

THE LAFFITE STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER

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PAM KEYES
Editor

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE PLANS ARTICLE ON LAFFITE NHP

According to recent accounts, National Geographic Magazine is thinking about doing an article on the Jean Laffite National Historical Park.

Minutes from the Delta Region Preservation Commission meeting show that a National Geographic representative and photographer toured the park region in January after contacting Frank Ehret of the commission.

No announcement has been made of the scheduled date of the article's appearance, but since most magazines operate six to eight months in advance, it seems reasonable to assume the public may be reading the article by October of this year.

The implications of such a prestigiously placed article are clear: through the historical park, Laffite

(albeit in the Laffite spelling) will be brought up to widespread public view.

This re-emergence of Laffite would undoubtedly create renewed interest in the privateer-patriot. If the National Geographic article is presented as planned, there well might be a renaissance of Laffite interest comparable with the celebrated letter-writing campaigns contained in DeBow's Review in the early 1850s.

Smuggling Persists in Southern Bayous

It's a sticky hot day on a murky bayou and a heavily laden boat is slowly, slowly edging through the cypress trees when its oarsman is suddenly startled by Customs agents.

Sound like one of Laffite's smuggling forays back in the early 1800s? Mais non, mon ami. This scene describes a drug bust which occurs almost daily in the Louisiana swamps of today.

Drugs are the new goods found in the modern smuggler's cargo. In the bayous, life continues to be almost as secretive and cut off from civilization as in Laffite's day. The shadowny bayou thoroughfares provide an effective screen for modern smugglers, as noted in an Associated Press report.

A recent story stated that "the intricate maze of inlets and bayous along the coast where the pirate Jean Laffite once reigned is developing into the nation's busiest drug route."

Cargos of tons of marijuana, plus cocaine and hashish are packed into a barge which might look like any of a thousand barges, or in small boats, or in small airplanes.

U.S. Customs Service figures for drug seizures show 350 tons of marijuana "interdicted" along the coast since Oct. 1, 1980.

According to Peter Dispenzirie, head of Customs Region 5, the New Orleans and Miami, Fla., regions accounted for 73 percent of all

(See Page 3)

DR. SCARDAVILLE ANNOUNCES FIRST SEBA CONFERENCE

Dr. Michael Scardaville has scheduled the first Southeast Borderlands Association conference for Dec. 4-5, 1981, at Atlanta, Ga. Topic for the meeting will be "Research Resources for the Colonial Southeast."

Specialists and generalists in the fields of historical documentation, cartography and archaeology will discuss problems in identifying and gaining access to resources and offer plans to solve the problems on a regional basis.

The SEBA is designed to serve as a forum for scholars engaged in Spanish, French and English colonial research of the southeastern United States.

Persons interested in the organization may write to Dr. Michael Scardaville, Historian, Historic St. Augustine Preservation Board, St. Augustine, Fla. 32084.

REVIEWS

Great Forgers and Famous Fakes, by Charles Hamilton. Crown Publishers, New York, 1980. \$12.95

Charles Hamilton writes exceedingly well about subjects in which he is an expert, such as Abraham Lincoln forgeries, but he falls short when it comes to evaluating the Laffite-Lafflin controversy.

In his current book, one whole chapter, "The Scion of a Pirate," is devoted to the Laffite Journal authenticity debate. Hamilton contends that the handwriting present in the journal collection is forgery, but he does not back his statements up very soundly in this reviewer's estimation.

Although Hamilton is a well-known autograph dealer and collector and is expert in the study of philographic items, he devoted only a cursory examination to the writing in the Laffite Journal itself, saying in comparison to an authentic letter Laffite wrote in Galveston, the signature's last "e" hovers above the "t" whereas in the Journal signatures, the "t" and "e" are on the same plane. Is this alone grounds for forgery?

It seems much more likely Hamilton was swayed into believing the Journal to be fraudulent due to the great number of real fakes found in the collection John Lafflin was parading around, such as the absurd Crockett, Roubidoux and

Lincoln forgeries.

In his chapter on the controversy, Hamilton relied too heavily on the observation of others, such as Ray and Sue Thompson



American Heritage features article on Barataria

"Barataria," an article written by cultural historian Frederick Turner for American Heritage magazine's August-September 1980 issue, is an excellent work.

Embellished by superb photographs of Baratarian sights, the article manages to catch a taste of the real mood of Barataria.

Included in the article is a brief look at the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, which is attracting attention from other prominent magazines also (as written about on page one).

and Charles Van Ravensway.

