

THE CROMWELLS OF AURORA:

Chapters in African-American History

Members of the Cromwell family (pronounced “Crummell”) were among Aurora’s very early residents. Zilpa and Isaac Cromwell were probably born in slavery in the 1760s, but are listed as free people of color in the earliest Aurora census in which they appear (1820). Listed with them are Mary (born 1785) and Allen.

In 1826, Zilpa and Mary Cromwell bought a small lot on the lakeshore, where this gray house now stands. William (1820-1862), probably Zilpa's grandson, lived there later. His family remembers him as a light-skinned man with some Native American heritage.



He worked as a wheelwright and married Mary Jane Stevens, an Irish domestic.

1860 census

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|--------------------|----|---|---|-------------|---|
| 23 | 29 | 29 | William Cromwell | 40 | M | W | Wheelwright | ✓ |
| 24 | - | - | Mary Jane Cromwell | 30 | F | - | Domestic | ✓ |
| 25 | - | - | Margaret Albertson | 22 | F | - | Servant | ✓ |
| 26 | - | - | William Cooper | 1 | M | W | - | - |

Their son George (1861-1924) married Kittie (or Kate) Shorter (1861-1949). They taught their nine children to aim high in everything they did.

Their third daughter, Margaret (born 1886, preceded by Maude, 1882, and Kitty, 1884) was tutored in Latin by Mrs. Lyon so that she could attend nursing school at Tuskegee in 1908.



Tuskegee faculty, 1906



Margaret was later head nurse at a school in Lawrenceville, VA (almost certainly St. Paul School). She might be included in the picture on the left.



George Jr. was born in 1888. This 1896 picture on horseback almost seems to predict his later adventures as a “Buffalo soldier” in the 1916 Mexican Expedition: “chasing Pancho Villa,” his brother Ray recalled.

**The 10th Cavalry In Mexico;
George would have served with this regiment or the 9th Cavalry.**



This 1906 service book of St. Paul's Episcopal Church records the baptisms of the four youngest children: Walter (born 1894), Elizabeth (1897), Annis (1899), and Ray (1902).

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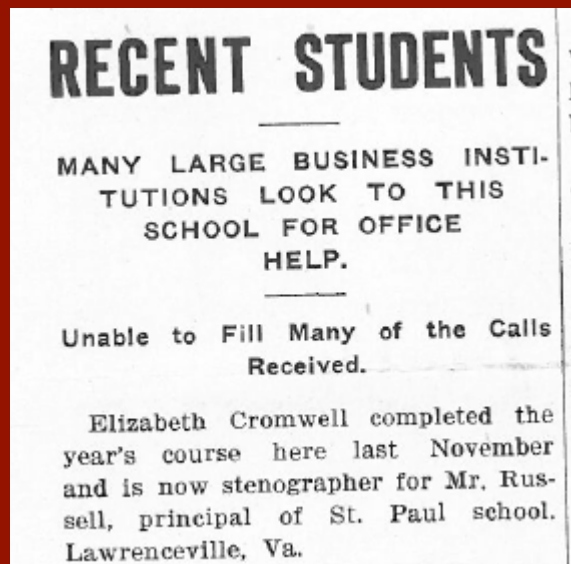
BAPTISMS

| Day and Date. | Place. | No. | Christian Name and Surname. | Place and Date of Birth. |
|---|----------------------|-----|--------------------------------|---|
| Sunday Sept 16 th 1906 | St. Paul's Church | | Walter Gould Cornwell | Aurora Ill October 3 rd 1894 |
| Sunday Sept 16 th 1906 | St. Paul's Church | | Elizabeth Van Baskirk Cornwell | Aurora Ill December 18 th 1897 |
| Sunday Sept 16 th 1906 | St. Paul's Church | | Annis Cornwell | Aurora Ill October 24 th 1899 |
| Sunday Sept 16 th 1906 | St. Paul's Church | | Ray Gungor Cornwell | Aurora Ill November 6 th 1902 |



Elizabeth (front row, left) and Annis (third row, right) are with Lillian Ritchie, Wells 1911 (second row, right) in about 1910. Lillian formed a club for Aurora girls.

