April 2016

Oscar E. Young Correspondence

Maine State Library

Oscar Emery Young 1861-

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalmaine.com/maine_writers_correspondence

Recommended Citation
Maine State Library and Young, Oscar Emery 1861-, "Oscar E. Young Correspondence" (2016). Maine Writers Correspondence. 835.
http://digitalmaine.com/maine_writers_correspondence/835

This Text is brought to you for free and open access by the Maine State Library Special Collections at Maine State Documents. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine Writers Correspondence by an authorized administrator of Maine State Documents. For more information, please contact statedocs@maine.gov.
Born at East Livermore, January 6, 1861.
Residence: Fayette.

Teacher for many years in schools in Maine and other states. Contributor to Lewiston Journal for over forty years: stories, articles and poems. Has written a number of Maine historical sketches; also a regular contributor to the Chicago Sun, contributing character sketches of a semi-humorous nature. He has also been a successful writer of plays, and the various houses publishing plays for production by amateurs have all published his work. A play entitled "Snappers" won first prize for the best one act play in a New York dramatic contest. Most of his work is farce and comedies.

His work has been widely popular; his stories and poems have appeared in various periodicals and newspapers, including Canadian and English publications.

He has taught at Portland, Cape Elizabeth, Long Island, Washburn, etc.

His work has appeared in various anthologies. A five act play, "The Little Red Mare," accepted by the Little Theatre Company.
R. 1, Kent's Hill, Maine, Apr. 4, 1931.

State Library, Augusta.

I am returning, either to-day or Monday according to the weather, the three books due Apr. 7. While in my possession, the cover of one was somewhat damaged by accident. I am ready to pay for the injury done, on notification, or will buy the book at a fair price for a used volume. I await your pleasure in regard to the matter.

I am also enclosing a volume of "Seaside Songs and Woodland Whispers" for Mrs. Fuller's department, according to my recent agreement with that lady.

Very truly yours,

         O. E. Young.
April 10, 1931

Mr. Oscar E. Young,
Route #1,
Kent's Hill, Maine.

Dear Mr. Young;

Thank you for remembering to send a copy of your book "Seaside Songs and Woodland Memories", for our Maine Author Collection. All of the books in this collection are autographed, so we are returning your book to you with the request that you autograph it for us. Perhaps you will also add a brief inscription about the writing of it. I find that we have no biographical data about you, and since we try to have on file here information about our authors I hope that it will not be too much trouble for you to send us a brief sketch of your life, something of a more personal nature that a Who's Who item, please.

We enclose postage and a label for the return of the book. I am sorry that you will twice have the bother of wrapping and mailing it. I think that I should have been more explicit about the autograph.

Very truly yours,

MAINE STATE LIBRARY

BY MCF
There has been nothing in particular of public interest in my life. I have never done anything at all spectacular, in fact I have always been a small toad in a very little puddle.

I was born on the east side of "Jug Hill", in the town of East Livermore, now Livermore Falls, on Jan. 6, 1861, at 2-15 A. M., and weighed just nine pounds at the time. I don't remember all these things, but so I have been told. At that early date I was afflicted with a gorgeous crop of curly red hair-- I have seen a specimen-- but Mother Nature afterward saw fit to disguise me with a thin, fine thatch of darker hue and straight as the path of duty. Thereby she aided and abetted a gross misrepresentation, as I have ever since been cursed with a decided redheaded disposition.

My parents were Chandler Walker and Arvilla Maxim (Tobin) Young, the latter always known by the name of Villa. The Youngs were probably of Irish stock originally, but in early days they migrated to Scotland, from there into England later. Moses Young, my grandfather four times removed, lived and died there. Three of his sons came to Massachusetts in early colonial times and founded the American branch of the family. It soon spread over into New Hampshire, and from there afterward into Maine. From one of these sons, Joshua, and his wife Betsey, surname unknown, I am descended, through Moses second, Joshua second and the Chandler aforesaid. The home of the senior Joshua was in Candia, New Hampshire, but his wife came through to Maine with some of her descendants, and here at length she died.

As far as I have been able to learn, the Youngs have usually been of rather more than average ability. In most cases they have been fairly successful business men and seem generally to have been people of integrity and much respected. Though I have never been able to trace the exact connection, it appears more than probable that Oscar L. Young, formerly Attorney General of New Hampshire, descended from the same original stock and is therefore a rather remote relative.

