

Miscellanea

Obituary

Franklin J. Tobey, Jr. (1919-2010)

Numerous amateur naturalists who have a paying job doing one thing but spend their free time devoted to a field of science have made substantial and sometimes significant contributions. One such person was Franklin J. (Frank) Tobey, Jr. He was an amateur naturalist interested in the communication of science to the public. He contributed much to herpetology, in this case to the herpetology of Virginia.

I first met Frank at a Virginia Herpetological Society (VHS) meeting at Camp Shawondasee in Chesterfield County in the fall of 1962. This was my first VHS meeting at age 14. The VHS officers made me feel welcome despite my age. Frank and the other society officers were devoted to Virginia's amphibians and reptiles and sought to keep it state-focused, despite some pressure to add exotics to society activities. Frank and the others, including my uncle Costello Craig, helped me to see that they were doing science by adding knowledge to our understanding of this group of animals. I credit Frank, Cos, and the VHS at that time for planting the seed that later caused me to become a professional scientist. I also credit these persons for making sure that including young people has always been a large part of how the VHS operates.

The VHS originated in the mind of Frank Tobey. As a high school student in New Jersey, Frank helped amass distribution records for the snakes of that state (Trapido, 1937). With that background, he saw the need for such herpetological information when he came to Virginia. In 1957, he wrote an article on snakes for *Virginia Wildlife* (Tobey, 1957) and asked if there were people who might be interested in forming a group. He and the original officers determined that their first focus would be on gathering locality information to generate distribution maps. Frank found like-minded friends, particularly W.L. Witt, another amateur, and started to accumulate reliable information on the distribution of amphibians and reptiles in the Commonwealth. The only checklist of species with locality information (e.g., counties) available on this topic was E.R. Dunn's (1936) checklist with county notations. These first VHS officers also consulted scientific papers written by others such as R.L. Hoffman (e.g., Hoffman 1944, 1945a, b, 1953), to obtain geographic location information. Frank was the repository of the society's distribution records derived from the Smithsonian Institution's Division of Amphibians and Reptiles, other museums, the literature, and viable reports from

citizens. His goal was to produce, through the VHS, a book with detailed distribution maps for all of Virginia's native species. It was to be a long-term project that finally came to fruition in 1985 (Tobey, 1985). Frank Tobey was a prominent figure in the VHS during its first 21 years of existence, and during lean times he WAS the VHS.

Frank and the co-founders of the VHS (W.L. Burger, O.K. Goodwin, R.H. deRageot, W.L. Witt, J.T. Wood) met at Camp Shawondasee on 18 October 1958 to officially inaugurate the society. Frank, having been a reporter and associate editor of a Washington, D.C. magazine, became the Secretary and newsletter editor. He wrote, printed, and distributed a total of 90 issues of the *VHS Bulletin* between 1958 and 1979, sometimes mailing as many as 300 copies of each issue. Although there were articles written by members, much of the information he wrote himself based on correspondence and notes from members. The journal *Catesbeiana* took the place of the *VHS Bulletin* a year after the last bulletin appeared (1979). Frank also organized many of the early VHS meetings, including those at the National Zoo in Washington.

Franklin Joseph Tobey, Jr. was born on 22 February 1919. He grew up in Newark, New Jersey, where he was a member of the Newark Museum's Natural Science Club from 1933 to 1938, when he graduated from high school. He was an Eagle Scout and assisted the camp doctor at BSA Camp Mohican for many years. He enrolled in Seton Hall University in Newark but transferred to Columbia College in New York, graduating in 1942 as a dual zoology and political science major. He was inducted into the U.S. Army on 10 June 1942 where he was trained at Camp (now Fort) Pickett, Virginia, as a motor transport officer in the Medical Corps. He was commissioned a Lieutenant after additional training at the Army Medical Field Service School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1943. He served in Ardennes, the Rhineland, and central Germany during World War II. He assisted in the return home of Allied Forces who had been in German Prisoner of War Camps. Soon after returning to the United States in early 1946, he married Carolyn Wiederspahn in June of that year. He graduated with a Master of Arts in Economics from Columbia College in 1947 and a year later settled in Oakton, Fairfax County, Virginia. He also lived in Maryland for a few years while still running the VHS before his move to a stone house on a ridge near Purcellville in Loudoun County. They had two daughters, Carolyn Tobey Berardesco and Alix Tobey Southwick, and one son, Franklin Joseph Tobey III. Joe played bagpipes at dawn at some



Fig. 1. Franklin J. Tobey, Jr. as a U.S. Army reservist in 1969. Photo provided to J.C. Mitchell by Frank Tobey.

of the field-oriented meetings in the early 1960s, sometimes to the ire of some participants. Frank had six grandchildren and six great grandchildren. Until 1959, Frank was a reporter and editor for the *Public Utilities Fortnightly* magazine but that year he was invited to join the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission as a media consultant and liaison with the U.S. Public Health Service. He remained in the U.S. Army Reserve until he retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in February 1969 (Fig. 1). Frank was always proud of his years in Europe and especially Germany. He knew German well and always signed himself "Franz Josef" in letters to Richard Hoffman.