**Her family
remembered
Elizabeth as the first
African-American
graduate of Oberlin
Business College.**



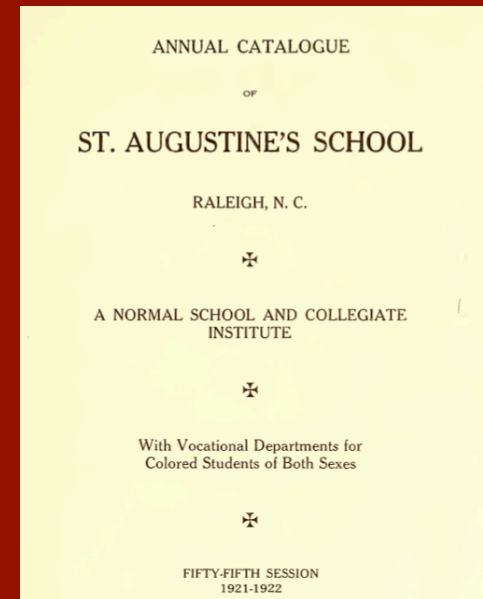
*Oberlin Business College
News, 1920*



**She worked for Archdeacon
James Solomon Russell, a
noted African-American
churchman and beloved saint
of the diocese. She had earlier
attended St. Paul, as did Annis.**

Walter and his older sister Rose (born 1891) graduated from another distinguished Episcopal school, St. Augustine's in Raleigh NC in 1915. Walter took the "Academic" (college prep) program and Rose the "Normal" (teacher training) course.

| <i>1915 Collegiate</i> | |
|--|--|
| William K. Bell, Student, Howard University, Washington, D.C. | |
| Walter B. Cromwell, Aurora by the Lake, N.Y. | |
| Henry B. Delany Jr., Student, New York College of Dentistry, New York City. | |
| Mildred E. Freeman, Teacher, Downingtown Industrial School, Downingtown, Pa. | |
| M. Rogerleen McCauley, Teacher, Boylan School, Wake Co., N.C. | |
| F. Pernetta Morrissey, Teacher, St. Philip's School, San Antonio, Tex. | |
| Mary J. Satterwhite, Teacher, St. Ambrose Parish School, Raleigh, N.C. | |
| Emma L. Smith, Teacher, Parish School, Greenville, N.C. | |
| <i>Normal</i> | |
| Rose Y. Cromwell, Teacher, St. Michael's Parish School, Charlotte, N.C. | |
| *Vera O. Hairston (Dunston), Raleigh, N.C. | |



Youngest brother Ray spent four years at St. Augustine's, graduating in 1922. He too took the "Academic" course.

| CATALOG OF STUDENTS | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT | |
| Fourth Year | |
| Bacon, Edith Mitchell..... | Perth Amboy, N. J. |
| Chavis, Benjamin Franklin..... | Oxford, N. C. |
| Cromwell, Ray Fenwick..... | Aurora, N. Y. |

It was a demanding program and, as at St. Paul's, the young men wore military uniforms and the young women dressed in blue serge.

