

# Times in Toano



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2023

Newsletter  
of the  
Toano  
Historical  
Society



Toanohistoricalsociety.org

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## A Letter from Jack Wray THS President

### My memories of the Toano Woman's Club

The beautiful brick building built in 1930 next to Toano High School, now the site of the JCC Fire Station 1, holds a special place in the hearts of generations of locals who share memories of a variety of events held there. You can't walk in the place without immediate feelings of nostalgia. *(See photo of Woman's Club on page 3)*

I was nine years old when I played King Herod in a Christmas Pageant put on by Mount Vernon Church. I wore a choir robe and a crown made out of cardboard wrapped with aluminum foil. There was a live nativity scene set up in front of the fireplace where Mary and Joseph were watching over baby Jesus. The Three Wise Men, other costumed actors, and I slow walked out of the kitchen around the audience to the manger. Back in those days there was always a nice fire in the large fireplace at the east end of the building that added to the ambience of the Christmas season.

We also had tremendous turnouts for Halloween costume contests and a super scary walk-thru haunted house in the kitchen. I remember reaching out and touching warm cooked spaghetti representing the guts hanging out of a poor soul who was laid up on a table. The Community House, as some called it then, was also well known for country music dances held every Saturday night.

Once in awhile the back door didn't get locked and Richard Cowles, Keith Sheldon, and I would sneak in after school, hang out and play the piano. The Ruritan Club hosted dinners, and the Junior Woman's Club sponsored talent shows there. Back in the 60's there were several local rock bands and other solo acts that competed. My high school band, The Immortals, played our very first gig for a birthday party there in

1967 when we were fifteen years old. At that time Tritty Geddy was in charge of collecting the rent. The cost was \$5.00 and you had to go to her house behind Wilkinson & Geddy's Store to get the key and return it the next day.



*The Immortals in 2012 in front of the  
Toano Woman's Club  
l to r: Jack Wray, Jack Lawson,  
Richard Cowles, Jeff Wray*

Our band got back together in 2012 and recorded a new CD. To promote it we came home to Toano and had our picture taken in front of the Women's Club, a special place where lots of sweet memories were made.

*Jack*

**5th Annual  
Toano Christmas Tree Lighting  
Saturday, December 2, 2023  
3:00-7:00 pm**



On December 2, Toano residents and friends are invited to gather on the Village Green to welcome and celebrate the Christmas season.

Activities will include: wagon rides, crafts for the kids, visits with Santa, a fire pit with s'mores, holiday vendors, the tree lighting and more! Concessions will be available to purchase.

Come be a part of this Toano holiday tradition!

**Volunteers are needed for this event!** Shift times and lengths can fit your availability. If you are interested in helping, please contact us at [info@toanohistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@toanohistoricalsociety.org).

### **Help Us Continue This Tradition**

The annual Christmas tree lighting is made possible by donations from our community. If you would like to make a donation, go to the [Donations](#) page on our website or mail a check to THS, PO Box 433, Toano VA 23168.

You can also support the event by purchasing a 2024 THS Calendar. All proceeds from these sales will go to the tree lighting event.

**Thank you for your generosity!**



## **2024 Calendar Features Paintings of Historical Toano Buildings**

Toano artist Bill Shockley has created a series of paintings depicting historical Toano buildings. These paintings have been compiled into a calendar that is being offered for sale. The price is \$20 each and the proceeds will be used to help support our fifth annual Toano tree lighting. Calendars will be available in November at the Open Air Market and also at the tree lighting event, while supplies last. These would make a great holiday gift!



*Paintings of Mrs. Moseley's Diner and the Carlton-Mitchell House as seen in the 2024 THS Calendar.*

## **Two Historical Toano Buildings Are in Danger of Being Lost**

Toano is facing the potential loss of two more historical buildings. THS works to advocate for the preservation of the historical properties in Toano. Our most current concern is that the Carlton-Mitchell house and the building that housed Mrs. Moseley's Diner on Richmond Road are in imminent danger of being lost.

