

*New Jersey's Barbary Diplomat (Part 1 of 2)***By Lawrence S. Freund****DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v8i2.284>**

Charles Davenport Coxe, the descendant of a prominent New Jersey family, likely inspired by the exploits of a small detachment of U.S. Marines in the spring of 1805 in Libya, accepted a commission as a second lieutenant in the Corps that fall, leading to an unanticipated (but coveted) diplomatic career. A few years earlier, Coxe had lobbied for consular appointments in France. Now, arriving aboard a U.S. warship in Tunis harbor, he found himself ordered ashore by his ship's commander to replace the late American chargé d'affaires. While exploiting the commercial opportunities of his consular post, Coxe also became directly involved in the politics of the region, notably the seizure of American ships by both the Barbary regencies as well as European powers. In 1810, he exercised considerable diplomatic skill in avoiding a clash between Tunis and the United States over the contested ownership of a commercial vessel. Coxe departed Tunis in 1815, returning to the United States and the family home in New Jersey, although not without hope of reclaiming one of his former positions. That story, however, will unfold in part two of this piece, in the Winter 2023 issue of NJ Studies.

The Barbary Wars of the early nineteenth century pitted an emerging assemblage of former British colonies in North America against several quasi-independent North African regencies within an Atlantic mercantile arena largely controlled by several European powers. The primary issue was trade, as the newly minted United States “hoped that the principles of equality and reciprocity would govern overseas commerce.”¹ Into this knotty commercial rivalry stepped the ambitious son of New Jersey aristocracy who would come to understand that, as historian Frank

¹ Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (Hill and Wang, New York, 2005), 9.

Lambert explains, “if the United States were to enjoy the principles of independence beyond its borders, it would have to fight for them just as it had fought for home rule.”²

In the early fall of 1805, American newspapers began to publish the first reports from the distant Mediterranean of a military victory so singular that it would be recalled in patriotic song centuries later and would likely set the destiny of the scion of a prominent New Jersey family.

The military action reported in September 1805 had occurred months earlier, in April, the conclusive battle of what would become known as the First Barbary War. For centuries, four North African regencies—quasi-states owing fealty to the Ottoman Empire and bordering the Mediterranean (Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, and Morocco)—had prospered through piracy, the enslavement of the crews of captured European ships, and payments for ransom and protection. American merchant ships, no longer shielded by British warships, began to feel the full force of the Barbary pirates after the American states declared their independence in 1776. In 1801, President Thomas Jefferson ordered a naval expedition to rein in the regencies. American warships blockaded Barbary ports, but their success was only mixed.

Years before Jefferson made his first move against the Barbary regencies, William Eaton, a former American military officer, had been sent to Tunis by President John Adams to negotiate a treaty with that regency, but on his return to the United States, Eaton was convinced that only military action on the ground would offer an effective deterrent to the regencies’ demands for tribute. Now, with Jefferson in the White House and looking for an effective option, Eaton developed a plan for a small contingent of Marines joined by Greek and other non-Muslim fighters along with supporters of the ousted pasha of Tripoli to march first on the coastal city of Derne (now Derna, Libya) and then on to the city of Tripoli to remove the reigning pasha and restore his

² Ibid.

banished brother. Despite setbacks, the plan succeeded and Eaton's force captured Derne, with the intention of moving on to Tripoli. However, Eaton's naval superiors restrained him from continuing his march after learning that the chief American diplomat in the region, Tobias Lear, had succeeded in wresting a peace treaty from Tripoli's ruling pasha, perhaps thanks to Eaton's success at Derne. The treaty came with a price tag, despite Jefferson's aversion to Tripoli's history of extracting payments—\$60,000, the cost of freeing the American crew of the frigate *Philadelphia*, captured in 1803 when the ship ran aground off Tripoli Harbor. There was still another issue at the time, the future of the U.S. Marine Corps. As military affairs author Chipp Reid explains, the Corps

was still new in 1805 and had yet to prove its usefulness. As the cost of the Tripoli war escalated, many Democratic-Republican members of Congress began to view it as an expensive luxury, one the country could do without. During the war Democrats made two concerted efforts to abolish the Corps or the Office of the Commandant or both, failing only by slim margins. By 1805, Commandant Franklin Wharton worried a renewed effort might succeed. Wharton needed a victory, something that would capture the public imagination . . . He found his answer in a twenty-five-year-old first lieutenant from Virginia. Presley Neville O'Bannon commanded a squad of Marines in Eaton's army . . .³

On September 11, 1805, news of the victory at Derne months earlier finally appeared in the American press, one newspaper commenting: "It is with the liveliest pleasure we are enabled to say that our late captive citizens in Tripoli are released, and a treaty of peace is made with the reigning Bashaw⁴ . . . By dispatches received from Mr. Eaton, and capt. Hull, commander of the *Argus*, it appears that the army headed by Mr. Eaton and the ex-Bashaw, after enduring severe hardships and surmounting great difficulties, attacked on the 27th of April the fortified town of Derne . . ."⁵ About a week later, another newspaper quoted a letter from Captain Isaac Hull of the

³ Chipp Reid, *To the Walls of Derne: William Eaton, the Tripoli Coup and the End of the First Barbary War* (Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, 2017), np.

⁴ Bashaw is a variant spelling of pasha, i.e., a high-ranking official in the Ottoman Empire.

⁵ "Washington City," *National Intelligencer* (Washington, DC), September 11, 1805, 2.

American brig *Argus*, which had played a key role in the capture of Derne and its fort. “At about half past 3,” Hull wrote, “we had the satisfaction to see lieut. O’Bannen (sic), of the marine corps, and Mr. Mann, midshipman of the *Argus*, with a few brave fellows with them, enter the fort, haul down the enemy’s flag, and plant the American ensign on the walls of the battery.”⁶ In Washington that same month, a dinner was held to honor Capt. William Bainbridge, who had been released with the crew of the *Philadelphia* after being imprisoned in Tripoli for 19 months. Toasts recorded at the dinner went first to the president and vice president of the United States and eventually to “Lieutenant O’Bannon of the Marines, and Midshipman Mann—The heroes who first planted the American banners on the walls of Derne.”⁷

The victory at Derne, still recalled in the Marines’ Hymn (“To the shores of Tripoli”), has been described as a “glorious awakening” of the Corps⁸ and brought it in sharp focus to the American public, very likely including Charles Davenport Coxe of Hunterdon County, New Jersey. On November 18, 1805, just weeks after Americans became aware of the Marine Corps’ achievement in Derne, Coxe made a dramatic turn in his life, accepting a commission as a Marine Corps second lieutenant.

Coxe was the descendant of a prominent New Jersey family with ties to nearby Philadelphia. His father was Charles Coxe, born in 1733, and “very prominent among the aristocracy of Philadelphia in the eighteenth century.”⁹ Charles (the father) was the son of Colonel Daniel Coxe, described as “one of the principal men in the Province of New Jersey, from his

⁶ “Domestic Intelligence,” *The Enquirer* (Richmond, Virginia), September 20, 1805.

