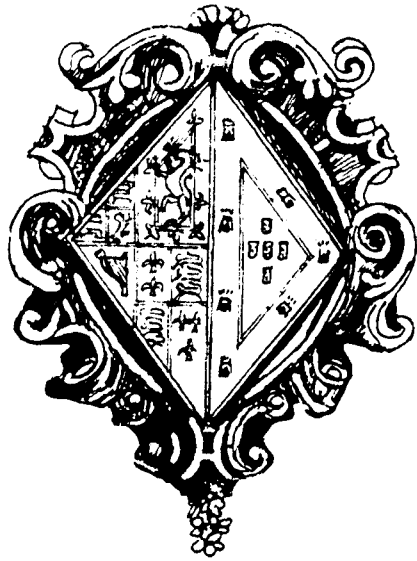


**THE BRITISH
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF PORTUGAL**

TWENTY EIGHTH ANNUAL REPORT
AND REVIEW 2001

Quinta Nova
Carcavelos
2777 PAREDE



THE DABNEY FAMILY OF FAIAL

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I Congresso Internacional de Estudos
Anglo-Portugueses
6th-8th Maio de 2001, Lisboa

In 1806 John Bass Dabney arrived in Faial to live and those family members still living on the island climbed aboard their ship on January 2nd, 1892 and said farewell to the island and its people, both groups feeling a great sense of loss. During their 86-year stay in Faial, the Dabneys provided 3 generations of American Consuls and were involved in ship supply and repair, trade in Pico wine, whaling and a variety of other business ventures. In addition, they had numerous important visitors and had a part in political and military incidents involving the United States, Great Britain and Portugal. They had a major impact on the Azores and were possibly the most important foreign family in the archipelago during this period.

The Dabney family in America traces its descent from the Huguenots who fled France in the 17th century to avoid persecution. Many of these French Calvinists fled to Britain and then to America. Cornelius and John d'Aubigne left Wales sometime between 1715 and 1717, changed the family name to Dabney and started the Virginia branch of the family. Their brother Robert went to Boston and established the Massachusetts branch of the family.

John Bass Dabney was born on December 13th, 1766 and on his mother's side his ancestry in America goes back to Samuel and Hannah Bass who arrived in Massachusetts not too long after the *Mayflower* and whose son John married Ruth Alden, daughter of John Alden and Priscilla Mullins, the first child born in the Plymouth Colony.

He started working in a counting room and then moved to Alexandria, Virginia where in 1789 he began his first business, which was exporting American products to Europe and bringing back wines, most of the trade being with France.

In 1792 John Dabney married Roxa Lewis and on March 19th, 1794, their first son, Charles William Dabney was born in Alexandria. He was destined to become the main figure in the Dabney family in the Azores. Within two months after his son's birth John Bass Dabney went to France and established himself in business there.

This was right at the beginning of the Reign of Terror. Nevertheless, by June 1795, he was part owner of 12 ships. His business took him to the Caribbean and the United States and, given the strategic location of the Azores as a stopping-off point for trans-Atlantic travel, it would be surprising if John Dabney hadn't visited Faial on at least one of his trips across the ocean.

When Britain and France declared war, John Bass Dabney found himself caught between the warring powers. His ships were targets for British confiscation since they sailed under French colours and he was a focus for attention by the French who were seeking British sympathisers and did not yet discriminate well between the countries of origin of English speakers.

As a result, his business was ruined and he decided to leave France. In the later part of 1804, Mrs Dabney and their four children departed Bordeaux for America. John Bass Dabney departed on a different ship and in a different direction, passing through Lisbon and stopping in the Azores.

In addition to the advantages of their physical location, which was convenient for re-supply of ships and a haven from the weather, the Azores were controlled by Portugal, which was a neutral country. For John Dabney the neutrality of the Azores greatly enhanced their commercial and strategic possibilities after his experience in France. John Dabney spent the winter of 1804-5 in Faial and arrived back in Boston in late spring of 1805, and set about making preparations to return to Faial and open a business there.