| ST. AUGUSTINE'S SCHOOL | |
|------------------------|---|
| ACADEMIC III | |
| Elect two | Plane Geometry (five books)—Wentworth. |
| | Latin—Cicero, Four Orations Against Catiline; The Archias; The Manilian Law, Allen and Greenough; Latin Prose on works read. |
| Elect two | French—Chardenal's Grammar. |
| | Le Francais et sa Patrie, Talbot. |
| Elect two | Reading—Le Courrier des Etats-Unis. |
| | Physics—Millikan and Gale, with Manual. |
| Elect two | English—Rhetoric; Composition based on works read. |
| | Literature—Julius Caesar, Shakespeare; The Oregon Trail, Parkman; Sketch Book, Irving; Ancient Mariner, Coleridge; Outside Reading. |
| Elect two | Vocal Music. |
| | Manual Training } See pages 20 and 21. |
| Elect two | Home Economics } |
| ACADEMIC IV | |
| Elect two | Latin—Virgil's Aeneid (four books), Allen and Greenough; prosody; prose composition. |
| | French—Newspaper clippings; Souvestre's Un Philosophe Sous les Toits; Voyage Autour de ma Chambre, Xavier de Maistre; Dictation; Composition, Talbot. |
| Elect two | Chemistry—McPherson and Henderson, with Manual. |
| | Bible Study—S. S. Teacher Training: The Pupil and the Teacher, Weigle. |
| Elect two | Solid Geometry, Wentworth. |
| | English—Composition. |
| Elect two | Literature—Minor Poems, Milton; Macbeth, Shakespeare; Washington's Farewell Address; Essay on Burns, Carlisle; Selections from Burns' Poems; outside reading. |
| | Vocal Music. |
| Elect two | Manual Training } See pages 20 and 21. |
| | Home Economics } |



In November of his first year, Ray would have been present for the consecration of the first African-American bishops in the Episcopal Church, held at the school's chapel.

After graduation in 1922, Ray returned home to Aurora to find his father seriously ill with diabetes. George Sr. would die in 1924. Although Ray was offered admission to Boston College, he stayed home to help his mother.



Ray Cromwell is second from right in the front row. He was the team's main catcher.

From 1929 until he was drafted in 1942 (at the age of 40!) Ray played with the King Ferry Little Giants, in the Post Standard League. Their games would draw as many as 2500 spectators, and Ray played three or four times a week.

“[They] thought we were just a bunch of farmers from King Ferry. But we showed them,” recalled Ray.



Picture identification (left to right): **Back row:** Ben Swayze, Jerry Mahaney, John Manzari, Art Bradley, Ken McGraw, Babe Bradley, Hugh Purcell and Harry Lacey. **Middle row (kneeling):** Bob Bradley, Paul Chase, Hank Dempsey, Tick Holland, Hank Bradley and Ray Crumwell. **Front row (lying):** Orin May and Harry Dempsey.

Ray saw to it that many local boys were given a chance to bat at team practices. “It was an outlet for kids and a healthy atmosphere.”



1971

Ray worked as a plumber with Buildings and Grounds at Wells College.

He was a dedicated member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, serving on the Vestry through the renovations of 1954.



Ray Cromwell is second from right

Ray's acts of kindness were too many to count and will always be gratefully remembered by those who were privileged to know him.



In memory of “a very kind man.”

The authors, Linda Schwab (Village Historian) and Judy Furness (Town Historian) wish to thank Linda Kabelac, Tom Gunderson, the Wells Archives, and Anne Salsich of the Oberlin Archives. Pictures and quotes from Ray's baseball years are from “Ray Cromwell's Field of Dreams” by George Peter, which appeared in The Cricket, II(5), June 1991.

Want to read more? Please pick up a card of sources from the rack just around the corner to your right.

Read more!

To learn about other African-American families in our area, download “Uncovering the Freedom Trail in Auburn and Cayuga County, NY,” www.co.cayuga.ny.us/history/ugrr/report/index.html

For the history of “Buffalo Soldiers,” the Presidio of San Francisco is a good place to start: www.nps.gov/prsf/historyculture/buffalo-soldiers.htm

“The Church Awakens” is a detailed journey through the Episcopal Church Archives, and even includes a silent film of St. Paul School: www.episcopalarchives/Afro-Anglican_history/exhibit/

To read the St. Augustine catalog - filled with fascinating details of life in an historically black school - go to www.archive.org/details/annualcatalogueo18991914 and look for the volume of interest. Ray’s era is 1915-1930.

St. Paul’s College in Lawrenceville VA and St. Augustine’s University in Raleigh NC will soon merge into a two-site institution.