

The Friends of the Page-Walker

Walking Tour

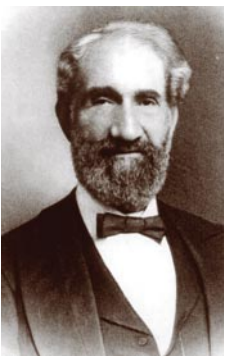
Page-Walker Arts & History Center

CARY, NORTH CAROLINA

Welcome to the Page-Walker Arts & History Center, a treasure serving Cary citizens in three different centuries!

Before you begin the tour, it is important to understand that the Page-Walker Arts & History Center has two wings: the historic Walker Hotel that faces the railroad tracks, and the modern annex attached to the back of the Hotel that provides support facilities. See the map to clarify. The primary visitor entrance to the historic structure is through the annex from the parking area. Take a moment to read the informative panels on the walls in the lobby: Page-Walker Restoration and Page-Walker Hotel, ca. 1868.

A brief history of the building



Frank Page

In 1868, Allison Francis "Frank" Page, founder of Cary and a leader in the N.C. lumber and rail industry, and his wife, Catherine "Kate" Raboteau, built the Hotel in the popular French Second Empire architectural style. Kate's maternal ancestors were innkeepers, and it is likely that she was influential in promoting the Hotel as a stopover for North Carolina and Chatham Railroad passengers and salesmen (called drummers), reflecting the traveling customs in the late 19th

century. It was unusual for a town the size of Cary, population 316 at that time, to have such a grand structure. Frank's sister, Mrs. Araminta J. Clegg, operated the Hotel until 1884.

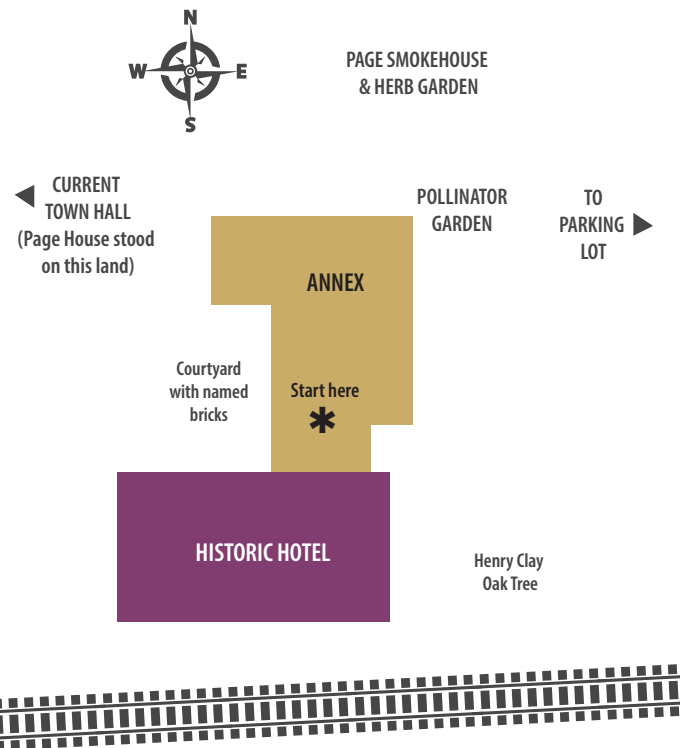


Helen Walker

In that year, Frank sold the Hotel to Jacob R. (Jake) and Helen Walker and moved to Aberdeen, N.C., becoming quite wealthy in the lumber business. The Walkers, and later their grandchildren, provided rooms for railroad passengers, Cary High School students and faculty. The Hotel was sold in 1926 to Rufus Theodore (R.T.) Coburn.

Note: Interior photos in this brochure contrast the pre-renovation period with the present.

In 1941 John Williams purchased the Walker Hotel for his home. He was a railroad employee who passed it frequently and dreamed of owning it. As his residence, he added plumbing, a steam heating system, and a roof balcony supported by columns (bottom photo). Behind the Hotel, he built circus wagons and kept ponies for his popular "dog and pony" shows. In 1971, the Hotel was sold to Bob Strother, who had it listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.