U.S. Consuls in the early 19th century could have their own business and perform the functions of Consul at the same time. John Dabney knew that in addition to benefiting him in his commercial activities on Faial, the high status and respect accorded to him by the people as the representative of the United States would be easier to attain than it would be for just a merchant, especially among the Morgados.

In the fall of 1806 John Dabney applied to the government for the Office of Consul General for the United States at the Western Islands, as the Azores were then known in America. To help with the support for his application, it is likely that John Dabney contacted a couple of uncles who were part of the Virginia branch of the Dabney family who knew their fellow Virginian Thomas Jefferson – President of the United States at the time. In 1806 John Bass Dabney was appointed the first Consul General for the United States in the Azores.

In August 1806 he arrived back in Faial with his mandate as Consul and immediately set about getting a place to live and arranging for warehouse space and wine cellars near the quay for the exportation of Pico wine. In September 1807, Mrs. Dabney and their children arrived on Faial and the Dabney family settled in.

However, the war between Britain and France made things very difficult for American shipping, plus that of the Dabney and other Azorean businesses. Finally things got so bad that America declared war against Britain in 1812.

Then, on September 26th, 1814, the nine-gun American privateer *General Armstrong* entered the Bay of Horta. It anchored and its commander Captain Samuel Chester Reid got permission to re-supply his ship with food and water. Since Portugal was a neutral country, both sides were allowed this privilege and the *General Armstrong* was given 24 hours to complete taking on supplies.

About sundown a British ship came around the point of the bay, but nobody was concerned because the commanders of the two British warships patrolling the Azores wouldn't violate the neutrality of the port. However, it took only a minute to realise that it was a different British warship, the 18-gun brig *Carnation*. The 44-gun frigate *Rota* soon followed the *Carnation* and the 74-gun ship-of-the-line *Plantagenet*, commanded by Captain Robert Lloyd, nicknamed Mad Lloyd, who had himself, previously used Portugal's neutrality in Faial.

Captain Reid was unable to flee. John Dabney, recognising that there would be trouble, sent his 21-year-old son Charles on board the *General Armstrong* with a message recommending Captain Reid move his vessel close in under the guns of the fortress.

The *General Armstrong* held off two attacks during the night, but Captain Lloyd refused to quit and threatened to sink the ship at the cost of destroying Horta. A third attack began at dawn and the Americans fled their ship and scuttled it.

After the battle Captain Reid discovered that only two of his men had been killed and eight wounded. The British losses, on the other hand, were tremendous. The British admitted to having 120 men killed and 130 wounded, but some eyewitnesses considered this an underestimate.

The battle in the Bay of Horta was over, but its effects extended far beyond a simple naval confrontation. When Captain Reid and his crew returned to America they were welcomed as heroes. In 1818 Captain Reid received recognition as the designer of the present form of the American flag with 13 stripes and a star for each state.

The consequences for the British were not so happy. They had been trying to capture the territory of the Louisiana Purchase up the Mississippi River. The British fleet was in Jamaica to await reinforcements, but Captain Lloyd and his ships arrived ten days late with some 200 men less than expected.

Lloyd's delay caused the British fleet to depart later than anticipated for New Orleans and they arrived on December 6th, four days after Andrew Jackson had captured the city. As a result, Jackson was successfully able to hold New Orleans against the British assault during the famous battle on January 8th.

Captain Lloyd's late arrival prevented the British from arriving in New Orleans a week earlier than they had planned.

If they had arrived before Jackson, they would have captured the city, held it and had possession of it when the Treaty of Ghent ending the War of 1812 was signed on December 24th 1814. Therefore, the battle in the Bay of Horta, the last naval battle between the British and Americans, had a direct effect on the outcome of the last land battle between the two countries, as well as on the westward development of the United States.

