<http://www.afn.org/~afn09444/genealog/disbrow/disbro07.html>

Tabby McIntosh , 2 Dec 2019 to Rick Geffken:

The slavery story that you will find of interest involves a ring of the family comprised of Morgans, Van Wickles and Disbrows moving enslaved children from New Jersey down to Louisiana, where they were transported to Colonel Charles Morgan's plantation, Morganza, in the parish of Point Coupee. The traffic blew up in a very public way that got national attention.

The nexus was the Morgan family; Colonel Charles Morgan's sister Susannah was married to John D Disbrow, who provided shipping for the East Coast stage of the operation. His sister Sarah Morgan was married to Judge Jacob Charles Van Wickle (or Vanwickle), who sat at the heart of the business

…my great grandfather, Jay Willard Sterner, self-published a series of family histories and his volume on the Disbrows has an excellent (if self-serving) account of the business. Pages 57-62:

**JOHN D. DISBROW  
1757 - 1835**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

When old John closed his eyes for the last time in

1771, it was in a world that had changed only superficial-

ly from that which his grandfather, Henry of Mamaroneck,

had known 100 years before. True, the population had in-

creased enormously; cities, towns, and villages had sprung

up thickly where Henry had known only the wilderness; the

thousands had grown to millions; already the frontiers

had been pushed back a hundred miles or more from the At-

lantic seaboard. But, politically, things were almost

the same as in his grandfather's time; John and his con-

temporaries were colonials, subjects now of George III

instead of Charles II, but loyal subjects nevertheless.

And, although in 1771 there was a growing friction be-

tween the Colonies and the Motherland, it is doubtful if

very many people yet dreamed seriously of independence

from the Empire.

Yet scarcely had Henry's grandson bade farewell to

the land he knew, when things began to happen which, with-

in the next five years, precipitated John D. and his

neighbors into still another world. In '72 came the burn-

ing of the *Gaspee* at Providence and the first organi-

zations against the Crown at Massachusetts. In '73 came

the Tea Act and the Boston Tea Party. In '74 the first

Continental Congress was summoned and in '75 came Lexing-

ton, Bunker Hill, the Siege of Boston, the invasion of

Canada - War! The world of old John was indeed turned

upside down even as the fifes were to shrill it at York-

town six years later.

John D. carries us one generation nearer to the pre-

sent and hence emerges a little more clearly from the

shadows than his predecessors. Also we are given one

vivid glimpse of him as, years later, he stands on the

deck of his sloop *Thorne*, lit by the flare of a torch,

which makes him, for that one brief instant, a real

**44**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

flesh-and-blood person. But, other than that, there is

little to go on.

He was born in South Amboy in 1757 but, prior to the

Revolution (he was nineteen in 1776), we have so far found

little - not even any family tales - and even during those

exciting years the direct information is vague and scan-

ty. In fact it was downright confusing at first glance.

In Ryker, that official list of all veterans of our

War of Independence, we find that John and Elijah enlist-

ed as privates in Capt. Morgan's Company, 2nd Reg't Mid-

dlesex Militia, in 1776. This regiment, known later as

the "**Jersey Blues**," has a long and honorable record.

Engagements - Quenton's Bridge, Hancock's Bridge,

Trois Rivieres (Quebec), Connecticut Farms, Van Neste's

Mills.

Battles - Long Island, Trenton, Asunpink Creek,

Princeton, Germantown, Springfield, Monmouth.

The confusing part of Ryker's record is that he also

lists John D. as

Teamster - Wagon Dept. - Capt. Seaman's Team Brigade,

Infantry and Artillery - Monmouth.

This apparent contradiction explains itself when we

see just what the Militia was and how it was used. Wash-

ington (or was it Tom Paine) once referred to them con-

temptuously as "*summer soldiers*" and this was warranted

in many cases no doubt; but in this particular instance,

I think it was not. These summer soldiers were mostly

farm boys who re-enlisted each year after the spring

plowing was done; then they had to get back to get in

the crops in the autumn. John and Elijah couldn't leave

it all to his mother and sister, could they? This was

tough on Army organization and efficiency from Washing-

ton's viewpoint, but how else could the Army and popu-

lation be fed? In addition, in the case of Monmouth

**45**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

and Middlesex men, they were needed to defend their towns

and farms against Tory foraging raids out of New York.

