YOUNGS' FOUR CORNERS

By William S. Hadaway

The intersection of the County House and Knollwood roads is called variously "Youngs' Four Corners", "Youngs' Corners", "The Four Corners", etc. The former road runs approximately east and west; the latter nearly north and south. In early days County House road was known as "Lower Cross Road" and upon it were located such well known houses as Reed-Landrine, Hammond, Widow Anne Miller, etc. Knollwood road was formerly designated Taunton-Unionville (now Hawthorne) or Pines Bridge road. The roads cross at an elevation of 460 feet above mean sea level; a few hundred feet south of the corners there is still a commanding view of Long Island Sound to the east and the Saw-Mill and Hudson river valleys to the west.

The house and farm buildings of Joseph Youngs were located about 700 feet north of the intersection of the above named roads at the time of the Revolution and from him the "Corners" are named. Youngs had considerable local influence and served as a justice of the peace and on the committee of public safety. His property was raided by British forces on Feb. 3, 1778, who seized him, according to some accounts, with many other prisoners. One of the purposes of this paper is to trace the intermittent use of Youngs' farm by the American forces as military quarters from the fall of 1776 until its destruction three and one-quarter years afterward.

General Charles Lee, second in command to Washington in the Westchester campaign of 1776, reached White Plains a short time prior to the engagement on Chatterton Hill on October 28. He was quartered at the home of Widow Anne Miller and is generally believed to have been influential in planning the defenses that were subsequently erected on the North Castle hills. A battery of field pieces consisting of a twenty-four, a six and a three pounder of brass and three iron twelve pounders was concealed on the summit of Miller hill directly back of the Miller house. The Miller family was removed to the "interior" of the county and Lee is

*An abstract of this paper was read by the author at the Youngs' Four Corners memorial on May 26, 1934 during the twelfth annual pilgrimage of this Society.
reputed to have transferred his quarters along the lower cross-road to Youngs' house, prior to November 1. 8

The new location gave Lee opportunity to move in any direction; while the sources of this information are traditional, such a move appears to have been a logical one to make under the circumstances. Westchester County is keenly interested in information about Lee and his subsequent treason. After Washington had left the vicinity of White Plains the command fell to Lee. His delay in obeying Washington's orders to follow him into New Jersey, his quarrel with General Heath, his ignominious capture at Basking Ridge, Dec. 13, 1776, "Mr. Lee's Plan" and his correspondence with the enemy, his failure to obey orders at Monmouth are all well known.

The important point is that Lee's defection from the American cause appears to date from the Westchester campaign of 1776 and it was Spartan justice that in the court-martial of 1778 he was dismissed from the army at a point near where his disloyalty and treason began to take form.

After the Continental forces left Westchester County for New Jersey in December, 1776, there was wholly inadequate military protection. The Committee of Public Safety ordered out the militia and Youngs' house was the quarters of some of them during the early part of 1777. In August of that year a regiment of levies of about 500 men was raised in Westchester and Dutchess counties, commanded by Col. Ludington and Col. Hammond. Col. Ludington's quarters were at Youngs' house until the regiment was discharged at the expiration of the period of enlistment.

The Lines, on which Youngs' house was an important post, were defended by Col. Hammond's regiment from October, 1777 to May, 1778. In March, 1778 Col. Emerick, who commanded some 300 British and Refugees, sent out Lieut. Althouse with thirty-two men to take and bring in the cattle of Joseph Youngs and other wights in that locality. The militia kept guard during the night and returned to their farms in the daytime. Forces were hurriedly rallied and Althouse together with his entire company were either killed or taken prisoners in this raid.†

*See Macdonald Papers, Part I, pp. 56-58 for details of defenses on Miller hill and use of same on Nov. 1, 1776.
†For other accounts of this affair see Macdonald Papers, Part II, p. 62. Also Souvenir of Revolutionary Soldiers Monument Dedication, Tarrytown, 1914, p. 74-75.

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had quarters at Youngs' house. In 1814 Samuel Youngs wrote a long letter telling among other incidents the value of Burr's services:

"... The troops of which he took command were undisciplined, negligent and discontented. In a few days these very men were transformed into brave, honest defenders,—orderly, contented and cheerful; confident in their own courage; and loving to adoration their commander, whom every man considered as his personal friend. ... During the whole of his command there was not a single desertion—not a single death by sickness—not one made prisoner by the enemy—for Col. Burr had taught us that a soldier, with arms in his hands, ought never in any circumstances, to surrender. ... When Burr left the lines a sadness overspread the country, and the most gloomy forebodings were soon fulfilled. The period of his command was so full of activity that every day afforded some lesson of instruction."

