs added a golf course to the amenities of the town.

The business community and town services also expanded during the 1950s and 1960s to accommodate the rapidly increasing population. The first supermarket, a Piggly Wiggly, opened in 1950, along with Cooper Furniture Company. In 1952, the Bank of Fuquay opened, becoming Cary's first financial institution since the Bank of Cary failed during the Depression. Cary Oil Company was also established in the 1950s. In 1956, a second pharmacy opened and the town hired its first firefighter. The town-funded Cary Fire Department was established in 1961. The Junior Women's Club organized the Cary Public Library in 1960 and the town took over full funding a few years later. In 1963, the first issue of the weekly *The Cary News* came out. The following year, the sale of alcohol was legalized in Cary (in fact, the State Attorney General issued a statement saying that the town's dry charter had been invalid since Wake County voted for the sale of alcohol in 1937). The town also tied onto Raleigh's water and sewer system during the 1960s, greatly improving water quality in Cary households.⁴⁰



Cary's African American history and the struggles of integration are profiled in the book "Both Sides of the Tracks," by Ella Williams-Vinson.

The population boom also meant many more children in the public school system. In 1945, there were two schools in Cary: Cary High School, serving grades 1-12 for the white students and Cary Colored School, serving grades 1-8 for the African American children (African American high school students were bussed to Berry O'Kelly High in Method, NC). In 1954, a new brick school was constructed across the street from the wooden 1937 Cary Colored School; both buildings were used until 1960, when an addition to the new school was constructed and the 1937 school ceased to be used.⁴¹ In the 1960s, five new schools opened as the Wake County Board of Education struggled to keep up with the growing student body population. The new schools included West Cary High, the first local high school for African Americans, which opened in 1965.

As the Board of Education dealt with overcrowding problems due to the rapidly increasing population, it was also facing the 1954 Supreme Court *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling, which deemed segregated schools unconstitutional. The 1960s saw the beginning of the end for institutionalized segregation in Cary. The initial step was the "freedom of choice" policy, adopted in the early 1960s, which stated that students could attend any school in the district where there was space. In 1963, the parents of 20

African American students requested that their children be sent to all-white schools. That fall, integration began slowly with six African American female students attending Cary Senior High. The ultimate goal was for the schools to reflect Wake County's racial mix: approximately 26 percent African American at the time. It took another decade of bussing and the opening of several new schools to achieve this goal in the late 1970s.⁴² Umstead Park, which had been divided into two separate segregated parks in 1950, was integrated in 1967.⁴³ The following year an interracial, interdenominational organization was formed called the Cary Christian Community in Action.⁴⁴ Segregation was ending throughout Cary in this time period, although some attitudes were difficult to change.

The Biggest Little Town

Cary's population boom accelerated in the 1970s, with the population doubling from 7,640 in 1970 to over 15,000 in 1975. Led by Mayor Fred Bond, the town of Cary worked hard to manage the growth and to promote quality development that protected the attractive small-town character of Cary. The first Planned Unit Development (PUD), Kildaire Farms, was begun in the 1970s. Kildaire Farms was grand in scope and, as planned, would feature a variety of homes, offices, retail, schools, open space, lakes, and greenways. Cary had never seen anything like it, and the town officials took some convincing. Developer Tom Adams arranged for them to visit the famous PUDs at Reston, Virginia and Columbia, Maryland. After this trip, the Town Council adopted a new PUD ordinance in 1973. Kildaire Farms opened the following year. The PUD concept caught on and Kildaire Farms became the model for future development. Between 1980 and 1992, 22 PUDs were approved in Cary, creating small villages within the town.⁴⁵ A Community Appearance Commission (CAC) was formed in 1972. Chaired by future mayor Harold Ritter, the CAC focused on creating a 'village atmosphere' downtown, with a particular emphasis on improving Chatham Street. The CAC worked for the adoption of a sign ordinance, which was passed in 1974 and which had an immediate impact on the appearance of downtown. Then in 1977, voters approved \$500,000 in bonds for downtown improvement.⁴⁶

In addition to controlling development, the town was eager to preserve green space and recreational areas. With this in mind, the Land Dedication Ordinance of 1974 required de-



Aerial shot of Kildaire Farm before development. (Photo courtesy of the Friends of Page-Walker's "What Have We Got to Lose?" presentation.)