The Carlton-Mitchell House is currently for sale. We have engaged several times with the owner and the realtor who are trying to sell this house. THS is not in the position to purchase and renovate properties, but we can work with property owners to stress the value of these historical buildings. The location of these properties makes them vulnerable to being torn down to provide access to the parcel of land behind it that is zoned for development.

If you are interested in investing in the legacy of historic Toano, we hope you will consider buying the Carlton-Mitchell House to ensure that it is saved. We know that historical buildings can be preserved and used for a new purpose. Just look at the success of Hohl Café!

## Toano History Spotlight: The Woman's Club of Toano

By Fred Boelt, THS Historian

By the early 1900s, the Toano village and surrounding area had become a center for industrial, retail, and professional services. Churches and the Masonic Lodge offered religious and social opportunities. In 1915, a group of women felt that they could offer something that was lacking locally. Members of the Literary Club that met in the library of Toano High School founded the Home Demonstration Club, with the school and community as their focus. One of their first projects was to plant shrubbery around the school.

The club initially met in the school auditorium and served refreshments in the home

economics room. Among their first service projects, they contributed funds toward the installation of electricity and the water system for the school. Up to this point, water had been carried in from the town well and outhouses were located behind the school. During World War I, the ladies worked long hours making bandages for the service men. During the war, the School Board did not have funds to pay the teachers. Rather than see the school closed, the women raised the necessary funds to avert the closure. Additionally, the club purchased kitchen equipment and began serving hot lunches to the students in the school basement.

By 1923, the club had seventy-three members with monthly dues of five cents. They hosted dinners for the holidays, political rallies, the Rotary and other events to raise funds. They put on numerous dances, carnivals, and fairs providing entertainment for the local citizens. The dark, damp condition of the school basement where their kitchen was located prompted the idea of a building of their own. On November 17, 1924, the

Board of Supervisors deeded a .15-acre portion of the school land to the club for \$200.00. Also, that year, the first Constitution for The Woman's Club of Toano was written and adopted. Additionally, the club bought a motion picture projector and sponsored silent movies every Friday night in the school auditorium for the people of the community.

In October 1929, the \$5,300 contract was let to Mr. George Sweeney, provided that Mr. R. K. Taylor, Sr. supervised all construction of the single story, red brick building measuring sixty feet long by thirty feet wide. Mr. C. C. Cowles, Sr. dug the basement free of

charge and school children sold bricks for \$1.00 each to help raise funds.

On May 23, 1930, the Masonic Lodge laid the cornerstone of the present building located at 7965 Richmond Road. Contents included a roster of the Woman's Club, a copy of the school newspaper, clippings from the Daily Press, and several rare coins.

Before the building was completed, it was decided to charge all non-members a rental fee for the use of the building to cover expenses. By late July, the women began meeting to paint the interior and exterior of the building, and by December, they had raised enough funds to have electricity connected by Mr. Joe Carlton.

In 1933, the club purchased a furnace that was installed by Mr. R. K. Taylor, Sr. The fundraisers and socials continued in their new building.

*(Continued on Page 4)*



*The Woman's Club of Toano as it looks today*



## *Woman's Club (continued from page 3)*

They even delivered coffee and sandwiches to the "stands" during fox hunting seasons. And now in 1934, dues were raised to ten cents per month! Community contributions focused on sanitary conditions at the black schools and the county jail, and they sponsored two charitable rooms at Bell Hospital.

By 1938, many active members had moved away; fund raising became more challenging, and debt service became a burden. Unable to find a renter for the building, the club house and outstanding debt of \$2,865.00 was taken over by the School Board in October 1938. It was a sad farewell meeting for the members in November, but it solved the school's problem of needing more space. After some renovations, the building housed Home Economics and the gymnasium.

