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## *Welcome to Toano*

The Friends of Forge Road and Toano are honored to offer this pamphlet of the history of Toano as an effort to chronicle our rich heritage and to explain why we feel that it is very important to preserve our historic sites. The area has experienced healthy growth for centuries, and as growth continues, we hope to encourage the preservation of the lifestyle that makes our homes and businesses unique.

Included in this pamphlet are only a few of the many beautiful buildings that have added to the Toano community. We wish that we could have included more in this, our first publication. We honor all of those who have added to the Toano story throughout the centuries and we look forward to a continuing community effort to preserve this special place.

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HICKORY NECK EPISCOPAL CHURCH, 8300 Richmond Road. The building seen today consists of the 1774 north transept (right two-thirds) lengthened by ten feet to the south in 1825 to create the school house that would become Hickory Neck Academy.

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The area around Toano, and particularly along Old Forge Road, has a rich historical background. James City was one of the eight original shires (or counties) chartered in the Virginia Colony in 1634. Early land patents around the mouth of the Chickahominy River were soon followed by patents for land higher up the river, not far from this area. Settlement moved inland rapidly.

Commerce, hospitality and a house of worship were well established before the Revolutionary War in the area that would become known as Toano. Richmond Road roughly follows the early stage road leading from Williamsburg to New Kent. As early as the 1760s, John Lewis was operating an ordinary at the intersection of Old Forge Road with Richmond Road, and John and David Lewis had a store near the ordinary.

As parish lines changed over the years, the Old Forge Road/Toano area fell into different parishes several times. The early church that stood where the present-day Chickahominy Baptist Church is located may well have been attended by families from this area. Even though the adjacent Blisland Parish did not encompass the Old Forge Road/Toano area, this historical church played a major role in our community at a later time. Blisland Parish was established at least by 1653 in what was then York County, later to become New Kent County. A new church was built at the lower end of this parish in 1734 on land donated by Mrs. Mary Holdcroft from her Hickory Neck Plantation. A north transept was added to the nave in 1774 to accommodate a growing congregation.

Undoubtedly, there were a number of early earthfast houses in the general area. The very nature of this type of construction caused decay and these houses did not survive for long. During the 1750s-1760s, tobacco prices rose, markets increased for wheat and grain, and affluence began to be seen in the area. Better homes were built on large tracts of land. Several of these homes stand today as testaments to the history of the area. Windsor Castle and Lombardy along Old Forge Road were both partially established during the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and doubled in size in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. By the 1830s,

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WINDSOR CASTLE, 1812 Forge Road. A typical planter's home from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century that was enlarged as the family grew and prosperity was on the ascendancy.

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Windsor Castle was owned by the Bush family, and later, through marriage, the Ware family. Lombardy passed through a number of families prominent in the area, and has more recently been owned by the Cottrell family. Peach Park, near the intersection of Forge and Little Creek Dam Roads, is a typical farm house of the period, and has two bricks in one of its chimneys inscribed, "W. W." and "1790." Cowlesville, located at the intersection of Old Forge and Diascund Roads, was the home of the Cowles family. Though no longer standing, it was a mid-18<sup>th</sup> century house with typical later additions to accommodate a growing family.

Nearer to Richmond Road, the late 18<sup>th</sup> century house at Aspen stands today with its 1850s large addition constructed by John Martin for his ever increasing family. Across the road at Sunnyside, another early house burned in 1905. This was the home of the Bush family and later the Branch family. West of Sunnyside is Variety Grove, where the Dandridge Marston family lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the old house was burned at Sunnyside, the Branches relocated to Variety Grove and built the present house. Farther west, a portion of the house at Warren's Mill Farm (also called Aspen Grove) was built by 1849. The site of the mill operated by the Warren family is now under the reservoir. Just down the road to the west, the house at Warrenton was rebuilt in 1932 by the Dozier family retaining the original style and reusing original materials. There had been a mid-18<sup>th</sup> century home here that was rebuilt in the 1850s by Dr. Michael Sherman Warren, owner of several farms in the area.