They operated as an actual Regiment only when there was

the prospect of an actual pitched battle. Usually they

operated as relatively small detachments to meet these

raiders, and were known as Minute Men. The famous Min-

ute Men of Middlesex County, Massachusetts had their

brief moment of glory at Concord and Lexington in '75

but that was their last real call to serve; from then on

the British were bottled up in Boston till the following

March and then off they went to Halifax. But here in

our own Middlesex and Monmouth Counties it was far dif-

ferent. From the time Howe occupied New York in Sept.

'76 till they finally sailed home in '83, foraging raids

out of the city were savage and continuous. All during

the long war our Minute Men never knew at what moment the

call would come. The whole coast line, particularly the

area around Raritan Bay, was completely vulnerable to

raids from the water.

Who were these Tories we were taught to hate? **Tory**

is a school-history term - our ancestors here in Monmouth

knew them by a more truly descriptive name; they called

them **Refugees** for that is what they were. Many had

never belonged to the Tory party - they were just bitter

landless men who, because they were loyal to the Crown

and their sworn allegiance, had been hounded from the

land where they too had been born and which they too lov-

ed just as deeply as did we. They were driven to the

protection of the British in New York, headed by the bas-

tard son of Benjamin Franklin - William Franklin, Royal

Governor of the Province of New Jersey. There under his

leadership, the younger men formed into Companies and

Battalions similar to our own Militia.

The British too had a name for these broken men,

**46**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

who had risked everything for their King and had lost it

all for what they believed to be right. It was an appro-

priate name, just as descriptive as our **Refugees**, but a

much finer one and it has lasted now for nearly two cent-

uries. The British called them then and they speak of

them now as the **Loyalists**.

From '76 on, the Enemy save for an occasional foray

in force or otherwise, were pretty well confined to the

New York area, particularly after the Battle of Monmouth.

The city was crowded with troops and these Loyalist Refu-

gees. For fresh meat, dairy products, and fresh vegetab-

les they were dependent wholly on the surrounding country-

side which was predominantly American and hostile. Hence,

from '76 on, these Loyalist outfits - knowing the country

intimately, having been born and raised there - became a

dreaded scourge. There were several of them but the one

that was the bane of Monmouth and Middlesex, the most

famous and effective, so far as I know, was "**Skinner's**

**Greens**" - so called from the name of their commander and

the color of their uniforms.

So, to meet this threat effectively, we evolved a

technique all their own within the framework of the reg-

ular Militia organization that was now common everywhere.

It is unfortunate that, so far as I know, there has been

no writer to do what was done for the men of Lexington;

no contemporary to tell the story as it should have been

told. It is a pity, for the brief glimpses we do chance

to get are revealing. There were so many raids, so many

savage little fights, month after month, year after year,

that I suppose it became routine and nothing noteworthy

to them.

According to Will Horner these men had a battle cry

"*They's fightin' blood in Monmouth Boys; they's fightin'*

*Blood in Monmouth*."

**47**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

or the variant which I prefer -

"*Monmouth Boys is fightin' Boys, they's fightin'*

*Blood in Monmouth*."

Their answer to the sea raids was the whaleboat flo-

tilla and it carried a deadly sting that made the coast

unsafe for the enemy unless he was in great force. These

minute men of the sea used whaleboats thirty feet long,

light, strongly built, drawing little water, sharp at

both ends so they could reverse quickly. They were man-

ned by oarsmen - sometimes as many as 24 - carefully

drilled, always ready. Each boat carried an auxiliary

force armed with pistols and cutlasses. Mounted in the

bow was a duck gun capable of throwing a four pound ball

and at close quarters their charges of heavy shot were

deadly not only to ducks, for which they had been used

normally. These guns were swivelled; leather muffled

the oars.

To show just how effective these boats could be, as

well as giving you a picture of the sort of thing that

went on all through this period, here is a brief account

of one attack on Middletown Point (Matawan) and what fol-

lowed.

On June 3rd 1778 more than 200 men of Skinner's

Greens landed on Conasconk Point, guided by local Tories,

and marched via Bethany (Hazlet) to Middletown Point.

