

TOOF HISTORY



Listed on the National Register of Historic Places

The Company:

Constructed in 1913, the S.C. Toof building served as the manufacturing, warehousing and general offices for the city's oldest commercial printing house. Founded in 1864 as the Franklin Job Printing House, Stephen C. Toof changed the name to S.C. Toof and Company in 1876 and incorporated in 1899, making it today one of the oldest continuously operating corporations in the state. Having temporarily moved from Memphis during the upheavals of yellow fever epidemics, S.C. Toof and Company returned to the city where they began a period of prosperous growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. During this time the printing operation expanded to lithographing, typesetting, bookbinding, office furniture, safes and electronic automation for encoding checks and deposit slips for magnetic ink character identification.

The Architecture:

G.M. Shaw, the architect, had a prominent commercial and residential practice in Memphis from 1895 to 1919. In addition to several fine residences, Shaw designed, in partnership with Charles O. Pfeil, the Tennessee Trust Building (1906), Business Men's Club (1906, National Register),

Commercial Appeal Building (1906), Fire Engine House No. 1 (1910, National Register), Memphis Police Station (1911, National Register), and the William R. Moore Building (1913).

The S.C. Toof Building is unique in that it is Shaw's only use of the Egyptian Revival style, his other commercial and governmental buildings being either Beaux Arts or Neo-Classical Revival designs. Shaw's choice of an Egyptian style demonstrates a deep connection that both Memphis and the printing company share with Egypt. Memphis, Tennessee, being located on the Mississippi River, was named for Memphis, Egypt — the historic capital of Lower Egypt located on the Nile River. The symbol for Lower Egypt is the papyrus, which was a plant used as paper for their formal writing system, the hieroglyph.

Naturally, Shaw picked up on the abundance of connections. As a result, the Toof Building is the oldest known example of an Egyptian motif building in Memphis, and it is one of the oldest reinforced concrete frame buildings in the entire city. Its exposed reinforced columns, with their cast-in-place decorative capitals, are one of the earliest examples of the use of concrete in an architectural manner to further accentuate this design concept.

Each floor is divided into three bays which are separated by quadrangular pillars with "T" shaped stone capitals typical of Egyptian structural piers. The north elevation columns take the form of an ancient Egyptian plant as does the "lotus petal" reveal which can be spotted from Madison Avenue between the fourth and fifth stories.

The Family:

Born in Canada, Stephen C. Toof came to Memphis in 1853. Three years later, at the age of twenty-one, he became the composing room foreman for the *Memphis Daily Appeal* (predecessor of *The Commercial Appeal*). When Memphis' capture was imminent during the Civil War in 1862, its publication, a vital Confederate newspaper, was threatened. Mr. Toof was responsible for the evacuation of the press and other equipment aboard a freight car in the last train out of Memphis with a Confederate crew. His brother, John Toof, followed him to Memphis a few years later, and also became an important figure in the early history of the city, having organized the Chamber of Commerce and the Merchants Exchange in 1859 along with serving as the original secretary of the Cotton Exchange in 1873. S.C. Toof's grandson, S. Toof Brown, Sr., continued the family's printing business and its activity in civic affairs. He was one of the original organizers of the Cotton Carnival in 1931 and was active on the Board of Brooks Memorial Art Gallery. S. Toof Brown's sister, Ruth Brown Moore, built a large home on a portion of the Toof Farm, which she had inherited from her Aunt Grace in southwest Shelby County. She called it "Graceland", in honor of her aunt; and now it is known world-wide as the home of Elvis Presley.