

August 4, 1955 ✓

(visit July 28-29, 1955)

EC#15

Internal Memorandum

Owen D. Young - Memo II

No account of Owen Young in the Federal Reserve Bank, or Owen Young as a force in industry, would be complete without an account of his life in his native village. He has a peculiarly strong loyalty to the village in which he was born and in which several previous generations of the family lived. This village of Van Hornesville lies amid rolling country some 60 miles west of Albany, between Route 20 which was the old road <sup>above</sup> along the Mohawk River and the new New York State Through-Way, which has largely replaced the old road as a carrier of commerce, important commerce, to the west. The village is little more than a small plot of houses on rolling land. It is an old village, and 25 years ago it had begun to lose population and was literally in danger of disappearing. It is Owen Young's loyalty, intelligence and perserverance which rescued it from this threatened fate, and which gave it the sound economic background which keeps it alive today. (2)

The village lies along Route <sup>30</sup> 35, leading north and south. It contains two or three stores, perhaps a dozen houses, of which Owen Young occupies one, and his son-in-law, Everett Case, another. <sup>Except for the school principal's</sup> (These two houses are the best in town.) There is also the office building which was built for Mr. Young on the site of the old red <sup>which he attended,</sup> schoolhouse, and across from it the mill pond which has been there for generations. The village is painted and <sup>prosperous</sup> smart in appearance. The mill pond is bordered by rolling grass instead of the bull rushes and swampland which were there 80 years ago, when Owen Young attended school on the spot on which he now does his office work. (EC)

All sorts of stories cluster around the man of such prominence, who is so closely identified with a small village. When the schoolhouse was dedicated, the newspapers sent reporters up who found a contemporary of Mr. Young's and asked him how it was that he, the contemporary, had stayed in the village whereas Mr. Young had traveled all over the world. Why was it that these boyhood friends had not set out together? The reply of the contemporary, somewhat agrieved at the question, was "How the Hell could I know he was going places?" This tale is told with glee by the

family.

Mr. Young himself told the story of how it was that he decided to be a lawyer, and told it with his customary dry wit and care for understatement. It seems that he had come back to Van Hornesville from a season in the Academy in <sup>East Springfield.</sup> Cooperstown. He was then 14. His father put him to work immediately in the fields driving three horses harnessed abreast and pulling a spike-toothed harrow. <sup>The driver hauled behind.</sup> The ground was heavy, and young Owen was soft from sitting in school. He found it very hard work.

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One day his uncle, who was being sued on account of a horse trade, asked him if he would like to go down to Cooperstown to attend the hearing. This was a treat for a farm boy, already <sup>i</sup> finding the limits of Van Hornesville rather narrow, and tired with heavy farm work. Cooperstown, which in an automobile is perhaps 15-20 minutes down <sup>route 80</sup> the road, was then a three hour trip each way in a horse and buggy. Court procedures in that town were very simple, and the man and the boy found lawyers sitting around a table in their shirtsleeves in a shaded room, laughing and talking. "They seemed to be having such a good time," said Mr. Young. On the way back he asked his uncle if being a lawyer was a way of making a living and if any one of these men earned as much at it as his father earned with farming. His uncle replied that they probably earned three times as much. From that moment on young Owen declared his intention of being a lawyer. Far from being the hard and lonely work which he had done on the farm, this appealed to him as a social trade in which men did not do hard work, but sat around and had such a very good time, and earned three times as much as could be earned on the farm.

In the telling of this there is no implication that the boy was bright. This was simply how it happened, and Mr. Young recognized that the motive which inspired him was not particularly lofty, noble nor bright. Nevertheless, he held straight to his course. His parents were Universalists, and the small Universalist Church where they went still stands in the village. St. Lawrence college <sup>-150 miles north</sup> nearby was

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also a Universalist school. The principal of the college came down to preach at the small Universalist Church, and his attention was drawn to young Owen <sup>as</sup> and the bright boy of the village. It was he who persuaded Mr. Young's parents that the boy should go away to school and that he would be safe in a Universalist college. There was also a suggestion that there might have been a scholarship which would help to pay the costs.

Mr. Young now lives in that house on a village street which he bought for his mother. It was built perhaps in 1870 and has the characteristics of that age. He bought it for her after he had gone to Boston, and though still a young and struggling lawyer, had made sufficient money so that he felt the time had come when he could help his parents to live a life somewhat easier than that which they had followed on the farm. He asked his mother what house she wanted in the village, and she replied abruptly, "You know what house I want. Don't ask foolish questions. I want the best house in the village. Go and get it." There is more symbolism in her remark than might show on the surface. Her son apparently has directed himself toward getting the best of whatever it was that he came in contact with. This is particularly true in regard to the people he has worked with and been associated with.

When the house was built, the kitchen was at the back, and Mrs. Young Sr.'s first desire was a post which would make it possible to hang a clothesline from the rear corner of the house to the post. Mr. Young Sr. cut down a young elm full of sap and put it in the ground. The sapling took root and the tree is still at the back of the house, showing the mark made by the clothesline years ago.

The sitting-room of Mrs. Young Sr. is preserved exactly as it was when she was alive. The hall is paneled with diplomas and degrees which have been given Mr. Young, beginning with his earliest diploma from the school <sup>(the Academy in East Springfield?)</sup> which preceded ~~the~~ St. Lawrence Academy, and going on through honorary degrees granted by many American institutions to the evidences of foreign honor, <sup>to</sup> including <sup>e</sup> the Order of the Rising

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Sun which was given him by the Emperor of Japan.