⁷ “Dinner to Captain Bainbridge Given by the Citizens of Washington,” *National Intelligencer*, September 25, 1805, 2.

⁸ Don Burzynski, *The First Leathernecks: A Combat History of the U.S. Marines from Inception to the Halls of Montezuma* (Warriors Publishing Group, North Hills, California, 2011), np.

⁹ “Annual Report of the Corresponding Secretary for 1910,” *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, Vol. 3, 178.

coming to America with Lord Cornbury in 1702 or 1703, until his death in 1739.”¹⁰ Charles, who served as a judge of the Hunterdon County courts, was said to have “maintained a prodigal hospitality” on his Hunterdon estate.¹¹ According to a family history, he bought the approximately 1,200-acre estate, called Sidney, in “the latter part of the eighteenth century . . . where he dispensed a princely hospitality which made the old mansion and its master famous.”¹² Charles Coxe was said to have been “a man of enterprise, and sought to turn the splendid water power on his land to account, by establishing a large woolen factory. He also was impressed with the unrivalled advantages that region possessed in its streams of water, for large manufacturing enterprises.”¹³ Beyond that, according to historian Jacob E. Cooke, he also “had conducted a profitable mercantile business in Philadelphia until 1766,” when he purchased and removed to his estate in Hunterdon, “where he also owned land bequeathed to him by his father. There he lived over the succeeding half century as a country gentleman in retirement.”¹⁴ An early history of Hunterdon recalled that Charles Coxe

and family frequently went to Philadelphia and remained several weeks at a time. The large proprietary grants of Col. Daniel Coxe made his descendants immensely wealthy, and they lived here in almost princely style. It is said that they had such a large amount of family silver plate that two horses could scarcely draw it. Some of the most distinguished people in America were visitors here, and as was the custom in those days of inconvenient travel, guests sometimes remained several weeks, during which time the largest hospitality was extended.¹⁵

Charles Coxe married Rebecca Wells in Philadelphia in 1759, and together they were the parents of a number of children, beginning with their daughter Grace in 1761. The youngest child

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Henry Miller Cox, *The Cox Family in America* (The Union-Gazette Association, Somerville, New Jersey, 1912), 214.

¹³ George Scudder Mott, *The First Century of Hunterdon County, State of New Jersey* (E. Vosseler, Bookseller and Stationer, Flemington, New Jersey, 1878), 51.

¹⁴ Jacob E. Cooke, *Tench Coxe and the Early Republic* (University of North Carolina Press, 1978), np.

¹⁵ John W. Lequear, *The Traditions of Hunterdon* (D.H. Moreau, Flemington, New Jersey, 1957), 145–146. Lequear’s observations were first published in the *Hunterdon Republican*, 1869–1870.

was Charles Davenport Coxe, likely born in 1777, although one significant source, his grandson John Coxe Caruana, said Coxe was born in 1774 at the family home in Hunterdon County, New Jersey.¹⁶ According to Caruana, Coxe “was educated in Philadelphia under private tutors and at nineteen years of age acted as super-cargo¹⁷ in different vessels of his father’s fleet, engaged as he was in the West and East India Trade.”¹⁸

Coxe’s experience aboard his father’s ships did not lack for adventure. In 1797, his brother-in-law, Tench Coxe,¹⁹ about 20 years Charles D. Coxe’s senior and a prominent political figure in Washington, appealed to the French consul general on his behalf. “I waited upon you this morning,” Tench Coxe wrote, “to request your interposition in favor of my brother-in-law, Mr. Charles D. Coxe, who is now a prisoner [in] the common gaol of St. John de Porto Rico [now San Juan, Puerto Rico] . . . [he has] been taken by a French privateer [and] has been treated quite as severely as an alien enemy . . .”²⁰ Coxe’s encounter with the French privateer would give him a foretaste of issues he would later encounter. The following year, 1798, Coxe informed his father of his plans to sail abroad, to which the elder Coxe, his views perhaps soured by the depredations of French privateering that led to what became known as the Quasi War between France and the United States, replied, “The voyage you have undertaken if it prove successful will answer the purpose of seeing a part of the world which will be both pleasing and advantageous. France is a

¹⁶ John Coxe Caruana, Letter to Edwin N. McClellan, in Edwin N. McClellan, *History of the United States Marine Corps* (U.S. Marine Corps History Division, Washington, DC, 1925–1932), Chapter XVIII; https://archive.org/stream/historyofuni00mcccl/historyofuni00mcccl_djvu.txt (accessed November 4, 2021).

John Coxe Caruana, the grandson of Charles D. Coxe, provided the 1774 date to McClellan.

¹⁷ The supercargo aboard the merchant sailing ships acted as the owner’s representative and was in charge of the cargo and the vessel’s commercial concerns.

¹⁸ Caruana, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Tench Coxe was the husband of Charles D. Coxe’s sister, Rebecca Coxe. Tench was also the cousin of both Rebecca and Charles (their fathers were half brothers).

²⁰ Letter from Tench Coxe to Philip de la Tombe, June 9, 1797, in *Fine Americana Manuscript & Printed*, Sotheby Parke Bernet, November 20, 1975, np.

https://books.google.com/books?id=cMJTAAAAIAAJ&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0&dq=de+la+tombe+charles+d.+coxe&source=gbs_navlinks_s (accessed 12 October 2021).

beautiful country but the inhabitants at present are the most extraordinary & unaccountable people in the world. And I cannot but be alarmed at your venturing amongst them. I don't see how property can be safe with them." The 64-year-old father concluded, "You are now engaged with this troublesome world but don't let the thoughts of this world hinder you from thinking of your latter [end] and . . . the world to come."²¹

Charles Coxe would offer sterner advice to his son in 1799 in the wake of a well-publicized spat between Edmund Bainbridge, a 25-year-old Princeton, New Jersey, physician, and Jesse A. Pearson, a 23-year-old North Carolinian and 1796 graduate of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University).²² July 4, 1799, marked the 23rd anniversary of the Declaration of Independence; to celebrate the occasion, a ball was held at a Princeton inn, with Pearson one of the managers. During the second dance, according to Bainbridge, an "altercation" took place between Bainbridge and another attendee over the treatment with "incivility and inattention" of Bainbridge's dancing partner.²³ Pearson asked Bainbridge to leave the room and the physician took exception, complaining that Pearson "was insolent, and received the chastisement he merited."²⁴ Pearson offered his own version of the event. "(I)n the execution of my duty," he wrote to a Philadelphia newspaper, "I was insulted in the grossest manner by Dr. Bainbridge of Princeton, who in addition to the most ungentlemanly language gave me a blow. I in consequence challenged him."²⁵ Bainbridge chose to ignore the challenge. A few days later, Charles D. Coxe, described by Pearson as his friend, entered the scene, delivering a note to Bainbridge on behalf of Pearson that

²¹ Letter from Charles Coxe to Charles D. Coxe, March 16, 1798, the Winterthur Library (Winterthur, Delaware), Galt-Motter-Bowman-Sitgreaves-Vail-Miller family papers, Col. 45, Box 21, Folder 7.

