

# Times in Toano



Volume 5 Issue 1

## Spring 2024

Newsletter  
of the  
Toano  
Historical  
Society

### A Letter from Jack Wray THS President Memories of the Brickyard



When I was growing up in Toano, the Brickyard was always a fun place to go. Most people that owned a boat back then launched it from a concrete ramp there on the Chickahominy River. It was closer than the ramp at the public access area at Jones' (The Haven) or the one at Jimmy's Marina in Lanexa (Taylor's Marina). Croaker Landing also had a ramp. It was about equal distance to the Brickyard from Toano but it was on the York River where you had to worry about low tide and salt water.

One memory I have have of the Brickyard occurred in the spring of 1966. My friends Richard and Minda Cowles, Mary Ware, and I decided to build a wooden raft. We probably got the idea from Mark Twain's book, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Behind the Cowles house on Forge Road was a wooded area where a spring fed stream ran through the bottom of a ravine. We used to build forts and hunt squirrels back there. Along both sides of the ravine there were tall, straight, smooth barked trees that were about 6" to 8" in diameter. There were plenty of them and they looked perfect for building a raft.

We got permission from Richard's father Kitchie Cowles to cut the trees. When he found out they were what locals called Paradise trees (Lantus Trees), the most worthless and invasive species of trees on the planet, he told us we could cut as many as we needed.

We decided to cut the logs 7 feet long and build a square raft measuring 7'x7'. We quickly discovered that carrying and dragging these heavy green logs up the ravine and out of the woods required the strength of all four of us...on each log. It was the most strenuous thing any of us had ever done. This project was definitely going to take more than a couple of days to complete.

Our design was simple. We started with two logs resting on cinder blocks spaced 6 feet apart. Over the course of several days we cut, hauled, and placed the 7 foot deck logs on top of the two support logs. We thought we were nearing the finish line when we started lashing those logs together with rope. I could visualize us on that raft floating down the Chickahominy just like ole Huck Finn.

Our plan was to lift the raft up on the sides of Kitchie's 1962 blue Ford pickup truck and have him drive it down to the Brickyard. Once there, we would back it down the concrete ramp and slide it off the truck into the water. Richard was the oldest of us and had gotten his learners permit. He backed the truck down next to our completed raft so we could load it onto the pickup. *(continued on page 2)*



Toanohistoricalsociety.org

Contact us at:

info@toanohistoricalsociety.org

(757) 741-5010

PO Box 433  
Toano, Virginia 23168

Copyright © 2024

*(continued from page 1)*

We soon discovered there was no way we teenagers could lift this heavy monstrosity. It was going to take some real manpower to hoist it. My guess it probably weighed close to 1000 lbs. We hadn't thought that part through, so we asked my father Johnny Wray, Kitchie, and a couple more men to help us. As soon as they saw this big clumsy rig and found out how heavy it was, they began shaking their heads, probably thinking this was a terrible idea. Sensing our disappointment if they didn't help us, they finally all got around the raft and lifted it up on the truck! We didn't bother tying it down very well because we thought the sheer weight of the thing would prevent it from sliding



*The fateful intersection of the Great Raft Adventure.*

around as long as we took our time and drove really slowly. Kitchie decided at the last minute to let Richard drive the truck thinking it would be a good experience for him to drive something with a heavy load. Kitchie sat in the middle next to Richard in case any problems arose, and Minda his daughter rode next to the window. My dad, little brother Jeff, Mary Ware, and I were going to follow behind the pickup truck to the Brickyard.

I begged my father to let me ride in the back of the truck with the raft, an idea that was immediately rejected.

Off we went down Forge Road as planned at a very slow speed. Triumph was in the air as Richard turned on his blinker and approached the left turn onto Brickyard Road. The problem was (according to Richard) when he tried to take his foot off the accelerator to brake, the weight of his father's leg on his leg hindered him from reaching the brake pedal in time to make the turn. The truck overshot the left turn, the front wheel went down in the ditch, and the weight of the raft swung the truck into a pine tree hitting the passenger door where Minda was sitting.