Club meetings continued in members' homes, and during World War II, the club again supported the war effort. They donated to the USO, to a Red Cross ambulance, organized for canteen service, volunteered as airplane spotters, and made many garments for the Red Cross. They saved scrap paper, grease, tin cans, and foil and sent magazines to the Panama Canal Zone. They chaperoned local girls to dances at Fort Eustis, sponsored bond drives, sent flowers and cookies to veterans' hospitals, and donated funds to pay for cots and bedding used in Williamsburg churches by the service men.

After the war effort passed, the club continued to donate to many charitable organizations and also contributed toward the purchase of uniforms for the THS boys' basketball team. At their meeting in December 1950, held at the home of Mrs. Neville R. Martin on Forge Road, four members were given recognition as the only living charter members and thanked for their long and faithful service to the club. They were Mrs. J. G. Carleton, Mrs. C. C. Branch, Mrs. R. K. Taylor, Sr., and Mrs. L. J. Haley.

In 1954, when the county and city schools were considering consolidation, the club took immediate action to reclaim their club house. In 1955 when the consolidation was finalized, the School Board agreed to lease the building to the club for

forty years at \$1.00 per year with a ten-year termination clause. After extensive renovation, club meetings resumed there in June 1956.

The termination option was exercised, and the club purchased the lot and building from the School Board in February 1966. It became a venue for many local groups for receptions, religious and political gatherings, and fund raisers for the club. Among these, their Country Christmas sales became an anticipated, well-patronized event.

The Woman's Club of Toano has been a vital part of the village life for 108 years. They have provided an enormous amount of services to the community and beyond. We owe them gratitude for their perseverance and best wishes for continued success. The club house and the numerous members over the years deserve a special place in our historic village!



*35th Anniversary, The Woman's Club of Toano, December 1950*

*L to R: Mrs. C. N. Dozier, current president; Charter Members: Mrs. J. G. Carleton, first president; Mrs. C. C. Branch, Mrs. R. K. Taylor, Sr., Mrs. L. J. Haley*



## THS Fall Members' Event October 26, 2023

The THS Fall Members' Event on October 26 provided an opportunity for THS members to mingle and hear about the latest news from THS.

### Some of our event highlights

Maureen Anderson and Michael Kellum brought a Taste of Toano, offering samples of some of the delicious food items available at the Toano Open Air Market.



William and Mary College senior, Joey Houska, presented information about her senior project. She is creating an interactive walking tour of Toano which will tell about the history of Toano as well as provide information on some of the historical buildings and landmarks.

THS introduced our new 2024 calendar featuring paintings of historical Toano buildings by Toano resident William Shockley. These calendars were for sale at the event, and the all of the original paintings featured in the calendar were on display.



**Thank you to all our volunteers who helped make this event a big success!**



## Become a Member of THS

Please consider becoming a member of THS to help us preserve and promote the history of Toano.

Annual Membership Cost:

\$25 Individual, \$35 Family, \$50 Business

Go to the [Membership Page](#) of the THS website to sign up and pay online, or sign up at the THS table at the Toano Open Air Market.

All memberships during the remainder of 2023 will include a 2024 membership.

### THS Membership Renewals

Current THS members are asked to renew their memberships for 2024. We appreciate your continuing support of our mission and vision!

A reminder letter will be sent to all members. Renewals can be done online, by mail, or in person at the Open Air Market. Don't miss out on our member events in the coming year!

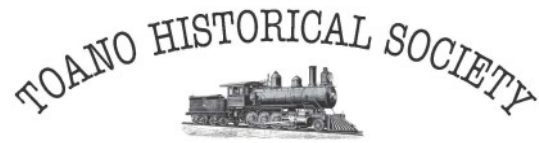


### THS Sponsors Food Collection For Proclaiming Grace Outreach

THS was excited to sponsor a food collection to help stock the shelves at the Proclaiming Grace Outreach Food Pantry. Shoppers at the Toano Open Air Market generously donated a variety of food and household items for this important community resource. Thank you to all who contributed!



*Some of the food pantry items donated at the Toano Open Air Market*



## **Toano Historical Society Board of Directors**

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