

Times in Toano



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Summer 2023

Newsletter
of the
Toano
Historical
Society

Special Summer Edition Past and Present Summers In the Village of Toano

A Letter from Jack Wray THS President



It seemed like it took forever for the last day of school to arrive back in the 50s and 60s. Most of us had already toughened our feet, ready to traverse grass, cornfields and the tar roads, going barefoot everywhere we went.

Our neighbor Woody Taylor refurbished bicycles. He would completely disassemble and rebuild them. It was a real treat to go down in his basement and see the freshly painted fenders, handlebars and frames hanging from the ceiling. I and others in the neighborhood got our first bicycles from him.

During the summer we stayed outside most days until dusk. My earliest memories of summers were catching bees in a jar, playing games like Kick the Can, Red-Light, Simon Says, and Hopscotch. I had a lemonade stand for a few days one summer. We played lots of sandlot baseball and football. Sometimes we'd play on the old baseball diamond at Toano High School where the back stop was still standing.

We organized a football team and called ourselves the Bandits in anticipation of challenging the Norge boys. We made jerseys out of white tee shirts and used green crayons to write "Bandits" and a number on the front and back. We did have that game on the old high school grounds. I don't remember the outcome, it was tackle not touch football, but no one got hurt.

In the summer of 1962, when I was 10 yrs old, we started a little club called The Toano Physical Fitness Club. We had several friends/members that participated for a few weeks. We made charts and kept up with how many chin ups, pushups and sit ups we could do. It was a short-lived venture, but it was lots of fun as most things were while growing up in the Toano I remember.

Cheers!

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Jack".



Toanohistoricalsociety.org

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THS Summer Solstice Food, Drink, and Fun!

On June 24, Toano residents and friends gathered on the Village Green for a celebration of summer. After a week of rain, it was a pleasure to enjoy the summer sun. It was also a time to celebrate our special community!

Thanks to all of our volunteers who helped make this event a success!



Toano History Spotlight: Toano Utopian Summers By Fred Boelt, THS Historian

It is summer time between World War I and World War II. Toano High School has closed for the season and the students are free to have fun. Many will have daily farm chores and the teenagers may have parttime jobs in the local stores or “scratching” potatoes, but how did they survive without all of the activities that modern children are forced to participate in? Well, fear not, for the children of days gone by had very wholesome, fun-filled summers without all of the modern conveniences!

We are fortunate to have several memoirs from our local Martin, Wilkinson and Fitchett families that describe the carefree days when playing outside and getting a suntan was considered healthy. While there were no swimming pools, the Chickahominy River provided for water activities. Complete with diving stands in the river, swimming, fishing, rowing and camping along the shores were all ways to cool off before the days of air conditioning. A 700-acre private tract known as “Jones’s” (Chickahominy Haven today) was considered a public beach and frequented by all ages.



Many youngsters had access to ponies or horses and were accomplished riders. This prompted occasional races among friends; good rivalry all in fun. There was an area known as the jumping pit located near the railroad tracks. The pit was filled with

churned up, very sandy soil. Afternoons were spent running, jumping, landing in the sand midway down the bank, sliding to the bottom, jumping up, running back up the hill and doing it all over again.



*“Camp Starnes”
Boy Scout camp on
the Chickahominy
River*

Across the tracks about a mile into the woods, there was a large spring at the bottom of a deep ravine. A fun activity was to swing across this ravine on wild grape vines “Tarzan” style and eventually get a refreshing drink of spring water. This was also a favored camping spot where hot dogs were cooked over small camp fires. With rolls and cokes, this was quite a feast!



The younger children enjoyed games of tag, hide and seek, and blind man’s bluff to name a few. As the children got older, “Fox in the Gully” and “Cowboys and Indians” were favored choices. Particularly, as the boys got older, marbles became an obsession and the winnings became prized possessions.

Remembering that by this time, many family members as well as friends had begun to leave the rural villages and farms, choosing life in the urban areas. But summer was vacation time and many folks returned to

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their former homes for visits. In many cases, this meant more playmates for the children and more reminiscing among the adults.



Sonny Martin, visiting from Texas with his family, plays croquet at the Martin home.

Walter Martin's home was built on a three-acre lot offering many possibilities for sporting activities. The family had a croquet set that occupied all

ages. A tennis court was on part of his land for a while, enjoyed by both boys and girls. Also, there was a baseball field here that saw action from early spring through the summer. Boys of all ages could be found here daily.

Perhaps the best of the summer activities were the tent shows and traveling circuses. Again, on the Martin land, small circuses would set up tents with one or two rings and horses, dogs, an elephant, and clowns performing to the delight of the crowds. At other times, movie shows would be produced by hand-cranked projectors and sound effects would be added by the projectionist. By this time, these traveling shows arrived on trucks with trailers, or occasionally by train.

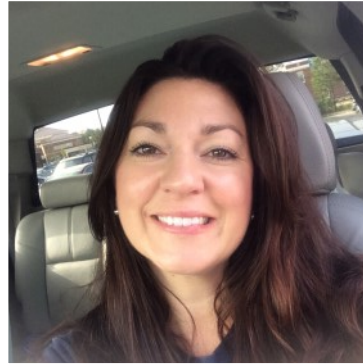
Churches held a prominent place in family lives and provided Vacation Bible School as well as homecomings and revivals usually held during the summer months. Children would have a week of religious instruction ending with a program to show off what they had learned. Homecomings usually featured "all day meetings with dinner on the grounds" and more subdued, scrubbed up children enjoyed playing with cousins and former friends. And the night revivals may have persuaded some folks including teens, to commit to joining the church.

Children today might find all of this "boring," but a hundred years ago in Toano, these were Utopian summers!

Meet the THS Board Members

Samantha Share

Volunteer, Programs, and Events Coordinator



Born in Newport News, Samantha has called James City County home for almost 30 years. A passion for people brought her to the Toano area as she began her professional career in cos-

metology. Being a business owner locally for 20 years, she has developed strong and life-long connections in our community. Samantha is married with 3 children and our area has been the perfect place to raise a family. In her free time she enjoys spending time with her family, the outdoors, gardening and kicking back on the beach.

Samantha's love for socializing and interacting with people has made her the perfect person to handle event planning for THS. It doesn't take long in Toano to see not just the small town character, but the passion that the whole community has for this beloved town. Bringing people together to keep delivering our vision is what she does.



THS has many opportunities for volunteers throughout the year. You can choose the tasks and commitment level that best suit your interests and availability. If you are interested in being a THS volunteer at future events or would like to learn more about volunteer opportunities, please contact THS at info@toanohistoricalsociety.org.

THS Spring Members' Event – May 20, 2023

Members Tour the Farinholt Historic House Renovation

The THS Spring Members' Event provided an opportunity for THS members to view the work being done to restore and preserve one of Toano's wonderful historic homes.

Nearly 100 members attended and were presented information about the history of the Farinholt and the house, built in 1900, and were also able to tour the house to see the progress of the renovation. We had time for socializing with our fellow members and enjoyed some delicious treats from Hohl. Thank you, Chris Starke!

The next members' event is in the planning stages, so if you are not a member, or if you haven't renewed your membership for 2023, you can ensure your invitation by joining now!



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, \$55 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.



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