²² Jesse A. Pearson; Undergraduate Alumni Records, 18th Century, AC104-01, Princeton University Archives, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

²³ Letter from Edmund Bainbridge to Brown & Relf, *Philadelphia Gazette*, July 20, 1799, 1. (Andrew Brown Jr. and Samuel Relf were publishers of the *Gazette*.)

²⁴ *Ibid*.

²⁵ Letter from J. A. Pearson to Brown & Relf, *Philadelphia Gazette*, July 12, 1799, 2.

Coxe said was a formal challenge. In succeeding days, Coxe's brother Richard also became involved in the dispute at Pearson's request, delivering yet another Pearson challenge to a duel. "Dr. Bainbridge then asked me," Richard Coxe would write, "if I was a brother to Mr. Charles Coxe—on my saying I was, he began to call my brother a damn'd liar, scoundrel, etc."²⁶ The meeting between the two, Richard Coxe and Edmund Bainbridge, quickly devolved into a physical encounter and Richard Coxe "demanded the satisfaction of a gentleman."²⁷

The same day that Richard Coxe's account of his confrontation with Bainbridge appeared in the press—July 27, 1799—his father, Charles Coxe, took pen in hand to rebuke his son Charles. "I am much concerned to find you have very foolishly got yourself involved in a dirty newspaper dispute," he wrote, "and what is more you have sold your country by carrying a challenge by which you are liable to a very heavy fine & imprisonment for a term of years—If you are prosecuted in this state nothing can save you from the lash of the law." Describing his two sons as "A pretty pair of Don Quixotis," the exasperated father added, "what will become of you both—neither of you will dare to set your feet on New Jersey ground."²⁸ Edmund Bainbridge had consistently refused to accept the challenges from Pearson and the brothers Coxe and there is no evidence that the dispute went any further.²⁹

At the end of 1800, Charles D. Coxe, now in his mid-20s, began to focus on what he hoped would be the next chapter in his life, seeking an appointment to the U.S. consular service and

²⁶ Letter from Richard Coxe to Brown & Relf, *Philadelphia Gazette*, July 27, 1799, 2.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Letter from Charles Coxe to Charles D. Coxe, July 27, 1799, the Winterthur Library (Winterthur, Delaware), Galt-Motter-Bowman-Sitgreaves-Vail-Miller family papers, Col. 45, Box 21, Folder 7.

²⁹ Edmund Bainbridge was an older brother of Commodore William Bainbridge, commander of the American frigate *Philadelphia* that ran aground in 1803 while blockading Tripoli (see above). Jesse A. Pearson fought in a duel with Montfort Stokes, a United States senator and North Carolina governor. Stokes was wounded in the duel. Pearson, described as "sudden and quick in quarrel" (John H. Wheeler, *Reminiscences and Memoirs of Eminent North Carolinians* [Columbus Printing Works, Columbus, Ohio, 1904], 401.), represented Rowan County, North Carolina, in that state's legislature and was an officer in the state's militia.

pulling whatever strings he could to secure it. One of them was an acquaintance, Thomas Boylston Adams, the youngest son of President John Adams and a near-contemporary of Coxe. The young Adams, writing on behalf of Coxe to his cousin William Smith Shaw (President Adams's private secretary), explained, "I understand (Coxe) intends making application for the Consulship at the Isle of France,³⁰ and his reason for applying during the present administration he avers to be, because he is a federalist & a friend to the government as hitherto administered." At the same time, Adams noted, Coxe had also made an effort to disassociate himself from his cousin and brother-in-law, Tench Coxe, with Adams observing, "He is anxious to have it known that he thoroughly despises the political character of his brother in law, and wishes not to be involved in the disgrace which that fellow's conduct has brought upon the name."³¹ Coxe's disavowal of his brother-in-law Tench Coxe is unsurprising since, while at one time Tench Coxe had been associated with John Adams's Federalists, he had since veered sharply toward Jefferson's rival Democratic-Republicans.

In his letter to Shaw, Thomas Boylston Adams also made clear both his reluctance to actually recommend Coxe ("I am too little acquainted with his character or qualifications to do it") and his doubt that anything would come of Coxe's request ("I have given him my opinion that the appointment he wants will not be immediately made"). On that score, he was correct: the Adams administration ignored Coxe's application. But much was changing in the American political landscape. Within months of Coxe's rejected request to President Adams for a consular appointment, a new president, Thomas Jefferson, was in the White House, and a politically astute Coxe enlisted Pennsylvania's Democratic-Republican governor, Thomas McKean, to plead on his

³⁰ Île-de-France, the Paris region.

³¹ Letter from Thomas Boylston Adams to William Smith Shaw, 21 December 1800, Founders Online. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-14-02-0224> (accessed October 25, 2021).

behalf with the new Democratic-Republican president. On August 10, 1801, McKean sent Jefferson a letter he had received from Coxe three days earlier in which Coxe boasted of his mercantile experience with “French possessions in the old and new world,” his French language proficiency, and his “enlarged acquaintance with the particular modes of Commerce peculiar to the French.” Coxe, pointing out that President Adams had “totally disregarded” his earlier request, now asked for a consular position at Dunkirk and Calais or Île-de-France. For his part, McKean informed Jefferson that Coxe’s sister was married to the son of a “considerable Banker in Paris,” had the support of three French merchants in Philadelphia (“all sincere Republican citizens”), along with the recommendation of “a great number of other respectable citizen-merchants,” and, McKean concluded, “I can add my opinion in his favor.”³² Less than two weeks later, Jefferson advised his secretary of state, James Madison, “There is a Charles D. Coxe (brother in law of Tenche [sic]) so well recommended for a Consulship that I wish he could be gratified.”³³ On November 11, 1801, a short item in a Washington newspaper announced Coxe’s appointment “to be Commercial Agent at Dunkirk.”³⁴

However, what seemed like a successful conclusion to Coxe’s political strategy was not to be. Within days, he began to have second thoughts about his financial prospects in the English Channel port city, complaining to Madison that he “had been informed by several merchants that his position as commercial agent at Dunkirk (would) afford him little profit.”³⁵ Coxe, not

³² Letter from Thomas McKean to Thomas Jefferson, August 10, 1801, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 35: 1 August to 30 November 1801.

³³ Letter from Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, August 22, 1801, Founders Online. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-35-02-0095> (accessed October 26, 2021).

³⁴ “Appointments by the President of the United States,” *National Intelligencer*, November 11, 1801, 3.

