

E. S. Tome / E. S. France, National Bank President

By Karl Sanford Kabelac

ALITTLE OVER A CENTURY AGO EVALYN S. TOME (E. S. France after her remarriage) was president of not one, but two national banks. She may well have been the only woman during the national bank note-issuing period to have that distinction.

She was born Evalyn S. Nesbitt in 1855 in the Maryland community of Port Deposit, which is on the Susquehanna River some 50 miles northeast of Baltimore. Her parents were Henry, a merchant, and Hannah Nesbitt. In 1884, when she was nearly 30, she married Jacob Tome, a Port Deposit resident some 45 years her senior.

Jacob Tome was born in Pennsylvania in 1810 and had settled in Port Deposit as a young man in the 1830s, becoming a very successful businessman and banker. He was a widower with no surviving children when they married. They founded the Jacob Tome Institute, a private school in Port Deposit in 1889. Both of them were very much involved in its development and early years. (The school has had a most interesting history over the last century. Today it survives as a private day school in the community of North East, Maryland some ten miles from Port Deposit.)

Tome was nearly eighty-eight when he died on March 16, 1898. He left an estate -- with a 48-page will -- variously estimated at \$4,000,000 to \$6,000,000. At his death, among his many business interests, he was president of The Cecil National Bank of Port Deposit (charter #1211) and The National Bank of Elkton (charter #1236). Both communities are in Cecil County. Elkton, the county seat, is about 20 miles east of Port Deposit. Both national banks had been founded in 1865.

Very shortly after his death his widow was elected president of The Cecil National Bank of Port Deposit. And nearly four months later, on July 12, 1898, she was elected president of The National Bank of Elkton. The *Baltimore Sun*, commenting on this

fact the next day, noted that "Mrs. Tome is also president of the Jacob Tome Institute, and her duties directing the affairs of that institution of learning, with those of her new positions, will make her life one of active care and equaled in responsibility by few, if any women."

The same newspaper, in an article on Nov. 23, 1898, about the Tome estate, listed the stock holdings in eight banks and five other companies that she had inherited.

One of the instructors in the Tome Institute was Joseph I. France. He was a graduate of Hamilton College, with additional training at the University of



Only known image of Evalyn S. (Nesbitt) Tome France, from a painting which was destroyed in a 1969 fire. (From *The Jacob Tome Institute* . . . and used with permission)



Leipzig and Clark University, who taught chemistry at the school. In 1902 he left to receive medical training in Baltimore. On June 24, 1903 they were married at her home in Port Deposit. She was almost 50 and he was nearly 20 years her junior.

Internal problems with the Tome Institute Board caused her to resign as Board President and a director in May 1904. She continued her bank presidencies for several more years, resigning the Elkton presidency in early 1906 and the Port Deposit presidency later that year.

Although trained as a physician, Joseph France had a political career. He was active in the Republican Party and served as a United States Senator from Maryland for a term, 1917 to 1923. When her husband was a Senator, she was a founding member of a group called, "Ladies of the Senate." Made up of Senators' wives, they met to do charitable work. The group survives to this day, now being called "Senate Spouses."

Joseph France was an early advocate of trade with the Soviet Union. In 1932, disliking Herbert Hoover's policies he tried, unsuccessfully, to receive the Republican nomination for the presidency.

They maintained a winter home in Baltimore. Evalyn S. France died in Baltimore on April 22, 1927, after a period of declining health. She was buried in the Hopewell Cemetery in Port Deposit. Her obituary in the *Cecil County News*

A postcard of The National Bank of Elkton, Maryland, mailed in 1906. The bank's entrance was at the left of the building. Today the building is the home of The Historical Society of Cecil County.

Tome.—Jacob Tome, President of the Cecil National Bank, Port Deposit, Md., and one of the wealthy men of the State, died March 16. Mr. Tome had long been identified with banking in the South. He was also largely interested in charitable and benevolent enterprises. In 1889 he founded the institute which bears his name, endowing it with a fund of \$2,000,000 over which he retained control during his life. His estate is estimated at \$4,000,000.

A Lady President.—Mrs. E. S. Tome, widow of the late Jacob Tome, the well-known philanthropist, has been elected President of the Cecil National Bank, Port Deposit, Md., succeeding her husband in that position.

President of Two Banks.—At a meeting of the directors of the National Bank of Elkton, Md., July 12, Mrs. Jacob S. Tome was elected President of the bank to succeed her late husband. Mrs. Tome is also President of the Cecil National Bank, Port Deposit, Md., and of the Jacob Tome Institute.

Three entries from *The Bankers Magazine* for April, May, and August 1898 recording the death of Jacob Tome and the election of his widow to two national bank presidencies.



Two Series 1882 five dollar notes on The National Bank of Elkton. The first is signed by E. S. Tome as president; the second, after her remarriage, is signed as E. S. France as president. (Images courtesy J. Fred Maples)

of Elkton noted that “she was a woman of most pleasing personality and unusual ability, and was most highly esteemed not only by her associates, but by all who came in contact with her.”

Her husband survived her by 12 years, dying in 1939. The bank in Elkton voluntarily closed in 1930; the one in Port Deposit was reorganized in 1933/1934, later merged with another bank and the Port Deposit office closed in 1986.

Sources and Acknowledgments

Only the main sources used in this article and not already mentioned in the text are noted. Biographical sketches of Jacob Tome are found in the *Dictionary of American Biography* and the *American National Biography*. The history of the Jacob Tome Institute and Evalyn S. Tome’s role are covered in William M. Hogue, *The Jacob Tome Institute and Its Schools, the First Hundred Years*, 1995. The *New York Times* (and presumably many other newspapers) covered her marriage to Joseph I. France, her death, and his death. These articles are found in that paper for June 25, 1903; April 23, 1927; and January 27, 1939. Biographical entries for both of them are found in *Who Was Who in America, 1897-1942*. I am grateful for the help of Mark Hotz and J. Fred Maples. ♦