On the distaff side of the house, the History of my family is rather more picturesque. The Tobins, too, were of Irish stock, with a similar blending of Scotch blood. My three-times-removed grandfather, James Tobin, at the age of eight years came to Portland, Maine, on one of the oldtime "wind-jammers", accompanied by his brother Michael, two years his senior-- as stowaways. They seem to have been bright, interesting little fellows. On the long passage over, the captain of the vessel became much attached to them.

On arriving at Portland he fell in with an old friend of his, also a sea-captain but hailing from New York. The Portland skipper made the other a proposal; the result was that he himself adopted the younger Tobin boy, James, while his friend did likewise by Michael and carried him away to the larger city. I have heard that somewhere in Oneida County, New York, there is a certain town whose population at a comparatively recent date, was composed almost exclusively of Tobins, descended, no doubt, from the little Irish stowaway. Be that as it may, the two brothers never met again.

In the Pine Tree State, James Tobin's son, James Jr., married Margaret Legrow (Le Gros (?)) of Windham. They had a rather numerous family, Joseph, Benjamin, Delia, Matthew, Nancy, John, Samuel and Henry--my grandfather. Joseph seems to have been considerable of a politician in his day, as he offered several of his brothers for that matter. In the year 1820 Joseph wrote the Constitution of Maine, very much as it stands today. At various times he served as jailor, high sheriff and county commissioner. He also was in the Maine Legislature at least one term; so were his brothers Benjamin and John. The fourth brother, Samuel, was likewise tendered the nomination for the same office, in that district equivalent to an election at that time. He declined to run, however,
saying that as long as three of his brothers had made fools of themselves he guessed he would stay at home. And he did.

When I was but nine years old I visited my great-uncle John at his home in Lincoln, Maine, the only one of that generation of the family that I ever saw. My grandfather, Henry Tobin, was drowned in the Penobscot River, not very far away, when my mother was only three years old.

Just after I passed my seventh birthday, Father moved to the town of Fayette, I had then attended barely one term of school, but I attended the Fayette common schools from that time until I was fourteen. As far as I remember, I always got rather better than average rank, being particularly apt in spelling and mathematics. During the craze of old-fashioned "spelling-scholastics" that swept the country some time in the seventies I acquired a rather widespread reputation as a speller, facing champions from far and near and very seldom meeting with a Waterloo. To-day I can't spell my own name without the aid of a dictionary.

It was while making a winter visit to northern Maine, in my tenth year, that I first began to babble verse. About that time my first bit of published rhyme, written-- or printed rather; I could not write much then-- on the back of an old paper collar, was printed in the Lewiston Journal. I have written jingle ever since, lots of it-- but never yet have I succeeded in writing poetry.

After a single term in the little home town High school I entered the neighboring Kent's Hill Seminary-- in the spring of '76. I never yet attended a full year there, usually the spring and fall terms, but never in the winter. At first the studies pursued were without definite objective; later I swung into the Scientific Course, finally graduating June 6, 1881. I had a rhymed essay on "Dreams", the only article in verse in a class of thirty-six. I also probably left a record number of prose articles and rhyming skits behind me, largely, I am sorry to say, in the nature of lampoons. Indeed, so ready was I with the pen, that the College girls nicknamed me "Will Shakespeare", a title I myself paraphrased as a signature into the more fitting form of "Billy Wiggledart". During those years I also acquired a considerable reputation on the ball-field.

During this same period I succeeded in organizing a Lyceum at home in Fayette, dependent entirely upon home talent. It ran for a number of winters, the first one at the "North Road" schoolhouse, after that at Grange Hall. Every week the place of meeting was packed. In "The Firefly", as its "paper" was called, I did my best to sustain the reputation for persiflage I had previously acquired. I think I was fairly dreaded by many of the attendants, as the harder I could lambaste anybody the better I enjoyed it.

Earlier yet, at a winter term of the "Tilton" school in the home town, taught by the late Hudson Maxim, the noted inventor, then at his old home in Wayne, I had gained some little literary training. We had weekly spelling schools there, at which was put forth a school paper, "The Froghollow Democrat", largely written by Maxim and myself. In this way any tiny bit of ink-slinging ability I may originally have possessed was nurtured and encouraged.

With the fall of 1881 I discovered that I had acquired a Kent's Hill habit that graduation had not cured. I did postgraduate work there with the College girls, four terms in the next two years, covering more than half of that course, though the school could grant degrees to ladies only. The late Professor Henry Trefethen of Colby, then President at Kent's Hill, assured me I would be admitted as a Junior at Wesleyan, without examination; to my everlasting regret afterward, this I decided not to do.

