

Times in Toano



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Newsletter
of the
Toano
Historical
Society

Toano History Spotlight:

Dr. H.U. Stephenson
Toano Physician, Politician, and Entrepreneur

By Fred Boelt, THS Historian



Hacker Urquhart Stephenson lived in Toano from 1895 until 1921. During that time he made quite an impact on the community as a physician, businessman, and political leader. His legacy lives on in a variety of ways.

Dr. Stephenson was born on November 5, 1872, in Southampton County, Virginia. His education began in the county public schools, continued at Corinth Academy in Franklin, Virginia, and after completing his undergraduate work at Richmond College [now University of Richmond], he graduated from the Medical College of Virginia in 1895.

Remembering that the railroad had recently come through Toano, Stephenson must have had a sixth sense about how the village would grow and how he could prosper. He opened his practice in Toano in June 1895.

Stephenson's early years in Toano are sketchy. When the 1900 census was taken, he was living at the Felix Hotel. At that time, medical assistance was often rendered at patients' homes, so Dr. Stephenson may have worked out of the hotel. In January 1901, E. S. Meanley, R. K. Taylor and G. P. Sweeney were invited to dine with the doctor at the Felix. These men had just completed the elegant new residence located on Church Lane. For reasons now unknown, Stephenson sold the house in June 1901, to James Banks from Croaker, who was moving to the village to operate a sawmill and a planing mill. Prior to this sale, the doctor had acquired a lot next to the Jennings Hotel [later known as the Wayside Inn].

Dr. Stephenson was very popular in the community. His name appeared frequently among those attending dances and parties. He was involved in at least two fraternal organizations, holding offices and hosting meetings. He was active in the local Democratic Party, and a strong supporter for good roads and schools. This prompted his nomination for the James City County Board of Supervisors which he chaired for several years.

He was among the top contributors to the fund to build the Toano High School in 1908. It was also his motion on the Board of Supervisors which appropriated county funds "for keeping in repair the famous Hickory Neck building," after the academy closed.

(Story continues on page 3)



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A Letter from the THS President

As we make strides to revitalize the Village, the historic buildings on mainstreet become increasingly more important to the economic vitality of the community. We now have nine buildings that make up the Toano Commercial Historic District (TCHD), the very first such district in JCC! All of these are located on the North side of Route 60 and have been in continuous commercial use, some from the early 1900s through today. It gives me great pride knowing that Toano has been accepted by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and The National Park Service as a State and National Landmark.

One of the goals of THS is to add more buildings and residences to the TCHD. They represent



Toano General Store

our small-town character and should be at the forefront of our revitalization efforts. There

are no restrictions on what owners of these buildings can do to their property. The main advantage are the tax credits owners can apply for if they decide to restore their building.



Mrs. Moseley's Diner

The next time you travel through Toano take notice of these unique and beautiful buildings beginning with Toano General Store (gun shop) and ending with the former SnoMania building or as I refer to it "Mrs Moseleys Diner". To refresh your memory, go to <https://rebrand.ly/toanoCHD>

Best wishes,
Jack Wray, THS President



H.U. Stephenson House

Historic Home is Site of Toano Open Air Market



On Saturday mornings, the former home of Dr. Stephenson is the site of a busy outdoor marketplace. Vendors provide a wide variety of items for sale. You can find beautiful vegetables, delicious baked goods, Tasha's Own products, and much more! Some weeks feature live music, and your kids will love going back to the barn to see the turkeys, goats, and chickens. This historic property has become a special part of present-day Toano.

Come out and support family farms and local agriculture and business!



Toano History Spotlight

Continued from page 1)

Stephenson served on the Board of Directors for the Peninsula Bank for most of time that he lived locally. The governor appointed him to the Board of Directors for Eastern State Hospital which he also chaired from time to time. He was later appointed to the Board of Directors for State Mental Hospitals as well.

On February 25, 1903, Dr. Stephenson married Cynthia Gertrude Early at the Hillsville Presbyterian Church in Carroll County, Virginia. Hack, as he was known to his friends, and Gertrude had two sons and two daughters between 1904 and 1916.