From 1980-85, the empty Hotel was on the market and deteriorated rapidly due to a very leaky roof, pervasive mold, roosting pigeons and vandalism. It was affectionately called the

"Plague-Walker." Cary Historical Society members, known as the "Bucket Brigade," placed pails throughout the building to catch the rainwater, emptying them after every storm. They also sought a solution to save this treasure. In 1985 they worked out an agreement with Mayor Harold Ritter and the Cary Town Council. The Council bought the dilapidated Hotel, worth only \$4000 in 1985, and associated acreage and leased them to the newly incorporated Friends of the Page-Walker Hotel. The Friends added the name "Page"



Walker Hotel, ca. 1918, original façade

to recognize the Town's founder. The Friends raised funds, matched by the Town, and oversaw the renovation using a 1918 photo (top photo). Donors who contributed to the effort are recognized on plaques throughout the building. Due to code requirements for a public building, an annex was designed to attach to the back of the Hotel. The Page-Walker Arts & History Center was fully operational on Dec. 4, 1994 and is now owned and maintained by the Town of Cary. The Friends serve as advisors.



Walker Hotel, ca. 1982. Porch reflects changes made in the 1940s.

➤ All aboard to begin our tour!

Start by standing in the first floor lobby of this 1990s annex. See * on the map. Looking out onto the **Courtyard**, you can see the back of the 1868 railroad Hotel with its handmade bricks that extends to your left at the end of the lobby.

➤ Enter the old Hotel by going through the open doorway. Notice the width of the door surround. These 18" walls were used throughout the Hotel to buffer train noise. In front of you, under the stairwell, is the most important door in the Hotel as it holds the only original doorknob in the building.

➤ Turn left and enter the **Parlor**. This was the bedroom of the Walkers who operated the Hotel from 1884-1915. Helen Bourke, a niece, remembers, "Uncle Jake would sleep with his head near the front window with all of his clothes on except his pants. Travelers arriving at night would knock on the front window and Uncle Jake would get up, put on his pants, and rent them a room."

This space became the kitchen for later owners. The mantel is original and the door, next to the clock, was originally a window. Cary citizens donated the period furniture. The 1827 American Square piano has a connection to the Pages. Read the framed wall label to find it!

➤ As you proceed to the raised step and front door, note the staircase on the right. Guests would follow Jake and his lantern up the stairs to their rooms on the second floor.

➤ Stroll through the **Entrance Hall** to the **Gallery**. The Gallery was originally divided into two rooms – the Walkers' parlor on the west, and a large center dining room. Mrs. Walker had an arrangement for the trains to stop at mealtimes. Helen Bourke remembers her aunt ringing a bell from the porch to announce the meal. Food was prepared in a kitchen that was once attached to the back of the Hotel, near the connection to the annex, and carried to a pass-through window between the hall and the dining room, where the single door is now. Meals were served to about 22 passengers daily on two long tables and everyone ate family style. Teacakes were a specialty, and Mrs. Walker often ate with the guests.



Gallery, ca. 1984

Originally, a second enclosed walled staircase, a twin to the one in the Entrance Hall, led from the Gallery front door to the second and third floors. During the 1980s renovation, the stairs and wall were removed to create this display and performance space. Musicians regularly praise its fine acoustics! As you visit the upper floors, look for the staircase extension from this floor that still exists.

Other things to note about the first floor Gallery space are:

• The Gallery mantel is original, typical of houses built from 1850 – 1875, as are the French paneled doors, 12-inch baseboards, and window surrounds. Paint research indicates that the original baseboards were painted gray.

• The ceiling beams camouflage the structural steel needed to meet modern building codes. The renovation engineer, Dave Fischetti, who also moved the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, designed this feature.

- Because all of the floors were badly water damaged, none of the original 5-inch wide pine flooring remains.

➤ Continue to the second floor by returning to the lobby, and use the elevator or stairs.