During this postgraduate work I kept up my interest in athletics and played first on the local team. Though only a prep. school, we actually downed both the Bates and the Colby nines. The following year, while teaching a term of High school at Fayette Mills, only a mile away, I went to Portland with the boys and met that year's New England champion
team. Amid April showers and on a diamond some inches deep in mud, and with an outfield liberally peppered with puddles, we got the walloping we expected—but the boys did run in a few scores. I did not get any myself, but I did make two of the six lonesome hits allowed us—and incidentally played an errorless first base.

About this time the Bates people somehow heard there was such a chap as I up in the backwoods and wanted me to play first for them; so I made plans to enter Bates. Unfortunately, that year the Bates Faculty voted not to put any nine into the field, so far as I know, for the first and only time in history. So that plan fell through, and again I failed to matriculate.

I did play my usual position on the Maranacooks, a picked nine from Winthrop, Readfield and Fayette, probably that same season. The team played every promising amateur team available, trounced all comers soundly up to eight straight victories then dropped two to Lewiston in succession—and disbanded. Augusta, Gardiner and Skowhegan each went down to defeat before us twice; just whose were the other two scalps taken I do not now recall, though I think one of them belonged to my old nine at Kents Hill.

It was at the age of seventeen that I taught my first school, the one at East Livermore Camp Ground and the one which I first attended myself. A considerable number of my pupils were older than myself. After that I taught at least one term of district school, in my own or a nearby town, most of them during the winter.

In 1883 I went to Portland with a friend who had applied for a school there and was taking the two-days examination necessary to qualify. Just for a lark, and to see what I could do, I took the examination also. Somehow, I don't know how it came about, my name led the list of those successful in passing in the First Grade. I was offered a Grammar school there in consequence, accepted the position and taught the winter term for two or three years in succession—or rather I was principal of a big Grammar school at Port Republic, New Jersey, the year after my first experience in Portland. After a year and a half in Jersey, I was called back to the Forest City and my old position, and made permanent incumbent there in response to a monster position sent in to the School Board to that effect. All told, I was principal of the Portland school the whole or some part of seven years.

During two or three of these last years I covered first sack for the strong Peak's Island ball nine, at least twice assisting in defeating the South Portland team, this last being in turn able to beat the State amateur champion Presumpscots on at least one occasion. Perhaps the most noteworthy game I ever played with the P. I.'s was against a picked nine from Portland, one Memorial Day. The game was tied in the first half of the fourth inning, five and five. From then on it was a scoreless game till the last half of the fourteenth—and P. I. lost, six to five. I remember I got eighteen putouts at first, I think without an error.

The spring after my first winter in Portland I taught a term of High school at Monmouth. Somewhere about that time I also officiated in one at North Wayne, as well as one at Fayette, as noted above, and one at South Fayette.

My work at Portland closed abruptly April 5, 1890, Saturday, when I received a telegram that my father was dead. The last train till Monday had gone, but I discovered there was a midnight freight east, leaving the Transfer Station, two miles out of the city. I got out there in ample time, but the conductor of the train refused to let me aboard, as there was a law prohibiting freight trains from carrying passengers. The engineer and fireman took pity on me and hauled me into the caboose after they were fairly under way. Readfield was the nearest station to my home, but the freight did not stop there nor would they slack up and allow me
The best I could do was to get off at Winthrop, fifteen miles from home, and walk up during the latter part of the night. I reached my father's late residence, six o'clock the following morning—Sunday.

It was in August, following that I was married to Eva J., a daughter of the late Captain John Dorsey of Portland. During the next ten or twelve years, our family increased by the arrival of seven children—Ouida Estelle, Edith Chandler, Villa Katherine, Carleton Leroy, Bryan Fitzroy, Bebbie Imogen and Edna Margaret. All lived to adult years, but I lost my eldest daughter in 1928. Two only are married at date, the oldest now living, and the youngest, Edith, Mrs. (Dr.) J. L. Ward now lives at New Haven, Ct., and Edna, Mrs. Stephen Bradeen, at Norway, Me.

During all these years I have dabbled more or less in literature.

While in New Jersey, in January, '86, my "Little Sweethearts" was awarded the first prize in a verse competition conducted by the Montreal Herald and Star, and in December of the same year I got second money in a similar contest sponsored by another Canadian paper, published at London but whose name I have long since forgotten.

During the latter part of my teaching service in Portland, I got a contract with the Chicago Sun for a bit of jingle and a short story every week. This was largely humorous stuff, though there were some tales of the weird and several serials, each installment of which counted as the week's offering. During the two or three years I worked for the Sun, until the special weekly edition was discontinued, I never had a rejection.