The area saw some action during the Revolutionary War. The State Shipyard located on the Chickahominy River at the end of Menzel's Road was established in 1777 to build ships for the American forces, but it was burned by the British in 1781. Fox's Ordinary, formerly owned by John Lewis, located approximately where the Toano Farmers' Market is today, burned early in January 1780; only the two chimneys remained standing. They became a landmark on war-era maps, and the area became known as Burnt Ordinary for the next hundred years. After the war, the area continued as a farming community. Tobacco farming had given way to grain and livestock farming for local markets as well as food for owners and their work forces.

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VARIETY GROVE, 2611 Forge Road. Built about a hundred years ago, this house is on the site of the earlier Marston family home.

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Revolutionary War era maps referred to the Old Forge Road as Coles Ferry Road, which led down to the Chickahominy River. Prior to the war, William Holt had operated a forge and several other enterprises in New Kent County in the area later to become known as Providence Forge. Remembering that Route 60 west from Anderson's Corner had not been built, we can see how Coles Ferry Road became known as Old Forge Road, as it headed toward Diascund Road into New Kent and on to Providence Forge.

Just to the north of Burnt Ordinary, Whitehall was built in 1805-06 by William Geddy. He descended from the family of silversmiths and blacksmiths who had operated shops in Williamsburg. Members of the Geddy family still own this farm near Anderson's Corner. Nearby at Hickory Neck Church, a significant event for education happened in 1825. The General Assembly authorized the Trustees of the Hickory Neck School Society to open a school in the old church. The original 1734 building was pulled down leaving the north transept that had been added in 1774. This portion of the church was lengthened and enclosed. Hickory Neck Academy became the premier secondary school for not only James City County but also for several other counties. A number of children from local families went on to William and Mary and other colleges after their years at Hickory Neck Academy.

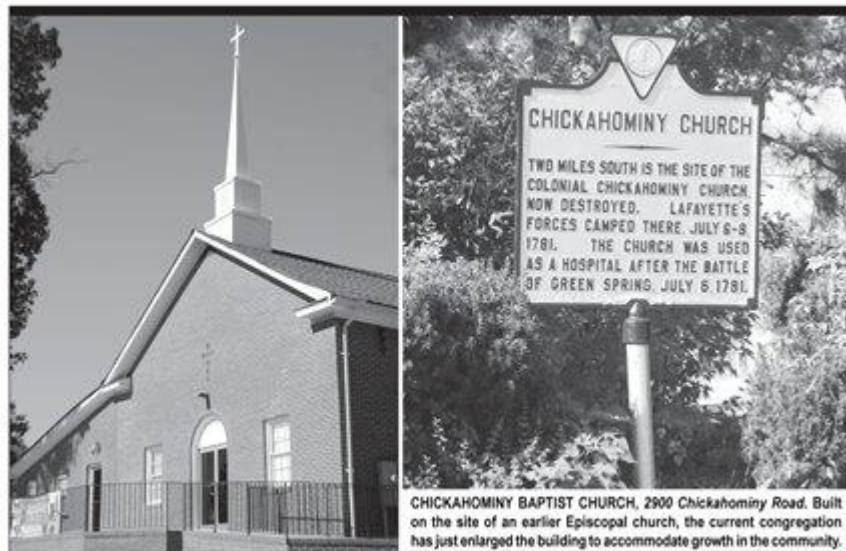
The disestablishment of the Anglican Church after the Revolution allowed other denominations a chance to gain acceptance in the area. The original James City Chapel, located where the cemetery of the same name is in Norge today, was deeded to the Methodist Church in 1791. This was the forerunner of Mt. Vernon Methodist Church located on Church Lane in Toano. A part of the original chapel was moved to the new site in the 1880s, and the congregation has built additions over the years. Olive Branch Church, organized by followers of Alexander Campbell, was built about 1835 on land donated by Dr. Charles Hubbard and his wife, Mary Henley Hubbard. The old Chickahominy Church burned during the 1860s, and the African-American congregation built a new church at that site soon after. An offshoot of this church was established in 1871 on Old Forge Road on land purchased from Enoch Martin, owner of Lombardy. Known at first as Sandy Bottom Church, this later became St. John Baptist Church.

