

Once a young man Austin Dabney (b. ca. 1765-1830) went off to the American Revolution, as did do many thousands of other Americans, even child soldiers, but he left as a mixed race slave in place of his white owner and despite Georgia laws that forbade service in the militia or bearing arms by African Americans. He witnessed some of the worst fighting in the South, what became a murderous civil war. He could have deserted to the British lines but chose to stay with his company.

Dabney was left for dead but was rescued and taken home by a white comrade, likely David Thurmond. Elizabeth, David's sister and only a small child, cared for Dabney although he would be a cripple. Dabney lived with this family for the rest of his life. Elizabeth's son William Harris would become Dabney's legal guardian and would name a son Austin Dabney. William and Austin are buried next to each other. No one now knows who is in which grave.

The state of Georgia granted Austin Dabney his freedom for his sacrifices, something it did not do for any other slave, and the first pension given to any African American. Dabney, much later, received lifetime control of land that he could not own because of his race.

In 1849, Austin Dabney's life became a story by Georgia Governor George R. Gilmer (1790-1859), a tale of humanity that challenge views of race even now. Dabney's life went largely in

ignored in the media, however, until social reformer Joel Chandler Harris (no relation to William) revived it in 1896. It is largely only commemorated in Georgia, however.

I am writing a biography of Dabney to show how his life and those of the 3,000 other African American patriots matter and should be remembered.