I also did locals, as well as an occasional article, during many years, for various other papers, including the Livermore Falls News, later the Advertiser, the Maine Farmer, the Rockland Opinion, The Portland Transcript, Zion's Herald, and the Lewiston Journal. Indeed I have contributed illustrated articles to the Magazine Supplement of the last named paper for the last thirty years or more.

In 1899 I started my careering as a playwright with "Popping by Proxy", a one-act farce which occupied the stage for nearly an hour. It was sent to Walter H. Baker and Company of Boston, who promptly snapped it up. The same Company has published a considerable number of plays of mine since.

But not all. Later I wrote between twenty and thirty of them, in rapid succession. "Riding the Goat", a mock initiation, was turned down by Baker, but immediately accepted by Dick and Fitzgerald, now the Fitzgerald Publishing Corporation, of New York. Shortly after its appearance Baker's people wrote me and frankly acknowledged they had made a mistake in rejecting it; they furthermore asked me to write them a script on similar lines—or a mock trial. I sent them "The Scroggins Divorce Case," which they accepted but wrote me they had an idea it was a mock initiation I was to write for them. So I pounded out "The Ancient Order of Knights of Chivalry" and speedily received a check in payment for both.

In the meantime I had written "Mr. Badger's Uppers", a heartbreaking story of that gentleman's agonizing struggles to break in his false teeth, in which a prominent character was a negro. This I had sent to T. S. Denison of Chicago. He published it as a negro farce, with six others that I wrote for him at his request. I did the whole half-dozen inside of a month. All were listed among the "New Plays" in Denison's next catalog.

At present writing I have done over sixty plays, long and short. Except for two full-length melodramas, everything I wrote in that line went, till I had completed about half that number. "Snappers", (short lobsters) the scene of which is placed on Long Island, in Portland Harbor, and which also has a negro in the cast, received the first award in a contest in New York, conducted by E. S. Hopkins, 418 Fifth Avenue, in 1905. The actress who was taking the leading part for the New York production, fell down stairs in a local negro boardinghouse, presumably while studying "local color", and never afterward recovered her senses. Hopkins was unable to find anybody else to take the part, as everybody seemed to
fight any of the rather difficult "business" involved in the play. He finally proposed that he and I should make a joint venture of it and produce it ourselves. Naturally I did not care to enter a business I knew very little about, with a man about whom I knew nothing at all—and so I informed him when I declined the offered honor. Eventually I got out of touch with Mr. Hopkins and what end "Snappers" finally made I never knew. My knowledge of the show business was at that time confined to my experience in amateur productions, and also in coaching them, both quite considerable—though one winter I was with the Fayette Comedy Players, a semi-professional troupe presenting two of my own plays, the "Popping by Proxy" and the "Mr. Badger's Uppers" mentioned above, both then new and the latter right off the press. The lead in both was, in fact, a real professional.

In addition to the houses already mentioned, I have had plays issued by the Penn Publishing Company, the Dramatic Publishing Company, the Ames Publishing Company and Willis N. Bugbee and Company. Every dealer in school supplies catalogs several of them. Even Sears, Roebuck and Company and Montgomery Ward and Company carried them, as long as they listed plays at all.

With the advent of moving pictures the demand for "legitimate" plays became very much restricted—or at least it proved so with me. I have disposed of so few since that I practically discontinued production quite a number of years ago, though all that ever were in print are still to be obtained. "The Little Red Mare" is used and recommended by the Little Theatre people. Beside the plays named above, the publishers inform me that quite a number have had especially large sales, notably "Love and Lather", "Unacquainted with Work", "A Pickled Polliwog", and "Sampson's Courtin'."

After being called home from Portland by the telegram announcing the death of my father, my work in the schoolroom ended abruptly. For fifteen years or more I carried on the home farm—after a fashion—doing much scribbling for various publications in the meantime. During that time Charles W. True and I leased the old Fayette Creamery, then practically on its last legs. In a short time we had it in the best condition it had ever been. We also sold grain, grass seed, fertilizer, and a small line of groceries in addition. I remained in the farm about a year, after which True carried on the business alone for a time. Eventually the Creamery Association resumed control, but eventually the plant was burned and has never been rebuilt.

But the old farm did not hold me indefinitely. In '95 I broke away to accept a position as Principal of the Tenant's Harbor High School. I was at the Harbor about two years, the family remaining at home in the meantime. From there I went to Cape Elizabeth High, in the same capacity, remaining there for four years. The next four years I was Principal of Mt. Vernon High, near enough home to return practically every week end. Then it was again the simple life for me.