Frankly, the lack of new material on the Journal handwriting controversy was a severe disappointment. Other points of contention included Hamilton's failure to explain what he meant when he stated that parts of Austin dealer John Jenkins' Laffite Journal purchase had been disseminated into the philographic market, where they "turned up from time to time." Where and when? This reviewer has searched through several philographic notices and catalogs and has yet to hear of a Laffite item, fraudulent or not, for sale.

That's enough for the Laffite chapter, which is only one in 20 in this rather nicely arranged volume. If you're looking for a book that will help you understand forgers and forgeries, it is excellent. There are some very detailed and absorbing chapters on Abraham Lincoln, George Washington and Constitution forgeries in addition to a humorous chapter, "Frivolous Fakes," devoted to such oddities as Christopher Columbus' log book. (That one would send anyone in laughing fits.)

But if you're looking for new information on the Laffite Journal collection, the book is not very good unless all you want is a basic summation of what a few other Laffite enthusiasts think.

*Review by Pam Keyes, Ed.

New members of the LSG are:

MAJOR PHILIP M. GROSS,
216 RIO HONDO DR.

MAPLEWOOD-SULPHUR
LA. 70663

MRS. BENNETT A. MOLTER JR.
910 WELLINGTON PLACE
OPELOUSAS, LA.

YATES SIMONSON
P.O. BOX 5
BAYOU LA BATRE, ALA. 36509

(SMUGGLING, Cont. from page 1)

narcotics seized nationwide in fiscal year 1980, which ended Oct. 1.

The increased drug traffic has caused Customs to step up patrols by 16 percent in Region 5, which encompasses Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee and the Florida panhandle.

The report comments

that Laffite would likely have found staggering the amount of cash involved in running dope, since marijuana typically represents \$1 million a ton in street prices.

However, it is difficult to say whether or not modern smuggling is more lucrative than in Laffite's time, mainly

due to the differences in the types of cargos (Laffite usually carried spices, cloth, slaves, liquors, etc.), but it seems reasonable to assume that given a cost comparison and allowing for inflation, Laffite most likely made just as much if not more than today's drug smugglers.

A Letter

Robert C. Vogel of the LSG wrote the following letter to Judge Price Daniel on June 26, 1980. Judge Daniel purchased the Laffite Journal collection and donated it to the Sam Houston Regional Library at Liberty, Texas.

Dear Judge Daniel,

I have read with interest Clancy DuBos' article in the New Orleans Times-Picayune, "Lafitte: Pirate's Costly Journal May Be Only a Famous Fake," wherein the authenticity of the manuscript journal-memoir in your possession is questioned.

On the basis of my investigations and consultations with other researchers, I believe that it can be proven beyond any reasonable doubt that the journal-memoir attributed to privateer Jean Laffite was not, in fact, written by him. My personal opinion is that the Journal MS was composed as a hoax, probably sometime during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

I have challenged the validity of the Journal of Jean Laffite on the grounds that it contains numerous errors and fabrications--too many, in my judgement, to be accidental. Unlike my very good friend John Howells and others, I have not addressed myself to the physical prop-

erties of the manuscript itself; nor am I willing to point an accusing finger at the peculiar John Andrech-yne Lafflin, alias Lafitte, who some have sought to label a forger. I was trained as a historian, not a graphologist or manuscripts sleuth.

My files are almost literally overflowing with data relating to the Laffite Journals controversy. These include copies of nearly the entire collection (as sold to William Simpson in 1969), newspaper and magazine articles, correspondence (including an extensive collection of John A. Lafitte letters), photographs and records of interviews. I have extensive experience in historical research and have worked in the National Archives, Bibliotheque Nacional, Archivo General de Indias and Archivo General de la Nacion, as well as in repositories throughout the Gulf Coast region.

The next installment of The Life and Times of Jean Laffite will be devoted exclusively to the Journals of Jean Laffite. We have invited students whose research is representative of all sides of the controversy to submit papers, short articles, documents or research notes for publication in this special LTJL.

A session on the Laffite Papers affair also has been suggested for the Louisiana Historical Association's next annual meeting. (1982 in Lake Charles, La.)

On behalf of the Laffite Study Group, I should like you to consider writing a paper for the special LTJL.

Sincerely,
Robert C. Vogel

A Glimpse At Pierre Laffite

Most of us are quite familiar with the actions of Jean Laffite. But what about his brother Pierre, who was a mastermind in his own right? The following letter from Pierre Laffite to Commodore Patterson, Commanding Officer for the N.O. Station, reveals much about his personality. Though it is a long letter, it is quite readable.

New Orleans, Jan. 3, 1820

Sir,

Persuaded that the communication of which this letter is the object, can conveniently be made to you only; it will, I hope, be received as an apology for the liberty I take of addressing myself to you.