Col. Burr was succeeded in command on the lines in the early spring of 1779 by Major William Hull who was later driven back by the British under Col. Tarleton. After the defeat and retreat of Hull the whigs in Col. Hammond's regiment formed into a company and for some time kept plundering parties of refugees in check until practically all of the stock was driven back into the country for safety when the militia also retired above the Croton River.

Washington's military maps of 1779, (more generally known as Erskine maps) designate Youngs' house as a tavern. No contemporary record has been found otherwise showing such use. Judge Stephen Ward's house, Eastchester, and Widow Anne Miller's house, North Castle, are also similarly designated. The exigencies of war undoubtedly required such use but no evidence has been found to indicate that these were taverns in times of peace.

When the "lines" were drawn north of the Croton and through Bedford a force of some two hundred and fifty Continentals, commanded by Col. Thompson was employed to patrol the roads and protect those who remained within the "neutral ground". It appears to have had a roving commission with instructions to remain at any one point for a brief period only. He, however, stayed at Youngs' tavern long enough for intelligence of his position to reach New York and on the morning of Feb. 3, 1780 a party of more than five hundred British, Hessian and Refugess troops attacked the post, killed a considerable number (accounts differ running from twelve to forty), took nearly a hundred prisoners, among whom some accounts say was Joseph Youngs, and burned the house and outbuildings.

The accounts of this "Affair at Youngs' House" that have been generally accepted are in Major-General Heath's Memoirs, Boston 1798, pp. 229-232; and A Military Journal During the American Revolutionary War by James Thacher, M. D., Boston 1823, pp. 226-227. General Heath's voluminous papers are preserved in the collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society. After his Memoirs were published Heath was vigorously assailed by his contemporaries who had served in the Revolution and he had ample reason to regret his attempt to record the events of that period. This source material should therefore be accepted with reservations.

Dr. Thacher was undoubtedly a sincere chronicler but he states in his introduction: "The subordinate station which I sustained
did not permit access to the great source from which all important events derived their origin; ... I can only claim the merit of having exerted my best effort to procure documents and assistance.

Judge Caleb Tompkins, who lived in Westchester County all of his life and served in the Revolution has left the following account of the “affair”:

"Col. Thompson was stationed at Young's house, with his regiment, in the winter of 1780 which was near the line of what now are the towns of Greenburgh & Mount Pleasant. Col. Thompson had sent one company of his men to the west near Saw Mill River & another to the east where Abraham Davis resided. They found the Enemy were approaching near them with 1500 men to attack Col. Thompson; he sent orders to the companies at Saw Mill River & Davis's to join him as soon as possible.

"John Odell was acting as guide to Thompson's regiment, he advised Thompson to retreat; he said his orders were to defend that post. Odell said not against impossibilities. He directed Odell to go & hurry on the men from Davis's. After Odell had gone a little distance, he saw that company ascending a hill about a mile to the north; finding it impossible to get them there, he bade any service, Odell sat on his horse & saw the battle.

"Thompson had about forty men killed, himself & a number of others taken prisoners."

This somewhat homely narrative is probably as close to the facts as can be obtained. The British reports state the patriot losses as follows: "Killed—1 captain. 40 Non-Coms and Privates. Wounded and left behind. 12 ditto. Prisoners—1 Lt. Col., 1 Capt., 1 Capt. Lt. 2 Lts. 2 Ensigns. 80 Non-Coms and Privates. N.B. 19 Privates are wounded." All accounts show that the Americans made a gallant defense of their outpost and that this was a serious reverse to their arms.


From 1780 onward to the close of the Revolution Youngs was referred to as the "Burnt House." For example: "Major Andre turned aside in his journey to White Plains after learning that a patrol of scouts was stationed at the "Burnt House.""

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THE QUARTERLY BULLETIN

YOUNG'S CORNERS AFTER THE REVOLUTION

Philipse Manor was forfeited to the State of New York and in the Abstracts of Sales of Forfeited Lands in the Southern District for Public Securities is the following data representing sales to occupants or "possessors" on December 6, 1785:

Joseph Youngs—Dec. 6, '85 Abstract of Sales, (A.S.) 51-152 ac. N. by road leading to Pine's Bridge—E. by said road and Abraham Ruze—S. by road leading to White Plains—W. by James Hammond, Thaddeus Avery and John Yorks, as possessed by said Joseph Youngs, 319 pounds, 4 shillings.


John Yorks—Dec. 6, '85—A.S. 18—Lib. 267-344 ac. N. by Catherine Yorks and highway. E. by highway and Joseph Youngs—S. by Thaddeus Avery, W. by Saw Mill River as now possessed by the said John Yorks. 772 pounds.

The Avery, Hammond and Yorks farms, which bordered a portion of Youngs' farm, sold at the rate of three pounds per acre. The Youngs' farm brought but a small fraction over two pounds per acre which may be assumed to indicate that its value in 1785 was still impaired by the raid in 1780.