Historic Kildaire Farm barn. (Photo courtesy of the Friends of Page-Walker's "What Have We Got to Lose?" presentation.)



The Hemlock Bluffs Nature Preserve was purchased in 1976 and features a rare stand of Eastern Hemlock trees.

velopers to donate one acre of land to the town for every 35 housing units constructed – or pay a fee. With the explosive rate of growth, nearly 460 acres had been donated by 1994. Beginning in the 1970s, more greenways -- modeled after the 10 miles of greenway at Kildaire Farms -- were constructed using both private and public funding. The State of North Carolina purchased 85 acres of land along Swift Creek in southern Cary in 1976 because it contained a system of north-facing bluffs that supports a community of Canadian hemlocks and other vegetation unusual to this area. The State classified the hemlock bluffs as a state nature and historic preserve. In 1983, the Town obtained a long-term lease on the state-owned tract for the purpose of developing and managing it as the Hemlock Bluffs Nature Preserve. (Through subsequent land donations and land dedications required of adjacent subdivision developers, the Preserve currently comprises 150 acres.) A master plan for the town park system was adopted in 1978.⁴⁷



The SAS complex boasts a 900-acre campus in the north section of Cary.

By the mid-1970s, the population of Cary was outgrowing its daily allotment of water from Raleigh. In 1974, town officials requested that Raleigh double the water supply to 2 million gallons a day. Raleigh initially refused. Although the request was later granted, the incident, paired with a 50 percent price increase in 1981, prompted Cary voters to approve construction of their own water and sewer treatment facilities. By this time the population of Cary was close to 22,000. The sewage treatment plant, North Cary Wastewater Treatment Plant was opened in 1984, followed four years later by the South Cary Wastewater Treatment Plant, which ended Cary's reliance on Raleigh for sewage treatment. Cary continued to get its water from Raleigh and was drawing about 6 million gallons a day in 1992. The following year, the Cary/Apex Water Treatment Facility finally opened.⁴⁸

Growth continued to be strong through the 1980s with the population again doubling from 21,763 in 1980 to 43,858 in 1990. Because most new industries were locating outside of the town limits, while new homes were locating within, Cary was not benefiting from the industrial tax base. In fact, during the 1970s, homeowners were paying more than 90 percent of Cary's property taxes. Town planners suggested that a 60:40 residential to non-residential split would be healthiest and this became the goal. The Chamber of

Commerce assisted the town in recruiting industry and during this decade, over 40 companies located in Cary.⁴⁹ MacGregor Park became Cary's first industrial park during the 1980s. SAS Business Intelligence Software located in Cary in 1980 and brought 20 employees from Raleigh. By 2005, SAS had a 900-acre campus with 24 buildings and 10,000 employees worldwide.⁵⁰

While growth began in the industrial sector, it remained strong in residential areas and accelerated in the commercial arena as well: 17 new shopping centers were constructed in Cary during the 1980s.⁵¹ Cary doubled in land area between 1984 and 1988 by annexing 8,791 acres of land. The Town remained very concerned with aesthetics and very active in controlling growth. A Tree Advisory Board was established to protect the urban forest. The town continued to be a pioneer in education, with Kingswood Elementary becoming North Carolina's first year-round school in 1989.⁵²

Although the pace of growth slowed somewhat after 1980, the population more than tripled between 1990 and 2009, when the Town's Planning Department estimated it at approximately 135,700 people.⁵⁴ The racial makeup of the community diversified with the influx of new residents. By 2007, Cary was approximately 80 percent white, seven and one-half percent Asian, six percent African American and four percent Hispanic. The current population is young, with a median age of 33, and well-educated, with 60 percent of the population holding a college degree and 23 percent a graduate or professional degree. Residents are fairly affluent, with a median household income of \$89,700, which is more than double the median income of the state of North Carolina. Cary is now 42 square miles, whereas less than 100 years ago it was one square-mile.⁵⁵

Westward Ho!

