



# The Laffite Society Chronicles

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Post Office Box 1325  
Galveston, Texas 77553

## THE EDITOR'S PAGE

JEFF MODZELEWSKI

Dear fellow Laffitians,

Please accept and enjoy this, your seventh semiannual issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*. This edition documents many of the activities of our group during the period July 1 through December 31, 1997, and contains additional articles about Laffite-related topics and events.

The Laffite Society's second half of 1997 was an interesting time span that was dominated by "special events." In Laffite Society parlance, the term "special event" has come to denote a meeting of our group at which activities occur other than, or in addition to, those typical of our standard stated meetings, where a featured speaker generally makes a presentation, after which a short business meeting is conducted. These special events often (but not always – witness our October 14<sup>th</sup> gathering, discussed below) take place at a venue other than our usual place of assembly at The Eiband's Gallery in Galveston.

The intent of our group's founders was to hold at least one special event per year. However, Laffite Society special events have, happily, come to be a more frequent occurrence. A combination of the generation of novel ideas for such happenings, and the contacts which the growth of Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coast interest in our group have created, has engendered more opportunities for these special events than perhaps even our original Board of Directors envisioned just three and one-half years ago.

For example, on August 12, 1997, members and guests convened just south of downtown Houston in the Simpson Gallery, at the invitation of Mr. William Simpson, a noted and veteran dealer in antiques and rare documents. Mr. Simpson there regaled attendees with the saga of his first-person role in helping to bring to the public eye, in its original French, *The Journal of Jean Laffite*, which now resides in the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center in Liberty, Texas.

After Mr. Simpson spoke, Laffite Society member John Howells, a foremost expert on attempts to authenticate *The Journal of Jean Laffite*, took center stage to further expound on threads of Mr. Simpson's tale. See the article in this issue entitled, "The Acquisition of the Laffite Journal," edited by Laffite Society member and proprietor of Dogwood Press, Don C. Marler.

On September 16, 1997, The Laffite Society again eschewed a formal meeting when member and world-class raconteur Victor Lang served as tour guide aboard the MV *Seagull* while Laffite Society members and guests enjoyed a leisurely, water-borne look at Galveston's waterfront. See the article in this issue by Society member and professional seaman Wil Zapalac entitled, "Special Event, September, 16, 1997: Galveston Harbor Tour Aboard the MV *Seagull*."

On October 14, 1997, The Society's monthly meeting was preceded by a book-signing by Jack C. Ramsay, Jr., of his 1996 work *Jean Laffite, Prince of Pirates*. The book-signing was sponsored by Laffite Society officers Jeff and Kathy Modzelewski's "Island Books at The Eiband's Gallery," a retail collection of some 1,000 mostly older, hardcover volumes spanning many *genres* but with a special concentration in Texana and Galvestoniana.

Mr. Ramsay, assisted by his charming wife Karin, later that evening addressed The Society as the featured speaker at its formal meeting. The interest which this presentation aroused may be gauged by the size of the attendance at that meeting. Fifty attendees signed in on that night's roster, and this number excluded many other people who dropped by beforehand to purchase and have signed a copy of Mr. Ramsay's book but who were unable to remain and participate in the formal program.

Then, on December 4, 1997, The Society held its annual Holiday Social, a tradition observed since our group celebrated its very first Christmas in December 1994.

All of these special events were fun, but they should not imply that more serious research work grinds to a halt in the interim. Many are those amongst us who continue to pursue their own individual Laffite trails come what may!

Coming in future issues of *The Laffite Society Chronicles* are reviews of two most exciting special events of The Society. On Thursday evening, January 8, 1998, Society President R. Dale Olson was honored to give the principal address to the Louisiana Historical Society at its annual banquet, held at the New Orleans Country Club on the 183<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans. And during the weekend of March 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>, Laffitians followed the track of our privateer to Lake Charles and the banks of the Bayou Contraband.

Until next time!

Jeff Modzelewski

## ADDRESS AT THE DEDICATION OF A HISTORICAL MARKER TO CHARLES CRONEA

JOEL KIRKPATRICK

[Editor's note: at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, March 1, 1997, Laffite Society member Joel Kirkpatrick, a retired reporter for *The Galveston Daily News*, addressed a sizeable gathering at the High Island Cemetery on Fifth Street in High Island, Texas.

The occasion of the address was the dedication of a historical marker at the grave of Charles Cronea, who had served as a cabin-boy with Jean Laffite's fleet.

Mr. Kirkpatrick had spearheaded the effort to gain approval for the historical marker, aided by the Galveston County Historical Commission and the Texas State Historical Commission.

The 22-by-42-inch marker of cast aluminum lists the dates of birth (1805) and death (1893) of the old pirate as well as some of his noteworthy exploits.

Cronea was born in Marseilles, France, and died in Rollover Pass (now Gilchrist), Texas. For a fuller description of his interesting life, see the article in the previous issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles* by author W.T. Block entitled, "Uncle Charlie Cronea, the Last of Laffite's Pirates."]

Some say that history is properly a study of great tides of social and economic change. But I think history is also properly a study of the lives of men and women who are caught up in those tides.

Like Charles Cronea.

We are here today to remember Cronea and to recognize some of his descendants, both living and dead.

You have already heard that Cronea was a teenager on a French Navy frigate. And that he came to Texas to join the band of privateer Jean Laffite. The facts of his life rival any fiction Robert Louis Stevenson ever wrote.

No one has said why Charles Cronea deserted the French frigate on which he served as a cabin-boy. But, years later, Cronea told a *Galveston Daily News* reporter in an interview that he had played a prank on a fellow crew member, and when the prank turned sour, the captain had him spread-eagled on a grating and given thirty lashes with a cat-o'-nine-tails.

Cronea said that after the whipping they had splashed him with seawater, and although it stung, "I never cried out." He and fourteen others

jumped ship in New York not long after that. The French Navy never saw them again.

We have records and affidavits showing that Charles Cronea enlisted twice in the army of revolutionary Texas. Those records show that he fought in several battles, first as an early rebel against Mexico, and later in the Army of the Republic under General Sam Houston. Records also show that he fought in the 1846-1848 Mexican War and collected a pension from the United States Army for so doing.

We have records showing that Cronea, as a surviving veteran of the Texas revolution, was awarded 1,280 acres of land.

We have from Charlie Cronea no journals or manifestoes. We know of no diary nor collection of letters that he might have kept. We have no statements of lofty purpose, no political comment.

We do have statements from Mary Sabinal Campbell that Cronea was a cabin-boy and cannoneer who served with Jean Callistre and "Crazy Ben" Dollivar for two years aboard her husband James Campbell's privateering ship *Hotspur*.

We have, from three different sources, a story about a mutiny aboard the *Hotspur* by the fourteen French Navy deserters, led by one of their number, a Lieutenant Gustave Duval. Mrs. Campbell told her biographer that if Duval had not served brandy to the mutineers, they might have succeeded.

But the mutiny was put down by Captain Campbell with saber and shot that splashed blood and brandy all over the decks of the ship. All of the mutineers were killed except Duval, who was saved for hanging by Jean Laffite's court in Galveston. Cronea survived because he did not take part in the mutiny.

Cronea tells in an interview that after Laffite left Galveston (which Laffite called "Campeche"), Cronea returned to the Island to find the Laffite settlement burned.

We have records showing that Cronea voted in Louisiana near Bayou Plaquemine, and later in Texas, at Old Jefferson (now Bridge City). We have records that show he lived, and served on a jury, in Jefferson County.

We have affidavits that Charlie Cronea was near the Battle of San Jacinto guarding two prisoners who were accused of murder, and that it was members of his company who captured

General Antonio López de Santa Ana.

And we do have what amounts to a biography in statements he made in an interview with *Galveston Daily News* reporter Ben C. Stuart in Galveston, under shade trees in front of the U.S. Barge Office on the waterfront. Cronea had sailed to Galveston, I believe, with his son-in-law, Henry Sullivan, with a schooner-load of watermelons or other produce for sale.

This plaque summarizes some of Cronea's life and a few of the events that shaped it. What is not recorded on the plaque is that Charlie Cronea lived nearly all his life as

a farmer in this part of Texas, and that he raised children as well as crops. It is worth noting that the historical events for which we remember him today were only a fraction of his life.

There are almost no written words about the ordinary life of Charles Cronea. But what Charles Cronea did when he was caught up in the tides of history tells us what kind of man he was.

On this eve of Texas Independence Day, we can remember Charles Cronea and know by what he did that he was a Texas patriot who was willing to fight, and perhaps to die, for freedom.