Minute Men of Bethany spotted them and reached the Point

ahead of the enemy by a short cut through the woods. Be-

fore enough men could be rallied, however, the mills,

warehouses and many boats were already burning. Ensued

a brief but savage fight in which two Americans were

killed and twenty wounded - British losses unknown. The

raiders withdrew to their boats and made good their es-

cape to New York.

**48**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

But while the ruins were still smoking the whaleboat

navy moved to retaliate. On the next night despite a

north-easter that was making up, they rowed into the

teeth of it through the Narrows to the Long Island shore

at New Utrecht, well within the British lines, unseen by

the enemy's patrol boats who were no doubt taking it easy

on such a dirty night. Leaving the regular crew in the

boat ready for an instant take-off, Capt. Marriner and

Capt. John Schenk with 10 men made their way to Flatbush

to the home of David Matthews, Lord Mayor of New York.

Fortunately for him he had chosen that night to be out.

Going next to a neighboring house, the invaders from

Jersey released an American prisoner billeted there, Capt.

Alexander Graydon. Next they seized at two other houses

a British Major Moncrieff and an influential Tory, a Mr.

Bache. Hurrying back to the boats with these prisoners,

our Americans pushed off for home at top speed, lifted

along by the storm wind which was now blowing a full gale.

They reached Keyport in the incredible time of an hour

and a quarter. Docking at Matawan before six in the

morning, they sent their captives on horseback to General

Washington at Morristown.

Elijah, John's brother, also had his troubles with

the raiders. In 1780 he filed the following claim for dam-

age by the British in February 1777.

**To - £ s d**

**1 Axe - 8 -**

**5 Sheep @ 10/ ea + 1 new skiff 10 -**

**8 Tons Salt Hay 9 5 -**

**30 Fowles 2 0 -**

**1 pr. Cotton Mockins (sic) - 5 -**

**1 Jackett almost new - 12 -**

**1 New small Skiff 4 0 -**

**1 Moslin Hank about new - 6 -**

**1 Bag & 1/2 Bu Rie Meal - 8 -**

**1 Pillow Case 1/2 worn - 2 -**

**1 Handsaw, Ironplate - 5 -**

**49**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

If you check the total of the above items you will find

it comes to exactly £ 26 - 1s & 0d.

Returning now to John D. of the Artillery, and Capt.

Seaman's Team Brigade etc. they show the various ways he

was fitted into the organization as occasion arose. He

is also listed as belonging to the Light Horse Dragoons.

These apparently contradictory classifications became re-

conciled when we realize that Capt. Morgan's Company

was not only mounted when occasion demanded it but oper-

ated with attached artillery. Then, again, they took to

the whaleboats. That this is no idle speculation is born

out by the following account which comes from the pen of

Will Horner, a boyhood friend of my mother and one time

editor of the **Matawan Journal**.

"*During the Revolution Capt. Morgan commanded a com-*

*pany of militia in which some of the writer's ancestors*

*served. This company seems to have been somewhat unique*

*in composition and service. It was composed in about*

*equal proportions of boatmen from along the shore and of*

*mounted farmers from further inland. We find this am-*

*phibious company operating, sometimes by land, sometimes*

*by water.*

*In the late spring or early summer of 1777, Capt.*

*Morgan and his men succeeded in making a prize of the*

*brigantine* *Ann & May*, *Capt. Jacobs, Master. Details of*

*this capture were not made known to the writer, only that*

*it was to the "sutherd" of Long Branch, to which place*

*the vessel was taken and beached and her hull stripped.*

*For a time her rigging, chains, etc., were left lying a-*

*long the beach but all were later sold at auction by*

*court order.*

*A few weeks later, our enterprising militia captur-*

*ed another enemy ship. A brig, trading out of Portugal...*

*for reasons we do not know, put in and anchored just off*

**50**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

*the foot of what is now* ***Wesley Lake***, *then known as* ***Long***

***Pond***, *in perfectly calm weather, and came ashore in the*

*ship's longboat, perhaps for fresh water. this boat and*

*its crew were captured by the militia who replaced the*

*British with their own men and put out to the brig which*

*they then took with little difficulty. The brig was*

*promptly beached and was promptly stripped. The hull of*

*this vessel lay there for many years*."