The raft slid off the back into the woods, and the truck surged across Brickyard Road and came to a stop. We watched the whole disaster happen in a matter of seconds riding behind them in my Dad's car. Richard and Kitchie were unscathed, but Minda's arm was slightly injured from the passenger door that hit the tree. Everyone piled in my Dad's car, and he drove Minda to Dr. Van Driem in Toano. She had to wear a sling for a few days but nothing was broken.

Needless to say, the maiden voyage of our raft was not realized that day, and the disappointment of all our efforts for naught kind of hurt. After things settled down, we were determined to try again and get that raft down to the river. Later that summer we went on a recon mission and loaded up what was left of the raft (we had lost a few logs), took it down to the Brickyard and finally got it in the water. I volunteered to get on the thing while the others held a rope to keep the current from taking it away. As soon as I got on board, it sank about 4 ft below the surface and would have continued sinking further had I not gotten off. It never occurred to us that those paradise tree logs were way too heavy to float. We should have thought about putting a few tire inner tubes under our raft.

We pulled the raft around to the dock and held on to it for a while and eventually turned her loose and watched the current take it away. The only evidence left of that first failed raft launch is the huge scar on the pine tree we hit. It's still visible to this day. I look at that tree every time I drive by it, with fond memories of that adventure.

*Jack*



*Jack points out the scar on the pine tree damaged in the Great Raft Adventure.*

# Toano History Spotlight: Brickyard Landing Park

By Fred Boelt, THS Historian

Recently, the James City County Board of Supervisors approved the master plan for a new recreational area to be located at 990 Brickyard Road in Toano. This 119-acre tract of land has been the site of various activities over several centuries. Now, the existing boat ramp will be improved and picnic shelters, restrooms, a playground, hiking and mountain bike trails and more parking will be developed.



*View of the Chickahominy River  
from Brickyard Landing*

Today, the land is bounded on the south by the Chickahominy River, east by Brickyard Road, north by a tidal marsh and west by an unnamed tributary to the river.

## *Native American Sites*

An archaeological survey, completed in 2020, has uncovered much of the history of the area. It should be pointed out that land disturbances at the site have obliterated potential Native American sites. However, it is known that during the Late Woodland Period, there were villages in the neighboring area. Oranieck village was depicted on the 1608 Zuniga map and Werawahon village was shown on the 1612 Smith map. Both of these villages were located very near the park site and were inhabited by Chickahominy Indians who resisted inclusion in the Powhatan Chiefdom.

## *Tobacco Farming*

By the 1640s - 1650s, these villages were gone, and the area had been taken over by the Anglo-Virginian tobacco planters.

Tobacco remained the staple crop throughout the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth century. The area where the park will be located today became known as Hog Neck sometime during this period. The river landing was designated as an official public warehouse under the Tobacco Inspection Act of 1730. The act was created to improve and control the quality of the tobacco being exported from the colony to Great Britain where it was exchanged for goods returned to the crop owners.

Leonard Henley and William Browne were appointed inspectors at the Hog Neck Warehouse. Hogsheads were rolled or transported to the warehouse, inspected, and loaded onto sailing vessels. In an advertisement in the Virginia Gazette in 1737, William Browne offered the 300-acre Hog Neck land for sale, "on which an inspection is kept." The warehouse remained active at least through the 1760s.

After the Revolutionary War, tidewater land had been depleted by over-farming of tobacco. By the 1820s, crop rotation and the use of marl to reduce the acidity in the land were common practices. And by the mid nineteenth century, grain and beef product yields had increased significantly and brought new income to tidewater.

While the tobacco warehouses at Hog Neck had long since vanished, the landing remained active throughout the nineteenth century. In 1854, Beverley Slater deeded a one-eighth share of the Hog Neck property to his brother, James M. Slater, retaining the use of the wharf on the property. The "mansion house" referred to in this transaction was located approximately where the picnic tables have been located in more recent times.