You have stepped into the second floor hallway of the annex. Look out the balcony doors at the Cary Town Hall built in 1975. This was the site of the Page House that burned down in 1970 (see map).

Visit the classroom to your right, similar to the one on the third floor, and note the scenic view of the **Page Smokehouse** and **Educational Herb Gardens**, then return to the hall.

➤ Walk past the antique wardrobe, and enter the historic wing. Turn left to the **Music Room**.

The Music Room has a significant connection to the Walkers. When Jake died in 1915, Helen converted the Hotel into a boarding house.

Students and faculty from Cary High School could rent a room for \$8 a term.

Upon the death of Helen in

1922, her four grandchildren inherited the property and continued to make rooms available. Granddaughter La Rue Walker Hunter Isaacs, a 1909 Cary High School grad, taught music lessons in this room. As noted on the wall plaque, Wade Isaacs, great grandson of Mrs. J. R. Walker, was a generous donor to the restoration.

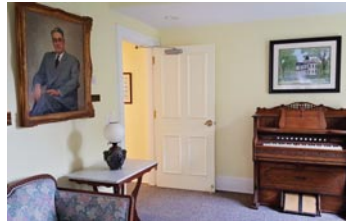
Rachel Dunham remembers living at the Walker Hotel while attending the school. She and her sister, Mossa, cooked their own meals on an oil stove, did light housekeeping and carried water from the well up the stairs daily. She and her sister would “stand on the upstairs porch and watch the trains go by, throwing cinders all over us.”

Frank Page gave the antique walnut chest as a gift to his wife, Kate, but it was not part of the Hotel furniture.

In 1926, R.T. Coburn, a business associate of LaRue’s husband, George Isaacs, bought the Hotel and continued to run it as a boarding house.

➤ Pass through the connecting doorway to the **Educational Center/Gallery**.

Oral histories share that a wall divided the entire second floor in half, north to south, possibly to create one side for men and the other for women. They also suggest that this space had been divided into four boarding rooms.



➤ Exit the Educational Center/Gallery to the **Instructor’s Hallway**.

Take a moment to enjoy the historic photos and art exhibit. Proceed to the **Library** at the west end of the hall. It is dedicated to Cary’s “favorite son,” Walter Hines Page, son of Frank and Catherine Page.

- This was one of the ten rooms for overnight guests. The platform rocker and fireplace chairs, donated by Wade Isaacs, are original to the Hotel. A secretary holds the Walter Hines Page Literary Collection.

- W.H. Page, born next door in the Page House on Aug. 15, 1855, was the U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain during World War I. He is one of only three Americans recognized in Westminster Abbey. A plaque reads, “Walter Hines Page, a friend in our sorest need.” He died on Dec. 21, 1918. Learn more about Page in the third floor Cary Heritage Museum.

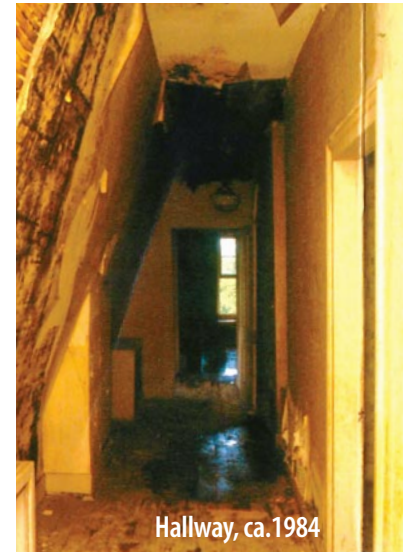
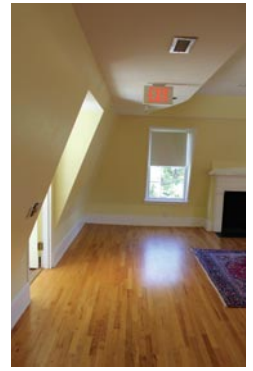
- Enjoy the photos of early Cary. Can you find the photo of the Page home that burned to the ground in 1970?
- Take a moment to listen to Cary citizens who share their remembrances at the oral history station on the east wall.

