

African American History Driving Tour

CARY, NORTH CAROLINA



This is one of a series of tours developed for Cary's sesquicentennial celebration in 2021. These tours celebrate Cary's past, present and future by guiding participants to many significant and interesting places throughout town.

The tours are not comprehensive; there is much more to learn about Cary than can be included in a tour designed to be completed within an hour. You can learn more about Cary's 150th anniversary celebration, find other tours, share your stories and see what else is happening in 2021 and beyond at www.cary150.org. You are encouraged to share your tour experiences and photos on social media using #Cary150Tours.

Refer to the map for the approximate locations of places on the tour, but feel free to visit them in any order using your preferred route.

Please drive safely, be mindful of when schools or churches might be in session and be respectful of cemeteries and other private property. Many tour stops are on private property, so please remain in your vehicle when visiting them. Circumstances might prevent stopping or parking at some tour stops. Please adhere to appropriate COVID-19 guidelines if you exit your car.

Cary's African American History

It is unknown when the first African Americans arrived in Cary, but by the mid-1700s, enslaved persons worked on the farms and plantations of Cary's white settlers, including Nathaniel Jones of White Plains. Before the Civil War, Cary had residents who were free people of color, but they were few. After the Civil War, African Americans acquired significant amounts of land in the Cary area, which they used primarily for farming and later for residential and business development. Over nearly 300 years, and through the struggles of enslavement and Jim Crow, African Americans contributed their labor, knowledge, and culture to help build the Cary we know today. On this tour, you can learn about some of the people, places, and stories of Cary's African American community.

In 2000, twenty-nine Heritage Families were honored by the Friends of Page-Walker Hotel for having family members who had been living in Cary for 100 years or more. Twelve of those Heritage Families were African American. The Boyd, Evans and Ferrell families were three of those Heritage Families and they have streets named for them. Keep in mind that 150 years ago, many of the tour stops were on the outskirts of Cary; today, Cary has grown to nearly 60 square miles.



Cary Elementary School (for Colored Children), ca 1937



1. Church 8500 Chapel Hill Road

This area of Cary was and still is home to many African American families. This is the original site of Mount Zion Baptist Church, which began in 1867 in a little wood-framed building on Ferrell Street in the nearby Kingswood neighborhood. The church was also the location of the first pre-school for Black children in 1968, organized by Cary Christian Community in Action. Mount Zion Church moved to Allen Lewis Road, near West Cary Middle School, in 2007. Although vacant in 2021, this building has been the site of several other congregations over the years. The parking lot is accessible from Chapel Hill Road.

TOUR EXTRA: As you proceed north on Academy Street after crossing Chapel Hill Road, on your right you will pass Boyd Street, which leads to Ferrell Street, both named for Cary Heritage families. Issac Boyd was a minister and raised 10 children on Ferrell Street. Ernest Bunn Ferrell was instrumental in establishing a school in the Kingswood community.



2. Union Bethel AME Church 514 North Academy Street

This African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church was established in 1898 by Addison Blake and his wife Mintie Blake. The Blake family lived on East Johnson Street. The area at that time was known as Blake Hill and people in the area referred to Union Bethel Church as “the Blake church”. The church remains active today and the Blake family is one of Cary’s Heritage Families.



3. Kingswood Elementary School 200 East Johnson Street

Kingswood is a historic African American neighborhood and Kingswood Elementary School is one in a succession of historically African American schools. The Cary Colored Elementary School once stood near the current Cary Elementary School in downtown Cary. It burned down in 1936; Cary’s African American parents banded together to advocate for a replacement school and a 5-room wooden building, Cary Elementary School (for Colored Children), opened in 1937 (shown at the top of the first page). A brick replacement building was built in 1953, expanded in 1960 and became the fully desegregated Kingswood Elementary School in 1969. Today, Kingswood Elementary is a popular Montessori STEM magnet school.



4. West Cary Middle School 1000 Evans Road

Evans Road, named for a Cary Heritage family, was a dirt road until the 1960s when Jeanette Evans petitioned the state to pave it. The Evans family owned and still owns much of the land in this area. James Lovelace Evans sold some of his land to the Wake County School system for Cary’s first African American high school, which opened in 1965 as West Cary High School. In the 1967-1968 school year, West Cary High became a fully desegregated ninth-grade school with 340 students, and the name was changed to West Cary Junior High. Today, it is West Cary Middle School.

TOUR EXTRA: On your way to Cary First Christian Church, you might see Mount Zion Church, across Evans Road from West Cary Middle School off of Lake Drive. This is the new location of this church that began at stop 1 of this tour.



5. Cary First Christian Church 1109 Evans Road

Cary First Christian Church (CFCC) is one of the oldest African American churches in Cary. It began after the Civil War with services held in a brush harbor off of East Cornwall Road. It moved to a small, wooden framed building on Holleman Street in 1883, at which time it had the largest church membership in Cary. The church moved to its present location on Evans Road in 1968 on land donated by Clyde Evans, Sr. Members of the congregation built the present day church, from the cinder block walls to the hardwood altar. Behind the church, from the parking lot accessible from Silvergrove Drive, you can see beautiful stained glass windows and the original church bell, which was moved to this location in 2018.





6. Turner-Evans Cemetery 800 Old Apex Road

Located adjacent to Sha'arei Shalom Congregation, this is a privately owned cemetery where members of the Evans and Turner families, both of whom are Cary Heritage families, are buried, along with other African Americans. The earliest known grave is that of Etta Turner and her infant child. Etta Turner was born in 1879 and died in 1914. The earliest birth recorded here is that of Charlie Evans Sr., born 1853 and died in 1936. The Evans and Turner families owned considerable land in this area.

TOUR EXTRA: On the way to Cary First Christian Church Cemetery, you'll pass the former location of the Cary Colored School and the original Cary First Christian Church building.

Both were located along a dirt road that used to be named Holleman Street. The original Cary Colored School was a three-room plank school building (see Stop 3 on this tour for more information about its history). The original Cary First Christian Church was a small wooden building built in 1883 (its current location is Stop 5 on this tour).

Remnants of Holleman Street, which ran from Kildaire Farm Road to Hillcrest Cemetery on Page Street, remain in the woods just south of Cary Elementary School. If you look carefully where there is a curb cut on Kildaire Farm Road, you can see a path that is part of the old Holleman Street and is planned to become part of Cary's Higgins Greenway. *See stop 6* on the map.*



7. Cary First Christian Church Cemetery 300 West Cornwall Road

This active cemetery is where some of Cary's most prominent African Americans from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are buried, including the Arrington, Bates, Cotton, Hicks and Stroud families, among others. It was a burial ground as early as 1867, perhaps earlier. Sallie Jones, a member of First Christian Church, led efforts to restore this cemetery in the 1980s. It was designated as a Cary Historic Landmark in 2013. Cary First Christian Church and the Friends of the Page-Walker Hotel are developing a walking tour for this stately cemetery; brochures are planned to be available at the cemetery by summer 2021. Be sure to return to learn more about this historic cemetery.

This tour includes several highlights of Cary's rich African American history, but it represents only a portion of a much larger story. Much of the material for this tour was provided by the Friends of the Page-Walker Hotel, who offer guided trolley tours, including an African American History tour, that provide a more detailed look into Cary's African American history. To learn more, visit friendsofpagewalker.org.

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2. **Union Bethel AME Church** 514 North Academy Street
3. **Kingswood Elementary School** 200 East Johnson Street
4. **West Cary Middle School** 1000 Evans Road
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