And then came the war. Both my boys went across during that unpleasantness. By that time I had become physically incapacitated for hard labor, and so was unable to carry on the old farm with much success. So I began to teach again, once more in the country schools, sufficiently nearby so I managed to go home nights. In this way I put in two or three years, in my own town and in Chesterville, doing what was done at home in the meantime. Finally the strain became too great for me and once more I abandoned school work.

Then the time of my older boy expired and he came home. I had been under heavy pressure to go to Mapleton High, as the war made teachers somewhat hard to find. My son agreed to look after things at home; so I finally accepted the offer and went—the first time I had ever held a subordinate position. I remained at Mapleton two years, teaching Latin, French, commercial work, and some classes in the Junior High at different
times. I remained at Mapleton two years.

At the close of the second year I went to the adjoining town of Washburn, as Superintendent of Schools in the Washburn, Wade and Ferham districts. I remained there only one year for the salary offered, though considerably larger than that received the year before. I was still hesitating which of two similar positions offered me to accept when each joint committee took it into its joint head to ask me how old I was. That settled it; I was too much of an antique. Both deals were off immediately. Once more I came back to the farm. There I am yet, and there I shall probably remain— at least as long as I remain anywhere.

During my long period of school work, I have many times had occasion to coach school and other plays, as well as train members of graduating classes, and get up, or assist in getting up, entertainments of all sorts. These last were usually for the benefit of various orders of which I was a member at different times, Good Templars, Sons of Temperance, Oddfellows, the Grange, etc. In these I had always found good tableaus, with colored lights, were very effective—and satisfactory ones very hard to find; so I xxxxx soon began to originate my own.

A few years ago I wrote out some of these, as well as a good many new ones. I sent ten to Baker, my first publisher of plays, who promptly accepted them. Thus encouraged, I sent a batch of fifty to Bugbee of Syracuse, who just as promptly accepted the lot. I have always since then intended to keep up the good (?) work, but alas! Man proposes—but he isn't always accepted. I haven't done it.

My one book of verse, "Seaside Songs and Woodland Whispers," appeared in '91, though I have been represented in numerous anthologies, "The Poets of Maine," "Flowers by the Wayside" and the like. At least one book of quotations has also accorded me a place. I have have bushels of jingle on hand that has never appeared, never will appear—and never ought to appear—though fugitive bits have xxx now and then found places in many different periodicals.

Except for the chairs of various orders, or moderator at town meetings, I have always fought shy of office, until the fall of 1930. Then I was suddenly pitchpoled into the campaign at the very last minute, and without so much as a "by your leave," by the death of the minority candidate for Representative. Of course it was only a barren honor, as every town in the district was normally about four to one against the party represented—yet somehow I carried my own town nearly two to one and came pretty close to swinging the much Y larger one of Readfield. The other allied towns did much better than usual for our side, myself included.

In the spring of '31, I yet more foolishly allowed myself to be over-persuaded to permit being used as a candidate for first select man, and was elected without a dissenting vote. Got involved in a local Donnybrook Fair and resigned in two months. The town was behind me, but my colleagues of the Board stood out in opposition. I have now retired on my illgotten gains, while they are are still in conflict with the Supreme Court of Maine—which serves us all right.

During the years that are past I have accumulated many book scripts. I have even made some effort to find a publisher for some of them— but the hardhearted villains will have none of them unless I stand a portion of the cost myself. These efforts, always spasmodic, have long ago ceased. Probably the stuff is not worth publishing anyhow. Maybe I have gained sufficient training to do better in my next incarnation, though.

There! I've blown my own bugle in great shape; I had to, in order to get it blown at all. Thought I'd better do the job up brown
while I was about it; if anybody ever gets up sufficient courage to tackle reading it, after I toot my horn no more, probably an extra thousand words or so won't make much difference. The reading will be no particular accommodation to me, any way. I'm going to have a little belated mercy on the problematical "gentle reader," however, and cut this thing right short off-- now!

O. E. Young.

R. 1, Kent's Hill, Maine, June, 1931.
August 20, 1931.

Mr. O. E. Young,
Route 1,
Kent's Hill, Maine.

Dear Mr. Young;-

Thank you very much for the autobiography. I have read it with interest and am very glad to have it for our files. You were very kind to take the trouble to write it for us; I wish that all of our Maine authors would be equally generous with their time and effort!

Very truly yours,

(Signed MGF)