³⁵ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to James Madison, November 27, 1801, Founders Online. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/02-02-02-0409> (accessed October 26, 2021). Until 1856, U.S. consuls did not receive government salaries and “were expected to earn their livings from private trade or from fees charged for official services. It was not uncommon for consuls to have been merchants with business connections in the cities to which they had been appointed.” (U.S. Department of State, “Frequently Asked Historical Questions,” https://1997-2001.state.gov/about_state/history/faq.html#consular [accessed October 26, 2021]).

especially “gratified” by his appointment to Dunkirk, attempted to extend his appointment beyond that city, perhaps to include Ostend or Calais, but by March he was informed by Madison that the Senate had confirmed his appointment to only the port of Dunkirk.³⁶ The next month, Coxe told Madison that he was turning down his appointment to Dunkirk. “I am extremely sorry,” Coxe wrote, “that in consequence of several untoward and unforeseen accidents which have interven’d since the acceptance of my commission, I am at this late period under the disagreeable necessity of returning it . . .” Financial setbacks, Coxe explained, had “so entirely deprived me of the means of supporting myself at so unprofitable a post as Dunkirk . . .”³⁷ So ended Coxe’s initial bid for a foreign posting but, unexpectedly, not his prospects for service abroad.

Just months before Charles D. Coxe accepted his Marine Corps commission, the *USS Hornet* was launched on July 28, 1805, at a Baltimore shipyard, part of President Jefferson’s shipbuilding project. After an initial cruise, the brig sailed to New York to prepare for its assignment as part of the Navy’s Mediterranean Squadron protecting American merchant ships. On March 29, 1806, the *Hornet* sailed from New York with now Second Lieutenant Charles D. Coxe aboard as head of a Marine Corps contingent. The ship’s first mission was to deliver U.S. diplomat Fulwar Skipwith to France; by late May, the warship had joined the Mediterranean Squadron at Gibraltar, beginning its patrol duties. In December, the *Hornet* anchored off Tunis, where, as the ship’s captain, John Dent, had learned, the American chargé d’affaires, Dr. James Dodge, had died in October. (Dodge, previously the ship’s surgeon on the *USS Constitution*, had been appointed as a replacement consul in August 1805.) Master Commandant Dent turned to Coxe—a Marine Corps officer but until recently a diplomat-aspirant—to replace Dodge, at least

³⁶ Letter from James Madison to Charles D. Coxe, March 18, 1802, Founders Online. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/02-03-02-0046> (accessed October 26, 2021).

³⁷ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to James Madison, April 21, 1802, Founders Online. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/02-03-02-0178> (accessed October 26, 2021).

temporarily.³⁸ On December 8, 1806, still aboard the *Hornet*, Coxe wrote to his new superior, Secretary of State James Madison, to explain what had transpired: “I take the earliest opportunity to inform you, that, in consequence of the recent death of Mr. Dodge our Charge d’affaires at Tunis, I have been authorized by the Commanding Officer on this Station (Capt: Dent) to act as his Successor; in consequence of which I shall proceed on shore to morrow morning.”³⁹ Coxe went ashore two days later, on December 10, and reported to Madison that he was “received & acknowledged by his Excellency The Bey in the most friendly manner.”⁴⁰ The *Hornet* departed Tunis on the 12th, leaving behind Coxe in the kind of diplomatic post for which he had lobbied several years earlier. Events soon made it clear the necessity for someone like Coxe to be on the ground in the North African city.

The previous year, on April 24, 1805, the same harbor in which the *Hornet* sailed peacefully with Coxe was a place of intense naval activity when the *USS Constitution*, blockading Tunis, captured a Tunisian xebec (a relatively small, two-masted sailing ship) along with the two prize ships the xebec had captured. The bey of Tunis demanded the return of his ships. The Americans refused and in August, Commodore John Rodgers, commanding the U.S. Mediterranean Squadron, brought his fleet to the harbor and demanded that the bey inform him whether he wanted war or peace. Instead, the Tunisian leader chose to send one of his senior diplomats, Sidi Soliman Mellimelli, to Washington. “Unable to resolve this issue with Rodgers,” writes historian Jason Raphael Zeledon, “the Bey opted to send an experienced diplomat, the

³⁸ Coxe later explained in a letter, “Captain Dent, knowing I had on another occasion, the honor of the President’s confidence, immediately concluded to leave me as Mr. Dodge’s successor till his pleasure should be known relating thereto.” (Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Unknown,” March 7, 1807, Charles D Coxe papers, 1806–1830, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Washington, DC, MMC-0260.)

³⁹ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to James Madison, December 8, 1806, Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers, Volume 6, Part 4 (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1944), 491–492.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 495.

wealthy Mellimelli, to the United States. In a warm letter to Jefferson, the bey described the mission as evidence ‘of my good friendship for you and your nation, and of the high esteem in which I hold you particularly.’ He blamed tensions on Rodgers’s ‘too martial temper’ and lauded Mellimelli’s credentials . . .”⁴¹ For his part, Jefferson told the bey he would treat Mellimelli “with all the cordiality and respect which a missionary from you so justly commands,” apologized for Rodgers’s conduct, and made it clear the United States would not pay tribute to Tunis.⁴² Mellimelli arrived in the United States in November 1805 aboard one of the American warships and remained in the United States until September 1806, when he sailed from Boston aboard the merchant ship *Two Brothers*, its hold filled with gifts for the bey and his chief minister. Writing to Secretary of State Madison about two weeks after setting foot in Tunis, Coxe advised, “Nothing of consequence occur’d ’till the 19th. when The Ship Two Brothers Capt Candler arrived here having on board H. E. Sodi Soliman Mellimelli & suite late Ambassador from This Regency to the U. States.” Coxe acknowledged receiving instructions on the distribution of the shipload of gifts⁴³ and said he was writing to Tobias Lear, the American consul general based in Algiers and the chief U.S. diplomat in the region, informing him of Mellimelli’s arrival and “of the necessity of his (Lear’s) immediate presence at Tunis.” Coxe also reported on his audience with the bey who, he said, appeared “very much pleased” with his list of gifts, and added, “I have no doubt it will have the desir’d effect from every thing I can see & hear.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Jason Raphael Zeledon, “The United States and the Barbary Pirates: Adventures in Sexuality, State-Building, and Nationalism, 1784–1815,” PhD diss. (University of California, Santa Barbara, 2016), 279.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 281.

⁴³ In a subsequent letter to *Hornet* captain John Dent, Coxe explained that the gifts included “Coffee, Cochineal (a carmine dye made from an insect), China, chocolate, Ginger, Logwood, Rum, pepper, Poligraphs (devices for duplicating handwriting), etc. with four Brass field pieces & their carriages complete . . .” (Letter from Charles D. Coxe to John Dent, January 5, 1807, *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, Volume 6, Part 4 (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1944), 497–498.

⁴⁴ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to James Madison, December 26, 1806, Founders Online. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/99-01-02-1212> (accessed November 1, 2021).

