

The Southern Lady and the British Prime Minister

by Jill Carpenter

Adapted from Sewanee Ladies, account by Mary Waller Shepherd Soper

Susan Dabney Smedes lived in Sewanee from 1892 until her death in 1913. She was born in Raymond, Mississippi, on August 10, 1840, the tenth of eighteen children of Thomas Smith Gregory Dabney. Susan's mother, Sophia Hill, was Thomas' second wife, and mother of sixteen of the children. They were originally from Gloucester County, Virginia. Susan traced her Dabney ancestry back to the Huguenot Agrippa d'Aubigne (1550–1630).

In 1835 Thomas Dabney moved his family and slaves from Virginia to Hinds County, Mississippi, where he purchased 4,000 acres of land and planted cotton on a large scale. He named the plantation Burleigh. He also built a summer home at Pass Christian.

Susan was educated at home, in New Orleans, and in Jackson, Mississippi. At the age of nineteen, she married the Reverend Lyell Smedes of Raleigh, North Carolina. They had been engaged for two years, and had a large wedding at Burleigh. She was left a widow less than three months later, and returned to Burleigh. Her mother died during that time as well.

Susan's life was disrupted even further by the Civil War. Mississippi seceded from the Union on January 9, 1861. Her father gave up cotton to plant corn for the Southern troops. At age 62, he wanted to go to the "trenches," but his daughters persuaded him to stay at home. In 1885, Thomas Dabney was living with several of his daughters in Baltimore, Maryland, when he died. He was a prolific letter-writer.

After the death of her father, Susan determined to per-



petuate his memory for the benefit of his grandchildren, whom she wished to have known him as she had. Her book, *Memorials of a Southern Planter*, was published in 1887, and won acclaim throughout the United States and England. It is a vivid and personal account of plantation life and a prominent (and large) family's life before, during and after the Civil War.

Susan sent copies of her book to Queen Victoria, Prime Minister Gladstone, and others. Gladstone replied saying he had received the book and would take great pleasure in reading it later on. Some days later she received an enthusiastic four-page letter from him asking permission to have his publisher, Mr. Murray, bring it out in

England. He asked Susan to cable her permission with two words, "Gladstone, proceed." The cable was sent, and the book went through several editions in England. Mr. Murray, in his yearly statement to Susan, always noted the number of copies bought during the year by Mr. Gladstone, never fewer than 20, which he presented to his friends. Susan and Gladstone corresponded until his death in 1898.

In 1892, Susan felt the need of a permanent home and was advised by her sister, Emmy, to move to Sewanee. Bishop Quintard had been a guest at Burleigh, and through his friendship and that of Miss Lily Green, she and her two sisters, Lelia Jacqueline Dabney (1852–1927) and Sarah Dabney Eggleston (1838–1927; wife of John Randolph Eggleston, 1831–1913), moved to Sewanee and rented a house in which they kept boarding students. The

Egglestons lived in Mississippi, but came to Sewanee during the "malaria months." The following year they built Gladstone Cottage on Oklahoma Avenue. When they cleared the forest for the building of the cottage, they left nine special trees, named for the nine surviving brothers and sisters.

Bishop Quintard was a frequent visitor to their cottage, and often came unannounced. At times he was seen planting flowers or a shrub in the grounds, once as early as before breakfast. He often took distinguished visitors to meet the ladies. A portrait of Gladstone hung in the entrance hall and another over the mantel in the dining room, which was furnished with Burleigh dining-room furniture. On the wall were old English prints that had hung in the great hall at Burleigh. The sisters used the Burleigh silver every day. Their table settings were beautiful: handmade dish mats, handsome folded linen napkins, and genuine old willowware used for breakfast and tea. Before the evening meal, Susan held family prayers, no matter the guests.

Susan built a house next door to Gladstone Cottage in which she held classes, the children of Sewanee coming to her for daily instruction. Susan died on July 4, 1913. Her sisters each year had a feast in her memory and placed flowers on her resting place in the University Cemetery.



