

The Laffite Study Group Newsletter

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Pam Keyes
Editor

LSG MEMBERS TO MEET IN NATCHITOCHES

Mark your calendars for the dates of the Louisiana Historical Association 1984 annual meeting: March 29, 30 and 31, in Natchitoches. Members of the Laffite Study Group will gather informally, with President Sir Jack D. L. Holmes holding court for Laffite aficionados at the Holiday Inn. Situated at the eastern gateway to the Neutral Ground (1804-1820), a sort of no man's land between Spanish Texas and Louisiana, the town of Natchitoches was the jumping-off point for many Anglo-American filibusters and adventurers of every stripe. The Laffite lore indigenous to northwest Louisiana is as spicy and unforgettable as the famous Natchitoches meat pie. We invite all Laffite gourmands to sample both during the final week in March.

Editorial Note

Ten years ago the Laffite Study Group was founded to encourage communication among students of Jean Laffite's role in American history, literature and folklore. Initially, we tried to foster this communication through The Life and Times of Jean Laffite, a collection of occasional papers, of which six installments have been published since 1975. More recently, we have published this newsletter to showcase members' contributions to research, review publications of interest and disseminate news.

With this issue of the LSG Newsletter, we are renewing our commitment to the concept of networking. The Laffite Network will be a regular feature in these pages, with notices of conferences and research in progress, bibliographic notes, research tips and commentary. Emphasis will be on the creation of a horizontal link between researchers and casual readers, professional and avocational historians. This will be a forum for the exchange of information and sources -- hopefully, it will go one step beyond the mere transfer of data to a new synthesis of knowledge about Jean Laffite, his life and times.

Election Results

The LSG Board of Directors is pleased to announce the re-election of the following officers for terms to expire in 1985:

President:

Sir Jack D. L. Holmes, Birmingham

Vice President:

Dr. Jane L. DeGrummond, Baton Rouge

Secretary-Treasurer:

Mr. John L. Howells, Houston

The LAFFITE STUDY GROUP NEWSLETTER is published quarterly by the Laffite Study Group, Inc., a non-profit educational organization.

Membership in the LSG includes a subscription to *The Life and times of Jean Laffite*, a collection of occasional papers and documents. Annual dues are \$10 for individuals and institutions, \$200 for life memberships. Contributions to this newsletter involving research in progress, reviews, short articles or announcements are welcome.

Write to:

Pam Keyes, Editor

LSG Newsletter

320 "I" N.W.

Miami, Oklahoma 74354

THE LAFFITE NETWORK /Compiled by Robert C. Vogel

Close Encounters

John Howells is compiling a record of contemporary eye-witness accounts of encounters with Jean Laffite. John, who lives in Houston and is one of the founding fathers of the LSG, is especially interested in physical descriptions of Laffite preserved in the diaries of the Champ d'Asile settlers and in the accounts of Spanish military personnel.

Louisiana Legacy

Legacy, the newsletter of the Louisiana State Archives and Records Service, is available from the office of the Hon. Jim Brown, Louisiana's Secretary of State. This is a fine little newsletter devoted to the preservation of Louisiana's unique heritage. It offers concise descriptions of archival collections, research aids, a wealth of genealogical data and frequent updates on the status of the new state archives building in Baton Rouge. It is currently publishing a calendar of documents from the Opelousas Post.

For further information write to:

Legacy
Louisiana State Archives & Records
Service
Office of the Secretary of State
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Bib. Notes

Blond, Georges. Histoire de la Flibuste.
Paris: Stock, 1969

Laffite's career as a privateer in the context of Latin American revolution and filibustering, pp. 279-369. Biographical material drawn largely from the Journal of Jean Laffite.

Charnley, Mitchell V. Jean Lafitte, Gentleman Smuggler. New York: Viking Press, 1940.

One of the better popular biographies, with more about Galveston than Saxon.

Dobie, J. Frank. Coronado's Children.
Dallas: Southwest Press, 1930.

Contains a brief account of Laffite, pp. 306-322, mostly legend.

Research Tip #1: Your Congressman Can Help

Because they enjoy easy access to the Library of Congress, the National Archives and the Government Printing Office, our elected representatives in Washington can provide significant assistance for research. Each Congressman has members of his staff available for "case work" on behalf of constituents. Particularly helpful is the Congressional Research Service at the Library of Congress, where Congressional staffers routinely conduct literature searches for the folks back home. Be sure to make contact in writing and be up front with your research needs and objectives.

