

Introduction

Long Island lies to the east of New York City, and stretches 120 miles out into the Atlantic Ocean. In the 1630s Dutch colonists crossed the East River and began farming the western end of the island. Later that century New Englanders sailed down and began settling the eastern end of the island. Queens County, established in 1683 from one of three "Ridings" established by the British in 1665, was where the Dutch and English met and mingled.

It was here that Samuel Youngs was born on September 14, 1803, in the Cove Neck (East Bay) section of Oyster Bay, Queens County, New York, about 25 miles northeast of New York City. He was a son of Thomas and Catherine Tobias Youngs.

The Rev. John Youngs had founded the Long Island village of Southold in 1640. A son, or grandson, also named Samuel Youngs, settled at Oyster Bay in 1654, and it was here, in that direct line of descent, that Samuel's father Thomas was born.

Samuel's maternal grandfather was Dr. Christian Tobias, of Nova Scotia, a surgeon in the British Army during the Revolution. After the war he located in Oyster Bay, and is buried there.

The year before our Samuel's birth, in 1802, his father Thomas, and uncles Daniel, Samuel and Thomas, purchased shares in a new Seminary of Learning, for \$72.50 each. The school was located on the old town common. The grounds were fenced and planted with Lombardy Poplars. This was where Samuel received his early education.

Oyster Bay was a rural community during the first half of the 1800s. As a boy, Samuel Youngs had access to regular digging of clams and oysters, and to fishing waters of the protected Oyster Bay. Each fall he would have joined in harvesting the marsh grass for winter feed for cattle.

After graduating from the Seminary, he read law and was admitted to the New York bar. He practiced law.

The Youngs property offered a beautiful setting, part of which Theodore Roosevelt would later purchase

to create Sagamore Hill. In 1858, a few months before Samuel left for California, one writer described the lands:

Farm of Mr. Daniel Youngs.... comprises about 300 acres, generally of a light, loamy or gravelly soil, though some fields are a heavy loam, abounding more or less with loose stones, of a suitable size for making walls. The farm lies partly on Oyster Bay, and partly on a fine ridge between it and Cold Spring Harbor. The situation is commanding and delightful.

The house was erected in the year 1650, being the first built in the place. It was honored by receiving General Washington as a guest for one night, while on a tour through Long Island after the Revolution.

...The sons of Mr. Youngs are devoting considerable attention to fruit and garden vegetables for the city market. They have just begun a vineyard of some extent.

Farm of Mr. Thomas F. Youngs.... lies a little back of Oyster Bay, runs down to Cold Spring Harbor, and comprises about 400 acres.... It is certainly the most beautifully situated and highly cultivated on Long Island. The buildings, also, are very fine and commodious. Mr. Youngs has been uncommonly spirited in his improvements. He has drained a large swamp, which...grew the second year after draining it, 123½ bushels of corn per acre.¹ Samuel Youngs' father Thomas did not live in the Homestead built by the original Thomas, but in a house built by Samuel's great-great-grandfather Samuel, always called "The Other House" and located across the way from the Homestead.² When Thomas died, Samuel's mother Catherine married her brother-in-law, Daniel.

At the time of Samuel's birth, both Thomas and Daniel were slaveholders. Daniel's slave Harriett bore a son the same year Sam was born. During Samuel's early years the Youngs' slaves were emancipated through New York's Law for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery."³

Samuel's father, Thomas, and his uncles, Daniel and Samuel, were involved in township government. His uncle Daniel was regularly appointed as an overseer of the poor when the Town Meetings were held on the first Tuesday of each April. He served as town clerk for many years, and was moderator of the town meetings for several sessions.

As soon as Samuel reached 21, he, too, entered municipal life. He was an assessor and a county road commissioner (1 of 3 of each) for four years, then became town supervisor (chief administrative officer) for six years. The next year served the town as an election observer and as a state legislator. In both 1847 and 1848 he was moderator of the town meeting, a post he had also held in 1839 and 1840.

Throughout the early 1800s, and into the 1870s, Oyster Bay operated through Town Meetings, with gatherings the first Tuesday in April and on special occasions as necessary. In 1931, Edward R. Summers, then 88, described the event:

Town Meeting was held at East Norwich, at a tavern or hotel.... The Town House used there was about ten feet square, with removable side bars by which it could be moved about. It stood by the roadside except at Town Meeting, when it would be carried to a convenient spot in front of the hotel. The Clerk and one or more Justices sat in it to record the decisions. The townsmen stood about in the

¹ From *The American Agriculturalist*, quoted in the *Hempstead Inquirer*, Hempstead, Long Island, Feb. 19, 1848, p. 1, col. 2.

