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## Warren County Historical Tidbits: Emmanuel Episcopal Church

Oh, The People You'll Meet...

Last week we started to tell the story of Warrenton's downtown with the Oldest Brick Store. In the coming weeks we'll see how the business district grew, changed and adapted to the times to serve our local residents. But before we continue that story of commerce, I thought it would be appropriate, as a temporary aside, to acquaint you with a little more about an iconic landmark that has watched that downtown through almost every step of the way...a beacon for all but 42 years of the town's history: Emmanuel Episcopal Church.

Now there are plenty of ways to become acquainted with a building; however, I think in this case, one of the best ways to tell this story is by introducing some of the notable people associated with it. I know that I'll likely miss some important people...and we should also remember the thousands of members of the congregation over the past 196 years who have shepherded this iconic Church of Warrenton. Please forgive me in advance for not having the space to include everyone. For today's story I've found a few of the people through which Emmanuel Episcopal Church can lay claim to connections to the War of 1812, our National Anthem, two North Carolina Governors, the NC State Capitol, a major New York newspaper editor & publisher, the westward expansion of America in the 1800s & the driving force in creating the NC Museum of Art to name a just a few...

Oh, the people you'll meet...if only you were the Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Warrenton, North Carolina!

Our story starts about 1821 when the first mention of an Episcopal Congregation in Warrenton was noted in the records of the Diocesan Convention. With a permanent home lacking for worship, the need was answered the following year when Miss Hannah Lee donated the lot where Emmanuel stands. Part of the conditions of her donation included the request that she and her father be buried beneath the Church...and they are. Money was raised through subscription and by 1824 they had contracted with a local architect and builder of note – Thomas Bragg, Sr. He erected a simple frame church with no tower and no steeple...an edifice that would stand largely unchanged for more than 30 years with the exception of the addition of galleries and vestry being added prior to 1842.

Bragg, as you may be aware, was the father of NC Governor Thomas Bragg and General Braxton Bragg of the Mexican War & the CSA (and namesake of today's Fort Bragg). Beyond the many homes he constructed after arriving in Warrenton about 1800, Mr. Bragg is credited with building the Methodist Church (Warrenton's first Church built) and overseeing the reconstruction of today's NC State Capitol building for about 2 months.

Now, before we go on, let me clarify an important point about the Church we see on Main Street today...some chroniclers have said that the present Church stands on the site of the earlier Church. Based on my research, and valued input from Mary B. Raiford, that is not accurate. The original frame Church is still there...when subsequent major renovations occurred they were made "around" the existing structure, adding to rather than replacing what stood before.



*Horace Greeley as a young man*

Back to our story...So in the early years of its existence, Emmanuel Episcopal Church would connect to events in the State and the Country at large twice more through people. The first occasion came on July 5, 1836 when the future famous journalist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Horace Greeley, came to Warrenton to marry Mary Youngs Cheney at Emmanuel Church. Shortly before he said, "Go West, young man and grow up with the Country", Greeley came South to marry his fiancée. This occasion was of such importance that it earned us NC Historic Market E-14 which stands on Main Street. When I first saw this marker on moving to Warren County, I mistakenly assumed that Miss Cheney was local...with Warren County being a well-known vacation spot before the Civil War it seemed logical to me that Greeley had come South and fallen in love with a charming & beautiful local lady. Well, in reading *The County of Warren: 1586 - 1917* I found that not only was Mary not

local...she hailed from Connecticut and was here to teach at Mrs. Harriet Allen's School...but according to several historians of the time, she was a notorious "hen-pecker" and "charming" does not seem to be a word used often to describe her personality. Oh, well.