Tobias Lear arrived from Algiers in Tunis on January 12, 1807, and a few days later began peace negotiations with the bey and his chief minister, both of whom insisted on payment in kind or in cash (or both) for the three ships seized by Rodgers nearly two years earlier. Ultimately, as Lear spelled out in a long, detailed letter to Madison, the bey agreed to accept \$10,000 rather than a replacement vessel, an agreement, Lear wrote, conveyed by the bey's minister, who said "that his Master would receive the money in preference to the Ship; and that now all matters were settled between us; and that the Citizens of the U. States might come here and trade upon the footing of the other Nations and feel as perfect a security as they could do in their own Country. He said the Bey was satisfied, and hoped he should always continue in harmony with the U. States."⁴⁵

In a follow-up letter to Madison, Lear, still in Tunis, explained to the secretary of state that when he arrived in that city, he discovered that Coxe had been left there "on the death of Dr. Dodge, to take charge of our affairs until I should be advised of the event."⁴⁶ Also in Tunis was Dr. Thomas Triplett, who had arrived there on the same ship as Mellimelli, on his way to an assignment in Algiers as a physician to the dey, the local ruler. But as Lear observed, the dey was dead (assassinated in 1805) and Triplett, no longer needed in Algiers, could now serve as a replacement for Dodge in Tunis, since Coxe was still in active service as a Marine and might be needed on the *Hornet*. However, the bey objected to Triplett's appointment, ostensibly because of Triplett's initial destination of Algiers, with which Tunis was at war, and, after several days of

⁴⁵ Letter from Tobias Lear to James Madison, January 25, 1807, Founders Online.

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/99-01-02-1329> (accessed November 1, 2021). Historian Jason Raphael Zeledon observes that despite Jefferson's objections to paying tribute to the Barbary regencies, at least some part of the \$10,000 paid to the bey should be considered just that. Moreover, Zeledon argues, "the Jefferson Administration concealed this payment from the American public in order to avoid generating further controversy." (Jason Raphael Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates," 315.)

⁴⁶ Letter from Tobias Lear to James Madison, March 6, 1807, Founders Online.

<https://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/default.xqy?keys=FOEA-print-02-01-02-1480> (accessed November 1, 2021).

discussion with the bey's chief minister, Lear decided "I should leave Mr. Coxe." Of Coxe, Lear added:

He appears to be a Gentleman of Genius & Talents, and must have a considerable knowledge of the World and of Business. Should he not suffer his vanity and impetuosity to warp his Judgment, I have no doubt but he will discharge the duties of his station with great propriety. I have spoken to him very freely on the evil which would result from an indulgence of these passions in this Country Particularly, and the observations he has made since he has been here, seem to convince him of the necessity of moving with the strictest prudence and caution; and, at the same time, with firmness and decision.⁴⁷

In a letter to John Dent, captain of the *Hornet*, Coxe provided his own version of the discussions between Lear and the bey's minister:

Mr. L(ear) declared he had nothing against me, but on the contrary approved of my character & abilities; that he did not want to force on them any one who was disagreeable to them—that he would consider on the subject & consult with the Commodore on his return from Malta to this place; & we took our leave. —This turn of the affair surpriz'd me not a little; as it was quite unexpected, & I had all packd up for my departure.—A few days after this Col: Lear informed me that he had attempted to get the Doctor acknowledged without success—That he thought it his duty to go thus far in consequence of his letters from the Secretary of State, but that he was now free to make choice of me, & gave me the appointment & my instructions accordingly, with the permission of the Commodore, which I not only obtain'd, but his recommendation also previously to his departure.⁴⁸

Coxe, at the time his appointment in Tunis was still uncertain, was nonetheless studying the landscape of the region where he had unexpectedly set foot. "I am treading on classic ground," he wrote to a friend in Washington, DC, "& feel a very great desire to communicate or participate with my friends the feelings excited by the ocular testimony I have of the beauties both antique and natural, which are everywhere scatter'd over the face of this beautiful country, tho' inhabited by Barbarians."⁴⁹ However, while the "beauties" of Tunis attracted Coxe's eye, the commercial

⁴⁷ Ibid. Following Coxe's appointment by Lear, Triplett sailed with Lear to Algiers, where he became Lear's assistant.

⁴⁸ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Master Commandant John H. Dent, March 3, 1807, *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, Volume 6, Part 4 (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1944), 510.

⁴⁹ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Unknown, March 7, 1807, Charles D Coxe papers.

opportunities of his new position also commanded his attention. Writing to the American naval agents in the nearby Mediterranean port city of Livorno (also known in English as Leghorn) in April 1807, Coxe reminded them, “The late amicable arrangement of our difficulties with this Regency, leaves a fair opening for American Vessels to trade here, and as you know American consuls are allowed to enter into commerce, I beg leave to make a tender of my services to you & your friends at Leghorn, as I am induced to believe a correspondence may be established to mutual advantage.”⁵⁰ The next month, he advised the U.S. consul in Marseilles that the ship that had brought Mellimelli from Boston to Tunis had since been loaded with a consignment of oil purchased by Coxe, Lear, and the ship’s captain and was sailing to the French port to sell it. Coxe also urged the consul “to tender my best services to your mercantile friends at Marseilles; as you know, American Consuls are allowed to enter into commerce; and they possess (here especially) innumerable advantages over private merchants. I am also the only American established here.”⁵¹ Then, in July, Coxe informed the American consul in Barcelona that a ship filled with barley was on its way to the Spanish port. According to Coxe, he had purchased the cargo and the vessel—a Sicilian ship captured by a French privateer—at auction in Tunis for the equivalent of \$5,096 and asked the consul to “dispose of the cargo & vessel to the best advantage.”⁵²

Coxe, in addition to pursuing his business interests in Tunis, also focused on what he described as his “little collection of antiquities,” in a letter to William Thornton, the physician, painter, and architect. Coxe also reviewed his artistic activity, explaining, “I have taken some

⁵⁰ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Messrs Degen, Purviance, April 19, 1807, Charles D Coxe papers.

⁵¹ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Stephen Cathalan, May 19, 1807, Charles D Coxe papers.