Another small detachment of the militia figures in

our own local Belmar history. When I was very young I

one day found, while playing along the river's edge near

the F Street Bridge, a heavily corroded ball from what

must have been a four-pounder such as was fired from the

swivel gun of a whaleboat. This may well have been a

relic of the wrecking of the Shark River Salt Works which

was located in about that spot. To quote Horner again -

"*On the first Sunday in April 1778, a detachment of*

*Skinner's Greens, to which had been added some Highlanders,*

*all under the command of Major Robertson, attacked Toms*

*River. This force, about 150 men all told, had been trans-*

*ferred thither in several armored vessels. They burned the*

*warehouses, broke up the pumps, tanks, pans, and other ap-*

*paratus used in the production of salt.*

*On the following day they proceeded to Squan Village*

*and....completely wrecked the salt works on the south*

*side of the river and then proceeded to the salt works on*

*the south side of Shark River, to which their flotilla*

*had preceded them. But while engaged in destroying the*

*Shark River Works, they were surprised by the appearance*

*of some fifteen members of the mounted militia troop.*

*The enemy feared this was the advance force of a larger*

*body so they decided to leave while the going was good.*

*As they were embarking, a few residents of the lo-*

*cality who had been watching the proceedings at a safe*

**51**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

*distance from behind a sand dune and the scrub pines,*

*drew near the shore, dodging from cover to cover, and op-*

*ened fire upon the Loyalists with their long range duck*

*guns. The enemy were seized with a sudden panic during*

*which several of their small boats were bilged or over-*

*turned. Whether they lost any men in this affair does*

*not appear*."

Such was John D's outfit but neither the record nor

family history tells us any details of his service with

them. The one thing we do know for certain that, in be-

tween his various tours of duty in the field, he found

time to court and finally win the daughter of his com-

manding officer Capt. James Morgan.

Captain James Morgan is not to be confused with the

famous Col., later General, Daniel Morgan of Morgan's Vir-

ginia Riflemen though there is reason to believe they may

have been brothers. Eloise Disbrow who is much more re-

liable than her brother Harold who would have made poor

Jane Cromwell the mother of our Peter and Henry before

she was even nubile, says that Daniel Morgan was born

1736, Died 1802, James was born 1734 and died 1784. she

continues - "*According to family legend these men were*

*brothers. Daniel ran away from home when he was 17.*

*(The family were Welch, having sailed up the Delaware to*

*Hunterdon County where both boys were born.) Daniel never*

*returned to live in Jersey. He seemed to have had a dis-*

*agreement with his father. I do not know whether the mo-*

*ther was alive when Daniel left home. His father's name*

*was not given and I couldn't find it*."

I have no reason to disbelieve this though I have

never seen anything to prove either. We do know he

came to Virginia from Jersey some time prior to 1755 for

he was a teamster in the Army when Braddock met that

crushing defeat and death at Fort Duquesne. So if you

**52**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

really want to call this famous man "Uncle Dan'l," you

have my grudging permission.

But to return to the Morgans we really know are our

ancestors on the distaff side. Captain James Sr. has not

only been confused with Daniel, but also with his own son

James Jr. who, years later, was a Major General in the N.J.

militia. Thus, our friend Horner says -

"*Capt. James Morgan (the wealthy General of post-*

*Revolutionary times) lived on a high bluff immediately*

*north of the mouth of Cheesequake Creek. The Morgan*

*burying ground is about a quarter of a mile away, and*

*there can be seen tombs of the Morgan family*."

Will Horner obviously did not walk that quarter

mile for here are the stones that are of interest to us.

**Capt James Morgan - born 1734, died Feb 26th 1784 in the**

**50th Yr of his age. "Missed because of his Virtues."**

**Catherine, Wife of Capt Jas. Morgan - died 1827, aged**

**96 years.**

**Lieutenant Nicholas Morgan - died 1782. "By Refugees he**

**lost his Life."**

**Major General James Morgan - died November 11th 1822,**

**aged 65 years, 10 months.**

**Catherine, (first) Wife of Col. James Morgan - died 1802**

**in the 37th year of her age.**

**Ann J. (VanWickle), (second) Wife of General James Morgan -**

**died August 13th 1869, aged 85 years, two months.**

So the confusion disappears and we see that James

Morgan Sr. was C.O. of Morgan's Company of the Jersey

Blues; it was his son James, brother of our Susanna, who

years later became the "wealthy General Morgan."