Martha Youngs was appointed administratrix of Joseph Youngs' estate July 15, 1790, her bond of 250 pounds having the additional endorsements of Samuel Youngs of Mount Pleasant and Daniel Williams of New Rochelle. The estate was appraised at 225 pounds 5 shillings.

The Youngs petitioned for reimbursement on account of damages to their farm during the Revolutionary War in which many of the

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*On February 11, 1829, the Committee of Claims of United States Senate reported adversely on petition of Martha Youngs, Samuel Youngs and others for reimbursement on account of losses sustained by their father in the raid on February 3, 1789. The amount lost was stated to have been from three to four thousand dollars.

On March 29, 1822 the Committee on Pensions and Revolutionary Claims of U. S. House of Representatives reported adversely on petition of Martha Youngs, Samuel Youngs, and Thomas Youngs in behalf of themselves and the heirs at law of Joseph Youngs for reimbursement on account of losses sustained in the raid of February 3, 1789.

Each of the above mentioned reports contains some of claims in original petitions and mention is also made of affidavits of officers and others who served in the Revolutionary War. Efforts are being made to obtain copies of this valuable source material.

See American State Papers, Class IX, Claims, Documents 618 and 609, Washington, 1854.
Isaac Van Wart, one of the Andre captors, bought Joseph Youngs' farm October 2, 1786. Following is an abstract of the deed:

Joseph Youngs of New York City to Isaac Van Wart, Jr. of Manor of Philipsburgh


Consideration, 600 pounds lawful money of New York. Conveys farm land in Manor of Philipsburgh lately purchased by said Joseph Youngs of Isaac Stoutenburgh and Philip Van Cortlandt, Commissioners of Forfeitures under act passed May 12, 1784 containing 152 acres bounded as follows:

". . . Beginning at the road or highway that leads from White Plains to Tarrytown by the land now or late in the possession of Gilbert Taylor, being the southeast corner of the above mentioned farm, thence running northerly by the lands the said Gilbert Taylor and by the lands now or late in the possession of Jas. Hasty, as the fence now stands until it comes to the road that leads to Piers Bridge, thence along said road until it comes to the land of John Yearks, being the north of the said farm, thence southwardly by the lands of John Yearks, until it comes to the land of Thaddeus Avory, thence by the land of said Avory by a range of marked trees until it comes to the land of James Hammond, thence by the land of said Hammond as the fence now stands until it comes to the before mentioned road leading from White Plains to Tarrytown, thence easterly by and with the same road, until it comes to the first mentioned bounds or place of beginning, containing 152 acres be the same more or less within the before mentioned bounds . . . . (etc.)."

A clause in a New York statute of October 7, 1780 granted three of the captors a gratuity of 500 pounds each and Van Wart settled in that portion of Dutchess County which now is Putnam County. After his return to Westchester County the following petition filed by him with the state legislature is of sufficient interest to warrant inserting in full:

Fifteenth Session, 1792

Wednesday, February 15, 1792.

A petition of Isaac Van Wart, of Westchester County, praying payment of a balance of a gratuity allowed to him by a clause in a statute of this state passed the 7th day of October 1780 was read and referred to Mr. Graham, Mr. Haight and Mr. Ford.

Wednesday, Feb. 29, 1792.

Mr. Graham from the committee to whom was referred the petition of

*American State Papers on Revolutionary Claims, Doc. 600, p. 839.
Isaac Van Wart praying a balance of a gratuity allowed to him by a clause in a statute passed 7th October 1790 reported that the petitioner was entitled to locate lands to the value of 500 pounds; that he located to the value of 422 pounds; that a balance of 78 pounds of the said gratuity remains unsatisfied; that the law granting him the said gratuity is repealed, and that it is the opinion of the committee, that a clause should be inserted in some bill, to enable the petitioner to locate the residue of said gratuity.

Resolved that the house do concur with the committee in the said report; and

Ordered that the same committee do prepare and bring in such a clause.

Isaac Van Wart and wife joined the Dutch Reformed Church in Sleepy Hollow May 4, 1795 though he later was a devoted member of the old Greenburgh Church, Elmsford, for many years and was buried in its churchyard after his death on May 3, 1822. Rev. Alexander (“Sandy”) Van Wart was born in the Youngs’ Corners house Sept. 29, 1799 and in his later life recounted much of the local history of his house and vicinity as did Samuel Youngs who had preceded him on the same farm.*

Mention has been made of the Avery farm which bordered the Youngs’ farm. The chimney of this reconstructed farm house still remains and attached to it is a little known silver tablet with the following inscription:

(SEAL D. A. R.)

“Captain Thaddeus Avery was branded with hot irons in this room and his wife threatened with death by the Hessians when they refused to divulge the hiding place of money for the Continental Army. Mrs. Avery baked bread in this oven for the Revolutionary Soldiers.