## *Civil War and After*

No intensive fighting occurred in the area during the Civil War. However, troops, both north and south, frequented the area as they headed toward Richmond after the Battle of Williamsburg in 1862. After the war, agricultural activities dwindled, and timbering became a lucrative

*(continued on page 4)*

*(continued from page 3)*

business. In 1871, James M. Slater sold the Hog Neck landing parcel to John C. Timberlake. In December 1879, a fire at the Hog Neck landing destroyed 500 cords of wood and 1,000 railroad ties that Timberlake had planned to ship to markets beyond the Chickahominy and James rivers.

### *Brick Manufacturing*

In December 1892, Melvin F. Timberlake sold the eighteen acre Hog Neck landing to Martha Hill, who with her husband George, then sold it to Robert H. Richardson of Hampton, Virginia in 1908. He was a part owner of the Richard H. Richardson and Sons contracting firm and they had erected numerous public buildings in Newport News and Hampton. A few years prior to 1908, the father had been acquiring various parcels adjacent to Hog Neck with a plan to establish a brick manufacturing plant. Ninety-five acres of the approximately four hundred acres purchased held significant clay deposits, and the deep water at the landing offered shipping possibilities.

In 1913, Richardson and Sons declared bankruptcy and the Hog Neck parcels and existing brick plant were sold to Clay Products Corporation of Hampton. They soon added equipment for making hollow tile, a new six track steam drier and a new round kiln. They had four scows with capacities of 85,000 to 140,000 bricks to be shipped by water, a unique delivery feature at the time. It is very probable that bricks from these two yards were used in the construction of many residences and businesses in Toano and the surrounding counties.



A fire in 1943 was the death knoll for the Clay Products brick yard. Eventually in 1953, the land was sold to Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Corporation. Soon after acquiring the property, Newport News Shipbuilding removed all the former brickyard structures and established an employee recreational facility. A boat ramp and dock for trailer-hauled boats was constructed and picnic facilities and sports fields were added.



*Brickyard Landing boat ramp*

After nearly forty years, Newport News Shipbuilding sold the land to a private developer in December 1997. James City County had long held a public right-of-way to the boat landing. In August 2020, the County acquired the associated 119-acre property. Brickyard Landing Park will soon offer more happy days for our county residents.



*Clay shards still wash up on the shore of the Chickahominy River, reminders of Brickyard Landing's past.*



## THS Receives Two New Picnic Tables For the Village Green

In 2019, a group of people came together and created the first all-girl Boy Scout troop in Williamsburg. Sarah Cook has been a part of Troop 20 since its beginning, and she is now working on her Eagle Scout award. For her Eagle project, she built two new picnic tables and donated them to THS for the Village Green. These tables will provide much-needed additional seating for market days and other community gatherings.



*THS President, Jack Wray, receives the picnic table donation from Sarah Cook.*



Making Eagle Scout is a huge accomplishment. We congratulate Sarah and are grateful for her hard work and generosity.

Sarah commented on her project saying, “I was very happy to build tables for Toano Historical Society and help out my community.”



Save the date!

## Toano Summer Solstice Celebration Saturday, June 22, 2024



Mark your calendar and plan to attend the Summer Solstice celebration on the Toano Village Green. This is the main fund-raiser event for THS, so please come and support THS by enjoying food, beverages, and music! More information will be coming soon.

### THS Membership

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.

# Thank You!

### THS Business Members

THS thanks these local businesses who support us through their membership. We appreciate their partnership in moving our vision forward.

American Pride Automotive  
Custom Culinary Connections  
Hertzler and George  
Ivey Mill Masonry Co  
Jeffrey N Clark Custom Builder LLC  
Lofty Dreams Farm  
More Than Coins  
Salon60  
Summit Care Partners  
The Courtney Martinez Real Estate Team  
Williamsburg Contracting LLC



## Toano Historical Society Board of Directors

President, Jack Wray

Secretary, Richard Krapf

Treasurer, Susan Kohlman

Historian, Fred Boelt

Virginia Main Street Liaison, Deidre McAuley-Hayes

Newsletter, Patte and Tim Martin

Volunteer and Programs & Events Coordinators, Open

Social Media, Emmalyn Carter

Board Member-At-Large, Rena Wray

Membership and Website, Tim Martin



P.O. Box 433 • Toano, VA 23168