Now that we have this matter straightened out, let

us see what follows from the known facts.

When, in 1776, John Disbrow the young farm boy of

19, enlisted in Capt. Morgan's Co., Capt. Morgan was 42

**53**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

with two living sons, James Jr. 19 - same age as our John -

and Nicholas 14, James Jr. being Ensign (2nd Lt.) in the

Company, probably in John's platoon. Actually John must

have known the Morgan kids since the very beginning for,

as you may recall the two great Plantations were very

close, if they didn't actually adjoin. They must have

gone to school together, been all dragged to the same

church every Sunday. In fact we know that he became so

intimate a part of that family that he married the kid

sister Susanna; and the *Thorne* incident tells us that 40

years later he and James were still closely associated.

All the male children of this union had Morgan for their

middle name. It is not improbable that young James was

best man at the wedding - for we never hear of Elijah.

But back to the War. While Morgans' Company was

mostly occupied repelling the Refugee raids there was, of

course, one last time when the Jersey Blues were used as

a Regimental Unit and that was at the Battle of Monmouth.

John D. was there with Morgan's Company as the records

show. In fact, according to one account it was the Jer-

sey Blues who started the action. Charles Lee had just

relieved Lafayette when he saw them driving forward be-

tween Knyphuysens baggage train and the main British

Army - their thoughts no doubt intent on the rich booty

those eight miles of wagons contained. Lee sent in an aide

galloping after them shouting - "*What is that blue regi-*

*ment? Where did they come from? Order them back at*

*once!*" And so started that senseless retreat that has

been so baffling to this day and that turned what might

have been the destruction of the British Army into the mish-

mash with no meaning.

For the long retreat was in perfect order and when

Washington arrived and rallied them they formed in per-

fect order and sent the British reeling back. If only

**54**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

Washington had left Lafayette in command. Where was Dan-

iel Morgan? - detached from the main army and sent far to

the south to Harry Clinton's right flank - (Robbing the

hen-roosts of Adelphia, according to Disbrow legend) and

arrived too late to join the fight. Where was Arnold? -

Back in Philadelphia languishing over that little Tory

snippet Peggy Shippen. If only that Arnold-Morgan team

which, only nine months before, had overwhelmed Burgoyne

at Freeman's Farm and together stormed Bemis Heights,

could have joined forces this day. Together these two

might have turned this battle into a crushing victory and,

perhaps, have ended the War years earlier.

Why this was any Commander's dream - the enemy strung

out for miles in hostile country with an eight mile long

baggage train to defend. As it was, Clinton slipped away

in the night and got his army with its huge baggage train

safely to sandy Hook and New York. How anyone could call

that an American victory passes my comprehension. And so

ended Sunday, the 28th of June 1778.

From Monmouth on, and particularly after Yorktown,

until the very end of the war, there were at all times

from 20 to 40000 British troops, Regulars and Loyalists,

cooped up in New York and its environs. They must subsist

on what could be ferried over from England and the West

Indies plus what they could forage from the country-side

in the way of fresh meat and vegetables. So, during all

those long years till the British finally evacuated the

city late in 1783, Monmouth and Middlesex Counties were

raided continually and more savagely than ever.

Will Horner quotes the **Jersey Gazette** on several of

these raids. Under date of July 4th 1781 the **Gazette**

says -

"*From Monmouth County we learn that on Thursday*

*last a body consisting of about 100 new Levies, Brit-*

**55**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

*ish and Foreign troops under command of Cortland Skinner,*

*made an incursion into that County - By their conduct it*

*appears that their intention was to plunder a place call-*

*ed Pleasant Valley where they arrived from Black Point*

*(Seabright) about 11 A.M. with little or no interruption.*

*The inhabitants had, however, exerted themselves in such*

*a manner in driving off their stock of every kind, that*

*the Enemy found little booty.*

*The Militia were by this time beginning to collect*

*and a pretty smart skirmishing was kept up through the re-*

*mainder of the day in which we are informed our people be-*

*haved with great spirit. The Enemy began his retreat ab-*

*out sundown and made no halt till they got to Garret's*

*Hill where they continued that night, during the course*

*of which one of our gallant officers made a descent upon*

*them and rescued a number of the stolen sheep. The next*

*day the Enemy re-embarked, having captured and taken off*

*with them about 40 cattle and 60 sheep with the loss of*

*one man killed and a number deserted; their loss in woun-*

*ded is unknown. We lost one killed and three or four*

*wounded. They have burned two houses but it is acknow-*

*ledged in their favour that they behaved remarkably well*

*to the persons of our people in general*."