Emmanuel Church's next connection to the events & people that shaped our Country came just over 19 years to the day after this wedding, but this time a more somber occasion. On July 16, 1855 the 16-year old daughter of Daniel Turner & Anna Arnold Key Turner, Mary Anderson Lloyd Turner, died and was buried on the grounds of Emmanuel Episcopal Church. Her headstone can be seen by walking around the left side of the Church as you face the front, immediately behind the Sanctuary. Through the young Miss Turner come literally a plethora of connections to key events in our nation. First, her father was born in Warrenton, North Carolina, the son of NC Governor James Turner (among many other



*Emmanuel Episcopal Church early 1900s showing Jacob Holt's remodeling. Note the frame siding and lack of stain-glass windows.*

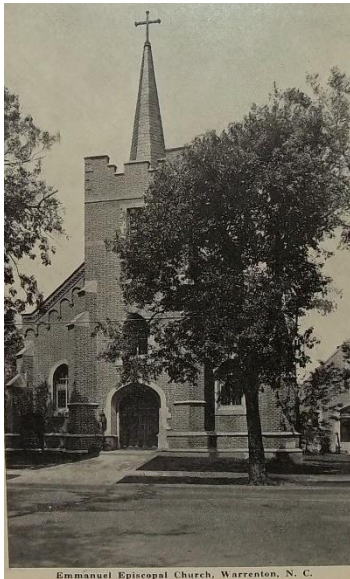
political offices). He graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1814 and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant of Artillery that same year. He served in the War of 1812 as acting Assistant Engineer. He went on later to become a US Congressman representing North Carolina from 1827 until 1829. Returning home, Daniel Turner served as principal of the Warrenton Female Seminary (later renamed Warren Female College on College Street.)

Interestingly, Turner's future father-in-law was also a part of The War of 1812...but not on the battlefield. His father-in-law and Mary Turner's grandfather, was none other than Francis Scott Key...writer of our National Anthem. Quite an amazing

family...and born and raised right here in Warren County.

That same year, 1855, the Congregation of Emmanuel Episcopal Church found it was time to enlarge and enhance the Church built by Bragg and called on famous builder, Jacob Holt to accomplish this renovation. Lizzie Montgomery writes that, "the church building was

much enlarged in length, width, and height, and a steeple was added." This steeple was to become an important part of the Warrenton skyline towering over Main Street to the current day.



Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Warrenton, N. C.  
1940...note the lack of the stone wall

Please allow me to stray for just a minute as I note another key part of Emmanuel Church's history...with no one person to connect to, but it's chronicled thanks to *Sketches of Old Warrenton*: a great fire and the saving of the Church organ. Apparently there was an organ of significance used in the Church from the 1850s until 1891. "During a fire in 1885 which caused considerable damage to the church building, the organ was hurriedly taken down by the excited crowd and its parts widely scattered over the church yard. It seemed hopeless ever to re-adjust them. With difficulty, the minister in charge, the Reverend Gilbert Higgs, who was gifted with mechanical skill, gathered all the pieces and restored the instrument to its original sweet tone." Just amazing to think that during a very large fire the people took the time to rescue the organ!

Emmanuel Episcopal Church's final major facelift came in 1927 when William Lawrence Bottomley redesigned the church into brick and transformed it to the Gothic Revival style, though keeping its basic form. Remember though, the original frame Church, built and consecrated in 1824 is still there underneath the layers...a silent sentinel watching the growth of downtown Warrenton.



Katherine Pendleton Arrington

And our tale of famous people connected to Emmanuel Episcopal Church would not be complete without introducing you finally to a civic leader and local resident for most of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century...the woman responsible for the NC Museum of Art, the addition of art classes to our public schools and supporter of many other local causes, Mrs. Katherine Pendleton Arrington. A dedicated member of the Emmanuel Episcopal Church congregation, Mrs. Arrington returned to her hometown after the death of her husband in 1916 and lived here until her death in 1955. Among her many accomplishments included volunteering for the Red Cross Ambulance Corps in WWI (the Armistice was declared before she shipped overseas), heading clothing drives for Warren County children during the Depression, donating scores of fine art pieces to area Churches, UNC-Chapel Hill and the State of North Carolina and being a staunch member of Emmanuel Episcopal Church. I've talked with several

older local residents who remember her entering the Church each Sunday...always in a violet gown...to worship.

Oh, the people you'll meet...if only you were the Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Warrenton, North Carolina! Wherever you turn in Warren County we have a jewel...

"Warren County Historical Tidbits" is a project of The Chamber of Commerce of Warren County.