⁵² Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Stephen Cathalan, June 25, 1807, Charles D Coxe papers; Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Andrew Thorndyke, July 18, 1807, Charles D Coxe papers. Coxe addressed his letter of July 18, 1807, to “And’w Thorndyke, Consul for the U. States/Barcelona,” when, in fact, John Leonard was the consul in Barcelona. However, Thorndike (correct spelling) was a business partner of Leonard at the time, a relationship underscoring the mercantile interests of consuls at the time. For more on Thorndike, see Timothy H. Kistner, *Federalist Tycoon: The Life and Times of Israel Thorndike* (University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland, 2015).

sketches of views about Tunis, but I find it is rather a difficult thing owing to the jealousy of these people; They think it is done only with a view to facilitate military operations against them, and the art of painting they attribute altogether to the Devil!” He continued with a consideration of the society where he had been living for the past half year. “When I reflect that I am on the spot which was once the theatre of Glory of so many great men & see its present degraded situation,” he wrote, “a train of melancholy ideas rush into my mind,” but he added his hope that the region “may one day be revisited by the beams of science, whose influence join’d to a more reasonable religion may illuminate & invigorate the most distant extremities of this Immense Continent, & that we may live to see a reverse of that picture from which we now turn our eyes with disgust & regret.” He concluded his letter to Thornton by noting the American complaints about the long-established European tolerance of piracy by the Barbary regencies, adding:

(B)ut we seem to forget it is perhaps a brutality ordain’d by Providence that we should receive as punishment from a portion of the inhabitants of Africa!—Africa from whose bosom the enlightened sons of knowledge, liberty & the true religion annually drag in slavery so many thousands of innocent victims.⁵³

⁵³ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Dr. W. Thornton, Washington, June 20, 1807, Charles D. Coxe papers. Charles Coxe, the father of Charles D. Coxe, was a slaveholder. On June 14, 1778, Charles Coxe advertised for the return of a runaway slave: “RAN AWAY from the subscriber, living in Kingwood, Hunterdon County, on Tuesday the 9th of this instant, a NEGRO MAN, named JEM . . .” (Graham Russell Hodges, Alan Edward Brown, eds., *Pretends to be Free*, Garland Publishing, Inc., New York, 1994, 215); memorandum of Charles Coxe hiring to his daughter Grace “a negro woman named Rachell the property of and belonging to him the said Charles Coxe” and specifying that Grace “will send the said Rachell from Burlington during the Christmas holydays to see her husband a negro man named Sam belonging to said Coxe . . .” (Memorandum of Charles Coxe, November 22, 1799, the Winterthur Library); on August 13, 1811, Charles Coxe submitted a note to the Hunterdon County clerk stating “my negro wench, a slave, named Betty, was delivered of a male child named Isaac” (Hunterdon County—Birth Certificates of Children of Slaves, 1804–1835, <https://www.nj.gov/state/archives/chnc1004.html> [accessed December 14, 2021]). In 1881, historian James P. Snell wrote: “In 1790 there were eleven thousand four hundred and twenty-three slaves in New Jersey, of which about two thousand were in Hunterdon and Somerset (Counties); they had increased to twelve thousand four hundred and twenty-two in 1800, after which the number very rapidly declined.” (James P. Snell, *History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties, New Jersey* [Everts & Peck, Philadelphia, 1881], 104.) However, as Professor James J. Gigantino II explains, “In New Jersey, slavery died harder, despite the best efforts of black and white abolitionists . . . This rhetorical attack proved futile . . . as slavery represented roughly six percent of the state’s population, with concentrations reaching as high as twenty percent in the northeastern countries. Slavery had engrained itself into New Jersey’s social, political, and economic framework far too deeply to be rhetorically defeated.” (James J. Gigantino II, “The Curious Memory of Slavery in New Jersey, 1865–1941,” in *New Jersey Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* (Winter 2020), 35.

In the ensuing months, Coxe—besides continuing his personal commercial interests— was also concerned with fighting between Tunis and Algiers, fighting among Tunisians as well as threats by the North African regencies against merchant ships in the Mediterranean. During all this time, he maintained his status as a Marine Corps officer. That lasted until mid-June 1809, when Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton—still new to his job—informed Coxe, “Your long absence is complained of by the officers of the Marine Corps—especially those junior to you in rank.”⁵⁴ Hamilton gave Coxe the option of returning to the United States and reporting to the Marine Corps commanding officer or resigning his commission. On December 23, 1809, Hamilton wrote to the Marine Corps commandant that he had received Coxe’s resignation and instructed the commandant to inform Coxe that it was accepted.⁵⁵ Coxe’s formal transition from armed service to diplomacy came at a most appropriate and symbolic moment, a time that would demand the best of his negotiating skills.

The overture to the impending events arrived in a letter from the American chief diplomat in the North African region, Consul General Tobias Lear, who was based in Algiers. In February 1810, Lear wrote to Coxe in Tunis, “I am very sorry to find so many of our vessels have been detained by French privateers; and sent into Tunis, as I am sure it must give you a great deal of trouble and may cause some unpleasant discussions.” Lear also advised Coxe, “The interest of the U. States in Tunis has become more important in consequence of so many of our vessels having been carried in them by French privateers,” adding “there is no appearance of any settlement between the U. States & France, to relieve our commerce from its embarrassments.”⁵⁶ The French depredations against American merchant shipping during this period occurred even after the

⁵⁴ McClellan, Chapter XVIII, n. 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, n. 5.

⁵⁶ Letter from Tobias Lear to Charles D. Coxe, February 11, 1810. <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-lear-tobias-washingtons-secretary-diplomat-letter-5156255/?> (accessed November 3, 2021).

conclusion of what became known as the Quasi War between the United States and France in 1800. The undeclared war had begun in 1796 when French privateers—private ships commissioned by the French government to capture enemy vessels—attacked American merchant ships, primarily in the Caribbean. The agreement concluding the naval conflict, known as both the Treaty of Mortefontaine and the Convention of 1800, established free trade between France and the United States. However, the signing of the agreement did little to stop French privateer attacks on Mediterranean shipping. “The reestablishment of diplomatic relations between (the United States and France) after the Mortefontaine Treaty in 1800,” writes historian Silvia Marzagalli, “did not stop predations on neutral ships, and French courts condemned American vessels as good prizes throughout the French Wars.”⁵⁷

In late 1809, the U.S. merchant ship *Liberty* sailed from the Sardinian port of Cagliari, bound for nearby Gibraltar. In December, the Philadelphia-based ship was attacked and seized by a French privateer, brought to Tunis where, following common practice, the prize was sold at auction on January 8, 1810, by order of the French consul. The buyer was the chief minister to the bey, who lost no time in preparing the ship for its next voyage, now under the flag of Tunis, to Malta, the British-controlled Mediterranean island. The vessel arrived there in May. William Forsyth, the *Liberty*'s supercargo, was in Malta and contacted the American consul, Joseph Pulis, who appealed to a Maltese court, where Forsyth filed suit on July 4 to recover his vessel. The court meanwhile took possession of the ship.⁵⁸ News of the legal action quickly crossed the Mediterranean to Tunis, where Charles D. Coxe was summoned to an audience with the perturbed

⁵⁷ Silvia Marzagalli, “French Privateering during the French Wars, 1793–1815,” in Bruce A. Elleman, S.C.M. Paine, eds., *Commerce Raiding: Historical Case Studies, 1755–2009* (Naval War College Press, Newport Rhode Island, 2013), 44. During the period reviewed by Marzagalli, France warred against Britain and other European countries as the United States sought to establish its neutrality in the conflicts.

