

## Ashley Habig

Buried under dense layers of dirt, my fingers brushed against a cool, solid, metal. I grasped the unfamiliar rectangular object and used all of my strength to pull it up to the surface. I rotated it in my hands and noticed a name engraved on the side, “Frank Page 1884”. I glanced up from my position in the center of the mulch garden and scanned my eyes across the “Page-Walker Arts & History Center” sign near the back entrance of the building. It was then I realized I had found an important historical artifact- a time capsule.

Unlatching the hinge on the side of the capsule, I was taken aback by the papers and photographs that tumbled out onto the ground. I was immediately captivated by a crumbling journal page from Frank Page himself. It described his encounters and plans for a 300 acre area he bought next to a railroad, which would eventually become a town named Cary. As an avid developer, his desire to transform the settlement was evident. He installed the first streets, a mill, a post office, and a general store in the small area known for its tobacco and cotton farms (Brief). Nevertheless, his ambitions did not stop there. In this particular journal entry dated 1868, he wrote of a newly constructed, second railroad to run through the town, and how he took the opportunity to build a hotel to accommodate the railroad passengers, often salesmen, stopping in Cary. He aimed to ease travels and worries after the Civil War, wanting to move society forward and not dwell on the past (Traylor).

I proceeded to pick up two documents tied tightly together with a withered piece of beige string. The first was a detailed sketch of the hotel with French-Empire style architecture, standing out in stark contrast to other southern buildings at the time (Seed). This early blueprint was complete with exact types of flowers to be planted around the front along with measurements for the front columns and second-level balcony. I slid the drawing aside to uncover a picture of Frank Page and his wife, Catherine Page, standing outside of the constructed hotel, almost identical to the sketch. The back of the photograph had writing that read “Page Hotel opening - 1868”. I admired the symmetry of the two images side-by-side before moving onto the next item.

I then came across a formal article with “The Town of Cary” written in calligraphy at the top in immense letters, dated 1871. This document officially incorporated Cary as an established town, and pronounced Frank Page as its first mayor. The name was chosen by Page in honor of Ohio congressman and prohibitionist Samuel Cary, who Page respected and looked up to (Brief). Below legal matters discussed for the town, a section titled “Goals and Visions”, was written and signed by Page. Page wished for Cary to blossom in size, become a central hub for education, and be a great place for citizens to live in America. Page was known for his determination and strong stance on issues he believed in, which largely explains how the town of Cary flourished into the town that stands today (Holland).

Finally, a modest, rectangular paper laid on the ground, stating the official ownership transfer of the hotel from Frank Page to J.R. Walker in 1884. It noted the primary purpose of the site would remain as a hotel to travelers, which Walker kept his word to, leading to a name change to the Page-Walker Hotel. This article was the last dated document in the capsule, signifying the end of Page's contributions to the town as his interests shifted to the Sandhills of North Carolina (Seed).

Although the Page-Walker Hotel is now known as the Page-Walker Arts & History Center, people have committed themselves to preserving the history of the building and its importance to the town of Cary. The hotel has shifted over years from a traditional hotel, boarding place for students and faculty of Cary Academy, which would become Cary High School, one of the first public high schools in North Carolina, and then to a private residence before being transformed into the community history and arts center present today (Traylor).



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