In 1908, Dr. Stephenson, C. C. Branch and M. S. Warren purchased the local barrel factory with plans to expand production. About the same time, Stephenson purchased the William R. Branch store building on Main Street. Early in 1910, he was having the frame, two story building bricked over. The first floor would accommodate a retail store while he would have three rooms upstairs on the front of the building for the offices of Stephenson and Stephenson. Hack's nephew, Dr. Junius W. Stephenson, had joined the practice in 1909. The large rear room would be used by the local Masonic Lodge. In the spring of 1910, it was reported that Dr. Stephenson had dug five hundred barrels of potatoes from his twenty-acre field, a comparatively low yield. From as early as 1898, he had been purchasing tracts of land for investment and was having the land cultivated.

In 1909, Hack Stephenson was the local nominee from the Democratic Party for the Virginia House of Delegates. He won the election handily and served in the House for two terms. He declined the nomination for a third term stating that his practice now extended over many counties and his patients would benefit from his full time availability.

In 1911, he purchased an automobile. He would drive to Williamsburg to catch the fast train to Richmond to see his patients who were hospitalized there.

Dr. Junius Stephenson moved to New York in 1911, and Dr. George G. Hankins, joined the practice for about two more years. Hack Stephenson was a Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad surgeon and attended conventions for this group regularly. In February 1913, he attended the inauguration of President Woodrow Wilson as well as the National Good Roads Convention while he was in Washington.

Dr. Stephenson seems to have settled into his practice again full time and continued to manage his other investments around the village. He, his wife and four children were living in the village when the census taker called in 1920. His occupation was listed as "doctor and farmer." Stephenson had a new home built in 1920, in Toano Terrace on Chesapeake Avenue. He sold this house to Walter C. Martin in 1921, around the time that the family moved to Richmond. Dr. Stephenson opened a private practice there. In 1940, he was semi-retired, serving as Medical Director of the State Industrial Commission. Hacker Urquhart Stephenson died on January 20, 1949 and was buried in Forest Lawn Cemetery in Richmond. He had lived a very full life!



One More Story About Dr. H. U. Stephenson

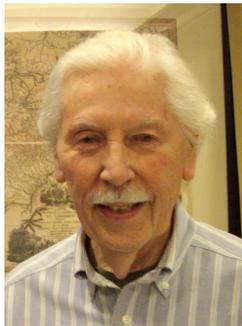
Dr. Stephenson built the Martin house on Chesapeake Ave. in Toano. The house was later purchased by W.C. Martin. A popular local story about the house was told by Tom Martin who was born and raised in that house.

"The intriguing legend which many local people seemed to believe, but which I never really believed, was that my father won the house in a poker game from Dr. Stephenson. He was the local MD who built the home but never lived in it. I never heard my father categorically deny the story, and I believe he was unadmittedly pleased about the legend, as he considered himself a good card player and capable of such a coup. "

(From: *From Toano to Germany and Back*)

Meet the THS Board Members

Periodically we will provide a profile of a Board Member. This issue we feature Fred Boelt, THS Historian



Frederick Boelt, a native of Williamsburg, grew up on Richmond Road across from the William and Mary college campus which was his early playground. He attended Mathew Whaley and James Blair schools and graduated from North Carolina State College. After college, Fred held

management positions locally in the hospitality field.

In 1976, Fred and his family purchased a farm on Forge Road and renovated a nineteenth century house using salvaged period materials throughout. Pursuing a longtime interest in farm animals, Fred works with the Livestock Breeds Conservancy to raise endangered species of sheep and poultry as well as maintaining a raucous flock of peacocks. As a promoter of maintaining farm land, Fred served two terms on the board of the Historic Virginia Land Conservancy.

Lifetime interests in local history led to Fred's appointment to the James City County Historical Commission. Additionally, he has co-authored two volumes about county cemeteries. When Fred became involved with friends of Forge Road and Toano (FORT) as historian for the group, he realized that our history needed to be preserved. An effort was started to gather oral, written and pictorial items that now serve as the nucleus of the display in the Martin Store Building. As historian for THS, Fred continues to add to the collection and encourages anyone with additional knowledge to share it with THS.

Fred's daughter, Sara has an equestrian business near Asheville, North Carolina, and his son, Wynne has worked around the world for not for profit humanitarian ventures. Wynne and his wife, Brittany, have a son and a daughter whom Fred hopes will share his interest in all things past.