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WAVERLY, off Richmond Road just past Hickory Neck Church. Built about 1852, this house is being preserved and will be renovated to serve as the community clubhouse for the Villages at White Hall.

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CHICKAHOMINY BAPTIST CHURCH, 2900 Chickahominy Road. Built on the site of an earlier Episcopal church, the current congregation has just enlarged the building to accommodate growth in the community.

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TOANO BUSINESS BUILDINGS, Richmond Road. Left to right: Meanley's Store, now the Masonic Lodge; the Bank Building, now business offices; W. C. Martin's Store, now the Equilibrium Exercise Center.

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TOANO WOMEN'S CLUB, 7965 Richmond Road. Once used as the gymnasium for Toano High School, the Women's Club building now hosts many community functions today.

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MOUNT VERNON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, 7837 Church Lane. With its origin from as early as 1791, the church has been at this location for about 125 years.

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LOMBARDY, 2724 Forge Road. With portions of the house dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this working farm has been a part of the agricultural community for several centuries.

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WARRENTON, 1827 Forge Road. This 19<sup>th</sup> century house was carefully rebuilt in the 1930s using original materials whenever possible.

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During Reconstruction, the area struggled to regain livelihood. By the 1880s, growing cities were in need of food supplies, and with the coming of the railroad, transportation was available. This is when Burnt Ordinary was renamed "Toano." Although there are several versions of the naming story, they are all similar. The crew that laid the tracks had been working on the Union Pacific Railroad before coming to this area. As they laid tracks from around Windsor Shades along to this area, they realized that the land went uphill. From this point to the south, the land ran downhill. The word "toano" is a Paiute Indian word meaning "high ground" that seemed applicable to the terrain as they laid the tracks. It has also been said that "Burnt Ordinary" was too large for the sign to be placed on the depot!

Food crops became a major industry for the area. A barrel factory opened to provide shipping containers, and the C&O Railroad hauled the crops to market. By the turn of the century, the Felix Hotel and the Wayside Inn offered accommodations to the many salesmen and commodity buyers that came through the area. In addition, there were five or six general stores, a bank, and doctors' and lawyers' offices in the village, all interspersed with homes. As vegetable production

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WHITE HALL, 3200 Rochambeau Drive. The two large chimneys housed four fireplaces that heated the first and second floor rooms of this early 19<sup>th</sup> century home of the Geddy family.

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increased, a canning factory was built to preserve the crops and increase the scope of the market. Toano even briefly had its own weekly newspaper, *The Peninsula News*, published in 1901. Coming full-circle, a century later, Toano again has its own newspaper, the *Toano-Norge Times*.

Unfortunately, most of the businesses and houses on the west side of Richmond Road were demolished when Route 60 was widened in the 1960s. A small core of buildings from the "business district" remains.

Three large structures of the Italian-Renaissance style stand side by side. Walter C. Martin's store (now Equilibrium) was built about 1905. Next door, the Bank Building was built in 1903, and next to that was Meanley's Store, which was purchased and renovated by the Masonic Lodge in 1945. Then just west of the modern Post Office, there is a good example of an early "Esso filling station," reminiscent of the era when gas was pumped for customers. Across Depot Street stands the Corner Tack Shop, a well-restored example of a small grocery/dry goods store from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Bowers home, built originally in 1910 for the Methodist minister, is a prime example of residences in the village. The Carlton house, just up the street, served as a showroom for coffins in addition to being a residence and a boarding house. The Pierce home, later owned by the Marston and Geddy families, dates from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and was situated where the Burnt Ordinary Apartments stand today. This house has since been moved to Depot Street and carefully restored. The exotic (at least for Toano) Gatewood house was built as a getaway for Dr. Gatewood and his family, who vacationed there from Richmond. The Wilkinson house (now Dudley's) built in the 1920s, and the Lightfoot Richardson house (now The Farm House Furniture Store) built in 1912, are examples of homes that have now been turned into commercial spaces. A number of homes on School and Church Lanes date from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This area may be considered as Toano's first subdivision.

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OLIVE BRANCH CHRISTIAN CHURCH, 7643 Richmond Road. Celebrating its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008, this congregation was organized and met at Hill Pleasant farm for several years before the present church was constructed.