Again in October '81 - same publication -

"*On Monday*

*the 15th inst., a party of Refugees from Sandy Hook land-*

*ed at Shrewsbury in Monmouth County and, under cover of*

*the night, marched undiscovered to Colt's Neck, near 15*

*miles from the place of their landing, and took six of*

*the inhabitants from their houses. The alarm reached the*

*Courthouse between four and five o'clock in the morning*

*of the 16th, when a small number who were in the village*

*of Freehold and its vicinity (accompanied by Dr. Nathan-*

*iel Scudder Colonel of Major Hunn's Reg't, accidentally*

**56**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

*in the place that night) went immediately in pursuit,*

*hoping to free their friends from Colt's Neck or to chas-*

*ten the Enemy for his temerity.*

*They rode to Black Point, the place where the Refu-*

*gees had landed (Sandy Hook was an Island then), caught*

*up with them, hotly attacked their rear and drove them*

*aboard their boats; in which skirmish, to the great grief*

*of our party, Col. Scudder, whilst he was bravely advan-*

*cing on the Enemy, received a wound by musket ball pass-*

*ing through his head, of which he instantly expired*."

But back to John and Susanna. Their first child was

christened Daniel, presumably after his uncle. Our ances-

tor was the second boy, **Nicholas Morgan Disbrow**, born at

Matchaponix October 8th 1782.

Young Nicholas, Susanna's kid brother, was now just

turned twenty. On December 29th 1781, according to Ryker,

he being now a 1st Lieutenant, he was assigned as "*Lieu-*

*tenant commanding a Company in Major Haye's Battalion,*

*State Troops*" (i.e. not mere militiamen). This was a

big jump for a nineteen-year-old; his Captaincy just

around the corner. Susanna was no doubt very proud of

her young brother - hence their next child was to be

Nicholas, not James or John.

That Christmas of 1781, just before Nicholas left

for his new duties, must have been a gay one. Cornwallis

had just surrendered at Yorktown, the long War was as

good as won, and Nick was home about to leave on his new

assignment, very soldierly in his red and blue regiment-

als, his sword and his golden epualettes.

Whether Nicholas Morgan ever saw his infant name-

sake we do not know. All we do know is what Ryker so

baldly state in this last entry - "*Lt. Nicholas Morgan*

*fell mortally wounded on December 9th 1782*."

This was just six days before his tour of duty end-

**57**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

ed - two weeks before Christmas and another gay home-

coming.

One last detail, his headstone tells is - "*By Refu-*

*gees he lost his Life*." So it was the Tories again; but

I have not yet discovered in what obscure, unimportant

little raid this happened, to get fresh meat for the

Christmas festivities in New York, no doubt. But it was

not unimportant to the Morgans that Christmas. There were

so many raids - I have described some - one was much

like another.

In these tiny facets of our local War of Independence,

interesting though they may be, John Disbrow figures

mostly by inference and deduction. We know almost nothing

of his life except that he was a farmer and that he owned

a sloop, but, nearly forty years later, he does emerge

definitely from the shadows and is caught for one blind-

ing flash in the spot-light of publicity.

In the year 1811 a U.S. statute was passed providing

that no slave could be transferred from one State to an-

other without his consent; nor, even if he consented,

without a manifest showing the name, age, sex, color and

stature of such bondservant or slave, held to service or

shipped. New Jersey ratified this.

In the year 1818 this very just law brought to

light, and I hope definitely put an end to, what appears

to have been a flourishing business in a real black

market - a business that might be described as the Under-

ground Railway in reverse. This enterprise was what would

today be called a closed corporation, a family affair;

**58**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

the families concerned being the Morgans and their in-

laws, the Disbrows and the VanWickles. As we have al-

ready seen from the stones in the Morgan graveyard,

James Morgan had, some time subsequent to the death of

his first wife, remarried - this time to a girl named

Ann VanWickle, and built himself a fine new mansion.