Frank continued to produce the *VHS Bulletin* for ten years after retiring. In reviewing specimen lists for the distribution maps (Tobey, 1985), he discovered that a Six-lined Racerunner (*Aspidoscelis sexlineata*) housed in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, had been collected in the Civil War during the Seven Days Battle in Hanover County in 1862. He tracked down the collector's name, which turned out to be Union General George G. Meade, or one of his staff. The specimen was sent to secure the attention of a Harvard scientist who Meade wanted on his staff. Frank's interests in history and herpetology combined to produce his article in the *Civil War Times Illustrated* (Tobey, 1991) that described this historical connection. Frank also contributed to the first effort to evaluate all of Virginia's threatened and endangered plants and animals by editing and writing some of the species accounts on amphibians and reptiles for the first book on the topic (Linzey, 1979; Tobey, 1979).

Upon retirement, Frank's long-time interest in geology and minerals led him to become active in amateur geology clubs (Franklin-Ogdensburg Mineralogical Society and the Mineral Club of Lower Bucks County, NJ) where he contributed articles to their newsletter. He wrote his memoirs of his experiences in World War II. He still contributed articles for *Catesbeiana*, however (Tobey, 1988, 1989a, b, 2008). In 1998, the VHS awarded Frank Tobey with its first Lifetime Achievement Award during the society's 40th anniversary meeting in honor of his outstanding contributions to Virginia herpetology and the VHS. This award was established to recognize members who have made important contributions to Virginia's herpetofauna and exhibited a positive image that reflects the values of the VHS.

Frank Tobey (d. 6 May 2010) will be remembered primarily as the person who almost single-handedly kept the VHS alive for over 20 years. Many VHS members who knew him will remember his kindness and gentle prodding to gather distributional data. His dedication to Virginia herpetology as an amateur naturalist is unmatched. He influenced numerous young people through the *Bulletin*, correspondence, and interactions at VHS meetings, including me. Virginia herpetology will forever be grateful to this amateur naturalist from New Jersey. His dedication to science shows what can be done by amateur naturalists if one stays focused. Such a life dedicated to a worthy cause would well be emulated by others seeking to make a difference.

I remember Frank for his warm and enthusiastic support of all the members who showed up for the meetings, except for the very few who were noisy and distracting. Even then he was the consummate diplomat, although he would tell some of us in private what he really thought. He was, after all, a military officer and acted much in that dignified manner. He was dedicated to the survey and followed up on each and every specimen location he knew about, and in those days it was all by letter. He told me that everything he learned about Virginia herpetology back then he put into the *VHS Bulletin*. Being a reporter, he of course put this material in more of a news format than a scientific format. I became less than enthusiastic about this approach around 1980 and when Frank said that number 90 of the *Bulletin* was his last, I advocated that the VHS start a new journal in a more scientific style. Richard Hoffman suggested the name *Catesbeiana*. Frank was not exactly pleased to see this turn of events but, nevertheless, as always, he remained a cordial and supportive friend and colleague. He could see that the VHS needed to grow in another direction

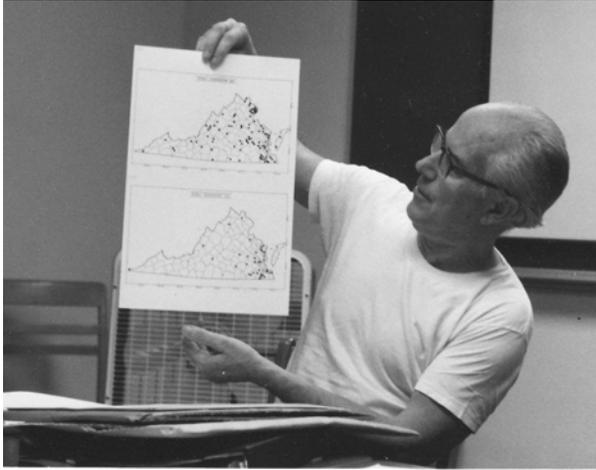


Fig. 2. Frank Tobey showing the page proofs of the Virginia herpetological distribution maps at a VHS meeting at the University of Richmond in 1982. Photo by J.C. Mitchell.

and he graciously stepped aside to let us younger upstarts take over.

The set of distribution maps (Fig. 2; Tobey, 1985) is a monument to his tenacity and love of Virginia herpetology. The meticulous records he kept on each specimen location are now protected for posterity in the VHS archives. Perusal of these documents shows that Frank was as honest and professional as any professional scientist. Virginia herpetology owes a great debt of gratitude to Frank for creating the first set of distribution maps for these two groups of vertebrates. Everything we have done and will do relative to the distributional biology of Virginia's amphibians and reptiles is and will be built on Frank's shoulders.

Acknowledgments

I thank Steve Roble and Susan Walls for critiquing earlier drafts of this obituary. Richard Hoffman provided the line about Frank's love of Germany. Janet Roetken of the Virginia Museum of Natural History sent me a copy of a letter sent to Hoffman by Alix T. Southwick following Frank's passing. I thank Frank Tobey personally for his support of my long-term interests in Virginia herpetology and for his support of me personally.

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