

THE STORY BEHIND MY SEA CHEST

A Case of Web-Assisted German-British-Brazilian Analytical Genealogy

by

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I am the proud owner of a genuine Royal Navy sea chest. However, its history was not at all clear to me. So I had to carry out some fact finding.

I started my research wondering what 'A' would mean in the inscription of the badge of the sea chest 'of uncle Ralph', fabricated by 'Gebr. Lindner Dresden', which I had inherited from my grandmother, [Marion von Braun](#). Finally I came across the website of [her uncle Ralph](#): There I learned that 'A' apparently stands for '[Abercrombie](#)'. Strange name which - apart from high-fashion rags - means something like 'tattered estuary' in Eastern Scottish language. The later Rear Admiral of the Royal Navy, [Ralph Abercrombie Otto Brown](#) (* 15 Dec 1834 in Groß Beuchow, Germany, † 25 Sep 1891 Radebeul, Germany), even his military career, was then identified.



Why this name? It turns out that the first military commander of Ralph's father, [Gustavus Brown alias Gustav Heinrich Gottlieb von Braun](#) (* 25 Dec 1775 [Arneburg](#) † 28 Mai 1859 Dresden), was [Sir Ralph \(first name\) Abercromby \(last name\)](#) during his assignments as a junior officer in the Royal British Army in Flanders and in the West Indies between 1794 and 1799. Thus, full of admiration for his former boss, Gustav baptized his son 'Ralph Abercrombie'. To find out why of all the sea chest was made of German oak in Dresden I, therefore, had to trace the life of Gustav, Ralph Abercrombie's father.



After the [Battle of Rabot](#) in St. Lucia, [Fedor's Rebellion](#) in Grenada, the [Battle of San Juan](#) in Puerto Rico and an assignment in [Suriname](#), Gustavus Brown was stationed at Up Park Camp Kingston Jamaica as a Captain of the British Army between 1800 and late 1809. During this period three of four children of his liaison with Janet Smellie were born:

Henry Brown	* 16 Oct 1803
Lewis Brown	* 8 Oct 1805
William Gustavus Brown	* 3 Feb 1809

When the - apparently unmarried - army general William Gustavus Brown died in 1883, it was his half-brother Ralph Abercrombie who took [care of his properties](#). They must have known each other from China. Both had been active participants in the [Second Opium War](#).

According to [very well prepared historiography](#), their father Gustavus Brown, reappears 1810 in Portugal as an infantry officer of the British and the Portuguese Army in the [Peninsular War](#). [Ray Foster](#) describes his head-on heroic fighting style. Due to his bravery as a battalion commander in the battles of [Buçaco](#), [Salamanca](#), [Burgos](#), [the Pyrenees](#), [Nivelle](#) and [Nive](#), where he was severely wounded, he was awarded several military distinctions. His highest rank in the British Army was Lt. Colonel. In the Portuguese Army he attained the rank of [Marechal de Campo](#) in 1821.

*Brown, Gustavus or Braun
 Capt 60 Ft. 30 Dec 97¹⁸⁰⁷ Maj 3 Oct 11, Br Lt. Col 17 Aug 12.
 Maj 2 Cavalry 21 Apr 10; Lt Col 7 line 3 Feb 10; Lt Col 9 Cavalry
 6 line 11; H.P. 25 Dec 16.*

*In Port Army, April to Jan 1811.
 Rus, Sgt Sal, Sal, Burg, Pyr, Pied, Hills, Nive, Ray.
 Mt. Burgos; M.D.B. 4 sur and Nive 13 December 1813.
 G.M. Sal Pyr, Nive, Nive
 also 5 line; 10 Dec 1814; W Indies 97 St Lucia, Grenada, Porto Rico
 Surinam 98.*

Little to nothing is known about Gustav's whereabouts between 1815 and 1823 except two indications:

- 3 Aug 1816: his daughter Maria Yates Brown was born in Jamaica († 30 Sep 1892 Radebeul, Germany), suggesting that Gustav stayed there, at least late 1815, the year before.
- On 10 Nov 1818 Gustav Heinrich Gottlieb Braun was ennobled upon initiative of his father.