This Ann's father was a Judge VanWickle. It further

develops that James' brother Charles had a plantation

in Point Coupé Parish, Louisiana, and a brig called the

*Mary Ann*. Our revered ancestor John, while living as a

farmer on his Roundabout which he had inherited from his

mother so long ago, also owned a sloop called the *Thorne*,

descendent of the shallop which first brought Benjamin

to Matawan Creek, and progenitor of the *Jersey Blue* and

the *John Travers* about which we shall hear later.

In the incident which follows you will see how the

brig *Mary Anne*, the sloop *Thorne*, the Morgans, John Dis-

brow, and the VanWickles got themselves involved in a

mess so nasty that I am sure only men with very powerful

friends in Court could have kept themselves out of the

hoose-gow; for this is what the record reveals.

On Tuesday, March 15th 1818, Nicholas VanWickle em-

ployed one David Bloomfield to take load of thirteen

black persons to South Amboy. While he was at supper,

they were assembled at Wilmurt's Dock and loaded aboard

the sloop *Thorne*. After supper, he drove to the store-

house and then home, after turning them over to John Dis-

brow who commanded the sloop. On his way home he met an-

other wagon coming down, driven by Charles Morgan. Bloom-

field received $4.00 for carrying "*some young, some old,*

*and some children 8 miles*." This sum was more than the

usual rate for so short a haul. A black woman was in his

wagon and, upon being discovered, said she had lived with

Judge VanWickle and now wanted to live with Massa Charles.

**59**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

(This suggests strongly that these slaves went willingly.)

Bloomfield understood there were 27 persons in all. They

were neither tied nor confined. He lived a quarter mile

from the Judge's home and frequently saw strange blacks

there, understanding that part of them belonged to a Mr.

Keyes, a Virginian, and the remainder to Charles Morgan.

From Wilmurt's Dock, between eight and nine that

same night of the fifteenth, the sloop *Thorne* slipped a-

way in the darkness and headed down the Bay with her con-

traband cargo. Charles Morgan was aboard and "*directed*

*Disbrow*" in stowing the blacks. Thomas Day and William

Gordon Abrahams came aboard after the sloop had left the

wharf, bringing four or five - some female slaves - with

them in a small boat. Jonathan Morgan was with this con-

signment. Another black who man was tied, was brought

out from Amboy by James Edgar and Lewis Compton. (Appar-

ently this was the only unwilling member of the sloop's

cargo.)

The *Thorne* arrived off Sandy Hook at 7 A.M. the

next day and here Disbrow transferred his cargo to the

brig *Mary Ann*, Capt. Lee, who immediately weighed anchor

and left.

On May 10th 1818, the brig *Mary Ann* arrived in New

Orleans with 36 black persons without manifest as speci-

fied by law. Among them were Claussie and child Hercules;

Rachel and child Rosina; Flora and child Susan; Jeanette;

Lydia Ann and child Harriet Jane; Hager and two children

Mery and Charles; Christina and two children Diana and

Darius; Phyllis and two children Elias and Robert; and

Sarah and child Diana. Between this voyage and June 1819

when the trouble came to a head, at least two other loads

were shipped in other craft.

What brought all these facts to light and into the

courts was the unexplained disappearance of Claus, and

**60**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

against James Edgar for aiding and abetting in said dis-

appearance. They then voted affirmatively to indict

Charles Morgan for taking away Claus. But that was only

the beginning. James Brewster, Collector of the Port,

searched but could find no copy of the *Mary Ann*'s clear-

ance papers for that March. His clerk informed him that

all papers relating to that vessel had been removed from

his office a few days after her clearance.

The position of Judge VanWickle in all this seems

open to grave doubt, to put it mildly. Was he a member

of the group buying and selling slaves - or even stealing

them from their proper owners? The testimony seems to

indicate that he was, if not openly then covertly, a mem-

ber. It came out that in March 1818 a number of black

persons were brought to his home, thence to be taken to

Point Coupé in Louisiana by Charles Morgan. Some even

were purchased directly from the Judge and from his son

Nicholas by a Virginian names Keyes for the express pur-

pose of being shipped south. All these blacks were

quartered temporarily in the Judge's home until shipped

thence in wagons owned variously by James Rickets, the

Judge, his son Nicholas, David Bloomfield, and Isaac

Lett. While Morgan found pork for them, the Judge sup-

plied them with bread; all of which indicates much more

than a passing interest and knowledge on the Judge's part

in all this obvious skullduggery.