⁵⁸ Greg H. Williams, *The French Assault on American Shipping, 1793–1813: A History and Comprehensive Record of Merchant Marine Losses* (McFarland & Company, Inc., Jefferson, North Carolina, 2009), 217.

bey on August 14. “He informed me,” Coxe would write, “that, in consequence of the seizure of a vessel belonging to him and bearing his flag, through the interference of Mr. Pulis, the American consul at Malta, he had given orders to arrest all the Americans, and to sequester all their property in the kingdom of Tunis, which he would hold until he received full satisfaction from the United States, considering them responsible for the acts of their public agents.”⁵⁹

Coxe immediately boarded a ship in Tunis and arrived in Malta on August 22, 1810, bearing in mind the threat by the bey that “if the ship was not immediately restored to the Tunisian subject, he would confiscate all the American property in his kingdom, to the amount of \$250,000, which he absolutely sequestered on the 14th instant; having also arrested the persons of the Americans who happened to be at Tunis, and further declared that, in consequence of non-compliance with his demand, he would take such other steps as he should deem necessary.”⁶⁰ Those “other steps” included the bey’s threat of a declaration of war with the United States and the seizure of American ships. Coxe convinced Forsyth (representing the *Liberty*’s owner) and Pulis (the American consul) to retreat from their court action and restore the ship to its new owner, so, as Coxe put it, “the only alternative whereby a very heavy calamity has been prevented, which otherwise would inevitably have ensued.” Coxe also explained to the U.S. Secretary of State, “I have, therefore, in consequence, promised much on the part of the United States, and beg leave to conclude, with a full confidence that ample justice may be done to the concern of the *Liberty* for their compromising this business, which has thus enabled me to restore the good understanding and friendly intercourse between the United States and his excellency the Bey and Regency of Tunis.”⁶¹ In 1816, Secretary of State James Monroe declared that the owner of the *Liberty* had “an

⁵⁹ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Secretary of State, August 26, 1810, *American State Papers, Class IX, Claims, Vol I* (Gales and Seaton, Washington, DC, 1834), 485.

⁶⁰ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Secretary of State, August 28, 1810, *American State Papers*, 485.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

equitable claim on the United States for indemnity for the loss which he sustained by the relinquishing of his claim to the ship *Liberty*, at the instance of the agent of the United States.”⁶² It was not until 1831 that France agreed to pay the American owners—more likely their heirs or insurance companies—of ships and cargoes seized by French privateers. Under that convention, the successors of the *Liberty*’s owner were awarded \$23,950.⁶³

Besides discovering in Malta a diplomatic solution to the bellicose threat by the bey, it seems quite likely that Coxe also discovered the woman who would become his bride during the same period he was on the Mediterranean island. Available records report his marriage on October 6, 1810, to Fortunata Caruana, the daughter of a gentleman described as a “colonel.”⁶⁴ Four years later, on April 25, 1814, their first child, John Charles Coxe, was born in Tunis.⁶⁵

By 1813, the Madison administration and its secretary of state, James Monroe, had decided to replace Coxe with a new consul, Mordecai M. Noah, a politically connected journalist who, like Coxe, had declined to accept his first appointment as a consul, in the case of Noah, to Riga, then part of the Russian Empire. In addition to his new assignment to Tunis, however, Noah was also secretly charged with another mission when he received his appointment on March 20, 1813. Months before that date, the American chief diplomat in the North African region, Tobias Lear—

⁶² *Ibid.*, 484.

⁶³ Williams, 218; *United States Congressional Serial Set*, Volume 289, Doc. No. 117, “Relations with France, and Duties on Silks and Wines,” (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1836), 50.

⁶⁴ “Married,” *American Watchman* (Wilmington, Delaware), March 16, 1811, 3; “Married,” *The Lady’s Miscellany and Weekly Visitor* (New York), March 16, 1811, 334. Fortunata Caruana’s name was misspelled in these articles as frequently elsewhere as “Fortuna Caravana.” The same date is listed among New Jersey marriage records (see Ancestry.com. *New Jersey, U.S., Marriage Records, 1670–1965* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2016 (accessed November 10, 2021). In contrast, Coxe’s grandson, John Coxe Caruana, wrote in 1923: “He married, while attached to the *Hornet*, Miss Fortunata Caruana, the daughter of a prominent merchant. It was a very quick courtship for he was only there three days and it would appear from the record that the lady accompanied him to Tripoli, where he was taken on the *Hornet*.” (John Coxe Caruana, Letter to Edwin N. McClellan, in Edwin N. McClellan, *History of the United States Marine Corps*.)

⁶⁵ Dean Dudley, *History of the Dudley Family with Genealogical Tables, Pedigrees, etc.*, Vol 6 (D. Dudley, Wakefield, Massachusetts, 1886), 651.

the man who had confirmed Coxe as consul in Tunis—had fallen out of favor with the dey⁶⁶ of Algiers and had fled his post July 25, 1812, writing to Coxe from aboard an American ship anchored off Gibraltar: “I expect that the conduct of the Dey, so unjustifiable, unexpected and apparently so disgusting to every one, may have disagreeable consequences for him.”⁶⁷ Faced now with 11 American prisoners held captive by Algiers and the absence of Lear to negotiate their freedom, the Madison administration turned to Noah, instructing him to bargain with the dey, with a ransom price of not more than \$3,000 per man. Noah set sail on the first leg of his journey on May 26, 1813, on a vessel bound for France, but on July 3, his ship was captured in the English Channel by a British warship (the United States had declared war against Britain on June 18), resulting in a long delay until Noah finally reached Spain, where he began the first item on his agenda, the negotiations for the release of the American captives in Algiers. After a detour through France, Noah arrived in Tunis aboard a Swedish ship in December 1814. “Towards evening,” Noah wrote, Coxe came alongside the ship “and informed me, that the Bey had sent down the necessary permission for me to land, and that the carriage of the French consul, would be at the Goletta⁶⁸ the next morning. He stated that I had been long expected . . .”⁶⁹ Indeed, it had been 21 months since Noah’s appointment to Tunis was announced. In his combined memoir and travelogue, Noah recalled that six days after his arrival in Tunis, he learned that the ruling bey had been killed along with others and that a new bey had acceded to the throne. The following day, Noah presented his credentials to the new bey. “He was very richly dressed,” Noah wrote; “his

⁶⁶ The “dey” was the head officer of Algiers (vs. the “bey,” who was the high-ranking officer elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire).

⁶⁷ Letter from Tobias Lear to Charles D. Coxe, August 8, 1812, Tobias Lear Papers. <https://clements.umich.edu/exhibit/barbary-wars/between-the-barbary-wars/lear-coxe-letter/> (accessed November 14, 2021).

⁶⁸ The fortified port east of Tunis.