## TESTIMONY OF THREE ESCAPED PRISONERS FROM GALVESTON IN 1818

JEAN L. EPPERSON

On May 18, 1818, Spanish authorities in Monterrey interrogated three black men whom they had apprehended. The three had been prisoners of Jean Laffite on Galveston Island. The men had escaped from Galveston three or four months before their apprehension and interrogation. This article paraphrases their testimony.

The three men - Juan José María Castro; Iorca; and Ennalt Calvin - were asked to tell who they were, what they did, and what they had heard and seen on the Island.

Castro said that he was born on the island of Anguilla under the English flag and had been trained as a ship's cook. His ship, a Spanish schooner loaded with powder for the king, was taken by a French pirate near the coast of Campeche. Castro was brought to Galveston Island, kept a prisoner, and made to labor building log houses for three months.

News came to him that Mr. Laffite, commandant of the Island, wished to send all the Negroes and other colored prisoners to New Orleans for sale. Fearful of the future, Castro agreed with Iorca and Ennalt Calvin to escape. One night, they seized a launch and fled, taking with them two small-caliber muskets, a little meat, half a handkerchief of rice, one dozen small copper pans, and one-half pound of powder.

After Castro had been on Galveston a little while, "General Charles" [Allemande] arrived in a large schooner with one hundred French and German soldiers. Castro heard it said that General Charles was waiting for another, greater general commanding two thousand men, and that they would go toward Mexico.

Castro's statement continues, saying that there were six schooners of importance with artillery in the bay. On the Island there was a cannon of a pound and a half that gave the stroke of a hammer. The blacksmiths were making shovels, bars, picks, and adzes and repairing musketry. The shoemakers were making bearskin caps with brass stars on the front. The tailors were making uniforms. Inhabitants of the neighborhoods came to the Island to trade the most eatable things.

Iorca, a boy, declared that he was born on the coast of Guinea. Three years earlier the

pirates seized him as a prisoner and carried him to Galveston. He was unable to give any reasonable account as he has only a limited knowledge of the English language.

The deposition of Ennalt Calvin declared that he was born on the island of Antigua San Juan of the English possessions. He had been a soldier since the age of seven years. He was brought to Galveston Island as a prisoner by the French pirate Captain Dampness who captured the Spanish merchant ship *Dandy*. The commander of the Spanish ship, Captain Doer, was headed for Havana when *Dandy* was seized near the Moore Castle.

When Calvin first came to Galveston as a prisoner Mr. Aury was the commandant. Calvin went with Aury to Matagorda in a convoy of one large and five small boats. The cargo of all the boats was armament. They stayed two months at Matagorda, where they built seven log dwellings and two large campaign shops, quarters for the soldiers. Aury lived separately with a mulatto woman.

While at Matagorda the pirates brought in two medium-size Spanish ships, one loaded with sugar candy, the other with ballast stone and brick. Aury learned from these ships that Mina was defeated. He was then joined by more than thirty Frenchmen with carbines and a small bronze cannon. Aury advised the Frenchmen to go no further but to rejoin him by land so that they could return to their homes.

A very strong wind carried three of Aury's ships on shore, where they remained. Burning the dwellings that he had made, Aury withdrew from Matagorda in the largest boat which remained, only to run aground with this vessel. Laffite sent a ship for the prisoners after Aury requested that he do so.

Calvin remained in Galveston and was used as a hunter and in unloading ships. A commandant or general arrived there with one hundred soldiers, a woman, and two children, a boy and a girl. Calvin did not know the name of the general. The general brought many iron shovels, bars, pickaxes, hoes, powder, and musketry. They began immediately making for the dragoons many green uniforms with red ruffles, bearskin caps, and deerskin slings for canisters of water. They had cannon and many wheels for moving the cannon. Four drummers

assisted the soldiers, who paraded every day.

They prepared to go toward Mexico and planned to land at the great bay near the mouth of the Rio Grande. Calvin had seen their map. The general and Laffite began attempting to get men to enlist for soldiers, and the blacks who did not enlist were to be sold in New Orleans. Fifty men, black and white, joined the general. As he did not wish to enlist, Calvin planned to escape from the Island.

Calvin related that a man named McFarland, a trader to all the Indian Nation, and others whose names he did not know, went to hunt horses with the Indians to mount the dragoons. When a large herd was gathered on the coast of the bay, McFarland made a big fire

as a signal and the horses were ferried across to Galveston. This man also went about persuading people of all the neighborhoods to join the general.

The Spanish official Felipe Roque de la Portilla recorded these declarations on the eighth of May with great labors and delays because the interpreter, Don Joseph Maria Henderson, a doctor and resident of Monterrey, said that the prisoners spoke very bad English.

Source: Bexar Archives; "Robert Bruce Blake Transcripts," Volume 8, Green Cover Set, Clayton Library, Houston, Texas.

## A VISIT TO LAFFITE'S GRAVE

REGINALD WILSON

[Editor's note: perhaps the single most debated subject in Laffite lore is the question of the veracity of *The Journal of Jean Laffite*. Some learned and noted historians believe it is a forgery and its contents thus fiction. Other researchers with significant credentials regard it as a genuine document and just what it is purported to be: a journal kept by Jean Laffite and detailing his post-privateering days in the American mid-West until his death there near the middle of the nineteenth century. One's opinion of the genuineness of *The Journal* will determine one's credence in the following narrative.]

According to *The Journal of Jean Laffite*, privateer Jean Alexis Laffite died May 5, 1854, in Alton, Illinois. He was buried several days later in the Culp Cemetery located six miles northwest of Alton. The funeral was reportedly attended only by his immediate family and a few close friends.

In November, 1966, the city of Galveston, Texas, held a three-day celebration recognizing Laffite's arrival at Galveston 150 years earlier. Attending that celebration as the guest of honor was an individual named John Andrechyne Laflin, the purported great-grandson of Jean Laffite. [Editor's note: in his latter years, John A. Laflin went by the name of "John A. Laffite." Within this article, he will be referred to by the name "Laflin," to avoid confusion with others herein with the surname of "Laffite."]

Following the three-day celebration in Galveston, John A. Laflin accompanied author Audrey Lloyd to her home in Midland, Texas. Audrey Lloyd had begun a large work, *Jean Laffite, The True Story*, and employed much information for the book from Laflin. On the return trip to Midland, Laflin related the following story to Ms. Lloyd concerning his visit long before to the grave site of his great-grandfather, the privateer Jean Laffite, accompanied by his grandfather, Jules.

Jules was, according to *The Journal of Jean Laffite*, twenty years of age when his father, Jean Laffite, died. Sixty-eight years passed before he returned to the grave site, this time accompanied by John A. Laflin.

"My grandfather took me to visit Jean Laffite's grave July 9, 1922. We left St. Louis on

the train for Alton, Illinois, where 'the old man' died May 5, 1854. His grave was on the 180-acre farm of Frank Culp, six miles north of Alton and 4 miles southeast of Bethalto, Illinois. Grandfather had not told me whose grave we were going to visit.

"Reaching Alton, we walked six miles to the farm. Grandfather liked to walk. I did not. It was a hot July Sunday afternoon. Perspiration ran down our faces and we were very thirsty.

"The cemetery was an old one, about one hundred yards long and eighty yards wide, about half a mile east of the Culp farm. It was without a fence and covered with bushes, vines, and tall trees. The last burial there was a soldier killed in the Spanish-American War, July, 1898.

"We reached the grave of my grandfather, Jean Laffite, in the northwest corner of the cemetery. A large tree had grown, spreading roots to heave up the ornamental iron fence around the grave. The fence had disintegrated with rust. I touched the fence. It was burning hot from the July sun. As we stood there, my grandfather finally spoke. 'This is where the old man is buried but no one knows.' The grave was covered with weeds.

"Grandfather stood in silence. I asked him if he cried when his father was lowered into the grave. He said he did not shed a tear but his mother, Emma, did cry very much. So did the others: grandchildren from his first marriage, and also my grandmother, Carmen Ernestina Andrechyne, cried. She was a young girl then, before marrying grandfather Jules.

"Hundreds of people have asked me if there was a marker on the grave. If there was one I did not see it. A tombstone with the name Jean Laffite would not last one week. Look what tourists did to the Bienville Plantation brick mansion which Dominique You shelled in New Orleans to rout the British housed there in the War of 1812. They had to put up an iron fence around the old brick wall to keep the bricks from being taken as souvenirs, just as plaques on the Laffite blacksmith shop were taken. The first plaques were bronze. Where these were taken, time after time, wooden plaques were put up. These were also taken.

