Fried Chicken and Chocolate Cake

The Story of Youngs’ Tea Room, 1909-1944
The story of Youngs’ Tea Room begins with Margaret Shorter Youngs.

The family name was sometimes given as the more familiar “Young,” as in this obituary.

Genoa NY Tribune, March 2, 1923

Mrs. Margaret Young

The funeral of Mrs. Margaret Young, 71, colored, one of the oldest residents of Aurora, was held from her home in that village Tuesday morning, Feb. 20. Services were held at St. Patrick’s church with Rev. James Kennedy officiating and burial was in Oak Glen cemetery.

The death of Mrs. Young at the Willard State Hospital on Feb. 17, marks the end of a picturesque career which began when she was born in slavery in Prince George county, Maryland, in 1852. When she was old enough she escaped from slavery and came North, residing at Poplar Ridge with the Quakers for a number of years. Later she moved to Aurora where she conducted a tea room.

Mrs. Young is survived by one son, Claude Young of Aurora; two sisters, Mrs. George Cromwell of Aurora and Miss Mattie Shorter of Washington D.C., and two brothers, Alsie Shorter of Elmira and Thomas Shorter of Cleveland Ohio.
Margaret’s younger brother “Alsie,” an artist and house-painter known in Elmira as Alsace Blandford (both the Shorter and Blandford surnames were used by the family), later recounted how their father Thomas brought them to freedom by a ruse. Margaret would have been about 9 at the time.

“Thomas was the foreman at the plantation and was responsible for driving produce to Washington for sale. He created a false bottom on the produce wagon under which he hid his wife and six children. Alsace was just three years old at time. Thomas placed a full load of potatoes in the wagon and left the plantation as he always did. Since he was a common sight on the route Thomas was never challenged. This time instead of going to market he took his family to freedom.”
Margaret married George Youngs; they had one son, Claude (born 1882). Claude graduated from the (then) Cayuga Lake Military Academy in Aurora, and attended the University of Rochester and Howard University. He married Sarah Freeman, whose family came from Hanover VA. By 1904, Margaret, Claude and Sarah lived in Aurora, across from N. L. Zabriskie (the E. B. Morgan house).

“Claude Youngs was a great lover of all sports, especially baseball, and he was an umpire for many years. He had a pleasing personality and made a host of friends.”

“Claude M. Youngs, Well Known in Auburn, Dies”
Auburn NY, Citizen-Advertiser, Mon. July 16, 1945
Southern Fried Chicken, cakes and pies made Youngs’ an immediate hit with Aurora residents, Wells students, and visitors - not to mention the Aurora boys who stole the occasional fresh-baked pie from those cooling on the porch railing.
Wells students had long been required to do 45 min. of daily exercise. A two-mile walk into the Village and back was a popular way to fulfill the requirement. The turn-around point was the big elm in front of the Zabriskies’ house, a mile from Main; it became known as “the kicking tree.”

This point was directly across from Youngs’ Tea Room. Students often crossed the street for a piece of pie or cake before the return walk to campus. Since nothing in Aurora remains secret, such unauthorized detours were probably well known to the Dean, who apparently overlooked them.
“Mrs. Youngs... must have served a few thousand guest meals, but the thing she remembers best now – the thing she was famous for – the thing she enjoyed most was making black chocolate cake.”

“Sarah Freeman Youngs celebrated her 93 years quietly at home.”

_Auburn, NY Citizen-Advertiser. Monday, April 5, 1971_
Margaret Youngs died in 1923; Sarah took over the tea room. Sometime around 1930, Claude got a job as an elevator operator in Auburn, and he and Sarah eventually moved there. Nevertheless, they kept the tea room going until their retirement in 1944. Claude died the next year, and Sarah in 1971. They are buried in Fort Hill Cemetery.

The Youngs’ Tea Room today

Village Historian Linda Schwab gratefully acknowledges the collaboration of Town Historian Judy Furness. In addition, she thanks Judith Bryant of Auburn for helpful discussions and intern Mariaelena Garcia, Wells ’15, for technical assistance.