The rest of his tenure as Consul ran smoothly and John Bass Dabney built up the family business and ran the Consulate in Faial so that it earned the respect of the American merchants with whom it dealt. Though a foreigner and a Protestant, no man was ever more beloved by the people of Faial. His charities to the poor were extensive. For example, when the harvest of Indian corn, which was the principal food of the labouring classes and the indigent, failed, the people were afraid a famine might occur so John Dabney brought in a shipload of corn from America which he sold at a price just to cover the cost and even gave some to the indigent.

John Bass Dabney died of a stroke in the early afternoon of September 2nd, 1826 at the age of 60, being survived by his wife and nine children.

As Vice-consul, Charles William Dabney took over the responsibilities of the Consulate on his father's death. Considering the slow speed at which sailing ships and governments move, Henry Clay's confirmation of Charles Dabney as U. S. Consul in the Azores on November 3rd was lightning quick. This was a significant tribute to the manner in which the Faial consulate functioned and to the man who had held the position.

Things did not move quite so fast in Portugal. Thomas Ludwell Lee Brent, the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires in Lisbon,

submitted Charles Dabney's commission for acceptance to the Portuguese Court in March 1828, but it was not approved until 1837. This was in part blamed on Charles Dabney's activities during the Portuguese civil war during this period, although he always claimed to be a neutral.

The incident that resulted in Charles Dabney being included on the Absolutist government's enemies list and prevented recognition of his position as Consul took place in 1828 when a group of about twenty young Liberals gathered with illegal weapons, some of which had been hidden in the Dabney's business location, and attacked and captured the fortress. However, the Absolutist soldiers recaptured it the next day.

In 1831, when Dom Pedro abdicated the throne of Brazil and returned to Portugal stopping in Angra, Charles Dabney sent an official report about the event to the United States State Department saying that he had

"...received advices of the arrival of Dom Pedro de Bragança and suite at Terceira in the Frigate *Rainha de Portugal* of 44 guns & that the Frigate *Dona Maria da Glória* of 42 guns & two transports had also reached that Island preparatory to the contemplated Expedition against Portugal which it was expected was to be ready to sail about the first of May. It may be interesting for you to know that the officers and crews of the Frigate are English, those officers who hold commissions in the British Navy act under assumed names."

Dom Pedro visited Horta on May 30th, 1831, after which the leadership on Faial decided to send a message to the Count of Vila Flor on São Jorge announcing the submission of the island. The Count of Vila Flor sent a letter to Charles

Dabney on June 8th and entrusted him with duplicate official dispatches in the event the originals couldn't be delivered and then contacted him from Angra, asking him to charter two of the American whaling ships in Horta to transport troops. Despite the large number of whaling ships coming to Horta, he had to tell the Count that he was not able to provide the ships since the only ones coming through wouldn't change their orders.

The local supporters of the King decided to build an arsenal in Horta to prepare ships for the expedition to Portugal and all the supplies necessary were obtained from the Dabney's ship supply company.

In April 1832, Dom Pedro returned to Horta, this time in the first steam-powered ship to visit the island. Dom Pedro was greeted with all the pomp and circumstance that the island could muster and he made all the official visits and inspections expected of him. Every evening saw a ball for the King and the third evening the Dabneys held a ball at their residence *Bagatelle* where the King danced the first dance with Emmeline Dabney who later commented, "It would amuse you to see with what spirit the Emperor dances the Gallopade."

Life passed peacefully and business improved for the Dabneys and then, eighteen years later, the Battle of the Bay of Horta in 1814 returned to complicate Portuguese-American relations and make Charles Dabney angry because he felt the American action cheapened a heroic event.

After the owners of the *General Armstrong* failed to get Britain to pay for sinking the ship, they asked for help from the U.S. government. The United States then turned to Portugal to pay the claim for sinking of the *General Armstrong* based on an accusation that Portugal had not defended the neutrality of the port. Portugal countered that its

resources in Horta would not have allowed this and that any action would have resulted in the destruction of the town.