"That day at the Culp Farm my grandfather introduced us under assumed names. Frank Culp told us about his barn, which he said was built in the spring of 1852 under

supervision of an old gray-haired man who walked with a limp in his right foot and who directed the carpenters how to assemble the heavy cottonwood beams without nails - only wooden pegs. He was very quiet, never talking, and said his name was Richard Leon, Mr. Culp told us. That was a name that ancestor sometimes used!

"Mr. Culp and his wife invited us in for lunch, never knowing who we were. We left at six o'clock in the evening, thanking Mr. Culp and his wife and their twenty-one year old daughter, Edith, for their kindness.

"After the funeral of Jean Laffite," John continued, "grandfather said, 'I felt very strongly that the old man was happy in death, that he had lived a sad and lonely life after he ceased his privateering and piracy, and although he had accomplished what he set out to do, to look back on it did not give him much pleasure. For he tried to do charitable work and he was afraid, always, that someone would recognize him and shout 'pirate' at him.'

"Emma Hortense Laffite did not remarry. She remained a widow for thirty-one years and died in Philadelphia, December 17, 1885.

"My grandfather cared for his mother always. Nine years after his father's death, when he was twenty-nine, he married Carmen Ernestina Andrechyne, in Carondolet, Missouri, June 10, 1863.

"My grandfather died in 1924 at the age of ninety. He and my grandmother were very good to me after my father was killed. My mother, Mary Pauline Fontenella Laffite, remarried and left me with my grandparents<sup>2</sup>."

Audrey Lloyd provided the following comment on John A. Laflin's recall.

"On the whole, John [Laflin] Laffite's visit was a memorable one which provided a harvest of emotions. I learned one thing: never underestimate the awesomeness nor the courage of inherited pirate blood."

John A. Laflin died in Columbia, South Carolina, February 20, 1970, and is buried in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

#### Notes

The first date given for this visit to the grave is July 9, 1922. Later John Laflin said it was a "Sunday." Several years ago I checked in an encyclopedia and found that July 9 was either a Wednesday or Thursday (I no longer remember which), not a Sunday. More than likely, the visit did occur on a Sunday and John Laflin just confused the date.

1. Translation of *The Journal of Jean Laffite*, p. 120; Lyle Saxon, *Laffite the Pirate* (1930), p. 260.
2. Audrey Lloyd, "The Audrey Lloyd Collection," Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas.

## THE SHIPS' OFFICERS

### (PART III)

WIL ZAPALAC

Delving further into the research of Laffite's officers, one notes mention of a "Captain Morin." Possibly sailing for a short time with Aury (through introduction by Herrera), Morin may have also run afoul of the "Commandante" after jumping over to his side. In J.O. Dyer's papers, he is described as a nervous, small, dark Frenchman, dishonest and miserly.

Yet another seaman to run afoul of Laffite was one "Captain Juana," who arrived in Galveston from New Orleans, possibly in 1817. Laffite at first would not give to Juana a commission or letter of marque (which, coming from either Venezuela, La Planta, or Grenada, went for as little as fifty dollars in that period). However, James Campbell and others talked the "bos" into it. Yet, Laffite advised Juana that he (Laffite) "had little confidence in him and that if he ever committed predatory [acts] upon any other than Spanish vessels, he would most assuredly hang him, if ever caught." Such Laffite did at Campeche Point.

If this account is true; and if the Marotte incident were true; and if the Brown/Ratti incident were true, one would gather that if things ever became too boring in the Laffite commune, one could always scamper over to the gallows and see which violator of the privateer's codes was having his neck stretched that week.

With such treachery forever boiling about him, Laffite surely must have missed the presence of some of the former Baratarians, such as Youx and Beluche, that had stayed behind in the old haunts of Louisiana.

Yet, leadership is an attractive force for a vessel, and as such it brought out the likes of Campbell, Churchill, Roach, Beguin, Cochrane, LaPorte, and Hill.

Laffite's offshore ventures probably peaked just before the destructive 1818 storm. The Dyer papers estimate that total prizes taken had amounted to twenty-three vessels. One would assume that it was at this period of time that the following statement was overheard and eventually published "back in the East": "Doubloons were as plentiful as biscuits in Galvez Town!" This must have been the case. Trustworthy officers such as Campbell, Churchill, etc., surely recognized that if they did nothing else but follow through on Laffite's

designs, plans, and orders, there would be no need to quibble over small pouches of coin or jewel.

And yet, to capture a prize, Laffite's captains had to put to sea. And, prizes or not, the Gulf of Mexico's waters could be treacherously demanding.

Studies show that the "boys" would succumb to the other pastimes of the island. In addition to gambling and varied debaucheries, many officers also found the hunting on the island far too good to ignore. Wildlife was plentiful, and some of the more reflective officers, such as James Campbell, used the hunting as a pause from the duties and duels. So it was that, at times, it was necessary to send "hunting" parties out just to man certain vessels.

There may also be some substance to the opinion that even the "bos" was not overly fond of life at sea. For one, the threat of capture was forever present. Second, the running of the isle's business meant more than rising each morn to check and see if the ladle were in the water-bucket. The base was nowhere near self-sufficient, so those supplies not furnished by captured vessels had to be bought and brought from elsewhere.

Also, having sailed since God only knows when, and being close to middle-aged at the time of his doing business from Galveston, Laffite more than likely had long since found the sea to not be the romantic escape over which poets have always warbled. Any person who has had to work at sea can attest to such, for man is not an albatross.

Pity the wretched offshore rig workers, not just stuck in desolate conditions but also stuck in one spot, day after day. While I was splashing around various back decks of various vessels, I occasionally rode the crew-change boat with construction-barge workers who did six-month stints on the things. Six months in the same spot or field in the Gulf of Mexico is a long time.

These offshore workers tended to either be rather quiet, or very much the opposite. And they acted the same as airline passengers, until the first hour of, say, ten-foot waves passed. Then – well, at that time, there were no seasick bags aboard crew boats.

The U.S. Coast Guard has a saying - possibly original - that touts, "Life at sea is ninety percent boredom and ten percent sheer terror." And this refers just to the weather. One can readily conjure up a scene where an officer in the "Commandante's" elite array of vessel commanders is just about to come up with the ninety-ninth version of mumblety-peg for the crew when a sail finally catches the squinting scowl of a half-mad lookout.

Whereas James Campbell at times seemed to be Laffite's ready aide at either port or starboard, one can only speculate as to which way the accolades went among the other trustworthy officers. And what led some of them to remain behind in the Galveston Isle area after the beefsteak had long since vanished?

Was the "bos" (many times dead, either by "doctored" or "third-hand" means) slipping back and forth with the same devil-may-care, devil-may-rot appearances, flung 'bout in the swamps of Louisiana? All the time? Or as his schedule permitted?

In the line of such thought, the name of "Stephen Churchill" springs up on Laffite's office chalkboard of staid officers. Who was Churchill? And is the name correct?

Nowadays (the pronunciation being "now-w-w ah-h daze"), utmost care is given to modern-day, heavy-duty watercraft which zip into, around, and back out of the oil business in the Gulf of Mexico. And such care is given especially to vessel logs, those red (or perhaps green), tightly-bound barmaids of the chart table.

Bad, if the logs show to not be in your favor; good, if they do. A vessel's log is the modern-day captain's on-board sea lawyer. Almost as reliable as Moses's tablets but not quite as heavy, these books contain not only the vessel's activities but the names and positions of crew members - and whatever else bit of fact the vessel's master deems pertinent or interesting.

Laffite was business-minded enough to form a real assembly, once set up on Galveston Isle. This led to an able and actual "stock

company," a Mr. "Ituribarri" being one of five directors. Yet, these board "officers" and other listings of such things neither included nor noted any person named Churchill.

Modern-day boat companies compile all vessel logs for the year when December 31<sup>st</sup> rolls around - or try to. Whether because Laffite was either extremely adept at attracting serendipitous women for secretaries, or because he became bored with the upkeep of the ships' logs, he leaves little mention of Mr. Churchill.

And thus begins, once again, the paradoxical mystery of the "Commandante" and his "movers." Churchill may have been on the papers of the "bos," meaning that he was included in a letter of marque's authorized endeavors, but not as a seaman, or a cook, or a cannoneer, but as a "lieutenant." Was "lieutenant" meant to be a francovian jest at the ranking systems of landlubber militias of the times?

The Laffitian humor is noted for such, assuredly, and at numerous times.

Study shows that if someone named Churchill sailed for brimstone and doubloons, it was a short and sweet sailing. He was not lost on the *Carmelita*, nor on the evasive *Devorador*.