In addition to Hickory Neck Academy, there were at least three primary schools located along Old Forge Road. One was on or near John Martin's farm, and he, among others, taught there for many years. The second one was located on a portion of the Peach Park farm. Robert Taylor, who lived at an earlier house at Vaux Hall, tutored some children in the area as well. Additionally, an elementary school for black students, located at St. John Church, was later merged with the larger school near Chickahominy Church. In 1908, the Toano High School serving grades one through eleven was opened where the Fire Station and EOC buildings are located today. This secondary school, the only one serving a tri-county area, further helped to seal Toano's position as the hub of James City County. The present-day Toano Women's Club building served as the gymnasium as

the student body grew.

Toano enjoyed many years of prosperity. But gradually, railroad shipping gave way to truck shipping, and after World War II, growth around Williamsburg shifted the business ventures in that direction.

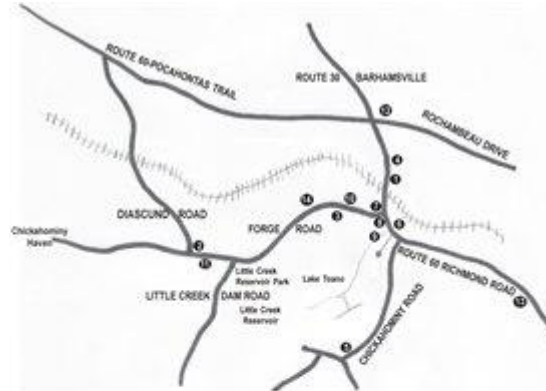
The closing of Toano High School in the 1950s and the widening of Richmond Road gradually changed the village. The rural atmosphere of the area has also shifted to smaller farms, and while there is still a good bit of crop farming going on, horse farms have taken over much of the land along Old Forge Road.

The recently opened Farmers' Market is a good indication that some truck farming still exists in the vicinity. The Toano Revitalization Initiative is working with the county to improve the village atmosphere of Toano and to preserve the rural landscape and ancient homes of historic Old Forge Road.





**ST. JOHN BAPTIST CHURCH, 2588 Forge Road.** Organized as an offshoot from Chickahominy Church for the convenience of members living in the area, the congregation is celebrating 137 years at this location in 2008.



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| 1. HICKORY NECK EPISCOPAL CHURCH<br>5300 Richmond Road        | 8. TOANO WOMEN'S CLUB<br>7903 Richmond Road                 |
| 2. WINDSOR CASTLE<br>1812 Forge Road                          | 9. MOUNT VERNON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH<br>7827 Church Lane |
| 3. VARIETY GROVE<br>2811 Forge Road                           | 10. LOMBARDY<br>2724 Forge Road                             |
| 4. WAVERLY<br>Off Richmond Road just past Hickory Neck Church | 11. WARRENTON<br>1927 Forge Road                            |
| 5. CHICKAHOMINY BAPTIST CHURCH<br>2980 Chickahominy Road      | 12. WHITE HALL<br>3208 Rochambeau Drive                     |
| 6. DOWNTOWN TOANO BUSINESS DISTRICT<br>Richmond Road          | 13. OLIVE BRANCH CHRISTIAN CHURCH<br>7843 Richmond Road     |
| 7. BURNT ORDINARY<br>Richmond Road                            | 14. ST. JOHN BAPTIST CHURCH<br>2588 Forge Road              |

Note: Map is just a visual and not to scale

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Friends of Forge Road and Toano Association, hereafter referred to as FORT, is a group of concerned neighbors and users of the road, who are joined in the common goal of protecting, preserving, and enhancing the tranquil beauty and peaceful character of our rural byway, the village of Toano, and adjacent neighborhoods within this area. Toano is designated as a Community Character Corridor and Forge Road will be proposed for scenic by way status.



Neighbors living on and near Forge Road and in Toano share concerns for the future of its rural character. We are concerned, that without proactive intervention on the part of residents and other concerned citizens, mismanaged growth will occur. We are organizing to inform the community at large about the importance of preserving these precious and limited resources.