

THE LAFFITE STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER

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PAM KEYES
Editor

great stamp campaign

How many of you are interested in attracting national attention toward Jean Laffite?

There is a simple and cheap way that it can be accomplished, but like all worthy endeavors, it will require a bit of work from everyone involved.

Not many people know that the U.S. Postal Service has a committee which selects stamp topics from suggestions made by individuals, but such is the case.

The proposal is simply this: make write-in suggestions to the Postal Service asking that Laffite be honored with a stamp and state your reasons for the recommendation.

It is the editor's opinion that such an honor is long overdue for Laffite. Though he was a smuggler, Laffite's loyalty to the United States during the

politically complex days immediately before the British attack on New Orleans deserves recognition. Without Laffite's hidden stockpiles of flints, muskets and gunpowder, Jackson might not have won the Battle of New Orleans. And then where would we have been? Under the Union Jack, most likely.

The Battle of New Orleans was recognized with a commemorative stamp on its sesquicentennial in 1965, and Jackson has been featured on several stamps through the years. But Laffite's visage has been on no stamp to date.

The Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee, composed of 15 persons from outside the Postal Service, meet six times a year to review suggestions received (approximately 3,000 each year) and to recommend subjects and designs to

the Postmaster General. Fewer than 20 commemorative issues are used each year.

The editor is not the first member of the Laffite Study Group to make a stamp suggestion. The General Bernardo Galvez stamp issued in 1980 was the result of a suggestion made in 1973-4 by someone who saw a copy of Marcha de Galvez, a booklet for the Baton Rouge Bicentennial which was written by LSG president Dr. Jack D.L. Holmes (or "Sir Jack"). The USPS had been looking for a Hispanic subject.

So, although it might be a few years before you see a Laffite stamp, it will be worth it.

Plans for the campaign call for everyone to write in a letter of recommendation to the USPS.

(Cont. on Page 3)

jean laffite & the press

It is a fact that Jean Laffite was interested in newspapers, and evidence of this can be seen in the following, a letter to the Louisiana Gazette which he signed "Napoleon, Jr." Vincent Nolte, an arch-enemy of Laffite's, noted in his autobiography that Jean had a habit of writing letters to the paper under the aforementioned name.

Communication: Mr. M'Keehan,

It is the duty of every good man to prevent monopoly, as far as in his power; therefore please to inform the public that several rich prizes have lately been brought to Grand Isle (regularly called Barrataria) by the remains of my uncle's faithful band of loyal subjects. The arrival of those rich prizes has been kept pretty much a secret, by a certain class monopolizing gentry in and near this city, many of whom have departed to Grand Isle to secure good bargains.

Signed Napoleon, Junior.

**** The letter appeared August 18, 1814.

"DR. STRANGEBREED, OR HOW I STOPPED WORRYING AND LEARNED TO LOVE LAFFITE"

By Sir Jack D.L. Holmes, Ph.D., O.I.C.
President of the L.S.G.

One climbs a mountain or swims a sea because they are there. A Laffite fan or aficionado does the same thing. And what a bunch of Laffites we have!

Bernardo Lafite was a soldier in the militia stationed at the Spanish Fort Carlos III of Arkansas in July, 1780. Elias Lafita was a corporal-first-class in the Pointe Coupee Militia from January 1, 1800. Ah, but the creme de la creme of the noble Laffite line just has to be our swashbuckling hero, Jean Laffite.

But which one! In the Mexican Archives, Seccion de Historia, Vol. 502, folios 151-262, there is a fascinating collection (or expediente) of documents concerning the role of Jean Lafita in the struggle between Mexico and Spain for the former's independence, 1810-1821. It was a story which has intrigued countless people from time immemorial. In 1940, Charles Ransdell Jr. told us "Why Jean Lafitte (sic) Became a Pirate." James Edward Parkin thought Jean Lafitte (sic) was good enough for a master's thesis at SMU in 1951. We are told, also that "The Pirate House" between Waveland and Bay St. Louis, Miss., was a fine old southern plantation with wide verandas, dormer windows, and wrought iron all built in 1802. "The world famous Jean Lafitte, born of a French father and a Spanish Jewess mother, supposedly had a secret tunnel from this place to transfer his loot to his boats," in nostalgic treks "Along the Old Spanish Trail."

