

THE LAFFITE SOCIETY

Meridian Retirement Center, 2228 Seawall Blvd., Galveston, TX 77550

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, September 12, 2011

Board Members Present: President Ed Jamison, SVP Kathy Modzelewski, TVP Ginny Roberts, Secretary Carolyn Peterson, Treasurer Jeff Modzelewski, Technology Director Rob Peterson, Editor Dan Cote, Publicity Director Dave Roberts, Archivist Larry Porter, Parliamentarian Diane Olson

Board Members Absent: Coordinator of Research Pam Keyes, FVP Jack Watson

Advisory Board Present: Jean Epperson, Jeff Modzelewski, Kathy Modzelewski, Dale Olson

Advisory Board Absent: Pam Keyes, Robert Vogel, Dr. Reginald Wilson

President Ed Jamison called the meeting to order at 6:34PM.

He welcomed visitors and returning members: Norm and Margie Sachnik, Dorothy Karilanovic, George and Lizette Gaudin Najarian, Jo Ann Cote, Eric Connor—son of Betty and Ed Connor. Ed mentioned that the person who announced President Obama before his speech is former Galvestonian, Bill Livingood. Speaking of history, he mentioned that the day after the meeting was the anniversary of the writing of the National Anthem by Francis Scott Key.

Ed thanked Ginny Roberts for the wonderful dinner, Marg for the salad, Carolyn for the cookies, and Todd for the assorted desserts. It was announced that Todd and his wife are expecting a child. Ed Connor was thanked for bartending this evening.

Editor Dan Cote announced that he is planning to put out a new Chronicle in January and that interested parties should get their articles in very soon.

Program Speaker – Betty Connor

Topic – Women in Laffite's Life

Ed introduced Betty by saying he remembered from elementary school and that she impressed him as being a serious student. Betty's first intent was to become a music teacher, but then she became interested in history and government leading her into a lifetime career of civic/government service. She serves on the boards of several public service groups. Betty says her favorite activity now is traveling and says that she have been to thirty-five foreign countries, but she hasn't been able to lose Ed yet.

Betty began by saying that there are family traditions, folklore, and fantasies about the women in Laffite's life, but not too much factual information exists. Laffite did not leave many letters records—so no paper trail. Records were lost due to governmental change, storms, and other events such as fires making it hard to pin down accurate information. During her presentation she dressed to give the allusion of various women she was depicting.

The first important woman in his life was his mother and Betty gave three different suppositions of his birth listing the possible locations of Santo Domingo, Bordeaux, Bayan—all French cities or possessions so he could make claim for a French Privateer license. Betty said that there are many examples of family folklore regarding Laffite's real identity. She brought up the case of Francois Zenon Boutte, whose parents were Antoine and Marie Francois Hyacinth Boutte. It would be very convenient if this folklore were correct, at would at least we would know his mother's and father's names and where they are buried. But alas-not so!

The second important woman would be his wife, but no one person can be verified. A name that has been referenced twice is Christiana Lewein (Levine). Betty presented two stories regarding her marriage to Laffite under different circumstances. The third reference of a wife has Laffite as a planter whose property is confiscated by the Spanish government and the wife (unnamed)

commits suicide. A totally unrelated story comes from a record from a church in Cuba saying that a Juan Laffite married a Juana Mané in 1805 and they had a son, Bartolomé.

The next category of important woman characters were his female acquaintances and possible loves. The first mentioned was Beatrice Tolliver, the beautiful and well bred daughter of a plantation owner, who met Jean at a ball. She was skeptical about his bad reputation until he killed one of her suitors for calling him a "Freebooter". She wasn't very understanding about this and sent him packing.



Another similar story was that of Mortimer Wilson who came to Charleston and met the Mary Martin/Morton. Again another former suitor was killed in a duel and Mortimer fled to Florida and became a pirate (the dread pirate Laffite?). Time passed and Wilson sneaked back into Charleston only to find that Mary had died.



Back in New Orleans another woman entered Laffite's life in the person of Catherine Villars, sister of Marie -- Pierre's mistress. Jean set up house, gave her money, and they eventually had a son. During this period, Jean would leave and return to New Orleans several times, but after 1820 he left for Galveston never to return to Catherine.

There were rumors that there was something between Governor Claiborne's daughter and Laffite, but this seems to be a contrivance by Hollywood for a movie romance.

Charles Sallier and Laffite were in business together in Lake Charles. One time when Charles was away, Laffite called upon his wife, Catherine, and gave her two young slaves. Charles arrived and thought that this was a very extravagant gift. He believed that something must be going on between the two. In a fit of rage, Charles shot Catherine. Thinking that he killed her, he disappeared, but she recovered and lived to a ripe old age.

Next in this lineup is Madeline Rigaud, widow of General Rigaud. There are two different versions of her and Jean's meeting, but both end with her death and her burial under the Maison Rouge.

The last two ladies are ones that we have heard about previously. One is Mary Campbell who greatly admired Laffite when they met on Galveston island. The other is Jane Long who was invited to Galveston for dinner and given a powder horn as a token. Jean leaves her building materials when he quits Galveston.

Questions:

How long did Betty's research take for her presentation? She said she began in July using internet sources as well as Jack Ramsey's book.

Of all the wife possibilities, which person is most likely? Christiana, she said.

Miscellaneous

Ed asked the audience if they were pleased with last year's Banquet venue and most said they were. He also polled the audience on whether or not A&M should be given the archives and most agreed it is a good decision. Jean Epperson mentioned some interesting changes at the Liberty library. The Laffite Journal is now in Austin and not in the Liberty museum. It may no longer be available for viewing by the public

The meeting was adjourned at 7:33PM.

Submitted by Carolyn Peterson
Corresponding/Recording Secretary