Off this hall, to the left as one enters, is the sitting-room of the senior Mrs. Young, its walls brown as they always have been, a great wood <sup>stove</sup> occupying part of one side, the chairs, the pictures and all the decorations exactly as they have been all these years. (Mr. Young probably bought the house somewhere around 1906, and Mrs. Young lived in it for 30 years.)

Mr. Young's first wife, who came from <sup>Southbridge, Mass.</sup> ~~the same region~~, died perhaps <sup>30</sup> 10 years ago, and he <sup>then</sup> married <sup>another</sup> an energetic and talented woman, who has "done over" part of the house. It now contains a dining-room suitable for the Young needs, a new kitchen and a new drawing room appropriately furnished according to good modern taste. It was noticeable that noon that Mrs. Young and her friends sat in the new drawing room, whereas Mr. Young and Mr. Case smoked their pipes and told their tales in the old sitting room.

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Mrs. Young, who has undoubtedly had her troubles with a village so ingrown as Van Hornesville, reports that the natives said when her renovations were finished, "Well, she hasn't changed the look of it much," and that was the highest praise she got.

Another small detail is the fact that the stairs which were straight and very steep were moved from the front hall to the middle of the house and made much easier to mount. Also the powder room is a detail of ~~great~~ interest. Its wide marble wash <sup>stand, with a ceramic</sup> bowl with a decorated interior, comes from a Hudson River house which was being torn down by one of the sons of Gerard Swope; <sup>has been painted in a pattern</sup> and the wall <sup>follows</sup> the decoration of the bowl. It is a striking evidence of Mrs. Young's taste.

The office building, which was erected by Mr. Young's son, Charles, for him (Charles is now an officer in the Radio Corporation of America), is <sup>an el-shaped</sup> ~~x~~ one story building of stone, steel, concrete and wood. It is built in the same general style as the schoolhouse, that is, long, low and generous. It contains an office for Mr. Young ~~and~~ two subsidiary offices for secretaries and a steel and concrete vault in

which his papers are kept. (See other memo for more detail.) This was put up when the old red schoolhouse to which Mr. Young had gone burned, and is on its site. He is proud that at 80 he looks down on the fair vista he saw when he was 8.

Talking of the problems of the town, Mr. Young, who has been a very tall man and is still taller than the average (and very little bent,) took me walking down toward the schoolhouse. Speaking of the threatened disappearance of the village, he said that the inhabitants were moving away to larger towns. "We decided that if we were going to keep the village alive, we had to capitalize on the town's two chief products, milk and babies," he said. They therefore set up a milk station to which the farmers in the country roundabout could send their milk for pasteurizing. He then set about building the school which is still the thing in town of which he is most proud. He got a well-known firm of architects into consultation, and when they asked him what kind of a school he wanted, he said he did not want a factory, but rather a country club. The school is built of native stone and wood. It sits low on its site in the center of the village, and is itself a most inviting place. Beside it is a swimming pool so arranged that little children do not conflict with big ones. Every child in the school signed a petition to have the swimming pool opened in the summer, and it is kept open for the village and the children in surrounding towns who come. The school is a central school which draws its population by bus from surrounding towns. It has all twelve grades, from the first through the high school. After it was built and furnished, Mr. Young gave it to the state of New York, and it is a regular part of the educational system of the state.

Mr. Young and his <sup>fathers</sup> friend, Mr. Tilyou, whose names are on the bronze plaque in the school as "Rockingchair Consultants" (this may be "Rockingchair Counselors," I am not sure), were wise enough to know that a school by itself was not enough unless it could attract the proper teachers, and <sup>that</sup> in order to attract teachers, there had to be adequate living space for them. Therefore a principal's house of the same stone and wood construction as the school was built across the street, and so designed as

No you were right first time. EC

to seem the chief house of the village. Nearby, an old house has been made over into community living space for single teachers, who have bedrooms there, a community sitting room, and a community kitchen.

The result of this forethought is that Van Hornesville, though small, is never at a loss for teachers of the highest grade.

Two other enterprises in the town owe their existence to the family. The second Mrs. Young, being interested in textiles, set up a community weaving center, which has in it at least a dozen looms. At one time she had a Swedish expert there to teach people in town who were interested, and there is at least one woman on salary who keeps the thing going. The difficulty in the summer is that people do not regularly stay by their work, and there is about the thing a slight aura of amateur art. Whether this is a disappointment to Mrs. Young or not, and whether she would have preferred a more professional air, is hard to know on single acquaintance. In any event, Mr. Young considers this another effort for the town, and while it may not be economically profitable, nevertheless he regards it as worthwhile.

The family itself owns not only the two houses of Mr. Young and Mr. Case, but also a large house on the edge of the village which is used at times as a guest house. In addition, Mr. Charles Young has a house above and behind the village street and is building his children another house higher in the hills, with a wonderful view of the Adirondacks to the north. *The 'home farm' OD's birth place, also commands this view; it is owned now by son Philip. (EC)*  
There is evidence that all during a long life Mr. Young has come back to the village when he could for summer living. It is probable that he owns a great deal of farmland in the vicinity. Also he owns a great many shares of the Herkimer Bank, the First National Bank of Herkimer, which is the nearest big bank. He has the welfare of the neighborhood very much at heart, and in these latter years he has spent most of his summers there, calling people to him rather than going to seek them out. It is a most interesting instance in American society of a continuation of the ancient *Scotch* pattern of the laird of the land. *(Young's ancestry is not Scotch but Palatinate German)*

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