

Times in Toano



Volume 1 Issue 3

Fall 2020

Newsletter
of the
Toano
Historical
Society

2nd Annual Toano Christmas Tree Lighting Watch the Facebook Livestream

Saturday, November 28, 2020

Livestream starts at 5:50 pm

Tree Lighting at 6:00 pm

(Rain date: Saturday, December 5)



Due to COVID crowd size restrictions, the Toano Christmas Tree Lighting will be held via livestream this year. The holiday spirit will be in virtual full swing with church bells ringing, Christmas music by “Winsome,” a drive-by visit from Santa, and the lighting of the Toano Christmas tree.

We will celebrate this event online and hope to be together in person next year!

The tree lighting will be an online experience, but in-person holiday festivities can be found on **November 28 at the Toano Open Air Market!** The Toano market will be open from 9:00 am–1:00 pm and will have a Christmas festival feel with a food truck, local fresh produce and other delicious eatables, local wines, and handmade crafts from local artisans. The Toano Historical Society will have the 2020 Christmas ornament and other THS items for sale. It’s a great way to kick off your day with some Christmas spirit!



Toanohistoricalsociety.org

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Follow the Toano Historical Society on Facebook
for details on how to join the livestream event.

A Letter from Jack Wray THS President

Toano is getting a bakery and coffee shop.

They say a small town's greatest assets are its stock of historic buildings. They physically connect us to the past and tell us where we came from. If a town is lucky enough to find the right business with the right concept in the right location it immediately gains the advantage of having an authentic story to build around... not to mention local support that comes with preserving a community icon.



The Historic Travers house (pictured above), circa 1900, located on the corner of Richmond Road and Church Lane will soon become the home of Virginia Bread Company!

(www.facebook.com/vabreadcompany)

The young owners of this business, Ainslie and Colin O'Rourke met at the Culinary Institute of Virginia in Norfolk. After graduating, Ainslie was hired by the Williamsburg Inn as their pastry chef. Not to be outdone by his future wife, Colin was hired as a pastry chef at the Williamsburg Lodge! These were wonderful opportunities for both of them but like most people with a strong entrepreneurial spirit they soon launched their own business, Virginia Bread Company, in 2018.



Operating with a commercial kitchen license from their home in Croaker, they currently stay busy baking for 6 restaurants and have a presence at the Williamsburg Farmer's Market and the Toano Open Air Market. They use local ingredients in their recipes from KelRae Farm, Mill Farm, and Sweethaven Lavender Farm.

Ainslie's mother, Maureen Anderson, has a small farm at the Historic Stephenson House in Toano just a short walk from the new bakery and the Toano Open Air Market. She operates her business there called Tasha's Own, famously known for her goat's milk soaps, honey, fresh eggs, garden vegetables, medicinal plants, and herbs. She also holds classes for children and demonstrates her farming techniques. When the Williamsburg Farmer's Market shut down last March due to COVID-19, Maureen and Ainslie spearheaded the Toano Open Air Market. A few of the Williamsburg vendors followed them to Toano where the TOAM was initially operated at her farm. It gained momentum, added a few more local vendors, and now has a growing presence, operating each Saturday from 9-1 at the Toano Station site on Richmond Road.

Everyone in town is super excited about enjoying Ainslie & Colin's fresh pastries, coffee, and sandwiches when Virginia Bread Company opens in the Spring of 2021. Customers will surely enjoy the cozy atmosphere of this quaint historic building in the Village Center.

Best wishes,

Jack Wray

Toano History Spotlight:

Variety Grove

By Fred Boelt, THS Historian



The history of the Variety Grove tract of land begins with Dandridge Watkins Marston who grew up at Roslyn [present day Colonial Heritage]. When his father died, he inherited part of his land. Later Marston sold that land, and in 1843, purchased 531 acres from the estate of John T. Semple. This tract of land became known as Variety Grove and was located on



*Dandridge Wesley
Marston*

both sides of Forge Road. The portion on the north side of the road to the west of St. John Baptist Church joined the Lombardy tract. The main house, dependencies, and quarters were located on the southern side of the road and were clearly marked on the 1863 Gilmer maps as “Dr.

