

The Laffite Study Group Newsletter

VOL. III, No. 2
Summer-Fall, 1983

PAM KEYES
Editor

Chalmette Discovery Shows Earlier Survey In Error

While checking out a spot planned for a visitor's center at Chalmette National Battlefield, Dr. Teje Birkedal, a National Park Service archaeologist, made an astonishing find - remains of a house which shouldn't have been at that location.

Dr. Birkedal's find was household debris left when the Rodriguez house was torn down near the turn of the century. The house was behind Jackson's line during the Battle of New Orleans on Jan. 8, 1815. A print of the battle made by Laclotte shows the narrow, two-story house near the middle of the line.

Since the discovery was made early this spring, further excavations have uncovered bricks and the old foundation of the house.

According to James L. Isenogle, superintendent of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, of which the battlefield is a part, the discovery means exhibits commemorating the battle will need to be shifted almost 500 feet.

Researchers earlier had believed the Mississippi River and its levee had erased the sites of three of the eight U.S. batteries. Park manager A. Wilson Greene said it appears that only two of the sites are gone. Battery No. 3, operated by Laffite's Baratarians under the leadership of Dominique You and Renato Beluche, is on dry land;

beside the levee.

The site of the Rodriguez foundation is surrounded by an L-shaped row of oaks 100 yards south of the Chalmette Monument, an obelisk commemorating the battle. To the east of the site is the Rodriguez Canal.

According to park officials, the erroneous reconstruction of the breastworks of Jackson's line as well as the location of cannon batteries was based on a 1935 survey.

Research is on-going under the direction of Dr. Birkedal and Ms. Melody Webb, regional historian.

Weekly Features Laffite Column

"Jean Laffite, From His Journals and Memoirs" is the title of a column which will run through November, 1983, in the St. Bernard Voice, a weekly newspaper printed in Arabi, La. Author of the historical column is Lionel Bienvenu, current president of the St. Bernard Historical Society and past Superintendent of the Chalmette National Battlefield.

In the column, Bienvenu analyzes the Laffite brothers' operations at Barataria and how they made their smuggling business into a thriving success.

L.S.G. Invites All To Join

Individuals, organizations and institutions are invited to join the Laffite Study Group.

The LSG was formed in 1975 by Robert C. Vogel, Jane De Grummond, John Howells, Sue Thompson and Harris Gaylord Warren. Primary focus of interest for the LSG is Jean Laffite's role in American history, folklore and literature. The LSG also concerns itself with aspects of United States and Latin American history which had a bearing on Laffite's life and times; piracy and privateering in the Gulf of Mexico and western Caribbean, Anglo-American filibustering, the activities of republican insurgents in the Spanish dominions, the War of 1812 in the southeastern United States, etc.

Memberships in the non-profit organization include subscriptions to the Life and Times of Jean Laffite, a collection of papers published irregularly, and the quarterly Laffite Study Group Newsletter.

Dues are \$10 for individuals and institutions; \$40 for sustaining, and \$200 for life memberships. All except life membership run for the calendar year.

The Laffite Study Group is wholly dependent on membership dues, subscriptions and gifts for its operating funds.

Checks should be made payable to: The Laffite Study Group, sent to John L. Howells, Secretary-Treasurer, 2570 Kevin Lane, Houston, Texas 77043.



News Exchange



LSG Officers To Be Elected

Election of officers for the Laffite Study Group will be held December 1, 1983.

Positions open are: president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer.

The Board of Directors welcomes nominations from LSG members. Ballots will be mailed in late November.

Central File Of Laffite Material Planned

A proposal has been made that the LSG start a central bibliographic card file of books, articles, unpublished papers, manuscripts, etc. that members of the LSG have collected. This bibliography will be made available to researchers who need to conduct intensive literature searches and document reviews. The index file will eventually be published. Persons with bibliographical

information not found in standard Laffite bibliographies (such as that of Lyle Saxon's) are asked to please send an annotated citation on a 3x5 card, including author's name, full title, publisher, date and place of publication, page numbers, series title, etc., along with the submitter's name and address to: Robert C. Vogel, P.O. Box 44, Cottage Grove, MN 55016.

Persons with articles or clippings for the next LSG Newsletter should mail them to Pam Keyes, Editor, 320 "I" N.W., Miami, OK 74354.

*****ANSWERS*****

The answer to the 1958 "The Buccaneer" movie trivia question in the last issue is Dominique You.

The unidentified brass object shown in the last issue is a cannon sighting device.

Smugglers Siphoned Merchants' Trade

News of Laffite's impact on commercial trade may be found in contemporary newspapers throughout the Mississippi Valley.

"The smuggling at Barataria has greatly injured all honest traders," writes an anonymous correspondent from New Orleans in the Missouri Gazette & Illinois Advertiser (Sat. June 11, 1814).

"In consequence of his (Laffite's) piracy and smuggling, a great variety of goods are very cheap here."

The Baratarians profited greatly from the effects of

the Embargo and the prohibition of the slave trade. Vincent Nolte complained that the Baratarians had siphoned off much of Louisiana's hard currency. Slaves sold for \$150-\$200 at Barataria fetched \$600-\$700 in New Orleans. (Memoirs, p. 189)



-----Beluche Biography Reviewed-----

By Pam Keyes

RENATO BELUCHE Smuggler, Privateer and Patriot 1780-1860. By Jane Lucas De Grummond. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge and London. 1983. 300 pgs. 8 illustrations, 14 maps.

To write a good biography, an author must understand the environment and era which influenced the person studied. For her biography of Renato Beluche, Dr. Jane Lucas De Grummond more than accomplished her homework in that respect. During 35 years of active research, she traveled from Baton Rouge to Venezuela, Panama, Colombia, Trinidad, Jamaica and Haiti, piecing together crumbling newspaper accounts and government documents relating to Beluche, the New Orleans native who became a general under the great South American leader, Simon Bolivar.

In the first third of the book, the background and careers of Beluche and Jean and Pierre Laffite are paralleled in an interesting manner. All three played an important part in the Battle of New Orleans at Chalmette; all three knew how to turn privateering ventures into highly profitable deals, although

Beluche was by far the best corsair. When the Laffites were at Barataria, Beluche often brought his captured prizes there.

Although the Laffites sank to obscurity following Galveston, Beluche found success sailing in the ranks of Bolivar's marine forces. The book deals well with tales of such conflicts as the Battle of Lake Maracaibo and the siege of Puerto Cabello.

One of the most absorbing accounts is a nearly complete transcript of Beluche's trial for piracy at Kingston, Jamaica. His supposed "piracy" was the theft of a small boat. The jury, however, apparently considered the evidence insufficient as he was found not guilty.

Exacting details from the reports of land sales and ship disbursements add to the color found in the book. A definitive biography of Beluche, the book offers much more: asides of Bolivar and his associates, and glimpses of the commercial aspects of privateering in the early 1800s on the Caribbean.

Above all else, the book succeeds the most in showing how the atmosphere of the time affected one man, privateer Renato Beluche.