But fun-time really comes when we look at the remarkable source on French troops who helped the U.S. win its independence, Les combattants francais de la guerre americaine, 1778-1783 (Paris, 1903). Are

you Laffite fans braced for this one?

Jean Lafitte, born in Aurignac, near Saint-Sever in 1755, joined on July 12, 1775, and was killed in action aboard the Tonnant on October 19, 1779. (p.310)

Jean Lafite was born in Beaumarchais, Gascogne, in 1746, and joined the military on June 18, 1777. (p.275)

Jean Lafite was born at Marpats, Gascogne, in 1744, enlisted on April 21, 1773, discharged on September 8, 1783. (p.247)

Jean Lafitte, dit La Grenade, was born in Carcassonne in 1747 and enlisted October 24, 1766. He was killed in action on June 18, 1784 at Uzes. (p.244)

Will the real Jean Lafitte stand up? Maybe he is the lieutenant in the second company of New Orleans Militia, as established by the Spanish Governor Alexander O'Reilly, on February 12, 1770. If we look through the New Orleans Cabildo records we see both Juan and Jean, LaFita and Lafitte, respectively, cadet and later lieutenant of militia and merchant (Ah, Ha!) who posted a \$1,000 bond and supplied gold and silver to currency-barren New Orleans during the Spanish dominion.

And there, my friends and fellow-aficionados, lies the secret in why I am Dr. Strangebreed, alias Sir Jack, how I stopped worrying about who the real Jean Laffite was, or why the new museum in lower Louisiana uses the wrong spelling. I dream the impossible dream: I shall capture the true Jean Laffite in legend and lore, will revive him and make his name a watchword of American Folklore!

Birmingham, Alabama

Jan. 7, 1981

mysteries

There is a tantalizing account in Saxon's "Lafitte the Pirate" of a miniature portrait of Pierre Laffite which the author had the good fortune to see.

Saxon writes that the painting shows Pierre "as a full-blooded young gentleman in a bottle-green coat and lace frills. He has large, dark eyes with a thread of white showing beneath the pupil; his hair is light brown and grows low on his forehead; he wears it parted in the middle and drawn back over his ears."

At the time the book was written (1930), the rare miniature was owned by James B. Pelletier of New Orleans. Where it is today is anyone's guess.

In Ray Thompson's "The Land of Lafitte the Pirate" we are shown the photo of a dress sword supposedly owned by Jean Laffite. In 1943, a Judge T. Mercedes Adams of Grand Isle owned it, but the present whereabouts of this possibly important Laffite relic are a mystery.

Anyone with information on either of the above or those who have quests and queries of their own are invited to write to the editor at 320 I N.W., Miami Okla. 74354.

Twelve skeletons were recently discovered about three feet below the surface of a plot of land owned by Stephen Stanich in Rockport, Texas.

Stanich had no idea of the origin of the brittle bones but speculated that they might be connected to "Jean Lafitte and his pirates" who "Used to be in and out of here (Rockport)."

Stanich said the discovery gave him the creeps but added, "I'm hoping to find a pot of gold."

The skeletons are much more likely to be those of the cannabilistic Karankawa Indians, a tribe which roamed the coastal area in Laffite's time.

It is doubtful that the true origin of the Rockport mystery skeletons will be discerned.

LSG MEMBERSHIPS & SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Laffite Study Group was formed in 1975 for the purpose of uniting persons interested in Jean Laffite's role in American history, folklore and literature.

Members receive the semi-annual Life and Times of Jean Laffite, a collection of notes and papers, and the quarterly Newsletter.

Dues are: regular, \$6 (\$7.50 outside U.S.) a year; sustaining, \$20, and life, \$100. Non-members such as schools, museums, etc. can subscribe to the Newsletter for \$2 a year.

Membership dues or subscriptions should be sent to John L. Howells, Secretary-Treasurer, LSG, 2570 Kevin Lane, Houston, Texas 77043.