² Letter from Mary Youngs, cousin of Col. Samuel Youngs, to Ethel Zimmer, April 5, 1957. Letter is located with the journal.

³ In the Youngs' Cemetery at Cove Neck there are plain white wooden crosses marking the places where slaves were buried. No cross contains a name or date (1987).

open air. The Moderator was chosen by acclamation. The resolutions were read by him, and voted aye or nay by upraised hands. The question was put: who do you wish for Supervisor, and the Moderator, judging from the voices would call out the most likely name, to be voted aye or nay. So on through the list.

It was a sort of annual fair for men and boys. Women did not attend, for civic affairs were the men's business.... Booths and stands displayed fruits, sweetmeats and drinks for sale and the bakers and other purveyors of food were there.⁴ Business at the town meeting usually consisted of protection of the oyster and clam beds in various ways, such as forbidding harvesting by plowing; forbidding harvesting by out-of-towners, etc.; to disposition of the marsh grass (salt grass) and to regularly reaffirming a rule that all fences be four feet high.

Samuel Youngs represented Queens County in the 66th (1843) and 67th (1844) sessions of the New York State Assembly. He was a member of the Assembly Standing Committee on Claims in 1843. He was not a member of any standing committee in 1844.

Youngs proposed the following legislation in 1843: An act relative to the disposition of moneys found upon dead bodies of non-residents of Queens County," and "An act in relation to the appointment of weighers of produce and merchandise." He supported several minor resolutions in 1844. Youngs was excused for "poor attendance" in the Assembly in 1844 and in both 1843 and 1844 he asked for leaves of absence of several days. No reason for his absence was recorded.⁵

The name Youngs occurs frequently throughout the history of Oyster Bay. Samuel was one of the popular names in the family. This was probably part of the reason the title of "Colonel." became attached to his name; to differentiate him from the other Samuel Youngs'. He received the title and rank of colonel as commanding officer of the 117th Regiment of the New York Militia, at Oyster Bay.

The last mention of (Col.) Samuel Youngs in the town records occurs in entries for April 4, 1848, when, as usual, the town meeting was held at John Layton's tavern in East Norwich.⁶ There, he was elected as a [County Commissioner].

On April 4, 1848, the Oyster Bay townspeople held their annual Town Meeting at John Layton's tavern in East Norwich. Col. Youngs was elected Supervisor (county commissioner).⁷

Major news of the day dealt with the bloody battles of the Mexican War. By year's end war had ended. News columns, and the word on the street, was the exciting reports of the discovery of gold in California.

In February, 1849, Col. Samuel Youngs joined a group of Long Islanders bound for the golden streams and dreams of the far West. Sailing south, they crossed Mexico by land, then sailed north to San Francisco. It is reported that during the summer of 1849, Col. Youngs was successful at finding gold in the Southern Mines.

During the following winter he joined partnership in Sacramento with Henry C. Kibbe and H.A. Chace to form YOUNGS & KIBBE. The firm was one of several Sacramento "importers, commission and wholesale dealers

⁴ John Cox Jr., *Oyster Bay Town Records, Vol. VIII: 1795-1878*, p. 334.

⁵ Letter from New York State Library (Susan Lawrence, Assistant Librarian), dated March 31, 1972.

⁶ *Oyster Bay Town Records, Vol. VIII.*

⁷ *Oyster Bay Town Records, Vol. VIII.*

in general merchandise, flour, grain, wines, liquors, segars, groceries, etc."⁸

The cholera epidemic of 1850 was especially bad in Sacramento and by the first week in November there were 60 deaths a day. The rate dropped off rapidly until mid-November, when the worst of the epidemic ended. Samuel Youngs' half brother, Edward, 26, died of cholera on November 8. His body was shipped home and is buried in the Youngs family cemetery at Oyster Bay.

Samuel Youngs and his partners moved into a new two story brick building at 168 J Street, Sacramento, in 1853.

Chace, a native of Rhode Island, was a socialite whose name often appeared among sponsors of fancy-dress balls. He remained a friend and correspondent of Youngs for many years. Kibbe, a native of New York, married Sarah Afflick, daughter of a prominent Sacramento physician.