Too long since, the name of the Lafittes have been the object of general execration, as well here as abroad; tarnished and devoted to contempt in publications without any foundation; and always found assimilated and attached to the criminal undertakings of a gang of Pirates of all countries; the audacity of which increases by impunity, and who have lately committed depredations and atrocities of all kind on the Sea coast, and even within the jurisdiction of this State. It would not be difficult for me to prove such Bandetti never were engaged, kept in pay, or protected by me, or my Brother in our different transactions at Galvez-town; and his late conduct in that country with regard to one of them, ought to destroy the least suspicion. But, as the non-ratification of the treaty by Spain gives to the Government of the United States the jurisdiction as far west as the Rio Bravo del Norte under the purchase of Louisiana; and as the establishment at Galvez, lying within those limits, was formed as conquered from Spain, by the Mexican Republic, and Republic of Texas; to put an end to all things, and to shew to the whole world that I never contributed to the violation of the sacred rights of nations, or

would offer resistance or offence to the Government of the United States; and in view of restoring all confidence to the foreign trade directing itself towards this place; and to destroy all fears which the Establishment of Galvez might occasion; I now offer myself to you, Sir, willingly and at my own risk and expence, to clear Galvez, and disband all those which are to be found there; taking the engagement for myself and my Brother, that it shall never serve as a place of Rendez-vous for any undertakings with our consent, or under our authorization. If the offer I make to you, Sir, can receive your approbation, I shall stand in need of no other thing but the necessary permit to prevent any embarrassment in the enterprize offering at the same time any satisfactory security for its unforeseen results, with permission to all those to be found there, to return where they may choose.

If my Demand is accepted, nothing shall be wanted on my part to bring it to a good result; and if you contribute to the general welfare by securing the commerce and the inhabitants against the audacious attempts of Ruffians; I shall be indebted to you, Sir, for giving me the opportunity of striking out the odious epithets affixed to my name by my enemies; and of evincing to the Government of the U.S. my earnest desire to comply with the Laws; and as far as may be in my power to conduce to the safety of the Commerce of this Port, and ridding the Gulf of Mexico of Cruizers obnoxious to the Government. I remain, Sir, your most Humble and obedt., Servant.

Pierre Lafitte

P.S.-

In case you take the present in consideration, I beg to leave to call on you on the day you may be pleased to appoint.

(SOURCE- Bibliotheca Parsoniana,
Louisiana-American MSS, No. 994)

LAFFITE'S LOCATION DURING THE BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS

Those who have studied the Battle of New Orleans know where Andrew Jackson, Dominique You and other principals were during the momentous battle against the British, but the whereabouts of Jean Laffite during that time are relatively unclear.

During the great Laffite debate carried in DeBow's Review in Vol. V, 1852, a writer for the National Intelligence had the following to say about Laffite's location:

The writer had the honor of serving under General Jackson at the siege of New Orleans as an officer; saw Lafitte every day and knew him personally. He was not

at the first battle, fought with the British forces on the night of Dec. 23, 1814; but was at the breastworks called Jackson's lines immediately thereafter, where he remained until the retreat of the enemy and the breaking up of the American camp. He was placed with his men by Gen. Jackson -- who had full confidence in his skill, ability and fidelity to the American cause -- in command of a battery of two 24 or 32 pounder-cannon, not far from the river, and between the 7th United States Infantry, Major Pierre and Blauche's battalion of city volunteers;What I have stated is on my own personal knowledge, and acted under my own eye; and is well known to Gen. Wm. O. Butler of Kentucky, at that time a captain in the 44th Infantry.

News Briefs

Although times have changed, it appears even such modern equipment as two-way radio and hoses aren't enough to repel pirates in the high seas.

An AP report from London stated recently that British merchant ships have been issued instructions on how to fend off pirates in the infested waters of Nigeria, Colombia and the Strait of Malacca between Sumatra and Malaysia.

Orders include keeping heavy-duty hoses at the ready to repel potential boarders, maintain visible deck patrols carrying two-way radios, and flood-lighting ships in danger zones.

Mrs. Lloyd G. Eads has a query which an aspiring or professional genealogist might like to delve into.

"My grandmother, Mary Adeline (Mayme?) Merritt, born April

29, 1860, in Detroit, Mich. (?) married Thomas Joseph Welsh, born Detroit (no date) Her death certificate gave her parents' names as Joseph Merritt and Carolyn Foote, both born in New York city (date unknown) They were both French and I was told Carolyn's family changed their name from Lafitte to Foote, reasons unknown. I would appreciate any suggestions on how to pursue this."