Eventually indictments were found against everyone

involved except Judge VanWickle and John Disbrow. The

Grand Jury voted 18 to 0 that taking infants away with-

out their individual understanding of what was happening

nor their consent, was an indictable offense under the

Act of 1811, even though the mother consented. It is

difficult for one unacquainted with the administration

of Jersey justice to understand how Judge VanWickle and

**61**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

his enterprising business associates got out from under.

Certainly, without his examination and sighting of the

certificates of lading, his son and the Morgans could not

have successfully carried on as long as they did; more-

over he advanced money for the purchase of these slaves,

kept and fed them in his home - so that he was obviously

well aware of what was going on. And our ancestor most

certainly aided and abetted whatever crime was committed.

In that year, 1818, John D. was sixty-one. Prior to

this we last heard of him at the close of the Revolution.

What happened in the interval is now mostly lot to us.

Not a word about the War of 1812 although that, no doubt,

had much to do with James Morgan's rise to Major General;

and where James went, there John was sure to be. We do

know that then, and for many years after, he lived on at

the farm at Matchaponix. Presumably, when not plowing

and getting in the crops, he used the *Thorne* for cargo-

carrying to and from New York as did his son and grand-

son after him.

It was during this Matchaponix period that he and

Susanna had their seven children -

**Daniel Morgan**

**Nicholas Morgan**

**James Morgan**

**Charles Morgan**

**Hannah**

**Catherine**

**Alice**

Some time prior to 1830, however, we learn that he

moved in to Middletown Point, for in that year "*meetings*

*of the Baptist Church were held at the Middletown Point*

*residence of John D. Disbrow, grandfather of the present*

*Marshall John N. Disbrow*." Then comes a deed dated 2nd

March 1833 in which "*John D. Disbrow and Susanna, his wife*

*of the township of Middletown, do grant to John C. Schank*

....*in consideration of $1175.00*...*land in the village*

**62**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

*of Middletown Point*." Just where he went from there is

indicated by his Will, dated at the "*Roundabout*" and pro-

ved April 11th 1835, which states him to be of the Town-

ship of South Amboy. The "*Roundabout*" appears to have

lain somewhere between the Morgan place and South Amboy

and was the land purchased by John Disbrow in 1739 from

a man named Robinson. Both the "*Roundabout*" and the name

Robinson appear in one of Nicholas M. Disbrow's letters

which you will see later. But to return to the Will; in

it he mentions his wife Susanna, sons Nicholas, James

and Charles, and the three daughters - no mention of Dan-

iel. Perhaps he was in disgrace. Jay [Sterner] Jr's mother-

in-law remembers a ballad she heard as a girl anent "**Dirty**

**Danny Disbrow**" that might possibly be the answer. In this

Will the inventory, other than real estate, totals $248.73 in

cash.

Four days after signing this Will he died, for we

read on his tombstone in the Baptist Churchyard at Cheese-

quake -

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

**A Patriot**

**Died April 15th 1835**

**In his 78th Year**

The term "**Patriot**" on the stones of the period in-

dicates that the man under it was a veteran of the War

of Independence.

Susanna survived her spouse by at least fifteen

years. In her Will, dated February 4th 1850 she men-

tions her "*dear grandson William Wallace Disbrow, son of*

*my son Nicholas*." Also mentioned as living are her daugh-

ter Alice Letts and five children; her three sons James,

Nicholas and Charles; and her daughter Catherine Burlew.

"**Dirty Danny**" must have died meanwhile. As sole executor

"*my grandson Andrew Jackson Disbrow*."

**63**

**JOHN D. DISBROW**

Since, however, my main thought in putting down all

these facts is to show you children how you came to find

yourselves in Belmar when you first entered this very

troubled world, rather than in some other place, I shall

here and hereafter, unless some very good purpose seems

served, dwell only upon your immediate ancestors. Hence,

in this case, we shall ignore all the above children ex-

cept your own great-great-great-grandfather

[**Nicholas Morgan Disbrow**](http://www.afn.org/~afn09444/genealog/disbrow/disbro08.html)

**64**