Martin.” While the last name is incorrect, it is thought that Dandridge’s brother, Dr. Thomas P. Marston, may have been living there for a while during the war. Family correspondence clearly indicates that Dandridge Watkins Marston remained at Variety Grove throughout the war years.

After Dandridge Watkins Marston’s death in 1873, the farm was divided among his heirs. The house tract was eventually owned by his son, Dandridge Wesley Marston, but by the turn of the century, he and his family were living in the Toano village where he had a very successful mercantile business among other pursuits. The original house at Variety Grove burned in 1901, and the present house was constructed at that time, incorporating the foundation and a chimney from the first house.

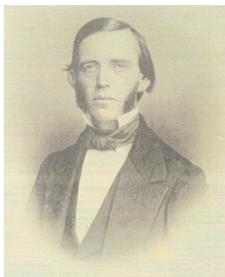
From this point in time, it is necessary to turn to the Branch family that lived at Sunnyside, an adjacent farm to the east, beginning in 1858. Cyrus Adolphus Branch was the son of Christopher and Catherine T. Branch of the Manchester area in Chesterfield County. He finished law school at age seventeen, but could not practice law until he was twenty-one. On a visit to Cary Wilkinson in James City, he asked for advice on what he should do. Wilkinson offered him a place to live and a job teaching at Hickory Neck Academy until he was old enough to practice law.

Wilkinson also, indirectly, provided Branch with a wife. Cyrus A. Branch married Mary E. Wilkinson, daughter of Cary and Mary R. C. Wilkinson, on December 27, 1854. The Sunnyside tract was offered for sale at a public auction in December 1858, and Cyrus Branch was the successful bidder.

Court records attest to the fact that Cyrus A. Branch practiced law for a number of years in James City and surrounding counties. In 1860 when the Agricultural Society of James City, York, Warwick and Williamsburg was formed, he was one of the two members from James City appointed to the Executive Committee. He served the Confederacy briefly in the James City Artillery. His land is shown on the 1863 Gilmer maps as “L. Branch”, perhaps Lawyer Branch? Cyrus went on to serve in the Virginia Senate 1863-1864 term representing the City of Williamsburg and the counties of James City, Charles City, New Kent, York, Elizabeth City, and Warwick with his residence listed as James City.

(continued on p. 4)

Variety Grove (cont. from p. 3)



Cyrus A. Branch

Cyrus and Mary Branch had five children: Catherine S., Mary W., Christopher Cary, Cyrus A., Jr., and Matilda T. Branch. Cyrus Branch, the father, died of apoplexy in 1874, on the road returning from New Kent Courthouse. In 1877, a court decree awarded Sunnyside to his heirs. Subsequently, the heirs each deeded their interest in the farm to their brother Christopher Cary Branch. Sunnyside continued to be owned by the Branch family until it was sold in 2006.

Christopher Cary Branch became a well to do entrepreneur and deserves his own story on another occasion. As his fortunes ascended, he built a very large Victorian home at Sunnyside. However, tragedy struck in 1917, and this home was destroyed by fire. After this fire, the Branch family purchased Variety Grove and moved there. Ultimately, two of the daughters of Christopher Cary and Laura Hammond Branch inherited the farm. Mary Mowbray Branch and Margaret Branch lived there for the remainder of their long lives, and the farm passed to a niece and nephew after that.

It is hoped that this Forge Road landmark can be preserved for the future.

Editor's Note: The future of the Variety Grove house is uncertain at this time.



THS Supporters Event Date TBD—Spring 2021

Due to COVID restrictions, this event has been postponed until the Spring. Watch for more details on the time and place.

Jack Wray will give a Toano revitalization update and provide details about how to support the work of the Toano Historical Society.