Mrs. Eads has the misfortune to live in an area of the country where she does not have ready access to census records and the like. She writes that her library is unable to offer inter-library loan.

Anyone with ideas or answers should write to Mrs. Lloyd Eads, P.O. Box 452, DeQueen, Ark., 71832.

If you sent in a recommendation for Jean Laffite to be honored by a commemorative stamp, you probably received a letter back from the U.S. Postal Service thanking you for your suggestion and stating that the idea would be brought up at the next citizens' stamp advisory meeting even though Laffite has been suggested for a stamp before and was not accepted.

This merely points out the real need for an active letter campaign.

If you haven't written a letter of recommendation yet, take a little time out to do it. And if you have written one, see if you can find a friend or two who might be interested in writing one also.

Suggestions for a Laffite stamp should be made to:

CITIZENS' STAMP ADVISORY
COMMITTEE
c/o General Manager
U.S. Postal Service
Washington, D.C. 20260



Le Brave Document
18 Aug. 1819



Laffite Journal
7 Oct. 1846



Laffite Journal
24 Sept. 1849

The Journal: Forgery Or The Real Thing?

BY JOHN HOWELLS

Ed. Note - This is a short, previously unpublished paper about the Laffite Journal controversy. Howells wrote a longer and more detailed piece on the same topic for "The Life and Times of Jean Laffite," Vol. I, Issue I.

Nationally recognized handwriting expert Ralph O. Queen examined the entire Laffite Journal on several occasions between June and September of 1974. Two pages which were dated and signed by Jn Laffite were removed from the Journal for intensive examination, one had been written in iron oxide ink and the other was found to have gallnut ink for a writing fluid.

Mr. Queen has over forty years experience in criminal investigation of handwriting identification for the Houston Police Department, the State of Texas and the federal government. He is a member of the International Association for Identification, whose membership is limited to persons with extensive legal experience in detection of forgeries.

The handwriting contained in the 250-page Journal of Jean Laffite was compared to documents which are generally accepted as authentic (such as the "Le Brave" document, USDC case #1440, and documents #19 and #24 in the Lamar Collection, Austin.)

The Journal handwriting not only had the same outward appearance of the genuine Jean Laffite documents, but upon microscopic examination was found to contain identical characteristics of letter formation. Attempted duplication of handwriting by forgers

is best detected by enlarging selected characteristic letters three times their original size, taken from authentic documents, then comparing them with similarly magnified enlargements of the same letters taken from documents under examination.

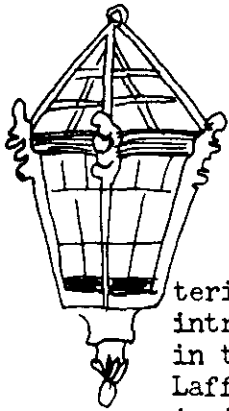
Although over twenty years had elapsed between the writing of the Le Brave and General James Long documents in 1819 and the Journal entries made in the 1840s, there was no change in formation of letters, slant, or change of pen direction at the same point in such letters as the "a's" and "o's". Laffite's "e's" were straight on the underside before the top turns to a downward direction, as though he intended to make an "i". Laffite's "d's", "t's" and "p's". Mr. Queen therefore concluded all the subject documents were written by the same person.

The paper in the Laffite Journal is of the heavy linen base type used before 1850, not the acid treated pulpwood type which came into common use after the 1840's. Paper in the Journal contained several types of water marks, none of which were on record with the Institute of Water Marks. One type of water mark was a large fleur-de-lis. The ferrous content of the iron oxide ink has permeated into the paper, permanently staining it, and cannot be readily removed by washing the paper.

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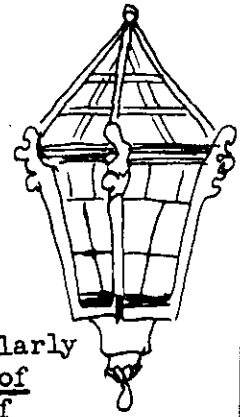
The Laffite Journal collection is housed at the Sam Houston Regional Library, Liberty, Texas.

LSG Memberships, Etc.



Like to read about mysteries, buried treasure and intrigue? Persons interested in the above and/or Jean Laffite and his environs are invited to join the Laffite Study Group.

The LSG was founded in 1975 by Robert C. Vogel for the purpose of uniting persons interested in Jean Laffite's role in American history, folklore and literature, not to mention motion pictures.



As a member, you will receive the quarterly LSG Newsletter and the irregularly published Life and Times of Jean Laffite, a journal of notes and longer papers.

