

## Biography of Robert Young

*Office of Historic Alexandria Freedom House Research Project, November 2020*

Robert Young was born on December 27, 1768,<sup>1</sup> possibly in Gilford Township, Franklin County, Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup> By 1783 he was living in or near Alexandria – that year he became a member of the Masonic Alexandria-Washington Lodge.<sup>3</sup> Later, he built the three-story building at 1315 Duke Street we now call Freedom House as his residence.

### Business

Young and Philip Richard Fendall became partners in 1796 and operated a merchant firm under the name of Robert Young and Company,<sup>4</sup> but the partnership only lasted until the following year. They financially over-extended themselves and were involved in lawsuits for years over payment of debts both owed by them and to them.<sup>5</sup> The lawsuits included a series of court cases beginning with Deneale v. Young and Fendall and ending with Turner v. Fendall (1804), which was heard by the Supreme Court.<sup>6</sup> The papers of George Washington suggest that the firm of Robert Young and Company was not held in high regard. In 1796 Washington's personal secretary Tobias Lear sent a letter to Washington regarding a Mr. Smith not meeting his payments, and Smith's excuse was "a want of punctuality in payments to him, particularly from Messr Robert Young & Co."<sup>7</sup> Smith informed Washington's farm manager William Pearce that Fendall could endorse the notes, but Lear pointed out, "as Mr Fendall is one of the partners of Robert Young it might be well to get [an]other person..."<sup>8</sup>

Advertisements for Robert Young and Company list a variety of general goods including strong beer, Madeira wine, hyson tea, green coffee, cotton, molasses, sugar, German goods, looking glasses, hollow glass, linens, cigars, and raw and Spanish hides.<sup>9</sup> Apparently the firm was also in

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<sup>1</sup> Tombstone inscription in the Presbyterian Cemetery, Alexandria, Virginia.

<sup>2</sup> John Matthews, ed., genealogical information provided in an entry for his grandson Philip Fendall Young in *Matthew's Armoury and Blue Book* (London: C. Mitchell, 1907).

<sup>3</sup> F. L. Brockett, *The Lodge of Washington. A History of the Alexandria Washington Lodge, No. 22, A. F. and A. M. of Alexandria, Va., 1783–1876* (Westminster, MD: Willow Bend Books, 2001), 128; unsourced family trees on Ancestry.com give Young's birthplace as Virginia, and it may have been in the vicinity of Alexandria as his father had a ground rent at the corner of King and Patrick streets which was devised to Robert. With this information his family will likely be able to be found with some digging.

<sup>4</sup> T. Michael Miller, *Artisans and Merchants of Alexandria, Virginia 1780–1820 Volume 2* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1992), 277.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, *Artisans and Merchants*, 277–8.

<sup>6</sup> A complicated legal muddle. It would be interesting to see how much of Fendall's 1803 bankruptcy was owing to his business dealing through Robert Young and Company; there are also many cases where Robert Young was listed as the defendant in 1812 and 1813.

<sup>7</sup> "Tobias Lear to George Washington, November 20, 1796," George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, Library of Congress.

<sup>8</sup> Lear to George Washington, November 20, 1796.

<sup>9</sup> Miller, *Artisans and Merchants*, 277–8.

the flour trade – in 1803 Young took out an insurance policy on a single-story wooden flour store on the north side of King Street, between Union and Water streets.<sup>10</sup>

After Fendall's death in 1805, Young became partners with William Yeaton and continued under the name Robert Young and Company.<sup>11</sup> Young had a number of other business interests in and around Alexandria. In 1808, Young served on the board of directors of the Washington Bridge Company, which constructed the first bridge across the Potomac on the site of the present Long Bridge. He also served on the board of the directors of the Washington and Alexandria Turnpike Company.<sup>12</sup>

## Military

Young was a captain of the Alexandria Dragoons in 1798<sup>13</sup> when the John Adams administration was authorized to create The Provisional Army of the United States. Wishing to further his military career, Young and a number of others called on General Washington on July 12, 1798, apparently to discuss a commission in the new Provisional Army. But Washington noted in his July 22 letter to James McHenry, "Capt (Young) of the Alexandria Troop is desirous of employment, but as his application has not been direct, I but barely mention the fact."<sup>14</sup> Young's name does appear on a November 1798 list of candidates for army appointments from Virginia with the notes: "desirous of serving his Country from zeal & activity can raise troops will do honor to his Country" and "wishes to be *Major* or *1<sup>st</sup> Captn in the provisional army.*"<sup>15</sup> Yet he was still Captain of the Alexandria Dragoons when he and other cavalry officers escorted General Washington into Alexandria for his final birthday celebration in February 1799.<sup>16</sup>

