

The Architectural and Historical Significance of All Saints', Warrenton, NC
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I. The Notable African American Episcopal Heritage of Warren County

Warren County can lay claim to being the birthplace of some of the great African American leaders of the Episcopal Church. The first is Caroline Wiley Cain Bragg, born in Warrenton in 1804, who as an enslaved member of the Thomas White family was brought to be baptized at Emmanuel Church, Warrenton. Caroline Bragg would eventually move to Petersburg, Virginia, where she would be instrumental in the founding of St. Stephen's, the first black Episcopal church and a center for ministry throughout southern Virginia. Her grandson, the Rev. George Freeman Bragg, was born and baptized in Warrenton before going to live with his grandmother in Petersburg. He would become the leading historian of the black Episcopal Church and rector of St. James', Baltimore, where the current Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, would be one of his successors. [Bragg's feast day in our calendar of saints is August 3.]

Another prominent Warren County native, and another grandson of Caroline Bragg, was the Rev. Thomas White Cain, the first black candidate for Holy Orders in Virginia. He served the oldest black church in Texas--St. Augustine of Hippo Episcopal Church in Galveston—and represented the Diocese of Texas in the national General Convention of the Episcopal Church. Thomas Cain perished in the historic Galveston storm of 1900, and the current All Saints' church building was constructed as a memorial to him.

Warrenton also has the distinction of being the birthplace of the Rev. William J. Alston, the first black priest of the Episcopal Church to graduate from a seminary of the Church. He graduated from Bexley Hall, Gambier, Ohio, in 1859, and served successively as rector of St. Philip's, New York, and St. Thomas', Philadelphia.

Warrenton produced one of the early African American bishops of the Episcopal Church. The Rt. Rev. Bravid Washington Harris was born in Warrenton in 1896

and baptized and raised in All Saints'. He attended St. Augustine's College (now University) in Raleigh; he was ordained deacon and priest by Bishop Henry B. Delany and was immediately put in charge of his home parish from 1922 to 1924. For 19 years he served as rector of Grace Church, Norfolk, Virginia and for the last six of those years, he also served as the Archdeacon for Negro Work in the Diocese of Southern Virginia. Harris was appointed the first Secretary for Negro Work by the National Council of the Episcopal Church in 1943, and two years later he was elected by the House of Bishops as the Bishop of Liberia, where he served until his retirement in 1964.

Another Warren County native, the Ven. Odell Greenleaf Harris, was raised outside Warrenton in Norlina and baptized at St. Luke's, the oldest historically black Episcopal congregation in Warren County. Like his cousin Bravid Harris, Odell Greenleaf Harris attended St. Augustine's College and served at All Saints' upon his ordination in 1933. Harris would also serve as Archdeacon and Dean of the Negro Convocation in the Diocese of Southern Virginia, again following in the footsteps of Bravid Harris.

II. The early history of All Saints', Warrenton: 1892-1908

Emmanuel Parish, Warrenton, had a bi-racial congregation from the antebellum period into the early 1890s, when steps were taken to organize a separate mission for African Americans. The precipitating event in the formation of the separate congregation was the visit of the Ven. William Walker in early 1891. A white priest, Walker was the newly-appointed Archdeacon for Colored Work, and his first initiative upon taking up the position was to tour Franklin, Vance, and Warren Counties, with an eye toward upbuilding work among African Americans. From that initial visit, Walker formed the plan of yoking Louisburg and Warrenton, establishing schools and congregations in both communities, and assigning one priest to oversee them both.

The priest Walker tapped to implement his plan for Louisburg and Warrenton was the Rev. Henry B. Delany, a faculty member at St. Augustine's School and a deacon preparing for priest's orders. Delany would be ordained to the priesthood in 1892 and asked to serve one Sunday each month in both Louisburg and Warrenton.

By 1892, the Warrenton mission had both a building and a name: All Saints'. The building had been purchased by the congregation members themselves, for \$400, and fitted for use as a chapel and a school. Delany continued to serve the congregation until 1904, when Archdeacon John H. M. Pollard, Walker's successor, took charge. At the time of the transfer of responsibilities, All Saints' had 22 communicants and a parochial school with 49 students.