⁶⁹ Mordecai Manuel Noah, *Travels in England, France, Spain, and the Barbary States, in the Years 1813–14 and 15* (Kirk and Mercein, New York, 1819), 244.

fingers and thumbs were covered with large and valuable brilliants; at his side lay a snuff box and a sabre, each studded with jewels; he hardly deigned to raise himself at my approach; ‘kiss his hand’ said Mr. Coxe, after performing the same ceremony himself; I stooped, for it is necessary to stoop, when conforming to this humiliating, and most degrading custom.”⁷⁰

As Noah sailed into Tunis in late 1814, the United States was steering toward what would be a climactic conclusion of its decades-old friction with the Barbary states. In March 1815, at the urging of President Madison, Congress authorized U.S. warships to return to the Mediterranean. The fleet, commanded by Stephen Decatur, made quick work of the Algerian navy, and by July the dey had agreed to Decatur’s demands for the return of American captives, payment for seized American ships, and the guarantee of U.S. shipping rights. Decatur moved on with his fleet to Tunis and Tripoli, where he arranged similar agreements. The following year, a combined British and Dutch naval force bombarded Algiers, persuading the dey to accept terms to end the regency’s

⁷⁰ Ibid., 257. Noah’s stay in Tunis was short-lived. On July 30, 1815, Commodore Stephen Decatur arrived in Tunis with the U.S. Mediterranean squadron and presented a sealed letter to Noah from Secretary of State Monroe, dated April 25, 1815. The now notorious message informed Noah, who was Jewish, “At the time of your appointment, as Consul at Tunis, it was not known that the religion which you profess would form any obstacle to the exercise of your Consular functions. Recent information, however, on which entire reliance may be placed, proves that it would produce a very unfavourable effect. In consequence of which, the President has deemed it expedient to revoke your commission. On the receipt of this letter, consider yourself no longer in the public service. There are some circumstances, too, connected with your accounts, which require a more particular explanation, which, with that already given, are not approved by the President.” (Ibid., 377) Historians continue to debate Madison’s and Monroe’s motives for Noah’s dismissal. According to historian Jonathan Sarna, “There is no mystery as to why the President recalled Noah. The government was highly dissatisfied with the handling of the Algerian rescue effort.” Sarna adds, “The government injected the religious issue into Noah’s recall notice precisely because the real reasons—those dealing with the secret Algerian mission—could not be put in writing.” [Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., New York, 1981), 27.] However, while conceding that the decision of Madison and Monroe to dismiss Noah from his post in Tunis was based on policy issues, others observe that the decision to focus on Noah’s religion “appears to have partaken of, or to have been calculated in some measure to exploit, the anti-Semitic prejudice widespread in American society in the early nineteenth century.” [“Mordecai Noah’s Mission to Algiers: Spanish-American Relations and the Fate of a Jewish Consul in Madison’s Administration, February 20, 1815 (Editorial Note),” Founders Online, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/03-09-02-0009> [accessed March 13, 2022].] Or, as historian Hasia R. Diner has written, “All sorts of political considerations independent of Noah’s Judaism motivated Monroe. But the fact that he couched his decision in language about religious limitations demonstrated how close to the surface lay the popular vision of America as a Christian, that is, Protestant, nation.” [Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States: 1654 to 2000* (University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 2004), 59–60.]

piracy and enslavement of Christians. “The Algerine War,” writes historian Frank Lambert, “ended America’s thirty-year effort to rid itself of Barbary pirate depredations and establish free navigation in the Mediterranean.”⁷¹

With Mordecai Noah now in Tunis, Charles D. Coxe and his family departed the regency, but rather than return directly to the United States, they spent months in Naples, Rome, and France. On September 13, 1815, Coxe’s father, Charles Coxe, died at his estate in Hunterdon County, New Jersey. It would take more than three months for Coxe to learn of the event. The news came in a letter written in Paris by his brother-in-law, Le Ray de Chaumont, who had received a note from Tench Coxe (the cousin and another brother-in-law of Charles D. Coxe) informing him “of the death of our venerable parent. He wrote to you at Malta and Tunis,” de Chaumont continued, “but the letters may have miscarried as you must be now upon the high roads of the continent. I direct this to Marseilles to your friend who best knows where to find you.”⁷² Coxe arrived in Marseilles on December 20 and received the waiting letter from Le Ray de Chaumont, “giving me,” he replied, “the heartrending news of the death of my dear father. This has planted a dagger in my heart as I fervently hoped that after so long and tedious a residence in the Mediterranean I should once more have the consolation of embracing him to my heart . . .”⁷³ Coxe arranged passage from Marseilles to Philadelphia for himself, his family, his belongings, and what he described as “my two superb Arabian stallions” on the ship *Hope*, which, according to a press report, unable to reach Philadelphia, arrived in New York on March 18, 1816, “75 days from Marseilles,” with a cargo including wine, brandy, and silks, along with the Coxe family.⁷⁴ Unmentioned in that initial report

⁷¹ Lambert, 199.

⁷² Letter from Le Ray de Chaumont to Charles D. Coxe, November 27, 1815, the Winterthur Library.

⁷³ Letter from Charles D. Coxe to Le Ray de Chaumont, December 20, 1815, the Winterthur Library.

⁷⁴ “Arrived This Forenoon,” *Evening Post* (New York), March 18, 1816, 3.

but of long-lasting significance among horse-breeding connoisseurs were the two steeds brought to the United States by Coxe, “two fine Arabian studs,” according to one account,

(which) will doubtless contribute materially to improve our present stock of those noble animals.⁷⁵ 'Tis said that these two horses are remarkable for their symmetry and beauty of figure, and fleetness and spirit, and well known characteristics of the Arabian breed. Having been landed at New-York in fine condition and sent to Sidney, in Hunterdon county, New-Jersey, (the residence of Mr. C.) they may fairly be classed among the many important acquisitions which we are constantly making from the old world.”⁷⁶

Coxe remained at his family estate in New Jersey in the following years, though not without hope of reclaiming at least one of his former positions. More on that in part two of this piece, in the Winter 2023 issue of *NJ Studies*.

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⁷⁵ A twenty-first-century listing of equine champions continued to cite one of Coxe’s horses, known as “Coxe’s Arabian”: “Imported into America by special permission of the Bey of Tunis in 1816 by the American Consul Charles D. Coxe, he was said to stand 15 and one quarter hands and be of the highest caste. He stood the 1820 season in Cincinnati, Ohio. He sired several winners, including Bey of Tunis and Mahomet although his most enduring contribution was his unnamed daughter who became a foundation mare of American Family and which still had descendants in the 1990s.” (Thoroughbred Bloodlines—Arabians, Barbs & Turks, <https://www.bloodlines.net/TB/Summaries/Oriental.htm> (accessed November 15, 2021).

⁷⁶ “From the Gleaner,” *Evening Post* (New York), May 8, 1816, 3. In addition to the horses, according to another newspaper article, Coxe imported “a correct Panorama view of the ruins and environs of the once celebrated city of Carthage. It is also said that his collection of ancient Roman, Punic, Greek and Egyptian Coins, is very curious and extensive, and that after leaving Tunis he resided some time at Rome and Naples, with a view to cultivate and perfect a strong natural taste for painting and sculpture, of which he has brought many valuable specimens, both of the ancient and modern schools . . .” (“The Fine Arts,” *The Telescope* (Columbia, South Carolina), May 7, 1816, 4.)