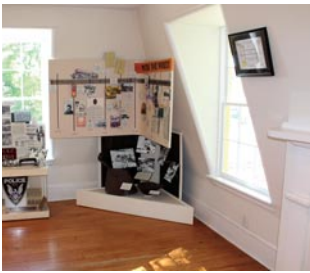
➤ Continue to the third floor by walking down the **Instructor’s Hallway to the annex and take the elevator or stairs**.

- From the elevator turn left to enter the historic wing and **Archive Gallery**.

- Proceed to the **Cary Heritage Museum** at the west end of this floor. You will pass the stairway once used to access the front door in the Gallery.

How this room has changed since 1984, as seen through the photos to the left! The Museum, created and funded by the Friends, features a timeline that traces the beginnings of the area until 2000, the year the Museum was completed. Frank Page named his town “Cary,” after Samuel Fenton Cary, a Union general from Ohio, because Page admired Cary’s stance on temperance. Due to this admiration, the town was “dry” (no alcohol sold) for its first 100 years. Interestingly, Cary might be the only southern town named for a Union general! Page incorporated the Town in 1871.





Note the watercolor above the original mantel that shows Walter Hines Page in his first public appearance in 1913 as Ambassador to England. Also trace the movement of troops through Cary during the Civil War, and view early Cary through the diorama and illustration where you can see the locations of the Walker Hotel and Page Homestead.



Museum, ca. 1984

➤ The final stop of the tour is the **Exterior**. Its architecture is the

primary reason why the Walker Hotel is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

➤ **Retrace your steps to the first floor lobby and exit the double doors, where you entered.**

Turn right and you can see the connection between the annex and the historic Walker Hotel. The east elevation of the Hotel is original, with the exception of the canopied doorway added in the 1940s. On your left is an oak tree grown from an acorn that was harvested from Raleigh's 200 year-old "Henry Clay" Oak (see signage).

➤ **Proceed to the lawn in front of the Hotel.**

The 1868 building was constructed in the French Second Empire style featuring a mansard roof punctuated by dormer windows. Built with handmade red bricks, the Hotel is embellished with tapered columns, Italianate wood detailing, chimneys with recessed panels, and decorative eave brackets, which were hand-painted by the Friends.

The façade was altered in the 1940s but thanks to an early photo, the Friends were able to restore the exterior to its original elevation. The blue ceilings are a common feature of Southern porches evolving from a superstition that they deterred "haints" (spirits) from the house.

We hope you have enjoyed the tour of our treasure, the **Page-Walker Arts & History Center!** Please come again and enjoy some of



Rare, Second Empire architecture

the wonderful programs, classes, exhibits, and concerts offered here. The Center is also available for private rentals, and named bricks for the Courtyard can still be ordered. Inquire at the front desk.

Before you leave, take a moment to visit the **Pollinator Garden** next to the annex entrance, and the **Page Smokehouse** and **Educational Herb Garden** on the north lawn behind the Center.

About the Friends of the Page-Walker

The Friends are passionate citizens who advocate for historic preservation, facilitate history education, and promote the cultural arts. Our non-profit, all volunteer organization was formed in 1985 as a grassroots effort to save the historic Page-Walker Hotel in downtown Cary. Since then, we have created the Cary Heritage Museum on the third floor of what is now the Page-Walker Arts & History Center and created and maintain an educational herb garden on the grounds. History is an ongoing narrative and we invite you to become a part of it. Learn more about us at friendsofpagewalker.org or email us at info@friendsofpagewalker.org.

Acknowledgements

- Town of Cary Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department
- 2018 Town of Cary Grant

Sources

- *Just a Horse-Stopping Place, An Oral History of Cary*, North Carolina by Peggy Van Scoyoc
- *Around and About Cary*, by Tom Byrd, illustrated by Jerry Miller
- Friends of the Page-Walker: oral histories, photos, and newsletters
- National Register of Historic Places
- John Williams & Family; Pat Bishop
- Carla Michaels: Research documents

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