Yet, Churchill was one of the officers to eventually end up staying in the Galveston area. Apparently capable of living with the notoriety of being one of Laffite's "boys," Churchill was in charge of running the ferry for the west end of the island. This led to the first mail route between the island and what was then known as the port and town of Velasco, now known as Freeport. There is also mention of the same Churchill and son apprehending a desperado wanted for murders in Mississippi, and turning the same over to the Sheriff of Galveston, one "W.J. Wilson." The desperado was eventually hanged back in Mississippi.

So it was said that Churchill was a man of good reputation but also "was a man who would not stand imposition and one whom it was not advisable to needlessly affront."

## WHEN DID JEAN LAFFITE LEAVE GALVESTON?

JEAN L. EPPERSON

[WITH A RELATED CITATION PROVIDED BY DR. REGINALD WILSON]

[Editor's note: two different years, 1820 and 1821, are both frequently quoted as that in which Jean Laffite abandoned his Maison Rouge and Galveston Island. Both years cannot be correct, of course, but the incorrect year (whichever it be, since the issue might never be resolved to the satisfaction of all) was at some point in the distant past noted in error, and that error has since been perpetuated through citation by subsequent writers of the work in which the original inaccuracy occurred.

The year of Laffite's departure from Galveston was the topic of the February 1997 meeting of The Laffite Society, and an abstract of that month's presentation was included in the July 1997 *The Laffite Society Chronicles*.

In this article, Ms. Epperson documents additional research into the issue. At the end of her article is appended a related citation from an issue of the *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* provided by Dr. Reginald Wilson.]

There has been much written, many discussions, and some creative conjecture about the date Jean Laffite finally abandoned Galveston Island. Did he leave in 1820 or 1821? Let's examine primary sources and statements nearest in time to the event to see if we can determine with some accuracy the correct date.

Laffite was told to leave Galveston several times by representatives of the United States government; the final time, in February, 1820, by Lieutenant Lawrence Kearny of the United States brig-of-war *Enterprise*. Lieutenant Kearny, aboard the *Enterprise* off Tortuga, wrote to Commodore Daniel Patterson on March 7, 1820, saying that he had witnessed the destruction of the commune on Galveston Island and that Laffite's house was burned. Kearny does not say he saw Laffite leave the Island but that he believes that Laffite will comply with the orders<sup>1</sup>.

Colonel Warren D.C. Hall, a veteran of the Magee-Gutierrez expedition into Texas in 1812-1813, came back to Texas in December 1815 under the command of Colonel Henry Perry at Point Bolivar. Perry and Commodore Luis Aury joined forces with Xavier Mina. Their expedition against the Spanish Royalists failed and Hall returned to Louisiana.

Hall once more arrived on Bolivar with Colonel James Long in 1820. He was left in charge of the camp when Long was absent in New Orleans on business. Hall became acquainted with Jean Laffite when Hall was preparing to vacate Galveston Island. Hall states that he and Laffite became quite friendly, visiting back and forth between Galveston and Bolivar. Hall was endeavoring to get Laffite to leave some of his possessions for the Long group.

Hall reported that Laffite left his town in ashes and departed Galveston the twelfth of May, 1820. Hall's memoirs were reported some thirty-seven years later in the *1857 Galveston City Directory*<sup>2</sup>. Thus we have a witness to the departure of Laffite but one who was reporting the event many years later.

The date of departure of Jean Laffite from Galveston was reported by Nicolas Josef de Villavaso, the Spanish Consul, as May 6, 1820, and he stated that Pierre Laffite later confirmed this date. The *Orleans Gazette* of July 13, 1820, and the *New York Advertiser* of August 18, 1820, also carried announcements of Laffite's departure from Galveston<sup>3</sup>.

Stanley Faye said that Laffite apparently did not leave Galveston until the middle of May, 1820, but New Orleans port data lists Pierre as having arrived there on March 7 on board the schooner *Pegasus*<sup>4</sup>. Captain William Mitchell of the *Pegasus* was put on trial for piracy on March 18, 1820. A letter written by Jean Laffite to M. Malus listing the articles he needed to "set sail on the seas" was among the trial documents<sup>5</sup>.

It is true that some of Laffite's men revisited the Island after Laffite's departure and that some captains came to the Island not knowing that Laffite had gone.

Henderson Yoakum's *History of Texas*, published in 1855, gives the date of March 21, 1821, as that of Laffite's final departure from Galveston aboard his ship *Fride*. Yoakum's data was based on William Bollaert's *Life of Jean Laffite*<sup>6</sup>. William Bollaert was an English journalist who visited Texas between February 1842 and July 1844. He gathered all his facts from secondhand sources and he was not above embellishing these facts to make them more interesting for the popular tabloids of the day.

Not only is Yoakum's date of March 21,

1821, as that of Laffite's departure from Galveston incorrect, there is no proof of the existence of a ship named *Pride*. Historians down to the present day have perpetuated both of these falsehoods. Warren D.C. Hall said in 1857 that Yoakum's history was full of errors too numerous to state in detail<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, primary sources agree that Laffite left his Galveston base some time in the spring of 1820 never to return.

#### Notes

1. United States Federal Archives, Record Group 45, #108, Office of Naval Records Library, Naval Records Collection, "Captains' Letters to Secretary of the Navy, 1807-1885," M-125, Roll 66, volume I, for 1820.
2. Anonymous, "Early History of Galveston," 1857 Galveston City Directory, pp. 58-63, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.
3. Stanley Faye, "The Great Stroke of Pierre Laffite," The Louisiana Historical Quarterly (July 1940), p. 823.
4. Reider and Reider, *New Orleans Ship Lists* (Metairie, LA: 1966).
5. Piracy trials, microfilm 7RA-10, "Cases of U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Louisiana," Federal Archives, Fort Worth, Texas.
6. William Bollaert, "The Life of Jean Lafitte, the Pirate of the Mexican Gulf," *Little's Living Age* (March 6,

1852), pp. 444-445.

7. Anonymous, "Early History of Galveston," 1857 Galveston City Directory, p. 62, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.

#### Related Citation of Dr. Reginald Wilson

Speaking of the vessel *Guerriere*, captained by Dominique You, in the company of another privateering ship, sailing south from the Gulf for the Caribbean, we read:

"...the *Guerriere* abandoned Aury as she had abandoned Galveston and sailed for the Yucatan Channel. On May 21 [1820], off Cape Catoche, the two vessels captured a Spanish schooner from Campeche, ordered her to Galveston and then sailed along the coast to examine the shipping of Vera Cruz. The prize captain reached Galveston two or three weeks after the brothers Laffite had evacuated the place. Therefore he had to sail away for the only prize court remaining open to him, that of Margarita Island in Venezuela<sup>1</sup>."

1. Stanley Faye, "Privateersmen of the Gulf and their Prizes," the Louisiana Historical Quarterly, Volume 22, p. 1012.

SPECIAL EVENT, TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 1997:  
DINNER PARTY AT THE EARTHMAN HOME  
*DOROTHY MCD. KARILANOVIC*

On Tuesday evening, April 8, 1997, Laffite Society members and their guests spent a memorable evening at a buffet supper hosted by Society Treasurer Jim Earthman and his wife and Society member Margaret.

The event was held at the Earthmans' historic Galveston home, an impressive Neoclassical structure built in 1906 for the Isaac H. Kempner family, leaders in Galveston's business, cultural, philanthropic, and educational affairs.

Guests were treated to a sumptuous meal catered and served in the formal dining

room by John Champeaux and Frank Petronella. The altogether pleasant evening was made especially enjoyable not only by the plentiful offering of food and drink in the comfortable Victorian setting, but by the fortuitous commingling of good friends, congenial guests, and, most especially, by the warm hospitality for which the Earthmans are noted.

At evening's end, Jim and Margaret announced that they hoped to make the occasion an annual event of the Laffite Society, to be held each April in commemoration of the birth of Jean Laffite.

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Photocopy of pencil sketch of Louis Michel Aury from The Center for American History at The University of Texas at Austin.

The Aury Papers (File #35102) contain letters to Aury's family in France and this pencil sketch of Aury when he was a young man. The papers were bought at auction from the Anderson Galleries in New York on an April 10th - the year is unreadable but is prior to 1925. [Submitted by Jean L. Epperson]

## GENERAL MEETING SUMMARIES AND FEATURED PROGRAM ABSTRACTS

The Laffite Society generally publishes in *The Laffite Society Chronicles* abstracts of featured talks presented at the General Meetings, when the nature and length of these featured presentations lend themselves to such inclusion, and when the speakers facilitate same. These abstracts might contain information which is in conflict with the opinions of others or established documentation. The material contained in this section does not, therefore, necessarily reflect the position of The Laffite Society. The Society does, however, encourage discourse regarding conflicting viewpoints, because it believes such discourse often leads to a broader and deeper understanding of the topics of discussion.