The Summer of '16

From all accounts, there was no summer in 1816. Across the northern temperate zone, daytime highs seldom reached above 50°F. New York City had a blizzard in June. Savanna celebrated Independence Day with temperatures in the 40's -- all this because of the eruption of Mt. Tambora in the Dutch East Indies early in 1815.

Sam Houston Regional Library

Located in Liberty, Texas, the Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center has several rooms filled with historical exhibits including the Laffite Journals collection. The facility's archival collections include a letter from Andrew Jackson to President Thomas Jefferson introducing Congressman Sam Houston, the Capt. William Logan Papers, historic photographs and the personal papers of several notable Texas politicians.

A VISIT TO GALVESTON IN 1818 / J. Randall Jones

After the Battle of New Orleans, La., Lafitte, who had taken an active part with the Americans, located on Galveston Island and my friends heard that he had a number of African Negroes to sell. A drove had been purchased of him at one dollar per pound and smuggled into Louisiana.

My friends wished me to let them [know] if any such speculations could be made and offered to divide profits with me for my assistance.

The last year several traders had come out and a good many American families had settled between Sabine and Nacogdoches. Also many Mexican traders were passing from San Antonio with horses and mules. I disposed of my stock and proposed to visit Galveston. I took two men with me on whom I could depend. I proceeded to Turtle Bayou near the mouth of the Trinity, where I found a man and wife settled. There I arranged to leave our horses and proceed in a large pirogue [canoe] along the coast to Galveston.

While preparing for the trip we saw several boats approaching - A small sloop and several yawls loaded with men, we could not conjecture where they were going, [and] on their landing I recognized an old acquaintance who commanded and owned the sloop. He informed us that it was General Lallemand, a Frenchman in command of about 100 men of all nations who was going to establish near the mouth of the Trinity on some revolutionary scheme.

The sloop was to return to Galveston. I and my companions took passage in her and took the pirogue in tow to insure a return passage. On arriving at Galveston I was introduced by my friend, the captain of the sloop, to the great Lafitte. He treated me with the most respectful attention, while I staid which was two days and two nights. I think there was 100 or 200 men there of all nations and some few women. There was a number of boats of different sizes. There was a large schooner which I was informed was a prize laden with sugar, coco, coffee and wines, and there was an armed schooner. Lafitte himself had a pretty good house, the balance were made hastily of planks, sails, etc. Lafitte had thrown up an earthen fort and had some cannon mounted on the Bay. There was a schooner from Boston there trading potatoes and etc. for groceries.

I informed Lafitte of my business. He informed me that he was out of Negroes at that time but he expected some before long.

Lafitte was a man about six feet in height, proportionately made, tolerable fair skin - his hair dark, a little gray mixed and was a very handsome man. I was well treated by himself and all his people.

We left Galveston in our small boat - crossed to Bolivar Point and came around the coast on the east side of the bay - landed safely at the mouth of Turtle Bayou. We prepared to return to Nacogdoches.

Some miles above and on the banks of the Trinity we came to the encampment of General Lallomand [Champ d'Asile], they were busily engaged in throwing up a place of defence of dirt and timber, everything was carried on in a military style. Sentinels on post day and night. The General treated me with marked attention. We stayed all night and left next morning; the General remained here a short time and then broke up and dispersed.

The storm was from the eastward. It occurred about the middle of September 1818. I was afterwards informed by a person who was at that time on Galveston Island, that it was all covered by water except about one acre where Lafitte's fort was on the Bay.

(From a MS by J. Randall Jones, originally in the possession of the Library of the Galveston Historical Society and copied by Philip C. Tucker. The original was destroyed in the 1900 hurricane.)

The Laffite Study Group is a non-profit educational organization which aims to promote research and the dissemination of knowledge concerning Jean Laffite's role in American history, literature and folklore. Membership in the LSG is open to all. Members pay annual dues and receive the quarterly newsletter and the Life and Times of Jean Laffite, a collection of occasional papers. Dues are \$10.00 for individuals and institutions (\$12.50 outside U.S.), \$40.00 for sustaining and \$200.00 for life memberships.

Address all queries concerning membership dues, subscriptions, etc., to John L. Howells, Secretary-Treasurer, Laffite Study Group, 2570 Kevin Lane, Houston, TX 77043.