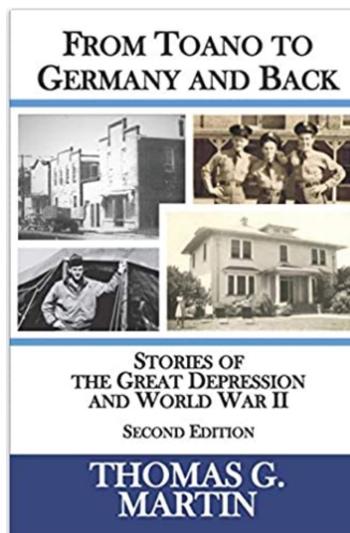


New THS Merchandise!



New THS merchandise is available for purchase. We have a new T-shirt design, watercolor note cards by former Toano resident Louanne Martin, and the 2nd edition of *From Toano to Germany and Back*. And we still have THS hats and Christmas ornaments. These will be available at the Christmas event, some Toano Open Air Market dates, and other events around town. If you have questions, contact info@toanohistorical-society.org.

From Toano to Germany and Back, 2nd Edition is now available



Tom Martin, born and raised in Toano, was a great storyteller. A second edition of his story collection has been released. These stories tell what it was like to grow up in Toano in the 1920s and 1930s and are filled with a cast of local characters with names that might be familiar to many current residents. He also

tells stories of his time in WW2.

The [book](#) is available on Amazon and at several Toano locations, including the THS booth at some Open Air Market dates. All proceeds from the sale of the book will go to the Toano Historical Society.

JCC Community Participation Team Listening Forum

In May of this year, the Toano Historical Society participated in the James City County Engage 2045 Listening Forum. Each participant was asked to describe their greatest needs and desired outcome that should be addressed in the County's comprehensive plan update.

THS president Jack Wray presented via Zoom on why Toano could become the greatest revitalized small town on the planet! He described his life growing up in Toano, gave a brief history of the village (old railroad town), and reviewed a list of the recent accomplishments of THS:

- Created the Toano Commercial Historic District, the first ever in James City County.
- Founded Toano Historical Society, a 501C3 organization whose mission is to inspire a new sense of community and preserve our small town character.
- Became an affiliate member of the VA Mainstreet Association
- Removed four blighted buildings on the southside of Route 60 in the heart of the new historic district.
- Hired urban designer Allison Platt with Rivers & Associates, who did a fantastic job laying out a new walkable village concept from the Firehouse to Toano Middle School.

Our goal in participating in the forum was for James City County to take notice of these milestone accomplishments and build upon them as they develop the James City County 2045 Comprehensive Plan. Our vision is to see Toano return to its former heyday era of the early 20th century as a bustling small "Village of Stores" complete with street lights, crosswalks, buried utilities and traffic slowed to 25 MPH through town.

Jack Wray's Listening Forum presentation is beautifully illustrated with photos of Toano and can be viewed in its entirety by going to <https://rebrand.ly/toanoclip>.

Upcoming THS Events

THS Membership Interest Meeting

Date TBD—Fall 2020

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

Come hear about the exciting plans for our community and how being a THS member will support those efforts.

2nd Annual Toano Christmas Tree Lighting Saturday, November 28, 2020



The holiday season will be here before we know it, and plans are in the works for the 2nd Annual Toano Christmas Tree Lighting. Watch for more information on this family event!

Call for Volunteers!

Work is already underway on the 2nd Annual Christmas Tree Lighting event, and volunteers are needed in the following areas:

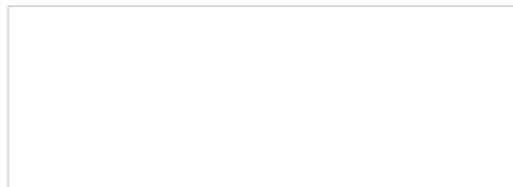
- Pre-event Planning
- Decorations
- Parking
- Kids Activities (crafts, games, face painting)
- THS Merchandise & Bake Sale
- Vendor Booths
- Santa Station
- Event Setup & Takedown

If you are interested in helping, please email THS at 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.



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