The Society recognizes that *The Laffite Society Chronicles* is its primary link with those members who do not attend monthly meetings. Therefore, even when a monthly meeting includes no featured presentation, the topics there discussed are presented in summarized fashion in this section, to impart some feeling of that meeting's content.

### Tuesday, July 8, 1997

This month's featured speaker was Laffite Society Press Director Dave Roberts, who discussed responses he had received to a recent "Letter to the Editor"-writing campaign to newspapers and other periodicals on the Gulf Coast. Among the more interesting replies he received were the following:

- A letter from Port Isabel, Texas, citing an article which appeared in the *Port Isabel-South Padre Press* in April, 1978, by Dr. James A. Hockaday, entitled "Port Isabel Past Included Explorers, Pirates, Indians." The article mentioned an "...old Laffite Well, at Laguna Vista," where the privateer filled his casks with fresh water. According to the correspondent, the well is still extant, although the water is no longer potable.
- A response from Port Lavaca, Texas, citing an article from the *Port Lavaca Wave* of September 19, 1973, entitled "Looking Back: Lafitte's Sunken Treasure Lost Forever?" by Paul Freier. The article mentions accounts of searches for Laffite's sunken ship the *Pride*, the masts of which were reported to have been seen in the Lavaca River, as well as the hunt for treasure said to have been buried nearby "in the salt flats in sight of the sunken ship, and the site marked by a 'Jacob's staff of brass.'" The correspondent extended an invitation to Laffite Society members to visit the Port Lavaca area.
- An article from *The Historian of Hancock County*, Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, from April, 1994, about a house in that area said to have been owned by Laffite. The article mentions that this story was recounted by J. Frank Dobie in his 1930 book, *Coronado's Children*. [Editor's note: a photocopy of the pertinent text, courtesy of Charles Sanders of Houston, now rests in the Laffite Society Archives, and as of this writing one copy of Dobie's *Coronado's Children* is available for sale at Laffite Society members' Kathy and Jeff Modzelewski's "Island Books at The Eiband's Gallery," 2201 Postoffice Street, Galveston, TX 77550.] According to the article, a land title of December 6, 1825, stated that "Sieur Jean Laffito" purchased property in Hancock County and "spent his last days in the 'Pirate House' on the beach of Bay St. Louis-Waveland, a house built expressly for him." The article goes on to say that, "according to more deeds made out to him," Laffite lived "in quiet retirement for about 25 years at Bay St. Louis, and was reported to have died about 1850."

After Mr. Roberts's presentation, the business portion of the meeting began with Editor of Publications Jeff Modzelewski, standing in for Treasurer Jim Earthman, reporting a current approximate balance in The Society's checking account of \$400.00.

Third Vice President Jim Nonus then spoke about information thus far gathered for a tentative three- or four-day trip to the Yucatán to visit alleged grave sites of Jean and Pierre Laffite. Discussion followed on the optimal months for the event (the informal consensus leaned toward April or May, when off-season rates would be in effect but by which time the weather would not yet have turned brutally hot and humid), and on other arrangements, such as whether to rent a van for travel along the Yucatán coast. Still to be investigated were air fares for direct flights to Mérida, capital of Yucatán State.

Mr. Nonus also noted that he hoped to arrange a talk for the August meeting of The Laffite Society by William Simpson, on the provenance of the collection of papers published as *The Journal of Jean Laffite* and now residing in the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center in Liberty, Texas. This

meeting would be held at the Simpson Gallery, just south of downtown Houston.

Regarding *The Laffite Society Chronicles*, Editor of Publications Jeff Modzelewski reported that Speedy's Kwik-Kopy of Galveston had been very accommodating in assisting The Society to continue to publish a professional-looking publication while maintaining a rein on its costs. Speedy's efforts contributed to the recent changes to double-sided printing and spiral binding. Mr. Modzelewski added a suggestion that The Society monitor closely the cost of publication of *The Chronicles* and be prepared to change to a schedule of a quarterly newsletter with one annual end-of-year *Chronicles* if necessary, as the backlogged, overdue issues of the latter, when caught up, had significantly and negatively impacted The Society's treasury.

Becki Hall, member of The Laffite Society's Archaeology Committee, stated that in her home she currently had custody of four boxes of material, excavated in the 1984 dig from the supposed site of Jean Laffite's Maison Rouge, which awaited cleaning and classification. Ms. Hall, a degreed archaeologist, opined that much of this volume consisted of items which possessed little historical worth and could be discarded, thus streamlining the handling of truly important artifacts. Ms. Hall also welcomed offers of help in the cleaning and sorting processes from interested Society members and friends.

Ms. Hall also reported that Sheldon Kindall, who directed the summer, 1996, excavation at the same site, had culled for disposal similar unimportant material collected during that dig. Ms. Hall has requested from Mr. Kindall a report on his findings. Of special note is that the excavated objects from the deepest stratum, "Level Five," of the 1984 project, are not present among the artifacts returned to Galveston from the University of Houston a few years ago. The supposition exists that these objects – which would hold the most importance, historically – may have been retained by, and are still housed at, the University of Houston's Department of Archaeology, under whose aegis the 1984 dig was conducted.

A suggestion was offered that a future meeting of The Laffite Society be devoted to a cleaning and classification session for the artifacts recovered from both the 1984 and 1996 excavations, to move them along the path toward analysis.

Society member Dr. Reginald Wilson displayed to attendees some colored photographs made by Oklahoma Society member Pam Keyes of a medal commemorating the Battle of New Orleans, which Ms. Keyes had recently purchased. Ms. Keyes had recognized the medal from a description she noticed in *Medals of the War of 1812*.

#### Tuesday, August 12, 1997, and Sunday, August 17, 1997

In lieu of a formal monthly meeting, Laffite Society members and guests met this month on the standard meeting date (the second Tuesday of the month, August 12, 1997) at The Simpson Gallery in Houston, Texas, to hear Mr. William Simpson, noted antique and rare document dealer, discuss his purchase of *The Journal of Jean Laffite* from John Andrechyne Laflin, alias John A. Laffite. See in this issue the article entitled "The Acquisition of the Laffite Journal," edited by Laffite Society member Don C. Marler.

Five days later, on Sunday, August 17, 1997, Society members Joe and Judy Dolfi hosted a barbecue lunch at their home in Tiki Island, on the mainland just across the causeway from Galveston Island. During the course of the afternoon, attendees made excursions by automobile to the not-too-distant Campbell Cemetery at Virginia Point, site of the grave (although no longer discernible) of James Campbell, a captain in Laffite's fleet. It is hoped that an article describing this special event will be published in a future issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*.

#### Tuesday, September 9, 1997, and Tuesday, September 16, 1997

On Tuesday, September 9, 1997, in lieu of a formal monthly meeting, The Laffite Society and guests attempted to make a waterborne tour of Galveston's harbor aboard the MV *Seagull*. When inclement weather forced the cancellation of the event, the group repaired to The Eiband's Gallery to dry off, re-group, and enjoy refreshments. One week later the elements were more favorable, and the excursion was undertaken and completed. See in this issue the article entitled "Galveston Harbor Tour Aboard the *Seagull*" by Society member and professional seaman Wil Zapalac.

#### Tuesday, October 14, 1997

This month, The Laffite Society held a very special event and meeting. Texas author Jack C. Ramsay, Jr., along with his wife Karin, honored The Society by traveling from Arlington, Texas, to

participate in a book-signing at Society members Kathy and Jeff Modzelewski's "Island Books at The Eiband's Gallery."

Mr. Ramsay inscribed for enthusiastic purchasers some thirty copies of the first edition of his work entitled *Jean Laffite, Prince of Pirates* (Eakin Press, Austin, TX, 1996), a book on which twelve years of research were expended.

This non-fiction book is significant for various reasons. First, new books presenting fresh material on Jean Laffite are not often published in the present day. Second, Mr. Ramsay possesses significant academic credentials as a historian, and he has included in his book copious footnotes and a substantial bibliography that may be of interest to history buffs interested in not just Gulf Coast, but indeed United States, history of the first two decades of the nineteenth century.

In addition, *Jean Laffite, Prince of Pirates*, is a scholarly work which steers clear - as does The Laffite Society - of the temptation to attract attention by sensationalizing the theme of buried treasure at the expense of hard fact or at least reputable research.