In the 1860s Kibbe became the California-based representative for some Virginia City mines. Kibbe later played fast and loose with money from the Ophir, and when discovered, committed suicide.

In June of 1854, suffering financial reverses during California's economic downturn of the 1850s, the partnership was dissolved through sale. The defunct KIBBE & YOUNGS was purchased by another partnership, KREANER & QUIVEY. Youngs maintained an interest in the brick building, and continued living there. He was in it shortly after midnight, on July 13, 1854, when fire broke out in a nearby hotel kitchen. The conflagration which followed destroyed wooden buildings in the downtown core area. Youngs recorded the fire in his journal, noting: "iron shutters red hot; had water and vinegar used freely. Heat and smoke intense and oppressive."

Once settled into life in Sacramento, Col. Youngs became involved in city government. As a member of the City Council he served as commissioner for public works under Mayor J.R. Hardenbergh. During his tenure the city raised the levees along the riverfront, "paved" the downtown streets with wooden planking, and began construction of the first municipal waterworks. At the same time he was a founding member of Grace Episcopal Church in Sacramento.

In 1855 Sam became suspicious of the manner in which U.S. Indian Agent T.J. Henley was conducting business in California. Henley purchased goods from Youngs for the Indians, and then asked him to sign blank vouchers. Sam reported his concerns in detail to J. Ross Browne, special investigator for the government. Browne got Henley dismissed, but was unable to press his case against Henley, who had powerful political friends.⁹

In political matters Youngs was a member of the Whig party during his New York days. In California he identified with the free-soil branch of the party, opposing extension of slavery. When the Whig party disappeared in 1855, Youngs briefly joined the American Union (The "Know-Nothing" party). Although maintaining friendships with California's politicians, he took no further active role in party politics until 1861. That year he became a proponent of Lincoln and the Union cause.

He corresponded regularly with members of the California Congressional delegation, and was a close friend not only of political leaders, but of Episcopal Bishop Leonidas Kip of California as well.

⁸ *Sacramento Daily Union* page one business cards, 1853.

⁹ David M. Goodman, *A Western Panorama, 1849-1875, the travels, writings and influence of J. Ross Browne*. . . . Arthur H. Clark Co., 1966.

In December, 1856, Col. Youngs became a partner in a new Sacramento partnership, LUDECHINS & VESARIA, and moved to San Francisco as the firm's produce buyer.

In San Francisco he was in the crowd observing the hangings by the Committee of Vigilance in 1856, and later paid dues to become a non-participating member of that group.¹⁰

Samuel Youngs passed his 56th birthday in San Francisco in September, 1859. He stood about 5 foot 10, and weighed about 140 pounds. He was clean shaven, with sideburns. In the 1850s he had been fitted with false teeth. He smoked cigars occasionally, and preferred expensive gin as his drink. Although Mark Twain would later accuse him of hanging around Carson City to visit with the ladies, Samuel Youngs never married.

When the great Comstock Lode was discovered, Youngs saw new opportunities. He prospected around Virginia City, then settled in Aurora. Becoming a friend of Gov. James W. Nye of the Territory of Nevada, he was deeply involved in the political life of the Territory. Successful initially as a mine and mill investor and owner, his wealth evaporated when the Aurora mines went bust. In Carson City again, he became a guard at the new federal Carson City Mint.

Returning to Oyster Bay in his twilight years, it was there that he died.

No pictures of Samuel Youngs have survived. A daguerreotype was taken of him in Sacramento and sent to his sister in Oyster Bay. It may have been saved at the time, along with letters home, earlier or later journals, and other personal papers. But all these were lost in a fire early in the 1900s. The remaining journal, for the period of August, 1853, through December, 1866, survived because he left it behind in Carson City when he returned to Oyster Bay. It was found face-down on the ground in a stable in Carson City, and given to the late Ethel Zimmer. Mrs. Zimmer made an edited, preliminary, unresearched typescript which was published in the Nevada Historical Society Quarterly. The journal passed to her daughter, the late Mrs. Louise Driggs, who allowed me to work with it for a decade from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s.

Robert E. Stewart

¹⁰ The Committee has been the subject of several books, the most recent of which is Robert M. Senkewicz, *Vigilantes in Gold Rush San Francisco*, Stanford University Press, 1985.