Dues for the 1981 year are: \$6 for individuals and institutions; \$20 for sustaining, and \$100 for life memberships. Dues should be sent to John Howells, LSG treasurer, 2570 Kevin Lane, Houston, Texas 77043.

Articles are needed for the LSG Newsletter.

How about a thumb-nail biography of a famous Laffite writer, such as Stanley Faye, Lyle Saxon, or the notorious Rev. Ingraham?

If that doesn't sound appetizing, how about a brief examination, such as whether or not Laffite was a privateer, using short quotes from sources?

Readers living in

lower Louisiana and Texas might want to interview an old resident who recalls stories of Laffite. Folklore has proven to be a very big part in the Laffite saga in past years.

If you don't want to write about Laffite, how about a story on customs during his time, such as the elaborate intricacies of duelling? Or what about auction procedures of early

New Orleans? (Laffite certainly had a lot of those.)

Every article turned into the Newsletter will be given consideration and will be used as space permits, with only minor editing.

Due to space limitations, articles should be no longer than 500 words and should be sent to Pam Keyes, Editor, LSG NEWSLETTER, 320 I N.W., Miami, Okla. 74354.

According to Robert Vogel, back-issues of the Life and Times of Jean Laffite are no more.

However, if you missed getting copies of these journals jam-packed with Laffite information, there is an alternative route possible.

Vogel is planning on creating a handy Laffite Study Group Reader which will be a collection of the

best articles from both the LTJL and the Newsletter. The reader could see publication this summer if enough interest is shown in it.

Cost would be approximately \$7.50 for LSG members and \$12 for non-members and institutions.

For further information, write to Robert C. Vogel, 6971 Homestead Ave. So., Cottage Grove, Mn. 55016.

Mrs. Sue Thompson has been named an honorary life member of the Laffite Study Group.

An avid Laffite enthusiast, she and her

late husband, Ray, wrote several articles on Laffite for magazines and newspapers. A book they wrote together, "Land of Lafitte the Pirate,"

filled with anecdotes and photographs, is now a rare book and lucky indeed is the person who can find a copy.

A Price on His Head or What Happens When You Test A Governor's Patience

(Taken from the Niles Register, November, 1813)

(BY AUTHORITY)

By Wm. C. C. Claiborne
Governor of the state of Louisiana & Com-
mander in chief of the militia thereof.

A PROCLAMATION

Whereas, the nefarious practice of running in contraband goods, which has hitherto prevailed in different parts of this state, to the great injury of the fair trader, and the diminution of the revenue of the United States, has of late much increased: and whereas the violators of the law, emboldened by the impunity of past tresspasses, no longer conceal themselves from the view of the honest part of the community, but setting the government at defiance, in broad daylight, openly carry on their infamous traffic; and whereas it has officially been made known to me that on the fourteenth of the last month a quantity of contraband goods seized by Walker Gilbert, an officer of the revenue of the United States, were forcibly taken from him in open day, at no great distance from New Orleans, by a party of armed men, under the orders of a certain John Lafitte, who fired upon, and grievously wounded one of the assistants of the said Walker Gilbert; and although process has issued for the apprehension of him the said John Lafitte; yet such is the countenance and protection afforded him or the terror excited by the threats of himself and his associates, that the same remains unexecuted.

And whereas the apathy of the good people of this state, in checking practices so opposed to morality, and to the laws and interest of the United States, may impair the fair character which Louisiana maintains, and ought to preserve as a member of the American Union:

I have thought proper to issue this my proclamation, hereby strictly charging and commanding all officers of the state, civil and military, in their respective departments, to be vigilant and active in preventing the violation of the laws in the premises, and in apprehending and securing all persons offending therein; and I do solemnly caution all and singular the citizens of this state against giving any kind of succour, support or countenance to the said John Lafitte and his associates, but to be aiding and abetting in arresting him and them, and all others in like manner offending; and I do furthermore in the name of the state, offer a reward of Five Hundred Dollars which will be paid out of the public treasury to any person delivering the said John Lafitte to the sheriff of the parish of New Orleans, or to any other sheriff in the state, so that he the said John Lafitte may be brought to justice..

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto caused the seal of the state to be affixed. Given at New Orleans on the 24th day of November, 1813, and of the Independence of the United States the thirty eighth.

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## EPILOGUE

Laffite, of course, was prepared with an answer for this proclamation; shortly after it appeared in print, he penned a parody of it in which he offered \$5,000 to anyone who would deliver Gov. Claiborne to him at the Isle au Chat near Bayou Lafourche.

Neither got any takers on their offers.