After the book-signing, and following a warm introduction by Third Vice President Jim Nonus, Mr. Ramsay addressed The Society as its featured speaker for the evening. He spoke to a standing-room-only crowd of some fifty-five members, guests, and visitors about his investigation of Laffite, and answered numerous questions from the attendees. Mr. Ramsay talked of the thought and purposes behind his research into the privateer: of his intention to sort out what seemed to be truth or at least plausible information from Lyle Saxon's 1930 work, *Lafitte the Pirate*, and to present a responsible portrayal of history. Mr. Ramsay stated that he had attempted to obtain a sense of the psyche - of the heart and soul - of the buccaneer.

For an overview of this work, see in the July, 1997, issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles* the article entitled "A Chapter-by-Chapter Synopsis of Jack C. Ramsay, Jr.'s *Jean Laffite, Prince of Pirates*, with Some Introductory Comments." For information about purchasing Mr. Ramsay's book, those interested may contact The Laffite Society at P.O. Box 1325, Galveston, TX 77553, or telephone Kathy Modzelewski at The Eiband's Gallery, (409) 763-5495.

To begin the business portion of the meeting, Editor of Publications Jeff Modzelewski, in Treasurer Jim Earthman's absence, reported that after expenses of \$330.00 for production and postage for the latest issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*, The Society's bank account reflected a current approximate balance of \$420.00. Mr. Modzelewski then distributed to attending members the aforementioned issue of *The Chronicles*, invited those interested to submit articles covering several recent special events, and suggested that The Society consider charging a nominal fee to cover costs for the sale of issues of *The Chronicles* to non-members, since requests for such purchases have become more frequent.

Third Vice President Jim Nonus and Editor of Publications Jeff Modzelewski acknowledged the efforts of those who helped to make the book-signing a success by providing assistance with its administration, refreshments, etc.

Press Director Dave Roberts reported that he continued to work on the preparation of radio vignettes about Jean Laffite for airing on local radio. Mr. Roberts asked for suggestions for background music, and Society member Tom Oertling offered to provide tape recordings of sea chanteys which might be suitable.

Society members Robert Vogel and Kathleen Taylor invited The Laffite Society and guests to a weekend visit to Lake Charles, Louisiana, in March, 1998, for a field trip to Bayou Contraband and environs. They also talked of their intention to return to the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico in January, 1998, to do further research on the alleged grave sites of Jean and Pierre Laffite.

#### Tuesday, November 11, 1997

This month's meeting featured no special presentation, but instead dealt with various Society business issues.

To begin, Second Vice President Kathy Modzelewski, standing in for Treasurer Jim Earthman, reported a balance of \$698.00 in The Society's bank account.

President R. Dale Olson reminded attendees of the upcoming annual banquet of the Louisiana Historical Society to take place in New Orleans on Thursday, January 8, 1998. Mr. Olson has been asked to be the principal speaker at the affair. He extended an invitation to attend, on behalf of the Louisiana Historical Society, to all Laffite Society members, and he promised forthcoming details about lodging options.

Second Vice President Kathy Modzelewski passed out copies of an itinerary for a Lake Charles field trip scheduled for Friday – Sunday, March 13 – 15, 1998, prepared by Robert Vogel and Kathleen Taylor.

Society member Dr. Reginald Wilson informed the group that he had submitted copies of examples of Laffite's handwriting to a Mr. Farrell, a handwriting expert who formerly worked with the FBI. Mr. Farrell had responded that, in order to make a thorough analysis, he would require original documents. Society member Charles Kelly advised the group that he is acquainted with a professional graphologist whom he would contact regarding this project.

Society Secretary Dorothy McD. Karilanovic commented on a letter from French member Patrick Laffite regarding his impressions of the handwriting alleged to be that of Jean Laffite in *The Journal of Jean Laffite: The Privateer-Patriot's Own Story*. Mr. Laffite obtained a copy of *The Journal* in French and is in the process of analyzing it. Mr. Laffite opined that the handwriting in the original document is not that of Jean Laffite, but is that of someone whose native tongue was not French, Spanish, or Basque. Mr. Laffite is preparing to author a book on his findings.

Ms. Karilanovic also commented on continued correspondence she has maintained since mid-August, 1997, with Richard B. Smith, the representative for a group of British researchers in West Yorkshire, England, who call themselves "The Company." The group claims to have decoded the Thomas Beale codex, which is purported to date from the 1820's and to contain information on the life of Jean Laffite and his family, as well as clues to the location of a vast amount of treasure. The original letter received from The Company was a solicitation of participants for an expedition to recover this alleged treasure. Mr. Smith told Ms. Karilanovic by telephone on Monday, October 27, 1997, that his group intends to share some information with The Laffite Society as such is revealed to them through their studies. Mr. Smith maintained that the recovery of hidden treasure is not their main objective; rather, their chief purpose is to give Jean Laffite the recognition they believe he merits as a political idealist and a supporter of French Republican goals in the struggle to resettle exiled French in America.

Bill Reeves, friend of The Laffite Society and current president of the Louisiana Historical Society, has requested that The Society give some consideration to the items it might wish to lend to a Laffite Exhibit which Mr. Reeves hopes to mount in New Orleans. To facilitate suggestions, Society President R. Dale Olson gave a short talk to attendees on the steps involved in the technique called "brainstorming." First Vice President Jean Epperson then recorded the suggestions of participants as they responded to questions posed by Mr. Olson.

Ms. Epperson displayed a photocopy of a pencil sketch of Louis Aury that she had obtained from the archives of the Center for American History at the University of Texas in Austin, which she said she would submit to Mr. Reeves for inclusion in the Laffite Exhibit. This sketch is reproduced in this issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*.

Finally, plans were begun for the next month's traditional "Holiday Social."

#### Thursday, December 4, 1997

As in Decembers past, the December, 1997, reunion of The Laffite Society eschewed a formal monthly meeting to instead hold its annual "Holiday Social." To accommodate members with early travel plans, the event was moved forward from what would have been the standard meeting date of Tuesday, December 9, 1997, to Thursday, December 4, 1997. As usual, a good time was enjoyed by all.

# THE ACQUISITION OF THE LAFFITE JOURNAL

EDITED BY DON C. MARLER

[Editor's note: On Tuesday evening, August 12, 1997, members and guests of The Laffite Society met at The Simpson Gallery in Houston, Texas, to hear Mr. William Simpson discuss his purchase of *The Journal of Jean Laffite* and other Laffite-related memorabilia from Mr. John Laflin.

Mr. John Howells, who did much of the early work of trying to authenticate the *Journal*, attended the meeting, and, after Mr. Simpson spoke, Mr. Howells presented an account of these authentication efforts.

Laffite Society member and avid researcher Dr. Reginald Wilson recorded on audio tape the remarks of Messrs. Simpson and Howells on that evening, and it is upon that recording that this article is based.

Considerable thought was given to how to present this material. Mr. Simpson's remarks made up the bulk of the evening's presentation and, though charming and entertaining, contained numerous digressions and parenthetical statements as well as historical data. Since the objective in requesting that Mr. Simpson address The Society was to obtain a factual account of the acquisition of the *Journal*, a word-for-word transcription of his talk would thus have contained extraneous text not suitable for this publication. It was thus decided to edit his remarks so as to distill the factual matter from the sum of fact, opinion, and commentary.

What follows is largely a close paraphrasing of the spoken remarks of Mr. Simpson and Mr. Howells. Editorial notes have been inserted in brackets.

To avoid possible confusion when reading the account that follows, it should be noted that the aforementioned John Laflin used the alias John Laffite and believed himself to be the great-grandson of the privateer Jean Laffite.]

## William Simpson's Remarks

About 1969, Mr. Richard Santos, from the Bexar Archives in San Antonio, called to say that an old man [John Laflin, alias John Laffite] had come to him with some papers. Santos had had time to go through some of them and said, "It is the most astonishing thing I have ever seen, because some of the things in these papers could only be proven by things in my archives, and I can assure you nothing has been salted here." The term "salted" refers to something being put

in rather than taken out.

I left Houston and went to Santos's office immediately. Santos confirmed the things he had relayed on the phone, and he warned me that Laflin was somewhat strange. Santos said he had also called Mr. John Jenkins in Austin and that the old man [Laflin] was headed there.

I left and met with Jenkins in Austin and later met with Laflin. The latter was a very curious and highly paranoid man.

I had no feeling at the time that Santos was acting as a paid agent, but I did feel that he hoped to put people together to purchase the documents and possibly get one or two pieces for his archive. I am not sure that was ever articulated.