* I am gratefully indebted to all on email correspondence and on the www who knowingly and unknowingly have contributed to this little paper

The need to legitimize him - his mother, [Johanna Christiana Großmann](#), was unmarried - by awarding him the German nobility title 'von', makes sense once I analyzed the website of Gustav's father, [Ludwig Christoph Gustav von Braun](#): It is striking there that he, in 1818 aged 67, lost three of his legitimate children within one month, supposedly being victims of a terrible epidemic:

Clementine	† 26 March 1818	Age: 22
Gustave	† 29 March 1818	Age: 12 (heir)
Ludovica	† 17 April 1818	Age: 9

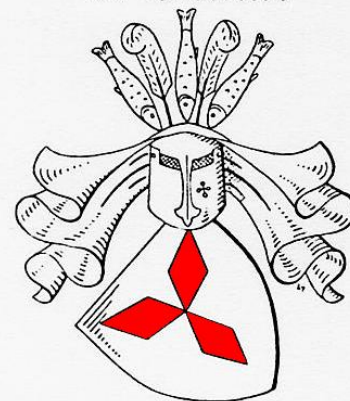
To ensure the survival of his noble family, Ludwig Christoph Gustav von Braun had to rush to ennoble his illegitimate son Gustav, then aged 42, within the same year. It would be interesting to learn how this - just in [Aachen](#), after the Congress of Vienna belonging to Prussia - had been carried out. A case of 'act under pressure': Have father and son met in Aachen?

Gustav's physical presence is documented again in Old Church, Saint Pancras, London, 6 Sept 1823: There and then he married [Jane Charlotte](#), née Cuff-Gore. The rest of Gustav's whereabouts can be traced by nine (!) births and three deaths of their children.

Brazil: In the evening of the 20th Feb 1827, after the indecisive battle of the '[Passo do Rosário](#)' (Ituzaingó), Marechal de Campo [Gustavo Henrique Brown](#) of the Imperial Brazilian army under the command of [Felisberto Caldeira Brant](#) carried out an orderly - life-saving - withdrawal of the infantry. The effect was that the Imperial rearguard was wearing down the pursuing vanguard of the Argentine army under command of [Carlos María de Alvear](#) who, in turn, had to withdraw his army to the south. By this the lost battle meant no complete disaster for the Imperial Brazilian Army. Instead, from a position of strength Brazil could enter peace negotiations with Argentina. Additionally, due to the intervention of [Lord John Ponsonby](#).

- Brazil retained the state of 'Rio Grande do Sul'
- Argentina had to pay huge reparations to Brazil
- the 'Provincia Cisplatina' became the independent buffer state 'Uruguay' between Argentina and Brazil
- the '[Rio de la Plata](#)' area was reopened for British trade

Das schlesische Uradelsgeschlecht v. Braun



Therefore, Gustavo Henrique Brown could be regarded as one of the *nolens-volens* founders of Uruguay and savior of the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. The historian [Carlos H. Oberacker](#), a Brazilian of German roots, describes the character of Gustavo and the then prevailing political situation.

End of 1827: There was trouble between the revenge-seeking, Prussian discipline-enthusiastic Gustavo Henrique and his new boss, Carlos [Frederico Lecor, Visconde de Laguna](#). Both were court-martialled due to their incompatibility. Gustavo Henrique Brown laid out his position in his '[Defesa e Relatorio...](#)'. Both were acquitted. Lecor remained in Rio de Janeiro. Gustavo Henrique - suddenly being declared a 'foreigner' - had to quit Brazil in 1831 - apparently without pay: A huge financial loss and a truly bitter dismount of his prestigious post! Until 1851 - i.e. for 20 years - Gustav Heinrich Gottlieb von Braun had to struggle to get a continuation of his Brazilian wages - finally he succeeded.

The path of their way back to Germany led through Cowes (Isle of Wight, UK, home to his wife, Jane Charlotte), Gross Beuchow, the birth place of his son Ralph Abercrombie, and Lübbenau (Spreewald) to Dresden where, in 1843, my great grandfather [Konstantin von Braun](#) was born as Jane Charlotte's and Gustav Heinrich's - then aged 68(!) - youngest child.

Dresden 1868: In recognition of the promotion of Ralph Abercrombie Brown to the rank of a Captain R.N., the sea chest was manufactured by the company 'Gebrüder Lindner' in Dresden, probably by order of his mother, Jane Charlotte. His father Gustav had already died in 1859, nine years ago.