Susan Dabney Smedes (second from left) with her sisters, Sarah Dabney Eggleston and Lelia Dabney, and an unidentified brother. They are four of the 16 children of Sophia Hill and Thomas Dabney of Burleigh plantation, Hinds County, Mississippi. Lelia was number 15 of Sophia Dabney's children.

In *Purple Sewanee* (p. 155), it is noted that Mrs. Smedes and her sister Miss Leila Dabney saved up for a trip to the Holy Land and put aside a certain sum to embalm whichever one died on the way, so that she might be buried at Sewanee; they both survived and in New York, with the money thus saved, invested in two silk dresses to which they always referred to as the "embalming dresses." ♦

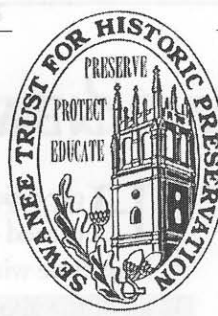
Ely Green Story Revisited

Ely Green (1893-1968) visited Sewanee briefly, five years after he left as a young man. In Ely: *Too Black, Too White* (U. Mass. Press, 1970, p. 327), he writes:

... I heard the sound of the feet of a fast trotting horse on the slag stone road. I hadn't forgotten the sound of Maudes feet. It was Miss Sally Milhado and her horse. ... There I waited for her to pull in, which she did so fast. Maude had to stop like she had four wheel brakes to keep from crashing Henry Hoskins hack. I bowed to her. She was wearing a tweed coat suit with a skidoo style hat to match. It was tipped on the left side of her head.

She sat for a moment looking at me. Then she said to Lady Elliott sitting by her: I will be darn if that isn't that little aristocrate whelp, Ely. I haven't seen him since heck was a pup. I ask her could I assist her from the carriage. She held out her hand. I braced her arm as she stepped to the sidewalk. She said: You have grown to be a fine young man. I like your courtesy.

She looked under her carriage, then said: You have the darndest habit of popping up when you can be of service. Will you please take that rattle snake off the rear axel of my carriage? I ask who killed it. She said: I was coming from Natural Bridge. He was in the road. He refused to let Maude pass. I whipped the life out of him with my buggy whip. Then I thought the students might have use for him in their labitorial work. ... I never saw Miss Milhado again. I kept those rattles over twenty years, to remember her and her brave ladyship.



Crash Landing

by David Clough

Crash Landing was designed by architect James W. Fitzgibbon and built by local contractor Riley Finney. The architectural classification is Modern Movement: Wrightian. It is constructed of native sandstone, glass, natural woods, and plywood and has an aluminum roof. It was completed in 1949.

James Fitzgibbon studied at Syracuse University and the University of Pennsylvania. He first worked as a designer with United Engineers in Philadelphia. He was the campus planner and teacher at the University of Oklahoma at Norman from 1944 to 1949 and then for five years at the Design School at North Carolina State University where he began a collaboration with R. Buckminster Fuller. From 1968 to 1985 he was Professor of Architecture at Washington University in St Louis, Missouri.

He became a friend of Bishop Gailor's grandson Professor Robert Daniel in Oklahoma, who brought him to Sewanee where he designed a house for Ellen Douglas Cleveland. The Cleveland house, now owned by Mrs. W. A. Griffin, is on Fire Tower Road behind St. Andrews-Sewanee overlooking Roarks Cove. Crash Landing was commissioned by Ms. Cleveland's friend Dr. Betty Kirby-Smith and is now owned by my wife Mary McCleaf and myself.

My mother, Dr. Betty, wanted a location near the hospital (now Hodgson Hall) as she was the obstetrician there and quite busy after WWII with the baby boom. She intended to locate the house overlooking the valley in the vicinity of Morgan's Steep, but unable to secure a lease in that area had the house built overlooking

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Sewanee Trust to Meet December 5

The Sewanee Trust for Historic Preservation will meet Tuesday, December 5, at 7 P.M. in the Sewanee Community Center. Attendees will learn about the building, and hear from fiddler Bob Townsend about preserving music indigenous to our immediate area.

The Sewanee Community Center building, on Bail Park Road across from the Sewanee Market, was originally a World War II barracks building. It is now used for several community activities.

David Bowman will present a

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