Come hear about the exciting plans for our community!

THS Volunteer Opening Fundraising Chair

The volunteer in this position will be responsible for working with the Board to establish a fundraising plan based upon the goals of THS. The plan should be updated annually.

The successful person will have proven experience in fundraising activities. A background in marketing & working with non-profits is a plus. Grant procurement experience is also a plus. The Fundraising Chair will be responsible for developing a committee and facilitate meetings on a regular basis to meet goals and advance the fundraising efforts of THS. The Chair, Committee, and the BOD will work towards the goals set forth in the fundraising plan.

Responsibilities:

- Work with Board to establish a fundraising plan using appropriate means, such as special events, merchandise sales, etc.
- Serve as a spokesperson within the organization for the committee
- Lead the committee in its efforts to raise funds
- Make telephone calls and visit local businesses to raise community awareness of the THS Mission & Vision
- Monitor fundraising efforts to be sure ethical practices are in place, donors are acknowledged appropriately, and that efforts are cost-effective
- Other fundraiser-related duties as assigned

If you would like more information or are interested in the position please contact THS at info@toanohistoricalsociety.org.



Meet the THS Board Members

Periodically we will provide a profile of a Board Member. This issue we feature Susan Kohlman, THS Treasurer.



Susan Kohlman and her husband Tony have lived in Toano since 1982, where they raised their three children on School Lane. Now her daughter and two sons are grown with their own families, and Susan is fortunate to have them living in Toano where she can spend time with her seven grandchildren. Susan works for Andy Bradshaw in the Old Bank Building in the heart of Toano.

But Susan's Toano roots go further back than 1982. Her grandparents, Lewis and Mary Trice, lived in Toano. Her Grandmother ran a Tea Room in Toano and her grandfather was sheriff of James City County for over 25 years. Her mother, Ruby, was born and raised in Toano. She married Arch (Zander) Williams in the early 1940's and they settled in the same house where Susan now lives. Her father was principal of Toano High School until his service with the Army Air Corp (later the Air Force) took them overseas.

Although the Air Force took the family far away from Toano, Susan remembers the visits to her mother's "home" and hearing many stories of growing up in the community. She saw the closeness between her mother's childhood friends. Susan's love and appreciation for the history of Toano was reinforced as she watched these friends continue to meet and reminisce well into their older years.

This cherished sense of community is what inspired Susan to become involved with the Toano Historical Society. She hopes that those in the area will have opportunities and places to gather and develop that same sense of togetherness that her mother shared with her lifelong friends.

2020 Toano Christmas Ornament

Available Now!

The 2020 Toano Christmas ornaments are in stock and ready for purchase! Save a place on your tree for the next ornament in this collectable series.

Cost: \$10

Available at the Toano Open Air Market

We still have a few 2019 ornaments if you want to complete your collection!



THS Merchandise

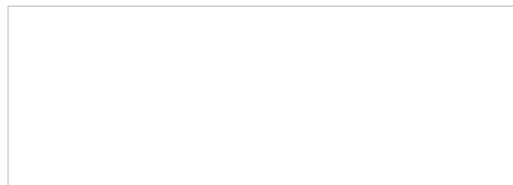
In addition to Christmas ornaments, THS merchandise is available for purchase at the Toano Open Air Market. We have T-shirts, hats, watercolor note cards by former Toano resident Louanne Martin, and the 2nd edition of *From Toano to Germany and Back*. If you have questions, contact info@toanohistoricalsociety.org.



Toano Historical Society

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Note: Due to ongoing uncertainties regarding COVID-19, planned events might need to be rescheduled. Updates will be posted on the THS Facebook page.



Toano Historical Society Board of Directors

President, Jack Wray

Secretary, Richard Krapf

Treasurer, Susan Kohlman

Historian, Fred Boelt

Website & Social Media Chair, John Drummond

Membership Chair, Samantha Share

Newsletter Editors, Tim and Patte Martin

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