III. A proposed Memorial Chapel to the Rev. Thomas White Cain: 1901

When Archdeacon Pollard made his 1901 report to Diocesan Convention, he announced: "It is our purpose to build here a Memorial Chapel in memory of the late Rev. Thomas White Cain, who was drowned at Galveston, Texas, on the 8th of September 1900. Both Mr. Cain and his wife were natives of Warren County."

That Pollard would support such an initiative is scarcely surprising; it may well have been his idea. He and Cain were the first two black candidates for Holy Orders in the Diocese of Virginia, and they studied together in the late 1870s under the tutelage of Giles Buckner Cooke at what would later become the Bishop Payne Divinity School. Soon they would be joined by James Solomon Russell and Cain's cousin, George Freeman Bragg.

Cain was ordained in 1881 and served St. Philip's, Richmond VA, until 1887, when he moved to St. Augustine's Parish, Galveston, Texas. During his time in Texas, Cain was an outspoken advocate for civil rights, and in 1893 he successfully sued the railroad for denying him a sleeping berth for which he had already paid. Most notably, the Diocese of Texas elected him to serve as a Deputy to the 1889 General Convention, the first (and at the time, only) black priest to be accorded seat and voice.

But Archdeacon Pollard not only wished to see a fitting memorial to a beloved fellow-priest; he also wanted to enlist all black Episcopalians in this effort. At the 1903 gathering of the diocesan Convocation of Colored Clergy and Congregations, Pollard issued the following appeal. Noting that it was the 25th anniversary of his ordination, he wrote: "I appeal **to colored Churchmen throughout the country** to give me \$1,000 for the building of a chapel at Warrenton, to be known as *All Saints Memorial*, in memory of the Rev. Thomas White Cain, who perished in the great flood at Galveston in 1900."

Pollard's hopes for building a new All Saints' church building as a memorial to Thomas Cain did not materialize. The presenting issue was siting the new church. The land on which the congregation proposed to build, and which they already owned, was deemed inappropriate by "white citizens" and in particular by John Graham, the Principal of Warrenton High School. A letter in the *Warren Record* dated July 21, 1905, stated the matter bluntly:

In our opinion colored churches should be built where the colored people live and the good white citizens will give their hearty support to those who are sensible enough to see that fact. But we have heard enough to quite convince us that our colored friends will get little or no help if they insist on putting themselves where they are not wanted. On the whole we do not believe that the colored men of the church will persist in disregarding the wishes of their white neighbors and other citizens who have so positively said that the church must be removed. We are already burdened with one Negro school and church in Warrenton where they ought not to be, and **don't think that our people will tamely submit** to the one referred to. I am sure the above meets the hearty approval of all the white citizens who live adjacent to the intended building.

The matter languished for the remainder of Pollard's tenure as Archdeacon and Priest-in-charge in Warrenton. But in 1908, on succeeding Pollard as Archdeacon, Henry B. Delany once again took charge of All Saints' and renewed the quest for a new building site. By 1911, the old property was sold and the new property purchased. By 1912, Delany was hoping to commence building.

IV. Proclaiming the dream and making it a reality. The building of All Saints' as the Thomas Cain Memorial: 1912-1918

All Saints' Church represents a distinctive effort to construct a building that would have the appearance of a Gothic Revival stone edifice, but would be simpler and less costly to construct, since the principal building material would be solid concrete blocks made to look like stone. In size and overall design, it resembles the design Silas McBee did for the St. Augustine's Chapel, but it also retains features associated with Carpenter Gothic, including the substitution of pentagonal window openings in place of Gothic arches.