The 21st century has seen the Town's expansion to the west. Cary's boundaries are slowly encompassing two small rural communities that have noteworthy histories of their own: the crossroads communities of Carpenter and Green Level.



The Barbee-Williams farmhouse (ca. 1900), formerly located on Morrisville-Carpenter Road, was lost to development ca. 2000. (Photo courtesy of Friends of Page Walker's "What Have We Got To Lose?" presentation.)



Schoolhouse in Carpenter (Photo courtesy of "Carpenter, N.C., As I Remember," by Bryan Edwards.)



Charlie Ferrell built his first store in 1906 and was in business there until 1928 when he moved into his second store. (Photo courtesy of “Carpenter, N.C., As I Remember.”)



This structure at 3041 Carpenter-Upchurch Road was built in the late nineteenth century as a boarding house for railroad and other workers.



Ca. 1930 storage building in Carpenter.

Carpenter

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a two-story frame general store was built at the junction of Chapel Hill Road (now known as Morrisville-Carpenter Road) and the road that is the modern-day Carpenter-Upchurch Road. This store was used variously as a farmer’s co-op, Masonic lodge, and meeting place for the Farmers’ Educational and Cooperative Union until after the 1900. Today it is known as the Carpenter Feed Store. In about 1895, William H. Carpenter built the Carpenter Farm Supply Company across the street from the farmer’s co-op. This was the beginning of Carpenter Village.

In the late 1800s, local farmers, capitalizing on their strategic location between Apex and Durham, had begun growing bright leaf tobacco. Apex had a tobacco warehouse, and Durham was home to one of the state’s largest tobacco markets. Entrepreneurs in Durham began to see the potential in having railroad tracks running through western Wake County, and by 1905, the Durham and Southern Railroad had built a railroad track connecting Apex and Durham, with the tracks running through the village on right-of-way donated by William Carpenter and his neighbor William B. Upchurch. The railroad also decided to locate its dispatch operation in the village and built a coal chute and water tower. The railroad placed a sign at the crossing, referring to the area as “Carpenter.” Passenger and freight depots were added around 1910. The coming of the railroad had spurred local farmer Charlie Ferrell to open a small store adjacent to the tracks across the road from the Carpenter Farm Supply Company. In 1906, the United States government opened the Carpenter Post Office in Charlie Ferrell’s new store, and the village officially became known as Carpenter.⁵⁶ During the next 27 years, the Post Office moved back and forth between Charlie Ferrell’s store and William Carpenter’s store several times.

By the turn of the century, the Carpenter area had most of the essentials of a small community. A small public school had been operating since about 1880. Good Hope Church was originally built in 1880 and then dismantled, moved to a more central location and reassembled in 1900. The village had the two-story co-op meeting house and the two general stores. The railroad also constructed five houses for personnel. Charlie Ferrell owned about two thirds of the land surrounding the railroad operation and began to sell

lots and build houses in the early 1900s. Additionally, Ferrell operated several businesses, including a funeral home, general store, sawmill, planer mill, machine shop and millwright shop, two blacksmith shops, and a grist mill. Soon Carpenter was a proper village. There were no distinct boundaries, but about 100 families within a fairly large geographic area considered themselves part of the Carpenter community.⁵⁷

Carpenter thrived briefly from around 1900-1930. Many of the older houses in the area date from this time. In 1926, the Carpenter School was closed. The students were sent to a new consolidated school, called Green Hope which could hold 200 students, grades one through twelve. The students from Carpenter were joined by students from the Green Level and Upchurch communities. Then, during the Depression, Ferrell became ill. He died in 1933 and all of his businesses closed. That same year, the Carpenter post office was closed permanently. Rail service ceased during the Depression and, coupled with the advances of steam engine technology, the Durham and Southern operations in Carpenter became unnecessary. The railroad discontinued service to Carpenter during the 1930s and 1940s, and the depot was demolished soon after.⁵⁸

Although the railroad and many businesses left during the Depression, the Carpenter community continued to endure primarily because of tobacco. Western Wake, southern Durham and eastern Chatham Counties were full of tobacco fields. These tobacco farmers looked to Carpenter for supplies and repair shops. In the 1930s, lumber became important in Carpenter as well. The Chandler Lumber Company opened in 1933 and produced 100,000 board feet per day at its peak. The Russell sawmill company was established in 1935. Both operated until 1960.⁵⁹ The roads in Carpenter were paved in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The majority of Carpenter is now within Cary's town limits. About 250 acres of the Carpenter Community were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2000 as the Carpenter National Register Historic District. The National Register District comprises the commercial crossroads buildings including the general stores and warehouses, nearby residences, Good Hope Church and cemetery, and seven complete farmsteads.



