

Hillcrest Past and Present: The Louisiana Connection

by Anna Lee Dozier

The presence in our area of the Young family dates back to the early 1700s. Benjamin Young, the first Young to come to the colonies from England, married into the Rozier family which had been here for generations. The family built up large plantations in Maryland, in what is now Prince George's County, and the District of Columbia. The area was prized for tobacco growing and the family enslaved large numbers of men, women and children over the years, hundreds if not upwards of a thousand, before the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863.

Around 1860, George Washington Young built a house on Bangor Street SE that is often referred to as the "Plantations House." This home was not the main house; according to records. The plantation owner at the time, George Washington Young, lived in Giesboro, a now-gone mansion in southwest DC. The plantation associated with the area where Hillcrest is located, Nonesuch, extended into Prince George's County and the Nonesuch Plantation House was located across the Maryland border. Like Giesboro, it no longer exists. Around 1866 George Washington Young gave the house located in Hillcrest to his daughter, Mary, as a wedding gift.



Photo: Nonesuch c. 1920

Although much has been written about the Youngs, there is far less information about the enslaved people who worked the land where we now live. We know some of their names through wills, advertisements to recapture those who had escaped, and through a detailed document that George Washington Young submitted in 1862 to the government to receive financial compensation for the enslaved people he'd been forced to give up after emancipation.

In the 1850s, perhaps sensing that change was coming, George Washington Young began to move some of the most financially valued enslaved people much further south to Louisiana to a sugar plantation under the oversight of his adult son, Joseph Young. Those who were moved were all young people in their teens and twenties. They were torn away from their parents and siblings who remained on the plantations in Washington, D.C. and Maryland.

Unlike Joseph Young, who returned with his family to DC following the Civil War and spent the rest of his life here, few of the forcibly moved young people likely ever saw their families again.

Nathan Sims and Kitty Bell were two of those young people sent down the River.

Nathan Sims

Nathan Sims, born around 1840, was the son of Portus or Primas Sims (he is referred to by both names in documentation), born around 1805, and Charlotte Sims born around 1810. George Washington Young inherited Portus/Primas in 1825 upon his father's death. Charlotte came under his ownership via his wife's inheritance. Portus/Primas worked in the fields, while Charlotte labored in the house.

The pair had at least four children, likely more, as there is about an eight-year gap between the birth of their first known child, Sarah, born about 1832, and Nathan. Children born during that period would have been the most at risk of being forcibly sent to Louisiana by the Youngs in the 1850s, so it seems possible that there were more. By the time of Emancipation, Portus/Primas and Charlotte were left with only two children, Daniel (15) and Elias (13). Both boys were described as field slaves in George Washington Young's submission for compensation.

It appears from census records that Portus/Primas, who was described in the compensation list as in poor health, had passed away by 1870. Sarah, who was not listed in the compensation submission, and therefore had probably been moved to Louisiana or sold by George Washington Young sometime prior to 1862, had reunited with her mother and was living with Charlotte, Elias and Daniel.

Charlotte Sims stayed in Hillcrest. The 1880 census lists her as living on what is now Alabama Avenue (then called Hamilton). She died sometime before 1900. It seems unlikely she ever saw her son Nathan, and possibly any of her children again.

Kitty Bell

Kitty Bell, born in 1843, was the daughter of Walter Bell, born about 1812, and Rebecca 'Becky' Bell, born about 1817. Walter and Becky had at least 10 children, but just like the Sims family, there are gaps between known children born in the 1830s and early 1840s, and it seems very likely that more of their children were sold or sent to Louisiana.

George Washington Young inherited Becky from his father and purchased Walter from a relative around 1840. Walter worked in the fields. When George Washington Young filed for compensation, he described Becky as paralyzed. Their two oldest remaining daughters, Louisa (25), and Nannie (21), are listed as working in the house, while a younger sister, Joanna (15), was assigned to the fields. Four younger children, Cristina (13), Elizabeth (11), Margaret (9), and Francis (4) were also listed.

Walter and Becky's 17-year-old son, Aloysius, perhaps fearing that he was about to be sold or sent to Louisiana as well, escaped on March 18, 1862, along with two other young men, William Sims (21), who worked as a carriage driver, and Clement Sims, his 19-year-old brother who worked in the fields. Perhaps not surprisingly, George Washington Young expected to be

compensated by the government for the three young men as well, despite the fact that they had already emancipated themselves at the time of his claim.

Walter and Becky had at least one other son who was sent to the plantation in Louisiana. Marcus Bell was born around 1831 in Maryland and was likely sent down to Louisiana in the 1850s. He met a woman named Louisa Carter, who was born in 1844 in Louisiana and around 1860 they had a daughter, Eliza. The small family made their way back to Washington, DC after the Civil War and had their marriage formally recognized in the District on September 25, 1867. By 1870, Marcus, Louisa and Eliza were living in Ward 4. It is unclear if he was able to reunite with his parents or other siblings, who I have been unable to find on any censuses or records after Emancipation.

Nathan Sims and Kitty Bell, the two 'stolen' teenagers likely never made it home. They married each other around the end of the Civil War and lived the rest of their lives, into their 80s, in Iberia, Louisiana. They raised a family and died within a year of one another in 1923 and 1924. Although they probably never saw them again, they never forgot their mothers. They named their oldest daughter Rebecca, Becky for short, and their third daughter Charlotte.

Sources

1. US Census records 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900 (available on [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com); access to the 1850 and 1860 US Federal Census Slave Schedules and the 1880 US Federal Census are free)
2. [Rural Remnants of Washington County: An Architectural Survey of Washington's Historic Farms and Estates](#), DC Historic Preservation office, 2013
3. [DC -- Anacostia Community Museum -- Exhibit: How the Civil War Changed Washington](#)
4. Henning, George [The Mansion and Family of Notley Young](#) for the Columbia Historical Society in 1913
5. Washington, DC Will and Probate Records (available on [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com))
6. King, Colbert; [DC's Grim Unfinished Business 154 Years After Emancipation](#); *Washington Post*; 15 April 2016
7. Washington, DC, US marriage records (available on [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com))
8. [Map of the land, mansion house, graveyard and buildings belonging to Mr. Notley Young](#)
9. [Bruce Dent; Nonesuch Property](#)
10. [Lost Landmark Homes of Early Washington: A Select Six](#)
11. Washington, DC, US Slave Emancipation Records, 1851-1863 (available on [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com))
12. [Transfer of enslaved persons by Nicholas Young to his son, George Washington Young](#)

Note: For those interested in identifying and researching enslaved persons and their families up to Emancipation I recommend learning about and using the [Beyond Kin](#) method.