News and/or letters for the Newsletter should be sent to Pam Keyes, 320 I N.W., Miami, Okla. 74354.

Papers and longer items should be sent to Robert Vogel, Editor, LTJL, 6971 Homestead Ave. So., Cottage Grove, Mn. 55016.

Deadline for the Spring issue of the Newsletter is

STAMP CAMPAIGN (Cont. from p. 1)

Also, if possible, see if you can persuade a friend or two to write in letters also. It is in this way that a support pyramid is born.

Suggestions for a Lafite stamp should be made to;

CITIZENS' STAMP ADVISORY
COMMITTEE

c/o General Manager

U.S. Postal Service
Washington, D.C. 20260

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SOUTHEASTERN

BORDERLANDS

Historian Dr. Michael Scardaville is interested in forming an organization dedicated to the study of the southeastern borderlands. The organization would include historians, archaeologists, archivists, geographers, historic sites specialists and interpreters, librarians, museum curators and others interested in a greater understanding of lands formerly held by Spain, France or England in the southeastern United States.

The organization could arrange for conferences and symposia and arrange for publication of papers resulting from such meetings.

Persons interested in the new association are invited to write to Dr. Scardaville, Historian, Historic St. Augustine Preservation Board, St. Augustine, Fla. 32084

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LOST ADDRESSES:

The LSG needs current addresses for the following:

Harris Gaylord Warren
Fred Steilow
Betsy Swanson

PARK NOTES & NEWS

According to minutes from the Delta Region Preservation Commission re the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, plans for the park are being slowly but surely outlined.

Perhaps the most important idea of the Commission are the plans for Chalmette Battlefield.

In Alternative A, visitors would be alerted to geographic features that were significant to events of the battle. The tour road would be re-aligned and a trail would be created along the American Rampart. Events from the American point of view could be expressed at this point. The visitor would then proceed on the tour road and be introduced to the British point of view at another wayside. Visitors would then have the option of touring the Beauregard House.

In Alternative B, the tourist will first arrive at a wayside at the entrance for a brief intro to the battle. The tour road may be partially removed, leaving access to the British side. The remainder will be turned into a trail.

Down the entrance road, the visitor will encounter stops along the rampart to obtain knowledge of events of the battle from the American p.o.v. Visitors would then proceed to the Beauregard House, which would be used as more of an interpretative center than in Alt. A.

In Alternative C, upon entering the park, there would be a tour stop and trail along the American Rampart. The wayside would introduce people to the battle, highlighting the various cultural and ethnic groups. Visitors would then proceed to the Beauregard House.

Tour boat visitors would be routed to an area for special programs.

COMMENTS: As far as the editor is concerned, the best plan for Chalmette Battlefield would borrow a little from both the Commission's Alt. A and B, in this fashion:

The geographic features significant to the battle would be emphasized, making full use of what's left of the original surroundings. A trail for both the American Rampart and the British p.o.v. seems the best idea, for it is only by walking a battlefield yourself that a person can get a feeling of the surroundings. Driving around in a car doesn't cut it unless the battlefield is huge, such as the one at Vicksburg.

The exhibits in the Beauregard House would relate more about the battle, such as ethnic and cultural groups involved and the events which led up to the final foray. Lafitte's contribution to the American victory should by all means be emphasized. During a visit to Beauregard House in 1977, the editor was disappointed to find so little information on Lafitte.

Chalmette Battlefield also could use a little landscaping in the way of trees. The old live oak trees near the monument are about the only landscaping left of the original battlefield. This was the editor's main gripe when viewing the battlefield, for there is nothing more disenchanting than seeing a battlefield which through recent years has been stripped of its original surroundings.

Those wishing to write to the Commission may write to:

Delta Region Preservation Commission
Jean Lafitte National Historical Park
400 Royal Street, Room 200
New Orleans, La. 70130

New members of the LSG include the following:

Sally Kettredge Evans,

Samuel B. Hughes,
Rialto, Calif.

Foch Lafitte, El Paso,

Sam Lafitte Jr.,
Shelbyville, Texas.

John Sugden, Hull, England