In 1850 President Zachary Taylor, under whom Captain Reid's son served as an army officer in Mexico, ordered the U.S. Ambassador in Portugal to present an ultimatum to the Portuguese government for payment of various claims, including that of the *General Armstrong*. After months of negotiations, the Portuguese finally agreed to pay all the claims except that for the *General Armstrong*, which they suggested be submitted to international arbitration. Clay turned this down.

In July 1850, the U.S. warships *Independence*, flagship of the Mediterranean fleet, and the *Mississippi* entered the Port of Lisbon with their cannons aimed at the city for 20 days. They brought orders for Ambassador Clay to give a final ultimatum regarding the *General Armstrong* and, if that were refused, to ask for his passport and leave the country. This threat at gunpoint greatly angered the Portuguese and was condemned by the Parliament and the press.

With Portugal unwilling to back down from its position, Mr. Clay packed his bags, demanded the return of his passport from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and boarded the *Independence*, thereby breaking diplomatic relations with Portugal on July 19th, 1850.

However, President Zachary Taylor had died 10 days earlier and Millard Fillmore had become President and selected Daniel Webster as his Secretary of State. Webster continued the negotiations and in August 1850 diplomatic relations was re-established between Portugal and the United States and Charles B. Haddock, Daniel Webster's nephew, was appointed Chargé d'Affaires. The claim for the *General Armstrong* was submitted for international arbitration and the

arbitrator was Napoleon III who decided in favour of Portugal.

As a sideline to these negotiations, the Portuguese government made a formal request to Britain to intervene militarily based on the Treaty of Windsor. However, the British response came after the situation had been resolved and, in any event, was refused because of Portugal's treatment of British ships in Mozambique.

Except for a brief incident during the American Civil War, the rest of Charles Dabney's tenure was relatively quiet. The Confederate ship *Alabama* sank 10 whaling ships in the Azores and the ship's Captain Semmes swore to sink the Dabney ships because of their sympathies with the Union and refusal to sell coal to Confederate ships. Semmes never was able to sink any of the Dabney ships and the *Alabama* was finally sunk off Cherbourg, an event memorialised in a painting by Manet.

Among the more important areas where Charles Dabney greatly expanded his father's business was whaling. Whaling ships from the English colonies in America, specifically New England, were hunting whales in Azorean waters by the second half of the 18th century. In the 19th century, the arrival of American whale ships at Horta increased from six in 1827 to 180 in 1841. This became a major source of income for the Dabneys and the islanders who provided fresh food, meat and wine. Charles Dabney also built his own try works to process the whales that ships caught before arriving in Faial and send the oil back to the U.S.

The Azoreans were also well known for their whaling in small boats from the shore. According to oral tradition, the first modern offshore whale boats came into use in 1832, but the business was not profitable. In the early 1850's, it started up once again and many of these later whalers were men who

had been forced into it because of the phylloxera that killed the grapevines in 1853. Contemporary authors and oral tradition give the Dabneys credit for bringing the original, modern offshore-whaling boats, or *canoas*, from America.

During the 1850's Elias Bensaúde opened a maritime supply company on Faial that competed with the Dabney businesses. The Dabneys and Bensaúdes were friendly competitors and both generous in their financial support of the needs of Horta and the betterment of the island's inhabitants. In fact Charles Dabney was so active in his philanthropic activities in Faial, as well as the surrounding islands, that he surpassed his father in the hearts of the islanders and was given the nickname "Father of the Poor". Nobody in need was ever turned away from the Dabney household.

When Charles Dabney died in 1871 at the age of 77 after 45 years as Consul, his third oldest son Samuel Wyllys Dabney replaced him as head of the family business and as U.S. Consul. Samuel had worked with his father for years and carried on the family traditions in business, political and philanthropic activities. In large part he had developed the whaling business for his father.