I took Jenkins aside, and we agreed to "go halves" on buying the documents.

I made some judgments about Laflin. He kept referring to people who had attempted to steal his collection. He did not want to show us the original collection, but he had numerous photocopies of it which he was willing to display to us.

I refused, saying I could not sell from a photocopy and would not buy from one. I told him, if he were serious about selling, to produce his collection. He could stand and watch [our review] or hire armed guards to watch.

Laflin referred to some people named Thompson – I believe they lived in New Orleans. He had a low opinion of these Thompsons. He said that they had put him up for a time, and Laflin believed that they did so in a scheme to attempt to steal his collection.

Laflin also said that at a radio station (later I learned it was a television station, but he said radio station) part of his collection had been burned. He did not mention that there had been a fire at his home earlier that had burned some of it; I learned about this from Dr. Reginald Wilson. Laflin did not mention it.

Laflin also told us that Charles Hamilton, the autograph dealer, had seen the collection and had attempted to steal it. I do not remember if Laflin said that Hamilton [was actually successful in stealing] some of the documents or only attempted to steal them.

Laflin finally agreed to bring in the collection. It was in the same box in which it was delivered to Mr. Howells a few years later.

The John Laflin that I met had been a

railroad man. His hands were quite coarse, heavy and gnarled. He was not a bookish man. He would have been incapable of faking the collection. He was not, by any stretch of the imagination, what we would call a "literate" man. The Thompsons said he used to go down the streets of New Orleans trying to buy old paper so he could fake these documents. Nonsense! the man would have been incapable - totally, totally incapable - of it.

Jenkins and I agreed to buy the collection for \$15,000. Jenkins was going to pay \$7,500 and I \$7,500. Laflin refused my check, saying, "Mr. Santos sent me to this man, but I don't know you." Jenkins paid him the full amount and I paid Jenkins for half.

Jenkins and I agreed that we would not sell individual documents, but would sell the collection as a whole. Jenkins agreed to market the collection. I later became aware of an agreement between Jenkins and Mr. Santos that Santos would act as agent for Jenkins. At the time, I knew nothing of this, nor did Santos mention it to me, nor did Jenkins mention this.

The collection was not in my hands. It was in Mr. Jenkins's hands. I did not bother to inventory the collection. I assume what I ended up with was the entire collection. I didn't go through the entire collection.

About a year later, Mr. Jenkins had difficulty with cash flow, and he called wanting to sell his half of the collection. I bought it, and the day it arrived my wife and I left for the Cabildo in New Orleans, where we were told we would find so much Laffite material we would be bowled over. They were able to produce one photostat with a signature. The handwriting matched that in my collection.

We were then sent to the university at Baton Rouge, which "was swimming in Laffite material." They had none.

Then I went to the Rosenberg Library in Galveston. They were highly skeptical of my collection and critical of John Laflin. The archivist fished out an old *Time Magazine* article with the wrong picture of a Mr. Laffite with an account of him being a mail fraud. Later, I learned that *Time* had mixed up the pictures. They showed this Mr. Laffite's picture and the article was about another Laffite who was a criminal in New Orleans - a waiter in New Orleans.

So I put my collection away thinking I might not have an authentic collection. For more than a year I never looked at the collection.

Then John Howells came along and took the collection and did all the work. In the Federal Archives in Fort Worth he found records of a court case in a sealed packet which contained a signature of Jean Laffite. We hired an FBI handwriting expert. This man determined that the handwriting in the collection and that found in the sealed packet in Fort Worth were by one and the same hand.

Governor Daniels and Mrs. Daniels came and expressed interest in the collection in 1975. I had the collection for about six years. Later, Governor Daniels came to this room. We sat at a table which had been in the Parliament; I had it shipped here from England. Governor Daniels, Mr. Howells, my son, myself, and maybe one other person who came with Governor Daniels, sat at that table. I set a price of \$20,000. I was not trying to make money off it, but wanted something for my friend who had worked so hard on it. Governor Daniels bought the collection. He later told me he believed in the collection. In 1978 he donated it to the Sam Houston Regional Library at Liberty.

Charles Hamilton wrote some very derogatory things about me and about the collection in one of his books. Hamilton, according to John Laflin, wanted the collection on consignment; he would have sold it on consignment. John Laflin would have none of that.

#### John Howells's Remarks

In 1973 I borrowed the Laffite *Journal* from Mr. Simpson, who had purchased it together with John Jenkins from John Laflin, alias John Laffite, the great-grandson of the pirate Jean Laffite. I began to attempt to locate a known signature of Jean Laffite.

At the Federal Archives in Fort Worth I found case #1440, "U.S. vs. John Desfarges." Desfarges was captain of the privateer ship *Le Brave* which was owned by Jean Laffite. The document contained the "division of spoils" in Laffite's own handwriting and signature. Desfarges and his crew had been captured at the mouth of the Mississippi River attacking a Spanish ship. They were taken to New Orleans where they were tried, convicted and hanged. These documents had been in the Federal Archives since 1819, so I knew they were genuine.

Later I went to the Texas State Archives and examined the Lamar papers. These papers were in the hands of the Lamar family from

around 1840 to 1890 when they were sold to the state of Texas, where they have been since. I examined documents #19 and #24, which were letters from Jean Laffite to General Long. They were given to Lamar by Jane Long.

Mr. Ralph Queen, a nationally known handwriting expert, was hired to examine the signatures and the handwriting of these documents. Queen had 40 years' experience with the Houston Police Department, the State of Texas, and the Federal Government, and was a member of the International Association of Identification.

Mr. Queen examined the *Journal* several times between June and September of 1974. Two

pages of the *Journal* containing dates and signatures of Laffite were removed for intense examination. One was found to have been written with iron oxide ink and the other with \_\_\_\_\_ [word unintelligible] ink. These signatures were compared to the known authentic signatures. The handwriting in the *Journal* when compared to the known signatures of Laffite was declared authentic.

[Mr. Howells then proceeded to give details of the evidence leading to this conclusion. These details have been recorded in writing in another work and are not repeated in this article.]

SPECIAL EVENT, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1997:  
GALVESTON HARBOR TOUR ABOARD THE *SEAGULL*  
WIL ZAPALAC

On Tuesday evening, September 16, 1997, members and guests of the Laffite Society ventured out *en masse* for a most interesting tour of the harbor of Galveston Island, Texas, Jean Laffite's privateering base from 1817 to circa 1820. What made the tour all the more interesting was the fact that it was conducted by boat aboard the MV *Seagull*.

The *Seagull* is a single-deck pontoon boat fifty-five feet in length. It is equipped with twin, 200-horsepower Evinrude engines, modern-day navigation equipment, head (that's "bathroom" for landlubbers), ample seating, wet bar, and various other conveniences.

The original harbor tour was to have taken place on the preceding Tuesday, September 9, 1997, but the spirit of Laffite must have been restless, for the weather on that day produced a raging set of thunderstorms that swept across the bay and island of Galveston, spawned by a blustery norther. The Laffite group, ever prudent, retreated to its usual gathering place at The Eiband's Gallery, 2201 Postoffice Street, to re-group, re-plan, dry out, and enjoy some of the refreshments that had been originally packed into coolers and cartons for enjoyment "at sea."

One week later, the elements were more favorable and the tour was undertaken. With an autumn full moon edging up from the eastern end of the isle, the *Seagull* slipped out of its dock at the Galveston Yacht Club basin.

The first event, albeit unplanned, was the sighting of a school of dolphin. In teams of mothers and calves, the creatures, which are said to carry the souls of demised mariners, romped to and fro as Laffite Society members and guests "oohed" and "aahed" appreciatively.

The tour then headed for the remains of the historic concrete ship *Selma*. This vessel, built in 1918, is indeed constructed of concrete, actually sailed, and now rests near shore at the eastern end of Pelican Island, just north of Galveston's harbor. A World War I steel shortage seems to have been the main reason for the choice of the ship's building material.

Having suffered irreparable damage from a grounding and a subsequent dry-dock accident, the vessel was scuttled in 1923 but remains viewable since it sits in water just a few feet deep. In the years after its scuttling, the *Selma* is reputed to have been the hideout for

hermits, World War II spies, and "others." The *Seagull* was able to get close enough to the *Selma* that many of those on board reached out and touched its ancient, barnacled starboard side.

Under way again, the *Seagull* headed for yet another unusual site, the University of Texas Medical Branch's "Face on the Wall." The story behind this "attraction" is the following.