This hero and heroine were the Grand Parents of Mrs. R. Ogden Dorman, Second Regent of the New York Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution which organization allowed this tablet June 9, 1900.

Captain Thaddeus Avery, born October 30, 1749
Died November 16, 1826.

Elizabeth Underhill Avery, born August 8, 1762
Died May 22, 1841.

Visita ter durum pietas” (Devotion has mastered the hard way)

In 1922 human bones were uncovered near Youngs’ Corners 1463 feet north of the north side of the corners and 78 feet eastward of the boulder fence line of the Unionville Road. One complete skull and a number of bones were secured and two small round objects which proved to be metal buttons one of which bore the letters “U. S. A.”, and the other was a regimental button of the 4th or King’s Own Regiment of Foot.

Following this discovery, under the auspices of the White Plains Chapter, D. A. R. aided by the Field Exploration Committee of the New York Historical Society, the surrounding soil was carefully sifted. Parts of human skulls, bones and teeth were found and in addition a number of U. S. A. buttons and a second one of the Fourth British Regiment. Two pewter buttons were also found marked, “R. R. N. Y.” which appear to be those of the “Royal Regiment of New York” the “Refugee” detachment which is supposed to have taken part in the raid.*

There can be little doubt that the burial place was thus revealed of some of those who had taken part in the sanguinary raid of 1780. The erection of the monument which stands in the triangle at the entrance to Grasslands followed. This memorial, standing on a plot of ground which belongs to the County, is recognition of an important military event in the struggle of the colonists for political independence.

The publication of Fenimore Cooper’s novel “The Spy”, in 1821, before a history of the County was available has resulted in many unfortunate misunderstandings. Because the story has a limited historic background the general assumption has been that it is history and has been frequently so quoted. Nothing could be further from the facts.

The exploits of Harvey Birch, the spy, are a composite of some of Washington’s secret service men with probably some fiction. The cowboys and skinners, which are featured so prominently, are a gross exaggeration of minor happenings. As to “The Four Corners”, also given considerable prominence, Edgar Mayhew Bacon contributed an instructive article to The Quarterly Bulletin, January, 1929 entitled “Where was Cooper’s Hamlet of the Four Corners”, which merits careful reading. Mr. Bacon sums up the historical value of the novel in a sentence: “Certainly the Spy was entirely a work of the imagination.”

*For further details see The Raid on Youngs’ Corners, 1780, by Reginald Pelham Bolton. Published by White Plains Chapter, D.A.R., 1922.
As the history of Youngs' Corners is understood more thoroughly the better will be the appreciation of the Hammond house nearby and the collection of implements contained therein. Westchester County now owns a large adjacent area devoted to welfare and correctional purposes. These unrelated later uses are evidence that this region possesses present as well as historic interest.

Dutch Reformed Church, Elmsford.

ELMSFORD AND THE NEUTRAL GROUND

By Mary Schuyler Hamilton

This is the second part of Miss Hamilton's paper read at the Elmsford Reformed Church at the time of the Twelfth Annual Pilgrimage. The first part of the paper was published in the issue of July, 1934.

For twenty-five years Elmsford was known as Hall's Corners because at that time John Hall was the proprietor of the tavern. Strange to say, he was also the district schoolteacher. About 1870 the name of the village was changed to Elmsford, following the example of the little village to the south which had recently adopted the name of Ashford. At Ashford, now Ardsley, the river had been forded by the Indians and early settlers. At Elmsford there had been a similar ford and we had a famous mammoth elm, which was nearly thirty feet in circumference, whose wide flung branches stretched far across the road. This elm was well known even in Revolutionary times when the American army was going into camp at Dobbs Ferry in 1781 and the French troops were pitching their tents on the eastward hills. On an exceedingly hot day early in July when a detachment of the French army marched up the Sawmill River road on its way to camp, Washington sent an orderly after it with a message for the officers to halt their men and rest for the heat of the day "under the big elm tree at Storms' Bridge." The French officers did not understand the message for they disregarded it and turned their men into the old Tarrytown Road which ran between the present church and graveyard. Up the hill they went under the broiling sun past Mrs. Olcott's home, called the Rochambeau House because Washington and Rochambeau are said to have held many conferences there, and so on to White Plains. Many of the men were exhausted by the heat and had to be carried to the French Hospital in White Plains.

Fifty years ago the old tavern saw its halcyon days. A charming family by the name of Hoagland ran it something like an old English inn. The living rooms were filled with beautiful old furniture and there was a lovely garden north and east of the house in which were many flower beds bordered with boxwood and filled with gay flowers. Until a few years ago a narrow porch stretched across the front of the house and the building seemed to nestle in