As the result of events that were not within Samuel's control, the Dabney businesses did not have the impact that they previously had. From the 1830's on, members of the Dabney family began moving away from Faial. This was not for lack of love of the Azores, but rather, the fact that the family business could not absorb all the Dabneys who lived there. John Bass Dabney had nine children and 32 grandchildren; 7 of these grandchildren were the children of Charles Dabney, who himself had 20 grandchildren, 8 of whom were Samuel's children, not counting the other Dabney family members. In addition, the commercial production of petroleum reduced the demand for whale oil and the growing

use of steamships decreased the need for ships to make a stop in the middle of the Atlantic. The competition from the Bensaúdes also helped decrease the profitability of the Dabney businesses. And, as a final blow, the U.S. Government made a decision that Consuls could no longer operate their own businesses. All of this led the family to make a decision that they could not continue in the Azores in the manner they had been used to.

They gradually sold off their extensive properties, wound up their businesses and bid a sad farewell to Faial. However, they were not forgotten and several contemporary writers eulogised them. Samuel Dabney is even mentioned in Vitorino Nemésio's "*Mau Tempo no Canal*" and, coincidentally, the Portuguese television version of this book used *Bagatelle*, the first home the Dabneys built, for filming the interiors of the Dulmo family home. And *Rua Consul Dabney* is in the centre of the city close to three former Dabney residences and their main place of business.

Throughout their stay on Faial, two of the major concerns of the Dabneys were religion and the education of their children. Being Protestants meant that the Dabney dead were buried on their properties until 1862 when the Horta Town Council ceded a part of the cemetery for their use in appreciation for Charles Dabney's philanthropic activities.

The early family in America moved from the Puritanism of Plymouth to Congregationalist and then to Unitarianism, which linked them to the intellectual community of 19th century Boston. It also had an effect on the schooling the children received.

Both John Bass Dabney and Charles Dabney sent their children to school in Britain and America. The schools chosen were generally those that followed the same religious practices

as the Dabneys. One of the more progressive schools was that of the Beecher sisters, Catherine and Harriet, the latter becoming famous as the author of "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*".

In the mid-1830's, Charles Dabney decided to bring tutors to Faial. Among the long string of tutors was Samuel Longfellow, youngest brother of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. His letters to his friends and family showed that he used his year with the Dabneys to reflect on what he wanted to do with his life. He also developed a life-long friendship with Samuel Wyllys Dabney.

When the Dabneys reached college age, there was no question which university to choose. All the young men went to Harvard where years before the Unitarian faction had prevailed over the Congregationalist. University President Josiah Quincy was a close family friend and Harvard's famous scientist Louis Agassiz visited the Dabneys in Faial on an expedition and Charles and Clara Dabney continued to send him specimens of shells and coral over the years and these are still in the University's collection.

The Dabneys had an endless string of visitors during their stay on Faial and almost every voyage of their ships carried family and friends between the Azores and Boston. Two of the more famous Harvard classmates of the Dabneys who came to visit, were Leverett Saltonstall of the famous Massachusetts political dynasty and the artist William Morris Hunt.

In 1852 the 15-year-old J.P. Morgan, who later became the richest man in America, spent a winter with the Dabneys to recover from an illness. Biographies record his pleasant memories of this visit. In addition his first partnership was Morgan-Dabney with Charles H. Dabney, a cousin of Charles William Dabney.

One final example is the *Quaker City*, one of the first cruise ships. It arrived in Horta in 1867 with Samuel Clemens on board who, writing as Mark Twain, records his visit in the early part of "*Innocents Abroad*" and his diary of his visit gives even a less flattering picture of the islands and those living there. The Dabney girls considered him snobbish.

One reminder of the Dabney family in continental Portugal is the *Escola Secundária de João de Avelar Brotero* in Coimbra. His mother was Nancy Dabney, daughter of John Bass Dabney.

This has obviously been a very brief overview of the life of a very active family, but I hope I have given an idea of what I consider an important link in Luso-American relations.

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This work is derived from research for a full-length biography of the Dabney Family of Faial.