Young served in the Second Legion of the District of Columbia Militia, commissioned as a Major on September 24, 1805.<sup>17</sup> He was promoted to Lt. Colonel in April 1810, and to Brigadier General in 1813.<sup>18</sup> Young was in command of the Second Legion of the D.C. Militia during the British attack on Washington in August 1814. While the Second Legion did not participate in the Battle of Bladensburg, General Young did participate in the Battle of White House Landing, where his Alexandrian troops defended the naval battery bombarding the British forces

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<sup>10</sup> Reel 3, Vol. 30, Policy #2179; and Reel 8, Vol. 61, Policy #188.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, *Artisans and Merchants*, 278.

<sup>12</sup> Miller, *Artisans and Merchants*, 230–1.

<sup>13</sup> "The Alexandria Dragoons, are directed to attend on parade, near the Powder House, at half past three o'clock, P. M. on Saturday, the 16th inst. Stable Jackets to be worn. ROBERT YOUNG, Capt." in *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, June 12, 1798.

<sup>14</sup> "George Washington [Diary Entry, July 12, 1798]," Founders Online (website); "George Washington to James McHenry, July 22, 1798," Founders Online (website).

<sup>15</sup> "Candidates for Army Appointments from Virginia, November 1798," Founders Online (website).

<sup>16</sup> *Centinel of Liberty* (Georgetown, D.C.), February 19, 1799.

<sup>17</sup> Frederick P. Todd, "The Militia and Volunteers of the District of Columbia, 1783–1820," in *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.*, Vol. 50 (1948/1950), 402.

<sup>18</sup> Todd, "The Militia and Volunteers," 400–1.

withdrawing from the Washington campaign.<sup>19</sup> Young would continue to serve in the D.C. Militia until he resigned his commission in 1817.

### **Community and Personal Life**

Robert Young was widely involved in Alexandria community affairs. In 1804, he was one of seven elected delegates from Alexandria who attended a meeting in Washington to discuss the retrocession of Alexandria back to Virginia. He served on the Alexandria Common Council, resigning in 1805. He served as President of the Mechanic's Bank of Alexandria, resigning in 1818.<sup>20</sup> In 1822, when retrocession was again discussed, Young was an appointed member of the committee to work in support of the measure.<sup>21</sup> Shortly before his death, he served as a judge of the Alexandria Orphans' Court.<sup>22</sup>

Young married Elizabeth Conrad in 1804, and they had two daughters. Elizabeth Mary Young married Philip Richard Fendall II, an attorney, newspaper editor, and later District Attorney of the District of Columbia. Roberta Eugenia Young married Albert Gallatin Brown, Governor of Mississippi and later United States Senator (until secession).<sup>23</sup>

On October 27, 1824, Young died, apparently in considerable financial difficulty. The only real estate mentioned in his will was an \$88 per annum ground rent at the corner of King and Patrick streets given to him by his father. A remarkable passage at the end of the will highlights the nature of his straitened circumstances: "I hope that my kind God enable me plainly to see how the great loss of my money occurred in the Mechanics Bank of Alexandria which has proved on my mind for more than seven years, the loss was trifling compared to the venom of evil tounge [sic] proceeding from bad hearts."<sup>24</sup>

His financial difficulty might explain the sale of his residence at 1315 Duke Street in 1820, and might also explain why Charles Chapin, cashier of the Mechanic's Bank, was listed as the owner when it was advertised for lease in 1827.<sup>25</sup>

The 1820 United States Census for the Robert Young household lists two enslaved women, one aged 15 to 26, and the other aged 27 to 45.

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<sup>19</sup> Ted Pulliam, "Alexandria and the War of 1812" (Alexandria Archaeology Publications Number #127).

<sup>20</sup> Miller, *Artisans and Merchants*, 277.

<sup>21</sup> T. Michael Miller, *Portrait of a Town Alexandria District of Columbia [Virginia] 1820–1830* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1995), 298.

<sup>22</sup> Wesley E. Pippenger, *Marriage and Death Notices from Alexandria, Virginia Newspapers, Volume 1: 1784–1838* (Richmond, VA: Virginia Genealogical Society, 2006), 468.

<sup>23</sup> Wesley E. Pippenger, *Marriage and Death Notices from Alexandria, Virginia, Newspapers, Volume 2: 1838-1852* (Richmond, VA: Virginia Genealogical Society, 2006), 84; Wikipedia, "Albert G. Brown" (September 19, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Will Book 3, 186–7.

<sup>25</sup> Miller, *Artisans and Merchants*, 277; Miller, *Portrait of a Town*, 391.