Delany himself said of the design: “This beautiful little church is cruciform in shape and makes a pleasing appearance, being located on a prominent corner. The basement walls are built of concrete, and above the basement, constituting the church proper, the walls are built of concrete blocks.” [*Carolina Churchman*, July, 1914, p. 13]

Delany may well have had a hand in the design of the building. He was long considered the designer of the chapel at St. Augustine’s in Raleigh, and while we know that attribution is mistaken, we do know he was actively involved in the St. Augustine’s chapel’s construction. Given the fact that All Saints’, Warrenton, was a project dear to him, for a congregation where he served as priest in charge, and given his familiarity with building methods and construction, it is entirely possible that he had an active role in determining the size, material, and overall design.

That the intention behind the choice of building materials was to create a building suitable for a lasting monument is clear from the words spoken by the Rev. Myron Cochran at the time the cornerstone was laid: "On Friday morning the corner stone of the new Thomas Cain Memorial Church was laid, a service in which the Bishop, Clergy and congregation assisted. There is now needed for the completion of this magnificent building the sum of \$1500 and it is hoped that the friends who are interested in the spreading of the Church among our people may lend their aid for the completion of a building which already has an interesting history, and **built as it is of cement and rock, will stand through many years, a fitting memorial to the late Thomas Cain at one time a boy of this town, and later the first colored man to hold a seat as a delegate in the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.**" [*Warren Record*, September 25, 1914]

The fact that this building was meant to convey magnificence, permanence, and honor is also evident through a comparison of this building with neighboring African American Episcopal church buildings constructed about the same time. Those buildings are much simpler, smaller, and built of wood, though they also retain such distinctive Gothic traces as pentagonal window openings and open ceiling trusses.

But the increased cost of construction for All Saints’, in comparison with neighboring black churches, had the effect of delaying the completion of the building and prolonging the fundraising efforts. Ground-breaking took place May 1, 1913. Within a year, the basement level was sufficiently completed that it could

be used to host the diocesan Convocation of Colored Congregations in August, 1914. It was at this time that the “Cain Cornerstone” was placed. Heavily dependent on outside small-donor funding, work to complete the rest of the building would continue for the next four years. The first public service in the church building proper would be December 1, 1918, when newly-consecrated Suffragan Bishop Delany held his first visitation outside Raleigh in Warrenton.

V. The Fundraising Appeal: Seeking commitment from black Episcopalians across the diocese and the nation.

When Delany became Archdeacon and Priest in Charge in Warrenton in 1908, he not only revived Pollard’s vision of constructing All Saints’ as a suitable memorial to Thomas White Cain, but he also renewed the call for all black Episcopalians to contribute to the effort. Thus, we read in the 1912 minutes of the annual meeting of the Colored District of the Women’s Auxiliary, that “Archdeacon H. B. Delany spoke in interest of the Cain Memorial Church to be build at Warrenton, N.C. He spoke of the life and work of the Rev. Mr. Thomas Cain and asked that the Auxiliaries pledge toward the erection of this church. Pledges were made by several of the branches represented.”

A year later, the case was made before the national Annual Conference of Church Workers Among Colored People, meeting in Lawrenceville, VA. After noting that the Rev. Dr. Delany and the Rev. Dr. Bragg were unanimously elected as delegates to the General Convention, to present the memorial of this Conference, the minutes state: “Rev. Mr. Satterwhite [St. Ambrose’, Raleigh] brought to the attention of the Conference ‘The Thomas W. Cain Memorial Church,’ at Warrenton, N.C., and requested the hearty co-operation of the Conference. Archdeacon [James Solomon] Russell promised aid from the Convocation of the Diocese of Southern Virginia.” [p. 5]

Helping to extend the appeal was the Rev. George Freeman Bragg, who used his influential periodical, *The Church Advocate*, to highlight the project. Delany noted Bragg’s efforts in the pages of the diocesan periodical, *The Carolina Churchman*:

The Rev. Dr. Bragg, editor and publisher of the *Church Advocate*, in giving a sketch of the life and work of the late Rev. Thomas Cain, has made a pertinent suggestion to the colored congregations throughout the country: one, that if heeded, would relieve our necessities, and make certain the completion of this church. It is hoped that they will begin now to fulfill the obligations made and renewed at several of our Conferences. Dr Bragg

writes thus: **‘Every colored Sunday School in the country ought to esteem it a great privilege to contribute a number of ‘blocks’ in the construction of the ‘Cain Memorial Church,’ in Warrenton;** and they will so think and act, if the colored clergy of the Church will tell them the story, and give them the opportunity to show forth their love in this matter. And what is true of the Sunday Schools would be equally true of all our congregations, if we could find some way to interest the colored clergy in the matter. In the meantime, let all those who have it in their hearts to make some offering in perpetuating the memory of one of the bravest, ablest, and cleanest men that have ever adorned the Afro American priesthood, send what they have to offer to Archdeacon Henry B. Delany, Raleigh, N.C.’ [July 1914, p. 13]

Delany was still raising funds to complete the building when he attended the national meeting of the Colored Conference in Baltimore, MD in October, 1917. He reported to diocesan convention the following May:

A trip to Baltimore last October to attend the session of the Colored Conference proved helpful to the [diocesan] Convocation [for Colored Work], for the Conference being in sympathy with our struggles for the completion of the Thomas Cain Memorial Church, pledged \$500 toward its completion; and nearly 50 per cent of the amount of these pledges have already been paid. In behalf of the Colored Convocation, I am glad to tell the Convention that had it not been for the embargo placed on building materials this church would have been finished. And as it is, the walls have been completed, the building enclosed, the roof covered with asbestos shingles, and sufficient funds are now in hand for its completion. When finished, it will be one of the most substantial as well as imposing churches of the Convocation. [NCDJ 1918. 128]

Given Delany’s personal investment in this project over the decade from 1908 to 1918, and given his earlier role in serving as priest in charge at the inception of the congregation in 1892, it stands as a fitting culmination of that effort that he was afforded the privilege of holding the first public service in the church building on December 1, 1918, and to do so in his new office as Bishop Suffragan.

The following notice appeared in the *Warren Record* for November 29, 1918:

“Thomas Cain Memorial Church Opens”

First Sunday in Advent, December the first, at eleven o'clock a.m., All Saints Church will formally open for public worship. It is unfinished as yet, but from now on the congregation will worship regularly in the new church. We invite our friends of Warrenton to attend the opening service. The Right Rev. Henry Beard Delany, D.D., the suffragan Bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina, will be the special preacher. The Consecration of Bishop Delany a few days ago marks a great epoch in the life of the American Episcopate.

Bishop Delany's report in the Journal of Convention reads as follows:

Dec. 1. *Advent Sunday*. Warrenton, visitation: 11 a.m. opening service of the Thomas Cain Memorial Church. Preached and administered the Holy Communion.

VI. Summary: A Tale of Pride and Persistence

December, 2018 marked the centennial for the All Saints' church building; it also marked the occasion of the closing service. During that century, this building was hallowed by sacred use, and by the leadership of such prominent figures of our Church as the Rt. Rev. Bravid Harris and the Ven. Odell Greenleaf Harris.

In its construction and in its fundraising, this building occupies a distinct place, for it was from its inception intended to be a building of permanence and significance not only for the Warrenton community but also for black Episcopalians everywhere. Although the story of the Rev. Thomas White Cain is not widely known and celebrated today, it was understood at the time as a story which held up the possibility of recognition and respect for black clergy as equal members of the leadership of our Church, called to have seat and voice in the Councils and Conventions of the Church. The call to build this church building went out not only from Bishop Delany but also from the Rev. Dr. George Freeman Bragg, both recognized as saints of our Church. It was answered in the affirmative by the Ven. James Solomon Russell and others within the leadership of the national Conference of Colored Workers.

The resultant building is a testimony to the persistence of all those who worked for its completion, and especially Bishop Henry Beard Delany. Although it has

suffered from deferred maintenance and neglect, it remains structurally restorable, thanks to the permanence of its materials and its solid construction. **All Saints', Warrenton** must rank within the handful of most significant church buildings for African American Episcopalians—not just in North Carolina, but nationally. If ever a church building should be found worthy of preservation on grounds of its historical and architectural significance, **All Saints'** is certainly one.

[Note: text in bold added for emphasis]