Several years ago, a mysterious image was seen on the exterior wall of a modern UTMB building sitting on the waterfront that was visible from both land and water. The image was more than a few feet in size and so became quite noticeable. Most viewers described the image as resembling a man's face. When press concerning the novelty apparently did not sit well with university officials, they hired someone to use strong acid-cleaning methods to scrub the image off the building.

However, just a few weeks later, the same image reappeared on a lower story of the same building, directly below the place the original image had occupied. Stain, phenomenon, or whatever, the "face" still remains to this day. It seems, to this writer, to resemble a man's visage with a strong chin and a slight smile.

There are other side stories that go with the matter - some funny, some not so funny. One of the latter group involves a woman who died while trying to view the image from her automobile. She drove around the building after dark and, in the poor light cast by the night sky and the few lights burning in the surrounding warehouses, the woman apparently became disoriented, drove off into the water, and drowned.

Departing the site of the spectral image, our group sailed gamely on, the orange glow of a huge, ominous, full moon heightened by the quickly-disappearing September setting sun. Once back into the harbor's shipping channel, the *Seagull* made a turn to port. Across the channel from this point, on Pelican Island, might have lay the dueling fields set up by Laffite - perhaps his answer to lawsuit abuse and finger-pointing!

The next stop was the berth and dock area for Galveston's "Mosquito Fleet." The "Mosquito Fleet" is a small fleet of even smaller shrimp boats, nestled in a tiny inset of the harbor,

only a few blocks from the actual location of Laffite's famous "Maison Rouge" (although Laffite might have actually docked *his* fleet of ships more to the east of this current-day mooring). Various unscrupulous business heads have tried over the years to force the "Mosquito Fleet" to move, but without success.

While the *Seagull* did a lazy turnabout in this "hidey hole" for shrimpers, our tour guide, Victor Lang, pointed out several birds indigenous to the area, as they roosted in the riggings of shrimp boats. It is unknown how many slumbering shrimpers were awakened by the chatter of The Laffite Society and guests, but this writer noted no objects hurled at our departing wake.

It should be noted that the aforementioned Mr. Lang is a most efficient and humorous guide. Outfitted with a wireless microphone headset which enabled him to bound about from gunnel to bow to stern to gunnel, Victor kept the participants forever informed and entertained.

From the shrimper haven the *Seagull* headed west, past the famous Galveston Isle sailing vessel *Elissa* and along the shipping docks.

To add to a night of "unusualities," two American-flagged deep-sea vessels arrived in port during the tour, each making ready to dock with the assistance of harbor tugs. As mentioned by our tour guide, due to the small size of the American merchant marine fleet, *any* appearance of its vessels is a welcome sight.

The *Seagull* then made its way to the odiferous sulfur dock and the bridge that connects Galveston Island to Pelican Isle, and, making another slow turn of one hundred eighty degrees across from the Texas A&M maritime training ship and campus, headed back for smooth docking at its berth.

The courteous and able captain of the *Seagull* is one Ron Mozara, assisted by competent and cordial deckhand Cecil Robles. Captain Mozara informed this writer that an additional vessel, *Seagull II*, has been built and will soon be pressed into service. This particular vessel will be of a two-tiered, catamaran style, able to roam forty-five miles offshore, with a capacity of eighty passengers.

The *Seagull's* tour coordinator, Amy Phillips, made the trip as well. Ms. Phillips ably demonstrated her substantial administrative abilities in arranging for the original sailing date, canceling that date due to the inclement weather, and then re-booking the tour for the subsequent week. She also attracted attention with her attractive necklace composed of "pieces of eight." This writer was, unfortunately, unable to gain any samples of said pieces of eight with which to start his own collection!

The hardy Laffite Society members and guests who were eventually successful in sailing on the cruise on the make-up date (and we extend our sympathies to those who were unable to be part of the re-scheduled fun and entertainment) included the following: Don Birkholtz, Bobby Boyd, Jim and Margaret Earthman, Bill and Bernadette Foley, Jeanette Haydel, John Hunger, Dorothy McD. Karilanovic, Nelson Leissner, Bill Leopold, Don and Sybil Marler, Louise Martin, Jeff and Kathy Modzelewski, Jim Nonus, Susan Baker Olsen, Don and Joy Peak, Ms. Potter, Dick and Marjorie Rasche, Dave and Ginny Roberts, Christa Sykes, and Judy Waggoner.

The success of this tour gave the group hope that another would be planned for some time in the future. For tour information for the general public, those interested may telephone (409) 765-1700.

# WELCOME, NEW LAFFITIANS

JULY 1, 1997 - DECEMBER 31, 1997

Linda Christman-Pitts  
Houston, Texas

Kenneth Deaton  
Galveston, Texas

Aaron and Gina Martin  
Alvin, Texas

Louise Martin  
Galveston, Texas

Sam Zaborowski  
LaPorte, Texas

## CALENDAR

General meetings of The Laffite Society are held on the second Tuesday of each month at 6:00 p.m. at The Eiband's Gallery, 2201 Postoffice Street, Galveston, TX, 77550, (409) 763-5495. Many of the meetings feature interesting and informative presentations by member or guest speakers. The exception is the December meeting, the annual "Holiday Social," which is an evening of food, drink, and entertaining conversation in a relaxed and festive setting.

Board of Directors meetings are scheduled for the first month of each calendar quarter (January, April, July, and October) on the same day as that month's general meeting and normally either precede or follow same. Additional Board of Directors meetings may be scheduled at the Board's discretion.

In addition to the general meetings, one or

more special events are normally scheduled during the year. Examples of such special events which have taken place include the September 1997 Galveston harbor tour aboard the MV *Seagull*, and the October 1997 book-signing by Jack C. Ramsay, Jr., of his work, *Jean Laffite, Prince of Pirates*, both of which are discussed in more detail elsewhere in this issue of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*.

Inquiries about upcoming special events may be directed to The Laffite Society, P.O. Box 1325, Galveston, TX, 77553, or to Second Vice President Kathy Modzelewski c/o The Eiband's Gallery at (409) 763-5495. The Laffite Society attempts to mail information to members and interested parties on the Society's mailing list as special event details are determined.

## SPONSORSHIP OF MONTHLY GENERAL MEETING SPEAKERS

Since its inception, a special feature of The Laffite Society has been a presentation at monthly meetings by a Laffite Society member or guest speaker.

In an effort to augment the pool of available speakers, The Society began a program of "sponsorships" in which the expenses of guest speakers are paid by donations from individual members.

Given that all members of The Society do not enjoy equal access to meetings due to their distances from Galveston, it was felt by the Board that any expenses incurred relative to a guest speaker should not be taken from the general fund.

Sponsorships in the suggested amount of

\$20.00 each are available to members who wish to make such donations. While speakers themselves do not receive an honorarium, accommodations and other expenses incurred during travel are underwritten by The Laffite Society through these sponsorships of its members.

Members purchasing sponsorships are given special recognition at the appropriate meeting, and in the pages of *The Laffite Society Chronicles*. Persons wishing to make suggestions regarding future speakers should contact The Laffite Society at P.O. Box 1325, Galveston, TX, 77553, or telephone Kathy Modzelewski at The Eiband's Gallery, (409) 763-5495.

THE LAFFITE SOCIETY  
 BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
 AUGUST 1996 - JULY 1998

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MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

The Laffite Society is a not-for-profit organization devoted to the study of the privateers Jean and Pierre Laffite and their contemporaries, and to the geographical locales and chronological era associated with them.

Annual dues are as follows:

Student .....	\$ 15.00
Senior (Over 65) .....	15.00
Institution .....	15.00
Individual .....	30.00
Family .....	35.00
Sustaining Member .....	100.00
Life Membership (One Payment) .....	350.00

THANK YOU FROM THE SOCIETY

To Mr. and Mrs. William Simpson, for hosting The Society's August 12, 1997, meeting at The Simpson Gallery, and to Mr. Simpson and Society member John Howells for addressing our group at same.

To Joe and Judy Dolfi, for hosting the August 17, 1997, barbecue for The Society at their home.

To Lyda Ann Thomas, Amy Phillips, Victor Lang, Ron Mozara, and Cecil Robles, for their hospitality in making the September, 1997, harbor tour aboard the *Seagull* a pleasant and informative event.

To Arriene Kaplan and the staff at Speedy's Kwik Kopy in Galveston, Texas, for working with The Society to keep costs under control while still producing publications with a quality look.

To Jack and Karin Ramsay, for making the October 14, 1997, book-signing a grand success, and the following meeting the best attended of The Society's history.

To Society member Andy Hall, for launching the Society on the Internet by designing its Web page.