The Carpenter Historic District retains many aspects of its turn-of-the-century agricultural heritage such as the Carpenter Farm Supply Store.



This late nineteenth-century farmhouse is located at 8700 Green Level-Upchurch Road (Photo courtesy of Preservation North Carolina.)



The windows of the historic Green Level Baptist Church are characteristic of the Gothic Revival style.



Green Level is one of the last expansive rural landscapes in the Triangle area. (Photo courtesy of the Town of Cary).

Green Level

Historic Green Level began at the junction of the Holly Springs to Hillsborough Road (now known as Green Level Church Road) and the Durham to Pittsboro Road (now known as Green Level West Road). Legend has it that this crossroads was named Green Level because it was green and level. Green Level was initially settled around 1800 by cotton farmers who constructed a saw mill so that they could cut the lumber from their land and saw it into boards to build their homes. Before long, a commercial hub began developing along the Durham to Pittsboro Road (a well-traveled stage route) where it intersected with the Holly Springs to Hillsborough Road. A tavern was constructed at the crossroads, as well as a post office, a cotton gin and a small general store.⁶⁰ The post office was established in 1847 and operated until it closed in 1888. By the early 1870s, the community was thriving with at least seven stores, two grist- and saw mills, two schools, the tavern and a Masonic lodge.

Around 1870, Green Level residents established a church, originally meeting in the tavern. The following year, the congregants built a two-story church building and changed the name from Providence Baptist to Green Level Baptist Church. The Green Level Masons met on the second floor of the church. Green Level continued to be an important commercial crossroads in the region during the latter part of the nineteenth century.⁶¹

Green Level Baptist Church was at the center of the community's life, and after about thirty years in the circa 1870 building, a larger church was completed in 1906. This second church building features typical gothic vernacular detailing, including pointed arched windows, and is still in use today. In 1920, a three-story addition was constructed for Sunday school classes. The church building is one of the best remaining examples of rural church architecture in Wake County and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001.⁶² In 1920, the church built the two-room Green Level High School next door. The school served grades one through seven. Later, a four-room high school building was constructed beside the first school. In the 1920s, the students at Green Level were sent to the new consolidated Green Hope High School, along with the students from Carpenter.

On through the early 20th century, even as other nearby growing villages and towns began to draw some of the regional business, Green Level continued to serve as an important commercial hub for area farmers, most of whom had begun growing bright leaf tobacco instead of cotton. During the mid- to late-twentieth century, as farming in the area declined, most of Green Level's businesses declined, but a garden supply store is still in business at the crossroads, and the church and the Masonic lodge continue to be religious and social focal points for the community. In 2001, a 75-acre swath, beginning at the intersection of Green Level West Road and Green Level Church Road and moving north on both sides of Green Level Church Road beyond Green Level Baptist Church, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Green Level National Register Historic District.

Conclusion

Because so much of Cary's built environment was constructed in recent decades, it can be easy to overlook Cary's history and the important historic resources that remain from the 19th and 20th centuries. These resources include the historic downtown area and neighborhoods of the railroad community of Cary, the villages of Carpenter and Green Level, the many remaining rural farmsteads and houses scattered throughout the town limits, and the recent past resources such as the neighborhoods and subdivisions of the 1950s and 1960s. All of these play an important role in defining Cary's history and heritage and are the focus of this historic preservation master plan.



**Old Green Level Baptist Church
and Masonic Lodge
1872 - 1982**

*The First Green Level Baptist Church and
Masonic Lodge. (Photo courtesy of the
Friends of Page-Walker's "What Have We
Got to Lose?" presentation.)*